

St Stephen's APCM 2020



Vicar's Report

Looking back to the year of 2020:

Welcome everyone to the annual report from St Stephens Church Southmead 2020.

2020 was an extra-ordinary year; a year of massive cultural, social, and historic changes the world over, which, I'm sure, will remembered for decades to come.

Through all this St Stephens has continued to be a church family, dedicated to being together (as best we can!). We've been worshipping and giving thanks and praise to God, serving our local and wonderful community of Southmead, and trying to proclaim and share the love of God with as many as we can, striving for the Kingdom of God here and now.

I know it's been a devastatingly hard year for a lot of us. Many of us have felt extremely isolated and alone, many of us have struggled a lot with our mental health, many of us have had real financial pressures to cope with, many have struggled with children at home a lot more than usual, and many of us have seen our families, particularly children, suffer and struggle alongside us, often unable to help in ways which we would normally take for granted. We have all of us faced pressure, stress, and challenges in our own lives in 2020, and sometimes these have been extremely different from those challenges we see in others around us. The extreme differences of someone spending months in isolation and feeling alone is almost the complete opposite to a family trying to homeschool young children whilst balancing work demands and everyday life. But both of these experiences, and



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everything in between, has its own particular and significant stresses. Covid has impacted all of us significantly, if differently.

Throughout this annual report you will read about lots that we have deeply lamented over 2020, but also the huge amount that we have done and achieved, where God has blessed and guided us as His people amid the significant stresses of Covid and the world we live in. You will read about, worshipping together every week online, continuing to go deeper into God's holy Word together, making up and delivering food parcel to families in our community, offering support to one another through a lot of phone calls and chats over doorsteps and in gardens, supporting parents with parenting courses, welcoming and supporting ordinands training for ministry, the Christingle Trail, children's activity packs, online quizzes, and probably a few other things I've forgotten about as well!

When I look back on 2020, and when we as a PCC reflected back, one of the words that came to us was 'proud'. I do genuinely think we can be proud of our church family, how well we have managed to keep in touch and keep going as a worshipping and missional family of God, and how prominently we have kept God at the forefront of our lives as a church. I'm so proud that we got food parcels set up and running so early in the first lockdown, and that this was almost as important to some folks as meeting for online worship; and I'm so proud that so many people were so willing to help out with our food parcels. I'm so proud of the way people have looked after others in the church, phoning, visiting, giving of themselves, and giving financially to the church to support this. I'm so proud of the team that put together the Christingle Trail to offer the chance to local families to still 'come to church' at Christmas, albeit in a different way. I'm so proud of the amount of effort that goes into providing activity packs, to help the children and families feel included and nourish their faith for so much of the time we've been online. I'm so proud of how welcoming we are to new folks coming into our church. I'm so proud of our prayer chain, our administrator and children's worker, our PCC, our church officers, our children and young people, and all the folks who have kept going in the face of this year. I'm particularly proud of how many of our congregation meet regularly for online worship - I know it is not ideal and is challenging for most of us, but a huge proportion of our regular congregation still gather together weekly amongst a global pandemic! And I'm so proud of how gracious so many of our church family have been during this difficult time - gracious in understanding that we're all doing the best we can, gracious in how we welcome one another in whatever ways we can, chatting in gardens, on the phone, over doorsteps, and meeting online. Proud of how the light of Christ has shone through the St Stephens church family!

This hasn't been the year any of us would have wanted, but we have worked hard as a church leadership team to do the best we can for as many of the church family as we are able. In the background we have been working on, the best ways to work as a PCC and leadership team (including developing some small leadership teams), the best ways to keep everybody in the church together through various lockdowns, what we needed to be doing to support our local community, the ongoing potential sale of the White Hall for the benefit of the future of St Stephens, and a lot of conversations about making our online worship as accessible and engaging to the gorgeous and varied church family we have at St Stephens. We've also been working on trying to communicate better as a church and as the church leadership, developing a buildings team to better look after the church building, and even plans for making the church garden more of a blessing for the church and wider community. Hence when I look back at everything we have achieved amongst tremendous hardship I think we can feel immensely proud of the faith and hard work of the St Stephens church family. There is much to lament in 2020, but there is much to give thanks to God for too.

A massive thank you!

I would like to end with a huge thanks to a whole load of people.

Thanks to everyone who came and joined in with worship online, I know it wasn't everyone's cup of tea, and many of us found it especially hard, but a very high proportion of the church family came, and we continued to be a worshipping community of believers. Thanks to everyone who helped support our mission and outreach to the wider community, particularly through food parcels. Thanks to everyone who kept going, in their jobs, looking after their families, shielding themselves, and caring for one another. Thanks to everyone who helped serve in a whole host of ways, from welcoming when we were back in church, to phoning one another for mutual support, to serving on the PCC or as a church officer, and to helping deliver various bits and bobs. You are what makes St Stephens the church family it is, and you are what makes the love of God felt and known in this community here in Southmead.

Thanks most of all to everyone for praying! Praying for each other, praying for those of us in leadership (especially appreciated!), and praying for the wider community, country and world we are all a part of. But thanks especially to God, who though His immense mercy and grace saw fit to bless each and every one of us with His immense love, the presence of the Holy Spirit which has been guiding and supporting us throughout this time, and who called us into this church family where we belong, to live out His Kingdom in Southmead and North Bristol. Amen!

Rev Jon Roberts

Warden's Report

Firstly, congratulations to Hannah and Joe Widdows on the arrival of their second child, Sophie. Hannah did an admirable job of Wardenship throughout her pregnancy, once again, as before with her first child Olivia. Moreover, during a pandemic! So, while Hannah takes maternity leave, as many of you know, I am standing in as Warden.

This past year has been one of searching for blessings amongst the difficult times, and so I'd like to note some of the highlights of the year, for me.

Finding a new way of worshipping together via Zoom! This started with a steep learning curve for many and has become our new way of gathering and seeing each other each week.

Quiz nights! Several quiz nights occurred via Zoom throughout the year, and it was so nice to have a laugh, exercise our brains, and socialise together: perhaps it's time for another one soon?

Being in the church building. Although this wasn't possible for many, and for safety we split into Wednesday and Sunday groups, it was nonetheless a novelty to be together in person. There have been differences of course, but one particular thing I love is the activity bags provided for the children; this has enabled them to safely have their own individual supplies for colouring, activities, and a snack during the service while we can't provide Creation Station for them. Thank you to those who made this happen.

Speaking of activity packs, we've also received many of these at home, for our children to do during the Sunday service each week. The arrival of the first box of activities back in April was wonderful, and felt like a huge "we see you; we love you, and we include you"! This has been invaluable, and I'd like to thank Tenna, Jon, and those involved in creating them and delivering them.

And lastly, our wonderful evening of Christingle! On Christmas Eve we were able to provide an outdoor Christingle trail, which brought many people together (at a safe distance) and was

absolutely wonderful, organised and manned by a team which included others from neighbouring churches. What a celebration of light and hope!

Jo Hamilton

PCC Secretary Report

The PCC met six times in 2020.

We had relatively normal meetings in January and at the start of March, and then the pandemic began. The next four meetings (April, July, September and November) took place on Zoom.

We had an average attendance of 85% which is really a credit to the group, I think everyone was fed up with online meetings but showed a real commitment to the ongoing running of the church during various lockdowns. We said goodbye to Nicky Bale in the September meeting, who will be greatly missed in the PCC and wider church and welcomed Michael Shields to the PCC in the November meeting, who I'm sure will be a big asset, especially in helping look after the church building.

Topics of conversation were typically focussed on how we should best respond to the pandemic and the rules at the time. There were church closures to agree, as well as procedures for reopening (and then closing again...)

We also spent time deciding how to support the community, with one of the most visible works being the several rounds of food parcels the church organised and delivered.

In many ways it has been a terrible year. I want to say well done to the PCC for being honest when they are struggling and for continuing to support each other, the church and the community.

Here's to meeting face to face again.

People and Leadership:

Janet Moreton:



With Tanya's encouragement I have spent two years studying – and building – my faith with the Exploring Christianity course. At the end of that I was invited to a discernment day in the summer of 2020. After a day of interviews, I was recommended to join a further year's training for Licensed Lay Ministry, which I started in September 2020.

It isn't easy; there's no guarantee that I will succeed, but I feel that this is something I am being called to do.

I hope to be able to be in a position to support Jon in his ministry here at St Stephen's as well as support and encourage all members of the congregation, both those here now and those in the future. Spreading the Gospel to a wider community will also be something I want to explore.

Unfortunately, because I am over seventy, I can never be a Licensed Lay Minister, but if I reach the expected standard, I have been told that I can have "permission to officiate".

Ordinands from Trinity College

In September 2020 we had the privilege to welcome 4 students from Trinity College, who are studying for ordained ministry in the Church. We welcomed them with their partners and families and have already been blessed with their leadership in preaching, planning and leading services, bible studies, and just by generally walking alongside St Stephens in our mission and ministry in Southmead. See below for a brief introduction from each of them:

Alex Keen



Thank you so much for the way you have welcomed me, Anna, Eliza and Martha to St Stephens and to Southmead. It has been a joy and a privilege to begin to get to know some of you, and we have been really touched by how you have included us and made us feel welcome from the very start.

Moving away from friends and familiar places, leaving my job, starting school, and starting college would have been daunting enough in ordinary times – doing this in the middle of a pandemic has been especially challenging! Yet God is good, and he is faithful, and he has blessed us with a wonderful church family at St Stephens. You have been so gracious, generous, and loving, despite the challenges you yourselves have been facing – thank you.

We have enjoyed serving in the small ways that have been possible in these first few months – delivering bible study notes and helping to lead the study, along with helping to deliver the children's activities, has been a good way for us to connect with people and places and get to know Southmead better. Taking part in the online nativity was a particular highlight for Eliza and Martha!

We look forward to journeying with you as we begin to move out of the pandemic. We are excited to see what God has in store: 'Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth' (Isaiah 42:10).

Stuart Samuels

Thank you everyone for the welcome you have given Abby and myself at St Stephens. We are definitely in some strange times that have made it harder for us to get to know everyone. However, I have loved being taken around Southmead on a tour, being invited round to people's houses and the trips to the pub when we were allowed. Even though we aren't physically together it has been good to be with you and see how you have adapted to the times. This physical distance has made me feel a little detached from St Stephens, however, I can still see the care, love and compassion you have for each other and your community. We look forward to what is to come and how God will use us in the next few years that we are here with you.

Fran Bliss

I have had the warmest welcome this year from St Stephens; thank you all so very much. I am always encouraged by being part of a worshiping family. In 2020 I have had the privilege of getting to know some of you and taking part in leading worship. Due to restrictions, I have been sorry to have

not been more involved in the life of St Stephens. I continue to see the values of family kindness resilience and worship being lived out in the community. I am looking forwards to things unfolding and imaging a better future together.

Julie Summers



As most of you will know I am a part-time ordinand on placement with you for two years. I also work part-time as a senior staff nurse in the Bristol Eye Hospital's outpatient's department. I'm married to Gerry who is a teacher (recently retired) and a musician, we have one grown up son called Peter who also works at the Eye Hospital. We live locally and both Gerry and I have been in Bristol for the last 34 years, which we definitely call home.

I would just like to say what an amazing church St Stephens is, you are such a warm and welcoming community of people and have made me feel part of the Church family in a very short space of time. It is so obvious you love Jesus and love to share your faith with those around you. It's certainly a privilege to train and learn from you all. My passion is evangelism and prayer, I love to chat to people about faith and also to pray with folk.

I've been so amazed at the many projects you have managed to do as part of keeping in touch with the community, you just get on with it, living the gospel. It's been hard not being able to be together properly and for me to see what church life was like before the pandemic. Still my hopes for the church in 2021 is to see us all back in action in the church building and community in an up close and personal way which we've been denied. In the meantime, here is something that cheers me up no end; 'lighter evenings' yeah! An encouraging sign that spring is coming - Ecclesiastes 3:11; 'He has made all things beautiful in their time.' God Bless.

Prayer Chain

In 2020, we sadly said goodbye to Nicky Bale, who moved to South Wales. This has been on Nicky's heart for a while, and she finally felt the call from God to make the move this year. There were some real answers to prayers as Nicky went through the rigamarole of selling and buying a house under extra time pressures of Covid restrictions, but she's finally settled in her new home. Nicky had run the prayer chain with such prayerful diligence and faith, and I know we were all sad to see her go.

Thankfully, the transition was an easy one as God had lined up the perfect replacement for Nicky, and Ali took over the prayer chain in October 2020. Ali has multiple and deep connections with the local community and has brought that into our church's prayer life and leads the chain with her usual faithfulness and compassion. It will be a privilege to see how Ali continues to grow as a leader herself in this role.

Church Wardens

For a number of years now, St Stephens has been blessed by having Hannah Widdows as our Church Warden. This year, she has done everything from welcoming on the doors when we were in Church, to completing the complicated CofE risk assessment for re-entering the church building after the first lockdown, to heading up the bulk of our grant applications for various church funds. In early 2021,

Hannah and Joe welcomed their second child, baby Sophie, and Hannah has taken a step back from all church roles to focus some dedicated, and well-earned time on family life.

We are delighted to welcome Jo Hamilton as a temporary Church Warden, who will take on a number of the responsibilities of the Warden going into 2021, particularly when we get back into the building. Please keep praying for all those in leadership in St Stephens as they give of themselves for us.

Our Electoral Roll

This is the official register of the adult and voting members of the church family. At St Stephens we use this as a way to keep contact details of every individual in the church family and use it to make sure we don't forget about anybody!

In the year 2020 one person asked to be removed from our roll. She has been worshipping in a different church for a few years now, but still maintains a warm relationship with St Stephens.

We've also had 5 new individuals sign up to the electoral roll - which is wonderful!

This takes the number on the St Stephens Electoral Roll to 48 adults. And of course, our wonderful children, roughly 20 or so, remain just as important members of the church family even though they aren't on the roll.

If you'd like to join this official church membership list, then please speak to Jon. Thanks.

Rev Jon Roberts

TLG Make Lunch

TLG Make Lunch enables and equips churches to bring hope to struggling children through holiday lunch clubs. Each club provides free, hot and healthy meals to children and families who would otherwise go hungry. Through TLG Make Lunch, your church can provide vital support to some of the most vulnerable children in your community and, in addition, build relationships with families in desperate need of the loving support of your compassionate church family.

One in five children in Bristol receives free school meals and I suspect those statistics have gone up since the Pandemic, especially being in isolation and people not being able to work.

We were only able to meet and do this in Feb 2020 when 13 families came.

Unfortunately, then the coronavirus restrictions came in, but we adapted this into food parcels which we did every month in the first lockdown and the summer holidays, and in October half term we handed out 18 packed lunches to families. So far, we have given 23 families food parcels and activity packs throughout lockdown and are very grateful for those who have given to this in whatever way.

Please continue to pray for the make lunch / food parcel team and families.

Alison Prince

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

0–10-Year-Olds

It feels strange reporting on a year like 2020. A year of very little face to face contact but that has not meant a lack of activity! It has been encouraging to see families embracing faith at home but of course we'd love to have been together too!

Before we had to stop meeting together in the building, we continued with our pattern of Cinema Sunday - watching Buck Denver taking us through the bible and Creation Station children's work. When the pandemic hit creation station had to adapt and come into our homes. Most weeks activity packs were delivered to each family and we have appreciated knowing that we were together despite the distance! The packs have ranged from colouring sheets to an easter box, that helped us think about the events of Easter through different activities.



Toddlers enjoyed a busy start to 2020, welcoming unto 22 families each week! Then the pandemic hit in March and we had to close. We were, however, able to keep connected a little bit by handing out some craft bags once a month, from the church steps.



school invited. pause the programme place and what a happy certificate to say, "I've



February 2020 saw the start of our 5th Kids Matter parenting programme This time we ran it out of Fonthill Primary school, and we had a full programme with 8 parents attend that the Unfortunately, due to the pandemic we had to pause until July but did finish it with social distancing in time it was! Who doesn't love getting a done it!"?



We did start a new programme with 2 parents, in September but again it is on pause due to COVID and we are looking forward to when it can resume in 2021.

It was a privilege to welcome about 20 families from the community to take a Christingle trail on a very cold Christmas Eve! Families travelled round stations building their Christingle and ended with a much-needed hot chocolate, mulled wine and mince pies.



And finally...



What a treat it was to have our under 5's tell the Christmas story as part of our carol service. The short film lifted our spirits at the end of 2020 - **Thank you!**



Worship at St Stephen's

It's probably been a first for the worshipping life of the church; to spend so much time together online instead of in person. I've been really proud of how St Stephens has adapted and persevered throughout this year. It felt like a steep learning curve for me to learn how to work Zoom, then learn how to use iSing and play music through Zoom, then how to use Power Point and videos, and make it all work together! Thank you so much for sticking with me throughout such a roller coaster of a ride!

We only missed one week of worshipping together in 2020 - Mother's Day back in March. Every other week we have prayed and worshipped together either online or in the church building, sometimes with Communion, but sometimes without. It certainly felt like a breakthrough when we were able to sing on Sunday mornings online. The PCC and myself chose not to do Communion when we went into the second lockdown in November as I felt increasingly uncomfortable celebrating on my own, and it didn't feel like it was serving the needs of enough of the gathered community on Zoom. Holy Communion continues to be essential for the life of the Church, but I think this year has cemented how important it is to celebrate it together and be equal in how we talk of God feeding each one of us. I can't wait till we can share in the gorgeous mystery of holy communion together in the building once again!

Through worshipping online week in and week out, we tried to involve as many others as possible. After the initial shock, we went back to using the reading and intercession rota, and involving our wonderful clergy, Jenny, Brenda, and Nick in helping to broaden and deepen our church family worshipping life. In time we too used the students that God sent our way, and they continue to bless us into 2021. Trena has been brilliant in keeping our young people involved and cared for with many an activity pack delivered throughout the year. All in all, we've tried to make the worshipping life of the church as inclusive as we could, and as mindful of all our different needs and likes as possible. My prayer is that we will continue to grow in breadth and depth of prayer and worship and involve more and more of our church family in how we gather together.

I think my highlight of our worshipping life in 2020 was baptising Olivia Widdows way back in March. I remember the church feeling full of life, so upbeat and warm with all the excitement and extra people joining us. It felt like a lot of fun, and like the church family really came together to celebrate Olivia and the Widdows family and give a great big thanks to God. My prayer for St Stephens is that this will be a foretaste of things to come for St Stephens :-)

Jon Roberts

Bible Study

We began meeting for Bible Study at the start of 2020 little realising the changes that would happen as the year progressed.

In January and the beginning of February we studied themes in John's gospel, (Light of the world, The living word, The body of Christ, The way of love and The 'I am' statements), and 10 or so of us enjoyed studying, praying and singing together.

Not long after, and before we could start our Lent study, we were no longer able to meet face to face. It took a while, but we finally got organised to meet in June by Zoom but also to deliver studies

to those who weren't able or wanting to use the technology, and then sharing written feedback from the Zoom meeting.

From June through August, we studied Paul's letter to the Romans. Personally, I loved doing the reading and preparation and the discussions we had were very stretching and stimulating. It was lovely, too, to have written comments from those who studied the questions on their own at home.

In November, we studied themes under the title 'Thy Kingdom Come' from Matthew 24 & 25. Again, some very challenging passages.

Stewart and Alex, two of the Trinity College Ordinands who are worshipping with us, led us through an Advent study entitled 'The Beautiful Disciplines', looking at Solitude, Simplicity, Submission and Service, which led us gently up to Christmas.

It has been sad not to meet in person, but great that Zoom meetings have brought different people to the studies. When restrictions lifted a bit in the summer it was wonderful to go round and doorstep/garden visit those who didn't meet on Zoom. Who knows what 2021 holds for us but how wonderful that we can still find ways to share insights from God's word and continue to pray and care for one another?

Treasurer Report

Following a rollercoaster 2019 for St Stephen's, 2020 proved to be another unprecedented year in the midst of a Global Pandemic. My prayer looking forward to 2021 is that we will see a bit more stability and normality for the church.

That being said I am pleased to report that our regular giving remained the same through 2020, which coupled with the property at 79 Ullswater Road being occupied for the whole year, overall income has increased from 2019.

Unrestricted expenses have reduced over the year, which is to be expected given we spent most of the year in lockdown. As we move into 2021 and lockdown restrictions are eased, I would expect these expenses to start to increase again and we may have to think about how we can increase our income, to avoid another deficit.

In amongst the difficulty of the year, I am humbled by the donations received to support the Food Parcel deliveries to local families in our community, it was gratefully received, to enable this ministry to take place.

I am also really pleased that the number of people donating regularly through the Parish Giving Scheme increased during 2020, a true blessing that so many are able to donate regularly in this way.

Steve