

- **The Rector's Report**

What a year! When I was appointed as Rector at the end of January 2020 little did I expect to arrive in a pandemic. I began working in April, but we couldn't move to the Rectory until June which presented its own problems, though at least with the joy of technology and the fact my previous parish was next door things were made much easier.

As a family though it has been hard to get to know the wider church, we are thankful for those who have popped round to say a socially distanced hello, and those who brought us gifts as we arrived too. And we are hopeful that we will be able to meet more of you in person, rather than just seeing one another on screen, in the not too distant future.

Although it has not been an ideal start to a new ministry in other ways it has been a great blessing and even though I still have many people still to meet, through the ZOOM "Meet the Vicar" sessions; through calls and through various online and In-person services, I feel like I have got to know a good number of people now.

It has been a joy getting to know the staff team, Wardens and PCC in particular and I have appreciated their support as I have tried to help lead us in these strange times. It is also so encouraging to see how proactive and willing they are to get onboard with different things that have cropped up through the year.

I believe these coming months are going to be very significant as we reacquaint ourselves with one another, but also as we seek God's will for how he is leading us forward as a church. The PCC has started conversations about this and things are beginning to bubble up which is great - please do pray for us as this continues.

I do so look forward to when I can see St Paul's in its fullness and vibrancy and meet you all properly, and maybe have a big party!

- **Encounter**

Amidst a pandemic meaning our usual worship has become somewhat...unusual, it has been wonderful that we have still managed to birth a new service, Encounter. Prior to my arrival I was conscious that the space on Sunday Evenings was still empty and there was a desire to have something put there. Following conversations with a variety of people early on in my time here, it became clear that Encounter was the service to fill this space.

The purpose of the service is to provide a space for people to encounter God's presence through sung worship, a short reflection and "holy silence". I remember vividly the first service at St Barnabas as we launched and was delighted at the beautiful atmosphere even though people weren't able to sing.

At the end of the year when we went back into lockdown we started streaming the service live. There were some technical issues to work out, but overall we still managed to achieve a sense of purpose, and more importantly God's presence.

There is a great team in place to whom I am really thankful, as without them, we would not be able to have the service. It is encouraging that this is a partnership team drawn together from St Paul's and St Barnabas. I look forward to how things develop in the future as we encounter God together.

- **The Sunday Streaming Service**

For those of you who have prepared videos for leading, preaching, praying, reading, family time, 2min testimony, or anything else - THANK YOU! Having recorded many myself, I know how challenging this can be, not least when you get close to the end and a member of your household wanders in to your video, or someone shouts in the background..."start again!" I also recognise that these services are not fully accessible to all people, not least to our children, but I am thankful that we have been able to offer other online worship opportunities for them - big thanks too for all those involved in the Facebook Children's worship which has plenty of engagement across that medium.

Amidst the challenges we have also seen great blessing and opened our eyes to new levels of creativity. We have seen this particularly in how St Paul's and St Barnabas have had the opportunity to meet each other and work together through these services. We have also experienced great blessing through enabling an open door for people to take a look through safely, to see what "church" is about. And this has led, for both Matt and I, to having engagement in conversations about faith with those who are seeking and had seen our services.

Though viewing numbers have gone up and down through the various lockdowns there has been a consistent core watching and some gigantic spikes - 15 November was our peak at 725!

The plan going forward is to continue with some form of virtual service even when we can meet in our fullness. So watch this space...

- **Prayer**

Though we haven't been able to have prayer ministry in our services because of restrictions in place there has still been prayer going on regularly. There is a small and committed group who using WhatsApp meet on Thursday mornings to intercede for points of need. We have relaunched the "sayoneforme@stpaulsyork.org.uk" email address so that people can send private prayer requests which feed into this small group and a small number of other trusted prayer's.

At the start of the first lockdown I began leading Morning Prayer on Facebook. Initially this was 6 days a week though has varied through each phase of the pandemic. This has been hosted on the St Paul's Facebook page and regularly has in excess of 30 people viewing either live or through the day. It has been a real blessing to pray together and I believe has helped many people engage with God through their day.

We also held a Dawn till Dusk prayer meeting on 23 May for Thy Kingdom Come. It was encouraging to see a variety of faces leading and praying together in different ways, and equally good to share this with St Barnabas.

I believe that praying together is really important as a church, but it takes time and effort, I hope we will keep pushing on with this particularly as we look to what God is calling us to as we begin to meet properly again.