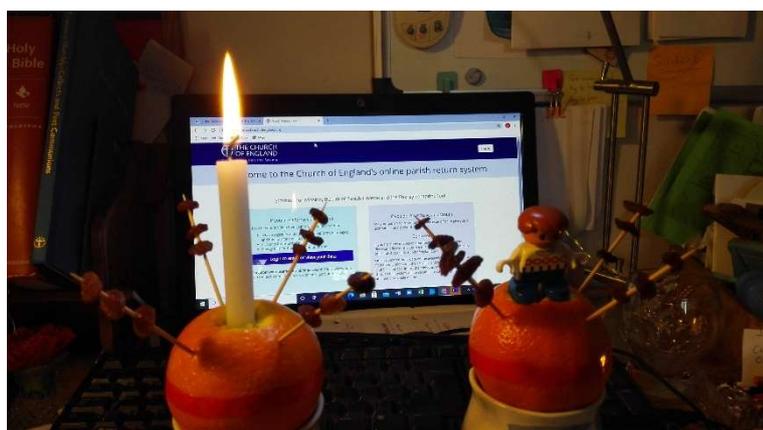


ST JOHN THE DIVINE, MERTON

ANNUAL REVIEW 2019 & 2020

(clockwise from top) Worship in church was suspended from the Third Sunday of Lent due to the Covid 19 pandemic. A socially distanced All Soul's service. Christingle with Merton Abbey School via Zoom. Tony Dove's beautiful Christmas Tee.



St John the Divine, Merton

Annual Review

Vicar's Report

I can honestly say I don't know where to begin. Is this the report for 2019, or 2020 I wonder, as I write this a quarter of the way through 2021!

As we commenced the Season of Lent in 2020, ready to prepare for our Annual Report for 2019, Covid 19 entered our lives and nothing has been the same since then.

2019 was a 'normal' year and an important year for Merton Priory Team as we went through the process of advertising, interviewing and appointing a new Team Rector. Revd Mark Eminson was duly licenced on the 4 September.

During the year St John's continued to host Wimbledon Foodbank. We were delighted to be the base camp for the 2019 UNLOCK walk and found ourselves welcoming literally hundreds of walkers who were offered a rest for their weary feet and refreshments. In October we celebrated our Foundation Day with a Ceilidh in the hall. This was a great success drawing people from the church and community with many talented musicians from The Trafalgar pub folk session. It was St John's turn to host the Team service at Christ the King when 15 children from our three churches were welcomed to receive First Communion.

As you can see St John's is a lively centre for much activity but we knew that we are facing difficulties with such a reduced number in our congregation. With this in mind we began to talk about approaching this situation as a Team and planned to make St John's a focus for mission. So with the dawning of 2020 we felt excited about the year to come, with a full compliment in the Clergy staff team and a new Mission Action Plan due to be explored.

However as everyone knows from 23 March 2020 our church buildings were closed due to the first Covid 19 lockdown and life became very different for us all. We opted to open a Merton Priory YouTube channel for a weekly service from the Team. At first this was filmed from the homes of those leading the worship, later in the year, when Places of Worship were open again, services were recorded in church. Thanks are due to Bruce Goatly and Peter Judge for their help and skill in recording and publishing our services.

We returned to church in July, fully risk assessed with all Covid 19 restrictions in place. This was at first for individual private prayer and then for public worship with a limit on congregation numbers, socially distanced seating and no singing.

We were very anxious to keep in touch with all members of our church community and to offer help both prayerful and practical where needed. Being aware that not all of us are on email we tried to ensure that letters were sent at times of festivals and at key moments of change in the restrictions. Keeping in touch by phone turned out to be a blessing with many good conversations shared.

During this very difficult and sad year for so very many people we have also suffered losses from our congregation. We began 2020 with the funeral of Pat Brunt someone who had done so much for St John's. Sylvia Knight and Tony Dove died during 2020. All of these faithful and committed members of our community, we shall miss them very much.

This year was difficult on so many levels. Paid staff had to go on Furlough and this has meant disruption for Irene Clugston, our organist and Lorraine O'Halloran, our cleaner; they have been very flexible and helpful.

As is reflected in Ann Newson's report our finances suffered from lack of Hall and Church income and so we opted to reduce our Diocesan contribution (Parish Support Fund – PSF). Thanks are due to Ann for her careful stewardship of our resources.

Our usual pattern of DCCs has also been disrupted with meetings held on Zoom for those who were able to do so.

Having applied to be a training parish for a newly ordained curate we were delighted that Simon Allat is going to be ordained and join the team in June 2021. Some very welcome good news!

2020 came to an end with Christmas celebrations in keeping with the unusual year. Our Christmas Tree, provided for the last time by Tony Dove, was absolutely beautiful. We opened our church for '25 minutes of Comfort and Joy', a resource compiled by the Deanery but sadly few people came in to share this. A small group enjoyed Carol Singing around High Path. Midnight Mass was celebrated quietly.

I am writing this on Maundy Thursday 2021 and despite the miracle of the vaccine, which so many of our older and more vulnerable members have had, the future is uncertain. Yet as we celebrate the Easter mysteries we rejoice that we believe and trust in a God who has made all things new; our hope is in him. Alleluia.

Merton Deanery Synod Report

Our Deanery Synod representatives are Eva Parker and Ann Newson

The following presentations, debates and discussions have taken place:

In **Autumn 2019** the deanery synod took place in St Andrew's Church, Wimbledon and the focus of the meeting was **Fruitfulness on the Frontline: Taster Session**. This was led by Steve Rouse, from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. Steve challenged us to think about where we see God and spread God's word in day to day activities, i.e. not just in Church on Sundays. His quotation from the theologian Richard Rohr 'We have built our church buildings but we have not built the church' got us thinking about what we can do as individuals to spread the Christian word throughout the week. **Mission in The Deanery**. This was led by Revd Duncan Swan. His main points for consideration were the importance of the Southwark Vision, challenging churches to grow by 5% over the next few years and to continue to recognise people with particular gifts and abilities within the deanery and give them support.

The **Spring 2020** meeting was deferred and held in July via Zoom due to the COVID-19 situation. Members were introduced to Revd David Ruddick and Fr David Pennells who have been appointed as Assistant Area Deans, and Julie Ashbee – the new Deanery Secretary.

In small break out groups members discussed the following questions:

What has your church been doing during lockdown, what has been helpful and what have you observed other churches doing?

What have you done as an individual, what have you found difficult, what have you been grateful for?

The **Autumn 2020** meeting also took place via Zoom. The convenor for the discussion was Revd Canon Jay Colwill, Canon Missioner and Director of Mission and Evangelism of Southwark Diocese. He gave a presentation about '**Being church and reaching out in the Deanery within current Covid guidelines**'. He referred to Romans 5:1-5 while talking about endurance, resilience and hope within the difficulty of engaging with the community during these times. Jay went on to highlight the possibilities of engaging in partnerships with other groups, with reference to Christmas services; signs of concern to be aware of; and signs of hope for what can be achieved with different ways of thinking and doing.

In Zoom break-out groups we discussed different activities which our churches were doing to engage with the local community during Covid times. We were also asked to share the different ways we were staying in touch with both the church and local community.

The **Spring 2021** meeting took place during January and so once again was held via Zoom as the country was in lockdown. It was an opportunity for **reflection and discussion in groups about what happened over Christmas**. Many churches were using zoom and either live streaming or uploading an act of worship for members of the congregation (and others) to engage in. We also spoke about how churches are endeavouring to **nurture spirituality** during lockdown. Online Bible study groups and discussions take place, but there are many Christians do not have access to the internet and the chance to join such groups and this is a challenge. It was recognised that it is important that churches are open for private prayer – even if closed for public worship to give people a space and the opportunity for prayer.

Electoral Roll Officer's Report

The number on the roll was 34. A revision of the Roll was not undertaken in 2020. Sylvia Knight had not been included in the new roll completed prior to the Annual Meeting in 2019. Due to the deaths of Tony Dove and Anne Cox (2021) the roll now stands at 32.