

St. Michael & All Angels, AGM

Rector's Report - 6 December 2020

In my opening paragraph of last years rector's report, I raised the issue of constitutional matters (Brexit & Independence) and wondered what might have changed in 12 months time. Words like Covid or pandemic wouldn't have been part of our everyday language – how things change! Leaving the EU is certainly in the air but nothing compared to C19 – will we be able to celebrate Christmas is a pressing issue for some! It has been an extraordinary year and the first thing I want to say is how well St Michael's has adjusted to this current new norm. Given all the changes and there have been many; not once has someone complained to me about the way we are now doing things at St. Michael's. I think that's impressive – there's an openness; graciousness and acknowledgement that we are all trying to do the best we can in this church in very challenging circumstances.

Earlier this year at the end of March, our normal pattern of worship came to an abrupt halt, not only did our public worship stop, we were told to close our doors! That went against every fibre of my being – completely unable to offer a sanctuary to the community at a time where people would have particularly appreciated it. The only positive I could take from our predicament, is that clergy were able to continue to pray in their church, unlike our brothers and sisters down south.

Every Sunday during lockdown; I rang our bells and Anna and I celebrated the Eucharist. Prayers never ceased in St. Michael's and the aumbry candle continued to burn 24/7. This continued until the summer when things began to loosen and Anna had the excellent idea that we could meet outdoors on a Sunday afternoon in one another's gardens for the month of August. This worked extremely well and even on one Sunday afternoon when it was particularly driech, people turned up anyway in good spirits to be together!

By this stage we were open for private prayer and this was greatly enhanced by Andrew and Barbara playing the organ and Joan playing the piano. It was lovely to hear music once again in St. Michael's. These Tuesday mornings for individual devotion prepared us for public worship at the end of August. We were far from 'normal' and still aren't, with no choir and numbers capped at 50 (by the Scottish Government). However, we are back and having started on Sunday mornings at 10.30, we then returned to having a midweek Eucharist but had to move it to Wednesday morning in the nave – two changes to help with our health and safety regulations.

This is where we are now, having 50% of our weekly services running and another idea from Anna; to add a seated exercise class after the Wednesday Eucharist to help us physically, emotionally and mentally. The stress caused by isolation is huge! 15 chairs in the upper hall with participants socially distanced; 20 minutes of exercise with a video from Trish, who specializes in, 'ageing well recreation.' This has helped greatly with building confidence and numerous people have commented on how much they benefit from the exercise.

I'd like to comment that this gradual build up of returning to 'normality' has worked well. Safety has always been paramount but we've tried to make the most of what we're permitted to do. I am aware that there is still concern and some don't wish to risk being inside a building. We all long for a vaccine when we are able to return to what we considered the normal way to do things at St. Michael's but for the time being we continue with our present format and I for one am grateful that we can gather at all...

Running with the impact of Covid for the moment; unfortunately with the link we had with St. Peter's Anglican Church, Lilongwe I couldn't see how we were able to develop this without meeting face to face. I was given a grant by the Province to fly to Lilongwe and had earmarked a couple of weeks in July this year to visit St. Peter's and spend some time getting to know their priest, Francis Matumba and the people of the parish. It transpired as time passed that this was not going to happen and I returned the grant to the Province. Particularly with no Internet connection to speak of; without actually meeting them; it is really very difficult to give the link momentum. Not being safe to travel and the air industry in turmoil resulting in more expensive airfares, it was time to draw stumps.

However, what has worked very well was another venture, also in Lilongwe, supporting the charity, Building Malawi. In the vast 22 acre site, the library building now has a large plaque; Helensburgh House Staffroom. You will see a picture of it as the back of the church. Underneath the heading it reads: 'With special thanks to Reay Mackay and the Rotary Club of Helensburgh - Reverend Dom Ind and the congregation of St. Michael and All Angels Scottish Episcopal Church.' Frankly, job well done and I particularly appreciate the partnership with the Rotary. This is exactly the sort of creative initiative we should be doing, coming together to serve those in need, in this case in one of the poorest countries in the world.

Changing tack, I would like to acknowledge those who have given wonderful service to St. Michael's but have now stood down. Let me start with Joan Sadden, who has done no less than three decades as Chief Sacristan! Now that is a long time to volunteer for anything - 30 years week in week out. Often or not in life it's attention to detail, getting the small things right - Joan does this, par excellence. We have a good collection of silver at St. Michael's and we try

to use it - it's not just kept hidden away at the back of the safe. Joan has had overall responsibility for that as well and of course the linen and the fabulous altar frontals we have. It's real behind the scenes work and my goodness it matters. We take it for granted that we have pristine vessels on the altar each week – that's work and it's those sorts of detail which greatly enhance our worship. Thank you Joan and indeed John. It's much appreciated that you will continue with the laundering after the services. Carol Parry is now Chief Sacristan – thanks to her and of course Nick for taking this role on.

I'm very pleased to say that the Flower Convener position has finally been resolved. Took us a little while to sort this satisfactorily but now Sue Ashby is able to stand down and will be replaced by Andrea Gibson. Thank you very much, Sue for doing this job for the last 6 years and to Andrea for taking on this role. Rather like what I was saying with the Eucharistic vessels, attention applied to the flower displays makes a real difference and helps lift people as we bring some of God's natural creation into church.

On enjoying God's creation, the Rambling Club has been seriously curtailed this year. John Hanks has been the contact person for this. There are of course others who take on responsibility of leading the days. John serves in numerous ways in St. Michael's and the wider community – for John this is one role among many. Thank you John for your contribution to the Rambling Club and thanks to Gerry Quickfall who has now taken over from John.

Moving now to the Vestry, two members are retiring: Jane Davies and David Ronald. They both have military backgrounds, Navy and Army respectively – they both brought a no-nonsense, down to earth approach to our Vestry discussions. Your contributions have been valued – thank you to you both. I'm pleased to say that Jane will continue with the important role of Stewardship Convener and will remain as the secretaries' secretary! Speaking of which, takes me to Nick.

I've been fortunate over the years to have had good Vestry Secretaries and Nick is no exception – indeed one of the best! Nick is vigorous in carrying out his role as Secretary to the Vestry and I am most grateful for his professional approach and not least his humour. I'm also indebted to Janina, our Treasurer – another person who operates in the most professional manner. The system for payments now is well organized and we are blessed with a Treasurer who is fast and efficient. Money matters and how we manage it is really important - with Janina we know we are in very capable hands.

Yet another good year working with Kevin and both of us having rapidly adjusted to this new way of doing worship. We both like to be well organized and these changes with Covid has certainly made long term planning difficult. I think we've born this well – we continue to deliver worship as best we can.

Kevin remains as hardworking and diligent as ever and I think it says so much about Kevin that he still produces sermon notes for Evening Prayer which I know is enjoyed by various people, certainly our choir members. In thanking Kevin, I always like to mention Joy. I appreciate Kevin is the Lay Reader but many of us know how much Joy does and we witness that every week at our Wednesday morning Eucharist.

Another one of the key jobs is being Property Convener and I'm most grateful to Reay for continuing with this role. Reay has a good background for this; transferable skills from boats to buildings! Living round the corner also helps – it's that type of job! This is a big plant – a sizeable church; two halls and a large rectory – most of which is over 150 years old and we have a challenging climate in Helensburgh. Forth Road Bridge comes to mind – maintenance is relentless. We strive to keep our building in good shape – preventative work is the key. Although the Vestry has overall responsibility of the fabric, part of the Trustees role, on a day to day basis it tends to be Reay. Thank you Reay for all you do, some serious multi-tasking which as a congregation we reap the benefit. Also thanks to Jean who often or not is there assisting.

With the plant, I would like to mention the outside of it, specifically the flower tubs. Chris and Linda looked after the tubs for six years or so and have asked for someone else to take on the responsibility of maintaining them. Gerry has kindly stepped up to the plate, as has Jo Scott. Nick has provided three new tubs and Reay one; so Gerry and Jo are now in a position to tend the tubs – not all being new but most!

I would also like to mention our two Richards who have been working extremely hard with the building, primarily with microphones and cameras. Many thanks to you both for all you do for St. Michael's. Not least to Richard Smith for producing the weekly service sheets and Richard Horrell for leading the Mothers' Union.

I'm very grateful for Maureen Kyle for agreeing to take on the other parts of outside the church – checking once a month or so and when the occasion arises, rallying the troops (that's us!) and we can blitz it – should only be necessary a few times a year to keep on top of things.

I can't stress enough how important it is that our plant looks well cared for on the outside around the church; the path down the back running parallel to the burn; two halls; the rectory and rectory garden. The reality is, many people do judge a book by its cover. For us, to attract people to our church, the cover needs to look good and its one of a whole. The entire corner of William Street and Princes Street should say to anyone passing – they care about what they do in that church and are prepared to invest time; money and energy into their

buildings. The initial impression matters – lets continue to work hard keeping that right.

I'd like to say something about our music which is a key part of what we offer. St. Michael's has a strong choral tradition – it's an integral part of the way we worship. At the moment we are unable to do that – it's quite a blow. We are extremely blessed to have Andrew and Barbara who have been playing on a Sunday morning since the end of August. How we have enjoyed their music, especially as we cannot join in. We have now introduced cantors – they stand behind a screen and sing for us; sometimes as soloists; duets and indeed we have one quartet! We are making the most of what we are permitted to do and the combination of our organists and cantors has made such a difference and we will continue with this until the choir are allowed to return.

On a very positive note; we do have new members of the choir waiting in the wings, ready for the return of choral music. Also last week we spent Shaun's generous legacy in giving the organ an overhaul. All in all, we are set to continue the great musical tradition of this church and we can look forward confidently to 2021!

A few words about my own ministry after approx. 2 and a half years as your rector. One plus with the pandemic is that I've not been rushing about quite as much as I normally do and consequently I've had opportunities to be with members of the congregation, mainly in their gardens (!), and have generally got to know people better. As priest and pastor this has been invaluable. One's priest craft at the altar is strongly connected with the people you are called to serve. The quality of the relationships within the community influences the quality of the liturgy in the worship. For me 2020 has been a very good year to develop those connections and an opportunity to strengthen pastoral care amongst you.

As you know, I've been interim priest in charge of Dumbarton and Alexandria – this has been quite demanding not least this year with funerals. Recently I've had a run of funerals from Alexandria. Sadly at St. Mungo's, at some point next year the church will be deconsecrated. It's not just about finance; there are very few healthy people to actually be trustees. I'm pleased to say that the story at St. Augustine's is brighter. Since the end of October, they have a new rector and I suspect next year, the able bodied members of St. Mungo's will make their way to St. Augustine's. As that develops, my role will gradually cease.

I do a few other things in the diocese and province but a main role is being the Mothers' Union Diocesan Chaplain. Primarily at the moment done through Zoom. I suspect in the next 12 months I might be able to visit other MU groups in the diocese. I would say that these last few months have been a good insight

into the workings of the MU and as I suspected, they do a considerable amount of good work for those on the margins.

Returning to our own congregation, I am very aware that there are many people I haven't mentioned who do a whole power of work. With Covid I think its only right that I mention Sheila Baker who has been relentlessly working the phone through most of this year. A really tremendous job looking out for people and reporting back to me with those in particular need – that has been invaluable during this crisis. Thank you Sheila and to all the others who have really gone out of their way to help those with shopping etc.

As I always do, I'd like to end with acknowledging my heart felt thanks to Anna, who just carries on behind the scenes, making a considerable difference oiling the cogs of our community. There have undoubtedly been some frustrations this year not least with the Drumfork Centre and all that we had planned with Eco Baby. Thanks to our earlier advertising people knew about our service and had contact details which enabled Anna & I to distribute clothing etc. to needy families even during the pandemic. We're grateful for everyone's help in washing and ironing these items. It's a holding game at the moment – it will happen! More than ever though your care and natural ability to communicate with people, has come into its own – on behalf of St. Michael's, thank you for your ministry in 2020.

Even with the stress and strain of this year and all the new challenges which have come our way, I can still say with total conviction, it has been an absolute pleasure to serve as your rector through this year – there has been many wonderful moments to remember.

Dominic Ind
Rector