

Stoke Poges Church

St Giles' and St Andrew's

Annual Report for activities in 2020

Welcome to our Annual Report which is coming you in one hit this year via the blog ready for our APCM. We report on activities between Jan-Dec 2020, some of which feels like a lifetime ago!

The meeting will follow a 10.30am Joint Family Service at St Andrew's (no 9am at St Giles' that day) and we will serve elevensies to tables and start the meeting at approx 11.30am.

Children & Young People

Tots' Praise – Revd Natasha

This group met every Monday in term time and began the year with the usual buzzy atmosphere about it. The format of the session had not changed, but the layout did in 2019 as we sectioned up the hall into 'rooms'. This enabled our youngest visitors a bit more safety from the older ones who loved to whizz around on trikes and ride on toys. Parents, carers and grandparents were welcomed and offered refreshments, as were the children. Near the end, *'tidy up time' is shouted* and toys are put away and there is a time for nursery rhymes and musical instruments. Our team of volunteers remained constant and fabulous ... and then, as we know March 16th 2020 arrived and this activity had to pause.



We managed to keep in touch with a couple of parents via WhatsApp but to be honest the rest just disappeared. This was of great concern to us, as a church, as we'd formed some lovely friendships and begun some faith related conversations.

Baby Steps – Revd Natasha

By the end of the summer holidays the government guidance had changed so that we could look at offering a 'support group' for new parents and their babies. So Baby Steps was born.

As numbers were limited and use of toys too we decided to make the main focus stories and songs. The format worked well. Mums and Babes arrived. Natasha



welcomed everyone, Jane Wall & Barbara Botcher supported her. Then using one simple Bible story as the theme for each week's more stories and songs were sung . using lots of actions and instruments ... and at the end time was given to share news and chat.

It started small and grew quickly, so that by the end of the year it was at capacity. Parents were happy with this new Christian support group and hopefully in 2021 it can expand.

Your prayers of last year - to enable us to be more confident in sharing the good news of Jesus has been answered, alleluia! Although we are working with a reduced team for now we are optimistic that by the autumn of 2021 we will be able to open this group to all pre- school ages and their carers.

So may I take this opportunity to give a heartfelt - **THANK YOU** ... to you all. Keep praying, and if you want to help out from September 2021 ... get in touch with me. There is lots you can do!

Natasha 

KiC – Kids in Christ – Janet Cottrell

Holding KiC sessions in person has not been possible during the past year due to COVID restrictions.

Natasha started preparing “KiC bags” after Easter 2020, delivering them to the doorstep of KiC families so that the children had their own activities to complete during the online Podcasts. Additional material for the upcoming week was provided through an activity sheet attached to the weekly service sheet. An online “Virtual Sunday School” series was also trialled which included a simple craft to make from household materials.



When restrictions eased during the summer months and in-person Sunday services resumed for those who felt comfortable attending church, children were provided with “KiC in a box”; activities to complete whilst sitting with their families.

In the autumn churches were forced to shut their doors again and KiC then merged into the family Zoom services where we could see each other face to face, albeit on a screen from home. On Sunday 29th November we were all encouraged to build a real or virtual fire for Fire Sunday and toast marshmallows (as demonstrated by Natasha from her front garden) whilst learning about Moses and the Burning Bush. The Wetherall family created a particularly impressive fire!

At Christmas the KiC children prepared nativity-themed artwork which was condensed to form a sleeve around a CD of Christmas carols to be included in each Afternoon Tea hamper that was delivered to the Senior Citizens who would normally have been guests at the Christmas lunch. Several children also took part in a “reverse advent calendar” organised by the Nickson family. KiC children donated an item of food for each day of advent and encouraged their friends to do so too. The food was then donated to a local food bank in time for distribution at Christmas.

In January 2021 when the country went back into lockdown, “KiC in a box” continued with crafts being delivered directly to families. It was fun watching the children complete the activities during our Family Zoom services. Hopefully we will be back to in-person sessions soon.

7Up – Simon Edwards

In 7Up we provide a safe space for teenagers to connect and build relationships with each other and with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For most of 2020 it was via a virtual safe space, using Zoom on 2nd and 4th Sundays. In one word, 2020 was INTENSE!



Although meeting online was not ideal for most, there have been a number of positives too. Meeting virtually enabled us to include young people outside our village. We also had lots of fun with virtual games and quizzes, and we used the online space to engage in listening and visualisation exercises as part of our delving deeper into some of our young people’s concerns and big questions: - ‘How can I believe in God?’, ‘Life after death – what’s that all about?’, ‘How Can I Shine God?’, among others. At the heart of our sessions has been listening to each other and to God, exploring and applying God’s word, the Bible, to our daily lives and prayer for each other and for our concerns.

Last summer we held a bar bq and said ‘adios’ to Joni and Lizzie as they headed off to uni. We also said farewell to the Purcell family who are now happily settled in

their new church family. Tara stepped up to co-lead 7Up when Hannah left 3 years ago to start her role as Head of Science at an international school in Portugal and Ryan and Lauren had been active participants in KiC and 7Up. So it was sad to say 'au revoir' to them all.

However, yet again we were reminded that our God is with us and knows his plans for us, plans to give us hope and a future. Even before Tara left, thanks to Zoom, Hannah re-joined as a helper and leader. As a teacher and head of faculty, Hannah has lived through the same challenges faced by our young people; uncertainty, adapted learning and assessment methods, social isolation, regular COVID testing, you name it. Hannah walked alongside our 7Up members through a very tough year and encouraged us all with her empathy, compassion and prayerful words of wisdom. Please pray for our young people and their leaders to draw even closer to God as we, and that we'll continue this amazing journey of faith with some new 7Up members.

Safeguarding – Revd Natasha



Stoke Poges Church continues to take safeguarding very seriously. Our safeguarding policy was reviewed and updated and approved by the PCC at the April PCC meeting. It is on display in the St Andrew's Centre and on St Giles' noticeboard.

This year there was a change to who should undertake the Basic safeguarding course which meant all our sides-people and the choir were required to undertake the training. Both ministries embraced this wholeheartedly and we had Rowena Griffiths come and deliver the training to us on behalf of the Oxford Diocese. So we are fully compliant in all our ministries now, which is a wonderful achievement.

We, will continue with our safer recruitment policy, as stipulated by the Church of England and to ensure that we have capacity to do that two more people became accredited with the Leadership qualifications in safeguarding and recruitment to assist me when taking on new people whether they are paid or volunteers. I hope as a church community you understand the vital nature of safeguarding. We must be a community that looks out for the vulnerable both children and adults, therefore if

you are stepping into a new role within the life of the church, do not be surprised to learn that safeguarding training and checks are part of that recruitment process.

Our annual Safeguarding Audit showed a few holes but they are now plugged and all those who need to renew their training have been contacted. For our certificates only last 3 years.

Natasha will continue to monitor their progress as the Interim Safeguarding Officer. Anyone requiring a new DBS should continue to contact Margriet Wells, as she deals with this area of Safeguarding.

Our hope is that everyone will feel enabled and safe within our Church and when necessary confident to share any concerns that they have, knowing that we all have ears to hear and the heart of Jesus to act appropriately to all.

Key message from the Oxford Diocese:

- The welfare of the child, young person and vulnerable adult is at all times paramount and takes precedence over all other considerations.
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser must be consulted whenever a safeguarding concern of any kind arises in your parish.
- Safeguarding is part of our core faith and an integral feature of Christian life in our parish churches.

Natasha x

Getting Involved

St Andrew's Worship Team – Heather McDowell

We had established a happy pattern of worship in early 2020 with a rota of live music from Lindsey Mackie, Heather, Tina, Janet and Matthew and using CD/MP3 tracks on other weeks.

We knew that we wanted to include music in our recorded services as we went into lockdown and we shared out “curating” each week’s music between, Janet, Heather, Tina and Natasha. However, it became apparent during the year that the music licencing rules were far more restrictive that we had realised and what had been a fun task for the first couple of months became frustrating and unsatisfying.

We are hugely grateful to Lindsey for sharing some videos and also St Nic’s Durham, who gave permission (via Debbie Langham’s

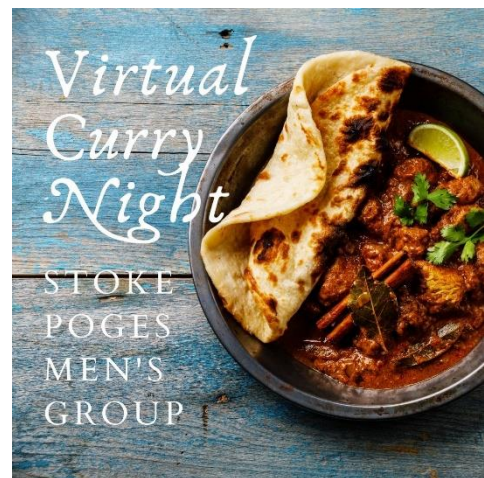


daughter Chloe) to use their growing catalogue of Youtube videos. We purchased some videos which included permission to use in recordings and luckily a number of the audio tracks we already owned came with this permission. The Church of England also made an arrangement with St Martin in the Fields to release a set of Public Domain hymns for each week's service and some seasonal ones, though these have only generally been suitable for Morning Prayer podcasts and also delivered quite late in the week.

For those wondering why we didn't just produce our own worship videos, this would have required recording equipment, volunteer time and knowhow that we just don't have. A couple of voices and a piano are only a small part of the puzzle.

Stoke Poges Men's Group – Nigel Lowe

The men's group began the year with a Beer & Skittles Evening at St. Andrew's, but sadly, all the following events that we had planned for 2020 had to be postponed when the country went into lockdown. Once we realised that the pandemic would continue throughout the year, we decided to start running virtual "Bring your own Bacon" Men's Breakfasts. The first one was in July and we followed this with two more virtual breakfasts in September and November. We had excellent speakers at each of these events and



were delighted at how well the technology worked. Unfortunately Lock-down has continued but at last there appears to be light at the end of the tunnel which means that our planned Brewery trip in September 2021 will be our first real live meeting! Which seems like the ideal event to mark our return to normal service, as we can, raise a glass or two together **in celebration!**

Reapers – Simon McDowell

Reaping at St Giles in 2020 had additional challenges as most of our 'normal' reaping group had to shield or isolate for most of the summer. It also meant that I



took over leading the group from Mike Wright, who has done a sterling job over many years leading the team and indeed, has been part of the team for half a century!

An appeal went out to the younger members of our congregation and friends, who came out to help on a more infrequent basis than we'd normally achieve. Sadly, the normal teas, coffees

and doughnuts were not able to be offered, but we managed to bring our own flasks and have a brief, distanced, outside chat after we finished. Our other big struggle was our elderly mower fleet breaking down a little too often and no repair shops being open.

Thanks to those temporary helpers, we managed to keep the churchyard looking 'not too shabby' and in good enough shape for us to return to reaping as a full team in 2021. I'm delighted to say that just about all our temporary helpers have augmented the team on a permanent basis.

Thank you to all the Reapers, both those who were able to help out in 2020 and those who supported us in spirit.

We still welcome more members to join us – please see the website for details on when we meet or ask me to add you to our WhatsApp group. We meet every 2-3 weeks between April and September with then one or two working parties later in the year to help with leaf clearing and autumn jobs.

Flowers at St Giles' – Jennifer Pickering



At the beginning of 2020, because of the Covid situation, the decision was made to suspend supplying floral displays in the church. We have a loyal group of flower arrangers whose talents are enjoyed by all who visit our church. However, the health and safety of the group was paramount. I am sure I speak for all the members when I say how much I missed arranging the flowers during this time.

As Harvest Festival approached, it was decided that it was safe to decorate the church for this special time of the year. All the members of the group provided arrangements and the church looked beautiful.

We have continued to provide flowers on a regular basis and now also for the weddings restarting in 2021.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to everyone who helps with the flowers. We are always looking for new volunteers. If you are keen to help, please let the church office know.

Bell Ringers – Judy Mackay

The bells were rung for services and practices as usual up to March 15th 2020. As lockdown approached, we knew that it was no longer safe to meet in the bell tower and so we lowered the bells with heavy hearts, not knowing when we might ring again. From March 23rd, the first lockdown and its subsequent restrictions meant that we were unable to meet to ring at all. Anne Frank tolled a single, half muffled bell on Remembrance Sunday but the bells were otherwise silent from March through December 2020. Tower maintenance continued through this period to ensure that bells could be safely rung once the restrictions were lifted.



Behind the Scenes

Office & Communications - Heather McDowell

Office life in 2020 was transferred to home working as far as possible for lockdown. Our Monday staff meetings moved to Zoom, the phone was redirected to Debbie's mobile and just about everything except for printing and distribution of hard copies of service sheets was carried out from our home computers.

Knowing how much some people were going to miss the social contact through the church and word of mouth notices about events, we became part of the "ringing around" team and sent out regular updates to those without computers, either hand delivered or posted. Printed service sheets were sent out for special services to enable those without the technology to join in.

Signage, QR codes, track & trace sheets and constant updates of restrictions, arranging ticketing, social distancing and cancelling events (especially in late autumn) were all essential elements of getting back to church safely as lockdown ebbed and flowed.

Taking our services online was a big change in our weekly schedule. As well as Zoom services, which not everyone could access, and which



provided challenges with audio and video quality for music, we asked everyone on the rota to send in recordings of them leading the service, readings, intercessions and sermons and used existing knowledge and tech to knit this together with the music choices into audio podcasts. These alternated between a St Andrew's style Family Service and St Giles' style Morning Prayer. Meanwhile, Natasha grasped the nettle of making videos to ensure we could receive Holy Communion in a visual form and that the All Age Services were accessible and interesting to as many people as possible. We have continued these as we returned to face to face church and hope to add live streaming later in 2021.

Having left our Facebook page fairly dormant for the last few years, Natasha and Heather went on a Social Media course in early March 2020 to make better use of this (plus Instagram) to reach current members of the church and the wider community with up to date notices, reminders and encouragement – an extra window into our world.

Richard notes: My main contribution as part of the Office Team is to ensure that my diary is in accord with all services happening in the church (mainly St. Giles') covering Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals and Interments.

I liaise with Debbie regarding queries raised by the congregation and other parties world wide regarding the St. Giles' graveyard.

Finances – John Wheatley

In 2020, it became apparent by March that we would have to manage our finances very carefully during the year. We decided however at that time to maintain as near as possible our budgeted commitments, which included:

- **Parish Share** We increased our Parish Share by 3%. Our contribution to the Diocese largely covers clergy stipends and pensions and the training of ordinands.
- **Mission Giving** We maintained that a minimum of 10% of all planned giving during the year would be mission giving and we will be donating to SHOC and NLT in line with last year. We also committed additional funds to outreach for the village via the Village Store Cupboard scheme.
- **AV System** We improved our AV systems to meet new styles of Worship.
- **Governance** We maintained a minimum of 3 months operating costs in our bank account, thanks to the generosity of our Church members, despite a massive shortfall in Hall Lettings.

Our restricted funds, e.g. for the upkeep of the buildings and churchyard, are in a healthy state and our ability to meet our improvement plans at both Churches remains viable.

The charts below show the income and expenditure for 2020 on the General Fund.

By way of explanation on the income side, "Fees" include charges for weddings and funerals, "Sales" covers the coffee shop and "Tax" is what we recover from gift aid.

We are reliant on our income from rent and lettings, as expected Lettings for the year fell considerably, we expect this to continue for next year.

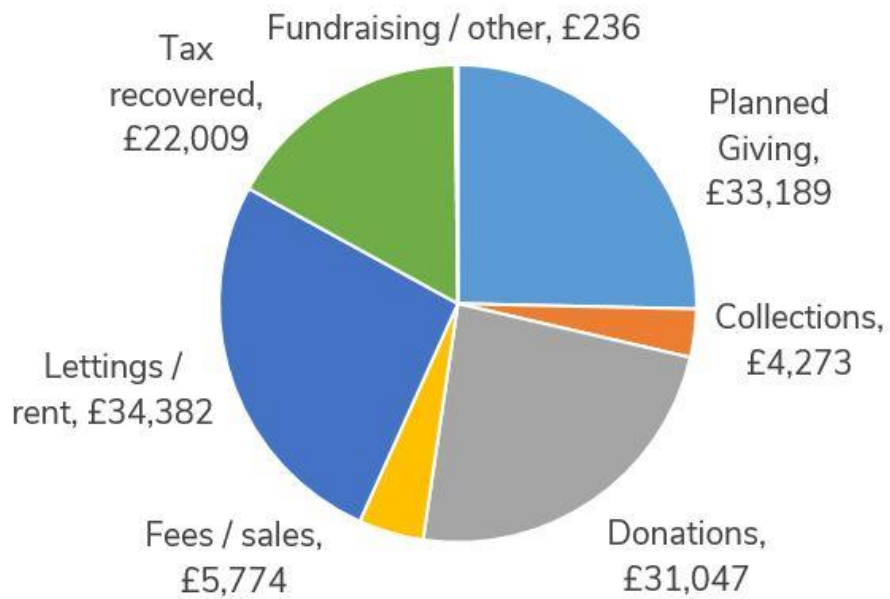
On the expenditure side, "Management costs" includes administration, office expenses, IT support, music licences, training and inspection fees, while "Buildings" includes minor maintenance, insurance, caretaking and utilities. "Church services" includes clergy expenses, junior church materials, organists, vergers expenses, costs of candles and Holy Communion wine and wafers.

In addition, each year we write down the initial cost of The St Andrews Church centre, this is shown in our restricted fund operating costs, not on the chart above, but this year the cost was £23,977.

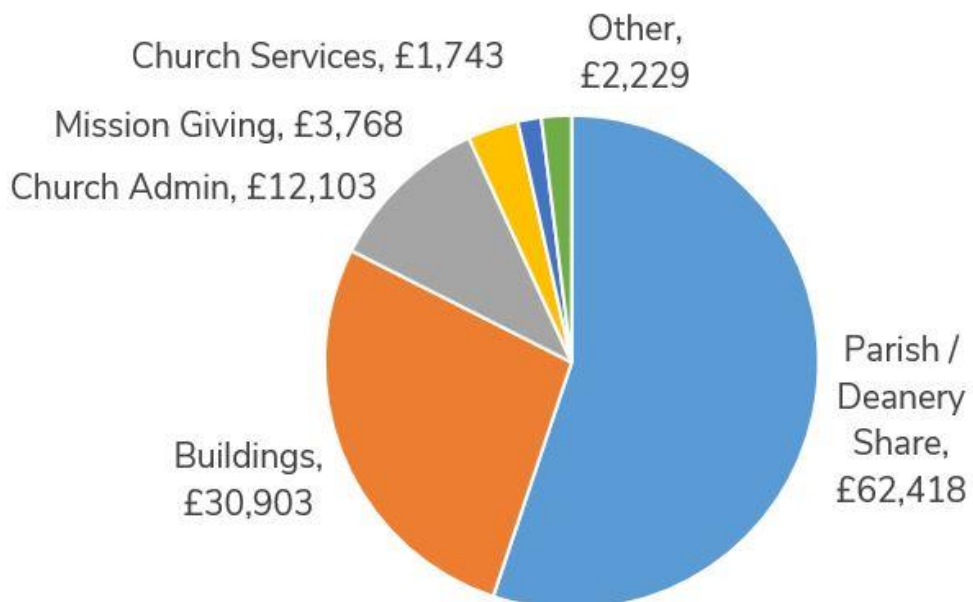
Our General Fund surplus was £17,746 (2019: £28,156) and our overall surplus for the general and restricted funds was £7,232 (2019: £325), largely as the pandemic stopped us from doing works that would normally be paid for by restricted funds (e.g. on buildings).

Whilst the above is a general outline of our financial year, more details can be found in the "Report of the trustees and financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2020" available on our website or by contacting the church office if you need a printed version.

General Fund income £130,910



General Fund expenditure £113,164



Churchwardens – Simon McDowell & John Wheatley

No church services, no building works, so surely 2020 was easy for the churchwardens?

Sadly, no.

We had to consider how to best support our congregation and the whole village through the pandemic, whilst being uncertain about when or whether we could open for services and sometimes having to cancel activities at very short notice – Easter and our Wassailing at Christmas being the two largest examples.

Pastorally, Natasha has been a rock for the village as a whole and we are just the pebbles supporting her in place. We have tried to get her great ideas to fruition and gently tell her to rest when she fell ill at the beginning of the pandemic.

As churchwardens, we are responsible for the running of the church and we also have the roles as PCC Secretary (Simon) and acting Treasurer (John). We are ably helped by the PCC, the church office and other church members to help us do this smoothly and we give thanks for the help and support that we have received from the congregation during 2020.

PCC Secretary – Simon McDowell

Our PCC moved to a virtual basis for part of 2020 as either precautions or restrictions kept us apart. We held five PCC meetings during the year, of which two were virtual and three together. Sadly, our informal, longer meeting was shelved for the year. We consisted of five elected members, two elected representatives of the Deanery Synod, two churchwardens and our Vicar. Average attendance at PCC meetings was 80%.

Our PCC has two active working committees:

- the Property Committee, which is responsible to the PCC for the upkeep of the fabric of both church buildings. It met twice and consists of PCC members plus church members who are experts in property matters and whose help is much appreciated; and
- the Standing and Finance committee, comprising the Vicar, Churchwardens and Treasurer with other PCC members attending as needed. It meets as required in between formal PCC meetings to address more urgent needs where a resolution is required. Although the Vicar and Churchwardens meet regularly, the Standing and Finance committee only met once during the year.

Due to the restrictions and the lower number of services and hall hires, the PCC's focus during 2020 was on supporting the needy and vulnerable in our parish as outreach, rather than expanding our Mission to come to church. The PCC

enthusiastically supported the Village Store Cupboard and members, along with other volunteers, helped to contact the lonely, deliver care packages and ensure that our church buildings were safe when they were allowed limited re-opening.

The reports of the other activities that took place during the year in our church community can be found elsewhere in this blog. The PCC is very grateful to all the leaders and their helpers who give up their time to make these activities happen.

Also on the website, are a summary the annual accounts, which reflect the financial state of the Stoke Poges Church and there is a separate Treasurer's report to describe what has happened financially.

The meaning of LIFE

Ladies' Life Group

Despite moving to Zoom for most of the year and two of our members moving to another church in the summer, we managed to continue to support each other by hook or by crook. We had a few false starts at the beginning of the year with bible studies – sometimes we just can't hit on one that speaks to us! And by the end of the homeschooling, family separation and bereavements of the first lockdown we could barely string a sentence together, let alone study anything.

However, two books that really stood out were "How to walk into church" by Tony Payne, which in God's great timing asked us to be bold and not selfish as we redoubled our efforts to make life group on Zoom and gathered our confidence to return to the church buildings last autumn. We coined the phrase "the ministry of turning up" as, although many of us do make contributions or receive a great deal from worship services or the act of sharing our week in life group, some weeks we just so exhausted or down, that we don't feel we have anything to offer; or that we are not getting anything out of coming. We need to remember that *just by turning up*, we are creating the opportunity to be fed, restored or perhaps be a source of encouragement to someone else.

The second study which we saw through to the end was "God is closer than you think" by John Ortberg, for which we extended an invitation to any other ladies in the church who wanted to be more connected, albeit via Zoom, to a church community they hadn't seen face to face for a while. We had two extra participants to add their perspective and this was a welcome change.

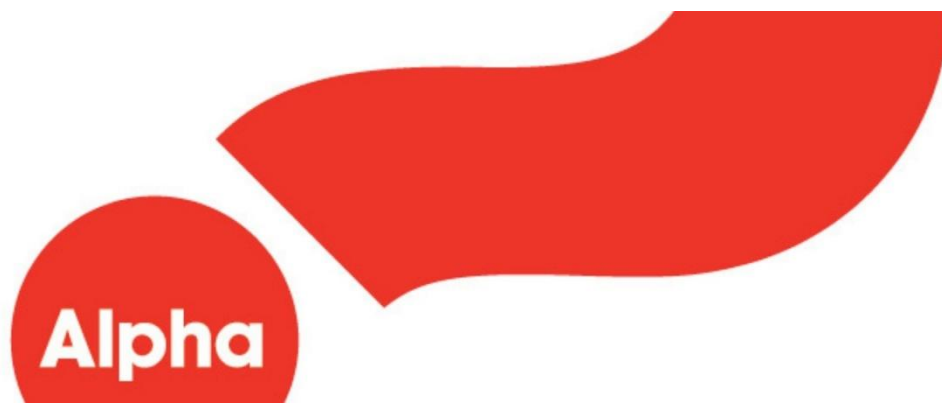
JTS Life Group

Our frontlines have been tough places to inhabit for the last year, let alone be shining witnesses of Christ. So coming together weekly around God, albeit virtually,

to share life and get refreshed in the Spirit has been essential for us. We were all impacted by reading during the first lockdown, 'How To Walk Into Church' by Tony Payne. In response, we have been more intentional in turning up and being present; finishing dinner having just got in from work and joining in, sitting in front of a crackling log fire in a comfy chair and joining in, feeling so shattered and stressed - having to lie down and still joining in. And the rewards have been amazing; peace, positive mental health, boldness, and many other blessings.

In the autumn term we stepped out in faith and hosted an online Alpha course, over Zoom. Although we had to change our planned Holy Spirit Away Day to a Holy Spirit evening, it didn't matter, as the Holy Spirit gently led us through the whole course. We were humbled and moved by the honesty and openness of participants in our 11 sessions together. New friendships were formed and old ones re-ignited. It was a special season.

Please pray for us to receive God's healing, grace, inspiration and wisdom for continuing to support each other while making space for and welcoming new members, within the context of COVID and meeting in homes or virtually.



Deborah and Matthew's Life Group

Our hope as a Life Group is to deepen our faith and walk alongside each other in fellowship.

Throughout 2020 we continued meeting on a weekly basis for prayer, fellowship and bible study, transitioning to the *new normal* of Zoom meetings at the end of March 2020. With covid restrictions severely limiting opportunities to meet others physically at work, church or other settings, Life Group has proved an invaluable constant in retaining social contact and fellowship within the Group.

Moving to Zoom has also blessed the Life Group with having one of our previous members be able to re-join us from Portugal and another frequently home-bound member attend more regularly from Stoke Poges!

Over the year we completed Rosemary Green's 'Listening to God' ten session adventure in purposefully setting out to listen to God; studied Acts; used the *Going Deeper* service sheet notes to explore the summer term's Sunday morning service

series in more depth; and worked through John Stott's bible studies on *Jesus Christ (Teacher, Servant & Saviour)*.

Although we were unable to physically attend the *Wildfires* festival as a church group over the May Bank holiday, one of the Group's highlights of the year was watching *Wildfires online* from our own living rooms whilst in parallel sharing edifying comments live via our WhatsApp group.

Despite this being a turbulent year, we have been reminded more than ever of the blessings and benefits of meeting regularly as a Life Group in terms of fellowship and answered prayer.



Vicar's Report

Stoke Poges Church is a place where we strive to know God, follow Jesus, love others and invite all. Little did we realise as we joyously began 2020 how much we would be tested to do just that. And do so in many untried and ingenious ways, but that is ... as the saying goes ... just how the cookie crumbles.

January 2020 saw us buoyant after a successful Christmas season, our congregations were beginning to grow and a second Alpha course was being discussed. Community relationships were improving and after a positive response to our stewardship Sunday in the autumn of 2019 we had the funds to offer the workshops, family ministry and expand our outreach to the isolated and the lonely as planned. Then as we all know the news of Covid-19 began to spread fast and the number of cases across the globe was spiralling. Nobody had a clue as to what was happening, how it would impact us locally, and when it would all end.

Sadly with the first lockdown announced on Monday 16th March 2020 Stoke Poges church had to close its doors and think fast. With the support of the PCC, the office and the congregation we managed to quickly convert 'in person services' into podcasts. I must give a massive thank you to both Heather and Debbie for stepping up and taking on many tasks that our shielded volunteers could not undertake. They did so with no notice and without complaint.

We quickly became adept at risk assessments, podcasting, video editing and change management. The first lockdown was brutal and very hard work for all of us. And I want to say, you really did love one another and the village immensely.

As the year progressed our plans for mission and ministry still needed to happen and they did, but not in the ways that we had envisaged so eagerly the year before. Easter had to be online, but the vicar shaped easter bunny managed to make it to many parishioners doorstep with a treat. Mothering Sunday posies did not go to waste, they too were similarly deposited.

To cope with the sheer volume of pastoral concerns I instigated a team of Pastoral Callers, whose aim was to keep in touch and ensure no one was left alone and without a friendly voice to listen to. Eleven of you helped and formed many new friendships ... God bless you for that kind and prayer fuelled ministry, sustaining it for many months until those under our care needed you no longer. I believe some are still benefitting from it, and that support, in a time of crisis enabled me to focus on the wider needs of the church, and maintain weekly services.

Ann Sibley was concerned for those who could not get to the shops and those facing hardship in our community. From that seed of an idea ... the Stoke Poges Store Cupboard grew. Each successive lockdown it opened and in partnership with the Good Neighbour Scheme, the Parish Council and our Pharmacy ... many, many villagers benefitted. As a church we organised, hosted and ran around shopping and cajoling folk into giving. Our reward for these endeavours was the many Christ centric conversations that we were given the opportunity to have. Often with people we did not and may never have had the chance to get to know in normal times. At a time when the nation was in despair we were on the frontline offering hope, conversation and food. I pray we did Jesus proud. By the end of the year deep friendships and a warmer attitude towards the Christian faith and its proponents was evident. The elderly, families and isolated people were served and served well. Again thank you all. You pulled together, changed tack and focused on being God's hands and feet in a time of great need. Sharing the love of God with all.

Our hope had been to offer workshops and mini 'Lighthouses' to our young families, building on the marvellous summer club that we help at and support. This was not possible, but what we did do was bring it to the families in their homes. By late spring we were able to deliver to all our known and some 'new to us' children across the parish a weekly KiC pack. Each week families had activities and bible stories/prayers and later on a quality Sunday School video to do. These packs enabled me to visit all our church families and some fringe families every week. Here I caught up with them, shared the the ups and downs of their week and took



away prayer needs to share as needed. By the summer our families were exhausted by home schooling, and yet there was still more of it to come!

In person School ministry had to take a break, as Stoke Poges School, the Teikyo School and Caldicott school were either closed or not able to let me in. We corresponded, and I was able to continue my Governor role within Stoke Poges School. We offered support, car parking and lots of cake to our village school teachers to help them cope with the challenges they faced. The store cupboard enabled some families to keep going as the financial implications of repeated lockdowns started to effect the children more. They knew the extended help came directly from the church and that even when the 'Store Cupboard' closed we did not, we still gave and helped through the summer holidays and between lock downs as needed. What a witness in generosity.



The Harvest Festival was stripped back and made Covid safe, but that did not stop us celebrating and giving what we could. We have formed great connections with the new Deanery Hub, based in Britwell and we continue to support SHOC. We were able to give all that was donated to them both. Which is good news in deed. Through out the year, as we were able we gave to other charities as the needs arose and we had goods that they needed. This included items for the Iver Scouts, and the Women's refuge in Slough.

Our Remembrance Sunday service was tweaked to fit in with Covid-19 guidelines, but we were able to do it, which I was thankful for. We managed - with the help of congregation families - to have representatives of most of the uniformed groups. Wreaths were laid for all organisations and I did a solitary service on the green which was video'd and shared on our website and social media.

Christmas was different, that was for sure. With increased health and safety concerns we had to cancel some of our activities and others were given that Covid twist ... and reinvented. Services were ticketed and concerts postponed, but we managed to serve 130 Christmas Tea hampers to our Senior Citizens, with thanks to a plethora of volunteers who made, packed and distributed them all. Our choir took on the role of readers for the Christmas Choir concert and we were blessed with music from St Martin in the Fields' choir for our Carols and Lessons. A recording of which went to all the seniors and is on the website.



As the year drew to a close, we were thankful that a remnant of us were able to gather and celebrate the birth of Christ. Sadly the second wave of Covid was brewing, but we kept safe, went online and readied ourselves for the next chapter - 2021.

May I, at this point, take the opportunity to say thank you to everyone in the parish? During the mid part of 2020 I needed to compassionate leave ... after a series of illnesses and family bereavements I needed three weeks to concentrate on my immediate family and their needs. You were very gracious and kind to us all. Your prayers and support at that time were felt and appreciated by us all.

Thank you for striving to live out the love that God has shown to us in Christ Jesus.

Rev Natasha Brady June 2021.

