

AMPC REPORT OCTOBER 2020

**THE VINE SHEFFIELD**

**APCM – OCTOBER 11, 2020**

**VICAR'S REPORT**

*Ephesians 3 - <sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

It is impossible to overestimate the impact that this year has had on our world, our community, and our church. The lingering effects of the pandemic will be significant across the board. By God's grace, these are our times to live in.

In this report my hope is to reflect a little about the life of our church since our last APCM in April 2019. Throughout, my confidence is in the presence of God with us; we *are* his church. He has called us to pursue his kingdom, on earth, in these our times, just as it is in heaven. I have included Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church at the beginning to express this prayer; that we would *know* the heart of God who is with us, and so abide in him and bear much fruit for his glory.

The grace of a crisis is that it shifts the ground, and causes us to look again to the rock on which we stand. This can be confronting as normal church activities cease or dramatically change. It makes us ask: What is this all about? What do we believe, and how, and why? What does it mean to be a church? What moves me and stirs me as a follower of Jesus within and beyond my church community?

This season is an opportunity, then, to take a breath and re-set our feet on Jesus, our firm foundation, and approach what comes next with our confidence in him. As we thirst and yearn for his kingdom, it will turn into a divine restlessness that will call us forward together. As we encounter him on the journey, we will find, in him, a confidence and peace of a life-changing sort.

I am looking forward to all that lies ahead. I have confidence in the presence of God in *us*, The Vine. We are the people of God in this time and place. Now and here is where we seek his kingdom come.

In that light, let us consider the journey of the last 18 months or so.

### **The impact of Covid-19.**

It is worth mentioning, for the record, how **the pandemic has affected our activities** : From late March public worship at St. Stephen's was halted, and the focus of our corporate worship shifted to a youtube livestream hosted from the vicarage. Our midweek public activities ceased, although small groups and other forms of fellowship continued online. In mid-July we recommenced a form of in-person covidsafe public worship on Sunday afternoons at St. Bart's under the leadership of Tina Powell-Wiffen. In August we were able to hold an outdoor gathering in the garden at St. Bart's. At the time of writing, in mid-September, we are planning to move the livestream hosting to St. Bart's, to allow greater participation and creativity, and we are considering opening St. Stephen's for covidsafe use by smaller groups. We are now aware of a growing second wave in the pandemic and we are expecting ongoing restrictions over the next few months, including Christmas.

I want to thank Steve Hill and Paul Sheridan, our wardens, in particular, and also the members of our Standing Committee (SC) and PCC. **We have had to make decisions quickly** , administrate flexibly, and discern carefully how to respond. Steve's awareness of the ever-changing guidelines is a diligence and a gift! Jon Smith, with Jackie Kieran, were able to bring together end-of-year financials at the height of the confusion.

At the beginning of lockdown PCC set up a **Temporary Pastoral Fund** to assist those who had particular needs in this season. Those funds have provided assistance, for instance, to those with transport and technology needs. A significant amount of funds remain and we are happy to be made aware of situations where we might be able to help.

You will be aware that **Steve Hill** is not going to be putting his name forward to be warden this year. I fully understand his decision; he well deserves a break from an office that he has exercised with wisdom and skill. Steve was warden during the interregnum, and has been, for Gill and I, a great source of stability, insight, and care over the last two years. It has been a blessing to have him not only in office, but active within the operations and management of the parish. We all owe him significant thanks. His contribution will continue in other roles, for which I am thankful!

### **Towards a united benefice.**

At the time of our last APCM we were becoming aware of the need for **significant structural changes within the Diocese of Sheffield** . We were beginning to grasp the impact they might have on the life of our Parish, and how our place within the

structures of the Church of England was likely to change.

In the second half of 2019, the Bishop released a consultation document which made the situation clearer. The proposed way forward was to reduce the number of stipended (i.e. paid) incumbencies and restructure parishes around "Mission Areas" to which "Oversight Ministers" would be appointed. Within Mission Areas there would be significant reliance upon "Focal Ministers" and ministry teams. The rationale behind this has been articulated in a number of ways and I am happy to pass on the explanatory material to anyone who requests it.

In early 2020, the situation became clearer still. The allocation of stipended posts to our Deanery (Hallam) included only three stipended incumbents to our Mission Partnership of five parishes (St. John's Ranmoor, St. Mark's Broomhill, St. Mary's Walkley, St. Timothy's Crookes, and ourselves). From the existing conversations within this Partnership emerged **the proposal that we as The Vine could form a united benefice with St. Timothy's Crookes**. We would share a vicar as an Oversight Minister, as well as other resources, but maintain separate parish identities.

This proposal was gently pursued through the meeting of wardens and vicars, and, in February, an evening at St. Stephen's where members of each parish shared something of our story, our heart, and our hope. This was received well.

Both PCCs felt able to discuss the possibility with some seriousness. In our March meeting (pre-lockdown), The Vine PCC passed a resolution agreeing to the commencement of the formal process towards consultation and action. St. Tim's PCC passed a similar motion. In July, the Deanery and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committees commenced the formal process.

At the time of writing, we are looking forward to a joint PCC meeting on October 4, at which the Archdeacon will be present, and which will conclude the informal part of the process. There is every indication that I will be asked to be the vicar of the new benefice. There will also be conversations about which of the two vicarages will be the official one, and what the name of the new benefice will be.

Formal consultations (contact with interested parties, opportunities for objection etc.) will commence soon after APCM. If all goes well from this point, **there is a likelihood that the changes will occur sometime in and around July 2021.**

I have spelled out the process in some detail here, because I want to be as transparent as possible about this **significant change in how The Vine exists within the structures of the Diocese**. It is *not* the same as the merge between St. Stephen's and St. Bart's in 2013; there are no plans to merge parishes or congregations. It will, however, effect (as positively as possible), not only our partnership with St. Tim's, but also our own internal arrangements.

The vicar in these new arrangements will not be expected to spread themselves thin across a duplication of ministries. Rather, as an "Oversight Minister", the role will be about enabling teams, congregations, and new mission opportunities, in creative and sustainable ways.

I have begun discussing with PCC the need to draw together a so-called “**Focal Ministry Team**” for **The Vine** which will be the on-the-ground resource for Sunday worship, small groups, and our other activities.

I have also asked a number of us at this time – Steve Hill, Paul Sheridan, Tina Powell-Wiffen, Claire Law, and Dave Neath – to form a “**Ministry Leadership Team**” (MLT). This leadership community will share with the vicar the task of discerning and articulating vision. We will consult and draw together perspectives and insights and wisdom, and imagine strategic ways forward, reporting to PCC. This team has already begun to form and meet, and we would value your prayer.

The end result, we hope, is a leadership structure that is more familial and shared, and less restricted by the capacity of the incumbent vicar.

Necessarily, and perhaps unfortunately, much about this change is focused on institutional structures. I am, however, very hopeful, even excited, for how this may assist us in **the real task of pursuing the Kingdom of God**. As **The Vine**, we will need to continue to discern and act upon our own sense of vocation and mission. As a shared benefice, there is every hope that the opportunities will increase: we can make better use of our resources, ensure the health of the existing congregations, and seize new opportunities for the Kingdom in places where we are currently unable.

### **Our own sense of direction.**

You will recall that just before the pandemic crisis we were considering **which of our buildings we wanted to use as a Sunday congregation**.

This consideration included a **survey consultation in the summer of 2019**. It was clear from that consultation that we *do* want to consolidate our congregational life in one location; at the same time we do not want to abandon either end of our parish. We were less certain about *which* of the buildings to use.

Subsequently, the PCC made a wise decision to hold some gatherings at St. Bart’s in January by way of experiencing that worship space. PCC then decided to make **a positive step towards choosing St. Bart’s as the location for our gathered worship**. This was not a *fait accomplis* decision; it was a choice to first investigate St. Bart’s as the possibility, and to make that the assumed, but not definite, route. The PCC began to explore issues relating to the practicality of the building, necessary improvements, as well as further exploring the missional opportunities of the location. Some initial thoughts about redeveloping St. Bart’s were presented to the congregation in early March 2020, with the hope that all information would have been presented to the APCM on its initial intended meeting date in April.

Clearly, the pandemic has significantly disrupted these plans. It is also clear that the focus for the next 12 months, at least, will be shaped by our response to the pandemic environment, and the priority of the process of unifying the benefice with

St. Timothy's.

In some sense, **this means a necessary pause in the direction of travel we were on.** I don't believe, however, that our efforts have been wasted; the consultation, the step towards St. Bart's, and the initial work towards exploring the possibility, are not fruitless. We will draw on them in due course.

However, the determining question was about how we locate our Sunday congregation, and in the current unpredictable climate the only thing we can say for certain is that **we will need to remain flexible and adaptable. We are focusing our limited activities at St. Bart's at this time.** This, in part, reflects the direction of travel set by PCC, but also simply reflects the need to more easily coordinate those activities in a covidsafe way.

PCC has considered and given cautious approval to **using St. Stephen's as a location for small groups to meet** in accordance with the guidelines. We can consider such use on a case-by-case basis, and with careful risk assessment. In the light of the increasing cases of Covid-19, we will need to err towards being cautious.

## **Outreach and activities.**

**Mutual Blessings**, the arm of our parish focused on research and advancement of Godly Play, has also been through some changes. During 2019 the *Stories for the Soul* project received a grant from Sheffield Council's *People Keeping Well* program to explore the use of Godly Play techniques cross-generationally in care homes. These funds enabled us to retain the expertise of Carrie Twist to see the project through to completion.

The completion of the project was an opportune time to review the operation of Mutual Blessings. It was clear that a number of sub-projects had come to the end of their season. Moreover, our accountability to Godly Play UK required us to narrow the focus of the work, and incorporate the Mutual Blessings online presence more tightly to our own website. In order to more accurately reflect the current situation, the Mutual Blessings board was disbanded and oversight now lies with the Standing Committee. The ministry of Mutual Blessings is now, in effect, limited to the distribution of Godly Play training grant funds.

During the summer we farewelled **Kathryn Lord** from our fellowship and wished her well into her increased involvement with Contemplative Fire. It goes without saying that Kathryn's contribution to the life of The Vine over decades has been of great significance. Her championing of Godly Play has not only blessed our Parish but also across a much wider sphere of influence as well. We give thanks for her ministry amongst us.

Our partnership with Timebuilders continued in the running of the **Foodcycle meal at St. Bart's.** This ministry continued to bear fruit under the leadership of Phil Townsend and a committed group of volunteers. I am immensely grateful to Phil for

the significant time and energy he has given to *Café Zero* as it emerged from a period of significant instability. The relationships, the community, the food itself, and the opportunity to pursue the flourishing of mind, body, and spirit in the light of Christ have been a blessing. *Café Zero*, of course, ceased operations as lockdown commenced. A renewal of this outreach in due course will require a careful, sustainable, approach and a strong community of praying and serving volunteers.

The **Thursday Community Café** at St. Stephen's continued to be a blessing and a joy throughout 2019. Our gratitude must go to Davo Smith for holding the logistics of this meal, and giving much time and energy, along with a small band of volunteers from within the parish and beyond. Sadly, at the beginning of 2020, it became clear that we were running short of the energy needed to maintain its operation. We had plans to give a suitable farewell to the near-decade-long ministry as lockdown occurred and it was cut short. We give thanks, nonetheless!

A realistic view of what these activities hold in common, is that **we have struggled to sustain and maintain** them, even before the pandemic. As we move forward, we will need to attend carefully to the priorities we wish to set, and the resources we wish to commit, and the burden and impact on committed volunteers.

The best sustainable base for an outreach activity is a team that acts as a community of faith. Such teams build around a shared passion and purpose, and pursue a task by embracing together the necessary steps of faith. Our task as a church community is to facilitate the beginning and continuing of such communities. My hope is that **a number of these teams will emerge and re-emerge in the seasons ahead.**

Active communities such as these are energised as we grow in the clarity of our collective call as a church community. They may be helped as we collaborate with St. Timothy's and find people of a similar heart in that wider community. We might also choose to act strategically, by, for instance, allocating some of our reserved funds towards employing an outreach worker, and growing our Focal Ministry Team.

Foundationally, our mission is a spiritual one. Our mission is *enlivened* and held together by our common worship. It is *located* not only in our church-based activities, but in the manifest presence of God in how we are in our workplaces, schools, and homes. Our mission is *clarified* as we collectively and continually offer ourselves to God.

As we face the unknowns of the next twelve months, this is my exhortation: to *pray*, to *worship*, and to yearn for God's word of life. It is in those things that we are renewed in our first love of Jesus. It is in those things that we are open to moments of conviction and repentance, and to moments of encouragement and bold action. Right now, our *activities* have been restrained; let that be an opportunity for us, then, to invest in *relationship* with God, and with each other.

We are his church. And we seek his glory. It is life for all.

Amen.

## Warden's Report

### Buildings

In 2019 The PCC and Standing Committee commenced a review of our building and the way we use them. Although no formal decision has been made we have commenced a direction of travel to condense all our activities to our St Barts Building. While this review has been taking place we made the decision to avoid any non essential works on both buildings. Both buildings are in need of some renovation and decoration. An audit of key holders has been undertaken and the key register has been updated.

The Area Dean visited and undertook a review of our records for both buildings. Overall this went well, and the few recommendations are in hand.

During the year we have undertaken the usual round of regular maintenance tasks e.g. gas safety tests, fire and burglar alarm tests at both buildings.

### St Stephen's

Our insurance company undertook a review of this building in early 2019. The main issue uncovered was that our electrical safety check was overdue. This was corrected as soon as possible, and found several minor issues. All necessary repairs undertaken. The heating in the hall was not blowing out heat. traced back to the blowers on the radiators needing a service after several visits.

The fire shutters on the kitchen hatch needed the switch replacing. The alarm keypad also replaced, so no more having to press the 7 very hard!

There is work outstanding on the gutters around the tower and also on subsidence damage in the pebbles room.

### St Bartholomew's

Following the St Stephens insurance review we also checked all points for St Barts ourselves. Again the electrical safety check was needed, and all necessary repairs completed.

Work undertaken to fix stairs to the allotment and water butts.

Gutters have been cleaned and minor roofing works undertaken following leaks in heavy rain.

The heating in the worship area is one critical area to bring this building up to scratch.

### Thank You

The wardens could not possibly do everything themselves, so in no particular order

A big thank you to all of the Assistant Wardens who have helped on Sundays. Thank you also to those who assist with communion, teas and coffees and elsewhere.

Thank you to Jackie our administrator for keeping all this in order and organising so many of the repairs.

Thank you to Will and family for their tidying of St Barts Garden

Thank you for the support of the Standing Committee and Operations team during the year.

## **COMMUNITY CAFE**

The Community Cafe came to an end in March 2020. The intention was to finish at Easter time, but, due to the national lockdown, the last two planned dates (19th and 26th March) were unable to happen. Below, I have reproduced the letter shared with the church and the cafe guests at the beginning of March in order to announce this closure.

On Thurs 6th September 2007 at 9am, Howard and Davo opened the doors to the first weekly Community Café. With a fridge full of sausages, a pan of beans and a couple of loaves of bread, we welcomed anyone who walked in through the doors. It started very quietly, but over the 12.5 years since, we've served around 15,000 breakfasts to people from across the area - old and young, from a great many backgrounds.

Over the years, we've fried thousands of eggs, burnt many slices of toast, dropped a few sausages and spilt several cups of tea. We've had conversations about God, about the weather and about the headlines of the newspapers on the tables. We've celebrated Christmas and Easter, we've laughed together and we've mourned the loss of several regulars who have passed away over the years.

Sadly, we have now reached the point where it is time to say goodbye to the Community Café, at least in its current form. We will be open on 12th, 19th and 26th March, after those dates the café will finish.

We are grateful to the many people who have helped over the years - buying the food each week, arriving early to set things up, cooking and serving, counting the money, cleaning and washing or simply sitting and chatting to our guests. I'm not going to try and list everyone, but a few names worth remembering: Howard and Joyce, Emily, Sally, Margaret, Debbi, Jo (and the rest of the Church Army team), Kelly, Lisa, Sid, Linda, Bernard and Vicki.

Out of the Café has grown a weekly litter-picking group, a Bible-study small group and many opportunities to meet up and make plans. We also built a partnership with TimeBuilders, offering time-credits for our volunteers and accepting time-credits for breakfasts.

God has blessed these Thursday mornings, so we give thanks for all He has done and pray for new things to grow into the space left behind.

Dave Neath

“Last ‘year’ we had 57 people on the electoral role, 33 non-residents with 24 resident in the parish. This year (unless Will has got some forms off of people) we have 56 people on role, 33 non-resident and 23 who are resident within our parish. 2 people have been removed and 1 has been added, although if we had had more contact over the last few months I think we may have been able to add a few more”

### **Hallam Deanery Synod**

Alongside Will, Ann Humphrys and I are, until this year, The Vine’s lay reps on the Hallam Deanery Synod. The Deanery is made up of 14 parishes covering areas which include affluent western suburbs and poorer inner-city areas. The Deanery Synod meets four times a year.

Over the last twelve months (prior to the Covid lockdown), meetings have inevitably been dominated by the need for the diocese to reduce the number of stipendiary clergy down to 75 over the next five years, and in particular how this affects Hallam Deanery. This included an away day with Bishop Pete to consider the Diocese’s consultation document on the issue. A key proposal is the introduction of ‘Oversight Ministers,’ possibly covering more than one of the existing parishes. The Vine responded proactively to this by exploring, (with our mission Partnership of five churches) the establishment of a United Benefice with St. Timothy’s Crookes. This will help to address the proposed reduction of clergy in the Hallam Deanery. We have ensured that the Deanery has been kept up to date with this.

In addition to these issues, we contributed to a Deanery Synod meeting focusing on the climate emergency and in July this year, a virtual meeting considering what we have learned during lockdown and as churches, what we might do differently after the Covid pandemic. The findings from this were reported back at an online Vine Sunday service.

Tim Hawkins