



St Mary the Virgin, Almondsbury

Annual Parochial Church Report

Presented at a meeting held on 8th May 2022

This combined report is presented in accordance with the Charity Commissioner's Statement of Recommended Practice commonly known as SORP 2005.

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St Mary the Virgin, Church Road, Almondsbury, BS32 4DT

**Annual Report of the proceedings of the Parochial Church Council
and the activities of the parish generally for the year to 31 December 2021.**

Correspondence address: The Vicarage, 3 Sundays Hill, Almondsbury, BS32 4DS

PCC Members:

Rev Philip Rowe (Vicar)	Rev Paul van Rossum (Associate Vicar)
Nick Roach (Treasurer)	Mike Jenkinson (Chair/Lay Minister)
Astrid Domingo Molyneux (Lay Minister)	Alison Rowe (Deanery Synod)
David Thomson (Deanery Synod)	Clare Jefferis (Deanery Synod)
Liz Tierney (Safeguarding Officer and Data Protection Lead)	
Mike Tierney	Dick Avery
Rose Pullan	Rosemary Griffiths
Tim Jefferis	Sandy Thompson
Judi Thomson (PCC Secretary)	

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The Parish of St Mary's, Almondsbury, is part of the Benefice of Almondsbury and Pilning with Compton Greenfield, of which the Reverend Philip W Rowe is Incumbent.

The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council (Powers) Measure. The appointment of PCC members is governed by and set out in the Church Representation Rules and is from those on the Electoral Roll of the Parish. The PCC is registered with the Charity Commission (registration number 1131407).

VICAR'S REPORT

The role of the Vicar together with the PCC is defined as the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. At St Mary's we have focused this with our Mission Statement of 'Connecting with God, each other and our community.'

2021 was largely dominated by the covid pandemic. My first reflection is to thank God for his faithfulness in bringing St Mary's through this challenging time. At the very beginning of the first lock down I prayed in the Church building, which was built over 850 years ago, that our Heavenly Father would bring us through the pandemic to come as he did through other plagues the building had witnessed such as the black death. This he has done.

We have continued to connect with God. This year public worship continued in the Church building every Sunday and we finished 2021 with about 60% of the congregation we had in 2019. We have also continued to live stream a service each Sunday. Sadly the 9.15am choral service did not restart so we finished the year with the 8.30am said Holy Communion Service and 10am All-age Service. It has been good to see some children returning to the All-age service. Our monthly Saturday morning prayer meeting continued online and has now returned to being in person.

We have connected with each other as covid restrictions have permitted. The coffee time after the All-age service has seemed particularly precious. We have also restarted Messy Church in the Church building and the Oasis team has continued to keep contact with families online. The house group has continued online and we resumed our nurture programme with the 'Discipleship Explored' course. The Daily Thought on email has brought spiritual food and a sense of belonging to St Mary's.

We have connected with the community through various means. The weekly toddlers group has restarted in the Church. The ministry of the Church being used for private prayer during the week has been enhanced by the new glass doors, the hard work invested in cleaning the Church and the new under floor heating. The Archdeacon of Bristol said he felt the welcome of God. We continue with our contribution to school life including an assembly each week and the faithful work of the foundation governors. We continue to support a cause each month and to practically contribute to local agencies including the Sisters' of the Church Food Bank, Bristol North Home Bank, and the Salvation Army Christmas Toy appeal.

I am so grateful to all those who, often in unseen ways, have worked hard to enable us to do all this in ever changing circumstances. It is through good teamwork and God's grace the mission of St Mary's has continued over this year. Someone commented that St Mary's is a happy ship. Thank you.

With a heavy heart I announced that I would be retiring from stipendiary ministry in August 2022 to serve in re-tire-ment. I thank God for over 25 good years in Almondsbury and the fellowship I have enjoyed with so many. The time is right for a fresh start for St Mary's. It is my prayer that God will guide the right person to you as your new Vicar and also you continue to make these connections in the normal with the reordered building.

With my gratitude and prayers,

Philip Rowe

WORSHIP AND MISSION

The Worship and Mission Team of the PCC acts as a focal point for consideration of how we, as a church and as individuals, can grow as Christians and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the report last year, I said that, 'in 2020 Worship and Mission will be considering how best we can use the newly reordered building towards this end.' As we know, the restrictions which started in 2020 continued through 2021, albeit with varying levels of severity. This continued to delay new initiatives. Hopefully, these can now be progressed.

As an experiment and to test their viability, we planned to return to having three services from 12 September: 8am Said Holy Communion, 9.15am Sung Holy Communion with the Choir, and 10.45am All-age Service with the Praise Group. This enabled us to ascertain how many people wished to resume attending these services and if there was someone to organise each service in the absence of a churchwarden. In the light of the results the PCC decided that, from Sunday 3 October, we would have two regular services each Sunday, at 8am Said Holy Communion (livestreamed) and 10am All-Age Service. From 7 November the 8am service moved to 8.30am. This pattern continues.

On Remembrance Sunday a short service was held in church before we processed to the war memorial where the Bidding, Act of Remembrance and two-minute silence were held. At the end of November, we resumed the Toy and Gift Service, including a pop-up nativity. The toys and gifts received were distributed to needy family through the Salvation Army. On Christmas Eve, an outdoor Christingle Service was held in the vicarage garden. Over 100 people braved the increasingly heavy rain!

Resuming in-person activities such as coffee after services, an Alpha Group, the monthly prayer meeting, and other business meetings, has helped to strengthen personal relationships. Some other activities and meetings, such as the House Group, have continued on Zoom.

Normally, each month a different charity is the focus for the church's outward giving. Unfortunately, during 2021 these arrangements continued to be curtailed as a result of the various restrictions required by the pandemic.

The church supports the Diocese's current Creating Connections vision: Connecting with God, Connecting with each other, and Connecting with our communities. Within this vision there is a focus on the four priorities of Making Disciples, Growing Leaders, Engaging Younger Generations, and Encouraging Generosity.

During 2021 the Diocese, in consultation with parishes, has been developing a new vision. As the diocese puts it: 'Transforming Church Together is a process to discern and develop the next vision and strategy for the Diocese of Bristol, and was started in January 2021. We want to understand what we do well, what we can change for the better and create a positive way forward together.'

'Vision, Purpose, Values and Outcomes have been discerned as follows:

Our vision

Humanity reconciled, creation restored.

Our purpose

To follow Jesus. To serve others. To transform communities.

Our values

- Openness: we value openness and are loving and open to all
- Generosity: we value generosity and receive and give sincerely
- Creativity: we value creativity and we cooperate with the work of the Spirit
- Bravery: we value bravery – we are courageous with our voices and our actions

Outcomes

These four key outcomes express where we believe God is calling us in our mission in the coming years.

1. To have a form of church in every community, and one church to which all can belong
2. To have people who worship God in every aspect of their lives, and throughout their whole lives
3. For the diocese to be recognised as a powerful force for gospel change
4. For the diocese to have sustainable finances'

In 2022 the Diocese will be working on how to achieve these four outcomes.

Living in Love and Faith is a national church initiative which encourages the whole church to think more deeply about identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage in the bigger context of being human. This work will be progressing during 2022.

Finally, I am grateful to Rose Pullan for taking over as Chair of the Worship and Mission Team from January 2022.

Paul van Rossum, Chair, Worship and Mission Team

BUILDINGS

There follows a summary report on the more significant items of work that have been carried out in and around the church. I acknowledge and appreciate the hard work of my friends on the F&B team, and funding from the Almondsbury Charity and the H. Stevens Trust.

Quinquennial Report

A final and revised report was issued in August 2020. Most recommendations categorised as "immediate attention" and "completion within 12 months" have been dealt with, with the exception of work on the Vestry roof. There has been good progress with recommendations "for completion within the quinquennial" - that is, before 2025. The PCC has agreed to defer some of these items until after 2025, along with longer term items identified by the Church's architect.

In 2021 passers-by would have witnessed the completion of three projects. A team of steeplejacks renovated the spire downpipes and box gutters, and new box gutters now serve the North Porch. The window opening in the North Vestry has been overhauled with new lead lining and the casement part now opens smoothly. There have also been conservation repairs to the base of the porch and repair to the door to the tower. Two church gates have been replaced (evident minor problems with staining will be tackled in Spring). Other work relating to frost damaged walls, electrical repairs and miscellaneous repairs and redecoration has been completed.

The vestry roof has caused some concern. Woodworm has been evident for the last three or so years. Our architect investigated further in April and suggests that rainwater was trapped in the truss volume after work to replace the lead roof in 2009. The Diocesan Advisors had for some time been reluctant to accept chemical treatment of the rafters. I am now hopeful that they are persuaded, but we need to find a means of ventilating and drying the affected zone. The construction of the ceiling truss makes ventilation less than straightforward.

The important work to be completed before 2025 includes maintenance of the church's remaining downpipes and gutters, a satisfactory solution to the Vestry problem, and patch pointing on lower parts of the nave.

The PCC agreed to postpone some items until after the next Quinquennial inspection in 2025. These include: refurbishment of wood-block flooring in the Nave, redecoration of areas of faded paintwork in the nave, investigations in the Lady Chapel and on the Chester-Master monument, options to improve lighting in the Nave and Aisles (at Architect's estimated cost of £20,000), resurfacing the upper section of the tarmac path. The architect's suggestions of items for longer-term attention include reroofing the North Transept.

Triennial Visit

On 8th June we had a positive meeting with Michael Johnson, Associate Archdeacon, and Rachel Stewart. Their report identifies only one action: it would be helpful to take new photos of the hallmarks of the silverware and add them to the terrier as well as storing them digitally.

Other Items

Limited finances and the urgency of the Quinquennial works have delayed several items of work. Following completion of some of the larger Quinquennial works F&B will, throughout 2022, prioritise other repairs and future projects for the attention of PCC. Accordingly, the treasurer has now renamed the Quinquennial Fund as the "Fabric Fund". Proposed items include: repairs and cleaning of the organ; repairs to the sundial and processional cross; installation of solar panels; cleaning of stained glass windows; repainting the interior of the church; repairs and polishing of the nave floor; replacement pew ends; modification to drainage at the West Door; long term reserved fund for installation of heat pump. A new bench was purchased with a donation.

PCC approved changes to working procedures, partly intended to improve our liaison with external charities. PCC will nominate a person to manage each substantial piece of work (obtaining quotes, drafting applications to DAC, drafting applications to charities), and signing off its satisfactory completion. To ease communication all applications to Almondsbury Charity are to be made through the F&B Chair. Likewise, all invoices for building work should be passed to the F&B chair in the first instance.

A number of minor tasks arise regularly throughout the year, akin to minor repairs and modifications in our own homes. To ensure these are delegated widely a list of tasks will be made available to volunteers. F&B and PCC should discuss setting up work parties.

Mike Tierney, Chair, Finance and Building Committee

FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year (31 December 2021) our financial position has again deteriorated on account of the covid pandemic. We still have considerable reserves but need to think about what action to take to address our day to day operating loss of just under £10k over the course of the year. Not as bad as the £18,500 loss last year but has been substantially helped out by the considerable rise in our investment fund rather than by increased church income. As I wrote last year, I would hope our position will further improve as we emerge from the covid threat but I would still expect us to make a substantial operating loss over this current year and perhaps for a year or so afterwards. That's always assuming that inflation does not take off or the international situation does not deteriorate further.

Our end year reserve stands at just over £215k but over £200k of this is tied up in existing commitments and endowment investments (where we can only access the dividends). This includes funds that the PCC has designated for specific projects such as a long term commitment to move to a green source of heating and funds that have been provided through grants and donations and can only be used for the purpose for which they were raised. An example being the over £20k that remains in the Bell restoration fund and will remain indefinitely as a Bell fund to complete the bell restoration project and provide long term support for the health of our church bells.

Our uncommitted funds (those not earmarked by the PCC for a specific purpose) stand at £15k. By comparison, at the end of 2019 uncommitted funds stood at £43k. Although the PCC is not aware of any specific spending obligation for which we haven't earmarked funds our experience is that new demands and problems can and do emerge at very short notice. Just as importantly, the large reduction in uncommitted funds greatly restricts our ability to respond rapidly in respect of mission and charity relief. Of course we can conduct fund raising for such purposes but, although we know that our church and community members are very generous, this takes time to organise and desperate humanitarian need can arise almost overnight.

Nick Roach, Treasurer

CHURCH REORDERING

The report last year included information on the completion of all of the reordering work in December 2020.

The only thing to report for 2021 is that the reordering has been given an award by the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (more normally referred to as the DAC). The DAC wrote as follows:

'Each year the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) recognises a number of projects via its awards scheme. DAC awards are made where a parish has completed a project to an exceptional standard of workmanship, or where a project has been key to that parish's growth and mission. In light of this, I am delighted to inform you that your reordering project has been granted an award in acknowledgement of your hard work.'

Normally the award would have been presented in 2021 but, because of COVID, was deferred to 2022. It will now be presented at a joint DAC Awards Evening on 9 June 2022, at Christ Church, Downend to celebrate churches that have won DAC Awards in years 2020-2022.

Paul van Rossum, Associate Vicar

SAFEGUARDING – PROMOTING A SAFER CHURCH

It is the aim of St Mary's Church to develop the spiritual and social life of the children and young people in church in a safe and secure environment and to protect them from harm whenever possible. St Mary's Church also aims to provide respectful, pastoral care for adults.

The church endeavours to follow the Safeguarding Principles of the Church of England which are:

- The care and nurture of and respectful pastoral ministry with all children, young people and adults.
- The safeguarding and protection of all children, young people and adults when they are vulnerable.

□ The establishing of safe, caring communities which provide a loving environment where there is informed vigilance as to the dangers of abuse.

In terms of Safeguarding, it is the duty of the PCC, with the incumbent, to promote a safer church for all in the church community, and to ensure there is a plan in place to raise awareness of, promote training and ensure that safeguarding is taken seriously by all those in the church community.

Because St Mary's Church provides activities for children and young people and provides pastoral care for vulnerable adults the PCC is classed as a charity. Members of the PCC, as trustee of that charity, are eligible for DBS enhanced checks under the recommendation of the Church of England and Charity Commission. They are also expected to undergo the online Basic and taught Foundation Training as recommended by the Diocese of Bristol. All PCC members have completed the DBS clearance and completed the required training.

St Mary's Church also continues with its requirement that all those wishing to work directly with children or to undertake pastoral visits on behalf of the church must go through our internal vetting procedure and obtain Enhanced DBS clearance.

We currently have in total 28 have also been cleared to do children's work and pastoral visiting. All PCC members have had DBS checks, as required by the Charity Commission, which is an additional 6 people. During the past year we have had 2 people who have come off the list, 2 newly recruited workers and 15 renewals. The main change was that the Church of England require for DBS checks to be renewed after 3 years, not every 5 years as from 5th January 2022.

The church office keeps an up to date record of all the DBS certificates, date of issue (renewal after 3 years), level of clearance, whether children's or adult work is undertaken and what safeguarding training has been done, which the highest level is required to be refreshed every 3 years.

The Church of England now expects that all church paid staff and volunteers receive Safeguarding training appropriate to their level of involvement in church activities. The Church of England and the Diocese of Bristol have changed the way training is carried out due to the pandemic. Most Basic Awareness and Foundation training continues to be undertaken online. A zoom training programme has been created for the Leadership course. Most people who were required to, have completed their refresher training over the past year.

The Church of England have made it mandatory (as from the beginning of 2022) that all PCC members, group leaders and pastoral visitors to do the Domestic Abuse Training. This is an online module which will need to be refreshed every 3 years. There is also a new online Safer Recruitment & People Management Module which the PSO and one other need to be identified to do and refresh every 3 years.

The Church office will keep a record of all training undertaken so please notify the office and the Parish Safeguarding Officer of any C of E Safeguarding training undertaken.

We continue to use the online Safeguarding Dashboard – this allows us to be able to track all the Safeguarding Policies and Processes. The PSO is responsible for the Dashboard and has editor rights – and some PCC members have read rights to the dashboard.

The Safeguarding Policy and guidelines have been reviewed and updated, and approved by the PCC in September 2021. This policy can be found on the Church's website, under Safeguarding and Data Protection.

Thank you to those who have renewed their DBS certificate this year, also those who have undergone Safeguarding training. Their commitment to Safeguarding in our church is greatly appreciated as is the support from Philip Rowe, the Ministry Team, Group Leaders, and the Safeguarding Team at Diocese of Bristol. Thank you for everyone who have supported me in my role.

Liz Tierney, Parish Safeguarding Officer

DATA PROTECTION REPORT

It is nearly 4 years since the new legislation for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force. Though we have left the EU, these rules will still apply.

The following can be found on the Church's Website – The Data Privacy Policy, Data Consent Form and Data Protection Procedures Policy. There are copies of the Data Consent Form in church.

Various other data consent forms are available for other areas where personal data may be displayed in the public domain – like Noticeboards, the website, or the Lich Gate. These include the Lich Gate.

All data, apart from the Lich Gate, is kept in the Church Office. The Incumbent, Data Protection Lead and Parish Administrator have access to the data. The Lich Gate data is kept by the Data Protection Lead and passed onto the Lich Gate Editor for inclusion in the Lich Gate.

We as a Church **MUST** ensure all emails relating to Church business are using the BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) option – many of us already do use this. We must remember that not everyone wants their email address in the public domain.

As part of the Livestreaming services, we continue to ensure that anyone who in front of the camera, had given their permission to be recorded using a separate consent form.

Thank you to everyone who filled these Data Consent forms over the past year.

Liz Tierney, Data Protection Lead

ALMONDSBURY CHOIR REPORT

It is now almost two years since the coronavirus pandemic started. In that time much has changed; many shops have closed, many businesses have stopped trading, and many clubs and societies have had to suspend their activities. One ensemble which has succumbed was, sadly, our choir. Although until last year it was up to strength, our numbers were greatly reduced in the summer; the departure of Chris Coltham, who with her husband Barry had been a mainstay of St. Mary's for many years, was a blow, and two other members left to worship at a church within walking distance. The retirement of members who have stopped driving or have been reluctant to drive at night has been a major factor in the choir's contraction and closure.

Inevitably, also, during the lengthy lockdowns people have fallen out of their weekly routines and have not always resumed them. When the restrictions eased last autumn the 9.15 service was reinstated but attendance was very modest. In fact, returning to the three-service format proved unmanageable due to the non-availability of churchwardens, and the decision was taken to suspend the 9.15 service and bring the All-Age service forward to ten o'clock.

As a substitute, two Sunday choral evensongs were held in November and December; it was hoped the very modest attendance would improve with time, but the choir numbers were insufficient to run the service, and the experiment was discontinued, the evensong on Sunday 12th December being the choir's final service.

It is very regrettable that the choir has had to be disbanded after centuries of choral services; it also means that we can no longer offer a choir for weddings or funerals, although we are able to offer a professional soloist in place of the choir. Of course, St. Mary's is by no means alone; choral music in many places of worship has followed a similar trajectory, and many other churches have lost their choirs over the last few years.

I hope it may be possible in future years, when everything has settled down, to restart a choral venture at St. Mary's. My warmest thanks go to all the choir members for their long service and commitment over the years.

Matthew Thomas, Organist and Choir Master

PRAISE GROUP REPORT

The Coronavirus pandemic continued to impact our worship during 2021, but we were at least able to meet regularly in church for most of the year, albeit with strict social distancing in place together with masks. Gradually, restrictions were eased and we were able to sing in church without masks. Having been deprived of live worship for such a long period, it was a real joy for the whole congregation to be back in church worshipping God together.

During the course of the year, we have continued to discover new songs as well as enjoy singing the ones with which we are more familiar. I want to thank Astrid, in particular, who selected songs appropriate to the theme for each week, and then distributed the lyrics and music in advance so that the service sheet could be printed, and the Group could practise at home.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the Praise Group this past year including: Astrid, Chris, Lyn, Matthew, Sandy, Sue, Susan, and Stephen. Can I also thank the AV team for their work, in the background, honing the sound and operating the projector and screens each week, allowing us to lead worship more effectively?

If anyone else would like to take part in the Group, as a singer or musician, you would be very welcome to join us on a regular or occasional basis, whatever suits. We are not looking for musical excellence; just a heart to work together to lead people in worship and draw them closer to God.

Mike Jenkinson

REPORT ON BRISTOL WEST DEANERY SYNOD

Introduction

This has been a second year of continuing disruption and unforeseen changes within our local communities, across society and experienced on a global platform.

As with last year, and before reflecting upon this Deanery, Bristol West, we must mark our awareness of, and our heartfelt prayers for, all who have been impacted upon by the global pandemic. Those who have lost their lives, those who have died alone and those whose livelihoods have been irreparably taken away; those who have been bereaved, especially when unable to be with and alongside loved ones; those who have fallen ill to the virus and the many who suffer from the long-term health impact; those many whose mental health, sense of wellbeing and spiritual strength has been damaged; and our brothers and sisters in other parts of our world who, in their millions, are suffering now – without the benefit of the support we have had. Recognizing that in many parts of the world they are entering the first phase of Covid now and without our levels of support and care.

We are also aware of the work of health and social care professionals; researchers and scientists and teachers; key workers and all who maintain the fabric of society. For them we give thanks and offer our prayers. As we do for those whose responsibility it is to make decisions on behalf of communities, nations and humanity.

We should also remind ourselves that this year has, once again, continued to shine a spotlight upon local and global issues:

- ★ Racism and minority ethnic groupings
- ★ Relationship between wealth and health
- ★ Disjoints between health work and social care
- ★ Pandemics don't recognize national borders
- ★ Human impact on climate change
- ★ Fundamental importance of social interaction in human wellbeing

Each of us could add to this lengthy list. And in our moments of reflection, this does lead us to contemplate our response to Jesus' answer to the question "Which commandment is the most important of all?" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Key Covid changes during this year:

To remind ourselves of the context:

- 8 March '21 Schools reopen
- 12 April Non-Essential Retail reopens
- 29 March Outdoor Gatherings allowed
- 17 May Outdoor Gatherings up to 30 people
- 19 July Most legal limits on social gathering removed (Step 4)
- 8 December Move to Plan B Measures
- 27 January '22 Plan B Restrictions removed

"We must learn to live with Covid" Government Statement

Over the course of the year the changes in the restrictions and the advice provided by the Church of England allowed parishes and churches to continue to adapt the way we all 'do church'. This includes the acts of worship and prayer, the way we keep our buildings open and in use and reshaping our place within community and communities.

There was a good deal of learning from the disruptions of the pandemic (see the Synod report 2020 – 2021) which continues to be put into practice. However, there were also a number of negative impacts that we are slowly coming to terms with – these are in addition to the unfortunate health consequences and increased deaths in relation to Covid.

These other impacts include reduced numbers attending church, a continuing sense of anxiety and reluctance to engage, reduced levels of income (both giving and rental/fee), reluctance to volunteer and feelings of impatience and frustration as the duration of impact lengthens.

‘Stop, Start and Continue’

However unfortunate, periods of significant disruption enable opportunities for reflection. Many parishes and groups have engaged in exercises to allow them to reflect on priorities and areas for attention and change. Many have used a method of looking to the future and asking questions about what has been and what needs to be – for the church to continue to live the Gospel and be a relevant agent within community.

The method of questioning what we need to ‘stop’ doing or new things that we need to ‘start’ doing, or indeed what we need to ‘continue’ to do (possibly in a different style) has provided a useful tool for many.

Deanery Synods in 2021 – 2022:

Inclusion and Representation

Deanery Synod on 18 May 2021 focused upon the issues associated with ‘Inclusion and Representation’

The Meeting was held by Zoom

The Main Theme:

The Area Dean introduced the main topic for reflection and consideration during Synod. This was the exploration of the extent to which we are truly ‘inclusive’ or are open to others with the expectation that, over time, they increasingly conform to established norms.

- The extent to which specific issues such as racism, ethnic minorities, gender and sexuality, poverty and wealth, and political perspectives have, over the last months, drawn our attention to difference.
- Coronavirus has, for many, significantly increased the sense and reality of isolation. All of us have had some experience of the impact of human separation and many have suffered as a consequence.
- Transforming Church has identified a theme relating to the tension between inclusivity and the socialization of newcomers (making them one of us).
- Within parishes we are inclined to see group categorizations and not take an inclusive perspective:

- We can see differences between those who attend different services (the early morning 8.00am Vs the Parish act of worship for example). These differences also show in multiple benefices where we might attend something at 'our' church but not 'theirs'.
- To what extent do we see the 'users' of our facilities as part of 'us'. Does the understanding of the church community extend across the worshipping communities to recognise other groups (such as those who hire our space and plant).
- How much is the community in which the church building is located seen as part of what we are and actively engaged in our thinking about mission?
- To what extent do we enable our voice to be heard within the community, Deanery, Diocese and more widely?

Transforming Church Together

Deanery Synod on 20 October 2021 focused upon the issues associated with the values associated with the developing Diocesan Strategy.

The Meeting was held in person at Christ Church Clifton

The Main Theme: Introducing the Diocesan Values

Archdeacon Neil Warwick explained that Transforming Church. Together is the process by which the Diocese has recently developed its vision, including desk research, an online questionnaire, and workshops held on Zoom. There were over 1,200 responses to the questionnaire, and around 2,000 people attended the workshops. Particular effort had been made to listen to those not normally heard, including disabled people, BAME people, LGTBI+ people and young people. An external consultancy assisted in examining the results of this engagement.

The values which have been identified in this process – together with associated behaviours, experience principles and benefits to our community – are as follows:

- **Openness** – we are loving and open to all, welcoming to everyone, embracing diverse needs, so that we have a long-term relationship with our community, based on acceptance and love for people as God made them.
- **Generosity** – we receive and give sincerely, giving our time and resources to share what we know of Jesus' love, caring for people practically and spiritually, so that members of our community experience God's love and have the opportunity to journey into faith if they so choose.
- **Creativity** – we co-operate with the work of the Spirit, being rooted in faith and responsive to the Spirit, in bold and joyful faith, work and worship, so that we have variety in our projects and worship styles, celebrating tradition and innovation to connect with God.
- **Bravery** – we are courageous with our voices and our actions, acknowledging and learning from our past and actively effecting positive change in the world, so that we are listened to and partnered with, and the collective voices and actions of our community help to bring about transformational change.

Net-Zero Carbon Proposal

Deanery Synod on 10 March 2022 focused upon shaping a motion to bring to Diocesan Synod to give the previously agreed Climate Emergency recognition a greater sense of urgency.

The Meeting was held in person at St Mary's Almondsbury

The Main Theme: Agreement of the Net-Zero Motion to take to Diocesan Synod:

Rev Dr Andy Murray to move:

that this Synod recognises the need to take urgent and immediate action at a parish, diocese and national church level, in order to achieve the Church of England's NetZero Carbon targets by 2030. We affirm the national church and diocesan work currently underway regarding these targets. In addition, we commend the proposals outlined in the 'Bristol West Deanery NetZero Carbon (March 2022)' paper and we therefore call upon the Diocese of Bristol to formally consider the proposals and recommendations contained within the above paper with a view to identifying a programme of support targeted at parish level.

The Uganda Link

The essential platform for this is '*building relationships of wholeness across culture with Christ at the center*'. In short this is about 'relationship'; between Christians, across cultures, over geography and with, sometimes, differing views of this world. It is about learning from each other and providing mutual support. The Uganda Link is a feature of every Synod and the working life of our parishes in the Deanery.

Two key thoughts at this time:

- ★ The impact of the pandemic has been serious and challenging within the UK; in Uganda and many other parts of the world it is disastrous.
- ★ Additional impacts of the virus have been loss of education opportunity for young women (due to an increase in pregnancies) and an increase in domestic violence.

Father Charles, Deanery Synod

DIOCESE OF BRISTOL REPORT

The Diocesan Synod, which is the primary, elected representative body drawn from across the Diocese of Bristol, met four times in 2021: in March, June and then following the elections for a new Synod in September and November. As well as hearing about and discussing a wide range of areas of the Church's work, it helps formulate and approve policy and the diocesan budget and debates important local and national issues affecting the Church.

Transforming Church Together

A large part of the Synods work during 2021 was focussed on Transforming Church Together. In March the Synod took part in the consultation and engagement process that took place right across the Diocese. At its June meeting the early findings of that consultation process were shared with the Synod and members had the opportunity to reflect on these, feeding back their ideas which led into the development of the Vision, Purpose and Values. In November the Archdeacons led an activity introducing the Synod to the emerging strategic priorities.

Diocesan Finances

The Synod's role approving the financial plans of the Diocesan Board of Finance was part of both the June and November meetings. In June Andrew Lucas, Chair of the Diocesan Board of

Finance, presented the 2020 Annual Report and Financial Statements and updated the Synod about the performance of the organisation in strategic as well as financial terms. In November, he presented the 2022 Budget for approval and Synod members participated in round table discussions to follow up any clarifying points and share views on the proposed budget. Andrew reflected on the impact of the pandemic on the DBF's finances, long-term issues of affordability for the Diocese, the future impact of the new strategy and the strength of the DBF's balance sheet. He also highlighted the tension between the desire to balance the budget and the need to invest in future ministry, with a large part of the projected deficit of £681k in 2022 being due our continuing commitment to investing in future ministry. With prayerful consideration, the Synod approved budgeted expenditure of £9.712m in 2022.

Other reports and discussions included:

The **Annual Safeguarding Report** in June, presented by Andy Wills, Independent Chair who spoke to synod about the considerable developments by the National Safeguarding Team following the publication of the report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), and media attention on a number of issues.

As the **Creating Connections** strategy came to the end of its active period during the year and the Synod heard reports from some of the initiatives and projects which had been started to support it.

Bishop Lee recapped that **investing in curacies** was one of the main strategic choices under Creating Connections, which committed the Diocese to growing vocations to ordained ministry by 50%. This was in line with a national Church of England initiative in the light of the gap between ordinations and retirements. A 50% increase would largely meet overall stipendiary clergy deployment plans nationwide.

The Synod heard from Liz Townend (Diocesan Director of Education), who gave a presentation on education work in the Diocese and specifically the growth of **new church schools**.

Two years after Diocesan Synod declared a **climate emergency** in November 2019, Clare Fussell (Diocesan Environmental Officer) gave an update report to Diocesan Synod members on progress.

Richard Leaman, Diocesan Secretary

THANKS

The PCC employs Matthew Thomas as Organist and Choirmaster and Judi Thomson as Church Administrator. All other routine activities are undertaken by volunteers and the Council places on record its appreciation of these volunteers who give their time and skills to the church and community.

ADOPTION

This report was adopted by the Council at its meeting on 29th March 2022 for presentation to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting on 8th May 2022.



St Mary the Virgin, Almondsbury

Reports from Organisations

Distributed with the Annual Parochial Church Report

Presented at a meeting held on 8th May 2022

FLOWER ARRANGERS

No report received at this time.

Sarah Redmond, Flower Organizer

THE LICH GATE

General

The early part of last year – as with virtually everything and anything else – was dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. As the year progressed and restrictions eased, events and other social gatherings began once again. This resulted in more content for the magazine to advertise them. This had a negative effect in that the number of original articles had to be reduced. As I was writing a good deal of them myself, this was no bad thing!

On-Line

PDF copies of the magazine are posted to the Almondsbury Community Facebook site (732 members) and to a dedicated FB magazine site (229 members). There is a dedicated E Mail for the magazine: editor@lichgate@yahoo.com

Printing

All issues during 2021 / 2022 were produced on time – Motion Printers of Severn beach who print it are reliable and flexible and provide a very good service. Personally, I am very happy with them, and I see no reason for any change in this area.

Other Issues

Advertising appears to have weathered the Covid-19 storm, and we have had few advertisers decide to stop using the magazine, and some new advertisers have also joined. It is not possible to determine how this compares to the “normal” loss/gain of advertisements that would have happened without the pandemic. The New Year is the period when advertisers renew their subscriptions, and this process goes until the March edition that is the first of the new advertising year. The task of managing this falls to John Ingle who is the Advertising Manager and who does a very competent job of this difficult exercise! He tells me that at the end of January all responses have been that advertisers want to continue, but 21 of the 42 advertisers last year have actually made their payments for the year. John will actively chase up the remaining advertisers in the coming weeks to retain as many as possible as has been necessary in previous years. With the agreement of the PCC John has increased the prices of the adverts by approximately 5% and also improved the pricing structure somewhat.

Editorship

The March 2022 edition will be my third full year as editor. I informed everyone last year that I am desirous to relinquish the editorship and I have publicized this widely. To date I have had one person express any interest, and I have agreed to meet with them when preparing the next edition so they may see what is involved. If they remain interested, I will put them in direct contact with the PCC who can take things further. I am happy to provide as smooth a handover

as possible, but my last issue as editor will be February 2023 – to coincide with the end of this advertising year.

Thanks.

My grateful thanks to everyone involved with the Lich Gate magazine, particularly the PCC, Philip Daniels, and John Ingle. I would like to thank Reverend Rowe for his support (and patience & understanding), and I wish him and Alison a long and happy retirement.

Edward Ranger, Editor

CHILDREN'S WORK

The weekly All Age Service has been a focal point for our children and young adult's ministry. Unfortunately, the various lockdowns and COVID restrictions has effectively prevented us from meeting in person until October 2021.

As we could not meet in person, a special video service was published on Facebook for the Good Friday Activities Morning.

Since October, a face to face children's group has been held each week during the All-Age Service. Numbers, though, have been disappointingly low, and we look forward to them increasing during 2022.

Paul van Rossum, Associate Vicar

BABIES AND TODDLERS GROUP

Babies and toddlers is going well. Different mums come and go each week and it really works well in church. The children whizz down the aisles on their sit and rides! We have playdoh and crafts at tables outside the lady chapel. Toys are stored well and played with in the lady chapel, but no food or drinks allowed in there. We round off a session with story books and singing with musical instruments. Mums have tea or coffee and children biscuits and squash.

Sandy Thompson, Leader

OASIS GROUP

This past year has seen a growth of faith and commitment of families who are having ONLINE OASIS meetings once a month.

The Bible story is linked with the lectionary and consists of reading, discussion, crafts sheets for cutting/sticking/colouring and prayers.

It is a catch up time with parents and children and LISTEN TO JESUS.

Sue Hewson has sent sheets which are printed off by the families for the children to be prepared.

It really is a happy time, and we have to be flexible on the day and discover what the children want to talk about.

In April we hope to be back in church and are thinking through how best to make the meeting relevant to their lives. It is good to see these families joining again in Sunday worship.

We are grateful for all prayer for this work and are delighted all the OASIS families have kept supporting each other in Covid. OASIS has a strong link with INCREDIBLE KIDS and the outreach of that group led by Jennie and Dom Prewett.

Jan Cooper and team (Sandy, Sue, Ro, and Michael)

MESSY CHURCH

We were keen to get messy church up and running after Covid. Fortunately, we were able to meet in the vicarage garden in June 2021 and again in September 2021.

We have met in church every month since then with an average of 30 to 40 children and carers.

We have a great craft team in Sandy and Mo and other helpers such as Pam, Tracey, Mary, Sarah, and Carol help to keep it all working smoothly.

It's an added bonus now having our screen and Projector to show the story on you tube as well as the singing which has led to impromptu dancing in the aisles! Tom comes straight from school to operate the technology.

Different themes each month help us to teach the children bible stories in a fun and relaxed way

As they come in from school, they are given a drink and biscuit and straight on to a variety of crafts on the tables at the front of the church. Story and singing at 4.15 followed by a cooked tea at 4.40 in our fabulous new kitchen.

We are always looking for new helpers, if you would like to be involved and are happy to do a DBS check please speak to Alison or Sandy.

Alison Rowe

CATERING COMMITTEE

Looking back at my diary I see that

Monday 24th February 2020 we opened our newly renovated cafe in the new church kitchen

Monday 2nd March 2020 South Gloucestershire council visited us and gave us a 5 * rating

Monday 9th March 2020 Lovely full cafe with many visitors

LOCKDOWN

February 2022

After 2 rocky years we are now starting to use our lovely kitchen for after church coffee and provide meals for 30 children at messy church. Sadly, the cafe has not been able to re-open.

We must pay thanks to Barry and Chris Coltham who put much energy into the cafe, and we wish them well in their new home.

Our first catering committee is due to meet this month to look at an updated risk assessment for the kitchen, a possible lent lunch and catering for the village fete in June 2020.

I appreciate the hard work done by those who make coffee each week and those who work hard behind the scenes to make sure hospitality is given in our church.

We are extremely grateful to the reordering team for the beautiful and purposeful new kitchen Rosemary Griffiths is kindly going to take over the running of this group.

Alison Rowe

BELLRINGERS

Another strange year, but at least an improvement on 2020

“Normal” ringing this year has been on and off, and we only really got going again in the latter part of the year, but I am pleased to say we’re back up to speed again with a few new faces, though a considerable reduction in members for one reason or another.

Thanks must go to the following people for keeping the metaphorical flag flying.

- The Jefferis family for ringing on Sundays and occasional events, including the death and the funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh. Thank you so much for keeping the sound of the bells ringing in the village and reminding them that the ringers and the church is still there
- Gerry for maintenance, risk assessments, CCTV, and being able to see the bells in glorious technicolour, fly cleaning and just about everything else that wouldn’t have been done without him!
- To Philip for his support of the ringers through this difficult time
- Adam for continuing as secretary and wedding organiser and doing all the paperwork and keeping us abreast of the news and developments, locally and nationally as well as being “Statto”, with all the facts and figures below.
- To our guests and visitors, who are really members of the tower family and I trust they know it, because without them we couldn’t function.
- Mike as Treasurer (now retired), Adrian as Deputy Tower Captain,

So, in terms of activities, the bells have been rung where possible on Sundays and for weddings and practice nights have resumed on Mondays. There was a large amount of ringing for the various Christmas services and activities and Tim, Caleb, Andrew, Tanya and myself rang at midnight on New Year’s Eve 2021/ Day 2022, keeping the tradition of Almondsbury bells ringing out the old year and ringing in the new.

Let’s hope for a better year.

In statistics the story of 2021 is:

- No ringing between 1 January and 3 April because of government restrictions

- Sunday ringing on all sixteen Sundays between 4 April to 18 July thanks to the Jefferis family who took advantage of government rules allowing members of the same household to ring together. They rang four bells on all sixteen Sundays
- Normal Sunday ringing on 21 of the 22 Sundays between 25 July and 19 December. There was no service and thus no ringing on Sunday 24 December. Attendance on the 21 Sundays ranged from 4 to 9, with the average being 5.9, down from 6.5 last year. We had six or more ringers on 11 Sundays (52% down from 82%), seven or more on 5 (24% down from 64%).
- Normal Monday ringing on 12 of the 13 Mondays between 20 September and 20 December. Attendance ranged from 5 to 11, with the average being 8.8 down from 10.6 last year. We had eight or more ringers on 7 Mondays (58% down from 90% last year) and ten or more on 3 Mondays (25% down from 50%).
- We have 8 resident and regular ringers, nine less than last year. There are also two regular adult visitors, three junior members who ring occasionally, and two further people who may return to ringing in the future. Two of the juniors are in full time education and aged 18 or over.

Our ringing highlights were a touch of Cambridge Minor, a spliced touch of St Simon and St Martin, a plain course of Bob Major, a spliced touch of Little and Plain Bob, and a touch of Stedman Doubles, all of which show that the diminished band retains much of its former expertise, and a touch of Grandsire Doubles rung by an adult learner, demonstrating that the band can still progress and learn new methods.

Otherwise, we rang 17 different methods versus 19 last year. These varied from Rounds to Cambridge Minor taking in Rounds and Call Changes, Plain Hunt, Grandsire Doubles and Triples, Plain Bob Minimus, Doubles, Minor, Triples and Major, St Simon's Doubles, St Martin's Doubles, St Clements Minor, Little Bob Minor, Reverse Canterbury Doubles, St Clements Minor, Stedman Doubles and Cambridge Surprise Minor.

Members and friends lost include Mike Tierney, who retired not just from work but from us, Nigel Waters due to ill health, Mike and Elaine Purnell moved to Calne and David Smith and Dan Gearing just disappeared! But we have welcomed Pauline Butcher and Wendy Goodliffe, as well as other occasional visitors such as James Joyson and I continue to "poach" wherever possible!

In order to support both towers, we have established a monthly joint practice with our friends at Chipping Sodbury, alternating towers each month. This allows us to ring Surprise Minor and Major and also give the learners a chance to have a stronger band around them as they progress. I expect to see more of this sort of arrangement between towers due to declining numbers.

There were no Branch practices or events. So Almondsbury continue to be the reigning Quiz Champions for another year 😊

"A bell's not a bell 'til you ring it"

Marcus Booth, Tower Captain – Almondsbury