

2021 Annual report to the Benefice churches, April 2022

Revd Adrian Morton



Introduction

The year 2021 was still profoundly affected by the Covid pandemic. In January 2021 the nation entered its third lockdown and this lasted to the end of March. Whilst throughout this period online worship services were offered, and continue to be, some of our churches opened for on-site from Easter 2021, albeit with face masks and social distancing. Gradually restrictions were lifted over the coming months with most legal limits on social contacts being removed on the 19th July 2021. Our churches gradually relaxed the restrictions, though caution continued to the end of the year due to the Omicron variant. The latter led to there being no large indoor carol services in 2021.

Ministry and Mission continues

Worship (online and onsite)

In September 2021, the online service changed from a pre-recorded service to a live stream of the weekly 11am service from St. Mary's, Wollaston. Viewing figures range from 40 to 100 for this, and there is still enough positive feedback to encourage us to both continue with this and to look to invest in making it better.

Onsite worship wise, numbers at Easton Maudit increased due to members from Bozeat preferring the traditional worship offered there. Numbers at Strixton are gradually increasing to what we saw pre-pandemic. Numbers at Bozeat are still lower and it is noticeable that very few of the families that used to attend the contemporary service have returned. Numbers at Wollaston are lower though new people have joined and we've retained contact with the families that used to attend. Throughout the year across all our churches, there are some who have stayed away due to the increased risks of catching covid through social contact.

Children's and families work

Contact with the schools remained when restrictions allowed. An onsite children & families holiday club based around the story of Nehemiah was offered in both Bozeat and Wollaston. It didn't attract any interest in Bozeat so wasn't run there, but a number of families engaged with it at Wollaston.

A huge thanks to Louise Morton, Jo Icke (children's & families worker at Bozeat) and the many helpers for ensuring the children's work continued to be offered on a Sunday morning at both Wollaston and at the contemporary service at Bozeat. Linda Brett & Jo re-started the Little Connections toddler group in Bozeat in the summer of 2021.

Youth work

This has continued with a mix of discipleship and outreach groups meeting via WhatsApp and Zoom. Once services were back onsite, Sarah Howes (youth worker) offered youth work at both the contemporary service at Bozeat and at Wollaston morning services. A weekly Youth cell group, lead by Chris & Sheila Dommatt continued to flourish, out grew their home, and now meets on a Monday evening at St. Mary's, Wollaston.

In order to build links with young people in the wider villages, Youth Cafe, on Monday afternoons, and regular Fire pit evenings, on Wednesday evenings were restarted. Sarah continues to support

the wider Deanery with youth work, particularly Gleneagles church, where she leads a weekly open youth club.

Contact with the secondary school in Wollaston reminds good, and Louise Morton leads and coordinates a team that provides a lunchtime club twice a week.

Adult ministry

3Cs (Coffee, Cake & Chat), the Health & Wellbeing group in Wollaston and 'Time for You' in Bozeat all restarted in 2021 offering support to people in the wider community. Chris Brett led an online Alpha in the early part of 2021 and also an onsite course in the Autumn of 2021.

What does the future hold?

Despite all the challenges during the last few years, I feel quite optimistic about the future. New areas of mission are opening up. Nigel Clent our Parish Evangelist is starting a day time Alpha course in a cafe in Milton Keynes. Ivor & Gemma Emmanuel have started a monthly support group at St. Mary's, Wollaston and the opening of the prison at Wellingborough is another possible area of ministry that the churches in the Benefice can engage with. A new toddler group (3Ts - Toddlers, Toast & Toys) has started in Wollaston; the youth team are currently running an Alpha course with 18 young people attending and it'll be great to baptise 3 adults and 1 young person (to date!) on Easter day at St. Mary's, Wollaston.

I'm heartened to hear about the numbers of families from across all the churches in the Benefice who have registered with the Government's 'Home for Ukrainians' scheme. Despite the difficulties of finding a family to sponsor, it is hoped there will be a number of Ukrainian families that will be housed and supported locally.

The congregations at Easton Maudit and Strixton are re-establishing themselves, and there are challenges ahead at Bozeat as we build on the links with families at Little Connections and try and re-connect with other families in the village.

A further challenge for all the churches over the coming year(s) is the inevitable strain on our finances due to the energy and fuel crisis. Family finances will be stretched and the cost of heating and lighting our buildings will be increasing hugely from April 2022. I'll say more about this at each of the annual meetings.

In July 2022 we shall be welcoming our new curate, Holly Horspole and husband Simon. Holly will be introduced to all the churches in July and will quickly get stuck into ministry across all the Benefice.

Again, as last year, I'm conscious this is a very brief report and apologies for what I've missed out. I know a lot of ministry (e.g. pastoral support, visiting etc) happens unseen and in the background, and I'm very grateful that many are involved in this.

Finally, with grateful thanks to all those who continue to be part of the church community, who have played their part in loving their neighbour, serving their Christian brother and sister, and in any way being an agent of hope, peace and comfort over this past year.

To God be the glory,
Adrian