**Vicar’s Annual Report to the APCM – October 2020**

What an extraordinary year (or 18months actually) we have had – a year of three halves!

Congratulations and thank you to everyone who has worked twice as hard as normal to ensure that the Parish of Fleet has kept alive and kicking during these difficult times.

We should all be proud and thankful for what we have achieved.

Our Sunday worship programme has moved from 3or 4 services in 2 churches each week, to one service livestreamed from the vicarage, to services live and livestreamed from P&J.

There was a time when not even I was allowed to enter any of our buildings, yet we have regularly had over 200 people view our services from New Zealand, Ireland, France, the USA and many different parts of the UK. In addition, some who have not been able to join us for worship for some years have been able to join us via technology.

On the other hand, there have been a significant number unable to join for worship or fellowship because they do not have access to technology. Chantelle and Elly have done sterling work keeping them ‘in the loop’ and the ministry team and many others have worked hard to keep in touch and where necessary and possible to meet their needs.

Not everything has been possible, yet it is amazing what has been possible!

All this has been a severe challenge to our resources and particularly our finances, and thank you to all those who have continued to give their support, and in some cases increased their support so that the work of the parish could go on.

In the spring Carol and her family moved on their new life and ministry in Easthampstead. We are extremely thankful for their years among us, especially to Carol for all that she brought to us, and leaves with us, during what have surely been the most difficult years for our parish in living memory!

We are delighted that next July Cally Burch and her family will be coming to join us. She will not be a like for like replacement for Carol. Cally comes to us fresh from theological training and will continue her training with us first as a deacon and then as a priest. She is likely to be with us for up to 3½ years and will be commuting from the family home in Guildford for the first year of her time with us.

Cally will not be ‘Priest in charge of P&J’, but will share with Jane, Mary and I in ministering to the whole parish.

That does not mean that we are to be forever one congregation. We already have several different congregations gathering at different times, and my hope is that we will worship in two buildings in some form as soon as that is possible.

It is true, however, that nothing will be the same again. Once we emerge from this time of transition that Covid 19 has brought upon us, our world, our church, our community and each one of us will inevitably be different.

This crisis has shown us that church is more than buildings and worship more than services. Parish life and ministry beyond Covid will be very different, and I suspect, much less about meeting in a building at a particular time on a particular day. It will be more about meeting people where they are and sharing the Gospel in the world outside. Much more like the early church and the church in every era when it was at its best.

I have written a separate report about the rebuilding of All Saints Church, so will not talk about it here, but my hope and expectation is that a rebuilt and renewed All saints will be the base for a new congregation of former, present and new church family members, and the centrepiece of our mission and outreach in the years ahead.

Once this crisis is over I suspect that some of our activities will have gone for ever, others will return in a new form, all sorts of new things, some of which have not even yet come to us, will become important features of what we do together.

The essentials however – Worship, Prayer, Fellowship, Service, Outreach, Witness, Discipleship (A ‘Rule of Six’, if you like) will still be our priorities and the heartbeat of our life together – just experienced in different ways for the new world that lies beyond.

We are in good shape! We are ready for whatever awaits us! I know right now many are struggling, many are anxious, some have been damaged by Covid 19, directly or indirectly. We must be sure to support and encourage one another, particularly the most vulnerable amongst us. We must continue to be kind, to be patient, to exercise self discipline for the sake of others, to forgive one another when the pressures make us act out of character, to cling on to the hope that is within us for the sake of the world, to make sacrifices where necessary for the common good.

In other words, we must be ‘Christlike’! There have been many wonderful examples of this from all of you during these difficult days, and I give thanks and praise to God for every single one of you and for all that he has done in and through you during this ‘wilderness year’.

It was through their travels in the wilderness that the people of Israel found God and learned to be his people. It was during his time in the wilderness that Jesus learned to be the Son of God. We too will emerge from the wilderness of 2020 a better, stronger, more focussed, more faithful people ready to serve God, one another, and our community in the promised land that lies beyond.

Thank you to all of you for your support and encouragement.

May God bless you all,

Mark