

Rector's Report 2020

Lock Down, ZOOM, PHONE CHURCH

I'd like to start with a huge thanks for everyone's efforts and all contributions made during this most unusual year. The way we have been forced to operate as a Berrow Benefice has stretched and tested us all in many directions. Covid 19 has reshaped the world, our nation, our community, our lives and the full impact of all this will only be fully understood, unpacked, and analysed in time. For now, we look at the impact upon our local area and in particular, our Benefice. Our 'Team' in the Berrow Benefice is something to be proud of. Our church members have shown significant strength amongst all the challenges. There may be dwindling numbers of folk to shoulder the responsibilities of the parishes, tasks which are at times onerous in trying to foster and engage in the deeper discipleship of the faithful as part of being the 'Kingdom People' in the Diocese of Worcester. Many have adapted, supported, and risen to take that 'Kingdom' of God challenge forward amongst all the difficulties presented.

Within the background of an increasing Diocesan deficit, with plans to decrease the number of Deaneries and the reduction of full-time clergy posts, we were hit financially as services ceased and plate collections and fundraising events stopped. Paying the Parish Share becomes even more difficult. But by a tremendous effort we have met our Parish share of nearly £53,000.

Many core members of our congregation and people in our community continue to have some long-term health concerns. It has not stopped the helping hand, great compassion and listening in the pastoral care for friends and neighbours, ably co-ordinated by Cathy Powell-Chandler. Bob and I are really thankful for the support, kindness, prayers, practical help of many folk but Anthea shouldered much of the responsibility too in my absence. Yvonne and all in the Pendock Cross Stores have gone above and beyond serving the local and wider community. We can never assume we know of the problems or issues you are experiencing. Do communicate with us, especially if there are any Safeguarding issues, in order that we can offer the appropriate help and support.

Church services, meetings, conferences, and education; the norm 'medium', has been through Zoom, Facebook, Face time and so on-to communicate due to the restrictions of Lock Down. Some organisations, parishes and individuals for many reasons have not embraced this technology but it has become a lifeline for many and it will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Our grateful thanks go to Rev'd Anthea and Mike Elston who set up the technology, keep the website up-to-date, send out service sheets, spread sheets, rotas, notices and information whilst other ways to communicate have just not been possible. Anthea and Mike support the Benefice in so many different ways-thank you! By recording 'Open the Book' and my assemblies, this virtual presence has been offered to our local schools to receive the dramatic and inclusive Bible stories.

Our ALM (Authorised Lay Minister), David Allen has organised the readers rotas and, along with Doug Braund, has also shared the Zoom worship, Compline, Family

services and Lent reflections. For those who lead our prayers, served on our 'Pop' up events, arranged flowers, cleaned, sanitised, remove bat and bird droppings, cleaned the brass, mowed and tidied the churchyards, opened churches, arranged the prayer stations and much more behind the scenes-a sincere thank you!

The Bible study group has carried on Zoom with studying Corinthians! Weekly prayers are said still -by phone and Zoom. Thank you to Celia Greatwood and Cathy Powell-Chandler for being our hosts on Mondays.

Being a Church Warden is a responsible role and one which can be daunting at times. Our grateful thanks go to Mary Williams, Janet Peters, Elisabeth Rambridge and Rosemarie Bolton for their continuing hard work and support. Dealing with the usual responsibilities is time consuming but Covid 19 has added extra tasks but with the support of a 'Team', we have been able to open churches safely and socially distance folk in our buildings! Once more, through perseverance and determination from all concerned.

All PCC necessary paperwork is down to our efficient PCC secretaries; Gill Robson, Martin Knott and Cathy Powell-Chandler. Martin still wishes to step down, so please suggest and pray for someone who can help! My thanks to them for their ongoing hard work, efficiency and commitment.

We met our Parish Share in full but it was a real struggle. Different ways had to be found to support charities like the Children's Society, Christian Aid, Church Mission Society, Malvern Foodbank, Macmillan nurses, Breast Cancer, The Royal British Legion, the Samaritans Shoe Box appeal and Crisis at Christmas to name a few. Our treasurers, Shirley Williams, Andrew Rambridge, Doug Braund, continue to collect the funds, bank and balance the books. Although difficult, creative ways to fund raise were found. There were the Gift Days at Hollybush and St Faith and the Pop up Berrow Festive Fayre, the Eldersfield Christmas Story ramble being some of the memorable and notable of these events.

The Standing Committee meetings on Zoom did mean we could still evaluate and communicate all aspects of church life throughout the year. Safeguard training was suspended and only on-line training is available, but all PCC's complied with and had due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance in relation to safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults (section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy discipline Measure 2016) and have safeguarding as a permanent agenda item. Many thanks to Diane Pettitt for her administrative skills, support and help plus Trevor and his skills in the building projects and repairs undertaken. On stand-by are the bells, silent during all this time. I am sure Janet Peters and the band of ringers are looking forward to being able to ring out those bells again.

Our grateful thanks go to Melanie Roberts for her administrative work and for her support on the 'sharing' screen, adding the lyrics and music for hymns during the services. We have kept the organs in our churches in good order and when possible, Giles Turner, has given us the special treat of music and hymns when in our churches.

Wedding couples have had to postpone their weddings at Birtsmorton and in the Benefice due to Lock Down. We are just beginning to welcome our couples back. Some have joined us on Zoom and we have felt their disappointment and pain. Pendock Cross and All Saints at Hollybush have remained open for private prayer and my grateful thanks those who have supported keeping these two churches open, especially Anthea, Celia Greatwood, Liz Lean, Gill Robson , Shirley Williams, Ruth Coates, the Knotts and Jess Robinson -to name but a few!

Both Rev'd Anthea and I are actively involved in the Governance and a presence in our local church schools. Head teachers, Mr Anthony Dixon-Gough at Eldersfield C of E Primary School and Mrs Hannah Gilroy at Pendock C of E Primary school and all their staff have steered their schools through the challenge of virtual, home schooling, social distancing and all the changing restrictions, rules and regulations thrown at them by the Government. The welfare and education of everyone has been deeply affected and the schools have gone above and beyond to support everyone.

The Benefice Magazine, run brilliantly by Brian and Leta Woodcock, stalled a little but continues through dedication and hard work, the brilliant folk who deliver them. Available on-line, with the local news and supporting local business has been important during this time of Lock Down. We welcome informative and reflective articles which give a flavour of the diversity of life in the community. Local families affected by crime has resulted in more local engagement in sharing and noting anything suspicious, thus re-energising the 'Neighbourhood Watch Scheme'.

'Where are we now and where are we going? To shoulder both the challenges and blessings as God's people, we work together as a Team and are always ready to welcome others to help share and shoulder the work ahead. We continue to pray, and with enthusiasm, joy, love and hope. We are open to the wisdom and discernment as God's people journeying on, looking for ways that are possible, sustainable and just with God's grace, mercy, love and peace.

Rev'd Julie James