

## **REVIEW OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES IN 2022** **(with updates to 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2023)**

### **ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN REDUCED IN THE FIRST HALF OF THIS YEAR DUE TO COVID-19**

The Coronavirus pandemic has quite understandably played havoc with the lack of activities which have taken place since 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 when the first lockdown took place. The Annual Report for 2022 includes the whole of that calendar year and activities up to 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 with the report being approved by the PCC on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2022 and is being presented to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) today.

### **CHURCH SCHOOLS:**

As part of our on-going commitment to our Church Schools, we continued to purchase sufficient **bibles to enable each child in year three, at both Howick and Cop Lane Schools, to have their own copy** to use for the remaining four years at their primary school and then to take with them when they move onto secondary education. Presentation of bibles to each school took place during the Autumn term. This continues to be very much appreciated by pupils, their parents and staff alike.

Due to COVID and the various restrictions and lockdowns, children's education has been adversely affected and the effects of COVID were felt up to the summer holiday in 2022.

Too much praise cannot be given to headteachers and staff at both schools for rising to these unprecedented challenges and going over and beyond to ensure that children continued to be taught. Foundation governors at both schools have ensured that their actions have been recorded at full Governing Board meetings had returned to face to face (F2F) meetings.

At Howick Primary school, there was unanimous approval for the change of status from a community school to a **voluntary aided status**. In effect very little changes as the school which has been in effect been a church school for some time. Some funding changed with the Diocese supporting more but the main effect was that the Foundation (church) Governors on the Governing Board had to have a majority membership over all other governor's status. Cop Lane school has been a voluntary aided school for some time.

Nationally, Government policy has been outlined to make all schools in the Country to become an **Academy or part of one**. Previously, only schools, which when Ofsted Inspected were graded "Requiring Improvement", had to become an academy, the Government are now moving ahead to make all schools becoming a member of an **Multi Academy Trust (MAT)**. This will be an on-going process which will take some time but the Foundation Governors are taking an active role to ensure that each school maintains its' standards as a good school whilst looking at various MAT's to see which ones suit the school best of all.

### **VOLUNTEERS:**

The Church Regulations require that any "**substantial voluntary help**" must be recorded in their Annual Report. There is a small group of active parishioners who give of their services in financial management, general maintenance and administration. The Parish is very fortunate to have such people who are prepared to continue to give so much of their time and talents for the benefit of the Parish. Our Vicar continues to say this publicly on all occasions. We are required by the Church Regulations to state if any member of the PCC has received any payment for their services during the course of the year. We report that David and Rachel Tuke are members of the bell-ringing team and their fees are in accordance with those approved by the PCC. Our organist Rhoda Martin is also paid in accordance with the approved RSCM rates for weddings, funerals and the 10.15am service on Sundays.

Another aspect of “Volunteers” is parishioners who have been involved in parish life for a long time. One such person is Alan Heald who celebrated his personal centenary in December 2022. Alan has been a regular parishioner at St Mary’s and a sidesperson for “over 50yrs”. Alan, a keen cricketer, was a former Probation officer and worked in all type of Courts and when he retired, he was Chairman of the then Church Men’s Society. Always immaculately dressed and spoken and looking much younger than his years, Alan has welcomed many people into church over the years and he still does today and take great pleasure in engaging in conversation. The Parish presented him with a “bottle” and a cake to mark the occasion and Alan brought in his congratulatory card from King Charles III to show us all but politely asked people not to handle it! A full article about the life of Alan appeared in the March edition of the Parish Magazine. Well done Alan 100 not out!!

We do not have an appointed vergers but when a wedding or funeral takes place, the Vicar asks if someone could act as a vergers. David Thornton and Jill Howe (Churchwardens) perform these duties but only infrequently and are paid the statutory fee in each case. This is not really defined as “**substantial voluntary help**” because only a small fee is paid but with the other substantial voluntary work each undertakes, it was felt this should be recorded in this report to demonstrate transparency.

### ECUMENICAL MATTERS:

All eight churches in Penwortham form the Ecumenical Group – two are Church of England (St. Leonard’s and ourselves), two are Methodist, two are Roman Catholic, one is the United Reform Church and the eighth is a free church which meets in Whitefield Road Primary School. Each church reports to South Ribble Borough Council’s (SRBC’s) Community Liaison Officer, the various events and services which happen during Advent and over Christmas who then produce and distribute a leaflet highlighting all these events in Penwortham.

The 2022 walk of witness and service on Good Friday was hosted by St Leonards Church. We provided an ecumenical service in Church later the same day on “*The Way of the Cross - Good Friday Reflective Worship*” which was put together by Rhoda Martin, our organist. Also, during Holy Week Rhoda produced a booklet to enable parishioners to pray with images reflecting the plight of the people of Ukraine.

### **Special Services of National importance:**

Rhoda Martin has also put together special orders of service as follows:-

- on a Sunday afternoon in May for “*a time of reflections, prayer & music for ALL caught up in war*”
- An act of remembrance and Prayer in September for “*the late Queen Elizabeth II and her successor King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla*”
- A worship service in November for Advent.

An invitation was sent out to all the Churches Together in Penwortham to join the congregation of St Mary’s on these significant events.

Similarly, both **Penwortham Live 22** and **Penwortham Gala in 2022** took place in May and June, 2022 respectively with active involvement of St Mary’s in each event.

To mark the late **Queen Elizabeth’s platinum Jubilee celebrations** the parish displayed an exhibition of more than 270 creatively decorated hobby horses entitled “**All the Queen’s Horses**”. Both church schools took part and the instigator of this exhibition David Ryan, a worshipper at St Mary’s, judged the winning entry from each school and one of the Deputy Lord Lieutenants attended our church to announce and congratulate the winners.

The church was open to the public for the two weeks leading up to the Jubilee celebration weekend in June during which members of the public came to see this spectacular exhibition - the culmination of which was the parish hosting a “Queen’s Tea Party”. The whole event created both public and press interest not least because we created an unofficial world record for the most numbers of Hobby Horses displayed in one place. We thank David Ryan, both Church schools and parishioners who took part as well as all those who helped in any way.

**Lancashire Sings Christmas 2022**, organized by BBC Radio Lancashire, was broadcast with gatherings at various venues up and down Lancashire including Penwortham Community Centre when a number of parishioners were present and enjoyed the singing of Christmas Carols with other churches in Penwortham which was followed by a hot pot supper.

#### **PARISH FINANCES:**

The Statement of Financial Practice (SOFP) 2015 and the subsequent changes to the Church Accounting Practices dictate how our accounts have to be prepared.

David Tuke is our treasurer, who has financial skills and he has prepared the accounts using specifically designed computer software for church accounting procedures and we have been able to show a true comparison with activity in 2021 alongside 2022.

The accounts, balance sheet and notes to the accounts forming part of the annual report are shown on pages 1 -10 including the Independent Examiners certificate giving us a clear bill of health (see page 11). These will be explained by our treasurer at our Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) scheduled to take place in church about 11.30am on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2023 after the 10.15am service.

The Church Regulations state that both the Annual Report and Accounts have to be approved by the PCC as they are the Trustees and this was done on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March. They are later presented at the APCM with a treasurer's power-point presentation for those present to receive and note. Details are then forwarded electronically to both the Church of England Statistics Branch and the Diocese.

#### **CHILDREN / VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION & SAFE FROM HARM POLICY:**

Gareth Allen, our Parish Safeguarding Officer updated our Policies and Appendices which were presented and re-affirmed by the PCC in July 2020 and reviewed annually at our July PCC meeting . These documents continue to be displayed in Church and on our Church website. The forms in the appendices continue to be valid and there was also no change to the Vulnerable Adult Policy.

The Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) has become much more rigorous as the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), now called "Thirtyoneeight", have had to comply with the latest changes to the Data Protection Policy. This is now giving greater security to our applicants as the information provided is highly sensitive.

The Church of England issued new instructions on what information about safeguarding had to be clearly displayed in church as well as on our church website. We can report that we are totally compliant.

We continue to be committed to providing a safe environment for all children and vulnerable adults. We are now at level 1 on the safeguarding hub and we will be looking at progressing to further levels by completing additional activities on the safeguarding hub home page.

#### **THE EFFECT OF COVID IN PARISH LIFE IN 2022**

COVID has during 2022 still significantly affected church life in what we have been doing prior to 2020 primarily in two aspects.

1. Almost every parishioner involved in **young people's ministry** continued to show reluctance to return to the youth work they were doing pre COVID. Hopefully this will change in 2023.
2. **The issue of not taking/offered the wine element at Holy Communion** was reviewed throughout the year. At the PCC meeting in February, 2023, it was agreed that from Easter Sunday both elements of bread and wine would be offered but there would be no requirement to take the wine if people were still concerned. The Vicar would make this clear adding that by taking the bread only, they were fulfilling the requirement of taking the sacrament.

**THE CHURCH BUILDING:**

**QUINQUENNIAL (every 5 years) INSPECTION:**

Every five years a full report (quinquennial report) on the condition and fabric of our Grade II\* listed church has to be carried out by a diocesan approved qualified architect who for us is Stephen Fish. The latest Inspection took place in September 2017 and the report was sent to the PCC in January 2018. The latest inspection is due in 2023. There were two urgent items requiring attention.

One was to address issues with the parapets which had resulted in some dampness coming through onto the walls in the Nave and the second was to address crumbling masonry around the West window. Specialists had given quotes for both jobs. The Chancellor of the Diocese (the planning authority) directed that the observations of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) had to be sought before anything further could be progressed. This delayed any work being started. In September 2020 the Chancellor gave authorization for the work to go ahead with the approved contractor giving a start date of February, 2021 but this was subsequently been put back due to COVID. The actual work started in September 2021 and was completed in January, 2022. The cost of these repairs was some £76,000 – the cost of maintaining a Grade 2\* listed building to keep it waterproof and windtight. Interestingly this was just less than we paid in Parish Share in 2021. This resulted in a working deficit for the year of £40K which was taken from the building fund.

In 2022, the PCC unanimously approved the proposal that we were not in a financial position to fully pay the Parish Share of almost £76,000 but that we would pay the Vicars stipend part which amounted to £40,000. We communicated this to the Diocese but have yet to receive a response. This is the first time any of us can remember that St Mary's have not paid the full Parish Share.

**COVID – THE EFFECTS ON CHURCH SERVICES:**

The government imposed a national lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2020 which included all churches. During this period, risk assessments were done and the church put in place all the requirements to be COVID compliant. Our monthly Parish Magazine, from the April 2020 edition onwards, has been compiled as usual but not printed as volunteer distributors to the 300 plus households and other premises in Penwortham were not allowed under COVID restrictions BUT the Magazine continued to be put on our church website and circulated by email to all 102 households who had authorised church matters to be sent by this method. This was the first occasion in over 150 years that the Church Magazine has not been printed and delivered by hand.

There was a nucleus of about eight or nine members of the congregation one or two of whom enhanced the Sunday service with their musical contribution particularly during and after the administration of the sacraments. Without the support of our organist Rhoda Martin this would not have happened. Singing by the congregation resumed in January, 2022.

COVID restrictions were gradually eased in 2022 with many of the legal requirements changed to advisory including the wearing of masks, the provision of hand sanitisers, social distancing and track and trace. Despite this many regular parishioners are still reluctant to return to church to worship with many of them joining us virtually by Zoom for the 10.15am Sunday service.

**THE CHURCH GROUNDS SURROUNDING THE CHURCH ITSELF  
(covering the church yard and Castle Hill – [the site of an ancient Monument].)**

**THE CHURCHYARD (covering all three graveyards and Crow Wood)**

The maintenance of the churchyard is the responsibility of the South Ribble Borough Council (SRBC) as we are a 'Closed Churchyard' and subject of 'an order of the Privy Council' back in the year 2000 which has been documented in most of the previous annual reports over the last 19 years. Therefore, only what has happened during the last year will now be included.

Mention has been made previously of the embankment on the eastern side of the front graveyard running from the Lynchgate to just past the end of the chancel. This embankment was examined and thought to be unstable and with a number of old graves near the edge of the embankment in the graveyard, they were liable to be exposed/ slide down the embankment. It was necessary that South Ribble Borough Council should take remedial action as it is legally their responsibility to maintain everything in the three graveyards around the church.

South Ribble has to obtain a faculty from the Diocese which would include estimates for the work to be completed and a plan for the work to be undertaken which would possibly involve re-interring some of the old graves until the work was completed. This work was delayed by COVID and afterwards estimates were obtained, the costs were far more expensive and the local Council had not budgeted such a large amount in the financial year 22/23 so the revised estimates will be included in the 23/24 financial year.

#### **STATEMENT OF NEEDS:**

The PCC approves a 'statement of needs' which in effect documents various projects some of which require no outside approval, some which require local authority approval, others which only require diocesan approval and the final category which requires both local authority and diocesan approval.

However, the costliest project is the building of a new annex to replace the 1956 extension. This would enhance the facilities up at church using the monies we received from the surrendering of the lease on the former church hall land on Cop Lane. The PCC had considerable discussions in late 2019 and into 2020 on how best we could achieve this. We had drawn up a list of requirements (statement of needs) we would wish to incorporate and professional advice was sort through our architect. The initial work was detailed in last year's annual report.

The PCC had agreed with the professionals that the most cost-effective solution would be to demolish the whole of the 1956 extension and to build a state of the art two storey annex which would be larger than the footprint of the existing building. The shape, however, was defined by the location of graves which we would not disturb. Our Architect Stephen Fish, who is also on the Diocesan Advisory Committee, drew up plans which, together with an artist's impression, were displayed at the back of church and on the whole were very warmly received. The comments and observations of parishioners were incorporated into a revised 'Statement of Needs'.

We had informally consulted with the Planning Department of SRBC who had not raised any objections in principle. The project has been significantly delayed due to COVID 19. Now finally costed, we are financially unable to move forward with the proposed annex. In view of this, the Architect has been asked to draw up a less costly option which uses the existing 1956 extension and a staircase down to the lower level where the current boiler house and toilet are situated which are no longer required because we now have gas central heating. The project would then have to go out to tender. We are awaiting the architects' drawings/costings before the plans will be formally submitted and approved by both the local authority and the Diocese.

#### **THE FUTURE:**

The effects of the Coronavirus pandemic will affect us for many months to come. The Government lifted all COVIDS restrictions from 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2022 but people are still reluctant to return to church and take part in parish life. We hope to return to pre COVID days with the church becoming more pro-active.



The Revd Chris Nelson – Vicar & PCC Chair



David Thornton - PCC Secretary