

Churchwarden's report for Fawkham Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting, Tuesday 1st June.

2020 was a strange and challenging year for the Parish of Fawkham and Hartley as it was for the whole country.

Several lockdowns meant we had to close our two churches and the Church Centre as well as suspending the normal pattern of Parish life.

This has been particularly difficult for our new incumbent, Rev. Adele Barker who barely had time to hold services in her parishes of Fawkham and Hartley and Longfield before the first lockdown. She has initially made herself known to people she encountered while walking and running round the parish and also through social media such as the Fawkham Community Facebook group.

Fortunately this has been partly remedied by being able to hold some live services as well as digital ones.

We have faced several challenges. The most immediate one was to set up a means of communicating with our parishioners. We used the Electoral Roll as a basis for this and it became obvious there was a digital divide with many people not having access to email. This has been gradually overcome by obtaining email addresses and posting church materials and information to people not on email resulting in a pretty effective communication network.

Key to this has been the Adele's creation of church Noticeboard and Christine's Mission Update which has promoted Worship at Home, Wild Church and many Community projects including the increased use of the Community Cupboard with the Rectory now being a collection point.

Another challenge has been to mitigate the effect that isolation is having on the wellbeing of our church family and friends.

The Pastoral team have worked hard to identify those who would appreciate a friendly telephone call and we now have a telephone network of volunteers who make regular calls to parishioners who are ill or living alone.

Not being able to have normal church services has given birth to imaginative ways of worshipping and fellowship with the acquisition of the RNWK You Tube channel through which regular services are streamed. We now have the facilities to do weekly RNWK group Zoom Worship and Zoom Bible study. The

advent of this technology has been one of the positives to come from the pandemic.

In order to raise spirits in the parish Adele proposed various “treats” throughout the year for people on the Electoral roll (plus a few others), comprising cards, candles religious material and food. A stalwart team of volunteers delivered Cream Teas, Advent Bags, Lent Bags and for Mothering Sunday, potted Polyanthus and Primulas.

The recipients were delighted as shown by the number of thank you cards and emails.

The most important aspects of these initiatives were the long doorstep conversations with people who were not getting out or were living alone.

An ongoing challenge has been to get our Church Centre and our churches Covid secure.

This has entailed keeping abreast of the Government and Diocesan conditions in terms of social distancing and hygiene etc.

This has been a costly business and thanks go to the Friends of Fawkham Church for their contribution towards this. Thanks are also due for contributions to the purchase of a Hymnal which we can use to play music for the services. One of the great sadness's of this past year has been the ban on singing in church.

At Christmas, St Mary's was lit up with a beautiful Christmas tree by the porch, a beacon of light and hope in the dark days at the end of the year. There was also a Group Advent Windows Trail which was Carol themed and the Holly and Ivy was represented by a lovely arch over the South porch door.

Easter was marked with a Group Stations of the Cross pilgrimage with St Mary's being the focus for the Crucifixion

Some positives have come from the pandemic.

We have learned once again .the value of community and the importance of caring for our neighbours.

No matter how daunting a problem can appear a solution can usually be found. It is possible to adapt to most situations.

Our key priority for the next 12 months is to repair our finances. The impact of the pandemic on our parish finances has been severe. The loss of income from the closure of the Church Centre to hirers combined with the inability to hold our usual fund raising activities such as the Summer Fete and the Xmas Fair has been very challenging.

However we hope to hold a small Fete in Church meadow on 18th September and I understand Fawkham Parish Council would like to have a stall to let people know about the Neighbourhood Plan which is in preparation at the moment.

As restrictions ease some of our hirers are looking at returning in the autumn which is encouraging.

I am sure that the coming year will hold many more uncertainties as hopefully we can find a way back to a more normal way of living. We know that with the help of God we can face what the future holds.

Gillian Cramp

25th May 2021