

## A Review of 2021

One of my first memories from 2021 was of waking up in early January thinking, 'This can't go on.'

Rental income had dried up, we had virtually no bookings, the 'Bishop's Staircase' at the east end of the church was subsiding, and it was enormously difficult even to get contractors on site. For most of the week, All Saints was almost like a ghost building and it seemed impossible to move increasingly urgent work forward.

But the problems extended beyond the building. Church attendance had been fluctuating – depending on lockdown restrictions – and our half-time Events Manager Adam was working without a Parish Administrator colleague. Thank goodness for Wendy, our part-time bookkeeper and Children and Families worker, and Amanda our highly efficient and very part-time communications officer. And for Jon Bolter, our ever-supportive architect.

And yet despite them all many of us felt anxious. In this we were not alone. The nervousness in the air was palpable. People everywhere were becoming increasingly worn down. Many said afterwards that the first three months of 2021 were the hardest of all. Our resilience was at an all-time low.

It was in this context that just before Easter I wrote a pastoral letter underlining the need for gentleness towards one another: for mutual support at a time so many felt they just weren't coping.

And yet from this very low point, so much emerged. Our Lent Appeal for the four charities with which we are most associated – 4All, the Foodbank, L'Arche and Robes Nightshelter – raised a magnificent sum. L'Arche produced some wonderful pictures of the Way of the Cross, and later in the year – for Prisons Week in October – we had a display of artwork curated by Koestler Arts.

Holy Week and Easter services resumed – almost to their full extent – and at our Annual Parochial Church Meeting several new people were appointed to our Parochial Church Council. Our outgoing Treasurer, Ros, who had guided our finances for so many years, reported that our 2020 deficit had been surprisingly small.

David took on Christian Aid at short notice, in Jenny's place, and with the help of a JustGiving page, we had a successful Christian Aid Week. This year, he's working with Liz, and we are thinking about how further to extend our involvement through the year with Christian Aid.

The summer pilgrimage was cancelled, but in its place we had an innovative Online Pilgrimage on our YouTube channel, which was promoted through the network of English Cathedrals.

Our system of pastoral care continued to provide much needed support to those who were vulnerable or isolated, overseen by our Pastoral Assistant, Valerie. Imaginative and thoughtful support for young people and families was overseen and developed by Wendy our Licensed Minister, Moira, our Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary.

The PCC continued to meet (for most of the year by zoom) making essential decisions: for instance, to go ahead with a very successful 40 Day Stewardship Campaign in the autumn, which secured pledges of an additional £10,000 a year.

In October we had a well-attended Living in Love and Faith workshop, as part of the national church conversation about sexuality and gender.

We rejoiced in the work of our Assistant Priest, Cathy – who had a much deserved five month sabbatical from September – our Director of Music, Ruth and our wonderful choir – both adult and junior (which she has built up) – in our Readers in training, Eleanor and Daniel, our Pioneer Minister in training, Ethan (who began his course last autumn, and who heroically accepted the role of church treasurer last summer), Steve, who took on the Sunday reading and prayer rota, and who together with Elizabeth coordinates the welcome team, our hardworking and ever-faithful churchwardens, Angie and Julian, our Lay Chair of the PCC, Elizabeth, and so many others.

Because of course there are so many people involved in the ministry of this church. With every leader there is a team. We are so blessed in this church by the gifts and energy of those who give so much, day by day, week by week.

Last year, we saw the careful navigation back towards worship in its fullness, towards the reopening of groups – such as Knit and Natter, under Jan and Pat – and the slow and often hesitant return of community organizations and orchestras. We saw the return of Carols4All, as our sister organization 4All began to open up, although sadly, the September 4All Community Fair wasn't possible and is unlikely to return. In its place, this year All Saints will trial an annual Church Fete: on Saturday 17 September. Save the date and watch this space. We saw new groups – such as Norma's monthly Thursday afternoon Tea, Cake and Poetry meetings – and had new activities – such a well-attended firework party in the vicarage garden in November, following a Messy Saints session in church.

So, there is much to celebrate. But we are not there yet.

Orchestra bookings are substantially down.

Christmas services were limited, and the common cup has not yet been restored to our worship.

Like most churches, our Sunday numbers in church are smaller – while there are some who worship online.

We still do much of what we used to do, but with fewer people. Just recently we have had appeals for support for Sunday refreshments and for our pre-school Friday morning worship group smAll Saints. If you can help with these, please do. The refreshments team is especially hard pressed.

Some of those running activities on a voluntary basis are becoming tired, and they need further support. Some activities have been suspended and may only return – if at all – in a different form. Sustainability is going to be a key consideration as we move head: committing ourselves to doing what we can well, rather than beating ourselves up over things that aren't as they used to be.

Wendy's departure to be Chaplain of Wandsworth Prison was the fulfilling of a calling, for which we thank God, but we then entered a period of financial difficulty: we only managed to appoint a permanent book-keeper in February 2022 – over six months later. In addition to his other responsibilities, Ethan has carried a heavy burden and the accounts have not yet been audited.

And yet for every piece of bad news, there has been good. God has led us forward.

An organizational review, chaired by Angie, led to staff restructuring and a more effective infrastructure. We now have an Operations Administrator, Mark, with oversight of the central admin and events. Adam left us recently, and we thank him for his loyal service, and in his place – with an adjusted job description – we have just appointed an Operations Assistant, Zorah, who begins in June. She will support Mark. Together with our new bookkeeper, Mel, and Amanda, in communications, we have a strong team: all part-timers.

We cannot afford a paid Children and Families worker. As you can see from Ethan's Interim Financial Statement we had a large deficit last year, from repairs to the Bishop's Staircase and from a dramatic reduction in rental income. But the people gap has been filled by Becky and others (smAll Saints), Claire (baptisms), Jeremy (schools liaison), Edwina (Family Eucharist and Junior Church), and of course our entire work with children and young people has been overseen by Moira, who has given so much for so many years to this church and beyond (for instance to 4All). I greatly enjoy working with this team of committed volunteers, but more help is always needed and welcomed, and we are conscious that young families are under pressure. There are some Sundays when Junior Church volunteers are discouraged to discover find that their carefully prepared sessions have few recipients.

Many people have stepped forward, but over the coming months some will need to step back, to 'be' rather than only to 'do', to re-discover joy.

Careful navigation through challenges, with a keen eye on sustainability and energy levels, will be key features of our recovery over the coming year. With this mind, the PCC is having a morning of reflection in June, looking back at the past year, and hoping to discern signs of where God may be leading us: for the green shoots God will surely provide.

From this we expect widening conversations, involving the whole congregation. One important step along the way will be on the morning of Saturday of 15 October. With the help of Abigail at Lambeth Citizens, all are invited to a morning to reflect on the vitally important issue of inclusion. We are all made in God's image and yet we don't always recognize that image equally in others. What are the things that stop of us from welcoming everyone? Who is left out? How can we get to know everyone better and constantly enable deep participation? How can we be ever more truly an Inclusive Church? Please put the morning of 15 Saturday 15 October in your diary now and make every effort to attend, to ensure the greatest possible involvement of everyone in the ministry of the church.

From this and other conversations, over the coming year the PCC and the whole congregation will work to renew our Mission Action Plan: looking for practical ways to widen inclusion, deepen our faith, and build community partnerships. It will be a gradual, reflective, prayerful process, attentive – we hope – to God's guidance.

I cannot finish without offering thanks for those I have yet had a chance to mention

- To Charles, and to the serving team.
- To those who have organized and led zoom meetings of daily prayer, and the zoom contemplative prayer on Sunday evenings.

- To Angie and the team who keep the church open for Daily Prayer during the week.
- To the Prayer Matters team, who do so much to shape and deepen our prayer life.
- To Will, Ethan, Peter and Harvey for our online presence. To our generous donor who has enabled us to have a permanent streaming facility.
- To Pat, who retired as Reader last year, who has done so much for this church for so many years.
- (And by the way, to Robin, who has just been restored as an active rather than resting Reader).
- To Carl, who has worked so hard to help us to support the Foodbank.
- To Amanda and Elizabeth, who have kept us up to date with Robes.

There were the further deaths of core members of All Saints last year, adding to an already significant depletion of the most active and committed. The launch of a bereavement course, run by Valerie and Sophie, was much needed and it will continue to run, perhaps twice a year.

The words I used this time last year still hold good: 'We will move forward, as a community, but many are wounded.'

And so, thank you for your faith, for your trust in God, for your commitment, your generosity, your creativity and your resilience.

We continue celebrate the privilege and gift of our Christian calling and discipleship, in the words of a prayer by the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld:

For all that has been,  
thanks.  
For all that is to come,  
yes!

With my very best wishes, and thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

Alan Everett

Vicar