



Chalke Valley
Church

Clergy Report For the APCMs 2021

This clergy report is an overview of the last fourteen months. For some parishes, who did their APCMs before the first lockdown, it will be a year since the last report. For other parishes, their 2020 APCM was as late as October.

Even so, so much has happened since October, much has changed, and the future looks, well just like the future normally looks, unknown. Little did we know in February 2020 just how our lives were going to be ruled by facemasks, hand gel and something called an 'R' number and, after a tough winter with two more lockdowns, finally there is hope that the COVID-19 pandemic will not make quite such an impact on everyday life.

During all of this, one important thing we can report is that the work of the church did go on.

Sunday in Church or Online

The first Sunday the churches were closed was Mothering Sunday, 22nd March 2020. Well, not quite closed because the clergy were allowed to gather for Holy Communion that day and we met at Coombe Bissett church. Within 24 hours Canon Law was suspended and the church buildings closed and locked.

Despite this and subsequent lockdowns we have provided some sort of worship every week. It started with emailed prayers but now we provide a weekly online content. The number of people watching ('views') has ebbed and flowed but the worshipping community has continued to gather, and the services has even gathered up new people who wouldn't normally attend a church service.

The videos have shown the seasons changing, two services have been led by the people supported by CRESS in the refugee camps in North Uganda and bishops and archdeacons have made guest appearances.

It all seemed very alien to start, now it seems almost normal.

While this carried on church buildings reopened, some closed again, and all will hopefully be reopened by the summer. When it was possible to gather people did return to church, despite the restrictions, the hand gel and the loss of our beloved singing.

Remembrance services, many held outside, were very well attended and Christmas was extraordinary with carols in the pouring rain or freezing cold. One village had over 100 people, socially distanced, singing 'Hark the Herald' behind their masks.

This has shown there is a spiritual resilience and a hunger for God in the valley, along with a clear realisation that people come to church as much for the community and company as for the singing and prayers.

The church in the community

Worship is not the only reason we exist, and this last year, and through the winter without a break, people have continued to support their local communities. We still host foodbank collections and one PCC helps their village by overseeing the payment of local food deliveries to people in the village.

Finance

One thing that must be reported because it is of great concern is the impact of this last year on the church finance. Every parish has lost out financially and it is going to be a hard climb to get things back on an even keel. To this end, the diocesan finance team are putting together a stewardship campaign to be launched in the autumn, but each parish will have to work out a way forward that is the best local fit.

Occasional Services

This last year has been dominated by funerals. Each loss brings its own level of sadness, but we are very fortunate few people locally died because of COVID-19. What has been especially hard is the way the pandemic has impacted upon the usual rites of grief. It is very hard to choose the 30 people to attend a funeral if you come from a very large family.

We did manage a few weddings that took place between the lockdowns and even one baptism.

Safeguarding

One thing that jumped online quickly was safeguarding training. Many of our LWLs who trained with Rick Williams are now due to redo their safeguarding training and some have successfully managed the diocesan online course. The clergy also must do this course alongside the safeguarding courses required to be a school governor.

News from the Curate

It has been a strange and yet fulfilling time over the past months. My ordination as priest was delayed from June to September but thankfully, did go ahead as planned in September including the planned retreat at Sarum College. My first communion was very special at Holy Trinity Bowerchalke. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions I have yet to celebrate communion with the common cup and this experience would seem to be some way off as it is likely that communion in one kind only is set to remain for the foreseeable future.

The enjoyment of producing virtual services has increased, not because I am getting any better at filming them, but my familiarity with the software, and its limitations, has massively improved.

I am very grateful to all who have willingly contributed to them, sending me recordings or by being filmed. It all helps. Despite the restrictions of lock down I have conducted a wedding and I have been pleased to be involved in collective worship, both virtually and for a short time in person, for Broadchalke School.

I look forward to the easing of restrictions which will allow greater fellowship before and after church services.

News from Jenny

Help in the Community

One of the biggest benefits of our small communities is that "church" people are always involved in many of our village organisations so although groups are not formally run by the church in fact they are! From deliveries to shopping to food bank collections to phone calls to Emergency Planning Groups to care, the church is working out its calling in so many ways.

Schools

Our schools have taken a big hit during these last months and the clergy have been able to support them both pastorally and spiritually. Being a School Governor is such a rewarding part of being of real use to our schools. It may be time-consuming, but it is well worth it! Surely one of our tasks must be to encourage others to volunteer their services to the Governing Bodies of one of our three schools! Our involvement in the Worship life of our schools has also gone online! What privilege to know we are beamed into our children's homes and to all those who have been in school throughout these months.

Church

Everyone has played their part in maintaining our worship life, but we would like to especially thank our Church Wardens. They all go above and beyond the call of duty and are a source of strength and support to the clergy. They were all admitted to their Office earlier this year by Zoom, by What's App, face to face masked and in a corner of a church and what an honour it was for us to be able to admit them in this extraordinary year!

News from the 'East End'

The East End produce a Team online service each month. It is wonderful how people have grown in confidence and Stephanie Elcock, Rhoddy Voremberg and Nim Martin have led services over the last few weeks coming up with innovative and moving ideas.

Charlton church was one of the last to reopen after the first lockdown because they decided to do a big clean, shifting a century of dust and grime from walls and rafters.

During the pandemic, online prayers via Zoom was developed to involve more people and Sunday@4 developed into Stories@4 on Zoom for families with young children to enjoy.

In December, a well-attended Nativity Tableau in Nunton Churchyard saw many children dressed as different Nativity characters, ranging from Angels and sheep to the star of Bethlehem, and a Mini Downton Band played carols through Charlton Village.

Catherine, Jenny, Anna Claar and Roger, wish to thank you all, for your kindness and support shown throughout another challenging year.