

APCM REPORT
BY THE TEAM RECTOR,
THE REV'D DR DAVID
MUNCHIN,
FOR
THE PARISH OF WELWYN
AND WOOLMER GREEN
2020

Happy birthday to Sue Keach!!

To state the obvious: this is a most unusual address at a most unusual APCM. We meet with no pre-meeting Eucharist, half time puddings or post prandial presentation. We meet six months later than would normally be legal because of the coronavirus pandemic. Some of us meet in person, others on zoom.

And perhaps most of all it is odd, because this meeting is designed to look back retrospectively at 2019, a year which now seems a long way away, and after all that has happened, an even more distant memory. It is perhaps easier to do with hard facts like accounts and reports, but in an address it is difficult to avoid the shadow which coronavirus has cast over events since the end of 2019. On December 31st I think few of us would have imagined what lay ahead. Indeed when I looked back on my electronic diary to construct this address it had already automatically deleted the first half of the year.

So my reflections on 2019 will be rather shorter than usual, and then I will say a little about COVID19 and then a little about the future.

2019 begun with me just fresh back from sabbatical and a year which included another sabbatical within the team ministry, with Susannah off from May to July. Susannah made poetry the focus of her sabbatical and just before lockdown, we had a

wonderful study day led by her – Dante for Dummies – for once we didn't mind being classified as dummies.

Previous to that we had a good Holy Week with an old friend of mine, Brian Cunningham the Chaplain from Oundle school, leading us through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day.

We had a successful holiday club and series of summer evensongs all sadly missing from this year. We looked at our Mission Action Planning, though as some of you were kind enough to point out the goals reached were not perhaps terribly stretching or exciting. We did however make strides towards looking at how we might be more eco-friendly as a church, engaging with the auditing process offered by Eco-church. That is something that will be important to return to when we emerge from coronavirus – in one of my recorded addresses I reflected that with slightly too many things being delivered sterile and pre-packaged as a result of COVID19 restrictions. we may find that the impact on our environment with things like single use plastics and disposable PPE equipment will in the long term be as severe as COVID itself. We also had a pantomime.

In the middle of the year Kirsty Wainwright moved with her family to St Albans to be ordained as a deacon and to serve as a curate in the parish of St Stephen with St Julian in St Albans. It

was sad to see her and the family go, but as we might expect she has been a great boon for that parish. Sadly her ordination to the priesthood was delayed from late June to a couple of weeks ago, and like all ordinations this year was not quite the grand event which it usually is – again due to the COVID restrictions. Nonetheless it is a cause for rejoicing that we have fostered that vocation to the priesthood here in Welwyn, as we have also fostered the vocation of Kathryn Alford. Kathryn was a year behind Kirsty in her training, but was ordained as a deacon to serve in the Hatfield Team Ministry – again delayed from June to a couple of weeks ago, and again on a much diminished scale. However still a cause for rejoicing.

It is therefore also true that there has been a slight loss of personnel in the recent past with Dominic our curate moving on to pastures new. Again there was a certain delay between Dominic being appointed – the last interview in the Diocese before lockdown – and the licensing of him last week as the priest in charge of Ampthill in Bedfordshire. Again not quite the joyful occasion which one expects but very good to see him, after a good curacy here, take on a role of greater responsibility, and again a source of pride that we have played a part in his formation. We, and particularly those at St Michael's will miss him. There is as yet no news of if and when we might have another curate in his place. However in the past

few months Philip Waller has been seconded to full time Diocesan DDO work, meaning that his half time role as Team Vicar based in Codicote has been covered by Liz Lavelle. Many of you will remember Liz as a ministry student here, and she has just finished her time as curate at St Francis in Welwyn Garden City. Liz is now looking for a permanent stipendiary role, but we are delighted that in the meantime the Bishop of Hertford has agreed to license her to the Welwyn Team Ministry on a self-supporting basis.

But more than Dominic, we will miss Daniel who has done a wonderful job in the essential post of PCC secretary, and it is great that he can be here today so that we can thank him in person, before he hands that task over. My particular thanks to him for getting the booklet and paperwork together for this meeting so late in the year.

As we then think of officers changing we must say many thanks to Don Bell in his role of Treasurer, which he now relinquishes and passes on to Maggie Varco. It is in some ways the most detailed and involved task of all the church officers, and Don has done it well – we will miss his enigmatic PCC reports.

We also say an enormous and heartfelt thank you to Stuart Carr for all the work he has done on the fabric at Welwyn, and now has passed that on to another Stewart – Stewart Jenkins. The

number of Stewarts around, of various spellings, being enough for a small royal dynasty.

So then to the present situation. Lent started normally, fairly well even. We had a pancake race, we had Ash Wednesday, we started a rather good Lent course based around the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book, 'Saying yes to life' by Ruth Valerio, which was concerned with environmental issues. But by Mothering Sunday our churches were closed for worship and very soon afterwards closed altogether, with not even the clergy allowed to enter them. Suddenly a lot of our and my usual work and activity disappeared – particularly pastorally, as one could not, and still in most cases can not, visit anyone in hospital, care homes or private houses. Many people were and are shielding. Our schools initially shut for nearly a term, before limited opening at the end of the school year. They are open now but in very different and sometimes rather difficult circumstances and I do ask that you continue to hold them all in your prayers. The staff led by Mary and Jan have been incredible in the amount of work and careful preparation they have done for children during this difficult and crucial period. At the same time as things shut down we had to learn to do other things quite quickly. We livestreamed services from the beginning and continue to do so. We thank Nikki Lewis for her help with that, particularly in the hijacking of her YouTube

channel. We had zoom meetings and events. We set up round robin emails to keep people in touch with all we were doing, and set up calling circles amongst the congregation. Of course relatively little of this was organised – often it was simply a case of friends and neighbours helping out and lending a hand, as was replicated millions of times across the country. My reflection on technology is that it is amazing what it can do, and goodness knows how much worse things would have been without it – I think particularly of the Christian Aid week zoom quiz, which was brilliantly organised, raised a lot of money for that worthy cause, and I hope was enjoyed by all who took part. However I think we should also acknowledge what technology cannot do, and how much people have missed and continue to miss what we might call real and normal interaction. It is not easy, and often one hears of people finding zoom meetings exhausting and frustrating. My hope is that when we return to something like normality we will have learnt to use technology better, but as a tool, using the right tool for the right job, and also learning where it simply falls short. We also need to admit that we, or rather I made mistakes in the roll out of responses to COVID19. However overall I think, although we cannot be complacent, our response has generally been excellent. People have been kept in touch with, we got into livestreaming very quickly, and as soon as we were able

more or less all regular worship resumed around the team. We've seen some very creative responses like the brief but thought provoking conversations topics on Facebook which have been a feature of the past few months. The magazine both virtual and now in print again has been a tremendous asset and resource for the village – many thanks to the team for all they do on that. Thank you to all who have helped with this. Particularly to Su Blanch, and Kathryn Alford before she moved to Hatfield. Also thanks to Peter Brattle for helping with the health and safety aspects of opening the church, particularly since July. However a special thank you must go to Jane Carr whose twice weekly bulletins have been the main stay of our efforts – they have been truly game changing for many people. Of course many challenges lie ahead as we will have several months of this yet. Part of the difficulty has been that things have changed rather quickly, and as we know from this week, may continue to do so. As someone who likes to plan ahead I know that this has not always been possible and that has been frustrating. Or we have planned things – and seen them come to nothing because the situation has changed. So Remembrance Sunday at this point we have a plan – which without any parading is a socially distanced outside service at the war memorial as usual. However we have abandoned the parade service in church as with the numbers attending there is

no way we can make this safe. You will ask about Christmas, and you might well do so. I think at this stage what I can say is that it will be different. Some services will be more or less as normal, or at least as the new normal, some will be very different, or virtual or a mix of virtual and real, or ticketed, or indeed some things may just not happen.

When we emerge from COVID19 we will have to reckon with emerging from probably the biggest threat to our national and economic life since the second world war. Some people will not have the jobs that they had. Some, perhaps many businesses will no longer exist. There will be significant hardship. The church will of course not be immune. Nationally churches will close and posts will be axed, and that includes this Diocese. Indeed some Diocese will struggle to continue in anything like their present form. In that sense we are all in it together. If we are honest there were some strained relationships in our church community in 2019, and that may continue when we emerge from the present crisis. Some people frankly will have felt or indeed been left behind or forgotten. Some people's mental health will have suffered. People will have died during the crisis. Our finances whilst robust at the moment, may well take a long term hit, meaning that we have to reassess our resources and aims. At the same time as resources dwindle locally and nationally, that situation perversely will of course

mean that human need is greater than ever, and therefore the need for the church and its ministry correspondingly so. And please do think carefully and prayerfully about that. There are several high cost fabric projects which are on going – the parkay flooring has just finished being relaid, and our gas boiler will be replaced, which is a very substantial investment.

The word crisis as I am fond of reminding people is however, simply the Latin word for cross. To be in crisis is to stand at the foot of the cross. It forces us to be there with Jesus. Crosses, like crossroads, point in several directions – to some extent different outcomes, both positive and negative, different directions are possible from the cross. Jesus on the cross confronts us with an existential decision – to live for God and one another, or to live for ourselves. As we will eventually pass through this cross, this crisis, things will change, but not everything is beyond our control – we have choices, we have decisions, we can emerge from this in various different ways, and quite a lot of it frankly is up to us.

I hope you'll understand that I keep thanks brief and representative. It's better to leave lots of people out and hurt everyone's feelings equally, than make ghastly omissions. Our thanks to all our musicians in this most frustrating of years, particularly to Penny and Linden. Our thanks to Tina in the

team office. I am so thankful to Linda and Richard and all the team of people in the vestry and servers.

Finally my thanks to our wonderful churchwardens, Sue, Diane and Stuart. They act with grace, humour and wisdom. I particularly want to thank them. And very finally thanks to you all, for the past year.

We also remember those who had died in the past year, their families, and we continue to remember and pray for them Molly Trudgett, Paul Stevens, Alan Plumley, Nora Burnett, Madeleine Phillips, Ethel Moore, Shiela Edmondson, Margaret Swift, Roger Francis, John Farrow, George Warner, Bobby Wilson, and Audrey Taylor. Quite a sad and full roll call this year, to people who have added so much to the life of this place in the past. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

David Munchin, Team Rector, 2020