

## **The Priory, Leominster**

### **Annual Parochial Church Meeting June 2021**

#### **Church Groups Report**

Many groups have not had the opportunity to meet since the last APCM in October 2020, but we do have a few reports. Thank you to all who contributed.

#### **Bellringing – Mark Pugh, Tower Captain**

As with all groups we have been somewhat reduced in our activities due to the pandemic, which started in March 2020.

Just prior to March, Leominster Priory hosted a “teach new Ringing Teachers” course through the Association of Ringing Teachers (A.R.T.) of which Leominster tower is a training hub. Our hope was to grow the competence levels of persons from nearby ringing towers as well as Leominster Priory, to then recruit and pass on the wonderful and historic art of Bellringing. We hope to restart this much needed teacher and student arrangement, when allowed.

With the guidance provided through the Central Council of Church Bellringers and an appropriate risk assessment, we manage to restart Sunday service ringing for short durations from early July, the time of ringing being short as recommended, so to reduce possible exposure to ‘A’ symptomatic covid carriers who may have unknowingly been a part of the Sunday ringers.

We successfully achieved Sunday ringing until November when restrictions were reintroduced. I was pleased to be allowed to call the faithful to worship on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 2020 but sadden to again call stop to ringing through further restrictions reapplied on Boxing Day. With the ringing duration restriction in place, no evening practice has been undertaken since the end of February 2020.

As I draw this brief report to a close, I do so still in tight restrictions on all our movements. We are planning for the future of Bellringing but we are unsure of what numbers will return to this ancient art when restrictions are finally reduced/removed but we shall remain positive and hope summer 2021 will be kind to us and reveal new challenges, which we have missed.

#### **Friends of Leominster Priory - Jimmy Lindsay, Chairman/Treasurer**

Membership of The Friends, currently totalling 80, is open not only to the church congregation but to anyone in Leominster and beyond; we have Friends as far apart as Carlisle and Spain!

Founded in 1945, The Friends assist financially in the adornment, beautification, restoration and repair of The Priory, all projects being progressed in conjunction with the PCC. In recent years the original remit has been extended to funding postage for the Shoe Box Appeal, a wheelchair ramp, a chair trolley, new vestments, external notice boards, organ renovation and even window grilles and automation of the clock chiming system.

In the past year The Friends were pleased to fund candle holders, altar linen and renovation of and repair to the weathervane on the tower, a total of £5,500.

Priory Friends’ income is derived primarily from subscriptions (see Priory web site link and Friends’ screen inside church entrance for application forms), donations, Gift Aid claims and fundraising events.

My thanks to those of you who are Friends; your on-going support is much appreciated. To those of you who are not yet Friends please do join so that we have the funds to continue supporting all future projects in The Priory.

My thanks to Friends’ Secretary Helen Oliver, Vice-Chairman Bill Quelch and all other members of The Friends’ Council. We are fortunate to have such a committed and supportive Council.

#### **Fundraising/Social Committee report – Geoff Bricknell**

A full programme of fundraising and social events had been arranged for 2020, and in January 2020 the diary was full. How optimistic we were! Although early expectations were hopeful for some events later in the year, it soon became clear that the annual Summer Fete and Christmas Bazaar were not going to happen.

In the latter half of 2020, a sponsored walk with a St Edfrith theme, raised a wonderful £4122. The initial idea came from Susannah Peppiatt, but Merrill Pitblado and Bill Quelch drove the idea forward and arranged the event. In place of the Bazaar, a Christmas Hamper draw was arranged, and this raised a creditable £636. Bill Quelch continued to organise the 100 club, and towards the end of the year a Priory Cookbook was compiled and published, courtesy of Sue Lindsay and Glenys Tyler.

In total, a figure of £6901 was raised in 2020, a very welcome addition to church funds. Although well below the excellent £17773 raised in 2019, we should be pleased that fundraising of some sort could continue in the very difficult circumstances. Thank you to all who helped and supported us.

### **House Groups**

The existing house groups have not been able to meet due to social restrictions, but there is a new online group to report on:

#### **New House Group – Susannah Peppiatt, Secretary**

The new home group has now met twice and is off to a good start with 7 people involved. The format of different people leading each week and praying Compline together at the end has proved really fruitful so far and we've been able to delve into some interesting ideas and stories together. We're continuing to meet once a month on Monday evenings on zoom for now, and although we're at quite healthy numbers as it is, we'd also be more than happy to welcome other members if anyone else would like to join.

### **Intergenerational Pioneers – Kathy Bland**

This year our Intergenerational Pioneer time has been thinly spread with lots of opportunities to do things differently and reach new people. We have tried to notice where God had been at work in Leominster and then to join in.

We have maintained a connection with our schools by recording and sending in videos while we have been unable to go into schools or have them visit The Priory – last April we made a daily video during Holy Week so that school children could still engage with Experience Easter even though we were unable to do this in Church and since then we have gathered our Open the Book volunteers together to produce Open the Book videos for use either at home or in school by Zoom or filming stories when it had been safe to do so. On alternate weeks we have created collective worship/ assemblies at home videos for schools to use.

We have been part of the service video editing team over the year and it has been positive to learn how to creatively present all age services online with the use of puppetry, animation and close up visuals which would not be easily possible in a service in Church. We have been able to share our all age services with a wider audience and have enabled Messy Church families to join in with both leading and watching services. Sunday morning services aren't necessarily easy for families to access; so offering something that people can engage with in their own time has helped to build the faith of our Messy Church families.

Messy Church has also required some pioneer creativity to respond to the changing context. Over the year we have continued to meet with Messy Church members via Zoom, Facebook Live and through delivering bags at home. The doorstep opportunities of delivering bags mean that we have been able to build relationships with people during the year. On a national level we have been leading training in Messy Church Discipleship, contributing to the Messy Church national voice in sharing our experiences via Facebook lives and being part of the conference planning team. Working more closely with the national Messy Church BRF team is helping to inform our local practice and keeping us in touch with a wide network of practitioners.

Adapting Christmas services to enable people to access them was an opportunity for creativity. We were able to offer Christingle and Nativity services both online and in church and the Crib service in church. We are aware of the large number of school children and families who usually come to church for carol services at Christmas and we hope and pray we will be able to pick up these opportunities next Christmas.

David and I have spent much of our time building relationships with people via the Food Bank's food share deliveries. Over the year we have delivered food to people in different geographical locations in Leominster every evening. We have a small team of people who do this – David and I have done between three and five sessions per week meaning that we have been able to get to know people who live in Barons Cross, Ridgemoor and the Mortimer St./ Wigmore St. areas of town as well as with people in temporary accommodation in the Talbot and Black Swan. At the beginning of the pandemic there was a particular need to ensure that older and vulnerable people had frequent access to food and this has bedded down into reaching those people who have longer term needs to access food on limited or no income. As a result of this work we have been keen to develop a money advice centre in Leominster and have now secured funding for this via Leominster Food Bank so will be actively recruiting volunteers to be money mentors over the year ahead.

Our work on Barons Cross over the year had been via these evening food deliveries and also occasional pop up larger food shares when we have had surplus food to give away. We were picking up Fareshare food from Birmingham once a month for part of the year which meant we had a large amount of fresh food to disperse on the same day. This was provided a wonderful opportunity to meet and talk to people on both Barons Cross and Ridgemoor. We have continued to be in conversation with Team Leominster and Leominster Town Council about offering family activity sessions at Barons Cross once restrictions are lifted and the Community Room is available to use.

As we move out of lockdown restrictions in the year ahead it will be helpful for us to reflect on how our pioneering has changed and to try to develop the community facing aspects of this even further rather than move back into church facing roles.

### **Messy Church – Kathy Bland**

Messy church went online and 'in a bag' in April 2020 after having three in person sessions at the beginning of the year. Our last public Sunday service in church On March 15<sup>th</sup> 2020 included the baptism of one of our Messy Church babies.

We tried a variety of approaches over the year including YouTube videos, Facebook live, session 'bags at home' and Zoom Messy Church. We found that younger children found it difficult to cope with Zoom and explaining activities with lots of activity happening in the different households on screen was tricky. However the positives were being invited into other people's houses ('by screen') which enabled families to experience what faith at home might be like and working with a smaller group of families enabled a quality of experience that we might sometimes miss with lots of people at Messy Church.

Between lockdowns we had two Messy Church sessions outside and one inside. These were similar in approach to our Zoom Messy Church with pre filled activity bags which pre-booked families used on their own socially distanced tables. Although we missed the ability to move around and chat to different people it was evident that the families who came were longing for some activities off screen and in the company of other people so it was valuable to do it even though it was not like the Messy Church we know and love! For those families not wanting to attend in person we sent session booklets by email and delivered bags of activities to those who requested them.

At Christmas our Christingle service was held in a Messy Church style with pre booked tables on which households were able to make and use their own Christingle. It was wonderful to be able to adapt our usual service in this new way and was very much enjoyed by people who took part.

We have kept in touch with our Messy Church families over the year and we hope and pray that our contact will mean they will return when we are back running more normally. This has been an extremely difficult time for families and we will have an important role in enabling families to meet, play, learn and worship together and build relationships again once it is safe to do so.

Our Messy Church continued to be part of the national Deepening Discipleship research which is being published in May 2021. Our focus was on social action and encouraging our Messy Church members to join in with social action projects either globally or locally as a way of enabling their faith to grow. Before the pandemic our approach was geographically wider – we visited our recycling centre, joined in with the shoebox appeal and were planning to twin a toilet. This approach became much more local post pandemic as people in need of our care were evident in our own streets and houses. As part of the Food Bank's 'food share' operation we regularly delivered surplus fruit and vegetables to our Messy Church families along with other people who might make use of them. We noticed that families were spontaneously sharing what they had and finding it a very positive way of blessing their friends and neighbours by leaving fruit or flowers on doorsteps – we even noticed messages of thanks popping up on local community Facebook pages!

In response to the findings of the research David and I have joined the Messy Church BRF trainers team so we are able to share some of the research findings with a wider audience of Messy Church practitioners online.

Jonathan became more active as a Messy Church young leader over the course of last year; helping to lead Facebook live sessions and plan sessions. He has joined the International Messy Church Conference planning team and he has

also created an online Messy Church young leaders group as a way of enabling Messy Young leaders to meet and encourage each other. This meets bi-monthly and is planned and led by young people.

## **Music – Hilary Norris**

### **Choir**

Since last April the choir has been recording tracks from home for the online services. The choir resumed singing for live services from July 2021, first as soloists and then together, as restrictions allowed. It was a blessing that we were able to sing as a full choir for Mike Kneen's final service. We were not able to sing during November, but enjoyed singing for many special services in October, and over the Christmas period. The choir has had to adapt to rehearsing and singing in new ways, according to guidance. This has been a challenge which choir members have risen to admirably. Some choir members have been shielding since March 2020, but have continued to feel part of the choir through their contributions for the online services and during zoom choir rehearsals that have taken place whenever live rehearsals have not been appropriate.

One of the highlights of the year for us was the 'Nine Lessons and Carols Service', the first time for very many years that the Priory Choir have sung this service in the Priory. We hope that this will now become an annual event, on the Sunday preceding Christmas.

We hope to continue to invite singers from village churches to join us for Choral Evensong, something that we had started to develop last year, when conditions allow. We have also been invited to sing at various churches, but this has not been possible due to the Covid pandemic.

### **Organ**

Last year I reported that the organ console may need attention soon (the restoration by Nicholson's (2015-2016) did not include work on the console). David Gallihan confirmed in October that present work can wait, but will need to be done within the next few years. Work should be coordinated with other work in the church.

The organ continues to be used by several people for practice and lessons, and for group workshops./events, particularly supporting the work of DHOTS and HOS.

### **Concerts**

All concerts have had to be cancelled this year, and fund-raising through concerts has not been possible. This year we hope to put on a Summer Concert (cello and organ), a few carefully chosen Leominster Festival events may take place, and the Presteigne Festival will be using the Priory as a venue for the first time (with a socially distanced audience). We hope that from September it will be possible for the Priory to continue to provide a venue for many other groups, but the situation remains unclear at present.

## **Plans for 2020-2021**

### **Choir**

Last year I reported that room in the vestry for choir practice is tight. In fact, since we returned to singing we have not been able to use the vestry for singing in at all, but this will remain an issue in the future. The annual RSCM Festival at the Cathedral in October is unlikely to go ahead, but, if conditions allow, the Advent Carol Service may provide an inclusive event involving other choirs/singers.

**Organs** In September the small Bevington organ, currently tucked behind a pillar in the Norman Nave, was awarded a BIOS certificate, officially recognising its worth as an historic instrument. Quotes for restoring it have been sought, and the funding needed for this will be part of a bigger bid for various developments, including work on the Norman Nave roof.

### **Concerts**

See above – all other concerts, including those by groups that use the Priory regularly, are on hold, pending Covid developments.

## **Pastoral Care – Helen Bricknell**

As with so much of life over the past 14 months, the Covid pandemic has made us look at the things that are really important to us and how we can play our part in the 'recovery'. This is true of the way the Priory community has worked together during the difficult weeks and months during the Covid lockdown and restrictions.

There has been a long established Pastoral Care Group, which has, for many years been a faithful group of people who have visited those who are ill, housebound, in hospital or simply in need of a visiting friendly face. This group has changed over the years as members have retired, moved away or sadly died. When it last met in 2019, a number of new members had joined the group which was encouraging! However, with the lockdown in March 2020, all visiting activities were suspended.

The Covid lockdown was very immediate and needed an instant response from the Priory congregation and clergy as to how we were going to support and care for those people 'stuck' in their homes. This was a moment when the pastoral care had to take a different route! A Leominster Priory 'Whatsapp' phone group was set up in early March 2020 with about 22 participants. This group initially made sure that everyone who could not get out of their homes to do shopping or any other tasks, had a way getting help.

A system was set up where members had about 10 'Priory people' to phone regularly to check all was well and to see what help was needed. It was a lifeline for many, particularly at the beginning of the Covid pandemic when many people were very afraid and anxious. A friendly, familiar voice at the end of the phone made a great difference to many!

Also set up was an email list, where a regular newsletter could be sent out quickly and easily, supplemented by postal copies to those without email.

The Leominster Foodbank was also very busy during the lockdown periods with huge quantities of food and other supplies being delivered or collected from the Community Centre. Several of the Priory congregation helped out with this vital work and still do. A 'Foodshare' scheme also began when the local supermarkets gave away much of their excess fresh produce. These sessions happened twice a week and Priory members also delivered these foods to friends and neighbours. If this food had not been shared with the community it would have been thrown away, adding to the already growing tons of food waste. People were very grateful and often excited to see what was being delivered to them each week! The Food Bank and Foodshare schemes now continue from their new premises behind the Priory near the Youth Hostel.

Although we have been unable to visit people in hospital, at home or in care homes over the last year or so, the pastoral care for one another, has been shown in other ways and this has been wonderful. It has made us look at how we engage and respond to peoples' needs in new ways and we hope that it has given us new impetus, when we eventually return to a more 'normal' way of life!

### **Priory Ministry Team – Paul Scott**

We have continued to support aspects of Priory life that have been affected both by the pandemic and the retirement of our Rector. The recorded Sunday services have continued and thanks to all who have taken part, particularly those clergy who have stepped in to help us out. We are grateful to Hilary Norris and the Choir for their flexibility, allowing the important choral aspect of services to be maintained. As the live Sunday morning service has recommenced, maintaining both live and recorded forms is a major commitment particularly for Sarah Chedgzoy, Susannah Peppiatt and David Bland, whom we thank. The Ministry Team are looking into ways of reducing that commitment over the long term.

Rob Walker has been producing the Sunday evening recorded services that have been much appreciated but due to other commitments these will now be occasional. The ministry team hope to continue to produce Evening Prayer once a month. The Team was pleased to offer various Holy Week services which maintained our tradition for this important prelude to Easter.

Some of us have helped preparation of the Priory Parish Profile, and look forward to the Rector post being advertised. We have been grateful to Rufus and Matthew who have joined some of our Team meetings. The Ministry Team was sad to say goodbye to Roger Pitblado, he and Merrill are moving away. Roger has contributed to the work of the Ministry Team, particularly in chairing its meetings. We wish them well in their search for a new home. We are in need of at least two new members of the team if we are to function effectively.