

St. Michael & All Angels, AGM

Rector's Report - 8 December 2019

2019 has been quite a tumultuous year for our nation. We're still part of the European Union and Scotland is still part of the U.K. The status quo remains but the arguments have been relentless and who knows, when I write this report in 12 months time, much may have changed or on the constitutional matters, may be still nothing will have changed! These things matter, as does our local context, here in this part of Argyll & Bute. We're about to celebrate the Incarnation in the locality we're rooted in; our country; planet earth – all these things have an impact on us and of course vice versa; us on our local community and so on.

After roughly one and a half years; I've had an opportunity to reflect after experiencing life in St. Michael's and Helensburgh; as rector with a hand on the tiller; give a gentle steer as to the direction we may wish to travel in. As priest and pastor, presiding over the St. Michael's community first and foremost, it's my responsibility to ensure that our worship is of the highest standard possible. Every service matters and at each service, we give our best. We are most fortunate that for 9 months of the year we can still offer 2 choral services on a Sunday. This of course costs us in time; energy and money but it is the prime reason for our existence as a church and it is why we invest so heavily in it. As Christian people we are here to glorify God and we do so at St. Michael's with a minimum of four services, most weeks of the year. 2 said Eucharists; 1 sung Eucharist and Choral Evensong. If we wish to be spiritual and numerically strong; it is getting these services right, offering quality worship in the Episcopalian tradition to the wider community. We continue to strive to offer people an opportunity to engage with the living God. Many thanks are due to our choir and organists who contribute so much to our worship.

Secondary to this but of immense importance, is what we do as members of the body of Christ, having been fed by a divine act of worship. We are sent out of this building, I would argue, to seek out the poor and vulnerable. It is this unequivocal bias to the poor which we read about in Scripture maybe most particularly in Luke's Gospel – that we try and respond in a Christ like fashion. There are many ways of doing this and I would say this congregation can hold it's head high in the way we serve those on the margins – in this sphere our track record is solid. However, to emphasize this point, we are now linked with one of the poorest countries in the world; depending on how you measure these things; Malawi is the fourth poorest country globally. In the UK we're in the top half dozen; part of the G7 and the City of London remains a dominant financial centre. It can be helpful to be reminded that not everyone lives like us and the majority live at the other end of the economic scale. To this end we are now linked with St. Peter's Anglican Church, Lilongwe, which is the oldest church in the capital city. It is the mother church of numerous congregations in and around Lilongwe and the parish priest is Francis Matumba. Another part of our Malawi commitment is to financially support a project called, Building Malawi. On behalf of St. Michael's, Reay and I are working on this together with Rotary. As I've mentioned before, the project is to build the Lingadzi Sports Academy on a 22 acre site in Lilongwe. We're trying to encourage as many people in Helensburgh as we can to get involved and by October 2020; the largest sports academy in Malawi should be built.

What we discussed as a Vestry, was to be involved with projects overseas, as well as in our backyard. As already stated, members of St. Michael's, do a considerable amount by way of charity work. We are also exploring ways we might connect with Churchill and specifically, the Drumfork Community Centre. This would link us with one of the poorer parts of

Helensburgh and put us in direct contact with Navy families. I have made contact with Shelley, the centre manager and we'll see how this evolves.

For my own ministry with vulnerable members of this community, I continue with my work as chaplain at Parklands School. This is quite complex, as it's a special needs school and what isn't really possible is to use verbal communication, which would be the norm for me. It takes a long time to develop some depth to these relationships and establish trust. What has worked well is the few hours I spend each week with Gareloch Riding for the Disabled Association at Colgrain Equestrian Centre. The riding and connection with animals is highly therapeutic for these children.

Earlier this year, the Acting Dean asked if I would be Interim Priest of St. Augustine's, Dumbarton and St. Mungo's, Alexandria. Officially these two charges are no longer joined but unofficially, there is still a connection between them. Primarily my role is to officiate at the Occasional Offices (baptisms; marriages and funerals). However, I've ended up with rather more on my plate: visiting some members of the congregations; attending Vestry meetings and dealing with constant emails. Clearly this curtails some of my activity in Helensburgh but fortunately it's a situation which is time limited.

If we move specifically to St. Michael's, we have for the last year been working hard and I'd like to thank people for their generosity of time and talent. It is fitting that I start with our Lay Reader, Kevin, the person with whom I work closest. Kevin and I work well together, and continue to enjoy our complimentary personalities and skills. Thank you to you Kevin and I'd also include Joy; for your unstinting hard work and commitment to this church and being so supportive as a colleague.

At each Vestry and indeed AGM, on my left and right sit the Secretary and Treasurer. It's really helpful that the three of us share a common vision for St. Michael's. Again three different personalities but a genuine compatibility which makes a major contribution to what I would describe as a strong Vestry. Thank you to Nick and Janina for the substantial amount of work you do in helping make St. Michael's a well oiled machine.

While on the Vestry, I'd like to thank the three members who are standing down: Ann Andrew; Helen Gibson and Geoff Mason. Thank you for your service to the Vestry and the individual contributions you have made. I hope you will continue to serve the church with your own distinct ministries.

I tend to talk about the two Richards – Richard H and Richard S. Richard H serving on the altar, running our Mothers' Union Branch; Lay Rep along with various other duties. Richard S as alternative Lay Rep and our person who produces all the paperwork and there's a considerable amount of it! When you get the weekly service sheet; when you get the Messenger – that's Richard. Not to mention all those liturgy booklets – you get the idea. My thanks to the two Richards.

Two new people I've been working with in 2019, are Reay MacKay and Sheila Baker. Firstly with Reay, he took over from Derek as our Property Convener and safe to say Reay hit the road running. Two large projects this year have been replacing the boilers and although we are still fine tuning it, we have a relatively warm building. Not such a large project but still important was the garage and short drive in the rectory garden. This is far more than Anna and I anticipated and we appear to have solved the parking situation which was indeed a challenge when we first arrived!

Sheila has taken over as the Visiting Co-ordinator and does a thoroughly professional job visiting members of St Michael's who may be unable to attend church. The visiting and regular updates are invaluable and certainly help Kevin and I with our respective ministries. To both Reay and Sheila, thank you so much for the considerable amount of time you give to the church. Whether it be fabric or people, both are very important to the well being of this community.

In The Messenger you will find a list of people to contact for the various work which goes on here. Everyone makes a great contribution to St. Michael's – thank you to all of you for the roles you fill. What makes St. Michael's such a healthy congregation is the work you put in – we are most grateful for that.

A few words about our mission at St. Michael's. Our aim is always to grow this congregation spiritually and numerically. The theory behind how you do this isn't complex and has remained the same for centuries. Quality worship; thorough pastoral care; a building fit for purpose and members of the congregation who are confident enough to invite family and friends to join our Eucharistic community. This is hardly rocket science; we know about these fundamentals. However, in recent decades, websites and social media have become key. It's what people now look at when they move to a new location and are seeking a new church. Chances are they will not turn up on a Sunday morning if they don't like the website or Facebook page. So, we have to get this right if we are serious about attracting new members to our community. Henry has been working extremely hard upgrading our website to make it more professional and reflect better the St. Michael's ethos. Likewise Aliet, relatively new to St. Michael's - she and Chris joined us from South Africa - has done a great job in propelling our mission via social media. These two vehicles of outreach require constant attention and we are most grateful to Henry and Aliet for doing this on our behalf.

Lastly, my thanks to Anna for all that she does for our community. Practically, she has done a huge amount of work in the rectory garden, making it look attractive and cared for. Often what oils the cogs is what's done behind the scenes and Anna always steps up to the plate. Anna, you're the archetypal people person and it's great to have you as part of the team.

2019 has been a very good year for our church where much has been achieved. May God bless us in 2020 as we continue to proclaim and live His Kingdom in and around Helensburgh.

Dominic Ind
Rector