

APCM REPORT
BY THE TEAM RECTOR,
THE REV'D DR DAVID
MUNCHIN,
FOR
THE PARISH OF WELWYN
AND WOOLMER GREEN
2021

To rather state the obvious, this is not a normal APCM and 2020 was not a normal year. Normally we would be starting this meeting, not on zoom but in person, and with a Eucharist. There would be high calorie count puddings and an interesting speaker after the business meeting. And we would be reporting on a very different year. What makes it odder still is that because of COVID19 the APCM for 2019 was only six months ago, and the year we are now looking back on, was almost itself over.

So I remind you that today we look back from January 1st 2020, and I begin by reminding you how normally that year started. We packed into Church House to hear a wonderful day on Dante led by Susannah, fresh back from her sabbatical. We crowded onto Codicote Road for a pancake race, we started meeting in people's living rooms for a very good Lent group based around the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book by Ruth Valerio, looking at the Christian response to environmental concerns. So far so normal. By Mothering Sunday everything was locked down. No services were permitted in church, and for a period not even clergy were allowed to enter them. All other activities ceased. And in the world outside the church, nearly everything closed down in the first lockdown: schools, businesses and shops. All our Holy Week and Easter services were led by the Bishop of Hertford from his dining room. And many thanks to him for that.

It wasn't until July that congregations were allowed back in church building for services, under the conditions which we have more or less had since. Things carried on until a second wave, when its associated lockdown came in at Christmas. We just about got our Christmas services in, and although this time there was no order to close churches, we suspended in person worship for two months, along it has to be said with every other church in the deanery. In mid February we opened up again. There are still many activities which cannot take place – really worship is the exception to the rule, in that it can take place indoors – and there will be some restrictions for another two months at least. Of course worship looks very different – face masks, distance, no singing, lots of sanitising.

Six months ago I said that I had got some things wrong over the past year. But six months on, I do want to say as a team some of the things we have done right. We have livestreamed services in one form or another from day one – never having done so before. Communication through weekly emails, youtube recordings, and the website has been brilliant from the start. Apart from those two months of high infection rates at the start of the year, not only have church services been held whenever it was legal to do so, but we have kept up a full rota across the team of every service you would expect – including midweek services, and special events. The churches have been open every day that it has been legal for them to be open. We've provided and supported local food banks, and sometimes in a loosely organised way, and sometimes just through natural friendships, people have supported and looked out for one another. So as a team together, I think we will look back and though we, like everyone, has struggled during this time, I think we can say we did quite well. It has personally been the oddest time in ministry. Along with my colleagues we have not been in a hospital or a care home for over a year, nor taken school assemblies, for even when they were back classes are confined to bubbles, only very rarely have we been able to visit people at home, all things which usually we would be doing several times a week. There have indeed been periods of frustration and boredom. Some other things to note about 2020. Again curtailed by circumstances, what would normally have been events with significant parish interest were curtailed, but nonetheless for the people involved were momentous. Delayed until September, Kathryn Alford was ordained as a deacon to serve in the Hatfield Team Ministry. Kirsty Wainwright who had been serving as a deacon in St Stephens and St Julians in St Albans for a year, was ordained priest. Also in two garden parties of 30 people and zoom, we said farewell as best we could to our excellent curate Dominic as he moved on to be Vicar of Ampthill group of churches in Bedfordshire, after he successfully completed his curacy here. More annoyingly he took a very good PCC secretary with him in the form of Daniel. We are at the moment

looking at possible candidates for curacy in 2022, and we hope to have news about that soon. In the meantime the house was updated and decorated, and is now successfully let, generating much needed income. Also we have been very pleased to welcome Liz Lavelle as an assistant minister in our team. Originally Liz came to cover a secondment by the Diocese of Philip Waller, but she enjoyed it so much she has stayed. Particularly with the loss of Dominic we are really grateful to her for her ministry, in a time when it is not easy to begin a new ministry anyway. We know we may not have her for long, but we are pleased that we have her now.

We should say a word about our excellent schools led by Jan Martin and Mary Westley. If you think you've had it tough, frankly unless you are a hospital acute specialist, walk a mile in their shoes. The teams at our church schools have been outstanding in providing often at times two parallel schools – one on line and one physical. Remember even when schools were, in inverted commas, 'shut', key worker children were still attending. The amount of work that has kept children and teachers safe, whilst continuing to provide a first class education is mind boggling, and we should remember what Christian service and outreach is done by our schools.

Of course we have learnt some new skills in the past year. Many will have learnt to zoom and to skype. And generally we have become aware of how technology can help us, both in the church and in daily life, and therefore have learnt new skills. Thanks in particular to Stephen Jupp and Nikki Lewis, as ever under Linden's musical direction, we have had a lovely recorded choir – we hope at the end of this to put together a recording of their greatest hits. I don't want to bore people with technical details, but very often when you hear the end result people think it's just a case of sticking up a microphone at choir practise. But of course, the people being recorded were all in their own homes, recording their individual parts to a backing track before being edited together – a few years ago the only place where such things happened were professional recording studios

with professional and highly paid producers – yet today thanks to technology and people’s gifts we can do it in parish living rooms. Also livestreaming is something which we started from day one. I know we haven’t always got it right, but do just reflect on the challenges involved. It is actually a very difficult thing to get right – armchair critics should remember at least two things. Most of what you see on TV is pre-recorded, and there is no audience. What we were trying to do is both do live TV, and for most of year also ensure that the sound and vision for the live congregation was not impaired, and on a budget. If you ask anyone in the profession those two factors complicate the equation quite a bit. Thanks to the generosity of many of you, we have now upgraded to some professional equipment, though even that needed some major tweaks after installation. Do remember two things. Firstly the average TV location broadcast truck has several millions pounds of equipment in it, and a staff of several highly qualified and paid individuals – I’ve organised such broadcasts from my time at the Cathedral so I know. Also we are dependent as every one is on outside telephone lines and internet connections – when YouTube stops livestreaming as it did the week before last, it is beyond our control to fix it. Having said that we are in as good a position as we can be to livestream quite high quality services in the future. I think it is important to remember that worship is something we participate in, whereas TV is something we watch. I think there are fundamental differences between these activities, and whilst livestreaming serves its purpose, I think we need to keep those in mind. It is true that livestreaming provides access to people who might not be able physically to get to church. I get that, but I would say that having just resumed home communions, it is being tech savvy rather than being physically limited, that determines whether people engage better with livestreamed or in person worship. Some things have gone swimmingly well on zoom. I know it isn’t always the best experience, and can sometimes produce bits of comedy unintentionally – but feedback suggests that the Lent groups which this

year had to meet exclusively on zoom, mainly thanks to the excellent material, were a great success. Also we have coming up again a Christian Aid quiz – please support this, as this is the second year we won't be able to do house to house collections - we've done a couple of these virtual quizzes, and I have to say, thanks to those involved, they have been absolutely great, and moreover raised large chunks of cash for good causes.

So to the future. We pray that over the coming months restrictions will ease, the risks of COVID19 will abate and we can return to something like normal life. Though of course, as perhaps we go through the period which has changed most our economic and social life since a world war, we will emerge different, as people, as communities and as a church. And I think I am a bit weary of people second guessing what that will look like – I think to a large extent we don't know. But somethings we do know. The economy and churches' finances have taken a hit. Some diocese are looking at cutting large numbers of clergy posts. We've sadly lost a lot of people in the past year, and many others have suffered the effects of illness, isolation, mental ill health, economic difficulties and other side effects of the restrictions. At the same time, we have not seen the usual trickle of people joining our churches, and many of our activities which we think of as outreach have not been possible. I think maybe in the autumn we are going to have to take a long hard look at some things. What sort of church communities do we want to be? Are we willing to give the time and money to become those communities? What are we expecting of other people, and what are we expecting of ourselves? I have to say some of those questions will not be easy ones, but I think there will have to be a sense of urgency and recovery over the next year or two. Not least in terms of necessary fabric projects like the installation of our new boilers and ancillary equipment. Of course I and all of you, assume you will come to church and there will be two inviting warm, well-lit, functioning buildings. The truth is that takes many person hours. We thank Stuart Carr for all he has done at St Marys' and I have to say the new Stewart, in this

case Jenkins , has taken over with role with similar efficiency and care, and we thank him for that. Also for the work Sue Keach does on the fabric at St Michaels. We thank Don for his years as Treasurer which ended after our last APCM a few months ago, and thanks also to Maggie Varco who takes up this detailed and time consuming role. And we thank Jackie Davis for her continued help looking after the money at St Michaels. I have already said a few words of thanks about our musicians when talking about recording, but to Linden and Michelle, and Penny, we are truly blessed in having such able, dedicated and helpful musicians.

A huge thanks must go to Jane Carr, who together with Su Blanch, has looked after the communications and website that have been so important in the past year and a bit. Thanks to Peter Brattle who has helped us out with making St Mary's COVID compliant.

Finally, my thanks to our wonderful churchwardens, Sue, Diane and Stuart. They act with grace, humour and wisdom. I particularly want to thank them. One of them rather modestly said with lockdown there hadn't been that much to do. But there is so much behind the scenes – and if you ever wonder who attends services, opens and closes the church every day, puts the bins out – then that is just the start of the wardens' duties – often overlooked or taken for granted. 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, Ethel Moore, Shiela Edmondson, Margaret Swift, Roger Francis, John Farrow, George Warner, Bobby Wilson, Audrey Taylor, Carol Roper, Dennis Dinsdale, Mavis Kingham, Michael Bartlett, Rob Hill, and from Ayot many will know Ruth Shirley and Poppy Richards. 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, 2021

