

## Vicar's APCM Report 2020

### **A year of hope and perseverance**

As I write, church and national life feel very uncertain. The coronavirus pandemic is curtailing work, social and community life, and is about to impinge on church activities more seriously. I wonder if the APCM for which I'm writing this report will in fact take place? I'm trying to 'keep calm and carry on', wearing the whole armour of God for protection. But it does feel a strange, demanding and worrying time, calling for faith and perseverance.

Indeed as I've looked back on the past 12 months, I've had to conclude that quite a lot of this last year has been rather demanding. A range of things have happened which have called on the time, energy, patience and hard work of a lot of us at St Michael's. You'll recall that in February 2019 we had a very nasty and upsetting break-in. The response of the parish in clearing up, supporting one another, praying and pulling together was phenomenal, and soon overcame the sense of invasion and desecration that had disturbed us. But, afterwards, a long process of restoration and mending was needed, taking ages to plan, consult, seek permissions and then effect the work. I'm grateful to Phil Smith and Rosemary Thomson for the tireless, and often tiring, work which they have been persevering with, to sort everything out. We are nearly there – just the stained-glass window to be replaced. So soon I hope we can wrap-up, finalise the financial cost, and move on from this draining saga. Perseverance will eventually pay off!

Dealing with the break in would have been enough to occupy our energies on the fabric of the church, but at the same time we have been dealing with repairs arising from the Quinquennial Inspection. And, simultaneously, we have been liaising with the bell-ringers in the development of their bells renovation scheme. The QI repairs were thankfully quite efficiently undertaken from last summer

onwards, and we trust we now have a more raintight and solid building than we did in 2019! You may know that progress on the bells has not been so smooth – objections to the original scheme led to its redesign, to retain the old bell-frame in the tower, as well as introducing a new one. Permission for this revised scheme has now been obtained, through dogged perseverance, but the task of raising the money remains significant. More perseverance will be needed to see it through.

While the building often occupies our attention and energy, it's important to remember that sustaining the worship and Christian life of our community is really what we're here for. We've tried to persevere with this too. After Richard Carr's 14 years as Director of Music we are looking to find a new person to come and lead our music. Despite assiduous efforts from the team involved, our search is continuing. We'll persevere: and we're grateful to Jonathan Newsome, Nathan Collins and Richard for the work they are doing so our music in worship can carry on. A real encouragement to me has been the willingness of Parish and PCC to look to grow our ministry, and focus resources on the challenging and important area of ministry with children and families. A great deal of work was done to enable us to interview 2 candidates in January for a Families Minister post. Sadly, all involved agreed that it wasn't right to appoint at this time. That was a great disappointment, to be plain, but again the team is determined to persevere, and see what God has in store.

The year has seen many joys as well, and moments I would like to recall and celebrate include preparing and presenting four candidates for confirmation at different points of the year. We have welcomed other newcomers into our worship and fellowship, and seen some begin to contribute to our mission and life together in very positive and encouraging ways. We've celebrated the festivals, and reached out to schools and the community with powerful music and worship at Christmas and Easter. And this year we've done some

new things: an encouraging Songs of Praise at Michaelmas where members of the church shared a favourite hymn and its place in their Christian journey. And a most enjoyable Harvest Lunch with hearty fare and good company last October. There have been stirring choral evensongs and delicious parish brunches, and so much more: too much to rehearse it all here. Every week I find there is some moment of encouragement: worship that inspires, moments of listening, care and concern, and opportunities to share the love and Gospel of Christ. A hug from a Tiny Tot or an offer of help make all the difference when challenges (like the current Coronavirus) seem to be all-consuming!

I'm helped in my perseverance, and encouraged in my joys, by all the people who serve so faithfully at St Michael's in so many ways. Their work – your work – will be noted and celebrated in the APCM documentation, and when we gather on 26 April. So I won't be exhaustive here, but simply record my thanks for all the humble, ongoing, often invisible labours that serve God and our brothers and sisters in sustaining our church life here. THANK YOU! I will just invite *your* thanks for the Wardens' team, PCC and committees, in all they do to pull everything together here. Much joy comes from our shared tasks. But perseverance is needed too. And particularly I want to note Rosemary Thomson's perseverance in serving as lone Churchwarden these past two years. Rosemary is ably supported by deputies, and now an expanded team of assistants. But despite our perseverance in seeking someone, no one has yet stepped up to join Rosemary as a fellow churchwarden. Please do give this some thought and prayer. I trust God has a plan for St Michael's, its organisation and ministry, in the medium-longer term, but it feels like it's taking a lot of perseverance at the moment to discern it. Please can you help in some way?

I've used the words 'perseverance' and 'persevere' rather often in this report, haven't I? Perhaps a bit too much. They're not words

we're that fond of in our contemporary culture. We tend to imagine the ideal world would be one where our problems are small and easily overcome. Where solutions to our ills can be swiftly, completely and easily discerned. Where other people don't create obstacles to our (obviously sensible!) plans, so that what we decide meets no obstruction or delay. But God doesn't often let us live in such a world (in my experience, at least). Perhaps St Paul gives a clue as to why this might be, when he writes to the Romans:

*We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

Perseverance is one of God's schools for faith, hope, trust and love. Without it we would not know the need to be patient, humble and grateful, because everything would fall into our laps trivially and immediately, as though we were entitled to it. Perhaps you're currently persevering with situations in your life and family which are taxing and demanding. Perhaps one of the areas of church life I've described above is one in which you too are persevering. Perhaps your whole journey of faith is one that often calls you to persevere, and just keep sticking with Jesus and his church through thick and thin. If any of those situations is yours, take courage that God is working through your perseverance, and glory awaits at its end. Glory that will be even more deep because of all our patient waiting, all that we've endured, all that we've struggled to attain, and all the joys that have encouraged us along the way.

Derwyn.