

Not the Vicar's report!

It is a year since Tim left, and in the absence of an incumbent I thought I should pen a few words about what has, and has not, been happening in the last twelve months. This is very much a personal view, but as lay vice-chair of the PCC I have found myself very much at the heart of things – much more than I expected when I agreed to take the job on.

My primary aim has been to keep the ship afloat; to make sure so far as we were able that our activities carried on as they had been, without things falling apart. And I think that has been achieved – thanks to massive and sustained effort by numbers of key people, to whom we all (and especially I) owe an immense debt of gratitude. We all knew we were fortunate in having so many capable and committed people in our fellowship, and this year they have shown just how committed and capable they are.

We managed to sustain our normal pattern of services, thanks to huge efforts by our readers, churchwardens, Mike Sanders; and various clergy from around the town who have been very willing to help us out when they could. Numbers attending services seem to me at least to have held up pretty well; numbers at the major services during the Christmas period were somewhat higher than last year. I have heard a number of comments from visitors to the effect that one would never know we did not have a vicar...

Until the middle of last year, of course, we still had curate Mike Smith. We were sorry to lose him but really thrilled that he now has a new post as vicar of Brockworth. One of the things Mike led on was the Alpha course. But thanks to the efforts of members of the Evangelism Committee and others we have run other courses during the year, Bishop Bob's autumn course of Bible Study, the Expressions course just after Christmas, and (though cut short) in Lent – Amanda Thiselton is rapidly becoming an expert at choosing and leading Lent courses.

Undoubtedly one of the major features of the year was the process which culminated in the appointment of Simon Heron as our new vicar. Like much in the Church of England, this proved to be extremely complex, but I have to thank the PCC that as a body they were fully and constructively engaged throughout. The key element in all this was the production of the Parish Profile – a hopefully attractive but honest statement of who we are, where we are, what we are not (yet) but would like to be, and what we felt we needed in and from our new vicar. The profile was a very major piece of work involving a team of five selected by the PCC, with the rest of the PCC offering input, comment and on occasion quite blunt criticism. It took several iterations to come up with

something we felt was good enough for us all to live with. I was really pleased about that; I took it as an encouraging sign that all involved were taking this really seriously, and of our diversity and maturity as a fellowship. It is worth saying that we did have a lot of extremely positive feedback from candidates and others who read it, so we can presume the effort was worth it in the end! (Now of course we need to make sure we don't just forget it, but keep it up to date as a living document).

After the profile came the shortlisting and interview process, for which churchwarden Barbara and I were selected to represent the parish. This too was quite challenging (not least for me because my mother's funeral was the day after the interviews). In the end we interviewed just two of the applicants, both of whom had real strengths but were very different. In the end I trust that God guided us to the right person; I hope you will soon have a chance to find out!

In practical terms this has been the year of boilers and squirrels. The project to replace our very old (they dated from 1992) and unreliable boilers had just started when Tim Mayfield left, and we needed to get it done during the summer so that the new boilers would be up and running by the time colder weather kicked in. It turned out to be a rather more complex and expensive project than we had expected, thanks to the discovery of asbestos in the old boiler room. Christopher Mullan and Martin Chapman managed to keep it all on track and we did complete the project in time.

While the boiler project was planned and we had set aside money for it, the loss of electric power in much of the Hall complex was sudden and totally unexpected. A quick examination suggested that something had been chewing through the electric cables in the (very small) roof void. Four of us ventured on the hub roof and quickly identified the culprit when a squirrel shot out of one of the roof ventilators! This could have been catastrophic as the rooms affected were in use every day, and frequently by those who had paid to hire them. Very quick work by Richard Tipping provided temporary power and lighting, and thanks to him and others on the fabric team – with some contractor support - we were able to squirrel-proof the roof space, make good the damage to the wiring, and have almost finished repairing the holes in the ceiling. Without our fabric team we would have faced a much bigger bill (our insurance specifically excludes rodent damage) but it was still a very large unexpected expense!

“All are welcome in this place” and it is fundamental that we want everyone who comes to Christ church to feel both welcome and safe. Safeguarding is now a standing item on every PCC agenda. Sadly this year we lost several good friends, including Sarah Harrison, who had for some years been our

safeguarding lead; but I am delighted that Mandy Whitefield has now taken on this role. If you have any concerns in this area, please contact Mandy.

I know this has been a frustration for some, but I have deliberately not sought to move forward with the reordering project. I had several reasons:

- I thought we lacked the capacity to take it on while having to deal with so much else during the vacancy. Some may have seen this as a lack of faith on my part, but I call to mind Jesus' cautionary tale about the man building a tower and the importance of knowing before you begin that you have the resources to complete the task.
- I feel that we still lack a sense of common purpose, a clear vision of what we want to do and why. We might have had one when we started thinking (some 12 years ago!) but I fear we have scattered since then. Perhaps we are in the desert, but without a Moses to provide leadership? I certainly did not feel that I was called to provide it.
- We don't have the money to do much more than maintenance; and without capacity and a clear vision we are not in position to seek it.
- I felt it would be very unfair to expect a new incumbent to take on someone else's project and someone else's vision. So I wanted to leave our new vicar free to make their mark. I have no doubt that Simon is going to bring fresh ideas and impetus, in this and in other areas.

And now of course we have been hit with the Corona virus epidemic, which has forced us to close down all our church based acts of worship and other activities, furlough most of our staff, and stop routine maintenance. But God has blessed us with much talent and we have seen the amazingly rapid development of weekly on-line acts of worship which are really slick and professional (thank you Readers, Mike and the techie experts) and which mean that we can still share and connect with others in the Church family on a Sunday Morning. We have discovered the benefits of social media tools such as Whatsapp to stay in touch with one another. And thank you to the many of you who are offering care and support to the elderly and isolated. This is a moment to show God's love, and I am thrilled that so many are rising to the challenge. Thank you. I look forward to seeing how this experience changes us and our sense of priorities – if we just return to life as it was before, I fear we will have missed an opportunity to move forward.

Even before the virus hit us our financial situation was certainly not comfortable, and we faced the prospect of having to make some hard and unpalatable decisions. Our income has been gently declining for some years. The closure of our buildings and the end of public worship will of course mean a further huge drop in income, though it is too soon to say just how severe the impact will be. As a church we should be thinking hard about what God is

saying to us in this, and where our priorities should lie. As individuals I beg you please to keep giving, even though you are not actually coming to church. There is no way of giving at church at present, but if you want God's work here to continue please give either via text message (follow the instructions below) or if you wish to give regularly please consider doing so via the Diocesan Giving Scheme (contact our Treasurer Phil Whitefield for further details). This is a very difficult time for Phil Whitefield and the Standing and Finance committee as they manage our finances, and they would certainly value your prayers. It is made more difficult because we are in the middle of a project to replace the church office IT system and in particular the very elderly and unsupported software used for our financial processing.

On a personal note I should like to thank you all for your support and your prayers this last year. I have been very aware of, and sustained by, both. And I know I don't really need to invite you to pray for and support Simon as he settles in here – but I do anyway. God bless us all.

Ian Kirkwood

To give by text message:

Text CHURCH to 70450 to give £10 to Christ Church PCC.

This costs £10 plus a standard rate message.

To give another amount from £3.00 to £20.00:

Text CHURCH (then space, then you can choose the amount to pay as a number) to 70450