**Annual Report and Accounts 2021**

**The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Barnard Castle with Whorlton**

**Diocese of Durham**

1. **Introduction**

This Report has been drawn up in accordance with the Charities Act 2011.

**2. Aims and purposes**

St. Mary’s Barnard Castle with Whorlton Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, The Revd Canon Alec Harding, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

**3. Objectives and activities**

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship and develop their faith in Jesus Christ through our parish life. Through its overview of worship and prayer, mission and outreach work, provision for developing discipleship and pastoral care the PCC acts to enable as many people as possible to be involved in the life of the parish. Services and worship put faith into practice through prayer, reflection on scripture, music and sacrament. Social activities seek to develop the community, and our use of our buildings encourages contact with the community and resources a wide range of community groups.

**4. Achievements and performance**

**4.1 Worship and prayer**

i. The year began as the country was sent into a post Christmas lockdown caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. Infection rates had risen over the Christmas period 2020-21and, once again, restrictions on social gatherings were introduced to combat these.

ii. Sunday service times shifted to a pattern that enabled the wiping down of surfaces between services and continued to cater for the needs of those who were isolating or particularly vulnerable. The ‘Saints groups’ introduced in 2020 were maintained with in person worship at 9.00am & 10.15am and a Zoom service at 11.15am.

iii. One Sunday service a week was broadcast on FaceBook Live until guidance from the national church in May alerted parishes to the GDPR requirements surrounding this. Attempts to avoid revealing the identities of those at worship eventually gave way to the cessation of livestreaming altogether.

iv. Service times changed again (9.00am, 10.00am and a service on Zoom at 11.00am) as it became possible to extend the length of services and to re-introduce congregational singing (albeit from behind masks). Further change in service times was effected after the summer. Whorlton church adopted a pattern of Morning Prayer at 9.00am on the second Sunday and Holy Communion at 4.00pm on the fourth Sunday. This change made a shift in the time of the early service at Barnard Castle possible, the church adopting a weekly pattern of 8.30am Holy Communion service (1662) and 10.30am Common worship.

v. Midweek services at 10.00am on Wednesday were re-introduced. These services will now use both BCP and Common Worship material and Wednesday morning worship will not always be eucharistic: allowing the possibility of using materials appreciated over Zoom in the height of the lockdown. Morning prayer at 9.00am on Zoom is offered for those who are shielding.

vi. Holy Communion was offered in one kind for most of the year. From the summer-time it was decided that wafers could be intincted with wine in advance of services. National guidance over the ‘common cup’ changed to permit its use but counselled great caution, the ultimate decision upon its return rests with the incumbent in consultation with the PCC.

vii. As best as we were able the parish celebrated the church year in both of the churches. Holy Week meditations took place online. Parishioners were directed to the Diocesan Maundy Thursday service via FaceBook. Good Friday and Easter Day services took place in both churches. Harvest was celebrated at the beginning of October with an auction of produce held at Whorlton.

1. Worshipping community: There are approximately 349 (231 in 2020) people (all ages) in the worshipping community. The increase reflects, in part, attention being given to bring church records up to date but also the wider ‘reach’ of the congregation.
2. Occasional Offices: The Covid restrictions applied for the first half of the year and continued to shape the church’s ministry in the conduct and provision of occasional offices.
3. Baptisms: The summer easing of the pandemic lockdown encouraged families to request the baptism of their children. At Barnard Castle 27 baptisms took place (9 infants, 14 children aged 1-4, and 4 adults). At Whorlton 2 children were baptized. Continued anxiety about the infection meant that baptisms were restricted to just one family (and their guests) at each service. This meant that clergy were baptizing every week from the summer well into the autumn. It was noted that the average age of children brought for baptism increased, so many new-borns affected by the lockdown.
4. No candidates were offered for confirmation.
5. Six candidates were presented for Admission to communion in the Autumn term with a service taking place at Green Lane school. Unfortunately, Covid restrictions meant that parents and supporters from church could not join with the children to mark this occasion.
6. Weddings: there were two weddings at Barnard Castle and one at Whorlton. Wedding couples’ plans continued to be overturned by changes in regulations concerning receptions with couples again choosing to postpone their services.

In the course of the year marriage law was changed removing from clergy the right to register marriages and issue marriage certificates. The churches’ marriage registers were closed and the end of almost 200 years history marked with special prayers.

1. Funerals: There were a total of 42 services: 25 services in church (one at Whorlton) and 17 at crematoria. The pattern and style of services has been shaped by the experience of the pandemic with increased requests for secular music for reflection within the service as opposed to congregational hymn singing (which for so long had been prohibited).

**4.2 Mission and outreach**

1. **Partnership for Missional Church**: The PMC Steering Team at Barnard Castle, under the leadership of Ms Beverley Pilcher, continued to guide the church through the PMC process and its final year which helps churches ‘Focus for Mission’. Time and thought was given within the team, the PCC and within the congregation to discerning the church’s Missional Vocation and encapsulating this in a draft ‘strapline’. ‘Celebrating God’s love in Barney’ has been suggested.

Noticeable in the year was the creation by the PCC of ‘Teams’ to address various aspects of church and community life. This does not seem accidental in a year which has ‘Dwelt in the Word’ on Acts chapter 6. The teams are finding their feet but are bring renewed energy to the congregation.

Members of the staff team took part in a webinar on Strategic Planning offered through the Major Churches network.

The Patronal Festival in September was used as an opportunity to highlight the Teams’ work and the honour lay vocation.

1. **Music** **outreach:** After so many months being unable to rehearse or perform ‘live’ the summer release from lockdown produced a rush of musical activity from the Community choir and orchestra. Music making continues to attract new faces to the church and forms a bridge into the wider life of the church.
2. **Schools**: The parish’s involvement with local schools was again severely curtailed by the severity of restrictions placed on schools by Covid hygiene measures. School classes came in and out of class ‘bubbles’; visitors were welcomed into school…and then asked to stay away. Ministry took place with limited class sizes or numbers in school, on Teams and/or on Zoom. Despite the restrictions a regular pattern of Collective Worship was maintained and the seasons of the year marked and celebrated. It was a sadness that the end of the school year saw a rise in case numbers in schools resulting in Leavers’ celebrations being considerably scaled down. Green Lane School conducted its own Prayer Spaces event in school in the Autumn term and sustained Big Story (Godly Play) through filming sessions for use with classes. The parish’s Foundation Governors ministry of strategic oversight of the church school has continued regardless of the pandemic.

The church celebrated with Green Lane CE school as it was shortlisted for the Northern Echo School of the year award and rejoiced with Mr Rob Goffee (Head Teacher) as he was awarded the paper’s Head Teacher of the year award.

Alongside regular contact with Green Lane CE and Montalbo school parish clergy have also been welcomed to officiate at events at Barnard Castle School and engaged with staff at St. Mary’s Roman Catholic School.

The autumn term saw the recommencement of hymn practices led by the church Director of Music (Annette Butters) assisted by a member of the congregation (Mrs Pamela Moody) – this practice then spills over into a ‘breaktime’ choir practice. Members of the parish were also able to return to assisting the school offering accompanied reading with children.

1. **Under 5s:** The parish under-fives group (Smuffies) recommenced its meetings in the arish hall in the second half of the summer term in response to the need for young children (and their parents) to be able to socialise together after 15 months of lockdown. A team of helpers was created to share in the considerable work involved in offering sessions.
2. **Families:** Attempts to re-start the ‘Four o’clock service’ foundered until the autumn when it was possible to host some differently styled events: namely
   1. a pet service on the Green at Whorlton
   2. a service for hallowe’en that involved prayers in the churchyard
   3. Christingle with the Praise Band
   4. An invitation to a drop in event to gauge what families sought from the church saw only one attendee which has made planning for 2022 difficult.
   5. On Christmas Eve it was decided (at short notice) to hold two Crib services as a means of dividing the congregation and giving greater confidence to families attending whilst the impact of the Omicron Covid variant was being assessed.
3. **Eco Church:** the call to care for creation resulted in the parish creating an Eco Church Team. The team conducted an audit of the churches and the parish’s activities following guidance available through an organization called Arocha. It promoted ‘Walk to church Sunday’ and, as the Climate Change conference in Glasgow (COP26) drew near the team called together a wide variety of partners (local schools, the University, DCC etc) for a Creation/Climate change event in the parish hall. This was very well attended and engaged a totally new range of people of all ages: the event ended with worship in the church. Learning from the event will be carried over into the new year.
4. **Care Homes**: It was not till the end of the year that access into Care Homes become possible – even then this was governed by staff being required to show Covid passports and the results of Lateral Flow Tests. The extreme restrictions upon access to Care Home residents became a national cause for concern. The clergy were able to connect digitally to some (not all) of the Care Homes but, as the easing of lockdown has taken place it has become increasingly difficult to establish a regular pattern of visits as regulations in each home change frequently. Lay ministry is yet to be re-established in care homes. John and Fran Elliot stepped down from many years assisting Revd Ruth Stables in the conduct of Holy Communion in The Manor House.
5. **The Parish Share** offered to the diocese was increased to £66,625. Financial support for the USPG projects in Tanzania and Southern India was reaffirmed albeit at a lower level.
6. **Donations to the FoodBank** can be made in the church porch. In the first half of the year these were taken to The Hub in town but are once again being taken to The Well in West Auckland (with a wider area of benefit). Provision of sanitary products in church helps to address **Period Poverty.**
   1. **Developing discipleship**

The parish has continued to offer opportunities for study and prayer through

* 1. A study of characters from scripture (chosen by participants) conducted over Zoom
  2. An in-person course based on the stories represented in the windows of the church
  3. Taking part in the national Living in Love and Faith discussion around identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage though both an in-person course and an online offer.

**4.4 Pastoral Care**

Through its activities and social events the PCC seeks to create and support healthy relationships through which individuals can flourish both within and beyond the church.

1. Safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults: The PCC ensures that Safeguarding appears on all PCC agendas and PCC members are encouraged to bring any safeguarding concerns to meetings. Towards the year end the Parish Safeguarding Officer indicated that she wished to step down from the role. A process of ‘safer recruitment’ was undertaken with 4 members of the congregation expressing an interest in the role. An appointment, subject to relevant training and DBS checks will be possible.
2. ‘Health and Safety’ is a regular item on PCC agendas providing an opportunity to consider health and safety issues which may need attention.
3. The Pilgrim magazine continues to inform parishioners of events in parish life.
4. The Church website has been totally renewed with help from partners in the NLHF Lottery bid DigVentures. The site offers an attractive introduction to the parish and is increasingly being used as a window into parish life.
5. Barnard Castle church was able to host its All Souls’ service and invite the recently bereaved to attend.
6. The Civic Remembrance service took place in church at Barnard Castle though numbers attending were depressed by concern over Covid and the requirement to wear face masks.
7. A Covid memorial tree was planted in the Barnard Castle churchyard in collaboration with the local Rotary Club. The tree commemorates all those who have died through the pandemic not just those who died of Covid 19. A planting ceremony as followed by a short act of worship in the church which offered the chance to voice lament alongside the Christian offer of hope.
8. Clergy and lay members of the congregation have taken part in scoping the possibility of employing a Parish Nurse to serve in Teesdale & Weardale.
   1. **Social Events**

The parish’s social events are so much more than ‘fundraisers’. They serve to create and nurture community, foster friendships across generations, support and encourage individuals in their mental health and wellbeing, develop gifts and form a part of the church’s mission.

1. **Windows to the World:**
2. The long planned (and delayed) community engagement events surrounding the National Lottery Heritage Fund project were able to take place supported by the DigVentures team. These involved a series of online local history lectures on a wide variety of subjects (The coming of the railways to Teesdale; Local folk lore; Douglas Pittuck; the cholera epidemic, Richard IIIs architecture and Women of the Durham coalfields).
3. A small team from the parish were trained in website management and content creation by DigVentures staff prior to the website being handed over to the parish.
4. The perseverance of Mr Robert Stenlake and the hard work of the DigVentures Team enabled a Festival of Music and a celebration of stained glass to be hosted at Barnard Castle church across two weeks in July. The ‘Journeys – Teithiau’ travelling exhibition of stained glass by 6 contemporary stained-glass artists was on display in the church. Visitors could enjoy the exhibition but were also invited to learn more about the church through tours of the building and the churchyard. Children’s activities involved a dance workshop, stained glass design and an introduction to medicine through the ages.
5. Music in the Festival included concerts presenting ‘Psalms for the soul’; ‘Music for lute and voice’ and a ‘Celebration of journeys, home and the natural world.’
6. **Music making:**
   1. The Director of music (Annette Butters) gave a short organ concert at Whorlton to welcome villagers out from behind their doors to a social gathering. This was then followed by a Harvest-time orchestral concert at Barnard Castle accompanied by tea and cake and a similar November community choir event.
   2. The community choir and musicians performed at Blanchland at an event organized by the Lord Crewe Trust.
   3. The church choir led evensong at Whorlton in November
   4. The community choir and orchestra gave a Christmas Concert and boosted the church Carol service in December having already offered carol Singing around the town in previous weeks.
   5. Musicians accompanied Carols on the Green at Whorlton on Christmas Eve.
7. **Christmas Tree Festival:** The bi-annual festival took place early in December just before the Omicron variant of Covid brought a restriction on activities and anxiety once more to the community. Hard work and learning from previous festivals saw over 3000+ people attending across 5 days. Once again, community support was harnessed through the sponsoring of trees and pulling together musicians to play ‘live’ throughout the Festival. The festival closed with Mayors from across the area being hosted by the Town Mayor (Rita Chatterjee) at a concert in church.
8. **Bell Ringing:** The Bell ringers had a busy year despite working under Covid restrictions. Alongside regular practices the bells were rung to mark: the anniversary of the first Covid lockdown; the 4th anniversary of the Grenfell Tower Fire; the founding of the NHS and the beginning of the Cop26 conference. The tower also hosted over 40 visitors on Heritage Open Day.
9. **Other:** Book sales recommenced in the parish hall as fundraisers for the church.

**5. The wider church and ministry**

1. **Staff:** the parish continues to enjoy the ministry of Revd Sarah Cliff as assistant curate and Mrs Gillian Lunn (ordinand). Lay ministry began to become more possible as lockdown restrictions eased and the team leading worship expanded to include the parish Readers and those who read and lead intercessions in church.
2. The end of the year saw the untimely death of Mr David Walker following a long illness. David had served as a Reader in the parish, church secretary, Deanery synod representative and GDPR data controller.
3. **Churches Together:** Whilst ecumenical activity has been extremely limited at was possible for the churches to co-ordinate the annual Christian Aid collection (with a preparation meeting being held online for this purpose) and to host some Advent Lunches in support of Christian Aid.

The local Roman Catholic community welcomed a new priest: Fr Thomas Mason. Local clergy (including the vicar and curate) were pleased o be invited to a formal ‘installation’ service.

At the beginning of September, the local Methodist congregation formally became part of the newly created Darlington and Teesdale circuit.

Ministers’ meetings have recommenced for fellowship across the denominations.

The HSBC (wishing to charge charities for the privilege of banking with them) encouraged the closure of the formal Churches Together bank account.

ii. **Deanery**: The parish may appoint three lay members to Deanery Synod.

* 1. In March a service was held in the churchyard at Gainford to launch the Pilgrim Way to Durham that begins in the village. This was the first occasion at which hymn singing was permitted since the pandemic began.
  2. Synod initially met online in the first half of the year. Agenda items included hearing from the Diocesan champions for ‘Caring for God’s creation’ – a fourth Diocesan priority. The autumn meeting at Staindrop church bade farewell to Revd Ken Steventon upon his retirement and heard about the Diocesan plans for renewal and growth from Mr Ali Bianchi.
  3. The Revd Darren Moore left his post as Chaplain at Barnard Castle School to become Vicar of Yarm.
  4. Revd Jonathan Barker resigned from his position as Priest in Charge of the parishes to the south of the Tees (Leeds Diocese). Leeds diocese is seeking to make its own appointment, making it impossible for these parishes to be brought into Durham Diocese as had once been hoped.
  5. Churches in the Dale have been severely stretched by the pandemic with finances hit and numbers regularly attending worship in decline. Parish Clergy are offering cover for parishes in vacancy.

1. **Diocese:** Elections to the diocesan synod took place with Mrs Frances Stenlake being elected to the House of laity and both the Vicar and Curate elected to the House of clergy.

**6. Wardens’ Report**

**Barnard Castle.**

* + 1. Restoration and cleaning work on the eastern window of the north transept was carried out by Jonathan Cooke at the beginning of the year.
    2. Storage for tech material was created by Mr Geoff Lowson in the ‘ladder store’ to the left of the church organ. In addition, Mr Lowson created a moveable cabinet for the church mixing desk.
    3. Ethernet WiFi connection at Barnard Castle was improved by Mr Dave Bailey and Mr Geoff Lowson.
    4. A digital card reader was purchased to enable the church to receive donations by card as fewer people have been carrying or using cash though the pandemic.
    5. Snagging works connected to the NHLF project were overseen by the church architect, Mr John Barnes.
    6. The PCC authorized the creation of a project team to put together a programme of works to address the repointing of the chancel and vestry and consider work on windows that have yet to receive attention. As part of this work an updated report on the condition of the windows was commissioned from Jonathan and Ruth Cooke.
    7. The PCC agreed in principle to the introduction of etched glass depictions of the Virgin and child alongside saints associated with the College of Richard III at Barnard Castle in the upper windows of the inner porch doors. The proposal (presented to the PCC by the Northern Dales Richard III Group) is to mark the 550th anniversary of Richard III becoming Lord of Barnard Castle in 1474. The NDRIIIG will now investigate funding and designs.
    8. The wardens and the newly created ‘Buildings Team’ have divided their work to oversee the care and maintenance of the church.

**Barnard Castle Parish Hall**

The Parish Hall is in the care of the Parish Hall Association under a lease from the PCC.

The PHA oversaw the restoration of the Pittuck Mural and, with a small ‘Pittuck’ group hosted an exhibition and sale of the artist’s work.

**Church Car Park:** Whilst the restricted use of the parish hall and church buildings meant that the car park was not needed for church activities the emergence from lockdown has necessitated a clampdown on unauthorized parking.

**Amen Corner:** delays at the Land registry have meant that the PCC has no formal recognition of its ownership of this land however, the Teesdale Mercury confidently declared the church as the owner in an article in the Autumn.

Kim Harding has carried out extensive research into the College that was proposed for Barnard Castle at the time of King Richard III. Her work has been published by the Scottish Branch of the Richard III Society and will be published in 2022 in the Richard III bulletin. It is her belief that Amen Corner was the site of some of the mediaeval College buildings.

**Whorlton**

1. **Whorlton church:**
   1. Work on the east end of the church was carried out by Mr Walton to address the damp that was making its way into the chancel.
   2. A full electrical inspection of the church was commissioned and a report received.
2. **Whorlton Churchyard:** A representative from Durham County Council met with Mr Roy Long (churchwarden) and agreed to effect repairs to the Lynch gate and to one of the box tombs in the churchyard. The council, alongside church volunteers, are greatly improving the appearance of the churchyard.

Members of the local Parish Council have now undertaken training for the management of the cemetery extension and its unsightly appearance has been addressed.

1. **Whorlton Village Hall:** The Village Hall is in the care of the Village Hall Association under a lease from the PCC.

**8. Structure, government and management**

Members of the PCC are either ex-officio, elected or co-opted by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting [APCM], in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. At its Annual Meeting in 2020 a motion was passed that came into effect in 2021:

1. Churchwardens be eligible to serve up to six consecutive years (this provision to be reviewed every six years as per the Church Representation Rules).
2. The balance between elected/ex officio members of the PCC be changed through
3. removing the automatic membership of Readers to the PCC
4. replacing the existing ‘rolling election of PCC members’ with the election of 8 lay representatives (who for the purposes of continuity can serve up to 4 consecutive years).

As Charity Trustees PCC members are mindful of the Charity Commission’s Guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the specific guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. There were 17 members of the PCC

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting was held in church at the end of April 2021. The Electoral Roll was reported to stand at 134. From the APCM the following served as members of the PCC:

Incumbent & Chairman Rev. Alec Harding

Rev. Sarah Cliff

Churchwardens

Mrs Joan Kemp Ambler (elected 2020)

Mr Roy Long (elected 2020)

Mr Allan Jones (elected 2021)

Mr Astley Fenwick (elected 2021)

Deanery Synod Mrs Frances Stenlake (and Lay Chair of the PCC)

Mr David Walker (RIP December 2021)

Ms Abi Littlefair

PCC Secretary Mr David Walker

PCC Treasurer Mr Robert Stenlake (co-opted April 2021, resigned June 2021))

Elected Members (up to 8 places)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| John White  Abigail Littlefair  John Emerson  Visitor: Mrs Gillian Lunn (ordinand) | Malcolm Makepeace  John Trevett  John Chadwick | Geoff Knott  Bob Ward |

The full PCC met 9 times in the year January to December 2021 with an average attendance of 65% The PCC operated through a number of committees, which met from time to time between full PCC meetings and reported back at the PCC. These were:

**8.1 Standing Committee**: This is the only committee required by law. It has power to transact the business of the PCC meetings, subject to any directions given by the Council (e.g. authorise payments beyond those set in the PCC's budget.) The Standing Committee was reshaped to accord with the Church representation rules so that it includes the Vicar, 2 church wardens and 2 elected lay representatives.

**8.3 Whorlton Church Team**: This team looks after matters concerning the Whorlton area of the parish.

**8.4 PMC Steering Team:** The Steering Team is charged with leading the church through the Partnership for Missional Church process.

**8.5 Windows on the World:** This is a small working group charged with taking forward the successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for work on Barnard Castle Church and for monitoring progress.