

This last twenty months or so has been a strange time for us all. We have been living through a time of uncertainty, not knowing what the future holds. Some of us have lost people close to us, not necessarily because of Covid-19, but this has added to the trauma of that loss and made the grieving process even more difficult. For me to take funerals with less than ten people present has been very sad. Watching loved ones sitting alone, without comfort from those who would usually sit and hold their hand or dry their tears; it's been heart breaking.

When Jesus lost Lazarus and saw the sisters of Lazarus and their friends grieving, Jesus wept. I believe Jesus has been weeping as we have journeyed through this pandemic – for those who have died because of it and during it, for families left grieving, for those who have worked tirelessly in the NHS, for all working in support roles keeping our country running; for educators; leaders of nations; for the armed forces; for churches - the list is endless. We still don't know what the future holds and when Christ the King journeyed to Jerusalem and to his death, the future was uncertain for him too.

I was at clergy conference earlier this month and nearly everyone there felt the same. Exhausted mainly, wondering when we will ever get back to normal and how we deal with that journey.

I think how we, St. Cuthbert's, deal with that journey is through love and support of each other, as Marie and I have tried to do, and encourage, since our first lockdown in March 2020. Both of us had to shield for a lot of the time but continued to do what we could. Each step of the way, we never thought we can't do anything; we always wondered 'what can we do now'. I don't wish to be negative but I do want to be honest in this report, and I know that some don't feel that we have done enough. All I can do is apologise, as there was no energy or time left to do any more. Moving forward, I believe we have to do this all together.

If you are concerned about friends within the congregation, don't wait to hear news from 'the church' but give them a call or go and visit; I'm sure they would appreciate it. If you are lonely, get in touch with us and we'll do what we can. If you would like to see or hear from someone specifically, get in touch with them.

As a rector, I have to rely on volunteers to help me and maybe that particular group doesn't suit you, but it's what I have and I'm very grateful for it. I'm afraid I don't have time to visit everyone, but I do try to get in touch with all members during Advent and Lent – by telephone, email or face to face.

I had intended to speak about the wonderful things that have happened in this last year but when I did that, my report would have ended up about 30 minutes long. Instead, if you stay for the AGM, you will see them in my pictorial report at the end. So instead, I've just chosen a few things to talk about.

Within our own community during covid, we have mainly had a team of telephone visitors, to whom I am very grateful. Margaret Dineley and I have visited homes and care homes, when allowed and when safe to do so, as we were both classed as vulnerable ourselves.

Marie and Philip faithfully prepared and delivered the orders of service each week during lockdown and beyond. I cannot thank them enough for what they have done and the amazing support they have been to me personally. Worship has been a variety of Zoom, YouTube and live, in church. Regardless of what we were going through, there was some form of worship each week.

I thank my husband Iain, who took on the role of cleaner during covid and has kept us safe during the pandemic.

Margaret Dineley covered the rector's sick leave at St. Fillan's for six months, before I took over as interim pastor in September for their vacancy. I thank Margaret for her gentle encouragement and love toward them during difficult times, which continues as she takes two services a month during the vacancy. Margaret also reinvented the Thursday service here, which now runs monthly with the help of Joan and Caroline Seville.

The Trinity Food Bank has been well supported financially by many, with special thanks to Susan and Patricia for coordinating the collections. I know how grateful they are for your continued giving. I have done food collections from church and neighbours for Oxgangs Community Church and St. Salvador's Food Banks. Again, they are very grateful.

We have continued to support charities locally, nationally and internationally, along with our support to the Scottish Episcopal Institute, financing one student a year for five years. This year's charities were Tiphereth, the Scottish Association for Mental Health and Vaccination Aid Covid-19 Appeal. We are coming up to our third year of supporting Women's Aid Edinburgh and Soul Food, both of whom support families in Westerhailes and Oxfords.

I have continued to meet on Zoom and pray with a wider group of local laity and clergy each month. We pray for the schools and their communities, and initially were invited to Firrhill to support the staff and youngsters there. We are hoping that we will be able to get back into the schools soon, but currently no visitors are allowed.

We were really pleased to welcome Lesley as curate in October, along with her husband Colin. Although she has only been here just over a month, I feel like we've known each other for ever. If you haven't already had a chance to chat with Lesley and Colin, please make sure you do so very soon.

I thank Mary Dale for the years she has run the coffee rota on Sunday's and thank Audrey for taking it on. I thank everyone on rotas of any kind, readers, intercessors, welcomers, the gardeners, those who run our social events, the flower ladies, the choir, the leaders of all the groups that run because of our church, the property group, Gavin Wye who has done Health & Safety for years, now handed over to Joan and Philip.

My thanks to Bishop Bob, Margaret, Lesley and Caroline for their support in leading worship. To Wendy for arranging the Zoom socials during lockdown, which were enjoyed by a number of people. And my thanks to Marie and Philip who have gone above and beyond in their roles, especially in their unseen support of you and me during this last year.

I have to thank Martin Fairley, who stood down as my warden because of other family commitments. Martin is a man with a vast breadth of knowledge and experience here, and I am very grateful for all he has done, and continues to do for me and the church.

I thank Judith Mackintosh for stepping into the role when I invited her to be my warden. Judith has been a great support since taking on the role and will continue as my warden for the next year.

Finally, I thank Margaret Holmes for all she has done in her role as People's Warden. I think Margaret is involved in every part of church, from buying toilet rolls and bin bags to social events, welcoming, reading, flowers and probably lots more I'm not mentioning – and then she agreed to be people's warden. Everything that Margaret does, Robin is close by in support. A couple truly serving God and this church in all they do. Thank you both but especially thank you Margaret for being People's Warden.

I'm sure I've forgotten things but we must turn to the future, or the AGM will be running late.

There have been talks of building works since before I arrived and, hopefully, in the coming year some of the ideas will come to fruition. Our discussions have been around how we can make the church more useable by others during the week. Turning the building into a comfortable community hub for concerts, meetings, events, classes, a safe space, prayer – a sanctuary for all. We have now named this The Sanctuary Project.

To begin this project, the first thing we are hoping to do is replace the old organ with a new one. We have had two reports stating that the old organ is not viable, so replacing it with a new one seems the sensible thing to do. The current organ will be used in part exchange for the new one, as it is now at the end of its predicted life. That will then leave space in the south transept for small groups or meetings. We hope to glass off the area and have the floors in the lady chapel and the south transept on one level.

Obviously, a congregational consultation will happen first and then Canon 35 but I wanted to let you know about the first part of the plan. More information will be given through the magazine and pew sheets over the coming year. The Heather Cottage Fund, in the church accounts for mission will be used to fund this, with the balance coming from general reserves.

I am very excited about this project, as it will not only benefit us, but give us a space for outreach – however that looks.

So, to end, I have attended a lot of study groups and training on Zoom this last year and two quotes have stuck in my mind, but sadly not who said them!

The first. “His destiny was the cross, His purpose was love, His reason was us.”  
“His destiny was the cross, His purpose was love, His reason was us.” and the second, “Where there is risk, there is hope.”

Christ the King risked everything for us, and gave his life. Our faith is built on hope and love. Are we willing to risk, to hope, to love to make sure there is a future at St. Cuthbert’s for everyone?