

Team vicar's remarks: April-Dec. 2020

With annual meetings in March it is hard sometimes to remember that a report is on the previous year. With an annual meeting in September 2020 (!) and the next one in May 2021 (!!!) it is even harder. However, since I recollect that I let Fr Andrew's remarks stand last year, I shall pick mine up with Easter (2020!!!) and hope that next year we will be in synch.

Hope for next year... there's a thought! The period about which I am writing started in lock-down, and ended in a brief interval between lock-downs. Fr Andrew left without anyone noticing (because we were in lock-down) and still we haven't said farewell, the church was closed for much of the year... and still we are back to nothing like normal.

Obviously the government ban on public worship affected us severely, as it did every church, but the further ban on many other gatherings (in place throughout the period of my attention) affected St Mary's more than most, as it is a place of meeting and gathering in the centre of the town. This meant that large public services such as Remembrance and "donkey carols" went but, perhaps more damagingly in view of our town centre mission, contact centre, playgroup, concerts, self-help meetings, were all affected to some extent. This not only meant loss of income, but worse, loss of mission. At the time of writing we can only hope for next year!

That said, it was not a year without any sort of progress. Our organist now has a contract with which he is satisfied, we have concluded discussions with the Romanian Orthodox community which formalize our relationship and which will lead, I am sure, to friendship (though they too have been affected by government bans and interruptions), and discussions began on the replacement of the vandalized corpus on the churchyard Calvary after the question was asked at the APCM. There were also some things which weren't done. After some very cold services Jean has managed to get the heating functioning (for which I, in particular, am very grateful!) though we have to ask whether the system is due replacement. The organ, similarly, is kept going through the attentions of the organist, but really is due a major overhaul. These, I am well aware, are massive tasks. But both are central to our town centre mission.

Eventually we will be able to pick up our mission again. Although my garden only flowers from March to November, that doesn't mean I don't do anything from December to February. I am out there weeding, mulching, edging and tidying. Although we are in a missional abeyance through circumstances beyond our control, we will in time thank ourselves if we can make plans for the future now.

My thanks, as always, go out to our district churchwardens, and through them to all who work so hard to maintain our presence and our mission in this town.

On the commemoration of the Martyrs of Nicomedia, 2021