

St. Mark's Church, Bedford.

Leadership Team Report April 2020.

Well, this is a first – an APCM Leadership Report on Zoom !

These are difficult times for churches across the land and many have not felt able to restart live services post lockdown, but whilst COVID-19 presents challenges, it also offers opportunities. I believe that, at St. Mark's, we continue to do our best to put what we believe into practice and serve God through our community in practical ways: helping out with shopping, or picking up the phone and having a friendly chat with those who feel especially isolated at this time. We have a well-established Telecare system in place and thanks must go to the small group of church members who regularly contact over 45 households, and indeed to all who are involved in our pastoral support. Home visits, Home Communion, delivery of flowers to those who are unwell, and the Bereavement Support Coffee Morning are all still, sadly, suspended. Also, the Commemoration Service has had to be incorporated into our two Sunday services.

We are in a strong position to do these things and more - and I would like to begin by thanking Charlie and Sam, Wendy, Richard and Alan, all of whom minister to our church and community in so many ways. Many congratulations to Sam on becoming Area Dean! We are truly blessed.

I would also like to offer huge thanks to the members of the Leadership Team - Jim, Ian (our Treasurer) and Laura, Alan, Liz and Janet; they all contribute so much to the wellbeing and life of St. Mark's. I'd like to extend particular thanks to Ian for his diligent and experienced management of our finances – a

particularly challenging task at the moment, and also to Jim who works closely with Ian on matters to do with Gift Aid and workplace pensions.

One event that has been affected by the pandemic has been the cancellation of the annual “inspection”. We nearly always sail through this without any issues being raised however, so this has not been a concern to us.

COVID understandably tends to dominate our thinking to some extent and we might be forgiven for overlooking events that took place between our APCM 2019 and lockdown in March, so it’s worth spending a few moments running through some highlights of those months.

We were able to hold car boot sales, we had our very successful Mission Weekend with Phil and Di Stone, and Harvest Festival, we held our usual Commemoration service and our very successful Craft Fayre (Thanks to Avril and her team), and we were able to sing carols in church and in the car park! I’d like to take a moment to reflect on our work with young people. Until “lockdown”, we continued to hold our usual Chat and Make, Chat & Play and Storybox, and thanks go to everyone who made these weekly events so popular. Messy Church started a decade ago and at its peak attracted an average of over 50 people. However it was felt that it had probably run its course and so it was decided to bring it to a close in June 2020. Covid-19 though meant that the last session was held in February. Wendy Waters and Richard Ledger were the leading lights in Messy Church, sharing God’s love with so many families with thoughtful enthusiasm over so many years; they were ably assisted by a very loyal group of church members and friends offering their various talents with equal enthusiasm. Grateful thanks go to each and every one. Prior to lockdown, there was a change of role in Junior Church. Linda Turner brought boundless energy and an abundance of

inspirational ideas to Junior Church, assisted by Janine Rolfe and supported by Sebastian and Aleta; however, Linda decided to step down and Janine agreed to fill the role, although Linda offered to continue to support. Thank you Linda for all you have done and continue to do, and thank you Janine for all your work with young people at St. Mark's. In the fullness of time, we would of course love to see young peoples' activities resume.

Whilst on the topic of young people, I would like to thank Janet Day, our Safeguarding Officer, for her diligence in keeping on top of all matters relating to safeguarding and DBS clearance. It's hardly a glamorous task, but one that is absolutely essential.

St. Mark's is not, however, without its young people at present, as our Pre-school is once again in full swing. During the lockdown period, it continued to offer provision for children of key workers and a few weeks before the summer holidays, another "bubble" was created allowing more children to return. A lot of careful thought and preparation has gone into the reopening of Pre-school and thanks must go to Helen and Sue in particular, as well as members of the Leadership Team for ensuring a safe environment for all.

Of course, it's not just Pre-school that is operating in a safe environment, as the entire premises has been the subject of a rigorous Covid Risk Assessment, making it indeed "The Safest Place outside your Home!" The Church Office is now open for business again and I am grateful to Wendy for providing me with some information regarding Centre Management. Prior to lockdown, we had bookings from just over 60 groups; although the majority have not returned yet, they do all plan to return when Covid is over. During lockdown, every room in the building was decorated and cleaned, including the flat, which has a new tenant. Janet and Dave have done an excellent job. In fact it seems there is very little they cannot turn their hands to! Wendy always says that she could

not manage without the devoted support of office volunteers. We were all saddened by the death of Milly at Christmas; she is much missed. Following lockdown, Erica has decided to retire from volunteering in the office (I often marvelled at her shorthand skills!). However, the good news is that Diana, Fiona and Pam (Seymour) have offered to help. Wendy is so grateful for all the support from this willing team of volunteers and asks me to pass on her thanks which are echoed by us all.

The grounds of our church require continual upkeep; our grateful thanks go to Jean and Malcolm who do a grand job in keeping things tidy. They are very dedicated and there is a rota of willing volunteers to cut the grass. (In fact, there is a rota for just about everything – except for coffee at the moment!) The Garden of Remembrance is doing well. We opened a new Area called Willow at the beginning of the year. There is a marble seat which has been placed in front of the Water feature in memory of John & Mary Stubbs. Mary of course administered the Garden for many years. In this new area we have had 9 interments, 1 Interment in the Columbaria and 3 reservations. Since April last year in the main area we have had 5 reservations and 30 interments. Obviously it was very quiet from March to September but now we have at least 6 interments in October. Our grateful thanks go to Malcolm and Jean who take excellent care of the Garden and are very dedicated.

At St. Mark's, we like to be ahead of the game, and so it proved once we were no longer able to worship in church. First on Zoom, then an inspired Royden idea which featured in Church Times – outdoor communion! Now we are able to worship again in church with 9.30 and 11.00 communion services every Sunday – within Covid guidelines of course - and we have our own YouTube channel! The Wednesday communion in the chapel has become midweek worship on Zoom. In these days of social media, not to be outdone, we are on

Facebook too! Ever resourceful! In addition to the usual contents, our weekly Parish News publication contains the liturgies for Sunday Communion, Wednesday Morning Worship and also a section for Junior Church. Thank you to Mike & Janet Warren for guiding our prayers over recent months. Thanks, Charlie for bringing all this together.

It's very hard to second guess what the future may hold in terms of local or national response to Covid-19, but I do feel that we are pretty good at adapting. We had hoped that our marquee would continue to provide a useful outdoor covered space for all to use, and might provide a solution in the event of a possible return to outdoor services, but summer storms had other ideas! However, we plan to provide a more robust alternative!

There may be stormy times ahead, but we are a strong community. There are so many people who give freely of their time and talents that it is a real challenge to name them all. One fear I have in delivering this report is missing someone out and forgetting to say "thank you", but whether it's for arranging flowers, putting out chairs, doing a Bible reading, operating the PA, playing for services, counting the offertory, or any of the many other unseen and unsung things that we do, to each and every one, a big "Thank you" – but more importantly, Thanks be to God!

Mike Cooper – October 2020