Churchwardens’ response to APCM 4 October 2020

Thank you Fr Kevin for your report on the life of St Paul’s over the past 18 months. It has been a busy period for us all, not without challenges especially during the last 6 months, and it is good to take stock of it now and especially to appreciate how much has been achieved.

Thank you Fr Kevin for steering us through this difficult time. We have been very blessed to have the help of Fr Michael Bradley, and the Revd Sr Hazel Smith and our thanks to them for not only presiding at the Eucharist but for being so much part of our church fellowship. It has been good to welcome Luke Larner first as pastoral lay assistant and now at last as deacon, and curate at St Paul’s.

Since becoming churchwarden last year I have learnt a great deal about the life and people of St Paul’s and of course about the building! What has struck me most is the dedication of a large number of people who give unstintingly of their time and talents and money to the mission of the church. St Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians that there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and that we are all members of the same Body and all have our part to play. I think that this rich variety of gifts is much in evidence at St Paul’s, uniting us in the Body of Christ.

At our PCC Away Day in November last year when we drew up our new Mission Action Plan we were all heartened to discover how much of the previous MAP had been achieved. None of this would have happened without the work of many folk, under the leadership and guidance of Fr Kevin. The list is long: our thanks to our office staff, Robin and Maddy, now enjoying full time motherhood, and Sharon who covered Maddy’s maternity leave, Miriam our cleaner who cheerfully tackles the enormous task, now made much bigger by the demands of Covid 19, of keeping our building inside clean. Our worship is dignified and enhanced by the team of servers. Our deputy wardens, Alison, Alan, Andrew, Brian, Tom and Ben made it easier to support all our regular services as well as the large number of special services held at St Paul’s during the year Our Welcomers and Sidespeople do a sterling job in making people at home in our church. Music is important at St Paul’s. Our thanks to Ian Runnells and the choir for facilitating and enhancing our worship in their unique way. We know how much they have missed being a part of our worship during the last 6 months and it was a great joy to hear the choir and organ once again for Harvest last week. How good it is too that the Tuesday Concerts, organised by Heather Turnham and Saturday organ recitals organised by Ian have been able to start up again. The Revd Septimus Harding says in Trollope’s Barchester Chronicles when he feared music would lose its place in the worship, “If there is no music there is no mystery. If there is no mystery there is no God. If there is no mystery there is no faith”.

The Flower Guild have beavered away with flowers, secateurs and oasis to add beauty to our worshipping environment. Again, we have missed their offering since March. Our team of sound engineers make sure we can hear the service.

Alan Bennett said in a sermon he gave that “The Church of England is so constituted that its members can really believe in anything at all, but of course, almost none of them do”. I am not sure he is right about all of that, but we are grateful to those who lead study groups helping us to think through our beliefs.

We also recognise the quiet work done by our Ministry Team, ensuring house bound members of our congregation and those in care homes are ministered to: Margaret Blake, Cliff Harris, James Beauchamp, Wendy Jones and Sue Gray. Sue works hard as our safeguarding officer steering us through seemingly endless but vital rules and regulations to ensure that St Paul’s is a safe environment for the young, the old and the vulnerable. She also works with the Young Gospellers and thanks go to her and to the team of people who help nurture a very important section of our church fellowship. They have worked hard though the last 6 months to keep in contact with Young Gospellers and their families.

Financially in spite of the difficulties of Covid this has been a reasonable year as the reports show, due in large to the generosity of so many of our congregation. We would struggle to maintain this wonderful building without the support of The Friends of St Paul’s, the Dorothy Porter Trust and other grant making bodies, and some faithful and generous anonymous donors, enabling us to fund various fabric projects and support the important work of our Pastoral Assistant.

 At this point I would like to thank Alan our PCC Secretary of 4 years, who prepares countless minutes of meetings, circulating these, and various missives from the Diocese and other important bodies with speed and efficiency which makes me wonder if he ever has time to sleep! In the absence of a treasurer he has also taken on the task of Interim Treasurer, though we hope and pray that someone will come forward to take on that vital role soon. Thanks to Brian Jolliffe, and Linda Ellis who assist with Gift Aid claims and book-keeping and to Cliff Harris for all the help and support he gives.

I am pleased now at our delayed APCM to have the opportunity to thank James Stephenson for all his work as churchwarden and especially for his work as chair of the Fabric Committee. He steered us through faculty applications and gave unstintingly of his time to forward many projects and maintain the fabric of this church, taking on also the role of Treasurer until he decided it was time to stand down as churchwarden at the beginning of the year. Thank you James for all you did.

Sadly, so much of what we do at St Paul’s suddenly ceased due to the pandemic. But St Paul’s is gradually ‘waking up’ again and we are discovering new ways to become ‘church’.

Finally, it has been good to welcome Alison back for another term as Churchwarden after a year’s rest. She has served as ‘warden in waiting’ for the last 6 months and we both look forward somewhat later than usual, to being officially admitted to office soon. We are privileged to be appointed as Bishop’s Officers for the coming year and we look forward to continue working together with Fr Kevin.