

October 2020

Dear Friends

It seems so out of sorts to be delivering my report this late in the year and 2019 seems such a long time ago; who could have known so much could have happened in the intervening period. Nonetheless let me attempt some kind of recap because we have still been so abundantly blessed as a community of followers .

2019 marked the first full year of the return of our buildings and it was gratifying to see the take-up of new and existing hirers making good use of our wonderful new facilities. Among them we welcomed Suresh and Cynthia with their Tamil Christian Group and Guitar school; a weekly CA support group, Slimming World, Weight Watchers, Mothers Union and Hope Cafe there were others who came and sadly went.

Our uniform groups absolutely flourished in the new halls with all the space they could want – except of course for the perennial problem of storage – which all our groups wanted and of which we quickly ran short in spite of all the new cupboards.

2019 also saw the flourishing of our Thursday evening Home Study Group as we covered Alpha, Christianity Explored, Discipleship Explored and Life Explored all this before C19 brought us to a halt – but there are plans to resume in the very near future.

Last year we were successful in bidding for a further grant of £10k from the National Lottery Awards for All Scheme and we were able to put that to good use in the formation of the new border and lawn to the rear of the church which is intended to provide an additional outdoor facility for our social events and for our community groups.

The PCC met monthly except for August and I'm grateful for all their support, in particular Jennifer O' Rourke who did some sterling work in securing a range of superb prizes for our Christmas and Summer Fairs. In January of 2020 the PCC along with some invited guests journeyed over to St John's Hartley Wintney for a very productive PCC Vision Day, some of the outcomes of which we are still working through.

This year we will see five members stepping down in Marilyn (PCC secretary) Kate, Clare, Jennifer and Charlie but being ably replaced by Jeanette, Denise, Lesley and big Steve. They will be joining Mark, Steve Wade, Chuka, Sandra and John Athanasiou. I should also make special mention of our church wardens Kelvin and Marion who have been so supportive of me personally in my ministry.

Throughout 2019 and into 2020 Amanda and Kelvin have once again proved invaluable in managing our administration and finance and I am very grateful to both of them for all their continuing hard work on behalf of all of us. It's an exciting prospect for the year ahead.

Our social occasions once again proved to be successful community events along with a magnificent Harvest Supper with live entertainment for the first time, a Maundy Thursday

Supper and Easter Breakfast which were very well attended as was the delicious Christmas Dinner.

In the community I have continued to serve as Chaplain to the Royal Air Forces Association and 443 Squadron ATC. I have also conducted around 40 School Assemblies and supported other events at the schools and in our wider community. There have been occasions of great joy as I took weddings and baptisms in St Gabriel's and other churches. There have also been times of sadness as we said farewell to a number of our congregation: Pete and Margaret Johnson, Noel, Maureen Score, Stan Emerton and most recently Angie Athanasiou and Rose. They are all greatly missed, may the rest in peace and rise in glory.

Our worship congregation has continued to grow steadily and prior to C19 we were averaging between 60-80 at the main service on a Sunday morning with an active children's church. The worship has been well supported and I am grateful to Revds Bob and Mandy Bowskill and Revd. Denis and Priscilla Smith for their amazing contributions and support along the way. Our worship team has also grown in stature and competence as we have explored so many new songs. Thank you so much to Emma, Mark and Karan, Kath and Sandra for your commitment and the ways you have helped us worship God.

We had an amazing Confirmation service in the spring of 2019 with Bishop David in attendance and again in December of 2019 a joint service with Pastors Joe and Marcy's group along with representatives from other Christian groups in our community. Sadly, after being really excited at the prospect of the evenings worship I was unable to attend as I had to travel to Manchester for my brothers' funeral.

I must conclude by saying a few words about the future. 2021 will see our retirement in July and C19 is presenting some serious challenges for the Church of England, for our Diocese and for our Deanery. I have had a number of conversations with both Bishop David and our Area Dean. Both assure me there is a plan in place. St Gabriel's is highly regarded at diocesan level and is valued as a mission centred church and a potential model for other churches. We are perceived as successful in our community outreach, our diversity and worship style. These conversations give me great confidence that even after Marilyn and I leave you St Gabriel's will continue to flourish and to grow.

With our love and our prayers

Arthur.

Vicar of Popley with Limes Park and Rooksdown, St Gabriel's