

2021 APCM Reports



Church Wardens' Report

In “normal” times two Services are held each Sunday – an 8.00am Said Eucharist which in 2019 had an average attendance of 14, and Parish Communion at 9.15am which in 2019 had an average combined attendance (adults and children) of 121. In 2019 Choral Evensong was generally held on the last Sunday of each month and which achieved an average attendance of 80 including the choir.

When the main Festivals were celebrated a single “whole of church” service was held at 10am and these were well attended during 2019 – the actual numbers were detailed in the 2019/20 APCM report.

The last 12 months of course have been far from “normal”. When we went into lockdown in March 2020 services at 8am and 9.15am continued online, initially with services conducted by the Vicar alone in the church, but very quickly having to be conducted from the Vicarage when the church had to completely close. Holy Week 2020 services were all undertaken online. Other online provision included daily prayers and reflections, YACC provision, and Messy Church provision online.

We were allowed back into church in the Summer, albeit with the absence of congregational singing. Nevertheless we were delighted to have our choir provide choral accompaniment at 9.15, and subsequently in the run up to Christmas at the Family Carol Service, and the 2 services of Nine Lessons and Carols that were held in church (as well as online). Advent Carols with pre-recorded lessons and music was only online. For the Family Carols service there were 58 attendees, and for the Nine Lessons and Carols services there were 71 at the 5pm and 74 at 7pm. Midnight Mass and Christmas Day services were held in the church and online, with 56 and 80 in attendance respectively.

In response to the situation regarding COVID-19 in the area at the beginning of January 2021, the PCC supported the ministry team in taking the decision to close the doors of the church building once again. The online worshipping provision was expanded to include (in addition to that mentioned above) Compline twice a week, a weekly prayer group and online Sunday worship – this time consisting of a recorded said Eucharist and then a Zoom service provided at 10am. The Zoom service proved to be very popular with numbers increasing week by week.

With the first step on HM Government’s “roadmap to recovery”, and following a review and updating of the COVID Secure Risk Assessment, services in church re-commenced in Holy Week 2021 and ran alongside online provision. On Maundy Thursday 26 were in attendance, Good Friday had 49 worshippers in church and on Easter Sunday the congregation was 124. The delightful weather on Easter Sunday permitted the ability for congregational singing of “Thine be the Glory” in the carpark and gardens at the end of the service – to the delight of all who were there.

The Church’s Electoral Roll changed from 183 (April 2020) to 182 (April 2021).

Very sadly none of the usual events we enjoy in the church diary for a “normal” year (Concerts, Quiz Night, Summer Fete) could be held. The Christmas Tree Festival was wonderfully adapted as the circumstances at that time permitted, with trees displayed outdoors on the Memorial Pathway, and a delightful representation of the holy family in the stable outside the wall of the Clare Chapel.

No recorded items of church property were disposed of during the year. However, and in response to the need to improve facilitation of online services last August, an UltraStream video streaming recorder with monitor was supplied and connected to the existing camera and the sound desk by DM Music.

Maintenance

Very little has been done in terms of the outstanding Quinquennial Survey items. The re-decorating of the Hall has been deferred and other items will be revisited and reviewed in 2021/22. Despite Frankie's Garden being officially closed when HM Government introduced requirements for regular sanitising of the playground items, there has been much activity in the grounds. Following reports from contractors on the need to reduce the trees in the grounds, and with formal written approval from Welwyn Hatfield Council, work was undertaken in January to remove up to 30% of the crowns and cut back numerous overhanging branches. This work should suffice for at least another 5 years.

We are extremely grateful for the work undertaken by Mandy Kirk on the gardens and flower/shrub beds.

Safeguarding Report

St Francis church endeavours to keep everyone, children and adults, safe and to comply with all relevant laws. The safeguarding group supports the PCC and all the people of St Francis in trying to do this.

The parish is, in turn, supported by the diocesan safeguarding team and the national teams. They provide the opportunity for training and advice on policies. Some policies, processes and training courses are mandatory.

It is important that everyone in our community at St Francis understands their own responsibility and is appropriately trained. Training varies according to role, not only must people be trained but we must keep a record of this training. In addition new volunteers must complete a 'safer recruitment' process. In some limited cases, if necessary, people need to be checked with the government's Disclosure and Barring Service.

As part of this the volunteer register must be kept up to date. Many of our volunteers were initially trained in 2017 meaning the training was due for renewal last year. Your group leader will be in touch with details of how to renew your training. The majority of this is now delivered online via an e-learning platform, for those who may be unable to access this we plan to hold some small socially distanced sessions.

Alison Paterson is the current Parish Safeguarding Officer, she is supported by John Butler, Tony Boon, Craig Lowes, Denise Crabb and Nikki Clare.

All our safeguarding information including important contacts are available on the Church website. We have worked together with the Ministry team and the PCC to ensure that as our activities resume post lockdown risk assessments are reviewed.

Alison Paterson
Parish Safeguarding Officer

Deanery Synod Report

The Welwyn Hatfield Deanery comprises fifteen parishes in Welwyn, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and those in surrounding communities. All licensed clerks in holy orders in the deanery are members and a number of active retired clergy also attend meetings. John Butler, Pui San Apling, Rob Smith and Tony Boon are St Francis's lay representatives for this current Triennium (2020-2023). The April round of APCMs were postponed to May (latest by 31st May) due to the third national lockdown from January to March 2021.

In any 'normal' year, this synod would meet 3 times face-to-face. In 2020/21, 2 meetings were conducted on Zoom. The 4th May meeting was cancelled so that parishes could focus their time and energy within their immediate communities under pandemic conditions. Each grappled with the complexities and the fine balancing act of providing ministry, pastoral support and outreach whilst holding services via new IT methods (virtual, online, web-streaming, recordings, etc) with very limited finances! Each meeting typically receives reports from the Rural Dean, the Revd Jenny Fennell, and from the Lay Chair. It also receives reports on the meetings of Diocesan Synod, the General Synod (CoE) and on the Diocesan Board for Finance. Similarly, both Diocese and General Synods also faced the same difficulties. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), legal compliance since 25th May 2018 and Safeguarding remain as repeated items on the agendas.

The 15th Oct meeting was a brief catch-up. The purpose was to uphold, encourage and support each other's parishes. Members held lively discussions and shared ideas on new ways to deliver the Advent and Christmas season (promoting the Diocese message of 'Comfort & Joy') within socially distancing constraints: outside Christmas display, outdoors crib scene, (door-to-door) Living Advent calendar, live online or pre-recorded videos of services, readings & music, etc. The conclusion: the need to deliver a variety of services in as many forms possible, 'be inclusive', enable all who want to access any such services to access them; online, recordings to live multiples of the most popular services like Advent Carols, Crib/Christingle, Lessons & Carols, etc.

The 3rd March 2021 Synod had an inspirational talk from psychologist Dr Kate Middleton (The Mind & Soul Foundation). She spoke on mental health matters and issues in lockdown; the speed and dramatic impact on all aspects of living for everyone, recognise the signs - that breaking point stresses affects everyone, pastorally managing awkward and difficult emotions with scattered communities, act as signposts to professional help, incorporating rhythms of rest, 'retraining' perspectives - relearn how to engage with face-to-face community living again and finally the importance of finding joy and connections under times of distress. The aim is to get people to 'thrive' not merely 'survive'. She was particularly insightful given that she is also an Ordinand in training; people in church leadership roles need to maintain own well-being too whilst assuming responsibilities for the wider communities' good mental well-being.

The Standing Committee, chaired by the Rural Dean, considers any matters arising between meetings. This committee also acts as the Pastoral Committee for the deanery, reviewing any pastoral matters. John Butler represents St Francis on the Standing Committee. At this time, the Lay Chair position remained vacant as Kathryn was licensed to diaconate in June 2020.

Churches faced 3 national lockdowns: end March to July, Nov to Dec and Jan to Mar 2021 where most public worship services had to move online and many of the typical big fundraisers (fetes/fairs/festivals, etc) could not be held. The Archdeacon of Hertford, the Ven. Janet Mackenzie, postponed the 2020 series of visitations.

The diocese operates a Parish Share system: all parishes' contribute (according to their means) to the diocese's running costs. This mainly covers the total cost of clergy provision in the diocese. In 2020 our deanery did not pay the share in full with shortfalls from 2 small parishes. There was no review of the deanery's share factors. Looking forward there remain challenges in meeting the full amount for the first half of 2021 but it is hopeful that most parishes will be able to catch-up on contributions by the year end.

The synod noted various changes in clergy deployment with 1 minister moving outside of the deanery, 2 newly ordained curates being welcomed and 1 curate priested.

John Butler, Pui San Apling, Rob Smith & Tony Boon, May 2021