

Vicar's Report for the APCM's of Broadway and Wickhamford Parishes

4th October 2020

I would first like to thank everyone for all that they do for our church! There are far too many people to name individually but without you all in the back and foreground our churches would not function!

I did wonder whether to date this report with the amount of changes that have occurred this year but I was hopeful we could still go ahead, even if it meant we had to revert to Zoom – who would have thought we'd be saying that last year!

Last year we celebrated Jo being Priested along with many others and Kevin receiving his license as an ALM (Authorised Lay Minister) enabling him to lead worship and renewing John Hayes License as ALM as well. We were more united with our ecumenical friends and came together on the green for Good Friday, Easter at Broadway Tower and Pentecost on the green. We gathered for Harvest in St Michael's and in the memorial hall at Wickhamford. I acted as Rural Dean for 3 months allowing Richard Thorniley to go on sabbatical and as part of that he walked the Camino de Santiago known to us as The Way of St James. St John's continued holding fundraisers - 'Quiz's with Fish and Chip Suppers' and 'Spring and 'Autumn Fayres'. In Broadway we had our tea tent and I was asked to help judge for the Horticultural show. We had all paid more of our parish shares Broadway managing 50% which whilst not good it was £5000 more than last year. At Christmas our churches were full throughout the many services and we were part of Christmas Shopping Nights on the High Street in Broadway. I don't know about you, but writing about last year, it feels a lifetime away, life now is so very different. I would say there was so much more that we did and still do as a church, but these are some of the highlights.

This year we said thank you to Margaret Deakin for her ministry to us as a Reader (Licensed Lay Minister) as she retired from this and as one of Broadway PCC Deanery Rep's at Deanery Synod. Margaret continues as Broadway representative on Broadway United Charities (BUC) as does Marion Moore (both of whom are up for re-election this year in October).

Then everything I am sure you agree changed. We heard the words Corona Virus / Covid-19 and by 23rd March all churches were closed by order of the government. Fortunately the week before this happened Georgina White and Claire Greave started a Facebook group 'The Broadway Coronavirus Support Group' for the village. I was able to join and we with Kevin Beasley (Parish Clerk as well as our churchwarden) and Helen Rushmore (Signpost) met in Number 32 and started this group. Little did we know how fortunate we were to meet on the Monday to get information for leaflets out to the village so that people without access or knowledge of how to use computers would have the information about how our village shops, business and volunteers could and would support them through this unprecedented time.

By the first day of lockdown we had leafletted the whole village and I as the person who was coordinating shopping and medication support had contacted my equivalent in Childswickham and in Willersey and later in Wickhamford. On the leaflet, as you will be aware, the Support Group gave out my mobile number to the whole village and area. At least everyone now knows how to get hold of me – *my plea is not to phone me at 7am!*

I would like to thank everyone who helped and supported me through these months not only were they very demanding and exhausting but also rewarding and a great way to help me keep in touch with the most vulnerable in the village. Our village rallied around with the many and various volunteers who came to help us all in our time of need. Also thank you to all those who 'stayed in' for lockdown – *I know it wasn't easy.*

Unfortunately, Covid-19 affected many things including weddings! Many wedding couples faced and made the hard decision to postpone their weddings to next year – so we have a long list waiting to

see what happens over the next few months hoping they can have the service they dreamed of and most Saturdays in spring and summer months have weddings in our various churches booked into them (a lot from this last year). As a church we gave them a cloth bookmark with 'Love never fails' on it and sent a card assuring them of our prayers being with them then and now through their disappointment. Please do continue to hold them in prayer.

I offered to be a Surrogate for our deanery for wedding couples for a common license and am awaiting to be sworn in. This is due to the fact churches closed and banns therefore could not be read but for those who, when churches do open, wished to still hold their service they could legally do so. We had one couple marry on 1st August in St Eadburgha's!

Sadly during this time, we also held funerals for many people and our thoughts and prayers are with their families. As a congregation we lost both John Hincks and David Folkes MBE due to Covid-19 and I'm sure I speak for all of us that our churches now we are back in them do not feel the same without them and they will be missed. Thank you to all who lined the streets to farewell David who did so much for our village and church.

At the end of March Childswickham PCC held a phone vote to join our benefice. Due to lockdown we had to think of a way forward and give them some oversight. Therefore, I have been given PTO to help them through this time and Jo and I have taken services there. You will have noticed that I include them on our website and notice sheets to help us all through this time and feel like the benefice we are heading towards becoming. I am sure you will continue to pray about this as they join us and welcome them to our group. The next stage is all the legal work that needs to happen which has been slightly delayed due to Covid-19.

During Covid-19 I had many conversations with Kevin about Broadway PCC finances and as you can see from his report we have really struggled through this year. Without being able to use a legacy as a float we would have not been able to meet the continued day to day costs of our church (which did not go away even though we were not worshipping in them!).

Both of our churches have had to write to the diocese to inform them that we are struggling to pay our parish share this year although Wickhamford tried to pay for as long as possible this year.

I have written earlier this year making you all aware that our diocese was also struggling financially and has had to source an overdraft of up to 2 million pounds. Our diocese has held a second round of 'Open Conversations' and sent around information about restructuring deaneries and we will be merging with Pershore Deanery. This is the first stage of restructuring to effectively resource mission in the Diocese. As we have been informed there is a need to reduce clergy by 15 across the diocese as we cannot afford them and a group have been set up to look at parish share which will be introduced to us next year and going through Diocesan Synod. The cost of ministry to the diocese is £64,000 per stipendiary post (when taking everything into consideration: stipend, housing, pension, training etc.) which is close to what both Broadway and Wickhamford are being asked to pay in parish share this year.

What is clear to me from all these discussions is the need for us to think hard and sacrificially about our giving and spending as a church in Broadway. We are not paying our way and need to have serious discussions about what we wish for our church and it's future:

- Are people prepared to give more? (To be blunt: to keep going as we are now for example, using 40 regular people attend our churches, it is equivalent to £35 per person per week or we need to cut our cloth accordingly)
- Do we hold an emergency appeal? (This would only plaster the cracks but help us through now.)
- Do we make more cuts and what can they be?

We desperately need to hold a stewardship campaign next year and need to ask the village for help.

Fundraising and an emergency campaign only goes so far. Regular and proportional giving is the biblical example we are given as Christians and the long-term sustainable solution.

It will not be easy and the decisions we end up making as a PCC and church may not be popular, but we cannot carry on spending as we are as a church and this includes the need to pay our parish share. It isn't right, as has been pointed out to me in various meetings, that we are asking poorer communities and churches to fund our ministry and church and I agree. It is an embarrassing position to be in when you honestly think about it - it should be us wishing to help them!

Before Covid-19 we were making progress and paying more of our share but this year we haven't paid anything at all and the diocese cannot afford to subsidise us or any other parish anymore.

I do not want to end on a depressing note and wont! I feel truly blessed to minister amongst you especially how we all came together this year and continue to do so throughout this unprecedented time. I pray the Holy Spirit helps us to discern the way forward for all our churches and communities.

Shellie

Revd Michelle Ward