

Links with Families, Schools and Children's Groups in 2020

In 2020 due to the restrictions with the Coronavirus Pandemic there were only 2 infant baptisms at St Michael & All Angels' Church. One of these was a separate service and the other was a Baptism in the Mass. Elizabeth did socially-distanced telephone baptism preparation with the parents. The mother of another family and her friend who will be a Godmother did some adult baptism preparation via telephone, Alpha at HTB and emails with Elizabeth, but then they decided to delay baptism until after the coronavirus crisis. All the baptism families going back to 2017 were invited to the pre-recorded Crib Service on YouTube when the children from the Church families re-told the Christmas story in a different way.

Fr Neil and Elizabeth both led an assembly at St Michael's Junior School in the Epiphany Term. Elizabeth led Assemblies at the Infants' School in the Epiphany and Lent Terms before Lockdown in March. The usual programme of School Services in Church, Class visits to Church and the termly Assemblies was not able to resume because of Covid restrictions for the rest of 2020. Covid meant that Fr Neil was not able to visit St Augustine's Academy. Fr Neil, Heidi Elvers and Fran Callaghan served on the Governors of St Michael's Schools in 2020.

The Wendy House were not able to come into Church for their usual Services at Easter, Harvest and Christmas. They were invited to the pre-recorded Crib Service on YouTube. They bring joy to the residents at Abbeyrose House Care Home with socially-distanced visits.

The Scouts, Guides, Cubs, Brownies and Beavers were invited to Church for Mass on Mothering Sunday, but this Mass could not happen because of Lockdown in March. I hope to use the poster prepared by the Beavers in 2021. The Cubs and Brownies were represented at our Harvest Mass as Dylan and Lottie led the prayers and brought up Harvest gifts wearing their Cub and Brownie uniforms. The Brownies were invited to the pre-recorded Crib Service on YouTube.

Fr Neil is chaplain for the Air Training Corps 40F (Maidstone) Squadron, where he usually runs a padre's session once a month, if there are no enrolments for him to carry out. He has done Zoom padre's hours in 2020 including an interesting and informative session about the Battle of Britain. The Air Training Corps 40F (Maidstone) Squadron were invited to join us via YouTube for the Battle of Britain Sunday Mass and for Remembrance Sunday. Cadets read at the Battle of Britain Sunday Mass and a Cadet read at the pre-recorded Carol Service.

Church and visiting families enjoyed the nature trails at the heritage Open Day on Saturday 12th September, organised by Heidi Elvers. Children and adults looked for animals in the stained glass windows, pictures and statues inside the Church and they found pictures outside. They had fun doing a craft activity.

Children in our Church family enjoy being actively involved in the Mass. At the beginning of 2020 there were sometimes 4 children in the Choir. The Choirmaster, Gareth James writes: 'Since the first lockdown Angelita and Dylan have worked online and completed 99 per cent of the RSCM Dark Blue award. This is a significant milestone. It only remains for them to be formally assessed in choir. We have had to pause Singing Exam preparations but they are currently considering future entry for Grade 3 Theory of Music possibly in the Summer Term.'

Five children regularly read at Mass. We were pleased to have a boat-girl on the serving team until Covid restrictions prevented this. At the pre-recorded Crib Service, organised by Heidi and made into a pre-recorded Service by Mark; eight children in our Church families had parts in the Nativity Play, including baby Thabo being baby Jesus with his older sister Eta and brother Zangi being Mary and Joseph.

Elizabeth Bryson, Reader