

Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames

ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

Park Road, Abingdon

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

PERSONNEL, 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2020

Clergy

The Revd Dr Charles Miller (Team Rector)
The Revd Paul Smith (Team Vicar)
The Revd. Canon Charles Masheder (house-for-duty priest)

Churchwarden

Mr Peter Squire (first elected April 2017)
Miss Joyce Kelly (elected April 2019)

Deanery Synod Representatives *

Sue Scott (from 2017; re-elected 2020)
Alexandra Scott (from 2020; also on **Diocesan Synod**)

PCC Members *

Hilary Clare (to 2022) John Clare (to 2021) Jenni Collins (to 2020); vacancy from 2020

DCC Officers

Vice-Chairman	John Clare	(PCC to 2021)
Treasurer	Mike Collins	(DCC to 2019)
Secretary	Hilary Clare	(PCC to 2022)

DCC Members*

Douglas Aitken (to 2022)
Dorothy Bell (to 2021)
Keith Bowman (to 2020)
Glynne Butt (from 2020)
Adrienne Compton-James (to 2020)
Frank Debney (from 2020)
Eileen Duckett (to 2021)
Jean Hercus (to 2021; resigned on leaving parish)
Louise Heffernan (to 2020)
Sau Ming Ng (from 2020)
two vacancies

* The date of the election of all officers and committee members is that of the AGM.

In 2020 the ADCM was deferred from 16 April to 4 October because of Covid 19 restrictions.

The **Standing Committee** is composed of the Vicar (or Rector), Churchwardens, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary

The **Fabric Committee** is composed of the Vicar, Churchwarden, Keith Bowman and Frank Debney (from ADCM 2017)

Other officers

Stewardship Officer	Julie Woodley
Electoral Roll Officer	Keith Bowman
Pew Leaflet	David Duce
Parking liaison	Peter Squire, Jenni Collins
Registers	Hilary Clare
Church Safeguarding Officer	Carol Bowman
Church-in-Abingdon representative	Jane Cadogan

TEAM VICAR'S REPORT

I didn't anticipate that at the time of writing we would be in our third Lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The ongoing crisis, not least through the winter, has caused considerable impact on our common life. We do, however, continue to look for signs of hope in our midst.

The year 2020 began in the normal way until we were plunged into the first National Lockdown in March. The decision to close churches nationally had a profound effect on people. As a parish, services were effectively recorded from St Helen's each week, and placed on their website, as a means to provide spiritual nourishment for all. All members of the clergy team, including some of our honorary assistants, participated in this endeavour. This does not underestimate, of course, what it meant to be deprived of the sacrament on a weekly basis: I think that everyone felt this keenly. In addition to the parish's worship provision, the diocese provided Church at Home where a member of the senior staff – usually one of our bishops – would preside from their home. I know that this facility, in addition to resources over the telephone, was appreciated by people.

Again, it was very hard that the Festival of Easter could not be celebrated in church. The fact that we were blessed with an extraordinary warm Spring made a difference but spending the majority of Easter Day in the garden did bring to mind those liminal places where Jesus appeared after his resurrection, and particularly, of course, outside the tomb with Mary Magdalene.

The Lockdown took us through to the summer when we were able to open the churches in the parish for private prayer. This was resourced at St Michael's by a small group of volunteer sidespeople to whom I should like to offer my special thanks. We began also to open the churches for public worship on Sundays and it was wonderful to have the opportunity to worship in-person again.

Both private prayer and Sunday worship could not resume without extensive risk assessments which were received from the diocese and through the hard work of implementing them locally.

I would like to extend my personal thanks to our Churchwardens for all their work in this respect. We owe them a debt of gratitude in ensuring that the building was safe on a weekly basis for us to use: for the arrangements of cleaning, sanitisation at different levels and for the safe configuration of our seating.

I have been acutely aware that not everyone is 'on-line' and that those who aren't have not had the freedom, therefore, of that form of communication. David Duce has faithfully provided us with extensive material for prayer and worship in our weekly pewleaflet for which I am most grateful. I know how many people have appreciated this and so we owe David a huge debt of gratitude. Thanks go also to those who have made sure hard copies of the pewleaflet have gone to those who cannot access them on-line.

It was a pity that a second, albeit shorter Lockdown, was enforced from 5 November which meant that once again worship was suspended. There was speculation as to whether churches would re-open for Christmas, not least as the Government imposed a tiered-system which was applicable to the number of infection rates depending on where one lived. Thankfully, in the end, Lockdown was eased in time for Christmas – and although it was a very different Christmas in terms of meeting with family and friends, and that was hard for many, we were able to meet for worship.

For us at St Michael's, while we felt it was important to rationalise our service pattern over Christmas, it was a sadness that we were not able to hold our annual Crib Service or Christmas Carol Service on Christmas Eve. One of the other deprivations in worship which has had a marked effect, is the suspension of congregational singing. However, it was wonderful that socially distanced singing in churches by small choirs has been possible and that this could be offered for Christmas. I would like to offer my thanks to Glynne Butt and to all who sang for us, not least on

Christmas Day for our Mass and again for the Sunday after Christmas. This very much enhanced our worship on these occasions.

We do not know what will happen during 2021 in terms of the pandemic and its effects upon our church life. The fact that vaccinations are taking place is certainly a sign of hope and something for which we are thankful.

Whatever the future, we must hold on to the hope which is at the heart of our Christian faith and the life of the church. In a time which is so uncertain and when it is all too easy to be weighed down by all that troubles us, our prayer must be that Christ, who is our hope, may uphold and sustain us together with his whole church.

My thanks to each of you for all you do and especially during this time of pandemic.

With every blessing and my prayers

Fr Paul

February 2021

BOOKSTALL

The bookstall was only able to function in the first 2 ½ months of 2020; during that period about £30 was taken for books and merchandise.

Adrienne Compton-James

CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT

Worship and Services

2020 started off with our regular pattern of services with Mass at 09.30 on Sunday, a Said Mass at 19.30 on most Tuesdays and a Said Mass at 12.30 on a Thursday. We are most grateful to our honorary clergy and our clergy for enabling us to worship at St Michael's.

In addition we did celebrate certain Holy Days (e.g. Epiphany, Dedication Festival, Ash Wednesday, All Saints Day, All Souls Day, and Christmas Day).

On March 23rd, the United Kingdom went into a national lockdown due to Covid-19 and for the first time Places of Worship had to close. The year, therefore, has been one of constant change and decisions having to be made to ensure that we were keeping people safely distanced and requiring people to book for services so as not to over-subscribe the available seating (fortunately this limit was never reached), thus complying with government and church guidance.

We were unable to celebrate Easter together.

The church was re-opened on 16th July for Private Prayer, having undertaken a risk assessment prior to this according to Church of England guidelines.

We re-commenced Public Worship on 26th July.

There was a further national lockdown in November and again Places of Worship were closed. Private Prayer and Public Worship resumed in December.

Christmas was a decidedly muted affair as we were unable on Christmas Eve to hold our usual Crib

service, popular Carol service and Midnight Mass. On Christmas morning we held a Mass with 31 attending.

At Private Prayer we had on average 7 attendees and at our Sunday services we averaged 35 attendees.

We held only 1 wedding as all the other couples postponed their weddings due to the pandemic. 1 baptism and 8 funerals were held during the year.

The pandemic has affected the mission and St Michael's in more ways that we have yet to realise. Just not being able to gather in church for the sung eucharist, the coffee and chat must take a toll on our well-being. St Michael's has stood as a rock of faith for 154 years which gives us all hope. Part of that hope is that we will once again be able to meet for sung eucharist and coffee and chat, hopefully in the not-too-distant future.

Outreach

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 St Nicholas' Primary School and Abingdon School were unable to hold their usual services at the church, and all the concerts we were due to host had to be cancelled.

The Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride did go ahead, but we were unable to give out our usual refreshments.

All our bookings for the hire of the church room were cancelled.

Fundraising

We continue to support:

Abingdon Bridge (a charity in town for young people) and Tariro (a youth charity in Zimbabwe);

The Porch Day Centre in Oxford by giving money this year instead of our Harvest gifts;

Oxfordshire Historic Churches by sponsoring Louise Heffernan and Nicola Ng for the Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride.

Volunteers

When things run smoothly, we don't always notice or appreciate all the work that goes on behind the scenes. The folks that come in to do the cleaning, the flower arrangers, the odd jobs that get done round the church, the garden that gets tended, the coffee that gets served (when we are allowed), the website and pew leaflet do not get done by itself. So, many thanks to all those volunteers.

Many thanks:

To all who help in our worship – those who serve at the altar, our sacristan, our organists, and dedicated choir members.

To the DCC members, and to all the sidespersons.

Thanks must also go to the congregation who have had to endure much and taken on board safe-distancing, facemasks, booking for church.

Finally, a big thanks to Fr Paul who in this difficult year has given leadership, support, kindness, and love. Let us continue to pray for the Lord's blessing on him.

Joyce Kelly and Peter Squire

ELECTORAL ROLL

2020 will be remembered as the year in which circumstances meant that the roll was revised not once but twice. This was because the Church Representation Rules require the timing of the revision to be linked to the date of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting and the first revision was well under way by the time the decision was made to postpone the meeting. Having compiled a new electoral roll in 2019 this year's exercise was just a simple updating. The roll for St Michael's on completion of the second revision contained 69 names, which was a decrease of two from the previous year. The changes comprise three additions, three deaths and two people moving from the parish.

Keith Bowman

FABRIC

Although it has not been possible to use the church for worship for much of the year, the need has remained to keep the building and its contents safe, secure and in good order. Routine maintenance of the heating system, fire alarm, emergency lighting, fire extinguishers and organ all took place as usual.

In view of the constraints placed on access to the building, execution of the remaining lower-priority repairs identified in the 2016 Quinquennial Review was deferred. As a new review is due in 2021 this deferment will allow us to target expenditure more appropriately if this later report shows newly-identified urgent repairs to be necessary.

Last year's report made mention of the damage suffered by the statue of St Michael during the Easter Triduum. The faculty authorising the repairs was granted in January and the contractor was then able to start work when their programme permitted. The repair was completed by the beginning of June. Return of the statue to its proper place in church posed certain practical problems so the contractor kindly arranged to keep the statue in safe storage until return was viable in December.

Keith Bowman

LABYRINTH-INSPIRED ACTIVITIES

World Labyrinth day

This fell on Saturday 2nd May 2020. Owing to COVID-19 restrictions, we were unable to meet together in church to walk our labyrinth and take part in this year's 'rolling wave of peace across the globe'. All those interested were therefore invited to join together to take part in a virtual meditative walk at 1pm by using a finger labyrinth at home. The diagrammatic form of our own labyrinth was sent round with this invitation.

Silent Reflections

2020 marked the 9th year of our monthly *Silent Reflections*. In the normal way, these are held on the last Tuesday evening of the month from 7.30 - 9 pm. Each time a simple theme is introduced before people move into the church for shared silence and personal reflection. This year we were only able to meet in church in January and February. However, themes were still produced by Fr Paul,

Rosalind Rutherford, Sue Scott or Sue Sheppy, and the material was circulated to those on our Silent Reflections' List, some 45 people, and was also put on St Michael's website by David Duce. Our session thus continued as *Silent Reflections At Home*. In this way, more people received the materials than in the normal way, so we will continue this practice, even when we are allowed to meet in church once again.

Circle Dancing/Moving into Stillness

Our Circle Dancing and Moving into Stillness groups have proved to be a real source of strength and encouragement this year. With the church closed to us, we lit a candle in our own homes and danced to music from CDs or YouTube, using instructions for steps from our teachers, Mary Williams and Elizabeth Mitchell. We have also been exchanging video clips, prayers and poems that have sustained us all at this difficult time. During the summer, when we were allowed to meet in larger numbers outside, we danced in Albert Park for a number of weeks (without holding hands and remaining two metres apart). It was such a joy for us to meet, and some of our congregation came down to watch. Many passers-by were cheered, too, by the music, as they made their daily walk round the park.

Advent Labyrinth Walks

The church was open on Thursday the 3, 10 and 17 December between 11 am and 1 pm for private prayer. It was not possible to walk the labyrinth but material for reflection was available on the following Advent themes: *Anticipation, Annunciation and Arrivals*, along with the set Advent prayers.

Sue Sheppy

MUSIC

The choir's activities have inevitably been limited this year by the pandemic. However, we did manage a socially-distanced 'sing' for some of the important festivals, among them our Patronal Festival in September and Christmas Day. With a full turn-out, we have a good balance of voices and have produced music of a very commendable standard.

The usual carol service on Christmas Eve had to be cancelled and our planned outreach of singing carols in the roads around the church also fell foul of government and diocesan regulations.

At times when services were permitted, the choir contributed one or two hymns to our worship every Sunday and this was much appreciated. Throughout, Graham has held the fort magnificently, managing to be both organist and cantor and to raise our spirits with his imaginative and skilful playing. We have particularly enjoyed his own mass setting, specially composed for St. Michael's.

Glynne Butt

SAFEGUARDING

Every effort has been made to ensure that the DCC has complied with the duty to have 'due regard' to safeguarding guidance issued by the House of Bishops. Any individual safeguarding training, outstanding at the start of 2020, has been completed online. Following on from the preparatory work

done by the churchwardens and church safeguarding officer in 2019, the production of the safeguarding requirements associated with the updated church/church room hire agreement was completed. For multiple bookings this involves the hirer declaring either that they have their own up-to-date safeguarding policies and procedures to which they must adhere or that they agree to abide by the church's policy and code of practice for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. By the end of February, just before lockdown began, organisations had started to respond and several safeguarding declarations had been signed, accompanied where appropriate by copies of their own safeguarding policies. We are therefore in a position to restart the process immediately we are able to accept bookings again. At this time the relevant information will also be made available on the website.

One aspect of safeguarding is the provision of a safe environment. During this pandemic every effort has been made by the churchwardens and others to ensure the health and safety of worshippers when the church has been allowed to open for worship or for private prayer. We record our thanks to all concerned for the high standard achieved.

Carol Bowman