

Report for 2021 Client AGM

19 May 2021

1. This Report

Last year we managed to hold our AGM in church in early March, just before the start of the Coronavirus Pandemic. That Report related to the previous year – to 2019 – and so to life before the Coronavirus Pandemic and the strange times we've all been living through since. I took the opportunity to reflect on the Open Conversations about the future of the church, which had been happening around the diocese, starting in 2019 – and relating them specifically to the life of our church here.

Today's Report obviously relates to last year – to 2020. Although most of the year was spent living through the pandemic, I think it's still rather early to reflect sensibly on it, as we haven't yet come out of the other side of it. There have been articles in the Church Times, and people writing in various newspapers about what the long-term effect of COVID might be on the church – and I'm grateful to people for sending me articles of interest, from time to time – but as we're still living through it, it's not the time yet to analyse everything or to create a new vision, though I'm sure the church will look and feel different in various ways when we finally come out the other side.

2. Coronavirus

However, as the virus affected all of us for most of the year, let's begin by saying something about it.

Just before Mothering Sunday, we were forced to abandon our church buildings and find other ways of being church. We started sending out worship material to everyone we were in contact with by email, and worshipping together via Zoom. Thank you to all of you who helped with this process, to those who distributed Pewsheets and service sheets to people who are not on email, and to those who helped others to join Zoom by computer or phone. Thank you to those of you who have been relentless in keeping touch with people over all these months, and holding us together as a church community.

As the situation started to improve, we were able to plan to return to church in a limited way in September – and to hold services both in church and on Zoom. Thank you to Churchwardens and others who spent a considerable amount of time and energy preparing our churches for opening in a limited and safe way. In November, COVID numbers started going up again and we had to go back to just holding services on Zoom, before going back to church and Zoom in December, and then returning just to Zoom again after Christmas Day, as new variants became a new threat. We have only started going back to church in a limited way, as well as continuing with worship on Zoom, once again from the beginning this month.

All this toing-and-froing has made planning extremely difficult – and it has been very hard for couples planning weddings or wanting to have their

children baptised. We have kept on having to move dates, as the goalposts have moved. It has also been extremely difficult for families wishing to hold the funerals of their loved ones – as numbers have been very restricted – as has what we can actually do at a funeral service.

However, at least we've had the technology in Zoom to enable us to meet together in a way we would previously never have imagined. We've been able to hold meetings on Zoom, and, even more importantly, to worship together. I'm very grateful for everyone's patience as we've learned what we can and what we can't do with the technology – and for everyone who's taken part in any way: with leading, with readings and prayers, with leading the singing, or giving reflections.

It's clear that there is much that people have really liked about the content and the style of the worship we have been holding on Zoom. We will have to assess, at some point, which changes we might embrace in our worship when we finally return to church in a full way. We're holding a joint Hagley/Clent PCC meeting tomorrow to find out what people think might be the next step. Kim and I have also met our church families (from both Clent and Hagley) on Zoom to find out their feelings about worship.

Since we started holding worship on Zoom, we have been joined, on a regular basis, by people we rarely saw in church previously. Some of these people couldn't physically get to church – others have just found something that hits the spot for them. That's also something that will bear reflection, in due course. Personally, I have enjoyed not dashing from one church to another, always in a hurry to get to the next service, on Sunday mornings, and often not having time to talk to people –

sometimes taking four different services before lunch. This enforced change has caused me to reflect that there must be a better way of doing things.

Worshipping together on Zoom has also meant that Clent and Hagley church members have got to know each other better. Hopefully that will help foster a sense of togetherness when we return to a 'new normal'.

3. Things that have happened in 2020

Despite spending the time since March last year in and out of lockdown, there have been a number of developments in our church life that we need to note.

Last year, we saw Kim Topham licensed as Curate for Clent and Hagley, and ordained Deacon in September. All being well, she will be ordained Priest this July. It's been a strange beginning as a Curate, as she hasn't been able to do a lot of the things that a Curate would normally be learning to do. However, in some ways it's been a very creative time, and we will catch up with baptisms, weddings and so on before long.

Also last September Alison Lewis was licensed as a Reader. Although her main focus is Clent, she was licensed to the whole Holy Cross Group.

Because of Deanery changes that happened at the very beginning of this year, that Group is never now going to exist. However, the paperwork is well under way for Hagley and Clent to become a new benefice. We will

continue to operate as two separate parishes, but also there are lots of ways in which our mission and ministry will be bound up together. Although the Holy Cross Group is not going to become a formal entity, we can still maintain the links we have with our neighbouring parishes – and work out ways of continuing to meet and worship together when appropriate.

One of the new ways Clent and Hagley will be bound together is by combining our admin. We have changed arrangements so that this is being done for both churches from the Parish Office in St Saviour's, Hagley, overseen by the Parish Administrator Sue Priest – though we are continuing to share the monthly magazine "Parish News" with Belbroughton and Fairfield.

Despite the pandemic, we have continued to relate to and reach out to people in our local community during this time. This has happened in a variety of ways – through Clent Connect, through Kim's Newsletter, through the website, through links with Clent School. Various initiatives, such as the Advent Calendar, have been well-received. The church has been open for private prayer at various times since last March, and we are grateful for those who put effort into enabling this to happen – not least to Dave Stokes, and we are sad that he felt he needed to step down as Churchwarden during the year. One of the new initiatives during the year has been Church Book Club, which Kim has run online for both Clent and Hagley, and which people have greatly appreciated.

The Various Group and other Reports (that are on the church website) testify to all sorts of activity that has continued to happen, despite the

pandemic. Many thanks to all of you for the roles you have been engaged in, and the time and energy you have given to them.

As always, there have been some sad losses during the year. It was sad to learn of the death of Pat Weston last May and Syd Hawkeswood in November, both of whom had been heavily involved in church life for a considerable amount of time, and who will be greatly missed. We also learned of the death of John Partington, after he had moved away from Clent, who had also been a keen member of this church for very many years – and of Bob Stevens, after he also moved to be nearer to his family.

4. Thank you

Finally, I'd like to say "Thank you" to everyone for being a part of our church community – and for all you do to enable our church to function. Even in this difficult time, the hard work has continued behind the scenes, and I'm grateful to all of you for the part you've played.