

Vicar's 2019 Report for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, October 2020

Last year saw the usual range of church activities, which have been reported on to this meeting by other people, such as baptisms and the annual Walsingham pilgrimage. There have been other events on which I will comment now.

On the feast of the Baptism of Christ in January I baptised Adam, an adult who had come to faith in Christ and had requested this sacrament at Midnight Mass the previous month. It was with pleasure that we learned that our Bishop, ✠ Norman Richborough, would be the celebrant on our patronal festival. We prepared five candidates, including Adam, for the Sacrament of Confirmation. I assisted the Bishop at the Pontifical Mass and was thus able to witness the joy with which the candidates received the priceless gift of the Holy Spirit as ✠ Norman laid his hands on each of them and anointed them with holy chrism. Afterwards they received Jesus' risen Body and Precious Blood when they made their First Communion. Following that service we had a memorable reception in the Parish Hall. The Bishop has subsequently more than once remarked what a wonderful day it was.

In Lent, at the PCC's request, we experienced the Alpha Course. This is a series of video talks that we followed by discussion. It provoked thought and exploration of the topics covered. The Mothers' Union set up a children's corner, with activities and materials for all ages. This proved beneficial both at Sunday Mass, when the parents can stay in for the whole service, and at baptisms. We continued our links with community groups by providing them with a place to meet, and inviting them to services that would be appropriate to them. Elizabeth and I maintained our pattern of taking assemblies in St Michael's Schools; the Schools also visited us and had their yearly landmark services in the church. Our halls are also used daily by the nursery school based here, which provides us with rental income. The vestry hall's lavatory was refitted last summer to give access to the disabled.

In August a group of us attended the Richborough Family Day at St Albans. This is not only a time of spiritual encouragement, but also an occasion of some fun with a picnic in the Bishop's garden. We also had a wonderful day as the See of Richborough at Rochester Cathedral; the Mass was concelebrated by over sixty priests, and the nave was filled with people from parishes all around the area. As a Forward in Faith parish, there are regular local meetings; I attempted to attend the AGM, but had an accident on the steps of the bridge at Maidstone West station so I never made it to the meeting (or had the lunch I had paid for!).

In September Elizabeth was licensed by the Bishop at Lambeth as one of the first two Anna Chaplains in the diocese. This was a grand occasion at Canterbury Cathedral, at which

Elizabeth spoke. This raises the profile within the diocese both of care for the elderly and of our parish church itself.

The acting Archdeacon chaired the beginning of the December PCC meeting where a formal request was made for my term of office to be extended for a further two years past my 70th birthday. I heard some weeks later from the new Bishop of Dover that the request has been granted; I shall accordingly continue my ministry here, its last day determined as 19th July 2022. Our proposal at that meeting for admitting certain children to Communion was also approved early this year.

Our annual mission figures have to be returned early in the year. Those for 2019 showed a 54% increase in regular attendance at Sunday Mass on the figures for 2016. We have been paying our way as reported separately by the Treasurer, so all was set fair for continued progress. Then in January part of the ceiling came down in the nave and I had to close the Church until repairs could be effected, which could not, it was estimated, be completed until Easter. We had our services in the halls instead.

Sadly last year and during 2020 we have lost long-standing members of our congregation: David O'Sullivan, Norman Rust, May Pilbeam, and more recently, Jason Orwin and Tom Barlow. May they rest in peace.

Usually this report would take us up to the APCM date in the spring, anticipating the rest of the calendar year. We now know that the ceiling was to be the least of our problems: Coronavirus forced a nationwide lock-down and the churches were all shut. I shall give a fuller report on the effects next year, but will refer now briefly to what ensued. Initially I provided resources on our website and encouraged everyone to set aside Sunday Mass time to read the lectionary texts, pray on their own or with their household, and make an act of Spiritual Communion; I celebrated Mass with Elizabeth at the Vicarage. After a few weeks, Mark Elvers and I set up the means of live-streaming the Mass from the Vicarage. Once the clergy were allowed back in church without a congregation, Mass was live-streamed from the church. In July the Government permitted us to open churches to congregations, but with a range of restrictions; we did so, but have continued to live-stream our Masses. The impact cannot easily be measured at this point, but I can report that new people have begun attending physically and we do know that there is a regular congregation attending Mass from home. We have had to postpone admitting some children to Holy Communion until we can so in more normal circumstances.

My thanks go to our retiring Churchwarden, Jessica O'Sullivan, who has been a model of energy and initiative, and also for her work in other areas, notably as our Safeguarding Officer. The Elvers family have been enthusiastic labourers in the Lord's vineyard in many endeavours; Mark is our webmaster and has set up and operates live-streaming: many other churches have not been so blessed. I thank also the retiring members of the PCC. I am also grateful to the Extended Ministry Team for their support. There are others who,

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like the unknown saints we celebrate next Sunday, who keep this church running with their work in the background.

I end by encouraging all of you to continue witnessing to the matchless grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ who, through His Precious Blood has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe in Him.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "N. D. Bryson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'N'.

N. D. Bryson SSC, Associate Vicar