

## Churchwardens' Report for St Columba's AGM – March 2020

In many ways the life of the church at St Columba has carried on as normal this year with many of the same groups meeting regularly and successfully as they have done in the past. However in other ways there have been many heartening and encouraging changes which it is a delight to be able to report.

At the start of the year there was still no formally appointed treasurer with the work being done more than efficiently by Sue Oswald and her husband John and everyone really grateful for the work they did and continue to do. In the last few months, however, Sue's daughter Rachel, an accountant with KPMG, has offered to take on the role of Treasurer for the church and she will be formally appointed at the AGM. Already there have been meetings between Rachel and Pauline and the wardens, we are all looking forward to working with her and the expertise she will bring to the church's financial issues will be invaluable.

As far as the finances are concerned it is clear that the church is spending more than it is receiving in income and that will have to be addressed. We are all most appreciative of the generous legacy left by Mary Collin to the church. Also to be noted is that this year the church has benefited somewhat from the current appeal of elections as the hall has been used three times as an election venue and so the hiring fee is very welcome.

We did a Christian Aid collection based on the 5 Mile Park but with very mixed success. We were very grateful to all those who helped but we all wondered whether the same results could not be achieved in another way. Definitely an item for discussion at an appropriate DCC meeting or even a PCC meeting if we adopt a parish wide perspective.

The Lent course, Building Bridges, led to a parish wide event at St Columba's which covered the whole gamut of church life and which challenged all to look into the future and glimpse what it might hold for the parish. It was a bold and ambitious project much enjoyed by all who experienced it.

It was with great sadness and shock that we learnt of the death of Father John Clasper. He has been a regular visitor to St Columba's, often taking the service on a Wednesday and helping out in many other ways too. He contributed a great deal to life at St Columba's and his absence is sorely felt by all.

The major piece of news to report is the appointment and licensing of Pauline as St Columba's vicar. This is an excellent development. We much enjoyed having Pauline for a number of months as our seconded priest, with a congregational trip to Holy Island the ten days of prayer from Ascension to Pentecost being particular highlights. On November 25 Pauline was licensed and installed at a service led by Bishop Christine and enjoyed by a

packed church, a clear sign of the respect and admiration all hold for her. It was a most joyous occasion and a wonderful start to her ministry with us.

Progress is being made in our discussions with the Tamil congregation about the use of the church. They are in the process of forming themselves into an association, the North East United in Christ and so we will henceforth know them as NEUIC, in order to progress insurance matters and they are also committed to the church's safeguarding policies and training. In addition invitations will be extended to all to attend each other's events and in this way we will forge friendship and understanding, terrifically important for two groups working closely together. These discussions are much to be welcomed and will continue.

There is ongoing discussion about the merits of having a defibrillator available for community use located at the church. A meeting has taken place between a representative of the North East Ambulance Service and the church and we are awaiting some more information from NEAS before we proceed.

Three parish events took place at St Columba's in the last quarter of 2020 – the Culture Kitchen lunch well supported by over 50 guests on Saturday 21 September, where local refugees and asylum seekers prepared a meal from their own indigenous cuisine, the day of reflection on prayer which was on Saturday 12 October and the carol singing around the Newcastle and District RDA horse box at The Travellers' Rest in Wideopen.

So, as is often the case with any successful organisation, the picture is of change and continuity in collaborative harness in pursuit of an agreed goal. That is the situation at St Columba's where Pauline has made a great start to her ministry and where we look forward confidently to more success in the future.