

ST JAMES' CHURCH
Brownhills



Following Jesus

APCM
REPORTS
2021

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Reports relating to St James' Ministry & Mission

1. Discipleship Groups (GTL)

Since October we've had 5 *Grace, Truth & Life* groups meeting during the week, each facilitated by either Liz, Pete & Sarah, or Gayle. Following the conclusion of the 'Moving On' course, the groups had a break for Christmas and began the Wellbeing Journey programme from the organisation 'Hope Together' and Kingsgate Community Church in Peterborough, in January.

As all groups have been meeting via Zoom, members were very thankful for the opportunity to see and talk to each other – albeit on a screen. The wellbeing subject matter was very timely in the light of the covid pandemic and has given rise to some interesting discussions and the chance to share how we've felt. We have also been appreciating how God has strengthened and supported us at this time. It was good to pray together as well and to share one another's needs and concerns.

The Wellbeing Journey concludes in mid-June, so for the summer period we'll be joining in with the rest of the church in enjoying planned opportunities to socialise in small groups and to go on prayer walks around the parish area.

Looking to future months, we've been noticing that many of our members at St James' express that they would like to grow in their knowledge and understanding of how the Bible fits together and works. With this in mind, though a programme or course is currently undecided on, our GTL small group sessions in the Autumn are likely to be focussed on this aim of getting to know the Bible better.

Liz Corbett, Pete & Sarah Biggs & Gayle Greenway.

2. Worship

"Sing praise to the Lord, all His faithful people! Remember what the Holy One has done and give Him thanks!" Psalm 30:4

Since the last APCM, worship in its musical form has been limited at best – near impossible at worst. However, we worship an amazing God who as we know *'makes all things possible'* Matthew 19:26. Consequently, small groups of musicians and singers have been able to gather, socially distanced, to make recordings to be used in the pre-recorded online services. My utmost thanks and gratitude goes to those who have been involved with this. Additionally, from the beginning of May we have been able to have small groups of singers within the services in church, again thank you to everyone who have embraced this as I know a lot of your comfort zones have been significantly stretched. As restrictions are gradually lifted, what we are able to offer should start to increase and we look forward to worshipping God together in the future. Praise be to His name!

Pete Biggs

3. Social

No social events have been possible during the last six months. Social contact has been very much missed by all our congregation. As Christians it is very important to us to spend time talking and having fellowship with other Christians. We have tried to maintain this by telephone calls and for a few weeks of the year we had a Zoom coffee morning. But it is not the same as face to face contact. I am sure as soon as possible we will be organising opportunities to meet together and also events to which we can invite the wider community. Hopefully this will not be too long before all this is possible. Even to chat together over a cup of tea etc after the service is a wonderful chance to catch up with one another.

Joy Powell

4. Pastoral Care

The Pastoral Team has been active during the last six months making phone calls to keep in touch and by delivering to those unable to access a computer. The notice sheet carries a contact number for anyone needing prayer and also for if they have any practical needs such as help with shopping. We intend to continue with deliveries – which besides the notice sheet, magazine and Bible reading notes now includes copies of the sermons – for as long as this service is required. As Covid 19 restrictions continue to ease, we will be looking towards providing home visits and Home Communion for those who require it, when it is safe to engage in these activities.

A couple of training sessions have been held on Saturday mornings. One session looked at bereavement and ways to support the bereaved that are both sensitive and that can help enable them to work through a healthy grieving process with the Lord. The second session considered general background on pastoral work based on the Bible, and helped us to learn more about how we could use the Bible when seeking to care for others. As part of that second session we also thought about key reasons as to why it is helpful to have a pastoral

team even though we want to encourage all members of church to have a heart to care for others. Key elements of our pastoral mornings as a team are worship and the opportunity that they provide to feedback to and support one another. To support communication between those mornings, we have recently gained a WhatsApp group.

Joy Powell & Gayle Greenway

5. Tribe & Sunday Club

This year has been difficult year for Sunday Club and Tribe due to the COVID19 restrictions.

Sue Bryan, Joy Powell, Mel Pearce, Carol Glass and Gareth Glass continue to run Tribe and Sunday Club groups. From September to December, these were held in the Church hall and continued, from the New Year onwards, on-line through the Children's Services. There are now only four members attending, three are Sunday Club age, two of which are nearly Tribe age and will join Tribe in September. The fourth member, it was decided, would become an Assistant Leader and help with the leading of the group. A number of children, however, take part in the on-line church events.

Instead of Halloween we did something called light party pack for Sunday Club. These contained two crafts, Play dough, decorating their own biscuits, word search, sweets and a prayer. We gave these packs to 10 families. For Tribe we supplied the materials to make Tie Dye cushions, canvasses to decorate for Tribe Room and chocolate. We encouraged them to participate in this rather than Halloween in order to show that Jesus is the light.

Christmas zoom meeting. This was a fun night full of games and the Christmas story. Six children took part.

Bake off and Quiz. We had 14 children participate in the zoom meeting. We gave each child the opportunity to make and decorate their own pancake, we finished with a fun quiz. This went down really well and it was great to interact with the children on line.

Easter. 19 activity packs were distributed, Each child had a book about Easter, an Easter egg, decorate their own Easter card and create their own sticker Easter scene. A Cross Sand Art bottle and Easter Egg and art decoration kit together with an Easter prayer.

Easter Zoom. 10 children took part in the Good Friday zoom meeting. We explained the meaning of Good Friday and Easter. The craft activities were conducted by all the children during the zoom meeting. We finished with games and a prayer. We held a crafting morning to create a garden of Gethsemane – 11 families and 15 children participated. This was an opportunity to finally meet up in person, although socially distanced. The families took their own garden of Gethsemane home with them. All received a hot chocolate and a cup cake. This was a perfect chance to share the wonders of Easter.

Pentecost. Zoom meeting scheduled for the 23rd May 2021 and also looking forward to a family games and picnic on Chasewater on the 25th July 2021.

During the Christmas Service and WoW Service, our young people continued to take an active part where possible. This included reading Harvest Festival Poems. Leaders continue to take the care of each child and young person very seriously and endeavour to develop good practise in our ministry with young people and children. With that in mind, there is an on-line monthly meeting with Gayle to plan events, etc. The children and young peoples' ministry continues due to the contribution of a team of dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly to keep these groups going and to whom we are profoundly grateful.

Carol Glass and Mel Pearce

6. Kid's Church online

We really wanted to keep in contact and reach out to our young people during the lock downs. We managed to achieve this by filming a weekly kids church. We aimed the topics at a level that our children could understand and participate in. We tried to make these as much fun and inter-active as possible whilst opening up the wonders of the bible's teachings and helping them to expand their bible knowledge. The practicalities of filming has been a steep learning curve for all of those involved.

7. Puppets' Ministry

The Puppet Group, *All 4 Jesus Puppets*, continues to meet on Wednesdays. Since the start of the Covid19 pandemic, the team have met on Zoom but from September to December they were able to meet in the Church hall. The team consist of Bella, Abbie, Carol and Gareth. The ministry, in the last six months, has participated in the Christmas Eve Service, the Good Friday Event and in all the Children's Services. The team has also been very busy producing a lot of videos for the Children's Services on-line which are also placed on the St. James' YouTube site. For the Christmas Eve Service, the team had to devise a new and Covid19-safe puppet set which was quite a challenge but completely successful. This new set made it possible to offer a live performance which was very satisfying. The team has worked really hard but it has been really enjoyable too.

Carol Glass

8. Local Outreach – the Lamp Foodbank

I would like to take this opportunity to give my most heartfelt thanks to the wonderful volunteers who despite the concerns of the Covid 19 virus attended to the needs of their local community without regard to their own safety. The community itself rose to the challenges in a most inspiring way, donating and assisting in any way possible to ensure that those in need were given assistance. Local schools and other agencies supplied us with details of people who required our services due to either financial, shielding or isolating and unable to get out of their homes. The Lamp Food Bank was more than up to the challenge and I take this chance to thank Janet of The Lamp Community Centre who was always on hand to assist and encourage.

Donations. We have had the most amazing donations from individuals to companies. They are far to numerous to mention everyone, but I would like to thank M & J Evans for the contribution of £600. Every single person who has contributed know that without them we could not continue. I thank them all from the bottom my heart. I am so proud of the fact that The Lamp Food Bank has never had to ask the Black

Country Central Stores for anything as our community has never failed us.

‘HELPING ONE PERSON MIGHT NOT CHANGE THE WORLD, BUT IT COULD CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ONE PERSON.’

God is working his wonders in the Brownhills community, anything is possible with his help and guidance.

Mel Pearce and Roger Corbett

9. Charities & Missions that St James’ supports

As no proper discussion could be held during 2020 on our charity giving, it was decided to give £400 each to the same six charities as previous years – Christian Aid, Pathway Project, Thomas Project, St Giles Hospice, Barnabas Fund and SGM Life words.

Ann Wilkins

Deanery Synod Report

The last few meetings of the Synod have been Zoom meetings. The major on-going topic is the “Shaping for Mission” project. At the last meeting of the Synod held on Zoom on 10 February 2021 there was a very detailed presentation from Revd Chris Baker who chairs the Shaping for Mission project in this Deanery. There is a Deanery committee which includes Revd Gayle Greenway from whom more information can be obtained.

Roger Corbett

Treasurer’s Report

Last year was a difficult year financially. Owing to the generosity of the Diocese who allowed all Parishes one and a half months free of Parish Share, we managed to make a profit on the current account. Thanks also to our regular givers although giving was down a little, it was only by a relatively small amount – except for cash giving. Fees were up slightly. It is to be noted that even when the Church is shut for months at a time our expenses really do not change.

Barnett’s Lane accounts stayed much as normal. Interest received was down a little. The Restricted account was not used so much as no events

were held. Lichfield Road account has been paying for quite a few repairs to the property over the last six months.

Joy Powell

Electoral Roll Officer's Report

The total number on Electoral Roll in 2020 was 86. During this revision, we have had one addition, one deletion and four change of addresses. This means that the total on the Electoral Roll for 2021 will remain at 86.

67% of those on the Electoral Roll live inside the Parish and 33% live outside the Parish.

Sarah Biggs

Safeguarding Report

No matters of concern have been logged. There is an ongoing review to ensure that all the relevant members of the Fellowship have undergone or are undergoing the appropriate training.

Roger Corbett

Children & Family Worker's Report

This year has been very challenging and different, but out of all the adversity, positives have taken place. Whilst we have been forced to isolate and keep social distancing, we have also strengthened many existing bonds and formed new ones that have added overall to the community spirit within the umbrella of our Church.

Schools. As a Church we are extremely blessed to have such a good working relationship with all our local schools. Whilst it has been impossible to attend the schools with my usual craft clubs etc . Contact with each school has been maintained and several of the schools have had reason, due to the impact of Covid, to call upon me for additional help. Many families from the six schools have been in financial difficulties and I have able to assist with food parcels, unfortunately some families have suffered from domestic abuse, made worse by the pandemic, and I have been able to seek additional support for them from the various agencies within Walsall.

I look forward to continuing the craft clubs now that the Covid regulations are easing.

Brownhills West have started a craft club and the remaining schools are opening within the near future.

I was invited by Brownhills West to join the board of School Governors and I have accepted this huge honour on behalf of myself and the Church.

In addition to the above Brownhills West were the only school that was not able to provide a breakfast club for the pupils. I have been able with the fantastic assistance from One Stop, to secure funding that enables the Church to let the school have Bagels or Crumpets for the pupils Monday to Friday so that no child starts lessons hungry.

One Stop. I have developed a really good working relationship with One Stop and they have contributed funding for the first two weeks of the breakfast club, financial assistance for the food bank and four hundred Easter Eggs that were distributed to the six schools and also to St. Francis School, Shelfield who have a regular collection of food stuffs for the food bank.

During the initial lockdown we managed to distribute over 1500 Easter Eggs, very kindly donated by Aldi, Brownhills. These were delivered to the schools who were looking after key workers and the majority were delivered on a door to door basis. Each had a sticker with the words, *'Easter Greetings from St James Church. Very kindly donated by Aldi, Brownhills. Be safe, stay at home. Best wishes, Mel'*. This was an excellent outreach that blessed so many families and was very warmly appreciated.

Open the Book. Due to the schools being closed to visitors, we still felt it was important to continue with Open the Book. We managed to film two bible stories a month and these were shown to each of the 'bubbles' at the schools. We have received favourable feedback and look forward to getting back in person asap.

Christmas. 'Glimmer of Hope'. I asked all the local schools to provide us with the names of their vulnerable families. We received a total of

150 families comprising of over 300 hundred children. We supplied the families with a Christmas hamper containing a present to the mother and /or father, as a gift from the children, a Christmas pudding, mince pies, crackers, biscuits, hot chocolate, marshmallow, selection boxes and a bottle of Shloer.

Christmas Eve boxes. Each child received a Christmas bible story book. Santa tray, Christmas tumbler, Chocolate coins, Christmas craft activity pack, Gingerbread house to make as a family and a Christmas bedtime story to be read by the parents before bedtime.

I wanted to do something meaningful after a horrendous year and to give families 'a glimmer of hope' for the future. I made an appeal via social media and local schools and groups for donations of the contents and I am extremely grateful to all who responded.

We put together a hundred Christingle packs in order that folks could make up their own at home. Fifty were distributed to the St James family in order that they could participate at home and fifty were given to the Homestead Care Home for the residents. This was in order that the meaning of Christingle could be celebrated on a wider scale.

B & M grant and donation of Christmas Presents. I applied for a financial grant from the social fund set up by B & M and was successful in receiving a grant to the value of £1500 to be spent within their stores. We managed to spend the total amount on items required by the Food Bank. In addition B & M donated 10 boxed toys with a total value of £200 that was used to assist families who were struggling and keep them out of debt.

St James Financial hardship grant. Local schools had contacted me and I was informed that 11 families were in financial trouble due to unemployment as a result of Covid, a house fire and. unfortunately. instances of domestic abuse. St James were able to help fund these families and was much appreciated.

Mel Pearce

Churchwardens' Report

The restrictions imposed by the pandemic have delayed and are still delaying two important tasks.

First the slipping of tiles from the roof. It is expected that a formal proposal will be put to the next meeting of the PCC.

Next the removal of the defective lightning conductors. Guidance is awaited from the Diocesan Advisory Committee on what permissions are necessary.

The management of Barnett's Lane Cemetery has become much less difficult in the past year. This is primarily due to a small group of volunteers who have no connection with the Church. They have taken over the responsibility for locking and unlocking the gate and have also taken over some of the grass cutting. They have negotiated with Walsall Council the provision of some refuse bins. These are emptied by the Council on an irregular basis at no cost to the Church. The volunteers have also undertaken a large amount of clearing and tidying work.

The law permits the interment of cremated remains only in an area consecrated for that specific purpose in addition to the ability to add cremated remains to an existing grave. The area is defined precisely. At the present rate of fresh interments, the existing area will be full within two years

A decision will have to be made quite quickly on whether a fresh area needs to be created and if so where.

Roger Corbett & Margaret Powell

Cards

What a year with twelve months of lock down having no baptisms or weddings. But we still had anniversary cards to send out for the year 2019.

Christmas time Reverend Gayle and myself took over 60 card and a

cake for everyone at Knaves Court and the Homestead to pass our Christmas wishes to them and to let them know they are in our prayers at this difficult time.

Mothering Sunday was a difficult with church not open but some of our pastoral team delivered over 70 cards, they were greatly appreciated by all.

Margaret Powell

Vicar's Report

Dear church family,

I continue to be so thankful for each and every one of you who I've been starting to get to know over almost a whole year now. Since my first report, for the APCM that happened last October, I continue to feel incredibly privileged to be able to serve in leadership among such a caring fellowship. It is an awesome privilege to work with a church that has a heart to collaborate with one another and to build on the links made with the wider community. I know, too, that within many of us there is an eager desire to reach out more into Brownhills and Clayhanger, and to find out more about God's vision for our work here. Thank you all, too, for your love and care shown to me over this first year of being with you. It's been a wonderful blessing to experience and feel your support over months that have been made quite different due to the pandemic.

Reflecting more specifically over these past six months, having been able to hold in-person services at the church building from the start of August to the end of October, we faced another national lockdown during the month of November. Although that was a disappointment, we pulled together, making sure that as online worship continued, members of our fellowship who weren't able to take part online felt very much connected through phone calls and the receiving of pastoral letters, weekly news sheets and sermons, as mentioned in the pastoral report.

With November drawing towards a close it became clearer that we could prepare for what would be possible during December. The rest of our Staff Team and others then demonstrated much understanding, patience and ability to think flexibly and creatively, whilst we looked at how new memories could be made in what was set to be a very Covid 19 marked Christmas season. By patiently giving God space to guide us, we saw Gareth Glass enjoy using his gifts with video making and editing technology to inspire our singers to try making sung worship for use online. This enabled many here as well as much further afield to be blessed by this heartfelt singing.

Reflecting a little more on online worship, whilst we continued to premiere morning and evening services on Facebook and YouTube, and to share an online Kids Service in the afternoon on Sundays, in January I began a more focused conversation about livestreaming in-person services with our PCC. This was partly because of it being unsustainable for me to continue making pre-recorded services that could then be premiered online. However, the primary reason was that the global Church in a vast number of locations has discovered that the pandemic has changed church life forever. A positive of the pandemic has been that it has forced the Church to get up-to-speed with the online world. We can no longer get away with doing church only in person. I remain convinced, as I know so many of our members do, that the more meaningful relationships will always be built through in-person engagement, yet I have also become convinced that the medium of online is one that we're called to be relevant to and to be very much visibly present within. For the apostle Paul wrote to the early believers in Corinth: *'I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some'* (1 Cor 9: 22).

What will being a witness online mean for us? Well, it's still early days. In March our PCC voted for live streaming our church services and any other events happening at church. To make this happen they also voted for a new church website that allows us to do this really easily, using just a mobile phone and an app that links to the media upon which the website is built. We'll still make use of our YouTube Channel and Facebook page, which means we can easily share things like words of

testimony and songs as we did during Thursdays in Lent. We can share times of prayer and resources from the National Church/other denominations, as we are during these days of *'Thy Kingdom Come'*. There are so many possibilities of what we can share to make the most of our online platforms as means of connection beyond ourselves. If you have any ideas that you sense could be God-inspired, please go ahead and share them with me.

Thinking a little about our in-person services and opportunities to serve the local community, it was fantastic to be back in church for Palm Sunday, and to see members of our fellowship return to in-person worship who hadn't been around since before the pandemic began. On Easter Sunday morning we had a great time of praise using actions and flags. I know God uplifted so many of us through that service especially. As we're all too aware, though, such an extremely sad tragedy happened in the afternoon that day, with baby Ciaran's life having been cut short. On the Wednesday after, many from our stewards and pastoral teams responded by being present at church during three time slots. Thank you again to each of you who made that happen through your practical support and sensitivity to the family of Ciaran and his parent's friends. In these days of continued mourning for the family and wider community, we continue to pray for God to be known as the One who brings comfort and consolation.

Looking to the summer months and into the autumn, we realise that we still have to rely on God for wisdom and remain cautious about the pandemic, but I am feeling greatly encouraged about the opportunities we will have to see each other more freely. Our Grace, Truth & Life groups are able to finish their last few sessions of the Wellbeing Journey in person. In these summer months I want to encourage us all to grasp the opportunities that will be there to engage more both socially and prayerfully. With our staff team, I'm going to organise some social gatherings of 6-8 people at a time at the Vicarage, and there will be opportunities to pray outside together at different locations in our parish, with open eyes and ears to take in what God might show us all about these communities where He's placed us.

I'll finish this report by reminding us of those five main priorities that I was presented with when I was exploring whether God was calling me to work with you: 1) to be growing in our ways of worshipping together, 2) to be learning more about following Jesus together, 3) to grow as a church family in which each generation is present and active, 4) to grow in sharing the gospel, and 5) to serve the local community.

Our PCC will be having an away day with me when the time is right during this year ahead. I'll let you know when that will be happening, so that you can pray for us all for that. In the meantime, though, I want to ask you all to please pray for me and for our PCC as we take time as part of our meetings to reflect on these five priorities. Know that as you do that, I am praying for all of us to receive any healing that we need to from the affects of the pandemic, as well as for us all to be filled to overflowing with God's love, peace and joy.

With love and every blessing in Jesus,

Rev'd Gayle