

ST MARTINS CHURCH SHUTFORD - ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021.

ST MARTINS CHURCH is one of six churches in the Wykeham Benefice in North Oxfordshire, which is part of the Deddington Deanery in the Oxford Diocese. The six parishes are Broughton with North Newington, Epwell, Shutford, Sibford, Swalcliffe and Tadmarton. The benefice was under the care of the Reverend Neil Bowler the rector and his associate minister Reverend Canon John Tattersall, with retired clergy assisting with worship. They, with the Parochial Church Councils, are responsible for the promotion of the mission of the Church of England in the benefice.

MEMBERS OF THE PCC are elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in accordance with Church of England rules and the following served during 2021. Rector - Reverend Neil Bowler, Warden – Ken Jeffs also Treasurer. Elected Members – John Bailey, Dominic Cadbury, Alasdair Gibbs, John Hodgkins also Village Hall Representative and safeguarding officer, Julie Hodgkins also Secretary and Sue Roe-French also Deanery Synod Representative. Clare McEwan was co-opted on to the PCC in December. The rector is an ex-officio PCC member.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

The coronavirus dominated the world again in 2021 and has affected church attendance reducing it to about 60% of that seen prior to 2020, with some older worshippers staying at home and the absence of any weddings or baptisms. Church services resumed after their suspension at various times in 2020 but with appropriate hygiene measures in place such as social distancing, face coverings and the suspension of communal singing until July. The church was open for Morning Prayer on Saturday and for Worship and private prayer on Sunday: it re-opened in October for daily private prayer. There were 11 members on the church electoral roll with a further 10 on the family roll. The average church attendance on a normal Sunday was 8, ranging from 3 to 14. A Benefice Service is usually held on the 1st Sunday of the month at 10.00am: the only benefice service in Shutford in 2021 was on 26th December, celebrating St Stephen's Day. On other Sundays BCP, Common Worship or Morning Praise services have been held, with an occasional evening service. Online Benefice Worship was held on Wednesday and Sunday. The usual time of worship was 9.30am. Morning Prayer on Saturday mornings had an average attendance of 3. Attendance on special occasions were as follows, Mothering Sunday 12, Easter Sunday 28, Harvest Thanksgiving 13, Remembrance Sunday 42, Candlelit Carols 42 and Christmas Day 20. The number of communicants in 2021 was 172 and overall attendance 646. We have a core congregation of about 25 of whom 15 people attend church once a month, 10 or so come to church occasionally, with others attending Messy Church Events and special services. Some church members studied a booklet: God's Story, Our Story during Lent. With many secular activities available on Sundays, few families with children attend worship in church. However, there is access to Christian teaching through school. Many villagers support our fund raising and other social outreach in the community.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The full PCC met 5 times (once online) during the year (including APCM) with 80% attendance. The Benefice Council met twice online. Rev Neil Bowler was licensed and installed as our Rector in January and inducted in May. As coronavirus restrictions eased, Sunday church attendance returned to normal but social gatherings and other outreach was affected until the summer, as church members remained cautious. The pattern of services has been varied and published well in advance through the Wykeham News, A Church Near You with reminders via the weekly pewsheets, emails and village communications. Information about Fairtrade is held in church. The Quinquennial Inspection Report was received - priorities include installation of fencing by the church steps adjoining the George and Dragon Pub and repairs to plaster work in church. Plans are in hand to allocate an area in the churchyard for the interment of ashes. A Church Social Gathering was held in Shutford Village Hall in August, an opportunity to meet Rev Neil, and a Harvest Supper in September. The annual OHCT Ride and Stride was held on 11th September with 3 visitors to church, the same day, a Village Get Together was held in the Manor Field at which a church group provided tea and cake. A successful Messy Church Event and Candlelight Carol Service were held in December. The churchwarden has kept the PCC up to date with finance and fabric issues. The Wykeham News and Shutford News help to raise the profile of the church and are delivered to every household. Collections and fundraising have helped Katharine House Hospice, Christian Aid, BYHP, RBL Poppy Appeal and The Children's Society.

BENEFICE COUNCIL was set up to act in an advisory capacity and is made up of representatives from each village. Online meetings were held in February and May: items discussed included news from the parishes, a need to review mission plans, safeguarding, Wykeham Benefice News and Benefice Expenses which were reviewed, worship patterns including online provision. Details of various community projects and initiatives, concerts and fund raising across the benefice were reported in the Wykeham News edited by Carolyn. All festivals were celebrated either in individual churches or as a benefice occasion. Because of concerns about the coronavirus, Benefice Worship was held in our larger churches with worshippers from all of villages making up a congregations of about 40 or so. In church Sunday worship was possible, with coronavirus precautions in place, with online worship at 6.00pm on Wednesday and Sunday. All our churches reopened for daily private prayer at varying times during the year. Tim Huckvale gives technical support for our online worship and meetings and maintains the benefice website which was updated as was our A Church Near You information. Rev Neil introduced a Pastoral Letter which was replaced by an article in each of our village publications. Lent study included an invitation to explore and Grow Together in our Christian Faith and Our Lenten Journey through Art. The Bishop of Dorchester visited the benefice in July.

DEANERY SYNOD met three times during the year: Sue Roe-French is our representative and was re-elected in September 2020 to serve in this role for a further 3 years. Minutes of meetings in May, September and November were circulated. Agenda items included a talk about Islam and inter faith understanding, election of Deanery officers, finance including parish share, mission grants, the Living in Love and Faith Initiative, a talk about the purpose of deaneries, Parish and Deanery Mission Action Plans and the Bishop of Oxford's visit to the Deanery in February 2022. There was feedback from the April General Synod meeting which focused on finance, safeguarding and how the C of E ensures it better reflects our society and diversity. The November Diocesan General Synod meeting included a talk by Bishop Steven about an Addressing Poverty and Inequality Report, a report about various projects and good news reflecting God at work in the Deddington Deanery and Oxford Diocese. Diocesan Synod elections took place during the year. Our new Bishop of Dorchester Gavin Collins was licenced in February and consecrated in April. Bishop Gavin and Archdeacon Judy French officiated at a Visitation in Deddington Church in September when all deanery churchwardens were sworn in to serve in their respective parishes for the following year.

FABRIC (incorporating churchwardens report)

St Martins is loved and well looked after by the PCC and many parishioners. All flowers, cleaning materials and refreshments, when served, are donated. The grass in the churchyard was cut 8 times by a churchwarden but the Sibford Road cemetery grass has been cut by W C Lovesey and financed by Shutford Parish Council. Small areas of grass by the church have been left uncut for conservation reasons with an abundance of wildflowers during spring, especially snowdrops and primroses, and summer. Swallows did not nest in the church porch this year. Butterflies have been seen all year round. Health and Safety issues are considered, including hygiene measures required to protect worshippers from coronavirus. Gravestones are checked regularly. Church records and inventory are reviewed from time to time. High level light bulbs have been changed and LED ones in the chancel and on the screen replaced existing ones. The long awaited Quinquennial Inspection report was received highlighting the need to install fencing by the steps adjoining the George and Dragon pub and repairs to plaster work in church. Plans are in hand to allocate an area to the north of the church to inter ashes. Church gates, railings, lamp post and noticeboard were painted by John Hodgkins. A box to collect non-perishable food items etc for the Banbury Young Homeless Project is in church. Fire Extinguishers have been checked with one replaced. Cleaning rota has been drawn up by Julie Hodgkins who has a small team of volunteers. Sue Roe French oversees church flowers and rota with flowers throughout the building at Easter, Harvest and Christmas in addition to those on the altar.

FINANCE

Planned Giving at £10369 has covered cost of ministry and benefice costs due to the generosity of our regular worshippers – direct bank payments have replaced most weekly envelopes. Other giving of £1344 includes collections, sundry donations, re-imburement of retired clergy fees and church box. Fees of £1544 came from cremation services, a burial, an interment of ashes and memorial tablet installation: a % is paid to the Diocese. Fund raising of £660 came from a Christian Aid Collection (£200), Harvest Supper (£250) and Illuminate and Celebrate Initiative (£210). Total General Income was £13924 with regular donations of flowers, cleaning materials, refreshments and parishioners' valuable time. After ministry costs at £8138, donations to good causes of £950 and General Expenses of £2201 there was a surplus of £2635 on General account increasing assets to £21169.

In the absence of major fund raising, £1400 from general donations, the Illuminate & Celebrate Initiative and The Harvest Supper was used to top up The Restoration Fund. In addition, £600 came from The Village Get Together and £294 from Investment Interest. A £2000 donation was received for future restoration work. After payment of £1975 for building insurance, Restoration Funds increased by £2318 to £19355. The financial situation at present is sound but we continue to rely heavily on a few regular worshippers and donors. We encourage the wider community to support specific fund raising for church projects and charities and interested villagers are aware of our need of an income of about £220 per week, excluding charitable donations and restoration work, to remain financially viable. See separate financial statement for full details: the accounts have been drawn up on an income and expenditure basis.

SUMMARY

We were pleased to welcome Rev Neil Bowler as our new Rector in January after an 11 month interregnum. Coronavirus continued to affect church attendance and social gatherings. Online evening worship on Wednesday and Sunday is available in addition to our Saturday and Sunday services. Attendance at a normal service in church was 8, ranging from 3 - 14, with good increases in numbers for festivals. Our Rector, Rev Neil Bowler and our Associate Priest, Rev Canon John Tattersall led worship assisted by Reverends Glyn Evans, David Pym and Christopher Hall. There was also some lay led worship. In the absence of an organist, music for services has been recorded, either via the organ or by CD or laptop computer. A small number of loyal good natured worshippers and others from the wider community value the presence of St Martin's in the village. Parish Life continued to be challenging with an ageing congregation and PCC membership, there is a need for younger members of our community to help keep the church viable and part of village life. Mission and outreach will be top priorities in 2022 with emphasise on families with children but not forgetting our existing congregation and our community pastoral care.