

St. Peter's Church, Bredhurst, Report to the Parish Council

19 May 2021 by 18 May

By the end of March 2020, all that was familiar to us at St. Peter's was cancelled or postponed, due to the pandemic. The church was closed and notices placed on the door. Baptisms and Weddings were cancelled or postponed and a limited Funeral service was offered, and yet, we became busier than ever in ways we never expected.

The locking of our church buildings meant that we all had to develop our Online skills fairly rapidly. Meetings of all kinds, discipleship courses and baptism preparation have all been taking place by Zoom. More people have been checking into the church website and St. Peter's Facebook page for information. Members of St. Peter's have contributed Online parish services, which are produced weekly on YouTube. A newsletter (Keeping in Touch) is published weekly and either emailed or posted parish wide. If you are interested in being included in that circulation please let me (Pam) know.

From July 2020, there were occasions when the church partially re-opened, with restricted attendance, first for private prayer and later for selected services, and the churchyard maintenance term returned to work. Although events across the year were severely restricted, we managed to hold a small service of blessing for the new Fleche Cross (which can be seen on the top of the church building).

By November we went into a second lockdown and in-person services were cancelled again. Then we entered Tier 3, then full closure in January in Tier 4, followed by full lockdown once more. A postcard advertising Online services with Christmas greetings was delivered to all Bredhurst residents, to Bredhurst School and to small groups. Another was distributed with a Palm cross for Easter. Thank you, to all those who made contact through this medium.

The Church Shop, has been revamped and is doing well, and opened intermittently. Manned by volunteers on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, the shop continues to raise much needed funds for charity.

The important connection with Bredhurst School has been maintained. The church features in a new promotional video for the school and, following the retirement of our organist, we welcome a teacher from the school to play at services for us. The church provided 150 Palm crosses for 2021 for both children and staff.

Sadly we have seen the loss of loved ones both from the congregation and village residents. A pastoral network has been at work throughout the year. A review was undertaken in January to ensure that pastoral contact has been, and is being, maintained. My thanks to those who have continued this important work during lockdown.

Five members of St. Peter's of the Parish have been authorized to give the talk and lead worship on an occasional basis. Two members are currently studying for the Bishop's Certificate, one of whom is pursuing Licensed Lay Ministry and who will join two other Licensed Ministers at St. Peter's as part of the wider Parish Team. A third person is training to become an Anna Friend (working with older people and people with living with Dementia) along with two others who have already received their training; others have undergone training to give bereavement support.

St. Peter's Church is registered as part of the Eco church scheme, which 'strives to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.' A 'Caring for God's Acre', webinar was attended recently, focusing on the importance of graveyards for biodiversity, and members of St. Peter's will be involved 'Love Your Burial Ground Week' (5th -13th June), which will involve a 'species count'. Details can be found on the Facebook page if you would like to be involved. Numerous wild flowers can be seen in both the old and new churchyards and on the mound by the car park.

A consultation regarding Churchyard regulations is underway seeking to clarify understanding of the current regulations upheld by the Chancellor in 2017, and the desire for changes to the regulations from some quarters.

Moving forward, all four churches in the Parish reopened on Easter Sunday. It will be some time before we are back to 'normal' but it is unlikely that things will ever be as they were before. We are watching for signs of what God is doing and will join in, starting small; due not least to our restricted financial situation, but 'green shoots' are appearing.

To begin, there is a new pattern of worship across the Parish. For a while there will be one service per day, per church, numbers will be limited and we still need to book. We will continue sanitizing, wearing facemasks, maintain social distancing and there is no singing. To that end, whilst the churches may reopen, we will continue with Online worship as well for the foreseeable future.

Bookings for Baptism have started and the first wedding of the season took place at St. Peter's on May 5, the first under the new registration system.

Plans for the future include an Alpha Course in to which anyone is invited who wishes to explore the Christian faith in a safe, friendly and confidential environment over breakfast and the restarting of the Village Hub in a new format. A special day to celebrate St. Peter will be held on 27 June.

Lockdown for many has been a lengthy period of reflection and renewal. Some people have stepped down from various commitments/activities, new members have come along and others are asking, 'how can I become involved?' If this is you please contact me (Pam).

Meanwhile, in these strange times, it continues to be a pleasure and a delight to serve the people of Bredhurst and the wider Parish of South Gillingham.

Thank you.

*Rev'd Pam Alexander
Team Vicar, Parish of South Gillingham
19 May 2021*

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43.18-19).