**Chaplain’s report AGM 2021**

It is now over a year since we went into a first lockdown and we have learned much over the past year about what it means for us to be ‘church’. After the surprise of not having access to the church building, we all quickly learned to verbalise and internalise a truth we have long known but perhaps not understood in a way that has been forced upon us, the ‘church’ was not closed, the  ‘church building’ was, the church community was still very much alive and open for worship, online.

We had to take a long hard look at ways of being a church community, some of which were no longer available to us such as gathering together in the church building for worship and fellowship, meeting for Bible study. It is still a time to note that which is good but not needed now; reflect on what can be left behind with gratitude for all that those ways had brought us, as well as restoring, re-establishing, rediscovering what is important.

The poet Richard Wilbur wrote *“ All we do is touched by ocean, and yet we remain on the shore of what we know.”* The gospel call is to be willing to be changed,  to ‘lean into’ that which is uncomfortable or challenging. To see, to understand, that church buildings, imbued as they are with the prayers of the faithful, are not where God lives.

What is next, how can we move from responding to the crises of the moment to defining our work over the next few years? We have shown remarkable agility in responding to the past year’s immediate challenges, and I am grateful to each of you that have been involved in the huge amount of work and effort to enable us to adapt quickly and creatively to the challenges the pandemic brought us.

One of my lessons from the last year is that I cannot do everything. I have had to begin to learn how to focus my time. What will I do? What will I ask the Church Council to look at? Who is doing something that we can support and celebrate? What will we not do for now? Some excellent ideas may have to wait. We do what we can and support others in doing what we cannot. The immediate challenges have been so urgent and so consuming that exhaustion seems to almost be the norm wherever we look, whether it is in the education system, workplace, commerce or indeed here at Christ Church.

The Church Council are working together to plan for sustainable growth, a long-term view. How can we join in with what God is doing in us and around us?

* What are we doing that is having a powerful impact? Should we consider continuing it indefinitely? Why? What results do we see? What is required to maintain the activity? Who needs to support it? What kinds of resources need to be put behind it?
* What are our strengths at this time? How can the next steps sustain the opportunities for growth?
* What opportunity or challenge have we recognized that needs to be addressed now and what can wait?

We need to help each other with discerning what is next. To look ahead and begin to make sense of the current moment and the near term beyond. May we encourage one another in discerning the next steps, just as we have encouraged one another in responding to the urgent challenges of the past year.