

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

WEDNESDAY 19th May 2021 7pm

OFFICERS AND GROUP LEADER'S REPORTS



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ST. MARY'S CHURCH, HIGHLEY

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St. Mary's Highley
Rector's Report to the APCM
Year 2020 to Spring 2021

'They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.'

Jeremiah 17:8

I chose the above verse as it stood out to me when I read it during Morning Prayer recently. In order to grow upwards and outward, a tree must be firmly rooted in the soil and gain sustenance from a source of water. This last year could easily be described as 'a year of drought', but as the text reminds us, it need not be a reason to worry or to stop bearing fruit. In fact, though I don't want to underestimate the difficulties, this last year has seen some remarkably exciting developments alongside some really challenging ones; both triggered by our having to come to terms with the coronavirus epidemic.

Coping with the Pandemic.

The difficulties caused by the impact of Covid-19 cannot be underestimated. Twice we have had to close our church buildings and Parish Hall (except for private prayer and FoodShare/Community Project) and each time during 2020 and 2021, for three months. The first closure we had no choice, the Government closed all churches, but more recently churches have been able to make their own decisions. Physical distancing has meant that we have not been able to do much personal visiting which has meant phone calls and meetings online. I spent much of March and April 2020 phoning around using the Church Family Prayer Diary, which has really come into its own. I am so grateful to David and Janet Crossley's for their commitment to producing this in 2020. By this means I have managed to speak to people I've actually never met! First calls were often tentative, but as time has gone on conversations have deepened. In addition, the Pastoral Care Team, who have responded so well over the past year, split our Electoral Roll members between them, so that we all have around 10 people to keep in touch with. I know that has also proved effective for the Coffee Morning contacts and Allsorts.

As I see it, there were two other major positives to come out of our enforced retreat over the last year. The first has been acting early-on in the pandemic to introduce a local initiative to serve the whole community. Stewart and Shirly Page set the scene, acting locally to help people on their street and, with Cllr. Dave Tremellen and others, we initiated the partnership that brought about 'The Covid-19 Support Group'. The objective was to assist those who were stuck indoors, to order shopping, supplies, post letters and even dog-walking. The support structure for this initiative involved some 50 people, either as first points of contact by phone or in follow-up roles and 'foot-soldiers' as we affectionately called them, doing the practical work. It was a wonderfully positive experience, knowing we were actively engaged in meeting people's most essential needs.

The other interesting and generally positive development, was the rapid transformation of church worship! This was worship without a building, except from people's homes and gardens! It took a while to get used to online services and we are indebted to the skill and reassurance of Stewart Page and Mark Williams for editing and broadcasting our services via the web site and on YouTube. This was no mean feat and I was so encouraged by the 'can-do' attitude of our staff team: Val, Keith, David Poyner, Mary and David Rayner, Rose and Roy and with Mark & Amy and Angie Forster. Before long we were asking families for dramatized readings and others for readings and prayers.

This led in turn to Zoom Sunday Morning Prayer with David Poyner and soon an evening Zoom gathering with Mark & Amy Williams which has attracted new people and families. This is based around prayer, testimony and music as well as crafts for the children. We average 25-30 views per week for online worship and when I completed our Mission Statistics for 2020, I worked out that we must have brought in around 18 new contacts through online connections, discarding those we know of who attend other churches. This is a welcome antidote to the trap of saying, when the doors of the buildings are closed, there is no corporate worship.

This brings me to another point regarding this challenging period of ministry. Over the last year, when our church buildings have been open, we have had to take precautions, put out numerous signs and limit numbers attending in order to be Covid-safe. David Rayner has been a great help with this, including the provision of sanitizer for all our churches. We chose, early on, that we would spread services around the benefice. Thus, each church had its Sunday to shine and this proved popular in the village churches (i.e. those outside Highley), which were blessed with increased congregation numbers. It was a shame that Highley seldom benefitted from a reciprocal arrangement, but then Highley is actually smaller than Chelmarsh and Glazeley, which can safely accommodate more people. This also helped these churches financially, given that the rural parishes are more dependent on gifts on the plate on the day, whereas Highley has a good number of regular givers (thank God) through their bank or the Parish Giving Scheme (see accounts). This variety made Sundays less demanding for most of the staff team, but when they were on it meant not only preparing the live service, but the online service as well. Numbers attending actual services in church have varied, but we have averaged around 20 individuals, whilst being aware that some have been reticent to come back out from lockdown.

One thing we have missed has been inter-action with the children. Amy and Mark have tried to address this in their zoom gatherings and during this period we have been posting material from 'Virtual Sunday School' which is so much fun and worth watching for adults too, if you feel your faith is a bit static! Rachel, Mary Homer and Lisa have been presenting a weekly challenge to those who normally attend Friday Event on Instagram, with a small prize for the winner. Messy Church has also been hit hard as the Severn Centre has been effectively, closed. My concern is how we will engage with our children once we are meeting again. Considering the future and for our families, it is very unlikely we will be back at the Severn Centre on a regular basis, but some interesting ideas are developing around the use of the Parish Hall for the children and use of the church with its new PA system, large remote-controlled screen and state of the art projection system as well as 50 new chairs to replace the pews, at the rear.

As to the modernisation of the church, whilst the building has been closed much of the time, the tower has been transformed. It has a new roof, new pole for the weathervane and some of the stonework on the tower has also been replaced with much pointing of stonework. David Rayner has overseen the project very skilfully and it was completed at the end of the year, thanks to Mike Gammon and his men. We anticipate its re-dedication by Bishop Richard when he visits on the 23rd May. This was made possible primarily through the very generous bequest of the late Delphine Brown along with a specific gift for the heating and individual gifts for the new chairs which replaced the pews at the back. We now have a building, built in the 12th century, but equipped for the 21st. Long may it continue to provide a place of welcome and service to our community. For further information see the Churchwardens report.

Preparing for the Future in the Present.

Change is part of life and as I prepare to hang up my cassock, I feel I ought to record where I think we are now and how we might be able to face the future with all its uncertainty, with confidence. We have a good team to carry the parishes forward.

Val Smith, my Associate, knows more about the benefice and its history than I do and can piece together why things are often as they are. She and Keith are committed to the mission of the church here in Highley and in the benefice as a whole. They are a great asset as we approach an interregnum, but we must be

careful not to ask too much of them. Val has voluntarily taken on the editing of The Forum from me, which is something of a relief after three and a half years, as the deadlines necessary for print and distribution are often tight. She is assisted by Alex Edwards, Chris Edwards' grandson. I am also grateful to Pat Whitefoot who oversees subscriptions and distribution and to Linda Ross who is now taking over advertising revenue (some £2,000/annum) from me.

David Poyner is about to become our second Associate minister, alongside Val. David will continue to be a great asset to this group of parishes, with his wide knowledge of the area and love of our churches. He now has full responsibility for Billingsley and has developed good relationships with the people there. During the lockdown period David has overseen the only house group to continue, with a variety of topics and a faithful Zoom-ing band of half a dozen or more people (see report). He is a pleasure to work with and a good colleague, but as someone who still works four days a week at Aston University, his time is limited.

We must be grateful to God for sending Canon Rose Lawley to us. Retiring from full-time ministry in Kidderminster where she was Team Rector of a number of churches. She brings energy, commitment and enjoyment to her involvement and has even taken on the task of Secretary to the PCC (see her report). Rose will be a great asset to the team going forward, but she is retired and needs space to that end.

These three are happy to engage with the occasional offices (baptisms, weddings, funerals), but as new legislation and training is coming in for weddings which means we can no longer register them, Rose has decided not to conduct weddings in the future.

This brings me to our Readers, a ministry that is weaker than it was when I arrived. This is partly due to our senior Readers retiring and not helped by the demands of safeguarding. All have to undergo training (including clergy, of course and those on the PCC), but this can be an onerous addition when all you want to do is serve the church. In October we said farewell to the Revd. Mary Nelson, who was a Reader until she went out to serve USPG in Tanzania and was then ordained a deacon! Mary has returned to this country, downsized and is now living in Shrewsbury. In addition, Ruth Honeybourne has retired after a long and distinguished life as a reader as has Liz Smith. We are grateful for all their work and ministry, but it leaves us with only one Reader, Keith Smith, for which, at least we are grateful. The contribution of Readers to the ministry of the church is of great value and if anyone would like to consider Reader training, have a word with Keith or myself.

Our saddest loss in recent months, is that of Mary and David Rayner. They have been a source of great help and encouragement to me, personally but in so many ways to the church here in Highley and across the benefice. Mary's service as Reader has been eclipsed by her service to us as Treasurer, both of which have been superb, but her heart has always been in the pastoral care of others to complement her Reader ministry. David, too has served us in an exemplary fashion over these last few years as Churchwarden and his service, often unseen as in repairing and painting, adding to his offering of helpful advice. They will be sadly missed.

Thanks be to God; we still have one churchwarden in situ! Roy Adlington, who has made a niche for himself in his desire to look after the churchyard and prepare the ground for the Garden of Remembrance. We now need younger men to come forward alongside Roy, as churchwarden, to share the load, but also with practical general maintenance. The quality of what has been achieved in the restoration of the church and in the care of the churchyard is a testimony to the work of our churchwardens and, hopefully we will no longer have to manage the complaints of local residents over dog fouling as the bins Roy has put up confirm that we are doing all we can.

For information, we continue to work with Highley Parish Council on the future of burials in Highley. You are all aware we have only 6 or 7 years of space left. The Council would like us to continue to develop the remaining part of the churchyard where there are trees and the PCC have agreed to co-

operate on the basis that we do not bear the cost of removing the trees and preparing the soil in order to let it settle before it can be used. It could enable up to another 20-30 years of burials. As space is currently so limited, there is a desire for people to reserve spaces. In a recent case, the Chancellor granted the application, but only for one year. We look forward to moving this ahead soon, after years of trying.

WEEK 1 and online	WEEK 2 and online	WEEK 3 and online	WEEK 4 and online
-	Highley Church SC with coffee from 10.15am & SS	-	Highley Church SC with coffee from 10.15am & SS
Highley Church HC 10am	Chelmarsh HC 10am	Glazeley HC 10am	Chelmarsh HC/MP 10am
Evening Zoom	Billingsley 6pm	Evening Zoom	Billingsley 8am
HC=Holy Communion; SC = Severn Centre (style); SS= Sunday School 5 th Sundays will continue to be benefice service Sundays.			

Sustaining services in the benefice

As we are coming out of lockdown, we are looking towards a leaner future in some ways. We have to manage the expectation that we will still need to communicate through online services and also juggle the needs of our seniors with the hopes of our families going forward and all out of one building. How that will work out in the long term will be up to my successor. As a positive step forward, appreciating what we have learnt from visiting different churches in the benefice over the months, we are recommending that Highley has at least one Communion a month and the others are spread around the benefice. In addition, the main focus in Highley on weeks two and four will be towards services with a more contemporary feel to complement the success of the bi-weekly Zoom gatherings in the evenings and services previously held in the Severn Centre. This is a balancing act which will not suit everyone.

Here we acknowledge the part that Amy and Mark Williams are playing in the way forward for the church in Highley as well as Angie Forster. In discussion, the church leaders and PCC felt that in order to help Amy and Mark develop their sense of calling to lead worship and in talks, they should engage with, at least the first year of the course for Readers and clergy held in Ludlow - the church paying. This they agreed to do and their report, herewith, makes interesting reading. Angie, who had begun the Ludlow course (formerly WEMTC which David Poyner participated in), is now awaiting an interview to be accepted for ordination training with our bishop's blessing; an exciting development looking forward and we wish her well.

Both Angie, Mark and Amy have participated with me on a tailored version of the CPAS Growing Leaders course and they have made comment on this in their reports.

The following is the proposed plan of services to take us into the interregnum, without putting too much pressure on anyone, given that online services will also continue for the time being.

Time for Change

When is the right to move on? I can't answer that question, though I've had some experience, except to say that it feels right, now. I have said before when I came here that it would be for five or six years before retiring, after a total of 43 years stipendiary (paid) ministry. I admit, I am slowing down, I get frustrated and get less done in a day as well as having a faltering memory!

I would have liked to have achieved more in my time here, but God has been gracious and kept me dependent on Him by allowing me to fail as well as succeed. Much of what has been achieved has been down to the efforts of others and it is very humbling to witness many volunteers (I prefer the word, disciples) around the benefice, stepping up to the plate over and over again. I would love to name them all, but there isn't enough space; hopefully you will know it is you. I especially want to thank PCC members for their loyalty and, of course, those who fly beneath the radar to keep things ticking over, demonstrating we're in kingdom business. My purpose in coming here was to bring stability after a difficult period in the benefice. I hope to have helped with that, moving us on, not to a comfortable place, but to be ready for a new and exciting period of growth.

The church building is equipped and ready for the future, though needing a toilet! The Parish Hall is in good hands and serving the community as is the Shop again (thanks Gay/Roy) and despite coronavirus. I have enjoyed serving on the Governing body at Highley School and taking assemblies and I celebrate the involvement of church members in teaching and governing. We are more engaged with the community now, I believe, though the churchyard will remain a challenge as well as a gift. I would love to see as many coming to worship the God of life and eternity as go to mourn the loss of loved ones outside.

I believe we are ready to face an uncertain future with heads held high, and we have learnt to be more trusting in our joint vocations to serve the King and His kingdom, faithfully and to be generous with what He has given. We do still need more to step up and be counted, however; the church won't grow otherwise.

May the Lord of love and grace enable you to go out boldly and grasp every opportunity to serve Him as you have proved you can do. What you have in your hand and heart makes a real difference.

Mike Harris

Associate Minister's Report:

Several years ago, when I was working for the Diocese as Parish Giving Advisor, there were many conversations about the cost of church buildings and the financial burden on congregations, particularly small ones, in maintaining them. I asked the question, ***'If you were unable to go to church (ie Sunday services held in the building) would you stop being a Christian?'*** At the time none of us had any idea that we would all soon be unable to visit our churches and worship in the way that was familiar to us. Neither would we be able to meet together as friends and church family for bible study, encouragement, fellowship and all the other daily interactions we took for granted. The question I ask today is ***'Are we still followers of Christ? Is our faith weaker or stronger or is it just ticking along?'***

I hope the answer is a resounding 'Yes! It is stronger.' Being a follower or disciple of Jesus is not defined by buildings, familiar and helpful though they may be. Faith is not about pew sitting every Sunday. Faith is a 24/7 state. It's believing and trusting in the Maker of heaven and earth and in his Son Jesus and the sacrifice he made on the Cross, and also rejoicing in the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the world today. So whilst our lives have been disrupted throughout most of 2020, we have also seen God at work in many different ways.

I have been so encouraged, seeing how people have sought to stay connected to each other through this time, despite not being able to move very far from their homes and generally not being able to have close contact with each other. Many of us have made new acquaintances as

we've walked the streets and lanes. We often still don't know their names, but the seeds of friendship and fellowship have been sown. There have been many examples of how neighbours have looked out for each other and helped with shopping and other necessities, particularly in the early days, when the shock and reality of lockdown was so acute.

As a church family, unable to worship together, we have looked towards technology to enable us to continue at least a semblance of 'public' worship. As leaders we have been challenged to embrace this. We've had to 'get over ourselves' and our dislike of seeing ourselves on video. It has been a whole different ball-game. Leading worship and preaching with a real congregation is so much easier than speaking into the emptiness of the living room. But we have experienced what we know to be true; that God takes our poor offerings and adds his supernatural element, so that what we offer can speak into the lives of those who hear. The appreciation fed back to us has, in turn, been much appreciated and has helped encourage us for the next time. Thank you.

Many have been blessed through telephone connection, either a personal call or the dedicated phone line which has been set up to offer hymns and reflection. Other have discovered the wonders of YouTube! There is a vast amount of Christian worship 'out there' on the internet – something for everyone. The Prayer Chain has continued and other prayer has taken place through FaceTime, Zoom, Skype and WhatsApp, and those are just the ones I know of!

God has been faithful and we must remember that however awful this last twelve months has been in many ways, and we remember with sadness those who have lost their lives to Covid-19, God promises that he is always with us. – in the bad times as well as the good times. And he will bring good out of the suffering.

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Throughout the year I have been listening to what God is saying to us as a Church -the body of Christ here in Highley and the surrounding villages. What I have heard and collated from others is that God is doing something new, something fresh. This isn't about us specifically starting new initiatives or projects, although that may happen in due course. It is more about God doing a new work in US. He has worked through lockdown to bring us back to Him in a deeper way; to remind us of who He is and what He wants to do in our lives and the lives of those around us. He has given us renewed vision and understanding of the Gospel. He challenges us to 'forget the former things' and allow Him to lead us in new pastures, fresh things, even if we can't quite see clearly the path ahead yet.

My prayer is that we will allow Him to work through us; that we will allow Him to challenge us beyond our comfort zones and that we will pray with all our hearts *"Your will be done in our lives and the life of the church."*

So we look forward to the next year in hope, praying Paul's words from his letter to the Philippians

'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all

understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.'

Val Smith

Curate's Report:

Due to Covid, most of my congregation-facing activities have been online. These have included contributing to the recorded services but in addition I host Zoom meetings for morning prayer on Sundays and Fridays, compline also on Fridays and on Wednesday what started simply as a social group but which now has become an online home group. In addition, I write a weekly blog "Thought for the week" on the parish website. I have assisted with funerals in the parish in the course of the year; for the moment I can do more of this ministry as I am working from home.

I also attend staff and PCC meetings as well as the Pastoral Affairs subcommittee. I remain active in the other parishes within the benefice.

During the first lockdown, all home groups were suspended, but a Zoom drop-in session was substituted for the Wednesday evenings, to allow people to keep in touch. Attendance was usually low although a small band kept the event going until lock-down restrictions were eased.

Subsequently the time was used to restart a virtual home group, beginning before Christmas. Topics covered have included Holy Habits; Eating Together, a study of Nehemiah and, during Lent, a series to discuss the sermons on "Hard Topics". Around 8 or so people typically attend each session. During Lent, on one occasion we were joined by the Bishop of Hereford.

It is also worth noting that during the Summer Stewart Page also offered a Zoom study on Galatians, that attracted a small but loyal following.

David Poyner

Secretary's Report:

This has been my first year as PCC Secretary, a year that I feel none of us would have thought would pan out as it has. Right from the start, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the PCC has been unable to meet in person having to resort to virtual meetings on line via Skype. These have not been easy for us all, but even more so for a relatively newcomer to the parish and the church who was not used to the way things were done as no two parishes are ever the same. Another problem I faced was not knowing who everyone was, having to ask who was speaking or proposing/seconding particular items the PCC were voting on. However, the PCC have been very patient with me and things started to become easier as the year progressed. I am very grateful in particular to Mike and David and Mary Rayner in particular for their help.

The Annual Parish Church Meeting did not take place until the 26th August 2020 because of the pandemic, however, from April 2020 until the end of March 2021 the PCC has met, or had to make decisions on particular issues eight times. Including agreeing that they "have due regard" to their responsibility as Trustees to safeguarding as required in the House of Bishops Safeguarding

Guidance. Most of the other church business discussed on these occasions has been commented on elsewhere in this Report.

I look forward, like most of us I feel sure, to getting back to a more 'normal' year, but of course there are going to be big changes ahead with Mike retiring and the parish entering into an interregnum. I pray that God will be with us all and that we may be open to the guidance of his Spirit as we go forward together.

Rose Lawley

Churchwarden's Report:

Before Covid affected the whole structure of what the church was doing in the community, we continued to be thankful at the number of groups and the rotas that keep things working. Without you very little could happen. The church in Highley is an amazingly complex organisation that includes music, children's activities, setting up for and running services, home group leaders, and the organisers, helpers and donors at the various events, shared meals and many others. At the same time we remain concerned at the workload on the clergy team and on the Wardens that could be shared if more people were willing to volunteer and commit to doing things. We remain in need of a hall management group to look after the hall, to manage bookings and maintenance and to report to the PCC. With the first Covid lockdown in March everything stopped, and the new language of online and video services was developed. When some use of the buildings was allowed again with social distancing measures in place the new service format rotating around the benefice met the needs of the few who felt willing to attend in person the infrequent use of the buildings resulted in ad-hoc cleaning, setting up and opening, and so many things have been unable to restart. We hope and pray that a little more normality will return later in 2021, and this will require the re-establishment of many things that just happened in the past; for example rotas for cleaning, setting up for services, opening etc. Work on the replacement shop was slower than hoped, and it had been planned to reopen in January 2021, however the Covid lockdown at that time stopped this and revised timescales are unknown at the time of writing. We thank Perry and Phillips for preparing the new shop and hope that it can revert to being a village resource and meeting point sometime soon. The Severn Centre services stopped with the first lockdown in March 2020 and have not restarted due to ongoing Covid restrictions. We are at last making good progress on restoration matters, please see the separate report. On financial matters as Churchwardens we remain concerned that we started the year with a projected deficit of some £6000, and of course at that point it could not take into account any cost increases due to Brexit or the adverse effects of the Coronavirus situation. However it will be seen from the accounts that giving has remained at a good level whilst costs reduced due to the Covid restrictions so we reached the end of the year in a better position than expected. We have limited reserves and they are already below the suggested 3 months level and any budget shortfall will eat into this and may leave us vulnerable in future years. As Churchwardens we feel that current PCC members will be negligent if they leave this problem for future PCC members to resolve and fundraising needs to be developed as Covid allows.

David Rayner and Roy Adlington, Churchwardens February 2021.

Fabric Report:

This has been both a very strange year due to Covid pandemic and one where despite the restrictions on both contractors and the use of the building some very significant progress has been made. Please see the Restoration Report for more detail, but we now have a watertight and restored tower and porch, a French Drain along the north of the building and other repairs to rainwater goods, rooves and the coping at either end of the Chancel. As reported last year we had tendered for and let a contract for updating the sound system and installing a projector and screen. The sound engineers managed to fit in a day before Christmas 2019 to get the basics working, and revisited in the New Year to complete the work. We have also been trying to get ideas and tenders for creating the garden of remembrance, but contractors either seem to want to gold plate their ideas, or fail to send ideas or costs. This has been only slowly moved forward during 2020 and the final form it is to take has not yet been agreed and so a faculty application or tendering is still awaited. This year the mowing contract for the churchyard was tendered and awarded to RJM Contracts who performed well. The Parish Hall continued to be a very useful resource to the church as the parish office, for meetings, meals, the Friday Event etc. We had regular bookings with the Highley Companions, the stretch class and the Pilates classes. A low level of other lettings was also provide some assistance with running costs and so whilst the hall is still run at a loss this is lower than previously. And then Covid struck and all use stopped. Later in the year as the need for “food share” mushroomed with the ongoing Covid restrictions affecting the pay of many we agreed they could use the hall as a base for their work – later in the year the Highley Group were established as a stand-alone food share group as the “Highley Community Project” and they have been putting out hundreds of food boxes each month. However, the hall is generally looking rather tired and could benefit from some decoration, some cleaning of chairs and recovering of others to make it more attractive to users. Pat has bravely taken on care of the hall. Due to her leadership the windows on the south and east faces of the building were tendered, and following a number of generous donations these windows were fitted. Pat has also led on the refurbishment of the toilets. But the remainder of the windows need replacement together with many other repairs or updating around the building – this needs a project team to support Pat; to develop the vision for the building, cost the project all and then seek grant money for the work. As a community building it should be easier to find grant aid to assist, though undoubtedly Covid will have taken its toll on availability! We would like to thank everyone that has helped around the church and churchyard including throughout the year. Covid has had a significant effect, and we hope that maybe by summer 2021 we will start to see a little more normality returning and volunteers will be needed to go back onto rotas for church opening, cleaning, setting up etc.

David Rayner and Roy Adlington, Churchwardens

Allsorts Report:

Well, what a strange year since the last report, with no face-to-face meetings. Pat, Thelma and myself have kept in touch with our ladies by phone or seeing them in the village. At Christmas we sent everyone a card and a chocolate Christmas tree decoration, just to show our continued love for them even when we cannot meet. We currently have approximately fifty members. We are really looking forward to meeting up again as soon as possible.

Lin Evans

Charity Shop Report:

As you all know, our charity shop, which had been raising around £12000 a year towards funds and charitable works, has been closed since the end of September 2019, when Perry & Philips undertakers purchased the premises. They offered to include a new shop within their redevelopment of their new offices/mortuary, and their offer was accepted.

Since then of course, we have endured COVID which put a stop to any building works for a while.

After a very long time the shop was ready for us and we intended to open in January 2021.

Unfortunately, we were again stopped due to another lockdown.

John Adams of Perry & Philips very kindly offered to forego the rent for the shop during lockdown and we are grateful to them for that. However, our rent will be double that paid to Bob Cowley for the original premises.

We are able to open the shop from 12th April and our first day will be Friday 16th April. Because all donations have to be isolated for 48 hours and due to the lack of space in the new shop we will be using the rear of the Parish Hall for receiving and sorting them. David Rayner kindly sectioned this portion of the hall off for our use, which we anticipate will be needed for a few months, until we get used to the new way of working.

We are being inundated with donations (as anticipated) and should like to thank our volunteers for their help, without whom we would not have a shop at all. Our customers and supporters are all excited to see the shop open.

We should also like to thank Roy Adlington for all his efforts in installing shelving etc. and Alastair MacNaughton for helping with our smart new counter.

On Friday 16th April Ruth Honeybourne, (who was involved in our original charity shop which was set up to raise funds to refurbish the Parish Hall) will be 'cutting the ribbon' to open the shop. We cannot of course have a large gathering and will still be subject to limiting numbers, distancing and government guidelines. We will only open for four sessions per week for a few weeks and pray that we won't have to close again.

Gay Lilley

Friday Event Report:

With the sudden closure, due to COVID-19 the use of Instagram has risen.

Last March as the world went into lockdown, we closed the Friday event doors, not knowing what was coming. Since then, we have used our social media platform to keep in contact with the young people and are grateful to see them when walking around the village.

We had hoped to start up in September last year, when restrictions eased for a short time and did a big shop to make the club Covid safe. Unfortunately, after just one meeting many of the committee and team didn't feel safe meeting and we once again closed.

We have spent time most weeks uploading competitions, greetings and opportunities to reach out on our Instagram page, with prizes to be won and an open inbox if needed.

We are keeping up to date on government guidelines and can't wait to open our doors once again and welcome our young people back.

Rachel Williams

Messy Church Report:

Our first Messy Church for 2020 got off to “A Fresh Start” in January when we explored the effect that meeting Jesus had on Zacchaeus’ life. Numbers were very good, and 6 new families came. We were able to let everyone know that Messy Church would be meeting six times in 2020, instead of the usual four. We also had plans to take part in the Highley Carnival again and to hold informal picnic get-togethers in the summer.

Plans were well under way for the next meeting on 28th March - Messy Easter – until everything changed... Some of us did manage to attend a very useful and entertaining Storytelling Workshop in Bridgnorth on 10th March. I wrote in my notes: “at Messy Church we don’t just deliver a story to those who come. We are all on a journey together; we need to think and discover together. We all tell our own story, not only by words.”

Although we were not able to meet at Easter, we did, however, send a link to all families on our e-mail list to a live online Messy Easter Celebration on Easter Sunday with accompanying activity material put together by the Messy Church Bible Reading Fellowship team.

And now we need to re-imagine Messy Church ministry for the future in an appropriate way for us all.

Moira Harris

Open the Book Report:

March 2020 brought a halt to the team going into Highley and Kinlet Schools as COVID was declared a global pandemic. Open the Book made the decision that their storytellers should not go into schools ; the first national lockdown soon followed .

I was able to forward videos of Bob Hartman , great storyteller and poet who wrote the stories for Lion Storyteller Bible , telling some Open the Book stories to the schools .

Open the Book have organised question and answer meetings on Zoom ; I attended one in November 2020 organised by Regional Training and Development Officer for the Midlands .

For Easter 2021 I have been able to provide the schools with access to various Easter story videos from teams around the country.

One of our team , Dot Fleetwood , has indicated she feels her years of storytelling should now cease , and Moira Harris will be leaving Highley in September.

None of us know when / if storytelling teams will be able to go into schools again but , as we all know , our Father God is always at work and His plans and purposes are perfect .

Jill Mansell

Pastoral Care Report:

This year we have had six meetings but with the exception of a social distanced one in Church, they have all been held via Zoom. The Covid 19 restrictions have prohibited us from visiting people in person but we have continued to offer friendship and support via the telephone.

The Memorial Service in November with which we usually assist was planned to go ahead in Highley and Chelmarsh but only in a very curtailed way. Unfortunately, even this was not possible due to government guidelines, but Mike produced a shortened version on our website with Mary and Pat

reading out the names of the deceased as he lit a candle. This was very well received with over eighty viewings. Cards were delivered to the families concerned.

Our purpose as a group is to be aware of any problems or concerns which parishioners are experiencing. It is our sincere hope that we shall be able to help in a more personal fashion in the not-too-distant future.

Gill Rees

Coffee Morning Report:

Since the 3rd March 2020, unfortunately, we have been unable to meet for the weekly coffee mornings held in the homes of our generous hosts. The whole year long restrictions have curtailed the possibility of recommencing this important and enjoyable outreach, for local friends, neighbors and passers-by each week. We are still unsure how long the 'Covid' situation will restrict our future reorganization.

In the previous October of 2019, we had conducted the legal requirement of Activity Risk-assessments (part of the parish Safeguarding regulations), for coffee mornings held in the private properties of our hosts.

A repeat of this is due yearly, and therefore for each of any hosts on re-starting.

Unfortunately, we have lost some of our previous venues, during the last year mainly due to illness etc. We do pray that there may be opportunities to continue in the near future.

In the 25 years of it's life, the voluntary donation funds have reached an amazing amount of almost £15,000.00 – thanks to the generosity of hosts and those attending. Several special celebrations have been held and very few Tuesdays ever missed. Our grateful thanks must still be expressed to all those who opened their homes to us all so regularly, several of whom achieved over 100 coffee mornings in that time. All voluntary donations were passed to the Treasurer of St Mary's for use, when one-off needs required funding. This has historically been used for many varied and interesting items over the years of village outreach. The youth Club pool table, Notice Board for Highley Park Homes. Technical equipment for Severn Centre worship and lap-tops for Youth Club and Treasurers need. Refurbishment of the Parish Hall, especially all the new kitchen fittings and equipment. For the last five years, all funds have supported the St Mary's Refurbishment Fund.

Over the years, many kind folks have also provided their car TRANSPORT, to get the elderly and those who needed help to and from the venues. To these, we are truly grateful also. The future is still unknown. There may be need for a new structure to be thought out and new leaders too if something similar is to be continued in the year(s) to come. Health and Safety will, no doubt, be much greater for a longtime into the future.

My privilege has been to see how many, especially of the older generation, (of which I now admit to being one!) have so looked forward to their weekly morning out, to share time, (and tea, coffee and biscuits) with others, who they might never have known as friends in the village. Just a different four walls to many and living alone. Therefore, an important Christian outreach to the needs of the village.

God has his plans for its future. We must wait patiently and listen for guidance. A big, big THANK YOU for all those involved in the past. God bless you all.

Yvonne Shaw

Catalyst Men's Group

2020/21 has been a time of both challenge and opportunity for many of us. Due to the Covid 19 restrictions put in place by the government we were unable to meet as a group. Initially, we were all uncertain what the future would hold, but after a little while the men were offered a Zoom meeting to look at the Bible and have the opportunity to meet online. We studied the book of Galatians in some detail and explored how Paul's teaching should influence us in our lives today. However, as only three men took this opportunity, at the end of June, due to holidays the meeting was suspended and did not continue after that.

No decision has been taken as to whether it will restart once restrictions are lifted.

All accounts have been passed to the church treasurer and fully reconciled.

Stewart Page

Deanery Synod Report:

The Deanery Synod last met in February 2020. No virtual meetings have taken place and it is not known when face to face meetings will resume.

Ruth Honeybourne

Wednesday Morning/Holy Habits group Report:

Sadly, we were only able to meet until mid-March. We averaged approximately 8 ladies for each session, sometimes one or 2 more. Throughout January and February, we spent time looking at Holy Habits – Serving. Part of this included the Church initiative for each home group to use £50 to bless the village. We chose to donate it to the Highley Companions Dementia Group, to enable them to buy some resources to use with their members. We particularly felt that this group reflected Jesus, who came and ministered to the poor, the afflicted and the marginalised. Not only does the group show love and care towards those who are suffering from dementia, but also provides space and peace of mind for their carers, who are often totally restricted through offering 24/7 care to their loved ones. We felt that the time spent discussing how and who to bless fitted in well with the Holy Habits units, particularly those covering generosity, sharing and of course, service.

Throughout lockdown some members linked up regularly using Social Media, FaceTime, Zoom and other online platforms. Some even used the telephone! Prayer and praying for each other and our village is central to this group and that continued. We listened to what we felt God was saying and where he was leading. The consensus seems to be that He is indeed wanting to do 'a new thing' (Isaiah 43:19) and that 'new thing' is about a refreshing of our love for Him, a 'new thing' in **us**.

Many of the group remember the move of God we experienced over 25 years ago here in Highley. We recognise the signs and look forward to being a part of a fresh move as we move out of

lockdown and are able to meet again in person. The last year has certainly reminded us of our need to have fellowship with one another. If you would like to join us, when we can meet again, please contact Val Smith or Pat Whitefoot or any other member of the group.

Val Smith

Safeguarding Report:

The restrictions of 2020 have meant that little or no activities involving personal contact with our young people or vulnerable adults has been possible for some time. However, it remains a legal requirement that everyone involved with youth work, helping with the elderly, including home visiting, and also all members of the PCC require a DBS check. These checks have to be updated every five years and training needs to be undertaken every three years. At the present time this training is only possible via the internet but other methods may be possible at a later date. The basic training (CO) is accessed via www.churchofengland.org and follow the link.

The benefice now has in place a "Promoting a Safer Church" action plan which details the requirement for each church to maintain a safe environment in which to carry out its work.

Gill Rees

Electoral Roll Report:

We have had no further additions or deletions during the revision period, so the current roll stands at 77. This is a reduction of 7 since the last revision as a result of 2 additions and 9 losses.

David Crossley

Afternoon Zoom, CGH and Growing Leaders Course Report: Mark & Amy Williams

This year has seen the start of our Afternoon Zoom Church gathering. We have a consistent core of 35-55 people including children. There are 7 families who regularly attend, with some others who have attended our Christmas and Easter 'extra' gatherings.

We have deliberately kept the meetings simple. They tend to last approximately 45 minutes although there has been the option of staying on to pray over the past few weeks.

The gathering isn't a children's service although we spend time asking the children to share their crafts and trying to ensure that they feel welcomed and valued. This is emerging as a core value: we want everyone who attends to feel valued and assured that God loves them and has a plan and a purpose for their lives.

A typical service would consist of:

Welcome

Sharing testimony, passages from the Bible, Lectio Divina, a worship song, a testimony and Bible focused interview.

We have had a mixture of people who have shared their story of faith with us. Some have been members of our own congregation and others are friends from other Churches. Each week has been really thought-provoking and helpful.

We see the meeting as a gathering point and a place where people can meet together and worship God.

We feel that we should continue with our fortnightly meetings for the time being and we also feel that at some point we would like to have a monthly face to face gathering too- this could perhaps

be in the St Mary's building. We would love to use the newly renovated building and also to incorporate a live stream element into the gathering.

We would also like to incorporate more sung worship into the gatherings when it is safe to do so and also to eat together.

There is also scope for short home group series on particular themes. For instance, it would be good to do a 3-week study on a book of the Bible or to watch a particular set of teaching videos together.

As the next step, we would like to see our regular members inviting another person or family to join with them for the Afternoon Zoom so that we begin to 'do life' with others a little bit more. Mark and I are very keen not to rush into the next step as the Afternoon Zoom seems to be an area where God is leading us into something new and we want to be obedient rather than over committing ourselves to things that are not necessarily the right things for us to be doing.

Cuddesdon, Gloucester and Hereford Ministerial Training Course (formerly WMTC)

We have completed two terms of this course and Amy really enjoyed the first term and Mark has really enjoyed the second term. It is hard work academically but we have both been able to implement some of the teaching into our daily life. For example, we both incorporate Lectio Divina into our daily life as well as really setting aside a Sunday for 'Sabbath rest' as much as possible. It has been really good to meet with people from different walks of life although it is a lot to take in online on a Wednesday evening!

We are both looking forward to the next two modules on 'Preaching' and 'Outreach.'

Growing Leaders

We have been doing this course with Mike and Angie and it has been really good to examine our calling and to look at different aspects of leadership. The course is easy to access and involves discussion which is a good way of engaging all of us and making us think.

Mark and Amy Williams

Angie Forster Report – Exploring Ministry:

About 10 years ago I had the sense that God was calling me to be more involved in the church services but I was unsure what this meant, so I went to see our vicar Clive who encouraged me to write and deliver the talk at a 6:30pm service in St Mary's. He guided me on the things I could develop and helped me to believe in what I thought God was saying.

As the years have gone by, I have had numerous people ask me if I had thought about training to become a priest after giving a talk or leading a service and started to think that ordained ministry might be the thing God was initially saying to me but I still felt very unsure. So, in 2017 I went away for the weekend with CPAS to investigate the different roles in the church and vocation in general.

After the most awesome experience of hearing from God so clearly about what He wanted me to do and talking to Clive again, I went to see Neil Patterson, the Diocesan Director of Vocation and Ordinands about starting the discernment process.

In our meetings Neil has giving me reading material on the different aspects of ministry and has encouraged me to experience different styles of church and worship, this including a very special few months last year attending the churches in the Much Wenlock Parish. Again, an experience

where God took me out of my comfort zone but spoke so clearly through people and the words of the traditional hymns they sung there.

I started attending Cuddesdon in Ludlow (formally known as WEMTC) in September 2019, on a Wednesday evening as an independent student for a term but was asked to stop as I'd have to repeat the year if I was accepted to go forward for training after the preassessment panel in February 2020. I could understand why I was asked to do this but was very disappointed, as I was learning so much and had met some wonderful people there.

In February 2020, I went to my first pre-assessment panel feeling totally useless and not really knowing what to expect. I had four people "interview" me and left feeling totally befuddled. Later that day Neil phoned to say the panel couldn't actually decide whether to send me onto the next stage, which would be to be interviewed by the bishop and BAP (Bishop's Advisory Panel), a weekend away for all possible ordinands, where you are constantly observed and assessed how you interact with others among other things. So, Neil said it was up to me to decide if I went forward or not. To which I decided I needed another year.

After a year of Covid and lockdowns, and meeting with Mark Daborn, who is assistant DDVO, I went forward for my second Pre-Assessment Panel in February 2021 feeling a lot more confident. As I felt I knew a bit more and what to expect this time. I was interviewed by two people via a Zoom meeting and was recommended to go forward to meet Bishop Richard.

So, feeling totally shell shocked I met with Bishop Richard, who agreed to sponsor me, which means at the end of July I will be having more online meetings, as they are not running BAP in the usual way this year.

I must admit this process has often left me with more questions than answers but I am trusting in God to lead my way and I know if this is where I am heading then He will make the way clear and nothing will stop me from doing what He wants me to do. Thank you for all your continued prayers and encouragement, it means so much to me.

Angie Forster



1 Corinthians 12

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For we were all baptized by^[c] one Spirit so as to form one body... **14** Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.