

Annual report 2020-2021

The past year has seen us learn to live with all the restrictions of three lockdown periods due to the coronavirus pandemic. This has been a very challenging time for all in the parish of St. Oswald. Our church here is still standing firmly thanks to so many people both on the PCC and throughout in the parish.

Keith Philips and Rodney Fowler have shown even greater dedication and hard work as churchwardens with Pam Adlington as an invaluable help to them in her role of as assistant warden. Ged acted as vice chair until July and we thank him very much for all his input and support. Our treasurer, Colin Gidman, has been very diligent in keeping our finances in good order and has continued to provide us with bi-monthly financial reports.

As lockdown one restrictions eased in early summer 2020, the church opened for private prayer twice a week following a risk assessment carried out by the churchwardens. Volunteers ensured that all guidance was followed and the names of attendees were recorded.

Father Murray's induction was celebrated by zoom on July 16th 2020 as he was not yet living in Cheshire. It was really good to have our first glimpse of Father Murray. Before being able to move to the benefice at the end of July, the vicarage required a lot of smartening up and several working parties were set up for painting, decorating and tidying up the garden. These parishioners worked incredibly hard in order to allow Father Murray to move in on July 24th.

Before any services were able to take place, there was a grand cleaning of the church and the new carpet was laid. The first service, which was a short all age service, was celebrated on August 2nd and provided a great opportunity for most of us to meet and welcome Father Murray. All national regulations concerning social distancing were observed and government guidance about 'track and trace' was followed. Service sheets could be downloaded or available at church and were to be taken home after the service. A one way system was put in place for entering and leaving the building.

It was lovely to worship alongside members of St. Lawrence's as well as regular members of the 8 am Holy Communion services. It was difficult to get used to

a service without hymn singing .Very shortly after, organ playing before and after services restarted –still no hymn singing allowed .As he was able to socially distance himself, Father Murray was able to chant the sursum corda and the preface to the Eucharistic prayer at Holy Communion services, a new and welcome variation for us. A one way system was also introduced for receiving Holy Communion or a blessing.

After a few weeks, the weekday Holy Communion service also restarted on Wednesday mornings, followed by private prayer .Services were shortly resumed at St. Lawrence's church as was the 8 am prayer book communion service at St. Oswald's.

The church website was also updated every week with information about upcoming Sunday services and weekday opening for private prayer. We were allowed to socialise outside church after services but had to keep in groups of no more than six. A one way system was put in place for entering and leaving the building and for going up to the altar for receiving Holy Communion.

All age services were held to celebrate the Harvest Festival in October and the feast of All Saints on November 1st. These were well received. Children's church was held outside in October and was very enjoyable and it was very encouraging to see so many children.

From November 5th the country was put into lockdown for the second time and so churches were closed again for a month! A short outside observance for Remembrance Sunday was held for all who felt able to attend .Father Murray and Ann wrote reflections for each Sunday on the website and emails were sent to keep us connected. A zoom children's church was held in November and the advent draw was thought up as a fundraiser and the Posada trail started with families from both parishes .From December 1st Father Murray started his job as a roving reporter -following the Holy Family as they moved around the three villages on their search for the stable in Bethlehem! This gave a lot of amusement to children and adults alike through watching these videos on the website. Father Murray also picked out a raffle ticket for the prize-winner of the Abvent draw for that day and some wonderful prizes were won.

Lockdown ended on 2nd December and our first Sunday back was our gift service on 6th, feast day of St. Nicholas. Gifts of children's presents and

foodstuffs were sent to the Salvation Army- it was fabulous to be back in church with friends again.

Children's church in December was again held outside and the children enjoyed looking for the angels! As we were unable to hold the Festival of nine lessons and carols due to limited numbers, many parishioners joined in carol singing outside the Crown. This was organised by two young mums, Stephanie Taylor - Wattam and Rebekah Norbury and was very well supported. There was a very small choir and a soloist at midnight mass to sing carols and the congregation were allowed to sing a carol outside after the service which was a very special experience .Attendance at all Christmas services had to be booked due to the limited number of congregation allowed in the church. The 11am service was a joyful all age service.

Unfortunately lockdown three began in January following the feast of the Epiphany. Ministry continued throughout this lockdown .The PCC agreed to temporarily pause face to face worship and reassess the situation as and when lockdown ended , aiming to meet again at Easter. All other church activities- outreach, - pastoral care, the provision of sacred space, and the support we give to our charitable interests and our schools continued .The discussions on Covid with the PCC through email were really good and helpful. The church was still open for private prayer on Wednesday and Sunday mornings, for moments of quietness and the lighting of candles- much appreciated by many members of the parish. The wardens and Ann were very supportive in this. The church also opened for private prayer on Good Friday.

Weekly church services with Ann and Father Murray were recorded and able to be viewed online. Ann did a marvellous job in keeping everyone connected by putting service information and the weekly reflections on the website and through a weekly email to parishioners.

Children's churches continued by zoom with Ann, Felicity and Father Murray. The ten families involved received an activity sheet from Ann each week. It was wonderful to see the children's happy faces and to see how well they engaged with the activities and songs and each other. Lower Peover School and the Little House worked very hard in a caring and loving way with their children throughout the benefice. Worship with the schoolchildren was online. Ann kept in touch with the little house and these children received some of

the activity sheets. The Little House and school are planning to partake in the all age services once they restart in early May.

As part of liaising more closely with our sister church of St, Lawrence, it was agreed that we should worship together in one or other of our churches as a benefice family on a fifth Sunday. This would enable us to get closer as we have wished. Hopefully coffee and cakes will be able to be served afterwards when restrictions allow.

Following the involvement and agreement of the PCC, St. Oswald's reopened on Easter Sunday. It was super to be able to rejoice together again and to sing the last rousing hymn outside! The Little House had prepared an Easter frieze and garden to go into the church and they were fantastic. Children's church in April was held outside and included a trail to follow and singing.

Following the death of Prince Philip, the church was opened for private prayer and a condolence book was made available for signing in church and online.

The flag was flown at half mast and muffled bells were rung. A special service was held on the Sunday following the announcement following the Church of England order of service.

Standing committee and PCC meetings were held by zoom throughout this year on zoom throughout this year I believe that we are all looking forward to holding meetings in person as soon as we can. The discussions on Covid with the PCC through email and phone were really good and helpful; all PCC members have contributed a lot of time and effort in supporting our church. Lynda Boag – Munroe has carried out a sterling job of editing the parish magazine. I would like to thank our organists David Tredwell, Barry Dodgson for their continuing service of providing us with beautiful and sensitive music through our services. We are all looking forward to being able to sing hymns with their accompaniment!

Our fabulous lay reader Ann has worked tirelessly throughout this year to keep the church going and to keep our spirits up- I can't thank her enough!

Last but not least, I would like to thank Father Murray for all his hard work and dedication in his ministry to our parish. He has proved to be a very thoughtful, supportive and kind vicar with a wonderful sense of humour. It would be fantastic to be able to hold a proper welcome party for him this summer, once it is safe to do so!