

St. Michael & All Angels, AGM

Rector's Report – 4th December 2022

Change is obviously part of life but some would say we've had more than our fair share in 2022. At the beginning of 2022 (24th February), we witnessed Russia invading Ukraine which was a major escalation of the Russo – Ukraine War, which began way back in 2014. Strictly speaking this war began 8 years ago but when Putin said that his 100,000 troops at the border of Ukraine weren't going to invade and then of course they did – it was a very sad day indeed, felt across Europe as this is unequivocally a full blown war. We continue to live with the consequences – not least with the energy crises we now face – we're all the poorer for what many of us perceive as a senseless war.

At home, we almost became blasé about a lectern being set up outside 10, Downing Street for yet another new PM. Boris Johnson was teetering for a long time by refusing to leave No.10 when it was generally accepted that he had misled the House – clear grounds for resignation. Campaign through the summer, at least for Tory members and then Liz Truss at the helm – for 50 days! The shortest serving PM ever and yet the damage to our economy was immense! We now have Rishi Sunk who would appear to have a better economic hand on the tiller.

Unlike British politicians this year, what we might call the bedrock of stability in British life, our late Queen died on 8th September, one we all knew was coming sooner rather than later, nevertheless a shock factor reverberated around our islands and sent ripples across the world. An extraordinary gathering of world leaders in Westminster Abbey for her funeral – a clear statement of what this Sovereign has achieved over seven decades.

That's our backdrop and of course it has an impact for the Church, not least with pastoral care and how people are affected by the economic squeeze. What has had a very direct impact is Covid,

which has not of course disappeared, but many of us have tried to resume life as we knew it pre-Covid. However, that's by no means the whole story, as it wouldn't be true to say, we find ourselves in the same place as where we were at the beginning of 2020. The weekly practice of attending Church on a Sunday was stopped; there are some who have never returned to that practice.

Another factor is that we learnt about recording and live streaming - the latter is a two edged sword with positives and negatives. If for instance you're in New Zealand and unable to fly to the United Kingdom for a funeral, you're now able to participate, in a way which would previously have been unthinkable. That's a positive, as it is for those unable to be physically present. However, when you have people who simply have got out of the habit or prefer to stay at home with a cup of coffee and watch the service on a screen – that's not such good news! This has had a negative impact on the Church, even when the Pope said earlier this year, “It's now time to return to Mass in person.”

We're fortunate in St. Michael's where we've not noticeably felt this negative impact. For most, if it was their habit to regularly attend St. Michael's, they have re-engaged and we record the service but don't live stream, so we don't give the option of staying at home watching it in real time.

Given what we've experienced these last couple of years, St. Michael's is in pretty good shape. Ultimately what makes St. Michael's what it is, is the people, to state the obvious. We are blessed with a good number of highly committed, able people and our outgoing Treasurer is one such person. Let me say a few words about Janina. Well, Janina, isn't a Chartered Accountant – she's a viola player. Having studied at RSAMD, Janina is a sought-after chamber musician but as it happens; she's rather good at figures! We've benefited greatly from this part of her skill set. We now have our accounts done on a computer; with good software and a healthy working relationship with Caroline Kerr CA, as our Independent Examiner. This system, which Janina has fine-tuned during her time as St. Michael's Treasurer

works extremely well and as a result we reap the fruits. It's not though just about being good with figures and using the appropriate software. It's about a practicing Christian understanding of what the appropriate role for a Church Treasurer is and facilitating the Rector, vestry and church community to get on with the business of ministry and mission. Janina absolutely got that and through her professional approach to this role, created a very solid platform for St. Michael's to get on with what we exist for – to glorify God and to serve. Janina, thank you, you've been an outstanding Treasurer and you're able to hand over to Jean Mackay, a well-oiled system for handling our accounts. As we say thank you to, Janina, I'd like to say thank you to Jean for being prepared to take on one of the larger roles in our church life.

Along with the Treasurer, the other major role is that of Vestry Secretary and I'd like to acknowledge the competent work which Nick has achieved once again. He has done his usual, going beyond what is required of the role. A good example of this is with the Co-ordinator for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults in the Church. Our thanks to Joan Thompson who did this for a number of years until 2nd May this year. The Co-ordinator role has to be filled – it isn't something that can remain dormant. Nick stepped into the breach – not something a Vestry Secretary is required to do. This position is now filled; thank you to Antonia Hammond for agreeing to take this one. It's Nick's willingness to go the extra mile which makes him such an excellent lay colleague to have at your side.

Although a church is first and foremost about the people, clearly the building matters. We have a fine church; rectory and now two halls, which are both in very good order. Reay Mackay as our Property Convener had more than enough on his plate; therefore, with the lower hall and kitchen renovation we had a partnership between Mark & Janina Duncan who designed the area; Derek Spall who produced the drawings and Anna Ind who supervised the work. It involved a range of professional tradesman – all in all quite a team to address the situation downstairs. Rosemary Rose generously left St. Michael's a legacy of £25k and we have

carried out Rosemary's request for an upgraded crèche area to the best of our ability. Thanks to Rosemary, the lower ground floor is now fit for purpose. This took a substantial amount of preparation and execution – the result speaks for itself.

Returning to Covid for a moment; a member of St. Michael's commented when Covid first hit, that it was a great shame when we had picked up such momentum in our first couple of years. Mothering Sunday 2020 we were stopped in our tracks. Ministry never stopped but clearly so much of our activity was put on hold. In the last month of 2022, I stand before you and say the momentum, which was there pre Covid is now well and truly back! The energy has returned; that forward momentum; a confidence that we know what we are about and where we are going. A belief that we have something to offer and have a desire to share it.

Maybe every church thinks of itself in some way as unique and there is truth in that. I certainly have that sense about St. Michael's being somewhat unique in the Scottish Episcopal Church. I've mentioned before to some of you that we have a 'quasi parish church' feel about us. Obviously we are not the parish church, that domain is for the Church of Scotland. However, in this unofficial garrison town, the largest in Scotland with the Royal Navy, many of the military here have at least a nominal Anglican background. That puts us in a strong position as people come up from down south to work at the Base – if they're going to attend church; St. Michael's is where many would have a natural affinity.

The Scottish Episcopal Church has a role in Scotland as we stand in the Reformed tradition and yet offer a robust sacramental and liturgical form of worship, far more so than any other reformed denomination. We make the most of that here at St. Michaels, working hard at the liturgy, trying always to produce worship of a high standard. Added to that St. Michael's has a long tradition of offering choral worship and we continue that today with a weekly choral eucharist and monthly choral evensong. We reinforce what

it is to be Episcopalian/Anglican and it's an offering to this town and surrounding area.

We now have another string added to our bow with buildings which we can be proud of. They are all of a high standard and our challenge is to keep them that way. We invite people to be part of our eucharistic community and with appropriate pride, we have people, buildings and forms of worship which are attractive to those interested in our style of Christian worship.

Changing tack I would like to acknowledge as I did in August, the immense contribution Kevin and Joy Boak made to our church. Kevin preached here for the last time as Lay Reader of St. Michael's on Sunday 14th August. We had a wonderful celebration but of course also tinged with sadness. Kevin and Joy are now getting on with their new life down in East Yorkshire; closer to their two daughters and grandchildren. We have no doubt they will have found a new Christian community to be a part of and serve.

I would also like to acknowledge my considerable gratitude to Anna for her contribution to St. Michael's as she continues to beaver away in the background. She is still involved with our Eco Baby project in conjunction with the groups in Glasgow and Drumchapel. By request Anna has restarted the exercise class on Wednesday mornings to help us through the winter, also the production of our St. Michael's knitted Peace Angels for distribution through December, with particular focus on the turmoil in Europe. Anna has done much work downstairs, supervising the tradesmen. Her soft skills have worked well organizing the workmen with her usual charm!

As for 2023, we are in slightly new territory here as this is the first time, so I've been told, that we do not have assistant clergy or Lay Readers. That puts a little more pressure on myself but I've discovered yet more talent within this congregation and we've started to utilize that. The lay team has widened and we are responding well to the challenge of serving the community here in Helensburgh and beyond.

On a personal level I've reduced my outside commitments to allow myself time to focus more on life in this congregation. Kevin obviously left a large hole and I am managing to fill that with the assistance of others. What we have in place now is a system which works well and I dare say that will continue to evolve.

I've made a point of not thanking every individual this year so people aren't left out but I'm very aware of substantial contributions made by numerous people. Ultimately we do this work for God; it's our offering and we're a richer community because of it and truly making up the Body of Christ. For all those who offer so much, my heartfelt thanks.

We are a strong; hard working; tightly knit community and it remains a great pleasure to serve as your Rector.

Dominic Ind
Rector