

**Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames**

**ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS**

**Park Road, Abingdon**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2019**

## PERSONNEL, 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2019

### Clergy

The Revd Dr Charles Miller (Team Rector)

The Revd Paul Smith (Team Vicar)

The Revd. Mary Williamson (house-for-duty priest) till September

The Revd. Canon Charles Masheder (house-for-duty priest) from November

### Churchwarden

Mr Peter Squire (first elected April 2017)

Miss Joyce Kelly (elected April 2019)

### Diocesan Synod Representative (also on PCC and DCC)

Alexandra Scott (from summer 2019)

### Deanery Synod Representatives \*

Sue Scott (from 2017)

one vacancy

### PCC Members \*

Hilary Clare (to 2022)

John Clare (to 2021)

Jenni Collins (to 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)

Adrienne Compton-James (to 2020)

Eileen Duckett (to 2021)

Jean Hercus (to 2021; resigned on leaving parish)

Louise Heffernan (to 2020)

two vacancies

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

Note that following the decision at the ADCM 2018 no DCC member is eligible for re-election until one year after the end of their term.

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)

The DCC met six times, and the Standing Committee informally, during the year.

### 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**

Welcome to this Annual Report for the activities of our church during 2019. I first want to say thank you to my dedicated Churchwardens, Peter Squire and Joyce Kelly, for all their hard work during the past year. Their collegial working and support have been much valued by me and I am sure by all of us. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

### **Clergy Staffing**

I am grateful to my clergy colleagues for their help and support over the past year.

In September we said farewell to the Revd Mary Williamson after three years of ministry in the parish. We were fortunate to find a replacement for Mary very quickly, in Canon Charles Masheder, who was licensed for three years, in St Helen's on 4 November by the Bishop of Dorchester. Charles, together with his wife Felicity, were warmly welcomed at this service. Charles comes with a wealth and depth of ministerial experience and we look forward to seeing more of him here at St Michael's during his time in Abingdon.

Special thanks go to the Revds Pauline and Christopher Seaman for assisting by covering Mass on Thursdays when I have been on annual leave or commitments have taken me elsewhere. I am most grateful for their willingness to help in this way and their ministry is much appreciated by the regular congregation.

### **Attendance**

We note from the Churchwarden's report that the average Sunday attendance has risen slightly, but we are more or less stable. This does have an impact on us in ways which I will mention further in this report. The weekday Masses continue to attract a regular, faithful number of people. However, it has to be noted that these two celebrations are largely covered by me (that is, the Tuesday evening Mass has to be cancelled when I am on leave, or participating in the leading of Baptism Preparation), and this is something that needs addressing in 2020.

### **Mission and Ministry**

At the end of last June the PCC had its second Away Day (which looks as if it will be an annual event), this time at the Carmelite Priory at Boars Hill. There was discussion on Communications and what part a parish web-site should be playing in our corporate, parish life; this is something that is going to be a significant project in 2020. Discussions over the use of social media for and by our churches was also raised. Not all the churches are doing the same thing in this respect, and uniformity here seems to be important.

The new group for Christian Teaching and Spiritual Growth, (of which Beryl Clements is our representative) met during the year to discuss how things could be done for the whole parish. Plans began for a Pre-Lent Quiet Day, and a Teaching Day between Ascension Day and Pentecost.

During the year the DCC agreed the three priorities: Pastoral Care, Hospitality, and Teaching. These came out of the Congregational Away Day which we had at the beginning of the year. At Michaelmas I issued a card with these priorities and also a prayer.

I would confess that I have not got much further than that, for which I ask your forgiveness. Six members of our congregation met with Charles Chadwick and me during November to explore Pastoral Visiting under our first priority. This was to explore whether or not they would be interested in assisting me in visiting people who are housebound or unable to attend church on a temporary basis. It is not intended to do visiting 'for me', but 'alongside me', and at the time of writing those six people are going to meet with me to discern whether or not this is the right ministry for them.

I want to pay tribute and thank Jane Duce and Eileen Duckett for the work they have done in terms of leading our Hospitality over many years. Towards the end of last year, Jane and Eileen told me that they wanted to step down from this work. Our thanks must go to them both for their work. I have been speaking with the Churchwardens as to how we move forward. One of our challenges (as it is for many churches) is that too few people do too many tasks. I am therefore aiming to widen the net in respect of how we do hospitality on special occasions, not least after key services, during the year: i.e. Corpus Christi and the Assumption. But there are other events too. The 'burden' of this ministry should not fall on too few people. It would be good if we could have a pool of people on whom we could call.

Thanks must also go to our DCC members for their work over the past year. Special thanks must go to those who are leaving us, and a warm welcome to those who may join us. I want to take this opportunity to say again that the work of meetings is not always easy, but joining the DCC, and being part of it, is more than about attendance. The flourishing of the DCC depends on all its members having a keen interest to see the ongoing mission and ministry of the congregation take place. Members are called to work alongside the Vicar and Churchwardens in seeing this happen. I think there is work to be done in finding better ways of communicating between the DCC and members of the congregation.

### **Sabbatical**

At the time of writing, I am planning my sabbatical, which, as I announced to the congregation at the beginning of this month, will be between August to November 2020. I am grateful to the Team Clergy for their support in covering my absence and for the encouragement of the Churchwardens. I am looking forward to this opportunity and to returning refreshed and renewed.

### **Thank you**

Finally, I am grateful to everyone for your commitment to our common life. Please pray for me as I do for you.

Your friend and pastor,

*Father Paul Smith, Team Vicar, March 2020*

## **CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT**

### **Worship and Services:**

During 2019, our regular pattern of services continued with the Mass at 09.30 on Sundays, a Said Mass at 19.30 on most Tuesdays (combined with lay-led meditations at the Stations of the Cross during Lent), and a Said Mass at 12.30 on Thursdays. We are most grateful to honorary clergy and the clergy team for their cover from time to time.

In addition, certain Holy Days (e.g. Epiphany, Dedication Festival, Corpus Christi and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary) were marked by a weekday mass.

The average attendance on Sundays has increased slightly to 44 (42 in 2018) whereas the average attendance at the Tuesday and Thursday services (9 and 12, respectively) was similar to that recorded in 2018.

In June, St Michael's hosted the Trinity Sunday Corporate Parish Communion and there were also 4 baptisms, 5 weddings, 1 blessing following a civil marriage, and 6 funerals during the year.

**Easter:** In Holy Week, which attracted 307 communicants (a significant increase on 2018), Mass was celebrated on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Throughout the week, addresses were delivered by The Reverend Paul Cowan, Chaplain to Bishop Steven.

We observed the Triduum in the usual way, beginning on Maundy Thursday we observed the Mass of the Lord's Supper with the Washing of Feet, the Stripping of the Altar and Watch of the Passion. Compline was then said at midnight.

On Good Friday morning Carol Bowman led a short inter-active children's service attended by 27 adults and 15 children and followed by a variety of craft activities whilst refreshments were served. Thanks to two of our young church members, Carys Hopkins and Sarah Clark who helped with both the service and crafts. This was followed by the Liturgy of the Passion in the afternoon.

The Lighting of the New Fire and Easter Vigil was celebrated on Holy Saturday and this was followed on Easter Day by The Sung Mass of the Resurrection.

**Christmas:** Our Christmas celebrations commenced with our popular Crib service, led by Carol Bowman again with the help of Carys Hopkins and Sarah Clark and accompanied by Keith Bowman on the piano, and attended by 80 adults and 25 children.

The Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve saw a full Church with an attendance of 208. Many thanks to Glynne Butt and the choir for the outstanding music on the evening. This was followed by Midnight Mass with 25 communicants (32 in 2018) and Christmas Morning Mass with 47 communicants (40 in 2018).

**Outreach:** St Nicolas' Primary School did not hold its normal service at St Michael's at the end of the Spring Term due to bad weather but Abingdon School held three services at St Michael's during 2019: A leavers' service in June at which 207 were in attendance; and Lower and Upper School Carol Services in December with 490 in attendance.

On two Saturdays in August, the general public were able to visit the church and enjoy afternoon tea and on 14 September we welcomed visitors participating in the Abingdon Heritage Weekend and Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride.

During the year, concerts were given at the Church by Abingdon Concert Band and Wantage Academy Band, and the Church was hired in October by New Life Church (Oxford). Our church room continues to be well used on a regular basis by five local organisations.

**Fund-raising:** We continued to fund-raise, during the year, for our two nominated charities - The Abingdon Bridge (a charity for young people based in the town), and Tariro, a youth charity in Zimbabwe.

On 25 August, John and Hilary Clare raised funds for the Simean Mountains Mobile Medical Support Unit (a medical charity in Ethiopia) by hosting a BALMORAL afternoon which included showing a film of Royal Deeside and giving an insight of the life there of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

We also supported:

1. CMS with a cash donation;
2. The Porch Day Centre in Oxford by donating our Harvest gifts and a proportion of the significant funds raised by a very successful Autumn Fair; and
3. Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust by sponsoring Louise Heffernan and Nicola Ng for the Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride.

**Many thanks:** To all who contributed in any way to our common life, particularly to those who serve at the altar, our sacristan, our organists, the dedicated band of choir members, members of the DCC, cleaners and flower arrangers; and, finally, to Fr Paul for his leadership, support, kindness and love over the year. Let us continue to pray for the Lord's blessing on him.

*Joyce Kelly and Peter Squire, February 2020*

## **FABRIC REPORT**

In January the five floodlights in the nave were replaced. At the same time the opportunity was taken to repair the defective spotlights in the chancel, and to conduct portable appliance testing and the 5-yearly testing of the fixed electrical installation.

The heating system has suffered a number of failures this year after a decade of generally satisfactory service. These have been both failures of individual elements and also the breakdown of the core control system. The successful integration of the replacement controller has taken some time, and the advent of winter weather has shown that more work may be necessary.

During the first half of the year building work was undertaken by our neighbours at 28 Park Road. This caused no particular problems although safety issues identified whilst the work was in progress did necessitate the temporary erection of scaffolding on the church's land.

The small piano was sold after agreement by the DCC.

During the Easter Triduum, the statue of St Michael, which had been removed from the nave to the vestry as part of the ceremonies, was extensively damaged whilst stored. An estimate for the repair was obtained and the process for obtaining a faculty for the repair was commenced.

Routine maintenance of the fire alarm, emergency lighting, fire extinguishers and organ all took place, along with the usual day-to-day tasks of keeping the church and its contents in good order together with preliminary planning of works for execution in 2020.

*Keith Bowman, 12 February 2020*

## **ELECTORAL ROLL**

2019 was one of the years in which the Church Representation Rules required the compilation of a new electoral roll, rather than just a simple updating. A new up-to-date roll is necessary to enable the elections to Synods in 2021 to be as fair a representation of church membership as possible. The new roll for St Michael's contained 71 names on completion, which was a decrease of 20 from the figure after revision in 2018.

*Keith Bowman*

## **SAFEGUARDING REPORT**

Every effort has been made to ensure that the DCC has complied with the duty to have 'due regard' to the House of Bishops Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance.

During the year two outstanding issues were addressed to ensure compliance with this policy.

The Parish Safeguarding policy, together with contact details and associated information, has been uploaded onto our website, accessible via a link on the home page.

In September the churchwardens and safeguarding officer began the process of reviewing and extending the terms and conditions for hirers of the church and/or church room. An important part of this was the need to formalise our safeguarding requirements. Currently the parish safeguarding policy and other relevant information is prominently displayed in both the church and the church room but from early 2020 all hirers will have to sign a declaration agreeing to conform to our basic safeguarding principles. Groups potentially including young people or vulnerable adults will have to agree to abide by our full safeguarding policy, or that of their organisation if applicable, and to familiarise themselves with the appropriate diocesan good practice guides which will be available from our website.

*Carol Bowman, February 2020*

## **LABYRINTH-INSPIRED ACTIVITIES IN 2019**

### **World Labyrinth day**

St Michael's was open from 12.30– 2.30 pm on Saturday 4 May for people to walk and pray the Labyrinth. Most of the participants came at 1 pm to join in the worldwide 'Walk as One at 1'. This was followed by prayers, led by Sue Sheppy, and a light lunch. Altogether, 12 people attended.

### **Silent Reflections**

2019 marks the 8th year of our monthly *Silent Reflections*. These are held on the last Tuesday evening of the month at 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 these themes were introduced by Fr Paul, Rosalind Rutherford, Sue Scott or Sue Sheppy. Eileen Duckett is our catering manager, and often assists in reading scripture or poems during the introductory sessions. Material is produced to aid these meditations, and we gather together again at the end for closing prayers and refreshments. Over the year, 18 individuals have joined us in this space at one time or another from churches in and around Abingdon, or from no regular church community. For many people a labyrinth walk is an important part of the evening. Spare copies of the materials are more widely circulated to those seeking spiritual nourishment, but who cannot always attend these evening reflections.

### **Circle Dancing**

These weekly sessions are led mostly by Mary Williams and occasionally by Elizabeth Mitchell; we use the labyrinth to circle up. We dance to secular and sacred music and it was seen from the beginning as a place to encourage those into our beautiful sacred space here at St Michael's, who do not attend our church, or indeed are not part of any faith community. In this way it is seen as part of our outreach to the community. Attendance is consistently around 12-14.

### **Moving into Stillness**

In addition to our weekly sessions, our circle dancing to Taizé music with silent interludes has become a regular monthly event. This is led by Elizabeth Mitchell, an experienced teacher in this way

of meditating through movement and stillness. As with our regular circle dancing, the labyrinth is used to maintain the circle formation. Between the two sessions, Eileen Duckett and Sue Sheppy have provided light refreshments for the dancers, which have been much appreciated. This event has continued to flourish with attendance averaging over 11 participants this year.

### **Advent Labyrinth Walks**

The church was open on Tuesday 3, 10 and 17 December between 11 am and noon, and 7 pm and 8 pm. There was an opportunity to walk the labyrinth or simply to enjoy the sacred space. Material for reflection was available on a different Advent theme each week: *Longing, Listening, Letting Go*. A short prayer was said at the beginning and end of the session, led each time by a different member of our congregation. Overall 27 visits were made, and spare copies of the material was taken to those confined to home or who, for various reasons, were unable to attend the sessions this year.

### **Groups and individuals**

We continue to be contacted by a number of people throughout the year who are interested in walking the labyrinth. All visits are welcomed. Contact is usually made either from information on our church website, or from the Word-Wide Labyrinth Locator managed for us by Carol Bowman.

*Sue Sheppy* February 2020