

Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames

ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

Park Road, Abingdon

ANNUAL REPORT

2021

PERSONNEL, 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2021

Clergy

The Revd Charles Miller (Rector)

The Revd Paul Smith (Vicar)

Canon Charles Mashender (House for Duty Priest)

Churchwardens

Peter Squire (until June 2021)

Joyce Kelly (elected 2019)

Louise Heffernan (elected 2021)

Deanery Synod Representatives

Sue Scott (from 2017 re-elected 2020) (from 2021 also on **Diocesan Synod** and **Bishops Council**)

Alex Scott (from 2020 also on **Diocesan Synod**)

PCC Members

Hilary Clare (until 2022), John Clare (until 2024), vacancy

DCC Officers

Vice-Chairman John Clare

Treasurer Susan Read

Secretary Hilary Clare

DCC Members

Douglas Aitken (until 2022)

Dorothy Bell (until 2021)

Glynne Butt (until 2023)

Beryl Clements (until 2024)

Frank Debney (until 2023)

Eileen Duckett (until 2021)

Sau Ming Ng (until 2023)

Nicola Ng (until 2024)

Catherine Ng (until 2024)

Vacancies

The **Standing Committee** is composed of the Vicar, Churchwardens, Treasurer and Secretary.

The **Fabric Committee** is composed of the Vicar, Churchwardens, Keith Bowman, and Frank Debney.

Other Officers

Stewardship Officer	Julie Woodley
Electoral Roll Officer	Keith Bowman
Pew Leaflet	David Duce
Registers	Hilary Clare
Church Safeguarding Officer	Carol Bowman
Church-in Abingdon Representative	Jane Cadogan

TEAM VICAR'S REPORT

Introduction

As a result of the pandemic, 2021 was another hard year for the church throughout the nation and as a parish, and here at St Michael's, we felt that keenly too. This made for challenges in our common life in the congregation which people met with courage, faithfulness, and remarkable fortitude. I want to thank you everyone for this.

I was not expecting the situation to dominate another year, for more 'Lockdown,' and all those restrictions meant. I want to thank our Churchwardens for all they did to help implement the ongoing changes in guidance from the diocese and the risk assessments which were involved.

After meetings with clergy and Parish Wardens, we agreed we would return to worshipping in our churches throughout the parish from Palm Sunday (28th March). It was wonderful that we could do more together again, and I want to reflect on some of those events later in this report.

Our Worshipping Life

Our whole 'common life' is rooted in, and springs from, our 'worshipping life' together as a Christian community. We are fed by the word of God and in the sacrament of the altar each time we meet for the celebration of the Mass. Having been nourished in this way means that we can be sent back into the world to live out our calling 'to go in peace to love and serve the Lord.' Our coming together to do this in our sacred space was seriously interrupted as Lockdown prevented our normal worship.

On-line Zoom each Sunday

We were able to worship 'apart' and yet 'together; through technology via Zoom each Sunday. I realise that this was not possible for everyone, for those who do not have access to a computer or another device, and I felt that acutely. I am grateful to David Duce who continued to provide such a wealth of spiritual and worship material through the Sunday pew leaflet and for arranging delivery of hard copies to those who could not receive this electronically.

Celebrating the Mass from my desk in my study, in front of the computer, was something I would never have foreseen in my ministry. I will confess that using Zoom was a steep learning curve for me and it would not have been possible without the patient tuition of others, and the forbearance of everyone with the mistakes I seemed to make on a regular basis as I got to grips with this new venture.

Moreover, it would not have been possible at all if the subscription for the Zoom account had not been generously donated anonymously by a member of our congregation.

I want to offer thanks on behalf of us all for the hard work of Ming Ng who helped us each week set up and ‘host’ the service and for those who assisted him as weeks went by. Our gratitude must also go to Rob Rutherford who gave advice and expertise as we prepared for our first few weeks.

Each week David Duce provided the text for us to see ‘on screen,’ and Graham Howell, also pre-recorded hymns and music from church which were uploaded in order that our ‘remote’ worship could be enhanced in this way. Out thanks go also to David and Graham for their valuable contributions.

At the end of each week’s liturgy we were placed into what were called ‘break-out rooms’ and having taken some time to make a cup of coffee, we spent fifteen minutes or so sharing news and how people were managing. It was, however, far from what we were used to after Mass in church. It did, nevertheless, provide time to catch up with one another.

Returning to church and ‘in-person’ worship

Returning to worship began on Palm Sunday, although we chose not to hold the Said Mass with Address in Holy Week (Monday – Wednesday evenings as has been a longstanding tradition), but just to observe the Triduum with some changes to reduce the liturgies. We chose to begin slowly in the interest of everyone’s safety, keeping the length of the service shorter on Sundays, omitting some of what we would typically include. Gradually we returned to what was more familiar by re-introducing the typical pattern within our liturgy.

Musical Development

It has been a highlight in the year to see a choir develop and flourish. Early in Lockdown(s) when congregational singing was still not permitted, they augmented our worship with singing. When congregational singing was restored, they have added a rich dimension to our worship which has been remarked upon by visitors and others and we are blessed to have a committed core group of singers.

Thanks is due to Glynne Butt, our Director of Music, for developing the music in this way, to our committed organists, Graham Howell and Malcolm Pearce, and others. And I want to thank Adrienne Compton-James for faithfully arranging organists to play regularly for us.

Christmas 2021

We were able to have a fuller programme of services than in 2020. It was decided that we would have one Midnight Mass only in the parish, this year again, and this took place at 10.30pm as the First Eucharist of Christmas. Mass was celebrated here on Christmas morning and again the following day for the Feast of St Stephen (it is rare that we have an opportunity to do that, but the Feast fell on a Sunday this year).

We had our Christmas Carol Service at 6pm on Christmas Eve, and although numbers were much less than in previous years, this was a wonderful service with glorious singing from the Choir. Councillor Andy Foulsham, Deputy Mayor, read the account of the visit of the Magi in Matthew’s gospel.

Despite advertising, and preparation, it was decided not to hold our Crib Service. This was a difficult decision, made with great reluctance, but made in this interest and safety of those leading this worship, and those who may have come. The decision was reached in light of the fact that families bringing school-aged children were among those who, because of their contacts, could most likely transmit the virus.

Very many thanks go to Nicola Ng and team for distributing Christmas flyers in the immediate locality of St Michael's and to David Duce for his poster.

Finance and Fund Raising

Our financial situation can be seen from the presentation of the accounts in this report and which our treasurer, Susan Read, will speak to at our Annual District Church Meeting (ADCM). It is clear that our financial situation is one of challenge with expenditure exceeding income. The pandemic has not helped us, and this is the situation throughout the diocese, and the wider Church of England. Some churches have suffered severely making redundant paid posts.

We have been running a deficit for many years, but the impact of the last two years has caused us to ask even harder and deeper questions. The fact that our Church Room has not been receiving the lettings that it would have normally has been just one factor, although some groups have been returning.

Our need to generate more income is a matter for strategic and long-term planning, not just at St Michael's, but across the parish. Fund raising events encourage others to visit us, with whom we might not otherwise come into contact, and successful events during the year have been hugely appreciated. A series of Autumn Concerts on Sunday afternoons, organised by Glynne Butt, and which attracted good audiences, made for afternoons of glorious and varied music as well as achieving a very pleasing financial result.

Our Christmas Fair, chiefly organised by Nicola Ng and Louise Heffernan, was a wonderful, community occasion which brought many visitors into the church and during which there was a wonderful atmosphere. Any concerns that this venture was not going do well were soon allayed.

With the Autumn Concerts and the Christmas Fair, a terrific sum of not much short of £3,000 was raised. This has not been the case in previous years, without the challenges of the pandemic. So I want to underline my deep gratitude for this notable achievement in 2021.

Fund raising is both rewarding and hard work, so it cannot be maintained by the few. The DCC therefore are commissioning an Events Committee, under the oversight of Louise Heffernan, which plans to organise events throughout 2022. These events will be wide-ranging, aiming to raise funds, as well as provide opportunities for social time together and attract others to meet us.

The DCC has discussed the matter over a number of meetings including the issue of mission and charitable giving. This subject has been discussed by the DCC since September and a lot of work and deliberation has taken place. More on this subject will be shared at the ADCM. However, the matter of how we look beyond our own needs, (even within our financial constraints), and how we show our love, care and support to our sisters and brothers, is both urgent and important. It is a difficult balance to strike, but it has to be done. Please can I ask you to keep this area of our life and responsibility in your prayers.

To end: a note of celebration and hope

One of the highlights of 2021 was the celebration of our Patronal Festival. We celebrated our Patronal Mass on the day of Michaelmas itself, 29 September, and welcomed Fr Andreas Wenzel, Vice-Principal and Director of Pastoral Studies at St Stephen's House, Oxford as our preacher. Thanks to our flower arrangers the church was beautifully decorated, and we had a wonderful celebration during our worship, followed by refreshments.

On the Sunday prior to the Feast itself, the Team Rector presided and preached at our 9.30am Sung Mass. This was followed by a shared lunch and was the first occasion since the pandemic that we were able to meet together socially. After the meal, there was a wonderful period of entertainment with a variety of contributors: they included recitations of poetry, vocal and instrumental items, and a wonderful setting of a Psalm composed by the Choir. For me, and I hope for many, it was an 'all-in' celebration, and will be a high point of what was a difficult year.

I conclude by underlining my gratitude to each and every one of you for your contributions to the life of our community. The pandemic has brought its pain, fear, and anxiety. But it has brought us opportunities to be more attentive to the grace, peace, and abiding presence of God in our lives and community. It has taught us afresh that 'nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8.39) and that '...and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.' (Romans 5.5).

With every blessing and much gratitude

Father Paul

CHURCH WARDENS' REPORT

Worship and services:

2021 started off with the country in Lockdown 3. It was decided by the PCC though Places of Worship did not have to close this time, that our churches in the Parish would do so. This was done to protect the safety of our congregations and the NHS. So on the 17th of January we commenced our worship over Zoom. The average number of attendees was 25. We would like to thank all who helped or participated in any in our Zoom services.

This continued until 28th March, Palm Sunday, when we recommenced our services in person. Thankfully, we were able to keep the church open for the remainder of the year, but still with restrictions in place.

For the first time in 2 years we were able to celebrate Easter. We held our Patronal Mass on the 26th of September followed by lunch and entertainment. We also held a Mass on 29th September, our actual Patronal Day. We celebrated Christmas with a Carol Service on Christmas Eve and Mass on Christmas Day. Our Said Mass on Thursdays recommenced on the 9th May. We have not recommenced our Tuesday evening Said Mass.

We had 3 weddings, 2 baptisms, 1 thanksgiving service, 11 funerals, and 1 internment of ashes in 2021. The pandemic continues to affect us in many ways, but it has been good to be able to gather in church for the Eucharist, meeting our friends, and coffee.

We are most grateful to our honorary clergy and our clergy for enabling us to worship at St Michael's.

Outreach:

Unfortunately, due to continued restrictions Abingdon School were unable to hold their Leavers' Service in June, but we welcomed them back to the church for their Carol Services in December.

The Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride did go ahead. We opened the church to meet and greet the cyclists and offered refreshments'

Bookings for the Church and Church Room commenced in September, and we welcomed back the Albert Park Singers, AA, and NA. The Albert Park Singers were able to give their Christmas Concert which was a most enjoyable occasion.

During the autumn 2 Sunday afternoon concerts were organised by our Director of Music. The East Oxford Community Choir also held a Sunday Afternoon Concert. These were well received and very much enjoyed. We are incredibly grateful to Glynne for her organisation and for her musical talent which enriches our experience both in our concerts and in our services through her leadership of the choir.

We were able to hold our Christmas Fair, which was successful. We thank everyone who contributed in any way to its success.

Fundraising:

We continue to support:

Abingdon Bridge (a local charity that provides support and guidance for young people) and Tariro (a youth charity in Zimbabwe),

The Porch Day Centre (supporting homeless people in Oxford) to whom we gave money this year instead of Harvest gifts,

Oxfordshire Historic Churches by sponsoring Louise Heffernan and Nicola Ng for the Oxford Ride and Stride.

Volunteers:

When things run smoothly, we don't always notice or appreciate all the work that goes on behind the scenes. We owe thanks to all our many volunteers: the folks that come in and do the cleaning, the flower arrangers, those who do the odd vital jobs – fixing things or sorting out the heating or sound, those who make the coffee, the gardeners, the writers or contributors of the pew leaflet and website. We thank you all.

Many thanks:

To all who help in our worship – those who serve at the altar, our sacristan, our organists, and dedicated choir members. To the DCC members, and all our sidepersons.

We would also like to particularly to thank Peter Squire, who stepped down as Church Warden in 2021 though he continues to work hard behind the scenes. His help has been invaluable, and he has served the Church faithfully in his 4 years as a Warden.

Finally, a big thank you to Fr Paul who in another difficult year has given leadership, support, kindness, and love. Let us continue to pray for the Lord's blessing on him.

Joyce Kelly and Louise Heffernan February 2022

ELECTORAL ROLL

In March 2021, the roll underwent a simple revision to consolidate the amendments which had been made since the revision in October 2020 for the APCM which was delayed that year.

At the conclusion of the 2021 revision the roll contained 66 names. This was three fewer than at the previous revision, reflecting those three members of our congregation had died. There were no changes of address, and no changes of name were notified.

Keith Bowman February 2022

FABRIC REPORT

2021 again saw the church closed for worship at the beginning of the year, the need has remained to keep the building and its contents safe, secure and in good order. Routine maintenance of the heating

system, fire alarm, emergency lighting, fire extinguishers, PAT testing, and organ all took place as usual.

Last year's report made mention that the Quinquennial Review would take place, and this did indeed happen. The Fabric Committee has met and now needs to action what is required.

At the end of 2021 there was again a problem with the heating, and we decided that during the month of December that we needed to keep the heating on 24/7 to ensure the comfort of both the congregation and anyone using the building.

Joyce Kelly February 2022

LABYRINTH INSPIRED ACTIVITIES

Silent Reflections

2021 marked the 10th year of our monthly *Silent Reflections*. In the normal way, these are held on the last Tuesday evening of the month from 7.30 - 9 pm. Each time a simple theme is introduced before people move around the church for shared silence and personal reflection. Themes were produced this year by Fr Paul, Rosalind Rutherford, Sue Scott and Sue Sheppy, and the material was circulated to those on our Silent Reflections' List, about 45 people, and was also put on St Michael's website by David Duce. Our sessions continued as *Silent Reflections At Home* from January to March. We began to meet in the church again from April coming in through the North door and sitting round the edge of the labyrinth. At 8.30pm, we gathered for the final prayers, after which refreshments were offered in the south transept. From April to November, 70 visits were made in all from 20 individuals.

Circle Dancing/Moving into Stillness

Circle dancing, led by Mary Williams, returned to church in April with strong support. *Moving into Stillness* resumed in September. Elizabeth Mitchell led us once again into a beautiful combination of dancing to Taizé chants interspersed with two periods of silence, for which we were seated round the edge of the labyrinth. A central display for both sessions always include lit candles, and, at the end, the light is sent out to those in most need of it.

Advent Labyrinth Walks

The church was open on Tuesday the 7, 14 and 21 December between 11am and 12 noon, and again in the evening from 7pm - 8pm. Material for reflection and simple activities were available for the different stages of the walk. The Advent themes this year were: *He Will Come, I Will Wait, and Costly Devotion*. Advent candles were lit in the centre of the labyrinth. Prayers were read at the different sessions by Fr Paul, Carol Bowman, Eileen Duckett, Gill Squire, Laurie King and Sue Scott. In spite of the Omicron variant being rife at this time, 25 visits were made overall from 12 individuals.

Sue Sheppy February 2022

MUSIC REPORT 2021

Since resuming singing after the pandemic, our choir has been in excellent form. With some extremely competent singers among our ranks, we have been able to sing to a high standard. This has been most obvious in regular unaccompanied communion hymns (commented on by visiting clergy) and, during COVID, in some splendid solo singing. Both of our regular organists have also been willing to lend voice as required to fill in any gaps!

The music at the Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols was the best for several years. The choir was augmented by a small number of extra voices and the quality of the singing was impressive. The accolade of ‘the best carol service in Abingdon’ was well deserved and only COVID restrictions prevented the usual ‘standing room only’ for the congregation.

Collaborating with such good organists as Graham Howell and Malcolm Pearce has greatly enhanced our worship throughout the year and the congregation generally has developed a tradition of remaining seated to listen to - and applaud - the concluding voluntary. On the occasional Sunday we are without an organist, Glynne Butt has played our lovely piano.

Having such a fine instrument has also enabled us to host a few concerts this year. We promoted our own concert series of ‘Music for a Sunday Afternoon,’ enjoying excellent performances by top-class local musicians – and at the same time, raising money for church funds. In addition, a local choir and orchestra have twice repeated their Oxford concert programme in St. Michael’s. It is to be hoped that the unfortunate failure of the heating on the day of their January performance will not deter future visits. Again, thanks to the piano, Abingdon Music Festival used St. Michael’s both for their piano classes and for their final Festival Concert. Other visitors have included Abingdon School for some of their end of term services.

Albert Park Singers rehearse weekly in the church – increased numbers meaning that they have, this year, outgrown the church room. Glynne’s recent appointment as their musical director has strengthened our links and they generously shared the proceeds of their Christmas concert with the church.

Glynne Butt February 2022

SAFEGUARDING REPORT

The annual review of the Parish Safeguarding Policy was completed in June.

The church and church room have once again been available for hire and bookings have been taken. Following all the planning in 2020, safeguarding requirements are now included in the hire agreement and a signed declaration that hirers will adhere to a relevant safeguarding agreement is required. This means they must either agree to comply with our Parish Safeguarding Policy and safeguarding procedures or with an equivalent safeguarding policy for their own organization.

Many of our DCC and PCC members, plus sidesmen and other church officers, received diocesan safeguarding training in the latter part of 2018 which means they were due to attend 3-year refresher course in 2021. During this difficult year, no such courses were undertaken. In the meantime, the training courses have been revised and extended and those required to retake modules or take them for the first time will be doing so from the beginning of 2022.

Many thanks are again due to the clergy and churchwardens for working so hard to provide a safe environment for our worship through all the varying levels of risk and the changes in Covid regulations during this year.

Carol Bowman February 2022