

Nicki's Sermon given, at the morning service, before the AGM on 9th December 2018

Last year, in my AGM report, I told you what I had learnt in my first six months, which basically was that St. Cuthbert's means a lot to you and that you care.

Today I want to look back over what we have done together this year, outside of normal services, and then talk about where we go next.

I must confess the start of the Church new year was not a good one for me and I was ill for about six weeks. I would like to thank everyone for their support during this time, in particular Revd Stephen Holmes, who covered a service at short notice and baptised Saro.

Along with our usual Advent and Christmas services, it was decided to host Carols at the Colinton Inn, which was a huge success. I thank Donald and the choir for their support and look forward to the next one on the 18th of December. It's nice to know that they enjoyed it as much as we did, as they asked for us to go back.

Training and study wise, the vestry had an away day in January, where we looked at the roles and responsibility of the vestry and an introduction to Mission Shaped Intro with Annie Nash. This was followed by a training day in August when we used the basics of Mission Shaped Intro to see where we are and where we want to go.

I am going to try and give the rest of my report chronologically.

Sadly, we had three funerals in the first week of January and another seven throughout the year, all of whom we will remember in the AGM.

In January Donald retired and we enjoyed cake. Some of you also enjoyed a good Burn's Night, which sadly I missed as I was on holiday, although my daughter Ceri did. Thank you for your hospitality to her and each other.

Following the introduction to the Vestry in January, during Lent some members of the congregation attended a six-week Mission Shaped Intro course, again run by Annie Naish, which enthused and encouraged us. We held weekly reflective services with a variety of people leading them. Thank you to all involved.

Also, during Lent, we enjoyed a wonderful St. Cuthbert's Lecture on the Apocryphal Gospels given by Prof Paul Foster. It was lovely to see so many people in attendance. I hope we have the same next year when the Venerable Stephen Robbins, former Chaplain General of the UK Land Forces talks about what the army can teach the church. This will be on Tuesday 19th March.

In March we enjoyed a wonderful service with Bishop John to celebrate Lay Ministry and licence our Pastoral Visitors. We have 8 pastoral visitors and this year they have carried out about 70 visits. Before beginning to visit, everyone was PVG cleared and received a basic training in visiting. This was followed later in the year with training on dementia, given by Mary. I am so grateful to them for their support to me, the sick, the housebound and those who live alone.

At the same service, Donald and Mary were both awarded the St. Cuthbert's Award by Bishop John to show our appreciation for their commitment and dedication to their respective roles.

Mary has now retired due to family commitments but hopefully will be returning for an official goodbye in the near future.

Palm Sunday we enjoyed a Walk of Witness with the Parish Church, ending here for fellowship and refreshments. Some of our young folk helped out by performing one of the stations – they were the only youngsters who attended, so I'm really grateful for their help.

In April, our Administrator, Marie Neil began to work for us. Marie has taken so much work off a number of volunteers and has worked hard at making things more professional and organised all round. She has been a great support to me professionally and personally during my mother's illness. An asset indeed.

In May we joined lots of others from around the diocese in the Big Day at the cathedral. A day where fellowship, ideas and food were shared.

At Pentecost, we shared our favourite new hymns; although there was some discussion on how old 'new' was.

May was the time for Canon John to retire on the anniversary of his ordination. I would like to thank John for the support and encouragement he has given me and continues to give to others, as well as me. We had cake.

Throughout the summer our regular services of Wednesday and Early Sunday Holy Communion, Sunday Sung Eucharists and All Age Eucharists, Monthly Evensongs, Open Forum, Shalom, Youth Alpha, Prayer for the Church, St. Raphaels', Cairdean and Thorburn services and Thursday afternoon services continued. As did meetings with Vestry, Communications Group, Hymn Group, Pastoral Visitors, Pastoral Care Groups, home communions and diocesan meetings.

I've really enjoyed seeing people from all the different groups and services participate in different things, maybe some outside their comfort zone. We have prayerful people and intellectual people. We have people who just want to worship on Sunday, or Wednesday or Thursday. We are all different and we should respect that. No way of being a Christian is better or worse than another, as long as it enables us to live our faith through love and action.

I also attended Army Cadet Force Camp in the summer as one of the chaplains. It is a great privilege to journey with these youngsters, most of whom know nothing about the church but are keen to chat and learn more. A lot are from broken homes or even in care, and it is not very often they are given the opportunity of an adult ear who really has time to listen. I thank the Vestry for allowing me to continue my links with the Cadets.

September began with Play Church and Fischy Music. Sadly, Fischy Music clashed with Art in the Park, so was not well attended. However, those who did attend had a lovely time out in the church garden.

Play Church has been of great benefit to the church, allowing the young folk to learn about Sacraments and what happens in church in a way they like to learn – through play. Thank you to Megan and her helpers for all they do.

Sometimes a lot of work and one child, or no children turn up. In those cases, it is hard to maintain the enthusiasm. If any of you would like to offer your gifts to the Sunday School, be it art and craft, holding a creche or anything else, please speak to Megan.

A few people had suggested it would be good to have a Play Church of our own, so we are looking at ways to make this happen. If we did, we could invite play groups or nurseries in to special events to play with it and learn about the church. What great outreach that could be.

While on the subject of young folk, our older youngsters have met monthly at the Rectory to discuss their faith using Youth Alpha resources – along with eating pizza. Joan, with her experience of teenagers, has been a great help in leading this, while I controlled the technology – sometimes with help from the youngsters themselves. I thank them all for their open and honest contributions.

September saw the start of a new prayer group. Initially it was a four week course led by Elaine Fyfe and Juliet Mackellaig of the Epiphany Group. I'm pleased to say that the people attending have decided to continue to meet and pray through Advent and onwards. If you haven't attended yet but are interested, please get in touch with Wendy, Elaine or myself, as you will be very welcome. Prayer is so vital in any church and in our lives and these evenings give you different ideas for ways to pray and be still with God. Prayer is about relationship and what better way to build a relationship than talking / praying to God. I cannot commend them enough.

We also gained a student from the Scottish Episcopal Institute in September. It was a pleasure to welcome Harriet Oxley in her last year of studying before ordination next year. Harriet is with us for 200 hours between September and Easter. I am certainly enjoying working with Harriet and hope she is benefitting from her time with us too.

October brought our Harvest weekend. Another time of fellowship, hospitality and worship. So many people worked so hard to make this weekend the success it was, I thank you all. The 'Come and Sing' was especially wonderful on the Saturday and, of course, the tasty Harvest lunch on Sunday.

Bishop John was back with us at the end of October for 9 confirmations. It was lovely to have all the boys with us on the day and Merchiston's have already asked for a repeat next year.

November – the 100th anniversary of the end of world war one. Obviously, we were not celebrating war but celebrating the end of that particular war and giving thanks for all those who died for our freedom. So many people did so much amazing work for this weekend, I don't know where to begin with my thanks. Margaret and her team for the catering at the street party, Donald and his team for the performance at the street party, Pamela Brown for her playing at the street party and service of Remembrance. Lots of people for knitting

poppies and Margaret Temple for putting the display together, Ellen for her flower display, Julian and the choir for helping to lead worship both morning and evening, Christine and John for the historical information for the silhouettes – I'm bound to have forgotten someone, so please accept my apologies if I have. A very special weekend. Thank you.

As part of her training, Harriet was encouraged to lead a study of some kind and we decided to use the Church of England Pilgrim course. We will have met for six weeks of scripture, prayer and discussion, ending with a light supper. Thank you to Harriet and those attending for their fellowship.

And then we arrive back at Advent. Welcoming the Light was a peaceful, reflective way to slow us down and begin the season of waiting. Advent Sunday we looked at how difficult it is to wait with the youngsters and enjoyed a beautiful Advent carol service in the evening.

Volunteers of any sort are the life-blood of all churches and I feel truly blessed here, to have so many people willing to give time to the church and to help and support me. From flowers, to coffee, gardening and heating, nothing would happen without volunteers, so I thank you all, without listing you all, for your contribution to our church.

A busy, wonderful year but what else has been happening.

I have been working hard at building relationships with Rolf and Gayle at the Parish Church, Nick, the Chaplain at Merchiston, Richard Begg, the new Padre at Dreghorn and becoming known in the community. I've had some good meetings with Bruce at The All Nations Church in Oxfords and Westerhailes Foodbank.

I have had the pleasure and privilege of baptising six youngsters, marrying two couples and the honour of carrying out ten funerals.

A space audit was carried out which will help the vestry in making decisions for the future of St. Cuthbert's to make sure we are fit for purpose. As more than half of our income arises from hall users, we have to look after them the best we can, while remembering that this is a place of worship.

I find it quite sad to see that in a church as lovely as this with as much money as we have, we do not have a decent room for Open Forum (or other groups) to meet in. The old vestry is getting more like a store room every day, which is not conducive for discussing faith as deeply as they do, or as a place of prayer. Shalom sit on different levels squashed into a small space, which I find unsuitable.

I also find it sad that the choir, without whom our worship would not be so beautiful, have to share their room with all the hall users to use as a waiting room.

As our administrator takes on more roles, she does not have the space to store all the paperwork generated. The photocopier is also causing more problems than it used to, so that will need to be looked at, as printing and copying is a major part of her job.

Every Sunday, when we have the toddlers here, I feel we should be providing a space for them and their parents to sit, maybe on soft mats with soft toys but still be a part of the

service. As they get bigger, it is harder for them to sit still for a whole service and I assume it causes stress to the parents, which may result in them not coming at all. I hear the phrase 'we need more children' so often, let's find ways of making them more welcome.

Now Mary has retired we need to assess the best way to utilise the funds used to pay her. Do we need another support worker for the elderly now that we have pastoral visitors? If we need more children, do we need to employ a youth worker? Do we need neither, or something completely different? All things that need to be discussed at Vestry.

I mentioned earlier that we have money. (This is where the treasurer might throw things at me). Churches are not supposed to have huge bank balances, we are supposed to use it for mission. We are very good at doing things in church and looking after each other but we need to find ways to do the same for those outside our doors – and that might mean spending money.

In January, I am meeting the CEO of Edinburgh City Mission, Duncan Cuthill. Their website states that they share the love of Jesus with the people of Scotland's capital city. They provide basic banks, soup vans, soul food, drop in centres, training, advice and have church plants. I know a couple of churches already partner them and I am keen to find out if or how we can help.

Another idea is that maybe we could help a poorer church in the diocese, where they cannot afford to pay a full or even half stipend but are in need of a priest to be able to continue. And maybe, with the help of a leader, they can build up their funds again, so that they can afford a stipend.

These don't have to be on-going but maybe we could commit to a short-term project with them. Again, ideas that will need to be discussed at Vestry.

We are still in the process of discussion with Bishop John about a curate for next year. If we do get one, it will be a non-stipendiary curate with no housing costs, probably for about 18 months. When a decision has been made, I will let you know.

So what is my vision for the future?

A church that is fit for purpose – that's the physical building and the people within that building. In the words of Mother Teresa:

I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that he will guide me to do whatever I'm supposed to do, what I can do. I used to pray for answers, but now I'm praying for strength, I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things.

So let's continue in prayer, in worship and in fellowship. Let's step outside our comfort zones and follow the example of Jesus, to love and to serve.