



SAINT MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS BARNES



A VIEW FROM THE VICARAGE 2020

N.B. This report was written before the outbreak of corona-virus and therefore some anticipated activities and events did not occur as planned. Nevertheless, it felt right not to alter the content as it remains an authentic expression of our life together. At a later stage there will be a separate reflection on the impact of corona virus on our parish and our response to it.

O ye angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise and magnify him forever.'

These words from *Benedicite* are inscribed in golden Latin script above the High Altar in the apse at Saint Michael's. While every church is first and foremost called to the worship of Almighty God, the dedication of our church to Saint Michael & All Angels points to a particular charism of our community to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness as a witness to the angelic ministry of eternal praise. It is this vision of heaven which inspires our worship at Saint Michael's, and I have structured this review around our Vision Statement with its three aspects

1. HOLY – A celebration of worship in the beauty of holiness

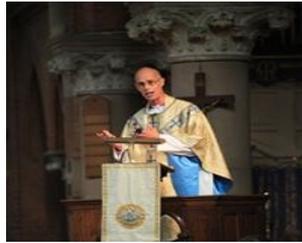
Our worship may be largely formal in nature, but occasions like Christmas with our famous '**Panto sermon**' demonstrates that solemnity is not incompatible with laughter and a sense of fun. Who can ever forget our Curate, Father Martin, and Head Server, Andy Puddifoot, playing the quarrelsome Ugly Sisters just a little too well! In this way, we surprise and delight people who may discover that the Faith has more joy than they realised.



In the last year we have sought to strengthen our music through the launching of a new **Choral Scholarships** programme. We appointed our first Choral Scholar, Kerensa Briggs, but after a few months Kerensa reluctantly decided to step down due to other commitments. Nevertheless, I am not downhearted. My initial research indicated that it can take several years for such schemes to become established and they are increasingly popular as they become known and young singers work towards them. Thank you to our donors, and we look forward to a new round of recruitment after Easter. Over the last year we have also enjoyed getting to know **Philip Berg** who plays the organ at some of our evening services.

Our worship has been enriched by a number of visiting **preachers**. Bishop Christopher of Southwark joined us for our Corpus Christi Open-Air Mass, and Archdeacon John Kiddle came shortly afterwards for the Evensong and Parish Garden party in July. The Dean of Saint Paul's preached at Michaelmas and the

Diocesan Secretary, Ruth Martin, was with us for our October Stewardship Sunday. In Advent we welcomed preachers as diverse as Fr Duncan Dormor of USPG, Fr Robert Stanier (Vicar in Surbiton, and son of Eleanor Stanier in our congregation), Fr Justin White from Westminster Abbey and the Bishop's Chaplain, Fr Joshua Rey. By the time you read this we will have welcomed Fr Andrew Hammond, Chaplain of St John's College, Cambridge as our Holy Week preacher. Such varied preachers bring different perspectives, styles and ideas to enrich our worship.



A group of pilgrims from Saint Michael's visited the Shrine of Our Lady of **Walsingham** in May for the National Pilgrimage when people from all over the country come together in 'England's Nazareth'. By Divine intervention it smiled with sunshine on the two outdoor services and processions, but the heavens opened in the breaks in-between – prompting us pilgrims to dive for cover! Pilgrimages help us to nurture our faith in the God who is with us in the world and I am looking forward to our pilgrimage to Rome later in 2020.

A particular highlight of the last year for me was an invitation from the Bishop of Southwark, along with a few other Southwark clergy to be present in Rome for the **canonisation of Saint John Henry Newman**. As the founder of the Oxford Movement, which later developed into the Catholic movement in the Church of England, Newman is a spiritual father for Saint Michael's which stands in that tradition. It was a great honour to be at the canonisation Mass at the Vatican along with other Anglicans, sitting just beside the Papal throne on the steps of Saint Peter's! We were shown particular courtesy and welcome throughout the weekend of celebrations and the whole experience was a deeply moving experience of ecumenical friendship. St John Henry *ora pro nobis*.

Other **memorable services** in the year include the wedding of Nicholas Harries and Camilla Tillyard, a very well-attended Choral Requiem for All Souls, and ever more popular Nativity service.



2. ACTIVE – Reaching out to our communities

As well as praise, angels have another purpose, evident by their name which means ‘messenger’. From this we may derive our second charism as a church to share the Good News of Christ with the people of our parish.

There are many events throughout the year that act as mission and outreach in our parish. I would particularly like to mention the **Barnes Art Fair**, now in its second year and doubled in size, which not only raised funds for Saint Michael’s, but also brought large numbers of people into the church to see the artistic talent that exists in our community. I pay tribute to the team behind the **Midsummer Fete** which continues to grow and renew itself – and we have exciting plans for further development in 2020. Let me also mention briefly the **Michaelmas Dinner** and the **Variety Show**, both of which were highlights of the last year. Ever since seeing ballet dancer Hannah Childs hit a tambourine with her foot whilst holding it six feet in the air, I have been attempting to do the same, with very different result.



The **PCC Away Day** in September was again held at St Nicholas’, Chiswick, and once again proved its worth in terms of strategic thinking and planning. Entitled ‘Authentic Mission’, it incorporated Bible study, worship, work on our Church Hall project, and Mission Action Plan. With regard to the latter, we reviewed our current MAP which has come to the end of its three-year life and noted:

- The particular success of the Barnes Art Fair (as described above)
- The somewhat mixed success of the Toddler Group which after a promising start has been discontinued due to lack of attendance.
- The delayed but still intended project to install glass doors at the main entrance to the church on the south side.

There is nothing wrong with this mixed picture. Some projects are successful and others turn out not to be. We shouldn’t be afraid of this, they are a learning experience, and apparent ‘failure’ is God’s way of telling us to think again about the

needs of our parish and how to engage with its people. The last part of the day was focused on looking ahead to a new Mission Action Plan which we hope to launch later this year, and we made the following observations with the assistance of input from the congregation:

- There is much more acceptance of change and St Michael's is less resistant to it.
- St Michael's feels more dynamic and there is a sense of momentum and direction.
- Greater openness and inclusivity.
- Our Catholic tradition needs to be celebrated and perhaps explained to some people.
- Increased use of social media which reaches out to people.
- Significant increases in confirmations of both adults and children.
- There is a desire to involve younger people and a wider group of people in the life of the church. More people are involved in activities, but even more needed.
- A desire to move forward with the Church Hall project.
- It is important to keep aware of pastoral issues.

I will leave the Churchwardens to comment further on the **Church Hall Project**, but back in November I was very encouraged by the second stage of consultation on some initial plans, which were well received by the community. This project is moving slowly, but we seem to be getting the process right and bringing people with us, and it therefore has a greater likelihood of success in the long-run.

Our annual programme of **confirmation** preparation is now well-established and last year 9 children and 4 adults were confirmed. This year 7 children and 3 adults are currently preparing to be confirmed in June. This recovery of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the increase in people's faith, is a tangible fruit of our mission.



All this is a cause for much positivity, but we need to remain attentive to wider patterns of declining Christian observance and church attendance in our society,

which means that we will need to be increasingly creative and intentional about our outreach if we want Saint Michael's to thrive. It is a question of how we can reimagine our Catholic tradition in an compelling and attractive way for our time.

3 OPEN – Welcoming and engaging

The openness of our church building and our **churchyard** is a practical expression of the welcoming love of God. It was therefore, with particular sadness and distress that, out of the blue, we received an application from a local resident to put a right of way through the churchyard. This ungracious and unnecessary action has rightly been criticised by many people in the church and local community when access to the churchyard has never been in question. Initially Richmond Council found against the application, but the decision was overturned on appeal. It was particularly frustrating to see how much misinformation became current in the community. The nature of the application was such that many people were given the impression that access to the churchyard was somehow under threat. I would like to pay tribute to Saint Michael's which, over many years, has given general access to our churchyard to the public as an act of generosity and kindness. It is such hospitality, given freely rather than by compulsion which binds our community together in service to one another and witness to God. I want to thank those who gave considerably of their time and energy to respond to it. In reality, the presence of a public right of way through our churchyard does not make much practical difference, but it was right to oppose the application in order to uphold Christian values.

One of the most exciting developments over the last year has been the formation of a group of **older children/teenagers** (aged around 11-14) who have started to come together for 'Youth Socials' held once a term. These have included a time of prayer followed by a fun activity. Most of them know each other through the confirmation classes, and such a group is potentially a means of keeping them engaged with the Christian faith. At a time when this age-group and older teenagers are largely missing from churches in most places, this is very promising and I am pondering how we might continue to nurture this group of young people. Another area where children of this age (and younger) are increasingly involved is as Altar servers.

We continue to engage with a number of local **schools**, among them Barnes Primary school. In the last year there was an goodbye to the popular and dynamic headteacher Mark Hartley – the emotion at his farewell assembly and staff leaving party at The Brown Dog was quite remarkable. However, we all rejoiced when we heard that deputy head Sue Jepson had been appointed in his place. Sue is a pleasure to work with supportive of a strong relationship between St Michael's and Barnes Primary as two important institutions in the local area. We have also recently formed a new relationship with Ibstock Place school which came to us for their

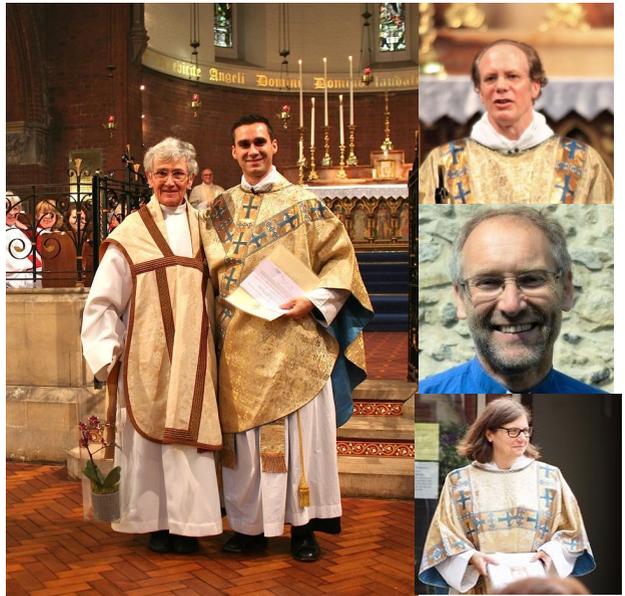
carol services for the first time. By the time you read this I will also have attended the consecration of the new and long-awaited chapel at St Paul's Boys' School.

A new role and aspect of outreach for me has been by chaplaincy of the **Barnes Air Cadets**. It is novel for me to be addressed as 'Padre', but like all chaplaincy it sits on an important boundary between the sacred and the secular where the Church may encounter people who it might not normally meet, and this is perhaps particularly important in relation to teenagers such as those who are part of squadron 39F.

In the context of the wider Church's continuing muddle and disagreement over a wide range of issues related to gender, sexuality and human relationships, the PCC affirmed our long-term commitment to the organisation **Inclusive Church**.^[1] The acceptance of a wide range of people such as those who are gay or divorced, is so normal to us at Saint Michael's that some members of the congregation might be surprised by how angry and hurt many people in our society are by the attitude of some particular churches and the stance of the Church of England more generally – particularly when negative views are shared by various forms of media. My sense is that we need to be much more open and obvious about our inclusivity so that we can combat that impression, let people know not all churches are the same, and stand up for what we believe are Gospel values of Christ-like love and welcome.

It was that same inclusivity which 27 years ago, enabled **Mthr Judith Roberts** to come to us at a time when most Anglo-Catholic churches such as ours were not accepting of the ordained ministry of women. This year at Pentecost, we had the joy of celebrating the 30th anniversary of Judith's deaconing and 25th as a priest – almost all of that time at Saint Michael's! She kindly shared with us an insightful presentation of how Saint Michael's and the parish has changed over her time here. On the subject of welcome, **Fr**

James Hutchings has now settled into Saint Mary's, Barnes, and his role as Team Rector. The loose but warm partnership between the churches of our team continues. It is a pleasure to have James as a senior colleague and he enjoys visiting Saint Michael's once or twice a quarter. Even more noticeably, we have welcomed **Fr Martin Calderbank** as our Curate along with his wife Louise and



their three daughters. He brings with him many skills, and considering Fr Martin's work in finance, it was particularly amusing that his first two sermons coincided with Gospel passages about money – but he is allowed to preach on other subjects too! *Deo volente*, we look forward to Fr Martin's ordination to the priesthood and first Mass in July.

Alongside welcomes we must also list our farewells. At Corpus Christi, we said goodbye to **Hayley Argles-Grant**, our ordinand on placement for three years. The affection for Hayley was manifested in the extremely generous collection for her leaving present – which was such that I had to keep buying more and more! Most notably the 'trousseau' of goodies included a beautiful red stole that was blessed and presented to her by Bishop Christopher.

Sadder goodbyes have taken place at various **funerals**, among them Rosemary Hurry, David Mertens, Stephan de Montaignac and Alan Fraser. In our prayers for them and for the bereaved, we sense how the Church on earth and the Church in heaven are one Church united in love. *May they rest in peace.*

It is with this love in mind that I look forward with excitement and joy to the year ahead and pray that we may continue to live our values as a church that is holy in its worship, active in service, and open in heart and mind to all that God is doing with us and among us in this place to his glory and honour.

Father Stephen Stavrou
Vicar

