

## Chaplain's report for the AGM September 2020

Well, it has been quite a year! Looking back at 2019 seems so far away as our lives are now coloured by living with the COVID-19 virus.

Since our last AGM at the end of March 2019 we spent time and energy planning for the celebration of our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in May 2020 and raising funds in order to do so. It was to have been a time of thanksgiving for all God's blessings on this church since its opening in 1870 and for all those who had given time and energy in her ministry and mission over the years. They built a foundation with love and dedication to make Christ Church the welcoming church that it is today.

The Church Council has thought and prayed about ways to grow our community. We held some great events, ranging from the tearoom at the Braderie to our Christmas celebrations; checked that the refurbishment of the hall was complete as we would like to be able to let other organisations use it in return for a donation. Plans were well in hand for an International evening to celebrate our members coming from so many nations to worship God under one roof.

Before the expected AGM back in April, the Church Council reluctantly accepted the budget that would show a 10,000€ deficit for this year. A deficit due to decreased income and increased outgoings (essentially the Diocesan Common Fund and utilities). All outgoings were carefully looked at again and a small amount of savings were made. Our Church Council committed themselves to looking at long-term sustained growth in income.

And then Covid 19 arrived and our doors closed for services for the first time in living memory.

It has been a deeply challenging time for each of us and as a church. So much of what we had taken for granted was suddenly taken away, perhaps permanently. I spent the time of lockdown here in the house in Hellemmes, as we worked to move our church online within days. Zoom moved from being something I had heard of but never used, to being used for all our meetings. Our groups moved online, Mosaic moved online until the end of the Summer, and we have been blessed by former members joining in from around the world and time zones. Instead of offering worship services in church, I began to record short video services to be posted on YouTube each week. Christ Church remained open, but online.

We live with a certain level of uncertainty, anxiety and of lament for what is lost. But also with a sense of God's presence with us and hope for the future. We are a different church, worship is offered both in person and online. Sunday Club has remained online but struggles to attract its usual membership and most families have not returned to church. Our other groups meet online and are flourishing.

It is a unique opportunity to re-imagine church together. What is God saying to us? What is the Holy Spirit doing in us that is shaping us, personally and as a church? What do we need to change in order to survive and thrive?

As we move forward over the coming weeks and months, we will be trying new things, some will work, others will not be as successful. But we will be discerning God's guidance for this church, together, and with God's blessing we will be different, changed, as a church community. An adventure on which I invite you to join me.

Canon Debbie Flach