

Churchwarden's Report for APCM – this takes the place of a Rector's Report.

2021 was another year in which St Edward's had to be flexible about the pattern of worship to take account of differing COVID restrictions at various points in the year. Zoom services continued to be well attended and helpful as a way of coming together for worship in a safe way. Once physical services could be resumed, we followed a hybrid model with some services in church for those who felt ready and Zoom in other weeks.

The second major development was the announcement by our Rector that he would be retiring in the Autumn. This gave us time to prepare for the start of the vacancy on 1 November, the day after Martin took his last service as incumbent and we were able to wish him and Trish well for their move to Yorkshire.

As expected, Bishop Rachel suspended the living of the Benefice for up to five years, mirroring the pattern of recent Priest-in-Charge appointments in two neighbouring benefices. However, it appears that our own appointment is inextricably linked to the outcome of the Strategic Review of the Deanery and that we shall not be allowed even to begin the process of recruitment until the Review's conclusions are known, possible in mid-2022.

The third major element was that we had to make a fresh start from scratch in seeking permission to carry out re-ordering works and install Audio Visual equipment. We fielded two official visits in the Spring, a preparatory one from Buildings Officers followed by a visit by members of the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

These visits led to our being given clear instructions that we should first submit a faculty petition for the AV equipment and only thereafter submit a more ambitious faculty petition for the re-ordering of the back of the church and the North Side of the North Aisle. With the possible exception of an application for draughtproofing of the South Door (which is not currently being actively pursued), we were to leave all other possible projects for decision once after the appointment of our new incumbent. We followed this advice and submitted both faculty petitions during the course of 2021. Both faculties were subsequently granted in early 2022.

Sadly there was a significant act of vandalism in that someone threw a large stone or other object and damaged part of the West Window in spite of the protective wire outside it. The stained glass has been sent away for repair.

We are particularly grateful for the support we have received from the Reverend Tony Whitaker who took over the preparation of all Zoom services and additionally celebrated two Communion services in the Benefice on a number of Sundays. His unstinting support has made a huge difference to the early months of vacancy and we send him and Monica every good wish for their move out of the local area. We would also like to record our gratitude to all the serving and retired clergy who have kindly taken services in St Edward's.

Following the gradual return to normality after the Covid pandemic, the following points give a summary of how the life of St Edward's Church has begun to reconnect physically with the community we serve.

- Planning for physical church services has and continues to take place, as the benefice continues in vacancy. As mentioned already, we are extremely grateful to all those who have supported ministry throughout the Benefice during the vacancy. The Reverend Ali Mepham, Senior Diocesan Interim Minister, has started his part-time support of the Benefice. Also, an additional Lay Reader has been licensed to the benefice
- Attendance at Sunday services has slowly begun to increase, with a pleasing number of 67 people attending our Easter Day service
- Liturgical practices are gradually being reintroduced e.g. Intinction at the Eucharist, and we thank the Stewarding team for stepping up to the challenge
- New AV equipment is now up and running, providing exciting ways of presentation and the live streaming of services. We thank Peter Dixon and his growing team of assistants for enabling AV to be used in a widening number of contexts
- The following Life Events have taken place, bringing the parish church of St Edward's back into the lives of the people of Stow: 1 baptism; 1 confirmation; 3 weddings/blessings, with 8 more arranged over the coming summer months; 17 funerals and related services. We are most grateful to Dougie King and Alan Lane, for their faithful work in setting up the church for these services
- Major events in the church have included: the Rector's Farewell Service; Stow Primary School's Harvest Festival and a class group visit focusing on baptism; The Christmas Tree Festival
- Nicholas Ashton, our organist, and his team, have stepped up to provide live music for all services, for which we are most grateful
- We are grateful to our Flower Arrangers for ensuring the church is regularly adorned with flower displays and professional church cleaners have been appointed
- The church is open every day to the public. We thank the Unlocking/Locking team for their sterling work
- New Benefice Safeguarding Officers have been appointed and Safeguarding training has been undertaken
- In support of the people of Ukraine, two Ukrainian flags are now being flown, one inside the church and the other on the flagpole in the churchyard
- Bell ringing has been reintroduced at St Edward's Church. We are most grateful to the North Cotswolds Bell Ringers for their support
- The Closely Knit group have now returned to regular Saturday morning meetings and have growing numbers
- The Mothers' Union has also returned to meeting in church, again with growing numbers
- There have been three commercial photoshoots in the churchyard, resulting in high profile exposure on the World Wide Web
- A visiting U3A group had a guided tour, researched and led by Susan Brattin, of the church's stained glass
- St Edward's recently hosted Bishop Rachel's Deanery Q&A session at the end of her visitation to the North Cotswolds Deanery
- The first physical PCC meeting, since the imposition of lockdown in March 2020, was held in church last month

We have been most fortunate to have a strong team of people willing to put their shoulder to the wheel to keep things running smoothly during a long vacancy. This team is by no means limited to the PCC itself and we are most grateful for the many hours of often unseen work by individual people whether supervising works, arranging flowers, providing refreshments or tackling administrative issues.

We would like to record our thanks for the many people who have helped us.

Robert Barnett and Desmond Watson
Churchwardens

April 2022