

Earl Stonham – Parish of St Mary the Virgin – 2020 Executive Summary

This report is an executive Summary of the Report produced for the Annual Parochial Church Council for 2020.

2020 started off just like previous years with services in the parish church each Sunday, and regular social and pastoral support activities.

The first Covid lockdown hit in March and everything stopped, or did it? It was time for prayer and for thinking 'outside the box'. Worship went on line and many people became adept at using Zoom. We discovered that attending church in the comfort of our homes had its advantages and some people joined these services who were not regular attendees in 'normal' times. Parish newsletters, Bible Readings, Service sheets and reflections were distributed weekly both electronically and, for these not on-line, by traditional GPO mail. Phones were vital for keeping in touch with one another but we all missed being able to actually get together.

Our community leapt into action with offers of help with shopping, collecting prescriptions and anything else required. New friendships were made and sharing worship with the other parishes within the benefice helped us to get to know our bigger church family.

By the Summer, Covid infections had reduced sufficiently for lockdown regulations to lift somewhat and physical church services started again on a smaller scale than before. Rules still forbade singing and social distancing meant spacing everyone out, people having to book a place in advance and masks being worn. At least the Church was open for private prayer on Sunday afternoons.

Happily it was possible for Celia Stanford's wedding to take place in July, even if on a reduced scale. Funeral services, and the associated support, continued, albeit in modified forms.

Many regular activities were cancelled or postponed. In their place, the 8 parishes of the Benefice have worked more closely together to share resources, including the opportunity to hold drive-in services for Harvest and Christmas. Good neighbourly support has been more valuable than ever, and has continued throughout the community, throughout the year.

As we move into 2021 we look forward to more change and more fresh activity.

Rev Philip Payne

Rector – North Bosmere Benefice

3 May 2021