

# MAIDSTONE URC



*Thankful to God*

**ANNUAL REPORTS  
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## Ministers Reflection on 2021

***‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
When you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you’ (Isaiah 43:2)***

Those words are from one of the set Old Testament texts for Christ’s Baptism (9<sup>th</sup> January) where we recount the holy spirit coming upon Jesus ‘Like a dove’ and a voice from heaven: ‘You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased’. As an aside I am not sure what to make of the verses which are omitted in the lectionary from Luke’s gospel which effectively say John wasn’t around he was arrested and sent to prison. Jesus was at prayer so I guess this must have just happened and then John was arrested. Was the baptism of Jesus the final straw to break the camel’s back with the disputes between John and those in authority?

I am struck by Isaiah’s words that as we journey the life-giving water of baptism can also be dangerous like gushing water that hold such power to cause destruction: ‘The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders; the Lord is upon the mighty waters’ (Psalm 29:3). Isaiah assures us from wherever we have been drawn North, South, East and West: ‘everyone who is called by my name whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made’ (Isaiah 43:7)

These texts have something to say to us as we reflect back on 2021 and look forward to 2022. One of the elders commented recently that we are preparing for our third lent and easter with the possibility that we will still be following some kind of covid

restrictions. Planning is difficult, the situation can change rapidly, and we have to be ready to change and adapt to the circumstances before us.

So, from me to you (in the words of the chuckle brothers) 'I am well pleased' and 'Thank-you' for the contribution in big and small ways that you have been prepared to do as we have had to adapt and change over these past few months. We have faced significant challenges and will continue to do so as we haven't a clue on the long-term effects of our congregation and buildings. What we can be sure of is that the place, witness and mission of the local Church has made a contribution to the communities in which we serve. There are practical things that we have been able to do. The church at prayer and offering 'A presence' in the communities has also had an impact on how we will recover and be changed by the experience.

One of the biggest challenges for me has been pastoral care: Limiting contact with multiple groups, popping in has to be thought through lateral flow test.

Access to residential care home has been stringent before further restrictions on 15<sup>th</sup> December. Some church members in this setting I have not seen for 2 years.

Local ministers have been encouraged to use the hospital chaplaincy to do those visits to limit the amount of clergy going in and out of Hospital.

Changes in my ministry during the Year:

During January- May I conducted more funeral than I would normally lead in 2 years. Many of these were due to covid when attendance was limited and even when restrictions began to be

lifted people felt safer watching the webcast from home. During this time, I conducted a funeral where I was the only people in the chapel while all relatives watched on-line.

It was a privilege to conduct baptisms and Weddings where travel restrictions and numbers had been limited. Families who belong to the reformed Church across the world couldn't return home to carry out those life events that are so important in their culture. We have had to think through how we can involve as many people as possible in a safe way with additional restrictions.

This year has seen me complete the MTh in Theology, Practice and Ministry with Merit and I was well pleased to have been able to complete this and thank you for your encouragement, support and prayers

I was approached in January 2021 by former minister Revd Keith McNicol if I would consider becoming Chaplain to the local Sea Cadet Unit 'TS Scott'. The appointment process has been chaotic and after a year still remains unresolved. It has been good to work with the staff and cadets (young Adults) developing their life skills which are based around the disciplines of the Royal Navy. I have been boating on the Medway a few times and had a day on HMS Cavalier the training ship moored at Chatham Historic Dockyard.

In May I was approached by the WKESSA Pastoral Committee and the Moderator to offer some URC input to Capel United Church. At Easter the URC minister and Church Secretary resigned over disputes about the direction in Church life. I believe that trying to navigate and interpret covid restrictions brought to the fore other underlying difficulties in trying to be a joint fellowship. Capel United Church is

an ecumenical Partnership with the Anglican Church. So, I am interim Moderator working with the Vicar and Deacon while a review takes place to consider the future of the church and fellowship in that place.

While the Year has been challenging, hard work and exhausting at times. I have appreciated everything that we have been able to achieve together in 2021. I had never imagined that Live Streaming would be such an important and technically difficult part of our witness. When I rise to lead worship on a Sunday morning, I am ministering to a congregation that is physically in the building, there are those able to login from the comfort from there home. That feels strange as they see me but I don't see them. We also have a congregation who login during the week and are also part of our fellowship and we have very little interaction with them. Sometimes I get a text or email to say that I watched the service on-line and thank-you to all those who made it possible.

There is that rustle when we have communion with the sealed communion cups as people do battle to remove the plastic lid for a wafer and the foil for the Wine.

It has been a privilege to have been your minister since 2013 (Maidstone) & 2017 (Staplehurst) as we have had to navigate extraordinary times and that leaves us with extraordinary possibilities of what it could be like to be a church in 2022 and beyond. The challenge for us is to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ who will get us through the ranging torrents and offers solace in the still small voice. Who is well pleased when we have done well

and changes and transforms us when we have failed to preach that life giving water that comes from the person of Jesus?

Into my inbox today was a reflection on 'A Solid Foundation' and my prayer for this book of reports it demonstrates something of Love of Jesus Christ based on those ways we have been Church in 2021.

***God, Lord of all creation, lover of life and of everything, please help us to love in our very small way what You love infinitely and everywhere. We thank You that we can offer just this one prayer and that will be more than enough, because in reality ever thing and ever one is connected, and nothing stands alone. To pray for one part is really to pray for the whole, and so we do. Help us each day to stand for love, for healing, for the good, for the diverse unity of the Body of Christ and all creation, because we know this is what You desire: as Jesus prayed, that all may be one. We offer our prayer together with all the holy names of God, we offer our prayer together with Christ, our Lord. Amen.***

*Andrew*

### **Church Secretary's Report**

This is the first report since taking over as Church Secretary. We are grateful to Graeme Wyles who took on the role of Admin Secretary last year. He handed all the paperwork over, in excellent condition!

It has been a strange year for all of us. There were several months when we were not able to worship together in church. During that time we were very thankful that we were able to use the wonderful

technology of Zoom, and You Tube. In August we were able to go back to church but wearing masks and socially distancing.

Six of our members passed to higher service. Sally Townsend, Charles Dunk, Jane Wearne, Don Bates and Ivy Grigg. In November we were able to have a remembrance service for members who had died during the pandemic, some whose families were not able to hold the funeral they would have liked. Relatives of members who had died during that time were also remembered.

We were pleased to receive 4 new members, John Thorne, Colin Rayment and Chris Wilkinson by Profession of Faith, and Margaret Dancer, who renewed her membership.

We now have a total of 66 members.

We were able to have a service to give thanks for the lift, which had been completed during the Coronavirus pandemic. We remembered the Property Development Group, the work which had gone into the planning of the lift, including applying for grants. Also, our own members who had contributed generously towards the cost. A much grander celebration had been planned, but it was not able to take place.

Four of our serving elders are retiring this year. Rod Cowell, Jenny Robinson, Pauline Jones and Keith Shave. They have all contributed to the elders meetings and served our church in many ways.

Rod, by looking after our AV, website and Facebook page. He also joined the A&F Ministry Group during the past year. Jenny as Chair of A&F has overseen many jobs which needed to be done in our building and looking at the work which needs to be done as a result of

the Quinquennial Inspection which took place last year. Pauline has played a part in the Pastoral Ministry Group, making sure that we are kept up to date with our members, particularly those going through difficult times. Keith together with his wife Annie led a lot of the music during our Zoom meetings during lockdown, also leading the music in many of our Sunday Services.

We now look forward to the new normal, as we begin to see our building being used again, and plan together what we can do to further God's Kingdom in our town.

*Catherine Johnson*

### **Treasurer's Report**

This was the year when our activities started to return a little to normal. We were able to gather for worship, fellowship and business meetings whilst still being cautious.

Our regular offerings were down around 10% against our budget. Although many who previously used the envelope system moved to standing orders we also suffered from the passing of several members. We were pleased that our major lettings resumed and the income from them was ahead of budget by some 20%. On the expenditure side our ministerial costs were down due to most of the Manse work being funded by Synod grants. Premises costs were up as we returned to regular cleaning of our buildings with a new contractor. As a bottom line we very close to budget with a deficit of around £7,500 on our general funds. This leaves us with reserves in the order of £61,000.

Our appeals analysis shows that we were able to send £431 to Commitment for Life, £430 to Christian Aid, £1,250 to Zimbabwe, £528 to World in Need, £547 to the Salvation Army from our Christmas Gift Service and £275 to Young Minds as our Christmas charity. As well as money raised through Mid Summer Music, Friday Market, and Fund Raising. The generosity of our Fellowship continues to be wonderful.

During the year we had our Quinquennial inspection and also have experienced problems with our old gas fired boilers so we can see some significant expense on the horizon which will challenge us in 2022.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jenny Robinson for all her support as Assistant Treasurer, particularly in collating and banking the offertory each week. Appreciation also goes to Graham Wootton who deals with our Gift Aid claims which significantly increase your giving. I am pleased to report that they have both agreed to continue in these appointments into the New Year.

*Rod Cox*

## **Pastoral**

We entered 2021 with hope for a better year. We had the vaccine which meant we felt a bit safer in meeting each other, in gardens to start with, then in our homes. The church opened for physical worship again on 23rd April 2021. Mask wearing and social distancing continued and our church followed the guidance, so that our church family could meet safely together again.

For those unable to join us in church, we continued with services on Zoom and have been able to watch services through You tube.

Flowers and bulbs were given out at Harvest and Christmas again and were appreciated by those who received them.

Sadly, there were a few of our church family who died in 2021 and we continue to think of their families in our prayers.

Pastoral contacts have continued through phone calls, emails, social media and prayer spider, whichever method people have decided to use. Although, it has helped that we have been able to attend worship and meet for coffee after the service, to catch up on news.

Christmas 2021 was a better time for us all, we were able to attend our Christmas services in church and see our friends and family.

*Pauline*

### **Administration & Finance**

**Cleaning & Clearance** Sadly we lost our long-term cleaner Dave who gave notice to cease due to the closure of his business as a result of the pandemic. At his suggestion we contacted the Kent Gurkha Company who are now cleaning for us.

The church rooms have undergone a clear out and the rubbish disposed of at great cost.

**Boiler & Heating** Our boilers are on their last legs so we investigated the way forward for our heating. David Johnson, after much

research, sourced infrared heaters and this work is ongoing for early 2022, together with the associated electrical work.

**Plumbing** A water leak from our building was identified due to the meter readings during the pandemic when the church was not in use. The plumber eventually located it to the upper vestibule toilet and the leak was stopped.

The regular **Pigeon roof cleaning** has been ongoing as recommended.

**Lift** The lift was finally in operation and after various snagging issues is a great asset for our church.

**Quinquennial inspection** This was carried out in July 2021 and as expected identified many issues that need our attention. A meeting was arranged with Colin McCracken (Synod Property Officer) regarding the Synod's support of our church to enable us to carry out the repairs. These include guttering, brickwork repointing, window 'replacement', plastering inside etc. We were able to photograph the roof and gutters with a drone, which has provided useful data.

**Screen and projector** These are to be replaced with a front projector and new screen to aid clarity. Our old ones have served us well over many years.

**Lettings** Only two of our existing hirers returned in 2021, RCCG and the Line Dancers. A new Zumba class has set up on Monday

morning. **The Williams Room** is to be decorated in 2022 to give another smaller room for hire/use.

**The Manse** Synod conducted an inspection of the Manse in 2021.

**The shop** Hi Kent continued in the shop until Christmas but have now vacated.

My **thanks** to the entire Admin & Finance group; Rod Cowell, Rod Cox, David Johnson, and John Wright for their great help and support

There's never a dull moment with buildings like ours!

*Jenny Robinson*

### **Education and Learning**

Junior Church has resumed this year and we have been so pleased to see our young people when they have been able to attend. Thank you to the leaders and helpers for all they do in preparing these sessions and working with the children.

We were able to send all our children and young people Traidcraft Advent calendars even though COVID prevented them from being physically with us in the run up to Christmas.

Work is ongoing in the Bremner Room where we are disposing of some unwanted materials and rearranging the room so that it suits our needs but is still an attractive room for others. Thank you to Jonathan and Erica for booking a slot at the Council Recycling Centre and disposing of quite a bit of rubbish.

This year we were able to catch up with Safeguarding Training. Belinda at The URC was able to offer Basic and Advanced training online. She offered lots of dates and people could book dates convenient to them which worked very well. Thank you to everyone who was able to sign up.

Thank you to Annie and Keith Shave who have been running a Bible Study group at their home which has been well attended.

We are running a Lent course on the Beatitudes this year. It is starting on the 9<sup>th</sup> March and will run for 5 Wednesdays. All are welcome.

*Maureen Miles*

### **Friday Market**

Friday Market opened on the Friday after Freedom Day, we were delighted that so many of our customers came in, since then they have continued to come back, alas there are some we haven't seen and we pray that they have survived this dreadful pandemic.

We were sad at the death of Ivy Grigg, Ivy was one of our regular customers.

We continue to be in need of ladies nearly new second hand clothes and bric-a-brac and we thank the church members who support us by their gifts for the stalls and to the ladies who provide wonderful home baked cakes week by week.

We were able to support 6 charities as well as making a donation to the church this year, but money isn't everything and providing a place of fellowship where people can come, make friends and enjoy our refreshments is our most important trademark.

Our helpers Bridget and Robert on refreshments, Joan on bric-a-brac and Ingrid and Vi on clothes are a great team, Rod keeps the money as well as me in order and I thank them all greatly for their unfailing support. Just before Christmas Maureen and Tony joined the team as our deputies and it will be wonderful going on holiday knowing that Friday Market is well supported.

*Margaret Cowell*

### **Toybox**

At the beginning of July, we held two Covid-secure (for the adults at least) sessions and it was lovely to meet again after sixteen months. The children had, of course, grown almost out of recognition. We had to be introduced to one little girl who had been just a "bump" when we last met!

When we resumed in the Autumn our numbers were much reduced as some children had moved away, and some had moved on to formal schooling. However, as the weeks went by, we welcomed six newcomers, and the year ended with our usual very happy Christmas party.

*Annie and Freda*