

THE BENEFICE OF WEST PURBECK, Parish update May 2021

This has been a strange year for all of us. I found it very sad when, in March last year, I had to lock St Laurence's church with no idea, at that time, of when it would open again. 900 years of being one place in the parish where people could seek refuge, sanctuary and peace, was closed.

A few months later we were able to open for private prayer two days a week and then hold a few services. All the books and kneelers had to be removed and half the pews were cordoned off, we had to wear masks in church and could not sing. People had to let the churchwardens know if they wanted to attend so that we did not have too many people in church.

Initially, funerals were not allowed in church at all then eventually 30 people were allowed to attend.

Slowly, things have improved and from 2 May this year, the church is open every day for private prayer and, at present, a service in the church each month.

However, the church has not stood still and our small parishes of Affpuddle and Bere Regis increased in 2018, to join with Wool with Revd Carol Langford as incumbent and Revd Sandra Williams as Associate Priest with a half stipend with pastoral responsibility for Bere Regis and Affpuddle. In July 2019, it was proposed to extend the Benefice to include the Lulworth Parishes with a House for Duty Priest (no pay but house) plus, in the Benefice, Revd Jenny Alidina as part time self-supporting minister.

In March 2020 an online service was held to celebrate the enlargement of the West Purbeck Benefice to include Affpuddle, Bere Regis, Wool, and the four Lulworth churches (East and West Lulworth, East Chaldon and Winfrith Newburgh).

In August 2020 Revd Carol, was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour. She was initially given just 4-6 weeks to live but underwent chemotherapy and radiotherapy to extend her life expectancy. This treatment did not improve Carol's quality of life. Sadly, Carol died on 6 April 2021.

To help support work in the Benefice, a group of Lay Worship Leaders completed a course successfully and 8, including Michael Menzies, were commissioned on 25 April 2021, by Bishop Karen online.

Online worship via Zoom began the first Sunday after Lockdown and was a fast-learning curve for all. Clergy produce PowerPoint Presentations with liturgy, source and download appropriate images as well as prepare a sermon each week. We have had online congregations of over 100 people for seasonal special services at Easter and Christmas. The pattern of Sunday worship evolved into a 9:00 am Holy Communion in Church, when allowed, and a 10:45 am online service.

Online services on Sundays, comprised two Holy Communion a month, an All Age Service, including two puppeteers providing a Puppet Video from the Bere Regis Junior Church, and a Café Church service.

Mid-week services of Holy Communion have continued twice a month online during the pandemic. In addition, there has been a Compline service introduced twice a month online. There is an online congregation saying Morning Prayer at 8:30am during the week.

Due to the pandemic, services in St Laurence's have been limited, especially in numbers to ensure the church was Covid Safe. However, we have had one baptism in 2020 and one wedding in 2020. In addition, there were 6 funerals followed by burial in the churchyard.

When allowed in church, we have been very lucky to have the organ played regularly at the beginning and end of services by Dr Richard Hall, ably backed up by Vivi Armitage once a month. Ivor Mullins, our organist for 65 years who retired in 2019, sadly died in November 2020.

As with all other organisations, no fund raising events could be held and the church has been reliant on income from those who kindly give via direct debit. Every year we have to pay a quite large amount to the Diocese for all their various support services and also towards the cost of our clergy. Up until 2019 we had been able to pay this, our Share, in full, but last year we had a £6,000 shortfall. We look forward to having at least a couple of small events this summer.

Affpuddle with Turnerspuddle PCC have continued to operate during that year with meetings on Zoom to enable decisions to be made about work within the church and churchyard. A member of the PCC was very involved in the Briantspuddle Covid Community Group which was set up last spring to provide support to those who needed it during lockdown.

At the PCC annual meeting last October, also held on Zoom, Stephen Sanderson retired after many years as church warden, and Michael Menzies was elected to join Elizabeth Whatley in this role.

The PCC is very grateful for all the support from people in the parish in so many ways and the Parish Council. We look forward to being able to share services and events with everybody in the near future.

The next service at St Laurence's is at 5pm this coming Sunday, Rogation Day, followed by the annual meeting. On 16 May, there will be a service of Holy Communion at 9am.

Once again, many thanks to s many people.

Elizabeth Whatley
Chruchwarden