



All Saints Church
WOKINGHAM

Annual Review 2020



Introduction

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2020 has been dominated by the pandemic, and the need to adapt to the differing and often rapidly changing requirements, with no element of church life untouched.

This years annual report looks at key aspects in the life of the Church during 2020 and the steps by the Ministry Team, Church Wardens, PCC and Church Groups to provide support and continued Christian worship during these challenging times.

Front cover photo: February 2021 PCC meeting – all PCC meetings moved to zoom from early in 2020

Foreword

2020 was a very strange year for our church community and for some families a very sad year too.

It is artificial to break the reflection on the year at the end of the calendar year because the coronavirus pandemic which dominated 2020 suddenly intensified in early 2021 and we were once again closed for public worship as we had been for several months in 2020. Much of our reflections are coloured by the second lockdown through the winter of 2020/21 which meant that there were no services in church not only at Easter 2020 but also at Christmas 2020.

New practices of communication and support were developed during the year. We became an online church. We discovered that it is easier sometimes to attend church events from the comfort of our sofas, especially prayer and study groups on Zoom, that would otherwise require us to come out on cold, dark evenings in winter. Nevertheless I feel myself that so-called silver linings and new things discovered because of the pandemic cannot deflect from reality that it has been a very difficult time.

We do have hope as Christian people and we do look for what we can learn from our response to challenging situations.

We look too for where God's Spirit has been at work. In both our experience as a church community and in the wider community many of us have drawn deeply on God-given gifts of resilience, hope, courage and compassion.

This report gives some insights into that resilience and compassion. As we look back on the past year we can still find reasons to thank God and to be grateful to the gifts and support we have shared with one another.

The Reverend Canon David Hodgson
Rector



Church Services

The church building was closed completely to the public by Government order for two months including Easter and then re-opened daily for private prayer as soon as this was allowed. There were extensive Covid safety measures put in place, thanks to some very hard work by the clergy and wardens with a team of helpful volunteers.

Sunday worship continued every week on-line during the ban on communal worship then in church when allowed between July and October. There was enough advance notice of the first lockdown to enable the Director of Music to record hymns and readings which he subsequently mixed with celebrations of communion from clergy homes, and later from the church to provide a recorded communion on YouTube every week. For people without Internet access, sermons, prayers and notices were available on a phone line.

X-plore youth church was a particular success via Zoom. Attendance increased from an average of eight or nine before lockdown to fourteen each week. The Group broadened its age range to include the seniors from Junior Church which was not able to continue in person. The family service continued, sometimes on-line and sometimes in The Cornerstone, with a change of time. This change allowed the Family Service to cover the Junior Church slot with parents attending in The Cornerstone and then going through to the Communion service in church.

Funerals, christenings and weddings were held following the rules applicable at whatever time they were held. There was a significant reduction in the number of all these occasional services. The first two of our Christmas services (Christingle and the Nativity) were held as planned, but the PCC decided to restrict all of the others to on-line only as the evidence of the spread of Covid grew in the third week in December.

Morning Prayer remained online by Zoom from March until the end of the year with slightly increased attendance. Night Prayer on Zoom weekly was added to the services schedule early in the lockdown and also continued through the rest of 2020.



Ministry Team and staff changes

During 2020 Chrispen Gumbs joined the ministry team as an ordinand who is studying at Oxford for ordination as an Anglican priest whilst living in Wokingham with his family. He is sponsored by his home diocese in the Caribbean region.

The Diocese responded to our request for a new training curate and it was confirmed that Becky Medicott will join the team when she is ordained in July.

We appointed a new Parish Administrator, Jane Hodgson (pictured - no relation to the Rector) and a new Cornerstone Manager, Amanda Lambourne (picture not yet available!). Both started work in August and were able to work together in the Parish Office and forge a good working relationship before the second lockdown in November forced them to work from home.

The Reverend Hannah informed us of the news that she was expecting her second baby in February 2021. She continued working throughout 2020 and began maternity leave in January 2021. We are delighted to report that baby Daniel arrived safe and sound in February 2021.



Pastoral Care team

Our Pastoral Care team Co-ordinator reports:

An emergency meeting was held in the middle of March when it was obvious that the pandemic was getting worse and that the first lockdown was imminent. Members of the pastoral care team, prayer and healing ministry team, bereavement care team, home communion team and christening care teams came together to discuss a plan of action. As a result, the coronavirus response team at All Saints was set up to help our church community at this difficult time.

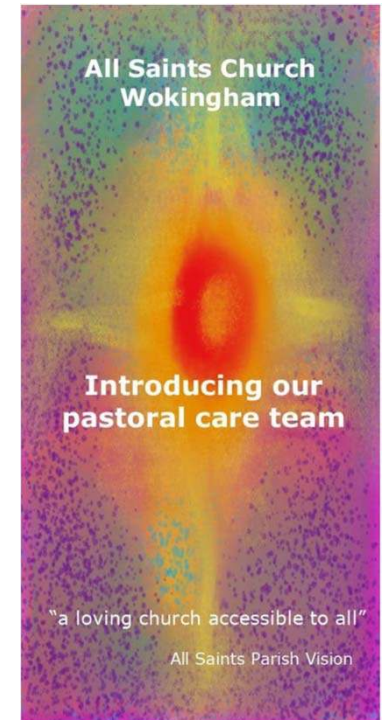
A dedicated phone number was set up for members to use if they wanted a chat, talk to a member of the clergy, or one of the team, receive prayer – in fact, no-one needed a definite request to use this phone line!

Regular phone calls were set up to members of our church community, who would appreciate it, to ensure that they were okay. Each team member was allocated specific people to ring and a database was organised to ensure that people did have regular phone calls which is still happening.

Everyone was encouraged to keep in touch with church friends and neighbours by phone to support and pray for each other.

This has been a hard and difficult year for the pastoral care teams. Normally we would see people at church and would address their concerns before or after a service, so we have been reliant on people letting us know if help was needed. We have had members of the congregation pass away, members contracting coronavirus, members having to self-isolate, members going into hospital for other reasons and family members not being able to visit, people feeling vulnerable and lonely and needing to talk. On top of this, the team themselves were feeling overwhelmed because they had their own family problems and struggles to cope with.

What a year! But having said all that, it has been a joy and a blessing that we have been able to help support our church community during 2020.



Home Communion Team

The Home Communion Team Co-ordinator reports:

The team consists of both clergy and lay members and our mission is to bring the church to those in our parish who for any reason cannot access it.

In January and February we visited church members who could no longer get to church and shared a short Communion service with them. We visited four Care Homes once a month: Down Lodge, Glebelands, Murdoch House and Suffolk Lodge. A clergy-led service also took place at the community room on the Acorn Drive estate.

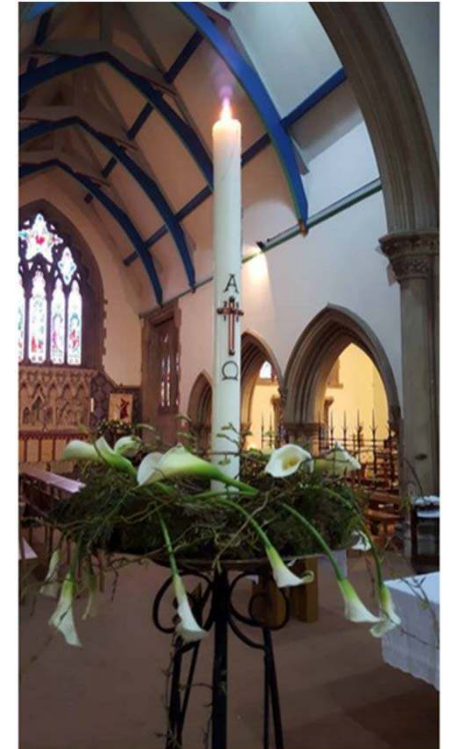
From March onwards we could no longer provide this service. We couldn't take communion to anyone. However, we tried to keep in touch with those we visit by phone calls, meeting in gardens when we could, or by writing letters and, in one case, by Zoom.

Wokingham Borough Council asked Churches Together in Wokingham to provide a contact person to connect to each one of the Care Homes in the Borough in order to show them that they are not forgotten. Four of our team members have been keeping in touch with the four homes mentioned above. We do this by phoning or emailing a designated member of staff.

We have talked to residents by phone and sometimes through a window. We have provided prayer cards for those who wanted them. Each Care Home has received a booklet of prayers, for particular help for the staff at the bedside when someone is near the end of their life on earth.

One evening the Reverend Hannah led a short service with a reading and prayers outside each Home in turn and blessed each one. This was well received and was very moving. At Christmas we sent cards from the church to every resident in the Care Homes and to individuals.

We look forward to the time when we can go into homes and worship together again.



Prayer & Healing Ministry Team

The **Prayer and Healing Ministry Team** is made up of three groups.

The Healing Prayer Group meets once a month to pray for anyone who feels in need of prayer. It is totally confidential and anyone can ask a member of the group to add their name to their list.

The second group is the team offering prayer ministry after the 9.30 service on Sunday mornings. After the service one or two members of the team will be in the Lady Chapel available for anyone who asks for prayer.

The third group is the team available for the Laying on of Hands at our Healing services. The 9.30 service on the third Sunday of the month alternates with the 6.30pm evening service on the fourth Sunday of the alternate month.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the only group that was able to continue during the last year was the Healing Prayer group. We continued to receive requests for prayer throughout the year and we met, virtually, every month to pray together. We also contacted those, whom we were able to, to check on how they were and to see if they still required our prayer.



Community activities at The Cornerstone

As the Covid requirements unfolded we became increasingly aware of the difference between the Cornerstone as a community venue (the halls and the de Vitre room) which had to close almost all the time and a rented space (the Wokingham Job Support Centre and counselling rooms) and our own offices which were able to be open at times, except during the first full lockdown of the year.

The requirements for each were very different but all our users were very sympathetic to the new requirements. Monica Martin retired as bookings secretary in June after 15 years of excellent support. We held a socially distanced time) outdoors in June. Judi Arnold retired as voluntary Cornerstone Manager in August after 6 years of visionary development of the scope of the activities. Amanda Lambourne joined as the new Cornerstone Manager in August. Due to the impact of Covid almost all community activities had to be suspended in 2020 such as the **Luncheon Club** which is so appreciated by many local residents.



Groups adapted where they could, for example, the popular **Willing Spirit Exercise Group**. Jo Asplin, the Group leader noted that at the beginning of March 2020, the Group had 30 individuals registered for the Wednesday afternoon classes with an average of 16-18 attending regularly. March 18th was the Group's last sessions of 2020 after which it was forced to stop due to the Covid-19 outbreak and the restrictions that were to follow.

During the last 11 months Jo has been emailing everyone with some workout videos to follow and updates on the situation as and when they are available as well as keeping in touch via Facebook.

On 22nd January 2021 Nina Hillier one of the Groups members passed away in her sleep after a long battle with cancer. Nina had been part of Wednesday Fitness community since April 2017 and Jo has so many fond memories of her. Her energy, her sense of humour and her determination to live life. Classes were always filled with laughter and a little bit of chaos when Nina was there.

As vaccinations for Covid-19 continue Jo hopes that in 2021 we will be able to restart sessions as soon as Government Guidelines allow. However in the meantime, Jo will continue to email workouts and keep in touch with the Group members.

Our support for charitable organisations

Partner Charities for 2020:



Night Shelter:

- There was a real success in the first two months, when, with a team of volunteers, we ran a Winter Night Shelter for two months from January 2020. We hosted Sunday nights and in co-operation with six other churches in the town, every night was covered. This was enthusiastically welcomed by all the visitors.
- The Church providing donations to The Salvation Army from its flexible donation fund to help with their support of the homeless in the local community. Statutory provision for the homeless was increased as result of Covid and in any event our early 2020 provision for a shelter would not be considered Covid secure. We hope that local authority provision for the homeless will continue, but if a shelter is required again there will be some residual momentum from 2020.

Mission Giving

- Giving remains a high priority for All Saints, and we give 10% of our voluntary income to charities each year. We have pledged support of just over £18,300 for 2020 and we work closely with the charities we support.
- We have partners to whom we give every year - USPG, CMS & Bible Society nationally and PACT, Soulscape, and Wokingham Food Bank locally.
- Each year we also give support to charities suggested by congregation members for three years at a time on a rolling programme. The two charities supported in 2020 were Potters Village and Connect Counselling Service.

Working with Christian Aid

- Peter Barrett as local chair of Christian Aid noted that 2020 was a difficult year for raising funds for Christian Aid, with the pandemic halting all activities. The Church made additional donations due to the cancellation of Christmas Services. However, as highlighted by Peter, the great thing was that lots of people approached him individually, wanting to donate. So a big thank you to them and everyone who supported Christian Aid, given the difficult circumstances.

Bellringers, Church Fellowship and Julian Groups

For the **Bellringers** the last practice night was 16th March but we have stayed connected every Monday evening, from 30th March for a chat and quiz via zoom and by 20th April we were registered with Ringing Room, an online bellringing platform.

The Central Council of Church Bellringers' have guided the ringers throughout lockdown. When services resumed in July we rang handbells outside the church and from 26th July we rang 4 or 5 tower bells. Between 26th July and 25th October we rang for 16 services, 12 with handbells and 14 with tower bells. For 10 services we rang 15 minutes of both handbells and tower bells. Since 25th October we have not rung for any services.

During the summer 4 members of the band rang handbell quarter peals on a member's front lawn. Two rung on 9th August were for David and Lorraine's 40th Wedding Anniversary. In October we initiated a handbell group in the Cornerstone before the November lockdown.

The air conditioning unit project was awarded its faculty on 24th August and installed in early October. Despite lockdown we had one new member wishing to learn to ring. She has been taught remotely and is now integrating into our online band.

Sadly in 2020 the **Church Fellowship Group**, after 45 years in existence had to fold due to the impact from Covid-19 on the Group's activities. It is hoped that in the future it will be possible to set up a similar group to provide friendship and support for members of the congregation and wider community

The **Julian Group** has had to take a pause during the Covid-19 crisis. The Group tries to keep in touch via email, phone and post, often sending little, "thoughts for the day". The Group eagerly await the day (or evening) when they can meet again.



The Flower Guild

When Lockdown began in March, and the church was closed, all flower arranging was cancelled. Lorraine and David came up with the wonderful idea of creating an Easter Garden in the wall outside the Cornerstone, and some of us provided posies of Spring flowers for decoration.

Once the church was opened for private prayer in June, we provided a pedestal in the porch to welcome people as they came in. When services resumed in July we were able to provide a platform pedestal as well. Despite all the limitations of wearing facemasks and keeping clear of the barriers, those of us who felt able carried on stoically.

We have continued to arrange throughout the church year, through Harvest, All Saints, Remembrance, Advent and Christmas, even though limited by social distancing. Our committee meetings were held on Zoom, as was our Christmas Workshop, extremely well led by Sue Hedley, and much appreciated.

We appreciate the continuing financial support of the PCC, and are grateful to several of our members who donate their flowers. Therefore we have managed to keep a healthy balance, despite not receiving our usual donations throughout the year.

Our membership remains constant, although we would always welcome new arrangers to the Guild.



An Easter Garden scheme created by the Flower Guild outside the Cornerstone....

Mothers Union

For the **Mothers Union** 2020 began as in previous years with our AGM in January.

Throughout the year, one project that has been able to continue is our commitment to sending Baptism Anniversary cards for the first three Baptism anniversaries to all those christened at All Saints.

Links with the Wednesday Mums have been maintained throughout the year and this support has been very valuable, especially for parents struggling with small children and/or those of school-age requiring home schooling.

As we were not incurring branch expenses, we decided to donate our branch subscriptions to the Mothers' Union Urgency Appeal as, in common with many charities, their income has been drastically affected.

Members also supported two Oxford Diocesan projects:- we collected toiletries and other requested items for the families at the Ronald MacDonald House at Oxford Children's Hospital and we contributed Christmas cards so that every person in Bullingdon prison received at least one card from MU members.



We have had the opportunity to join online Mothers' Union services and meetings, within the branch we have kept in touch by email and telephone calls and several members have also regularly phoned other members of the congregation. This has been especially valued by those who have been isolating on their own.

We look forward to being able to meet face-to-face once again.

Offering leadership and support in responding to the climate emergency

As a church we have committed to take action in response to the climate emergency and call upon others as well as ourselves to take fresh and urgent steps to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

The main ways we have been promoting this in 2020 are:

- by reducing the carbon footprint of our church properties such as fitting low-energy lights; and
- our electricity is supplied from renewable sources; and we host an array of solar panels on

The Cornerstone:

- we maintain our 4- acre churchyard in ways which encourage biodiversity and we are developing projects to better understand, conserve and promote the biodiversity
- we observed the Season of Creation as a church again in 2020 and we regularly encouraged reflection, prayer, thought and action on environmental sustainability issues
- we supported with a grant Soulscape in their climate action project CARE with pupils of St Crispin's School
- we held an online Climate Emergency workshop in summer 2020 and we are gathered together a standing Climate Emergency Action Group.
- we signed up as a church to a diocesan pilot project and have two church members currently attending a climate change course run by the Diocese in conjunction with University College London
- The Rector led a climate change session at Sonning Deanery Synod in early 2020



New Communities and *spaceforall*

We end this report with a look to the future.

Included within the PCC's specific objectives for 2020 were to:

- develop its mission to the new housing areas in Wokingham
- further develop the plans for the *spaceforall* project to turn the church into an active community hub

In our **New communities** one of the main events was the distribution of sunflower seeds in the spring, during Lockdown #1. A few volunteers distributed small packets of seeds across new estates including Montague Park and Keephatch Gardens, with simple instructions on how to plant and care for them – both an activity for families and something to brighten up the neighbourhood. It was something that people really appreciated and engaged with, the results were lovely and quite a few photos were posted on the Facebook page.

Meetings and events have been very limited due to Covid but the ladies group met for dinner in early 2020 and keep in touch via WhatsApp.

The *spaceforall* project (www.spaceforall.org.uk): Work on this project slowed after the first lockdown for Covid but we subsequently took a hard look at this and realised that it was essential to move forward as quickly as could to create an open and accessible community hub.

We were granted a faculty in December and recruited a fund-raising consultant to help us realise the much cut down Phase 1 of our building plans.



An artist impression of the Church acting as a hub for the local community

Our thanks to the contributors....

The PCC would like to thank the Team/Group leaders for giving their updates on events during 2020 and reflections of the challenges faced.

Contributors included:

- Pastoral Care team: **Jo Robinson**
- Home Communion Team: **Barbara Smith**
- Prayer & Healing Ministry Team: **Gill Allen**
- Willing Spirit Exercise Group: **Jo Asplin**
- Church Fellowship Group: **Gill Sutterby**
- Julian Group: **Su Mcarthur**
- Bellringers: **Jane Mellor**
- Flower Guild: **Gail Houghton**
- Mothers Union: **Pam Creech**
- Prayer & Healing Ministry Team: **Gill Allen**

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The Parish Office, The Cornerstone, Norrey's Avenue,
Wokingham RG40 1UE