

May 2022

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING (APCM)  
Vicar's Report

Dear Friends

We thank God for all his goodness and provisions this year! For the purposes of this APCM, this report reflects on the period between January to December 2021.

I would like to give thanks to God for all who have supported the ministry and mission of the benefice this year. As we have navigated ongoing pandemic times, there is much to be thankful for in our communities of Gorse Hill and Ferndale. We give glory to God for all that is good in our benefice.

On behalf of the churches' communities, I offer my thanks to Revd Barbara Sheppard, Brenda Young, Revd Judith Ashby and Revd Gill Behenna for their invaluable ministry. I also offer my thanks to the Wardens at both churches, Jenny Roe and Julie Hailstone. My thanks goes to Janet Sullivan and Jenny Bassett for all their administrative support, to David Robinson who keeps our website updated. I am also thankful to all our PCC Members who prayerfully steer the direction of our churches. Many thanks to Judith Garratt and Jean Richards in their roles as Treasurer. Thank you to Malcolm Williams and Richard Hailstone for their ministry of music and worship. I take this opportunity to thank every single person who has supported the worshipping events at our churches and at our Zoom offerings. Your ministry is invaluable. I pray God would continue to bless and encourage us in our faith and our ministries as we seek to serve God at this time.

I am also extremely thankful to our ministry team and worshipping communities who supported my compassionate leave of absence in the the autumn due to my father's passing.

As we emerged out of various lockdowns, we have seen a good number of people returning to our church services. On Sundays, the attendance ranges between 15 and 25 people at All Saints and St Barnabas churches. At our monthly zoom service, the numbers are at 8-12 people. We continue to serve our communities through Life Events services. We have received confirmations of weddings to take place in the summer of 2022.

It has been great to see our hall bookings back to capacity with groups returning to use our facilities and indeed we have had some new bookings. We are thankful to God for his faithfulness. Open Door have remained consistent in their use of our halls throughout the pandemic. We give thanks to God for seeing us through this wilderness season.

Chaplaincy work to our Gorse Hill shops have resumed. It has been good to stay connected with shops and businesses who have been impacted tremendously during the past 2+ years. We thank God for Brenda Young's ministry. We also give thanks to God for Revd Barbara Sheppard who has maintained strong links with Ferndale and Poppies schools and the opportunities for in-person assemblies and developing projects with the school children is building up. We have also sustained a level of engagement with people on the fringes of church life through our benefice

magazine, phone calls, prayer and various outreach projects. My thanks goes to all who have facilitated the prayer and pastoral support of our communities.

This year I have sustained a regular pattern of meeting with key groups of people, namely: Ministry team, Worship team, Benefice Ministry team, Wardens and PCC. We have reviewed our Safeguarding policies and are up-to-date with these.

With regards to outreach, our focus has been partnering with organisations that are doing awesome work in connecting with vulnerable people, those on the margins of society. We support the work of: Food Bank, Women's Refuge, Threshold, Safe Families and Harbour Project. I am incredibly humbled by the generosity of the benefice in supporting these organisations both financially and with much needed items.

Looking ahead, there are many signs of hope and I am optimistic about all that the Lord will gift us in 2022. Things that I am looking forward to in the coming year include:-

- Exploring the possibility of redeveloping the St Barnabas church halls (a long-term vision).
- Exploring the possibility of relaunching Messy Church.
- Being intentional in our prayer life across the benefice, developing a posture of prayer.
- Regaining a focus on our Mission Action Plan.
- Seeking opportunities for intentional outreach and partnerships, reaching out and serving the unchurched in our communities.

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).’” As a worshipping community we are tasked to seek more of Jesus in our lives, to know and trust him with our daily lives. My prayer for us this year is that we would allow God, through Jesus Christ, to be our compass and our guide, as we move from being about ‘the self’ (that is focusing on what serves and fulfils us individually) to being about ‘the other’ (that is focusing on seeking to serve those beyond our church walls). As I write this, I am reminded of why we are here, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).” We are called to serve those who are yet to know the gospel message of love, hope and peace.

May we move forward in God's goodness, grace and confidence as we embrace all that 2022 will bring. Amen.

Blessings,

Revd Dr Catherine Mark Okoronkwo  
**Vicar, All Saints and St Barnabas**