

Report for the APCM Christ Church, 28th. May 2023 Pentecost Sunday.

It seems very fitting to share these memories of last year, alongside questions for going forward as a Church Family, on Pentecost Sunday, when we rejoice in the birth of the Church, through the giving of the Holy Spirit, poured out on all people. We have much to be thankful for, alongside, of course, a few challenges.

1. Looking back over the 12 months of 2022....

It's been good to have mostly got back into a normal pattern of being open, and of worship, after the constraints of the Covid restrictions. So we've been busy! Emma kindly totted up the Pastoral Services for me, and we had, during these 12 months: 39 funerals; 3 weddings and 22 baptisms. These have kept me very busy, especially for a Part-Time priest, and I was very glad to benefit from the ministry of Margaret, our Lay reader, who soon found leading Services of the Word and funeral ministry worthwhile. I have been so glad of her ministry, as I have of that of James, and of Carol.

It was, of course, our 175th. Anniversary Year, with so many of our church family working hard with special events, and the Recipe Book. We had: the 'Times Past' memorabilia exhibition, the bridal dresses presentation; the 'Open Garden' afternoon, and the U3A History Group Exhibition, which was linked with the mapping out of the graves in the churchyard. The special events culminated with the Anniversary Thanksgiving Service, led by Bishop Sarah, which was supported ably by the 'A-Choired-Taste' Choir. A lovely afternoon, although sadly not particularly well-supported. It was good, though, to be joined together in thanking God for His faithfulness to the life, work and witness of Christ Church over the past 175 years.

Jane Eastham organised an 'Easter Egg Hunt' on the Tuesday of Easter Week, which was such a hit, we had to send out for more eggs! The congregation enjoyed a 'Songs of Praise' in August, and we commenced a monthly 'Healing Service' on the third Sunday of the month at 6.30, to complement the service of Evening Prayer on the first Sunday of the month. The monthly Film Club recommenced, where we enjoy each others' company, a good film, and lots of cake. Two successful Coffee Mornings were held in June and August: successful both in terms of funds raised, and in visitors being welcomed. The Service time on a Sunday was brought forward 15 minutes to 9.45, for which I'm very grateful, as it means I have more time for travelling to a second service.

Other visitors include the concert given by the German Youth Orchestra, which was really appreciated by a full church. We also welcomed Archdeacon Paul Thomas; the Shropshire Historic Churches Trust, who included us on their tour; and Buntingsdale School, who came for their Remembrance Service, and also to present their Christmas Nativity. I was asked to receive a candidate for discernment for ordination for a 3-month placement, and weren't we blessed by Jenny Cresswell being with us? She took part in our Lent Course, and we also had an Advent Course, too.

We marked the Queen's passing with special prayers and liturgy, and were glad to meet together in such strange times.

The Community Space is not as utilized as it might be: the 'Warm Space, Warm Welcome' project attracted a lovely group of willing volunteers, but, surprisingly, no takers from the community, despite extensive publicity. We can only assume that there was little need, despite the cost of living crisis. A few of us undertook training in the Deanery 'Open the Book' project. The last thing to report is that there was a Quinquennial Inspection of the Vicarage in May.

What a year! And many many thanks to all of those who faithfully serve in our church, doing all sorts of jobs- we salute you!

2. Looking forward....

So- how do we approach the next 175 years? One of Christ Church's strengths is the fact that it's very much a family Parish Church, by which I mean that people in the Parish look to us for their weddings, funerals and baptisms because 'Grandad and Grandma got married here, etc,' which is good in that we serve people beyond our regular attenders, who always get to hear the Gospel message, but I think there's these tend to take up a disproportionate amount of time for a half-time priest (many of you will know that Little Drayton has been relisted as 0.5, rather than 0.6. Not a big difference, but time is at a premium, always). I'm hoping this year that we can reformulate our Mission Action Plan, so that we make time together for praying about mission, and how we can do this, in addition to the Pastoral Services, more effectively, especially now that the impact of the Covid constraints is reduced. A helpful question that we can already consider is: 'what would you say is the vocation of this church at this time?' In other words, what is our specific calling? What do we bring into our parish that is of the Kingdom of God; which witnesses to Christ and serves the people around us? Another way of looking at where we are now, and where we feel called to be, is to ask what our strengths and spiritual gifts are, alongside

what we feel is now missing, and what our challenges are: what we celebrate and what we mourn.

We also need to address the question of finance, as the concept of the Common Fund and mutual generosity from within the deanery hasn't helped us as much as we, and the Diocese Finance Director, had hoped, and we have thus been reliant on the Parish Assessors to help us. So- a direct and blunt appeal- have each one of us reflected on our personal giving recently, and is this something we could do?

So, on this Pentecost Sunday, I'm mindful of the fact that we serve a mighty, faithful, living, often surprising God, who can transform and revive (think of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel's vision). As the Archdeacon movingly reminded us in his visit last year, this church was earmarked for closure, and yet still has a remarkable ministry.

May the Lord constantly lead, direct and infill us.