

Chairman's Annual Report 2022

Through the second year of the pandemic, and with the associated restrictions the challenges to ministry & mission have continued. Once again, I find myself feeling thankful of the work and understanding shown by you, our members, the PCC and Committees for your work and engagement in meeting all difficulties with a positive 'can do attitude'.

This has allowed St Mary's to continue to move forward, safely, slowly and onward toward the normality we all crave. Our church has remained open wherever possible, we have seen members coming back to worship, committees reforming and a re-designing of our pattern of services which have been adapted as a result of experience, and recognising the power and opportunity of just opening the church on a Saturday morning for private reflection & prayer. Hence 'Prayer Space' has become a regular and popular feature on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Saturdays at 10am-12noon.

I am proud of the dedication of our members in maintaining contact with friends who can't yet return to church. Family and friends networks, a digital weekly news sheet (also a hard copy for those not on-line) and of course the monthly magazine continue to inform, support and bring comfort to so many.

Whilst lockdowns have occurred (often alternating with 'last minute' and 'new' restrictions) we have been balanced, safe and compliant with guidelines. The immediate challenge for us is to recognise that, as we come back to a more normal way of life, many people may still feel anxious about infection and so we encourage all to be mindful of not just their own health needs, but also by accommodating those of others.

We have always ensured 'Occasional Offices' (Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals) have continued over the past two years. However, we initially 'lost' a lot of weddings and baptisms due the restriction on the numbers of people allowed to attend. I am pleased to say we are now working through a back log of Christenings (we are fully booked to the end of the year) and are also beginning to see marriage couples return. Funerals have always remained high, and it is a privilege to help families through such difficult times.

I give special note to our 'team' who have led us through three years of challenge, questioning and collegial working with other churches in the initiative known as Partnership in Missional Church. Like all journeys we learned a lot; especially of how to remain open to God's calling, to new partnerships, new ideas, new ways of being, and also, of what we might choose to leave behind.

We have retained good relationships with the local schools and have included them in our prayers. I also continued to offer support as a governor to three schools. Our Schools have suffered huge pressures from many quarters over the last two years, and yet, have achieved so much for the children in their charge. None more so than the Parochial School who have been well steered by the outgoing, and incoming 'Chair' of Governors; both of whom came from within our own congregation.

I wish to thank all our staff (now returned from furlough) for their resilience and hard work and ability to adapt to new working practices. We particularly remember Christine Graham who has died recently. Her presence and management of the Centre will not be forgotten, and I know her legacy will remain a positive example to us all. Lastly, I wish to thank you, and all our members for the care and support you've shown for the Parish Church in so many ways; using your many and diverse talents for the benefit of others.

We have managed to continue as a worshipping and praying church, and are viewed as supportive and relevant to our community. We are deeply appreciative of your ongoing financial giving, which in business terms has kept our 'heads above water' despite rising levels. However, we need to start to re-build and grow our congregation, to review our donations for the forthcoming year and importantly, ensure that we are here to reach out to all, and as these two years have shown, **we can't do that without God, faith and you.** **Barry, Rector of Whickham**