

Vicar's Report for the APCM August 2020

I've modified my original report for the planned APCM in April, but not by much. It mainly looks back over 2019.

THANK YOU: to everyone for all you do, from leading worship, leading bible studies and prayer, putting on the heating, church cleaning, making things (e.g. cakes, fabrics) befriending people etc. It is impossible to mention everyone or everything, and apologies for omissions.

2019 began without a curate – Andrew Smith left at short notice end of 2018, and Richard Southey (Reader) began regular on-call work. The immediate impact was a need to change the service pattern. We stopped the 9am BCP service and Breakfast @St Lawrence, and introduced Morning Praise and a mid-week Holy Communion once a month. This was all done with good grace by the worshipping communities. Thank you!

Richard and Val Howard volunteered to help with Open the Book in Long Buckby Infants and Juniors (and Martha Pinent for West Haddon) – fantastic! Val Howard has led the pastoral team and completed her funeral training and began to fly solo. Chris Banks has taken on some treasurer functions, safeguarding lead, and used his Human Resources skills to steer recruitment of Children and Families Worker Sue Jefferson. Sue made an immediate impact assisting with schools work, setting up Tea Time Together, and mobilised many others to assist. We said thank you to Sue Plant at the end of the year for her admin role, and we have now appointed Pete Jefferson from January 2020.

Sue, Chris and I attended a 4 day residential Leading Your Church Into Growth (LYCIG) course in October, and from this we have done the Welcome course during January and February 2020, a fruitful course which has identified a number of issues for us to address going forward. We also intend to run an enquirers course (START) in the autumn, and we know there is a lot more we could do with home groups. We want to grow in numbers and in maturity of Christian faith.

We are so fortunate to have Lois Johnston, St Lawrence Singers, Annette and the worship band – few rural churches can provide such a rich breadth of music for our worship. Lois, together with Ray & Margaret Mann also serve our community during the week at the funerals we hold at the church, and Glennis Ambrose has also stepped in on occasion to play the organ.

We miss, among others, Dorothy Hobbs and Cliff Harper, long standing members of the church who died in 2019.

I was very conscious of the burden that fell on the church when I went on Sabbatical, and the challenges that COVID 19 made. A few days into it I did offer to postpone my sabbatical, but the consensus from Church Wardens was “go away!” – so I did (at least to an upper room in the vicarage). Thanks to everyone for what you have done during this time. A special thank you must go to Chris Banks who supported not only Long Buckby but all the parishes in our Benefice.

I want to give a special thank you to “retired” clergy. Peter Allen returned from a cruise in March 2020 and sounded full of energy, ready with another retired vicar, Revd Alan Panton to provide cover for services during my sabbatical. These plans unravelled with lockdown, although Peter took one funeral early on. After that Revd Andrew Smith provided funeral cover whilst waiting to move to his next post.

The ministry team, including new member Revd Dr Mark Betson have done a wonderful job in establishing Benefice services on “Zoom” every week, and in helping people master this new technology. Thank goodness for people with technical know-how like Richard Southey and Justin Baker.

What happens next? We face new and unexpected challenges from the Covid 19 Pandemic. It will be with us for a while yet. It is a call to pray together, read and reflect on God's word together, and probably, for a time, to be still together and wait. How do we follow Jesus Christ now? What does our mission look like? I'll finish with words from the ordination service – which apply to all of us in our calling to follow Jesus Christ:

You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

With love and prayers,
Graham 10th August 2020