

# The Minster with St Matthews Church Annual Report 2020

## Welcome from the Rector

At the beginning of 2020 we had no idea of how different life and our church's ministry would be a year later. The global coronavirus pandemic impacted every part of our lives and brought sadness, suffering and disappointment to many of us. But despite these challenges, my overwhelming sense at the end of 2020 is one of deep gratitude to God for his presence with us by his Spirit, his comfort and strength in some very dark days and that he is still building his church, as he has promised to do. I have a great sense of privilege of being the Rector of our church at a time like this. The ministry team and army of other ministers that I lead has been quite magnificent in rising to the challenges of the lockdowns. Over and over again they have gone the extra mile, worked very long hours and gone out of their way to make sure that there was still a service every Sunday, superb pastoral care especially for those who are on their own and not online, small groups continuing to meet and care for their members, resources for our children and young people and outreach to those who are not yet believers. Even though we have been scattered for most of the year and unable to meet as we normally do, we have been united in our commitment to the gospel, to each other and to serving our community.

The main staff changes this year have been that Annie Phillips was on maternity leave for the whole year. Simon Phillips stood in for her, assisted by Joanne Von Bergen from October. In September we recruited Rachel Hargreave as operations manager who quickly made a significant difference to the smooth running of the church. During the lockdowns Sarah Brown and Jenny Aldridge were put on furlough but did a wonderful job in extra cleaning when we were allowed back into our buildings to ensure that they were Covid secure. I am particularly grateful to Alex Dyson who has kept an eye on our buildings throughout the lockdowns and seen to any problems that have arisen.

At the APCM in 2019 I launched a new vision for St Matthews and the Minister and we have been guided by this vision and the ministry priorities that I set out there. The rest of my report is under those headings.

Our overall aim as a church is to become more 'Passionate about Jesus.' We have seen that passion in the way in which the church has risen to the challenges of the last twelve months with renewed faith in Jesus and commitment to live for him in the following ways.

### 1. Discipleship

In early 2020 we began a new sermon series in Mark's gospel called 'Rediscovering Jesus'. Little did we know that this voyage of rediscovery would take us the whole of the rest of the year and beyond. This series has pointed us back to the foundations of our faith but has also empowered us to take up our cross and follow in the steps of the Lord Jesus on his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. This year has taken many of us on a journey that we were not expecting and have not enjoyed but we have found that, by his Spirit, Jesus has journeyed with us and given us the strength to keep going. Our small groups have continued to meet and to study mostly in online Zoom meetings with an overview of the Bible, studies in Paul's letter to the Philippians and in the Psalms. Jayne Seward quickly discovered a new gift as a children's TV presenter with her brilliant Sunday Club and Pre-school Praise sessions.

### 2. Prayer and Worship

Within a week of the announcement of the first lockdown the whole church was meeting online and has continued to do so for most of the year. This is thanks to Simon Phillips, Alex Dyson and Luke Blackburn who have done so much to help us film services and edit hours of video recordings. As the year went on, we had children's and youth activities online as well as services of morning prayer and daily updates. All of this has helped us to remain connected to the Lord and to each other.

The Minster congregation was quick to return to meeting together when we were able to in July and St Matthews followed in September with a livestream. Although it was good to be together again, we all felt the lack of being able to socialise with each other, the barriers of masks and the sadness of not being able to sing. We managed to

celebrate Christmas in our church buildings although many of our activities had to be cancelled or curtailed. But we did still have the donkey for our Nativity services.

Richard Tilson was appointed as director of music at the beginning of the year and, almost immediately, he and our music groups had to quickly record as much music as they could before we were no longer allowed to meet in person. I am so grateful to Richard and all our musicians for all that they have done to keep us singing God's praises during lockdown.

One of the unexpected blessings of lockdown has been discovering how well the church prayer meeting works on Zoom. We have had many more people praying together once a month than we did when we were meeting in the Wesley Room. Maybe we will continue online after lockdown.

### **3. Outreach**

At the beginning of lockdown, many churches recorded huge numbers of people taking part in online worship and many wondered if this was the beginning of a new way of being church. As the pandemic continued online numbers began to dwindle and we realised that many of those initial 'hits' were people dropping in for just a few minutes and then leaving. I don't think we have seen any signs of non-Christians being reached online in large numbers, but we have continued with our outreach programme which has born some fruit. We ran online Alpha in the Spring and again after the Love Cheltenham Carols by Carlight carol service. That event on the racecourse carpark attracted over 600 carloads, perhaps over 1500 people, and was one of the most effective outreach events of lockdown and a sign of how effective it is when churches work together in mission. A few new people have joined all our services during the year some of whom are new Christians.

One of the highlights of lockdown has been the launch of Saturday Kitchen, our weekly lunch for vulnerable people in the town centre. This has met every Saturday since the beginning of lockdown with a team of 40 people from the church each serving in five teams once a month. I am so delighted that one of the first ways in which we have used our new kitchen is to feed the hungry in Cheltenham. I am also very grateful to Paul Chesworth whose initial vision this was, to Tony Whitbread whose experience helped us to launch in record time and to David Warren who is our 'front of house manager'.

We have made a special effort during lockdown to stay in touch with our mission partners with contributions to our online services and monthly prayer meeting. In some ways we feel better connected to our partners than we have for many years because of the wonders of Zoom. This is another unexpected discovery of lockdown and is surely here to stay.

### **4. Community**

Our life together as the people of God has been one of the biggest losses during the pandemic. We are really missing seeing each other, eating together, handshakes and hugs. One of the first priorities when the restrictions are lifted is going to be getting together again. Despite not being able to meet we have kept in touch in other ways. Many have joined Zoom coffee after the 10am and 6.30pm services. The Small Group network has been the primary pastoral care network and the leaders have done a brilliant job in caring for their members. Clare Dyson and the pastoral team have ensured that as many people as possible have been kept in touch with by phone, CDs or printed versions of services and daily updates. CAMEO have continued to serve their members with summer, harvest and Christmas deliveries and regular newsletters. And somehow, people who have been bereaved or who are unwell have been cared for and supported by the pastoral team.

As ever, much of the pastoral care in a church like ours is unplanned and unseen as people have looked after each other, gone for socially distant walks, picked up the phone, taken meals round to each other, spent hours on Zoom and prayed for each other. This is what has kept our church alive and functioning as the body of Christ through the pandemic and which means that we are now in a good place to make the most of all the opportunities that the release of lockdown will bring.

I am very aware that in this brief survey of the year I have not been able to mention everything that has happened nor thank everyone who deserves our thanks for the ways in which they have served the Lord and his

church. You will be able to read more about this extraordinary year in the reports that follow. As you do, I hope you, like me will be moved to give thanks to God for his great faithfulness to us.

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23

*Richard Coombs*

### **Churchwardens report**

Well, what a year 2020 has been! We started the year with such high hopes of all the ways in which we could use the new kitchen and enjoyed a grand opening in March but all this was curtailed with the onset of the COVID pandemic only a few weeks later. It has been a real privilege to be Church Wardens at such a testing time and, although there have been a number of challenges along the way, it has been really encouraging to see The Minster and St Matthew's continue to grow and flourish as a loving church family and especially to witness the start of Saturday Kitchen in which we are able to serve the local community as well as putting the new kitchen to good use!

We have continued to meet with Richard fortnightly and endeavoured to support him and the rest of the staff with all the demands that they have faced. They deserve our immense gratitude for the way in which they have responded to the global epidemic with creativity and inspiration, enabling services to move online and the team to continue ministering to and pastoring the congregation. There have also been a number of practical issues to deal with. The building work around the church finished during the year and there are now just a few loose ends to tidy up. We have become experts in submitting faculties including one for the bollards in the churchyard and another for the installation of iron gates at the Minster. We are, as ever, thankful for all the willing 'volunteers' who allow things to run so smoothly in a wide variety of capacities.

Thank you for your prayers, support and encouragement over the last year. It has not been what we expected but we have been assured of God's sovereignty despite the uncertainty of the current situation as well as his presence with us and his provision for us all.

*Clare and Bill*

### **Report from Parochial Church Council (PCC) and Standing and Finance Committee (S+F)**

It has been an extraordinary year in which we have all been significantly challenged, not least in carrying out the governance and leadership of our fellowship. One consequence of the pandemic was that the Annual Church meetings, reporting on 2019, didn't take place until the autumn of 2020. Following Diocesan advice, the existing membership of the PCC were all generously willing to remain in office until the 2021 Annual Meeting which we assumed would be at the normal time towards the end of April. This brought continuity in unpredictable times as well as avoiding a complex and unrepresentative electoral process, given that we were not able to meet in person.

Another impact of the pandemic was that in its early stages decision-making was delegated from the PCC to the smaller group, the S+F Committee. This was essentially to reduce risk through contact as we hadn't adequately mastered the magic of Zoom at this stage. As a result the PCC met in only three rather than the usual six months; January, September and November. S+F met in February, April (twice), May, June, July, October and December. Writing two separate reports, for the PCC and for S+F, seemed inappropriate.

In March there was a 'crisis' meeting of the Staff and Wardens to plan our initial response to the first lock-down guidance, and in August we tried to be on holiday. Ian Perry had volunteered to take the Minutes of all these meetings and we are very grateful to him for that. We have discovered that although Zoom did allow us to meet remotely it wasn't an ideal vehicle with the larger number attending the PCC: nuances could be missed and discussion inhibited. The detailed monthly financial report has enabled us to keep a clear and up-to-date view of our financial situation. We are grateful to Adrian Bowcher and Andy Ponting for the confidence this has given us.

Ministry was delivered very differently from March onwards. We responded to the guidance coming from the Government and Diocese, often at short notice. The ongoing restrictions needed sensitivity, flexibility, imagination and perseverance from the Staff. The PCC have appreciated and admired their response. Without the immediate feedback from face-to-face situations the dynamics are very different and less rewarding. Not only that but new skills had to be quickly learned and refined.

Annie Phillips was on maternity leave for all of the year. We are grateful to Simon who, in Annie's absence masterminded the Youth work, only to also find himself taking the lead in delivering the technical know-how as the Staff team moved rapidly into filming and streaming. Despite the restrictions and rigours of the pandemic the PCC approved the appointment of Rachel Hargreave to fill the newly created role of Operations Manager. Jayne Seward stepped down from her Administration brief to concentrate on Children's' Ministry. The PCC endorsed the appointment of Richard Tilson as Director of Music at St Matthew's, a voluntary role, as are so many. The PCC also approved the plans to upgrade the audio-visual facilities in the Wesley Room, masterminded by Andrew Jack. This improvement and Rachel's appointment were largely funded by specific gifts.

Safeguarding is always on the Agenda. The PCC noted our gratitude to our four Safeguarding Officers for their scrutiny, advice and their efforts to ensure that we are compliant with the latest guidance and practice. The PCC approved the policy that whenever either church is 'open' there must always be at least two 'welcomers/stewards' present.

Despite the restrictions of the pandemic some repair work has been carried out, notably some new external doors at the Minster. The installation of retractable bollards was approved and will form part of the Borough's Minster Churchyard project currently underway. The St Matthew's Kitchen refurbishment was completed at a cost of c.£50,000 just prior to the March lock-down, enabling the 'take-away' meals to be served at the Saturday Kitchen. More suitable chairs were purchased for when 'table service' can begin. When the church buildings were closed, Alex Dyson kindly carried out the required weekly safety and security check, and the staff involved with their cleaning and preparation were furloughed. Progress was made with the builders' work around St Matthew's, agreed as part of the John Dower House/Latheram House development, but some aspects remain to be completed. Travel restrictions prevented the expert advice needed to help prepare for the movement of the new Minster organ.

So, as far as possible 'normal service' has been maintained, and indeed developed. What has been a challenge has also become an opportunity as we have begun to reflect on lessons learned and how the future might need to be different. As a start, the PCC approved the first stage of a re-branding project, to include both churches, towards the end of the year. Whilst we are feeling the seemingly relentless nature of the pandemic we are grateful for the Lord's guidance and strength, and are resolved to continue to seek to grow his Kingdom in our town.

*Bill Harvey*

### **Electoral Roll Report for the year 2020**

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting last year, it was reported that there were 256 names on the Electoral Roll, with 18 of these people living within the Parish boundaries.

This year the roll was amended only. There are 268 names on the new electoral roll with 20 in all living within the parish boundaries.

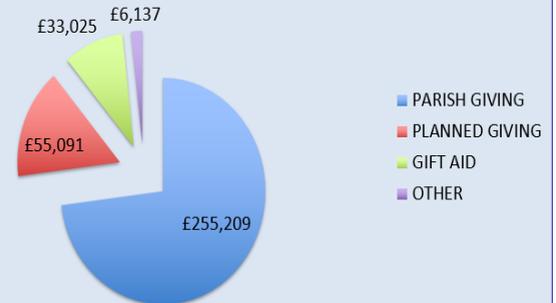
*Gill Sage, Electoral Roll Officer*

## Planned Giving

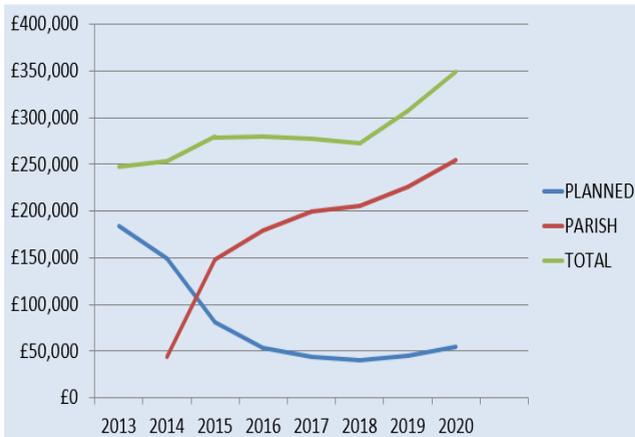
### SUMMARY OF 2020 GIVING

- 111 members of the **PARISH** Giving scheme  
(An increase of 3 from 2019)
- 42 members of the **PLANNED** Giving scheme  
(An increase of 7 from 2019)
- No collections at Church Services during 2020
- GIFT AID Donations increased by 80% (thanks to a single large donation)
- Christmas Appeal raised £4740 (includes Gift Aid)
- **OVERALL – GIVING UP BY 14% ON 2019 FIGURES**

### Summary of Giving 2020



### Main giving schemes



### WAYS OF GIVING

- Preferred way is through the **PARISH GIVING SCHEME**
- Planned Giving –Direct Debit
- Envelope Scheme - cash weekly or monthly
- Cash in Collection
- Directly into our church bank account
- DONATE giving platform – on line giving

Contact Andy Ponting for details of how to cheerfully give to the church  
[andyonting2806@gmail.com](mailto:andyonting2806@gmail.com) or Tel 01242 517812 or 07881 501325

### PLEASE:

If you are a tax payer **GIFT AID** your donations to enable us to claim 25% back from HMRC

**And finally:**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS GIVING !**

*Andy Ponting*

## **Safeguarding**

The Parish Safeguarding Officers have been keeping up to date with the changes in and new requirements that have come from the Diocese. To some extent, these are developments that were expected but they have been accelerated with the publication of a number of serious reports over the past year. Partly as a result of this, and as a consequence of the pandemic, the safeguarding training has been totally revised. There are 3 levels to the training and, according to their roles and responsibilities, both staff and volunteers are expected to complete the appropriate number of courses. We will be following the guidance rigorously and therefore the number of people who will have some level of safeguarding training is likely to increase significantly throughout the coming year.

The Parish Safeguarding Officers with responsibility for children and young people (Julia and Stephen) have been revising procedures and processes with the church's children's and young people's teams, ensuring that the requirements of our policy are being fulfilled. Julia has done training sessions with the team to bring them up to date with current requirements and give them information about the context for these. There is now a clear safer recruitment process. In addition there is now a termly meeting with the Youth and Children's Ministers to discuss any safeguarding issues. The agenda always includes discussion of volunteers and any potential recruitment; the children and any difficulties that have arisen; risk assessment-related activity. Thanks to the hard work of Jayne, Annie and Simon, all risk assessments are in place, including for the online work which has been happening during lockdown.

In addition to individual pieces of casework, the Parish Safeguarding Officers with responsibility for vulnerable adults (Emma and Paul) have largely been involved this year with making recommendations and drafting policies for Saturday Kitchen. Every one of the volunteers for this has to have appropriate levels of training and we have to have proof of their certificates before they join a team. The compliance has been excellent and we will be able to use this as a model when we review other church activities in the coming months.

Both Safeguarding Policies (Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults) were revised, presented and adopted by the PCC in November 2020. They are to be found on the front page of our website under the "church family" drop-down arrow at the top. We would encourage everyone to read them.

*Emma Abbey, Julia Sawers, Paul Collacott and Stephen Ayland*

## **Deanery Synod**

Deanery Synod met in March this year for the first time since February 2020. There were two main topics on the agenda.

The first of these was a request for people to consider becoming Foundation Fellows to help with the work of the University of Gloucester and its Anglican Evangelical Christian Foundation. Fellows provide prayer support, attend Chaplaincy events, or simply offer financial support to the Fellows' Fund. Application forms are available on request.

The second main item on the agenda was a survey conducted in March this year across churches in Cheltenham. The report showed that the majority of those who attend church in the town are over 60, that volunteers were hard to find, and most critically that despite the significant number of churches within the town the Church of England only reaches 5% of the population. The key challenge was how to extend the Church's reach beyond its immediate congregation.

The next meeting of Deanery Synod is scheduled for June 15.

*David Evans/Ken Syme*

## **Buildings and Fabrics**

We are again thankful that both Cheltenham Minister and St Matthew's Church are in relatively good shape. Thus it has been another year of keeping the two churches in good order and planning for future improvements not to mention delivering on others. It has also been a year in which the buildings have been underused due to Covid-19 and we are immensely thankful to Alex Dyson for committing to undertaking weekly walk arounds of the two Church Buildings so that we could keep on top of maintenance and other building needs.

### The Minster

At the Minster, we have completed the replacement of fire damaged external doors and protected these with some protective wrought iron gates for security. The Bollard faculty came through but this is now being taken forward as part of wider Cheltenham Borough Council flagship plans for the development of the adjoining site as a Growth Hub and a full makeover for the updated landscaping of the grounds around the Minster to ensure that the two work together in order to make the town centre an attractive place to be.

For a more detailed review of the year at the Minster, building wise in 2020:

January	Lightning conductor tested and certified.  Boiler repair – PCB Board replaced.  A new oak door fitted to the Bell Tower door.
February	New Wrought Iron Gates and Oak Doors fitted to Bell Tower and School Room doors.
June	Fire extinguishers inspected and replaced where necessary.  Gutters, valleys and downpipes cleared.
September	Boiler serviced.
November	Gutters, Valleys and downpipes cleared.

As ever we are tremendously thankful to the efforts of The Friends of The Minster, the Church Welcomers, the cleaners, the flower arrangers and all those who make the Minster look cared for and welcoming for those that visit whether for services or just passing through.

### St. Matthew's

At St Matthews' Church, the landscaping of the car park being taken forward by LifeStory in conjunction with Latheram House immediately to the south of St. Matthew's has been ongoing, and the new kitchen within St. Matthew's installed. We are very grateful that through most generous donations for this that the extent of the work could be extended and this has enabled an outreach and community Saturday Kitchen provision to provide meals for those in need around the town. Stackable and easier to clean (i.e. Covid resistant) chairs have been provided.

And again for the more detailed review of 2020: -

January	The gutters, valleys and downpipes were cleared.  Disabled toilet replaced.  New Kitchen refurbishment, including all units, worktops, appliances, washing up area, new flooring, LED lighting, roller shutters, re-decoration and tiling etc.
February	New telephone system installed.

March	New HD Camcorder installed for live streaming services.
May	Boilers serviced.
June	The gutters, valleys and downpipes were cleared.  The fire extinguishers were checked and replaced where necessary.  New LED Down lighter lamps fitted in Wesley area.
July	Two new projectors, two new screens and one new monitor installed along with associated video distribution equipment.
September	Moving Walls in Wesley and Wycliffe/Hooper rooms, serviced.  Boilers serviced.  New HD camera installed for live streaming services.
November	Gutters and gulleys cleared.  Tune organ and repair organ pipe stop.
December	New projector, screen and audio equipment purchased for Wesley area.  (Fitted in January 2021).

We have also changed our Diocesan Architects to be Camilla Finlay, the Director at Acanthus Clews Architects based in Banbury. Camilla is an Accredited Architect in Building Conservation and is responsible for conservation. She will be undertaking the Quinquennial for the Minster shortly.

Rachel Hargreave has also joined 'The Team' coming in as Operations Manager for both Churches, though of course Rachel has far wider duties than just the buildings!

Sadly, we also pay tribute to Chris Chadwick who gave much to ensuring that the two churches have been kept up to date especially in the areas of ecology and sustainability. Chris Passed away suddenly on 30th July 2020 aged 61 years. Chris was the much loved husband of Debbie, and loving father of Rachel, Heather and Malcolm and grandfather to Arthur - we take a moment to uphold them whilst being thankful for all he did as a faithful Buildings and Fabrics Committee member over many years.

Both churches have continued to have their gutters regularly cleaned by Gooch and there have been a myriad of other small (and some larger!) jobs ably carried out by our wonderful team of volunteers, mainly comprising Roger Abbott, Chris Pinnington, Roger Stephens and Henry Williams, whose dedication and expertise we are immensely grateful for. Thanks must also go to Peter Ormerod and Ken Syme for keeping such a careful eye on the Minster and all the members of the Building and Fabrics committee both new (Alex Dyson and Oli Parker) and departed.

As we get back to more in-church meetings it goes without saying that we again thank those who maintain, clean and tidy the church and those who beautify it with banners and flowers and keep it suitably cleaned and sanitised for safe use so that we can enjoy worshipping and serving the wide communities in and beyond our two church buildings.

*Godfrey Tarling, Chair of Building and Fabrics Committee*

## **Operations**

I stepped into the Operations Manager role mid-September and relieved Jayne Seward of the additional administrative tasks she's been admirably looking after for some time. Following on from Jayne and Gill Sage's (Rector's PA and PCC Secretary) rationalisation of the historic files, the implementation and more effective utilisation of SharePoint and OneDrive has begun. New laptops were purchased for Luke and Rachel to enable more efficient home working, Jayne and Annie will be receiving their new laptops soon.

During the various lockdowns endured during 2020, Luke has developed his video editing skills with the services and Daily Updates. He has also been instrumental in publishing the MailChimp email with the Daily Updates to enable us all to keep in touch with our The Minster and St Matt's family.

Thanks to a generous benefactor, new pew bibles have been purchased and we have been able to gift the better of our old bibles to BookAid to be sent to Christians overseas and have some made available for our Saturday Kitchen guests.

Eventbrite has enabled us to manage returns to coming to the 10 o'clock service at St Matt's including for Young People and Sunday Club attendees. Thankfully there had not been a requirement to share our bookings with NHS Test and Trace before Christmas, but it was good to know our system worked.

Our social media presence has increased, with postings on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as well as our YouTube content. Using the different media platforms at our disposal to engage with both our church community and those 'browsing' or exploring church. At Christmas we were able to highlight services online, in the building as well as other notices publicised – joining the Cheltenham Noticeboard Facebook group enabled publicity for the Christmas services.

The website is slowly being updated with amendments being made to the giving page, mission partners page, PCC and Safeguarding pages. There will in due course be a rebuild of the website, but meanwhile the text and links are being updated in preparation.

Finance, the DONATE platform is up and running, enabling gifts by text and updating the website page to increase the options available for people to gift financially. Donations for the Christmas Appeal as well as other gifts to the church have been used with this platform and it is hoped that when visitors can return to the Minster, they will be able to make use of this facility too. An efficient system of paying invoices and expenses has been developed as well as a more transparent audit trail for expenditure – although this will be further tested when normal can return!

Thanks are due to the many volunteers who help the Office, those who helped with the Parish Mailing in December, preparing the banking, on Reception early in the year and all the jobs which make for a smooth running of the churches and ministry. Thanks are extended to the practical team: to Sarah Brown for setting up the many and varied events we hold each week and to Jenny Aldridge for cleaning both our buildings.

*Rachel Hargreave*

## **Prayer and Worship**

### **10 O'clock**

The last year has presented some unique challenges for music ministry at St Matt's, the most obvious being that normal congregational singing has been illegal! It was shortly after the start of the first lockdown that I took over as Director of Music for St Matthew's and, as a result of these extraordinary circumstances, the role has been primarily about maintaining some form of sung worship through ever changing (and previously unimaginable!) restrictions.

Plans for a music vision day, musician training and various other activities have had to be put on hold, and the music generally produced in a different way. The whole of the music team have been fantastically flexible and willing to use their skills in different ways. Home recordings gave way to in-church recordings, a brief spell of almost-normal music (except without the main thing - congregational singing!) and now again (February 2021) we find ourselves back online. If there are positives, it has given some space and time to work on our organisational systems, and no doubt some of the technical skills gained by the sound and visuals team as well as musicians will prove useful in the longer term. It was also good that we were able to do some in-person services particularly around Christmas, with the Nativity services being a particular highlight!

I am hugely looking forward to the possibility of singing again our praises to God in the months ahead, as a church together, and I hope next year's report will be very different from this one!

*Richard Tilson*

## **11 O'clock**

Worship at 11 o'clock continued as in the previous year until the COVID pandemic closed the church for worship in March. A joint online service was produced with the 10 o'clock service at St Matthews. On June 22nd the Minster was able to open for private prayer. On July 19th a weekly service at 11 o'clock recommenced. This was a Communion service each week with a maximum capacity of 50 people due to the necessary social distancing restrictions. Each service was well attended with people from both the 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock congregations. Once St Matthews started to have services in the building the 11 o'clock returned to its usual pattern of two Communion services and two Morning Prayer services a month. These continued to be well attended within the restrictions on numbers. The new service book is ready to be printed once the church rebranding has been finalised. The building had to be closed again for November. A Carol Service was recorded in The Minster and shown through YouTube. Fellowship within the congregation has remained strong despite the restrictions placed upon us by the pandemic.

*Rev'd Clare Dyson associate vicar*

## **Cheltenham Minster Bell Ringers**

It is hard to remember what the beginning of the year was like in ringing circles. We held practices and rang on Sundays. I went on holiday at the beginning of March and came back the day before lockdown. And everything changed.

I wondered how I was going to keep the band together and then I read about a tower that was having virtual pub sessions. So I set up The Minster Arms. This takes place on Zoom (of course) and is every Thursday evening from 6.30 until 7.10 so people know exactly how long the meetings are going to be.

I am really pleased with the results. Our first meeting was on 26th March for a chat. I realised we would run out of things to say so I set a subject each week and we go through the register so everyone gets a chance to speak. Numbers have kept up well, with a high of 17 and lowest being seven but averaging about 12. Subjects started with 'things to do after lockdown' and 'places to travel to after lockdown' and have progressed through favourite books, music, jokes, animals, poems, bucket lists and also two quizzes. Anyone can suggest a subject and one of the best was 'favourite sandwich fillings'.

In July we started ringing on Sunday mornings for 15 minutes for the 11 o'clock service with an invited band wearing masks. As we have 12 bells we can ring six, and with couples we can ring some interesting permutations. Unfortunately this has had to stop due to Lockdown 3.

We all can't wait to get back to ringing all the bells for practices and Sundays but at least we are seeing each other regularly – even if it is virtual.

*Liz Coke, Tower Captain*

## **Flower arrangers at St Matthew's and The Minster**

Floral displays are usually maintained each week at the Minster, and for special celebrations at St Matthew's. This year has been somewhat different with most flower-arranging effort being focussed on displays for visitors to the Minster during times when the church was open for visitors during lockdown.

There were occasions for more creative flair at Harvest time and Christmas when tableaux illustrating relevant themes were placed around the Minster, supplemented with font, window sill and pedestal displays. The tableaux were designed and built by Rev'd Clare Dyson and her husband Alex, and were intended to inspire personal prayer and meditation whilst taking a walk around the inside of this historic building. Ann Attwood, Nickie Pettman, Debbie Chadwick, Kathy Williams and others have contributed to the displays at The Minster.

Several artificial flower displays were created for St Matthews to enhance the online broadcasts of Sunday services during lockdown, when the maintenance of real flowers would have been difficult.

*Nichola Pettman*

## **6.30 service**

The shape of the 6.30 service has clearly been defined in 2020 by the Coronavirus Pandemic. We started off the year with a successful 'Big Questions' series, looking at various 'hot topics', which attracted a mix of people from other services as well as those exploring the Christian faith. This was followed by another series called 'encounters with Jesus' – lifechanging encounters from the gospels. We included testimonies from congregation members and from others online to include contemporary encounters. We missed the last of this series due to the first lockdown, but after one week managed to move online to Zoom. We have also read through Philippians, the first half of Exodus, and had a series on praying the Psalms.

Our Zoom services enabled us to hold together the 6.30 community right until we met in person in September. We began broadcasting the livestream from the church building to Zoom in July Zoom, until we returned in-person in September (with a live stream for those unable to attend). We were keen to get back in-person as soon as possible in September, so that we could be easily accessible for students and young adults moving or returning to Cheltenham. At this point we had a number of university students, as well as sixth formers from Dean Close who joined our congregation and have stuck with us through the two lockdowns since then.

We have made some changes to the 6.30 service this year, opting for two 'hosts' each week, instead of a single service leader. This has helped give a much more relaxed feel to the service. These hosts also lead times of prayer throughout the service, especially during a regular 'response time' after the sermon. We have also merged the 'coffee team' and 'welcome team' to create a new 'hospitality team', recruiting a number of new team members. One of our hopes for the future is to build on this to create a welcoming 'family' culture, open to everyone, but especially a 'hub' for our older youth, students and young adults. Once the coronavirus restrictions are lifted we hope to re-introduce regular food after the service.

*Simon Phillips*

## **Sound and Visuals**

This has been a year of upgrades for St Matthew's audiovisual facilities, in three main areas.

First, we have invested in hardware and software to enable us to record and stream services both within and outside church. It has been interesting to see the convergence of the traditionally quite separate "visuals" and "sound" side of the technology as we strive to enable participation from as many people as possible. Thanks are particularly due to Simon Phillips for investing time in making live streaming and recording happen.

Second, we have upgraded both the projectors and screens in St Matthews to suit modern video content. "Widescreen" (as you undoubtedly have at home) has been standard for many years, and we finally have projector screens which are suitably sized. The new projectors are brighter and use LED light sources, and therefore use less energy, and do not require incandescent bulbs which gradually fade and require ladders to replace. The sharpness of the image is also now improved.

Third, thanks to a generous bequest, we have installed a brand new projector and screen in the Wesley Room, together with a high quality sound system. This will vastly simplify the setup for video and film presentation in the Wesley Room and, together with the new kitchen, means we will be able to expand what we can offer there. Special thanks to Oli and Clive for providing many hours of time and expertise which enabled us to make the bequest stretch a very long way (How far? You'll have to wait until you see and hear the new system!). We'd be interested in your ideas on internal or external groups who might wish to use the room with its improved facilities.

*Andrew Jack*

## **Prayer Ministry**

Prayer Ministry continues to be an integral part of our church's prayer life. It is an opportunity to seek prayer for oneself or on behalf of another. It is a short time of prayer, not in depth counselling. Confidentiality is paramount.

At the beginning of 2020, the Prayer Ministry Team were still able to offer this ministry in the usual way, at the end of the 10 am and 11 am services, in St Matthew's and The Minster respectively.

With the onset of the Covid pandemic, the ministry had to be paused following the closure of the churches.

Since then, the Prayer Ministers have been pleased to be able to offer ministry, by Zoom or telephone, as requested, via Clare Dyson.

As a team we look forward to the lifting of lockdown, and welcome the opening of the churches, when we can once again exercise prayer ministry in the customary way.

*Judith Wynn*

## **Discipleship**

### **Children's Ministry**

Our Children's Ministry has been through tricky but exciting times since Lockdown began in March. Normal ways of working and meeting together stopped abruptly (and were only resumed with a few of the children for a short period later in the year). However, within a few days we were up and running on YouTube with weekly sessions on Sundays for Sunday Club and a midweek session for Preschool Praise. At present, there has been nearly 50 sessions for each, consisting of Bible stories, songs, crafts and video clips. Viewings have remained steady as the families stay committed to church despite the difficulties of Covid living and sofa-church. Friends and family living further afield (including overseas) or those whose churches have not been able to produce material also joined in.

For this YouTube presence, thanks are due to Alex, Janion and Luke who provide the technical support and to Holly and Eric for their musical enthusiasm. The Sunday Club team have stepped up wherever possible but some have had a difficult year with increased work pressures, home schooling and wider family commitments. However, all have supported the work with love and prayer.

In addition to online content, we have sent out regular mailings of Bible story books, puzzles and crafts to maintain contact and build faith. Children and their families have engaged with the activities particularly the daily Bible time in the run-up to Easter. The results of activities such as the Easter Garden Challenge or creating Lego Bible story videos were brilliant and even engaged some adults from the Ten O'clock congregation. Preschoolers have been keen to send in photos of their crafts to be shared in sessions.

Bright Lights has been in abeyance although contact has been continued via email and on a one-to-one basis. The October Holiday Club was postponed along with the Light Party. However, Christmas was not cancelled although it was certainly different and pared back. Shoebox Sunday could not happen in its usual format and then our new Covid-secure plans were suddenly scuppered by the next Lockdown. Nevertheless, a few children were able to meet, very last minute, to do socially-distanced packing and 41 boxes were sent off via Operation Christmas Child.

Restrictions meant our annual Christmas Craft afternoon was far smaller and needed a rethink as it could not be a children only event with a large team. Instead, eleven families gathered to make festive crafts, including table decorations and nativity baubles, and explore the Christmas story. However, families celebrating by doing things together gave us pause for thought about the kind of activities we could offer post-Covid. Twelve Bright Lights' households also met for a Nativity story and songs around the tree. This, our only gathering since March, was a moving affair and everyone engaged in a more meaningful manner. We managed a Preschool Praise Christmas session in St. Matt's as well which again was a time of real engagement.

But how could we undertake outreach with the constraints on gathering? Two ideas came. Christmas craft and story bags were handed out to visitors to The Minster for their children or their neighbours. Then in December, it was realised that families with young children were gathering in Pittville park because there was nowhere else to meet. So Annie and some St. Matt's mothers distributed Christmas storybooks and invitations to the Nativity Services and the online Christmas Eve Children's Special. Good conversations were had and the gifts were appreciated, including an email from one person who was delighted to have been given something to counter Santa and the getting of stuff! A couple of families came to the Nativity and others may have watched online. We intend to build on this type of outreach next year.

There is no doubt this has been a tiring year. Face to face contact has been limited, relationships particularly with those on the fringe have inevitably suffered, but there is also much for which we can be thankful. Jesus has been proclaimed, families have not fallen away even though life has been tough, we have reached children over a wider geographical area, and ideas have been sown as to how we might operate in a post-Covid world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have been encouraged to keep going because helping our families to bring their children to know Jesus for themselves, and reaching out to those families who do not yet know Jesus, is one of the best things we can do in or out of a pandemic season.

*Jayne Seward*

## **Youth Ministry**

Over this last year in and out of lockdown, the youth ministry has been very changeable, both in terms of what we have provided and how the youth have engaged. The year has been challenging for us all but especially so for teenagers, including the absence of summer camps, usually a highlight. Earlier in the year we were sharing teaching via YouTube and Instagram, but this had limited engagement, mostly encouraging adults, which was great but not the aim! We also tried zoom socials with a mixed response, while zoom Bible study was more consistently reaching young people and creating the space to grow together in faith. In the summer we were allowed to meet again in the church building, which gave opportunity for lots of fun on Fridays, with socially distanced games and Bible study. And on Sundays there was a big uptake across all ages of the youth for the 10 o'clock and 6.30 services, with a hangout after the 6.30 for the older youth. A few of the older young people have also been key in leading the 6.30 music, which has been such a blessing to the church in being able to continue using their gifts in this way.

Other changes this year have been in the youth team, with Simon Phillips overseeing the youth ministry during my maternity leave, Joanne von Bergen working with us as Assistant Youth Worker from October to January

2021, and my return to work part-time in January. It was such a blessing to have Joanne on the team, even for only a short time; she ably used her gifts in Bible knowledge and teaching, and her compassion for the young people shone in the way she quickly built relationships with them. She is missed but we are grateful for the way God provided through her for those four months. In all of the changes over the year, God has provided, especially in the great team of committed, generous volunteers who have continued to support, invest in, and pray for the young people: big thanks to Tom Wilding (who was offered a Youth Minister job at Burford church), Dan Wright, Max Dancer, Clareece and Jay Nevill, Becca Coulton and Louise Brown.

*Annie Phillips, Youth Minister*

## **Central Small Groups**

Like the rest of the small groups, Central Small Groups has moved online during the pandemic. We have spent much of our time in 2020 reading through Exodus (alongside the 6.30 service), as well as the Sermon on the Mount. We also completed two courses, 'God's Big Picture' and the Alpha Course (as a refresher, as well as to encourage our young adults to invite their friends on subsequent Alpha Courses). We have a growing number of students and young adults, and as we consider moving back to in-person meeting we will be reviewing how we can best serve them in providing small groups and opportunities for community.

*Simon Phillips*

## **Pastoral activities**

The COVID pandemic and the restrictions it has brought have meant pastoral care has been done in a very different way this year. Small Group leaders had care of those in their groups and I had care of the Small Group leaders. 90 people in the church family were identified as not in a Small Group. They were put into groups and allocated to volunteers who were tasked with phoning the members of their group weekly. The phone calls settled into different patterns that worked for the group members. The pastoral team continued to stay in contact with those they look after. We had regular team meetings via zoom. A daily email was sent until August when it went to three times a week. This held church family news and prayer requests. Those not on email were called daily by a member of the pastoral team. And a hard copy of the contents of the email was sent to them weekly. When restrictions have allowed pastoral care has been given by visits to people's gardens and walks in local parks. There has been opportunity to meet through zoom coffee after the 10 o'clock Sunday service. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the care and support they have shown within the church family and the messages of appreciation and support the pastoral team have received.

The way prayer requests are received has changed during the pandemic. These now come to me either via email, text/phone or letter. Prayer requests are then made known to the church family through the daily update emails. We continue to have people would will pray confidentially if that is preferred. We ask that regular updates are sent to me. Thank you to the team of people who faithfully managed the prayer requests for many years.

*Rev'd Clare Dyson associate vicar*

## **Mission**

### **Mission partners working group**

#### **Pandemic responses**

Details of our Mission Partners are available on the church's website, with the same information also available as a leaflet. The latter is available to be downloaded or a printed copy supplied by the church office upon request.

Two of the families we support relocated during 2020. Dan and Narineh returned to the UK and are now living in the Bournemouth area. Dan is leading training for Wycliffe Bible Translators based at Moorlands College, Christchurch as well as continuing in translation consultancy for several projects in west Asia.

Mat and Katy moved to Kenya in the autumn following several delays caused by the disruption to international travel. Mat is now involved in regional training for indigenous peoples and Katy is involved in medical training.

During 2020 two new Mission Partners were introduced, namely A Rocha and Wanyeki and Mary Mahiaini. Further information on these is available from James Hargreave and Richard Combs respectively.

We anticipate further changes during 2021. One is known, since Mike and Helen Morrissey announced during 2020 that they would be leaving their work in Senegal in April 2021. They are returning to the UK and will be based in the Exeter area where Helen has secured employment.

At the end of 2020, ten Mission Partners received regular financial support from the church.

*Ian Davies*

### **Christmas Appeal**

This year we raised money for one of our local mission partners, Youth For Christ Gloucestershire, and specifically their new Jobseeker Mentoring Scheme. YFCG support youth work in churches, schools and more widely in the community. With unemployment rapidly rising amongst young people, finding work is currently a major issue for them. In the scheme YFCG work alongside young people one to one, helping them with the process of applying for jobs, setting lifegoals and boosting their sense of identity. The hope is not only to get them into work but also for them to encounter Jesus.

*Rod Pellereau*

### **Saturday Kitchen**

It was during lockdown that the idea for Saturday Kitchen came into fruition. As it turned out, there had been a few of us thinking about and praying for a way of serving the local community and, in his perfect timing, God brought us together and enabled us to set up lunches for the homeless and vulnerable on a Saturday. We were keen not to duplicate what was already on offer in the town but rather to complement what was already happening and enable us to work alongside other churches and organisations such as King's Table and Open Door.

With Matthew 25:35-36 as our strapline, the aim of Saturday Kitchen is to express God's love for those in need and it quickly became clear that there were many members of the church family who had a heart for this work. It was immensely encouraging to see God bless the work with offers of volunteers, food items and money.

The project started in May and there are now well over 40 people in the teams that provide a hot meal, a sweet snack and tea and coffee to the guests who come for takeaway on a weekly basis. There are about 30 regulars as well as others and it has been a privilege and a joy to begin to get to know them and to feel that we are helping in some small way.

Enormous thanks must be given for the army of Saturday Kitchen volunteers – those who cook and wash up, those who host and chat to the guests, those who provide tray bakes and those who take care of the administrative tasks. It is wonderful to see the church family coming together in this way and serving the vulnerable in our community. We are so thankful for the Lord's provision in numerous ways and excited for where God will take us next as we plan for a return to the church building.

*Paul Chesworth/Clare Salisbury*

## Community

### **CAMEO – Come And Meet Each Other**

A group, with a Christian flavour, which is most likely to appeal to seniors. The regular activities include speakers, musical entertainment, Book Club discussions, watching films and playing board games.



CAMEO started 2020 with a Gala Christmas Lunch before the kitchen was closed for refurbishing. For a couple of months we continued to meet with reduced facilities, but still managed to run our normal programme and provide a sandwich lunch every week. However, it all came to a sudden end in mid-March with the COVID lockdown.

For the remainder of 2020 we were unable to meet inside but in the summer we took the benefit of the warm sunny weather to meet outside the Minster in socially distanced groups of 6 for coffee and chat.

Also, during lockdown, we have kept in touch with CAMEO members by sending out monthly newsletters, chatting to them on the phone and treating them to goody boxes - a Cream Tea, a Harvest Supper and a Christmas Variety Box.



Recently CAMEO and the Barnabas group decided to amalgamate and several Barnabas members have been welcomed into CAMEO. When we are able to meet again we will have a monthly Barnabas style meeting in the CAMEO programme.

*Valerie Waller*

### **Street Pastors**

Street Pastors are trained volunteers from local churches who carry out a ministry of 'caring, listening and helping' on the streets at night. With a significant number of night clubs in the town centre, Cheltenham has much need for its scheme which has been operating for eleven years. Normally a team is on duty every Friday and Saturday night between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. Several members of St Matthew's have served as Street Pastors over the years.

During 2020 night clubs were closed and patrols not operating during lockdown. A limited service with shorter hours operated when pubs and restaurants were open and this was much appreciated by the council and police.

Much importance is attached to prayer. Each team is supported by its own prayer pastors and under normal circumstances a monthly prayer meeting in support of Street Pastors is held at St Matthew's. During the period of Covid restrictions material to encourage prayer has been sent out each month even though the group has not been able to meet as usual. Also, on three occasions members of the prayer group met to pray in Pittville Park!

Some street pastors have resigned for health and other reasons and unfortunately two died during the year. The possible resumption of the normal night time economy during 2021 may present a challenge with the reduced number of volunteers and new recruits will be needed. Some training activities have continued online during lockdown and new volunteers are always welcome. Finances are in a good position and thought to be secure into 2023.

*David Hunt*

## **Minster Singers 2020**

The Minster Singers held their annual Minster Birthday concert on 15<sup>th</sup> February. We had a joyful time, sharing some new music that we had learned and, once again, benefited from having Holly as soloist. Like many other activities, things came to an abrupt end immediately after that and we could not effectively meet because of the ongoing restrictions. Although we considered what we could do in the meantime, it seemed most appropriate not to try to do anything virtually. The reason for this was that our activity benefits from physically being in the same room. We encourage each other and aim to blend the sounds naturally. It would have been particularly hard for us to do this via technological means, so sadly there has been nothing that we could do, apart from keep in touch a bit and share the music videos of others.

Many people are keen to return to singing activities but it looks very much as though that will not be possible until after the final stage of relaxation has been completed. When we come back, there will be new music and arrangements to tackle and we're looking forward to being able to continue to provide a friendly musical experience and meaningful concerts in the Minster.

*Paul Collacott*

## **Finance**

### **Treasurer's Report on 2020 Financial Year (2019 figures in brackets)**

#### **OPERATING PERFORMANCE**

**Income** (see page 10 and from page 15 of annual report)

The Pandemic decimated our income from collections and lettings. Lettings and other income totalled only £6k (£27k). Collection's income was £1k (£20k).

Thankfully the planned giving was not too damaged and a generous individual gift of £20k helped ensure that overall, our income was not too badly affected.

Total income was £423,596 (£441,006)

**Expenditure** (see page 10 and from page 17 of annual report)

Overall expenditure was £410k (£403k)

Mission giving increased to £47k (£21k) Staffing costs overall were £10k higher and Parish share slightly higher at £136k.

Some overheads were less because of closure but not as much as you would hope, Standing charges are there for a reason!

We saw savings in building costs £8k (£24k) and building overheads £35k (£45k).

Depreciation jumped from £9k to £17k because of the investment in to the fixed assets. Kitchen £42k and various IT/Audio visual projects £17k)

**Overall, there was net surplus of £13k.**

**BALANCE SHEET** (Page 11 and from page 20 of the annual report)

You can see the investment into the fixed assets on page 20 with the kitchen project £45k (Fixtures and Fittings and the AV project (Office Equipment £14k added).

With the above spending cash balances decreased from £107k to £66k. The PCC also has at its disposal funds of £58k (£54k).

### **FINANCIAL CONTROL**

We successfully upgraded the Accounting system and moved it and all finance files to the safety of the cloud, with the accounting system hosted and managed now by Sage plc. themselves and the finance folders held in the Microsoft SharePoint environment.

We have improved oversight, with the finance folders being accessible fully by the three-way team of the Operations Manager, Qualified Accountant and Treasurer.

*Adrian Bowcher*