

Vicar's Report for the 2020 APCM

The last 18 months have been dominated by three factors. First, the coronavirus pandemic and the associated restrictions have changed our church life significantly since March 2020. Secondly, the change in clergy provision for St Peter's is having a major impact on the shape of ministry. But, thirdly, and most fundamentally, the faithfulness of our God has been shown time and time again.

The initial response to the lockdown restrictions from March onwards involved a significant amount of online ministry, as well as a reshaping of our pastoral and practical church support. By and large, this was well received and enabled the church's ministry to adapt quickly and meet the needs both of the church congregation and of those in the wider community we were enabled to serve. The recovery phase is now well underway, although it is clear that this will take much longer than initially expected. We expect to be living with the restrictions until well into next year, and some of the longer term implications may stay with us for a generation.

Meanwhile, there have been significant changes in the clergy provision for our church. Revd Aella Gage has now moved away from Colchester, and left with our thanks and very best wishes for his future. It is unlikely that the PCC will be in a position to employ a full-time Associate Minister to replace Aella for the foreseeable future, both because of the cost and the new diocesan policies, and therefore the PCC has had to consider how best to reshape church life for the next few years. Meanwhile, the tensions at St Botolph's came to a head after the St Peter's PCC passed a resolution under the house of Bishops declaration, which ultimately has led to the breakup of the town centre benefice and a new role for the vicar.

Most significantly, however, we are able to look back after the last 18 months and give thanks to God for so many answered prayers and signs of his grace. The fundraising for the redevelopment project continues to move forward, our other financial needs have been met by the generosity of God's people, we have seen the church continue to grow in both numbers and maturity, and we are thankful for the way in which people's gifts and talents have been able to be used in the service of the gospel. For this, and for so much else, we are grateful to the God from whom all good things come.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that the immediate future for St Peter's is a little more stable than has been the case for several years. However, the wider picture of the Church of England is becoming more concerning — and this in turn may well affect our church over the coming months. The financial situation for the Deanery of Colchester and the Diocese of Chelmsford was worrying even before the impact of the coronavirus was felt, the pastoral implications of the *Living in Love and Faith* report will start to be felt from next month onwards, and we await news of the appointment of the next diocesan Bishop at some point in the coming months.

Closer to home though, I would like to take this opportunity to thank a number of people. It was good to be able to say something of a proper farewell to Aella in August, but I would like to put my thanks to him on record for all he did during his time with us. Meanwhile, this year's PCC has served an extra-long period of time, and I am grateful for their wisdom and support through a very tricky period of ministry. As has so often been the case, Bernice has been a fantastic support in the parish office, and I am delighted that the PCC have supported giving her additional responsibilities for the coming years. Most significantly, however, I am very grateful indeed to Dan and Wendy for six years of service as churchwardens and for their support for me in particular — it has at times been very hard for both of them, but they have served faithfully and sacrificially in the service of our church, the gospel, and our Lord.

It is even harder than usual to look ahead and make predictions about the churches life. In many senses, our priorities are unchanged: we look to preach the good news, to serve those in need, and to find ways to be faithful and fruitful in an increasingly hostile culture. As much as ever, we need the Lord to be at work, and so I hope you will join with me in a closing prayer: *Lord, teach us to be generous; teach us to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil, and not to seek for rest; to labour, and not to ask for reward — save that of knowing what we do your will. Amen.*