

## Vicar's Report 2019

It is true to say that 2019 is a long time ago, and it feels even more so because this Annual Meeting has been delayed by six months because of the COVID-19 lockdown. Reflecting on where we are now and looking back, with 2019 being my second full year as Vicar here, it feels like we are in a giant game of snakes and ladders. We've been edging our way up a number of ladders, but unavoidably with the onset of lockdown it feels we have landed on a big snake and we've slid back quite a way. But thinking more positively, it's an opportunity to pause and consider how we move forward. There has been talk in recent weeks of a mini lockdown acting as a circuit-break to stem the rate of infection. In a similar fashion, we have been given the option of a circuit break in the life of the church - an imposed vantage point from which we can look back and look forward, but with less pressure to carry things on as they were before unless they are fit for purpose and effectively enable the mission and ministry in real terms.

But of course that's the vantage point now - the 2020 vision if you like. The Annual Report for 2019 shows a steady development in the life of St Saviour's. Maybe nothing earth-shattering, but a steady growth none the less. I'm grateful to all who have contributed to the many and varied activities which make up our life together and our service to the parish. It's a bit of a cliché, but it really is like the proverbial iceberg: visible above, there are a few familiar faces and personalities, but under the surface and usually out of sight there is a vast body of people each doing their little bit, practically, financially and spiritually to keep the show on the road. Thank you to absolutely everyone.

Thanks are due especially to our churchwardens, **Diane** and **Libby**; to **Imogen**, who has made significant progress in establishing the Parish Administrator's post whilst continuing her training for reader ministry, and to **Matt** and **Jeremy** for managing the financial life of the church. In 2019 we were pleased to welcome **Fr Tony Halton** as Assistant Priest alongside his role as CEO of a major London Hospital. Thanks also to **Fr Andrew Ferrar** who continues as Associate Priest, and **Fr Ian Pidoux** who is with us regularly at the altar; to **Michael Elves** who celebrated 50 years in reader ministry, and **John Winter** who announced his retirement at the end of the year. We are immensely grateful to John for over a decade of service to St Saviour's as Director of Music, and then for the most part of 2019 as organist. Thanks also to **Nicholas Hare** for stepping up and expanding the choir's repertoire and its contribution to our weekly worship, and to **Nonita Palmer** who handed on the Tots Time baton after many years as the group's leader and guide.

It has been a real gift to St Saviour's to be a trusted place where a number of students have been sent for placement experience as they prepare for ordination and reader ministry. **Corniel Quak** has completed his first year with us as part of his theological training for ministry at Cuddesdon Theological College where he studies Monday to Wednesday in preparation for ordination in 2021. So we have him for another year at least, but we are already grateful for the energy, gifts and experience he has brought to us - and also of course Avah & Amarah who have taken part in services, and Families at Four.

I am hoping to be able to confirm the appointment of a full-time assistant curate to serve as deacon in the parish from June 2021. You'll be pleased to know that this makes no difference to the Parish Share and the only cost to the parish is in covering expenses of office. Full details will be given when the appointment is confirmed, but I've been advised by the diocese to say no more publicly at this stage until the necessary checks have been completed and a formal offer made by the Bishop. So watch this space....

Two important community-facing projects progressed significantly through the year:

**The War Memorial Restoration Project** secured sufficient funding through personal donations to attract match-funding from the War Memorials Trust and to make a faculty application viable. I'm very grateful to Fr Andrew for his patient perseverance in negotiating the many hurdles and hoops in order to get the final specification agreed.

**The Defibrillator Appeal** attracted generous donations from a number of local community groups (Rotary etc) as well as individual contributions. Thanks to Libby for heading things up and to Cllr Geoff Harrison for bringing the appeal to the wider community.

Further developments in our worship and outreach included:

**The Sound System** being upgraded having been limited and unreliable for some time, with thanks to Jeremy Harding and Colin Innes-Hopkins for their sage advice and also to anonymous donors who made the project possible.

**Families at Four** was launched in May 2019 as a new congregation for young families on the second Sunday of each month, recognising that for various reasons we were unable to bridge the gap with the 9.30am Parish Mass and Junior Church. With a usual monthly attendance of 25-30 (10-15 being children, the rest parents and helpers) an informal programme of games, activities and bible stories ends with a simple tea time meal for those who are able to stay. An important part of FaF (as it has become known) is that it is an end in itself, rather than a way of feeding families into 'proper church'. Thanks to Laura Summers and 'The Faffers' for their vision and energy in making it happen.

**Rainbows and Guides** have returned to the hall after an absence of some years, and it is hoped that the **Brownies** may be accommodated in 2020. We have discussed the possibility of St Saviour's becoming their sponsoring group and also plan to establish a parade service a few times a year in which they can take a lead as well as presenting their standards.

**The 2nd Beer & Fizz Festival** attracted over 1,000 visitors and raised funds for the church and also our chosen charity, Earthworks. A number of local pubs and companies sponsored the event, and Empty Events provided a full programme of live music from local bands and artists without charge, and One Big Company again donated around £5,000 worth of design and artwork for the festival publicity.

**Harvest Festival** was celebrated on a grand scale with a day long event pioneered by Josh Pollard and his team, which involved serving around 60 ploughmans lunches, live music and poetry, stalls and a mini beer festival and ending with Beer & Hymns. The Harvest Service drew a slightly larger congregation than usual, and we were able to send a very full car-load of donated goods to FEED, the foodbank at The Vineyard Church.

On a personal note, it was wonderful to be able to celebrate my 25th anniversary of priesting in June (with a cast of thousands!) and subsequently to receive the bespoke and beautifully written icon of 'St Alban and the Magpie' as well as a generous cheque, much of which was spent on an original oil painting of Cley in Norfolk, and a new vestry bell for the north aisle in Church. Many thanks to all who made it such a special celebration.

With apologies for any omissions, and sincere gratitude for all who give their time, energy, money and prayers to our life together.

*Fr Richard Watson, Vicar  
October 2020*

## A COVID-19 Postscript

Although beyond the scope of this report it seems foolish not to say something publicly about the lockdown and the impact on St Saviour's - and indeed the impact we have been able to have on the community in various ways.

- With the church building standing empty and unused we were able (with various legal permissions and a fast-tracked faculty!) to make provision for an overflow Chapel of Rest for **Phillips Funeral Directors** which proved invaluable at the height of the first wave of the pandemic. Although the chairs have been put back now we are remaining on standby in case the space is needed again in the coming months. Jason Downing, the General Manager at Phillips in St Albans has expressed his profound gratitude to the PCC and also to the Bishop (who has passed on his thanks to the parish as well). It has been an important part of our care for the locally bereaved and those who have died, and my thanks to all who helped put arrangements in place quickly and effectively.
- With the restrictions of social distancing, the city's main homeless charities **Open Door and Centre 33** were unable to provide food for those they usually cared for. Some were still sleeping on the streets but many had been placed in hostels and shelters, but still needed a hot meal. Again we were able to respond quickly and provided the free use of our kitchen facilities in the hall to enable the charities to support some of those most vulnerable. Their trustees and volunteers have also been tremendously grateful for the practical support St Saviour's was able to provide.
- Cllr Geoff Harrison's links with **Morrisons** supermarket have meant we have been able to operate a mini-foodbank with tinned and packet food to help those who were shielding or low on income, mainly through congregational contacts or through the schools. Every now and then the 'surplus' goods have been passed on to Mthr Sally Jones and the parish of St Mary Magdalene, Munster Square for distribution through their Church School.
- Sunday worship was transferred to **Facebook and YouTube** from 15 March - thanks to those who lead Night Prayer daily and all who take time to record for Sunday's online service (today was the first time in 6 months we had a proper break!). We have logged over 30,000 views in that time and although the data isn't reliable to interpret (for instance we can't tell who watches it all, or skips over bits!) it's enough for us to be confident that the time spent doing it is worthwhile. For those of you wondering and maybe worrying about how much all this is costing to put on, I can assure the grand total is about seventy quid.

My thanks to everyone who has been rallying round and keeping an eye on others within their own network of friends and neighbours, and within the congregation. We are by no means out of this particular wood and at the moment I can't be absolutely sure of what our Christmas worship will look like, but we are planning to do as much as we safely can.