The Team Rector’s Report to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2020

My first year here as Team Rector has certainly been a very eventful one! Thankfully, none of us could have foreseen the challenges that would come to everyone in March of this year. However, I want stress that Sally & I have settled well into parish and church life in Binsey, despite the significant challenges for all of us, and we are very grateful for the welcome and support, we have received.

In the midst of all that these past 6-7 months have brought us, there have been some real encouragements to celebrate alongside the significant challenges, which remain in maintaining 13 historic buildings in very small rural communities, where fewer people choose to attend church regularly and many not at all. Although, we are drawing from an increasingly smaller number of volunteers, we must never underestimate the impact of the ministry of the church in the wider community, even though currently we have to find some different ways of engaging with people.

The New Year began with a new Sunday service pattern for the Binsey Team and with the reduction in the number of services taking place, we began to see some larger congregations as more people travelled to worship in different churches across the Team. It was encouraging to see this happening and given the small size of our congregations it has to be the way forward in the future, despite the restrictions that social distancing places on the capacity of our churches.

In a rural setting like ours, it is through the ministry of baptisms, weddings and funerals that we see large numbers of our parishioners attending services in church and hearing the Christian message, with funerals especially drawing very large numbers. Of course, all of this has changed and for the time being we cannot minister to the wider parish in these significant ways.

Yet, thankfully we are now back in church conducting Sunday services and we have also conducted 8 services outside since July, which has been a really enjoyable experience, not least because we have been blessed with good weather! Open-Air worship has also brought some new people and it clearly is something that we must look to do more of. Since lockdown began, then we have sent out weekly via email a Sunday service and reflection, and we will continue to do so, as a good number of people have not returned to worship in church. It is essential that we carry on offering a variety of ways in which people can share in worship and prayer each week.

I am also very grateful that the new Binsey Team website is now up and running, and offer very grateful thanks to Catriona Kinghan for her time and expertise in developing it. We also need to record our gratitude to Catriona for her dedication as Team Administrator these past 2 years and wish well in her new career as a Teaching Assistant.

Change has been a recurring theme during my first year as Brian Stephenson stepped down after 4 years as Team Treasurer having managed the Team accounts very effectively in that time and given invaluable help and support to our church finance officers. Like Catriona, Brian has been a very valued and respected member of the Binsey Team and we wish him well.

Thankfully, Craig Williamson has stepped very quickly into his new role as Team Treasurer and I am extremely grateful for the very calm and efficient way in which he has guided me and the PCC and DCC’s since the start of the year. We are all in unchartered territory, with some very significant financial challenges, but we are delighted to have Craig managing the Team finances.

Meeting the Parish Offer was already challenging and inevitably has got more so since March, but a number of the DCC’s have already found some innovative ways of bringing income in, and we will continue to look at financial giving and stewardship across the Team. The new website also enables on-line giving as well and we will have to see if that brings further income to our churches.

In this current time, nothing is straightforward and more challenges remain, but we believe and trust in a God, who in Jesus Christ has overcome all human difficulties. Therefore, we continue to pray that God will guide and direct our churches and the Binsey Team in these coming months. We also pray that we will continue to help, support and encourage one another.

I finish by thanking everyone involved in the life of the Church here in Binsey, and for all your hard work, encouragement, love & prayerful support.

Stephen Banks

Revd Stephen Banks

Team Rector