

ST GEORGE THE MARTYR, WASH COMMON
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD IN THE CHURCH AND BY ZOOM ON TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2020

CHAIR: Reverend Becky Bevan

The meeting opened with prayer at 7.30pm. Due to social distancing restrictions, a Zoom meeting was active to allow people to participate in the meeting from home. Technical problems were experienced for which we offer sincere apologies.

ATTENDANCE: 59 parishioners (24 on zoom and 35 at church).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: received from Glenn Wycherley, Elizabeth Hanning and Eileen Carey.

Farewell to Simon Pook as Churchwarden

Revd Becky thanked Simon for his 6.5 years of service as churchwarden and his willingness to continue for the extra 6 months to provide stability during the Lockdown period. Simon is held in high esteem by all – kind, diligent, calm, and a steady influence in the church community. Rita Gardner expressed her gratitude and presented him with gifts for himself, Sarah, Joshua and Isobel.

MEETING OF PARISHIONERS

1 Election of the Churchwardens

John Huckle	Proposed by Simon Pook
	Seconded by Ronnie Herd
Rita Gardner	Proposed by Avril Bainbridge
	Seconded by Robert Bigg

John and Rita were elected unopposed.

It is hoped that a new role of assistant or deputy churchwarden can be introduced to assist with the greater demands of the churchwarden function on Sundays and offering an opportunity for new lay involvement. Linda Ling is nominated by RG. This to be confirmed with the new PCC.

There being no other business the meeting was declared closed.

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

2. Approval of Minutes of the APCM held on 2 April 2019

The APCM minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2019 were approved as being a true record by Bruce Blaine and Kathy Winrow and were duly signed by the vicar, Revd Becky Bevan.

3. Reports

The following formal reports, having been previously distributed to parishioners, were presented and received at the meeting with approval.

i) Electoral Roll Report

In accordance with the requirements of the Church of England, the Electoral Roll had been amended for the year and on the closing date there were 189 names on the roll. This has increased from 176 last year.

Revd Becky thanked Margaret Blaine for her work as Electoral Roll Officer.

ii) Report on the Proceedings of the PCC

The PCC Secretary, Mary-Ann Ferneley, gave a brief report of the key focus areas of the PCC for 2019, as detailed in the annual report. Received by the meeting with no questions or comments.

iii) Churchwarden's Report

The Churchwarden's Report, as given in the annual report booklet, was received by the meeting with no questions or comments.

4. Informal Reports from church committees and groups

The 'Celebrating 2019' booklet had been widely distributed to all on the electoral roll and all those who had provided reports were thanked. Revd Becky picked up on the content of the booklet in her Vicar's report.

5. Presentations

i) Vicar's Report – reproduced here in full as the zoom link failed at this point in the meeting.

At the beginning of this year when I wrote the report that introduced the booklet 'Celebrating 2019' I had no idea how our lives were about to change.

As we look back on last year we are bound to feel sad about what has been lost over the past eight months, but by looking back we can also see where the seeds of hope are, and be confident that new growth will come.

The booklet is a joyous testimony to the rich life of St George's – over 40 pages of reports capturing the activities of a wide range of groups from right across the life of the church. If you haven't had a chance to read through it, please do. (It was emailed to over 200 people on our database and copies printed off for those not able to access email, and it is also on the website.)

The booklet is worth reading even though so much has changed since 2019 because within it are our grounds for hope, the firm foundations which will underpin our recovery from the impact of the virus. As I have said repeatedly for 3 years, we have all the right ingredients to serve God faithfully and creatively in this parish. The virus has set us back, and of course things will change because of this crisis, but the rock on which we build is firm.

As I point out on page 2 of the booklet, our focus in 2019 was to 'get organised to move forwards...equipping us to reach out in love and service in a fast-changing world.' Well the world has changed so fast in the last 8 months that we can hardly catch our breath, but thank goodness we had begun to build stronger communication and organisational structures. The timing of this has turned out to be prescient. Similarly, the implementation of the Parish Giving Scheme last year has helped us to weather the storm of this year and its impact on our finances.

But the firm foundations, the solid rock, goes much deeper than this, and what the booklet reminds us is that the spiritual life of St George's has both depth and vibrancy. The nurturing of children and young people, the gathered worship, music, nurture and study groups, pilgrimage, prayer, contemplation, and quiet days... St George's is alive and growing in both depth and numbers. This will come back.

Thank you one and all for the amazing team effort which is reflected in the 'Celebrating 2019' booklet.

With the APCM postponed from April to October our meeting tonight takes place in a very different context, gathering via zoom and socially distanced in church with masks being worn. Unimaginable 8 months ago.

Obviously, we will report on 2020 at next year's APCM but it is worth capturing something of what has happened so far this year because I believe this gives us further evidence of our reasons for hope for the future.

I am going to use pictures I have taken since March to share with you something of our response as a church to the difficulties we have faced these past 8 months and how as a community we have risen to the challenge.

(Pic one) Words cannot describe how awful it was to close the church building. It contradicted everything we stand for, but we had no choice. The doors of the church were closed but the life of the church would continue.

Just before lockdown the PCC met socially distanced in church to put contingency plans in place.

To begin with clergy were able to be in the church for private prayer and for recording services.

Quickly decisions were made about postponements of church events and activities. Rita Ball and Jon Houghton undertook to liaise with all hirers, and to put the site onto 'shut-down' mode and to save costs wherever possible. It has taken a huge amount of work by them and others to respond to the crisis and to enable our two key educational hirers to return safely to using the hall in June.

We decided that the only sustainable way forward was to operate as a benefice for Sunday worship, and it also became clear that communications had to move to a benefice model. We created a temporary benefice website which was operational within days and the first benefice newsletter was emailed to those on the electoral roll of both churches. This was an extraordinary achievement especially given that there was no admin support as Margaret Ford was self-isolating at home and unable to work remotely. The Newsletter and Prayer Diary has been distributed every week to over 250 people.

(Pic two) Our first online worship was on Mothering Sunday 22 March broadcast from St George's. (Over 500 people have since viewed this service on YouTube.)

(Pic three) On Tuesday 24 March the Government announced the full lockdown, and the Church of England ruled that clergy were not to enter churches for prayer or for recording worship. (I confess that I ignored the first part of this and entered the church each day to pray, light candles for those who had requested prayer, and to check the office answering machine and email account.)

Following the lockdown new decisions had to be made. The priorities were:

- To find sustainable ways to worship together online each Sunday
- To hold the worshipping community together through new forms of communication and existing networks
- To uphold the life of prayer of the benefice and ensure pastoral care continued
- To communicate to the wider community that although the church buildings were closed, the work of the church continued, help was on offer.

(Pic four) The Foodbank collection point was moved outside and has been used to such a degree that around 5 crates of donations have been taken to the Foodbank distribution centre each week. Volunteers from St George's assist with distribution around Newbury and Thatcham.

(Pic five) After the first Sunday on YouTube which was recorded in church we had to move to recording in our homes. The first of these was on Passion Sunday. With help from Jennie Marwick-Evans from St Johns we devised a way of recording so that both churches were visibly brought together through the split-screen of Zoom. The week after was Palm Sunday and now, more confident with the technology, other clergy colleagues were involved, and organ music (from Clive's archive) was introduced to open and close the worship.

(Pic six) Holy week began and, based on the bold decision to offer worship every day, we delivered online Evening Prayer on Monday and Tuesday, Holy Communion with our young people on Wednesday, a Eucharist for Maundy Thursday, an Easter Garden service on Good Friday morning and Stations of the Cross in the afternoon.

(Pic seven) Easter Day began at 5.30am with a last-minute decision to carry out a solo dawn service with the Paschal Candle being lit from a bonfire by the cloisters and the Easter light carried into church, recorded live onto St George's Facebook page. When the final 'Alleluia, Christ is Risen' was proclaimed inside the still dark church immediately Alleluias pinged onto Facebook from early risers who happened to be looking at their phones. This was even more surprising because no one knew this was going to take place. The Facebook video was viewed by over 600 people.

The Benefice Easter Eucharist followed and wonderfully we were able to include hymns for the first time, pre-recorded by Clive, which added to our sense of joining together as a community, something which has continued each week since. We were also delighted to include laypeople from St John's and St George's for the first reading and the intercessions.

We were constantly aware in lockdown of how excluded those with no internet access have been from worship. Telephone church in part addressed this, but the fact remains that this has been a particularly sad and difficult part of the impact of the virus.

(Pic eight) Thanks to Mary Bishop our Lenten cross came alive on Easter morning and stayed in place until Pentecost proclaiming to the Andover Road that 'Christ is Risen.'

(Pic nine) In addition to Sunday worship we started Wednesday Worship on 22 April at 7.30pm via Zoom and this has since taken place weekly with good attendance.

(Pic ten) Thy Kingdom Come, a prayer initiative from the national church to mark the period between Ascension and Pentecost, took place albeit rather differently from previous years. The artwork in the picture is by Helena Herd who used a montage of images capturing life in lockdown to spell out the words.

(Pic eleven) Various small groups have gathered by zoom and phone, and during the summer months socially distanced in gardens, for 'Conversations along the way' exploring themes arising from reflection on bible passages and art.

(Pic twelve) Facilitators and leaders of existing church groups were encouraged to stay in touch with group members. To this end, there were, for example, on-going lent groups, Sunday Club and Justacross gatherings, Monday Meet had its first new style gathering on Zoom in April. Tiddlers & Toddlers has used their Facebook page to stay in touch with their group. A small allotment group kept the St George's patch going when lockdown eased and has grown vegetables for the foodbank and flowers for church.

Working Groups of the PCC have met online, and much phoning around has taken place formally and informally. The Prayer Chain is still operating and has been in use.

Zoom Coffee and Chat on Sundays began in April with large numbers attending. It was utter chaos to begin with but settled into a more satisfactory model with break out rooms enabling smaller groups to chat. It was great to have this as a benefice wide gathering. This has recently moved to Wednesdays at 7pm.

(Pic thirteen) During lockdown we operated a systematic way of phoning around to stay in contact with people, prioritising those who live alone or who haven't got access to the internet. In addition to regular phone calls, newsletters have been delivered to those not online (in a Covid safe way)

each Saturday. It has been clear that people from right across the church community have been making a lot of phone calls to check in with our older and more vulnerable parishioners. It's been very heartening to see the response.

(Pic fourteen) The new website has been a vital tool in helping the benefice community to stay connected and is evolving all the time. Huge thanks go to Revd Gary for his work on this. The Wash Commoner has been published on the website since April.

(pic fifteen) Up until 4 May we lacked any administrative support which inevitably made a difficult time even harder. Margaret Ford who had served St George's so faithfully for 12 years decided that the new benefice wide administration role was not for her. It is sad that her time with us finished during lockdown, however thanks to generous contributions from the congregation leaving gifts were presented to her by Simon Pook at her home.

(Pic sixteen) A new Benefice Office Manager, Alex Brown, was appointed and much work has been done to implement new benefice wide systems and communications. A new church office management system (known as *iknow*) is now up and running and has revolutionised our ability to undertake large-scale mailings. Thanks to Gemma Previte our Facebook and Twitter accounts have been much more active and church members have been encouraged to re-post items from the St George's Facebook page to other community groups.

(Pic seventeen) Funerals took place throughout lockdown and were of course more emotionally draining than usual due to the restrictions, and with some families unable to be with loved ones as they died. The recent memorial service socially distanced in church was full, bringing together families for whom we have conducted funerals over the past year or so.

We were one of very few benefices locally to reopen the church as soon as we were allowed to at the beginning of July. It was not church as we knew it or wanted it, but over successive weeks this has settled into a good pattern and feels more normal. A team of stewards along with our churchwardens, has done a brilliant job of keeping us covid safe while undertaking many other new roles on Sundays. Special thanks to Ronnie Herd for co-ordinating the stewarding team.

(Pic eighteen) On the first Sunday back a tent was erected in the vicarage garden so that we could accommodate socially distanced groups for our children and young people. Kathy and Terry Winrow along with a team of others have worked hard and well to keep our younger congregation nurtured and supported throughout this difficult year. Sunday Club, CIA and Justacross met regularly via zoom throughout lockdown, and have gathered every Sunday since.

(Pic nineteen) In these difficult times it has been especially lovely to welcome a new curate into our benefice and to see how well Revd Julie has settled in and become part of the family. She was priested on 19 September and celebrated her first Eucharist the following day at St George's.

(Pic twenty) The last 8 months have been a bewildering journey, full of loss and anxiety. Our day of pilgrimage and prayer in October offered an opportunity to bring our deepest feelings, fears and longings before God. It was a special and enriching day. The labyrinth at St John's offered a kind of snapshot of 2020 so far – a journey with constant twists and turns, with the way ahead unclear... And yet even in this troubled and confusing time we can see signs of hope, new insights, a fresh sense of what matters, of what will endure. We know we will have to remain flexible and adaptable, open to chance and change, but we are not lost, our foundations are firm, God is our rock.

As we travel on, these words from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians come to mind –
'Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you have been doing.'

A member of the meeting immediately responded by thanking Revd Becky and the ministry team for live streaming the services and keeping those at home fully involved.

ii) Treasurer's Report and Annual Accounts

Philip Read, on behalf of Glenn Wycherley, gave a summary of the Church and Centre finances for the past year with the help of Powerpoint slides summarising the key points from the Financial Statement in our Annual Report.

Additionally, a projection for the impact of Covid on our financial position for 2020 was given. The main loss of income has been caused by the closure of the hall and annex during lockdown, reducing our projected 2020 year end cash position and meaning some spending on non-urgent maintenance will need to be deferred. Thanks to the success of the Parish Giving Scheme last year we entered this year in a strong position which will help us to stay in the black despite these losses.

Questions were invited but none were asked.

Revd Becky took the opportunity to thank Philip for all his diligent work in implementing the Parish Giving Scheme.

The Annual Report and Financial Statement have been approved by the PCC and signed by the vicar of St George's church and the PCC secretary. The meeting received the Report with thanks..

6. Elections

Revd Becky thanked all those standing down from PCC and Deanery Synod this year. The existing 3 year term for Deanery Synod representatives has come to an end.

The following are standing down:

Terry Rayson, Maria Pratico, Bruce Blaine and Glenn Wycherley from PCC

Robert Bigg, Norma Murray, Margaret Blaine, Philip Read (though see below) from Deanery Synod

Revd Becky explained that Glenn Wycherley had decided earlier in the year to stand down from being PCC Treasurer after 25 years. Glenn had agreed to stay on during the Coronavirus lockdown for a further 6 months but is now ready to stand down. Revd Becky acknowledged his detailed and reliable approach, always on board with the aims of the church. A gift to thank Glenn for his service will be given to him on behalf of the congregation.

- i) There are four elections required for Deanery Synod this year as. Only one nomination has been received:

Philip Read proposed by Christopher Ball and seconded by Bruce Blaine.

Revd Becky explained that the PCC will need to look at how we recruit additional Deanery Synod representatives.

- ii) Three places are available on the PCC. Nominations have been received for:

Francis Clayton, proposed by Glenn Wycherley and seconded by Janet Wycherley

Sarah Pook, proposed by Ronnie Herd and seconded by Margaret Blaine

John Bolan, proposed by Philip Bevan and seconded by John Gardiner

All were elected unopposed.

7. Appointments

- i) **Election of Sidespeople**

Huge thanks were expressed to Eileen MacKay who is retiring from her role after many years organising our sidespeople on Sundays. A gift has been presented to her at home.

Revd Becky explained that sidespeople are no longer appointed at APCMs, and will now be appointed at the first PCC meeting. Due to all the changes caused by covid with many people continuing to self-isolate new people have become involved on Sundays co-ordinated by Ronnie Herd. Ronnie and the team were thanked. An updated list of sidespeople will be brought to the PCC for approval.

ii) Auditors

The re-appointment of Haines Watts as our Auditors was approved unanimously.

8. Parochial Questions

There were no parochial questions.

The meeting closed with a blessing from 2 Thessalonians at 21:25.

First PPC meeting is on 17 November 2020.

Mary-Ann Ferneley

20 October 2020