

St James' by the Park



Annual Parish Church Meeting Monday 4th April 2022 7.30pm

Agenda

1. Worship and prayer
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of last year's meeting Pages 1-5
4. Formally required reports Pages 5-9
5. Election of church wardens
6. Election of PCC members
7. Financial report Pages 10-11
8. Appointment of independent examiner
9. Updates on buildings
10. Questions so far
11. Dan's reflections and group work
12. Further questions
13. Other brief updates
14. Prayer

St James' by the Park – identity, purpose, values, vision

Who are we (identity)?

We are ordinary people following the extraordinary Jesus together

Why do we exist (purpose)?

We exist to Go deeper (with God), Grow closer (to each other), Reach further (with the good news of Jesus).

How should we act (values)?

In the light of the pandemic, this is under review.

Where are we going (vision)?

In the light of the pandemic, this is under review.

What is God calling us to focus on (our mission focus areas)?

A few years ago, we discerned that God was calling us to focus on:

Families and children; teenagers; older people; the environment; inter-cultural relations; financial hardship; mental wellbeing.

In the light of the pandemic, some of this might change.

PARISH OF SHIRLEY, SOUTHAMPTON MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS MINUTES OF ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

Monday 26th April 2021 by Zoom

1. REFLECTION AND PRAYER

The meeting started with a time of reflection and prayer led by Simon Clift.

2. PRESENT:

80 people in total attended the meeting; 76 people were on the Electoral Roll. 71 people attended by Zoom and 9 by YouTube.

3. APOLOGIES:

Helen Thaxter.

4. MINUTES OF THE 2020 MEETING OF PARISHIONERS AND THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING:

Dan drew people's attention to the minutes of last year's meeting which were within the full report and agenda available from the APCM page on our church website.

Nick Smith proposed that the minutes of the 2020 meeting were approved; this was seconded by Simon Clift and voted to be accepted by the meeting. The minutes will be signed by Dan Clark as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

5. FORMALLY REQUIRED REPORTS

Dan drew people's attention to the formally required reports in the APCM full report.

6. THANK YOU TO SIMON

Dan gave a huge personal and public thank you to Simon Clift for the incredible job he's done as Church warden and serving a second stint. Dan has found his leadership and support invaluable during this time. The support and encouragement he's given to Dan and the wise leadership of the church has been invaluable. In addition to Simon's duties here at St. James, he's also a member of General Synod, which takes up a good deal of his time. Dan sent Simon a restaurant voucher as a thank you.

7. ELECTION OF CHURCH WARDENS

There were two nominations for Churchwarden:

Jacqui Dowdell, who has already served as churchwarden for 5 years and continued to serve on the strategy group since then.

Nick Smith who has been a really helpful member of PCC over the last couple of years.

This year the two nominations we have are as follows:

Jacqui Dowdell was proposed by Lynne Lockwood and seconded by Patricia Yandell.

Nick Smith was proposed by Victor Humphrey and seconded by Simon Clift.

Jacqui and Nick were duly elected.

8. ELECTION OF PCC MEMBERS:

There are three people standing down from the PCC; Jayne Crispin and Sheree Drury who have finished their three year term and to Julz Evans who stepped down during the year due to ill health. Dan offered a big thank you to all three for their really helpful contributions during their time on PCC.

There were five PCC vacancies in total and five nominations were received as follows:

Nichola Caveney, nominated by Simon Clift and seconded by Theresa Bowen.

Marie Gray, nominated by Caroline Wilkins and seconded by Helen Taylor.

Tracy King, nominated by Simon Clift and seconded by Lena Phillips.

Geoffrey Payne, nominated by Simon Clift and seconded by Bob Petch.

Rachael Young, nominated by Peter Evans and seconded by Hannah McPhillimy.

All five were duly elected.

Dan hoped the PCC would be able to co-opt a youth rep once the exam season was over.

Georgia Condell prayed to give thanks for all those stepping down and to pray for those just starting.

9. FINANCIAL REPORT (YEAR ENDED 31/12/20).

The PCC had already looked at the accounts and were happy to propose that they should be accepted as true and accurate record of our 2020 finances.

Dan highlighted the following points:

2019 finances were exceptional; we'd cut back on expenditure as we were anticipating a decrease in income but we ended up with an increase in income so we ended the year with a £50,000 surplus.

2020 finances weren't significantly impacted by covid and we were very grateful to God for the giving of the congregation holding up over the last year.

The expenditure for 2020 was slightly down, partly due to the covid pandemic and partly due some of the planned activities being delayed such as the appointment of an assistant leader. This all meant that we ended up with another surplus of £23,000 for 2020. For both years the PCC has given away 10% of the surplus as a thank offering, which was in addition to our regular giving to our mission partners. The PCC had agreed to split the remaining surplus 50:50 between building and staff costs.

The PCC is aware that they haven't been keeping pace with some of the regular maintenance that should have taken place. They are hoping to appoint a building maintenance manager very soon who will be able to start on the building maintenance that needs doing; having money in the bank will help that. We want to get the buildings to a place where they're helpful for mission rather than a hindrance.

Some of the money allocated for staff costs has enabled us to appoint Paul as assistant leader for an initial term of 18 months and that funding is guaranteed. It may be possible to extend that; his appointment has been a real blessing.

Dan offered a huge thank you to David Phillips for overseeing the finances and working extremely hard on the annual accounts and also to Claire Clements for processing thousands of transactions each year; to Theresa Bowen for processing a huge number of payments and receipts and to Catherine Humphrey who manages the payroll

Tamsyn Langton proposed that the accounts were accepted, this was seconded by Aimee Whitfield and accepted by the meeting as a true record of our accounts.

Dan encouraged people to send any questions people had to David Phillips.

10. ELECTION OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER:

David Phillips proposed that we appoint Abraham and Dobell again for 2021, this was seconded by Bob Petch and agreed by the meeting, so Abraham and Dobell were appointed as our independent examiner for 2021.

11. PRAYER:

A time was spent praying in small groups in breakout rooms.

12. QUESTIONS:

i) When we be able to do catering again and have coffee back in Church?

This was not known; Dan explained that we're going fairly cautiously with how we apply the government and church rules, but he acknowledged that hospitality is so important and looked forward to the day when we can do more.

ii) What is Josh's status going to be if new post is for a children, youth and families?

Josh will carry on as youth team leader; the new person will be a children's team leader but they will work together to develop a whole ministry focus. They will have a joint responsibility to develop and deliver a strategy for the children, youth and families ministry and work as a team. One of the goals will be to encourage a smoother transition from children to youth work.

iii) Will the money from the sale of St John's be ring-fenced for only capital works and what environmental goals were the architects given?

The money from the sale of St. John's will almost certainly just be used for capital works to go towards the redevelopment of the remaining buildings. It is a bit too early to talk about environmental goals but architects have been told that we are an Eco church and that will be an important factor in the eventual scheme. Decisions about things like solar panels, heat pumps and insulation will come at a later stage and will depend a bit on how much money the PCC has to spend.

iv) The Guides and Rainbows have equipment stored at St, John's; when will they be able to clear out their cupboards?

This can be done any time and they should liaise with Theresa to arrange this.

v) I'm really encouraged by our digital presence, partnerships and much more open diverse and eco relationships. How does St. James fit into the Diocesan strategy?

The Diocese have had to do quite a major re-think in light of the pandemic, particularly in terms of staffing and clergy numbers. Dan is part of a small group looking at how Anglican clergy are allocated across Southampton. Southampton is in a good place in that they don't need to make any clergy cuts but there are some parishes that may get joined up.

In terms of the Diocesan strategy there are things to do with passionate personal spirituality, authentic discipleship and stewardship which ties in with what we're trying to do. There is also pioneering communities which we've been trying to explore; we need to keep trying with that to reinvent church for the coming generations.

Not everything that comes from the Diocese sits comfortably with us but we do try to take on board what feels good and appropriate for us at a local level.

vi) At the moment there are 2 youth groups, years 6, 7, 8 and 9+, is this planned to change?

There are no immediate plans to change anything at the moment. Future plans will need to wait until the new person is in post.

vii). How are we becoming a greener church generally?

Things have taken a bit of a back seat with the covid crises, but a document was given to the PCC in February. The Church of England has set the target of being net carbon neutral by 2030; the environmental group encouraged the PCC to adopt the same sort of wording in its outlook, to see what would be required to do that by 2030. As part of that we're also setting up a carbon offsetting scheme with Enable Busoga. We will be hearing a lot more about this in the next few months especially with what is happening with the COP26 conference in Glasgow later in the year. The PCC has also agreed to have an environment focused Sunday before COP 26'

12. CLOSE OF MEETING:

Dan ended the meeting by praying.

2021 Formally Required Reports

Electoral Roll

There were 201 members in 2021. The changes in 2022 are as follows:

No longer members: 4; new members: 7

Therefore the total number of members enrolled for 2022 is 204

No. of members living IN the Parish – 133

No. of members OUT of the Parish - 71

Theresa Bowen

Church Wardens' Report

We began the year by getting to know each other and learning how we would work as a team alongside Dan. It is quite unusual to have 2 wardens begin at the same time but

we found that with Nick's recent role on PCC and the Buildings Development Group and Jacqui's previous experience as warden, we quickly got up to speed. We have discovered that we both bring very different but complementary skills to our roles and hope that this is of benefit to Dan as well as the wider church.

Nick has taken the lead, along with the Buildings Development Group, to make significant progress in shaping how we use our buildings in the future. The sale (subject to contract) of St Johns' is a large piece of this puzzle but there are still many unknowns around what changes we make to the Parish Hall and St James'. (See separate report)

Jacqui, along with Georgia, has been trying to discern how we encourage a shift in our whole culture that enables a community of disciple making disciples. We feel strongly that this is not just a topic for a season but hope that we will see long term fruit as we each learn to apprentice alongside Jesus and become more like him. We have begun this through leading some sessions at PCC meetings and through the sermon series in the autumn and spring terms. PCC have begun a process of looking afresh at our church values and we feel that a strong call to be disciples will be embedded in this.

As a leadership team we are aware of the profound impacts that the pandemic has made and will continue to make on our future ministry. Over the year we have sought to support and encourage Dan as well as discern what God may be calling us into. We have found that any long-term strategic planning is almost impossible but have found a certain uneasy peace in the fact that God seems to have been telling us quite clearly that we remain in a time of waiting. We see this waiting not as a passive time of sitting and doing nothing but an opportunity to press more into God and seek his will, perhaps in ways we haven't done before.

We are immensely grateful and humbled that unlike many churches, our income from regular donations has remained stable throughout the pandemic. This is a huge commitment from the congregation during a time of massive uncertainty. This wonderful generosity is sowing seeds into the future of St James' by the Park, whatever God has in store for us. We continue to grapple with knowing which ministries can/should restart and how reduced numbers of volunteers impacts some of these decisions. Please pray for us, that we can discern next steps as we keep learning how to grow deeper with God, closer to each other and reach further with the Good News of Jesus. Thankfully we worship a God who "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen"

Nick Smith & Jacqui Dowdell

Parochial Church Council Report

The PCC is the leadership group of the church. It works closely with Dan, the Strategy Group and staff team to help develop and carry the church vision and mission.

Each meeting starts with a look at a bible passage and a time of prayer led by different members of the PCC. From June onwards the PCC used a discipleship shape tool to help them work out the shape of our discipleship. Each meeting ended with a time of prayer. Due to the ongoing covid pandemic, all meetings up to and including April were held via Zoom. Meetings from May onwards were held in person. To make all decisions legal, following a Zoom meeting, they had to be agreed by email so this was done after every zoom meeting. The June meeting was held in St. James' Church on a Saturday morning, followed by lunch for those who could stay. The PCC aims to have 2 or 3 day meetings each year as more can be achieved and it's an opportunity for the PCC to get to know each other more.

The new PCC had a meal together in May to help them get to know each other.

The Standing Committee made most financial decisions by email but met in November to start planning the 2022 budget.

During 2021:

- A safeguarding update was given at every meeting; either with a scenario to work through or an update from the team's meetings.
- Discussions were held about how to allocate the 2019 and 2020 surplus. It was agreed to allocate these between building and staff costs. The PCC agreed to tithe the surplus; this was split between Winchester Diocese and off-setting our 2020 and 2021 emissions.
- Off-setting our emissions will be built into the budget from 2022 onwards.
- There was a building update at most meetings; the areas of discussion were selling St. John's and redeveloping our other buildings. A group was formed to look at the fundraising side of any building development.
- Following on from the LISTEN exercise, 4 additional areas were identified as areas to focus on. These were: discipleship, engaging with 18-30 year olds, digital reach and communications and reshaping our ministry to children and young people.
- A review of our children and youth ministry was undertaken. It was agreed to advertise for a new children and families worker to work with Josh making the youth, children, families and schools ministry one area. Angel Itzstein was appointed in September.
- The Environment Group made proposals to which the PCC agreed, to commit to the General Synod's motion to work to achieve year-on-year reductions in emissions and also work towards reaching net zero emissions by 2030.
- The external Missions group reviewed our existing partnerships and proposed some changes to the organisations we support. The PCC agreed to the proposals.
- The PCC ratified the pastoral care guidelines that the oversight group drew up.
- The PCC started a process of working out our vision for the future.

- Steve Condell was appointed as our building maintenance manager.
- The PCC started thinking about the priorities they thought they should be focussing on; the 3 areas that were recommended were buildings, discipleship and being a diverse community.
- It was agreed the organ was too expensive to repair (quote of £110,000); options for selling or disposing of the organ would be investigated, together with options for replacing it.
- A review of our contested heritage items was started and is ongoing.
- Ground rules for PCC meetings were drawn up following a training event for PCC members.
- The PCC started reflecting on our current values and thinking about whether these needed to change

Theresa Bowen

Deanery Synod Report

The Deanery makes up the collection of the Anglican churches in the city of Southampton, seeking to discern God's vision for the City as we work together to enable 'His Kingdom Come...' Each Parish in the Deanery elects a number of representatives dictated by the number of people on its electoral roll. St James' by the Park has three elected reps, David Bates, Rosie Brooks and me. Simon and Esther Clift are also members of Deanery Synod because of their position on General and Diocesan Synod respectively. One of the roles of Deanery Synod reps is to elect lay members to those "higher" Synods.

The Deanery is headed by an Area Dean, supported by, now, two assistants. There were three meetings of Deanery Synod in 2021 all of which were held via Zoom. Each Synod includes news from around the deanery including clergy comings and goings and a time of worship. Administrative matters, approval of minutes etc. are kept to a minimum. Meetings are not restricted to Synod members and anyone is welcome to attend. Synod reps. are elected for a 3 year term and, since the February meeting was the first of the new triennium, some time was taken up with election of officers and committees. We then split into breakout rooms to share what God had been doing and what we were thankful for over the previous few months.

At the May meeting, the main topic was Clergy wellbeing with Synod members being encouraged to take this back to their PCCS.

The October meeting saw a presentation on Creation Care which was followed by Revd. Chris Hill, the Diocesan Mission Trainer, talking about his role with the Bishop's Commission for Mission (BCM). BCM is a lay training programme focused on enabling church members to live missionally in every part of their lives. The Spring 2022

programme includes courses on Creation Care, Growing Faith, Pastoral and Pioneering. There was also feedback from the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee on the progress of the proposed merger of the parishes of Freemantle and Millbrook, from Diocesan Synod and on the support that Lighthouse Ministries had provided to Children's and Youth Work in the Deanery.

As noted in last year's report, Synod has a fund, "the Deanery Collaborative Working Fund", which can be accessed by two or more churches in the Deanery wishing to explore new collaborative ventures.

David Wagstaff

Fabric and Buildings Report

Sale of St John's Centre

During this year the Buildings Development Group has continued to progress the sale of the St John's Centre to the point where the PCC has accepted an offer for the building from the Church of the Pentecost UK.

The situation as of the April 2021 APCM was that an application had been submitted to Southampton City Council for outline planning permission to construct two pairs of semi-detached houses on the site. The council planning committee voted to approve the application in July 2021. With this secured, the BDG approached three local estate agents for proposals to market the property, and appointed Primmer Olds BAS to handle the sale.

The property was placed on the market in October 2021 with an asking price of £550,000. The sale process ran until early December, by which time five confirmed offers were received. The PCC held an away day on 15th January 2022, with the opening part of the meeting held in the St John's building. The PCC heard testimony about some of the gospel ministry that's happened there over the decades – from breakfasts for homeless people to discipleship groups for young mums to a recording studio to Guides groups and parent and toddler groups. Not to forget the church services and Sunday schools, baptisms and funerals. And so so much more. We were reminded that "God is in this place" and we gave thanks for all that had happened there in Jesus' name. The PCC unanimously agreed to accept an offer from the Church of the Pentecost (UK), who currently meet in Lordshill Community Centre.

The PCC has appointed Batt Broadbent & Co as the solicitors to handle the sale on our behalf.

At the time of writing (early March 2022) we are awaiting feedback from the buyer's survey of the building, and the solicitors are preparing draft contracts to complete the

sale. The total legal and estate agent's costs for the transaction are estimated to be in the region of £12,000 plus VAT.

We are grateful that St John's will continue to be used as a place of Christian Worship.

Parish Hall & St James' redevelopment

At the 2021 APCM, a number of potential designs were presented to the congregation for the development of the parish hall site, 133 Church Street and the interior of St James. There were five potential options put forward, comprising some combination of either a one or two storey redevelopment of the parish hall, a new building on the site of 133 Church Street and either a partial or full mezzanine inside St James. The congregation was invited to comment through a survey on the possible alternatives. Consultations were also held with a number of key stakeholders, such as the staff and childrens/youth teams.

Following a review of the feedback, the PCC asked the Buildings Development Group to pursue a scheme that comprises a new two storey parish hall and a partial mezzanine floor at the rear of St James. The vision is that a two-storey parish hall will provide both a parish office and two meeting halls.

The Buildings Development Group has worked with Studio4 architects to refine the designs for the new parish hall. At the end of November, we submitted a planning pre-application to the City Council to ascertain their views on the project. Feedback from the council is expected shortly.

The exact configuration of the space provided by a mezzanine floor in St James has not yet been decided. In September 2021 the PCC decided that the current organ will not be repaired and can be disposed of, which will create additional room in the mezzanine. We are awaiting the council's reaction to the parish hall designs before making further decisions.

The Buildings Development Group has also obtained a cost estimate for the proposed scheme. The cost of demolishing and rebuilding the parish hall is estimated to be £742,000 at 2022 prices. The cost of the internal modifications to St James, including removing both galleries and inserting the partial mezzanine floor is estimated at £549,300. The PCC has set up a separate working group under the leadership of Susie Hoare to look at potential sources of finance to meet these costs.

Nick Smith on behalf of the Buildings Development Group

Financial Review

The PCC's total income for 2021 amounted to £272,240 (2020 - £278,327).

Net expenditure was £267,203 (2020 - £255,170).

This resulted in a net surplus for the year of £5,037 (2020 – net surplus £23,157).

	2021	2020
	£	£
Total Income	272,240	278,327
Net Expenditure	267,203	255,170
Net Surplus / (Deficit)	5,037	23,157

The PCC's total income decreased by £6,087 compared to the previous year (2020 – decreased by £18,704). This was predominantly due to a year-on-year decline of £6,133 in income from donations and legacies.

The main areas of donor income were:	2021	2020
	£	£
Planned Giving	208,645	210,320
Tax Recovered : Gift Aid	44,508	47,019

Planned Giving showed a marginal (1%) decline of £1,675 year on year.

Gift Aid at £44,508 declined by £2,511 versus the prior year comparator of £47,019.

Additionally, a reduction in non-repeating Donations of £1,419 contributed further to the total decline in Income.

Gross expenditure of £267,203 represented an increase of £12,033 compared to the previous year (2020 – increased by £8,623). However, this was lower than the annual expenditure budget, which was set at £278,900. This difference was predominantly due to changes in salary costs.

The main areas of cost were:	2021	2020
	£	£
Common Mission Fund	102,000	104,603
Lay Staff Salaries	83,489	72,681
Buildings (maintenance, insurance & utilities)	35,131	28,292
Donations – UK & Overseas Missions	14,520	13,071

Payment of £102,000, representing our contribution to Diocesan activity via the Common Mission Fund was, as requested by the Winchester DBF, decreasing by £2,603 from 2020.

Annual salary costs increased by £10,808. This was predominantly due to full year costs of staff taken on during the previous year, offset by interim savings accruing whilst recruiting for a replacement Children and Families Team Leader.

Annual expenditure on buildings increased by £6,839, with the following elements representing the most significant year on year changes:

Buildings Project Increased by £2,478 analysed as follows:

	2021 (Future Building Configuration)	2020 (Sale of St Johns)
Planning Fees	£ 1,416	£ 1,167
Architect Fees	£ 1,368	£ 5,042
Future Option Studies/Plans	£ 6,097	Nil
BAT Survey	Nil	£ 2,694
Legal Fees	Nil	£ 1,500
Specific Donation	Nil	£(4,000)
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Net Cost	£ 8,881	£ 6,403

Building: St. James increased by £2,170 from £5,478 in 2020 to £7,648 in 2021 predominantly due to repairs to crumbling stonework (£3,444).

Giving to UK & Overseas Missions increased by £1,449 year on year due to the following:

Increase: Enable Busoga £1,970 : Winchester DBF £1,350 : CPAS £1,000

Decrease: CMS General £500 : SCRATCH £520 : SCM £950 : Tear Fund £1,100

We entered the year with a Cash balance of £157,914 and closed with £168,775.

The cash increase of £10,861 was the result of an overall surplus of £5,037, plus a reduction in debtors of £15,316 offset by a decrease in liabilities of £8,615 and an increase in fixed asset value of £877.

The annual surplus of £5,037 outperformed the 'deficit' operating budget predicted in last year's published accounts of £16,000 by virtue of enhanced levels of income amounting to £9,590 (Actual = £272,240 vs Budget = £262,650) and lower than anticipated expenditure of £11,697 (Actual = £267,203 vs Budget = £278,900).

Outlook

A pleasing financial outcome (£5k surplus vs £16 budgeted deficit) highlighted an impressive resilience and generosity in terms of donor income coupled with a measured increase in staff related costs to boost ministry as we gradually emerged from the COVID pandemic.

Repetition in the future, given the current prevailing financial uncertainties surrounding, conflict in Europe, Brexit, Post-Covid, Energy and other living costs should not be assumed and a watchword of 'Affordability' will be key to future decision making regarding future ministry and the buildings re-configuration project.

The PCC will continue to be consider matters of affordability by frequent observation of trends in donor income which can be facilitated by reference to Church Suite.

Additionally, the PCC has agreed to invest some of the reserves accumulated, into a deficit budget of £29k for 2022.

David Phillips

Dan's review of the year

When a car ploughed into one of our gate pillars outside the church building, knocking it flat, it served as a useful picture for the wider impact the pandemic was having on our church. The gate post was eventually rebuilt – looking the same as before and yet different. Some of the bricks were the same, but in different places; other bricks were new. The function and purpose of the repaired gate post was the same as before – but now it is undoubtedly stronger than before. Covid continues to have a big impact on our world and society and upon our church. But we can have confidence that Father God knows what he is doing as he rebuilds us into the church he wants us to be for the coming years.

Emotionally, many of us found the early parts of 2021 far harder than the lockdowns of 2020. We responded by looking at wellbeing as a whole church: on Sundays; through the continued vital role of cell groups and missional communities in providing mutual support for many of our church community; through the 'Wellbeing Journey' course; and through the continued support of Thrive, our mental wellbeing resource group. It is good that we are now more confident talking about our mental wellbeing struggles in church. This will continue to be a massive issue in society for years to come, and the first step of us responding to others is to acknowledge our own frailties.

We also opened up a conversation about Race, God and the Gospel. Again, racial justice, equality and integration are huge issues in our society, and if we are to be and speak the good news of Jesus into these topics, we need to be much more aware of the richness of the biblical insights on race. Those of us who are white need to become more aware of our inherent white privilege; those who are brown or black or of some other ethnic minority (in the UK) need to find our distinctive voice within the church community to enrich us all. We have much more work to do in this area.

The pandemic has forced us and freed us to be more creative than we were previously. In 2020, we displayed large crosses outside the church building which had been knitted by individuals in lockdown and brought together as a piece of public art, with people invited to see the cross as a symbol of #hopeforthehurting. We also hosted an art exhibition which drew in many people from the local community, and have started Sanctuary – an informal monthly group for people who want to be creative together.

We began to see the potential of using Colebrook Green, too. We hosted 2 outdoor services in the summer (a third got rained off) which were fabulous opportunities to gather in larger numbers and worship in song together. They were warmly received by the local community and made us realise that outdoor worship has mission potential. We built on this in December when we hosted Christmas on the Green (with help from some other local churches) – a community event which drew hundreds of people.

I thank God for the prayerful listening, creativity and boldness which helped us dream these sorts of events into being – clearly prompted and used by Father God. Much of the future remains uncertain. The first thing that has been sharpened in our understanding is our need to focus on all of us being disciple-making disciples. In the Autumn, we began to look at this more closely on Sundays and through some of our small groups. In Advent, many people appreciated lighting the advent candles and following the written reflections that a small team had put together for us and video reflections that Georgia (priested in the summer) recorded. We have much more work to do in this area to make sure that disciple-making is part of our culture as a church and foundational to all we do.

Part of making disciples is passing on our faith to the next generations. It has been great to welcome Angel Itzstein to our staff team as a full time Children and Families team leader. Her creativity, passion for Jesus and love for children is already making a significant difference. It has been quite deliberate to experiment with our Explore Together services as a way to help all of us learn to hear the voice of God for ourselves more clearly, and to create a space where all adults (not just parents and junior church leaders) can help disciple children by modelling growth in faith to them. And for the adults, it has often been a wonderful encouragement and challenge to hear the children articulate their faith and insights. Similarly, the Wonder Walks are a deliberate way to liberate disciple-making from the church building and to give parents some tools to help them disciple their children in the world around us.

I'm very grateful to the countless people who have carried on serving in many different parts of church life through all the challenges of 2021, and for those who have started or re-started serving, too. I continue to be enormously grateful, too, for our hard-working staff team and church wardens who have supported me personally, persevered when the going has been very tough, prayed hard when that felt all we could do, continued to adapt to ever-changing circumstances and kept a focus on Jesus throughout.

It is a sadness that some events or ministries still haven't managed to re-start (notably the Ark), but we trust in Father God's timing and sovereignty. Just as we had to wait for the gate pillar to be re-built – and some parts of it took longer than others – so we wait for him to keep on rebuilding his church in the way he wants us to be. Our plans don't always align with his plans as closely as he would like – so we need to keep on listening to him, submitting our plans and priorities to him.

We are "... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2.20-22).