

## Rector's Letter 2021

The Annual Report of the PCC contains a good summary of how things were in 2020, a year that will always, I suppose, be remembered for the outbreak of the world-wide Covid-19 Pandemic. You will be glad to know that I do not intend to repeat everything that has already been written in Section 5.1.

Whilst the pandemic is not yet over, and indeed in some places, has still not reached its peak of death and destruction, there are hopeful signs in the UK at least, where, as of today, some 62 million people have now received either one or two anti-Covid vaccinations and restrictions are being gradually eased.

The effects of Covid on continents, nations, communities, families and individuals will be long with us. Indeed, it will take decades, if not centuries, to pay off the debts governments have incurred in trying to combat the virus.

Church, and other faith, communities have not, of course, been immune to the effects of the pandemic.

Here at St Marylebone, apart from the months when the bishops of the Church of England forced the closure of parish churches, not only to worshippers but to priests, the parish church has remained open; open, not only for private prayer and public worship but for so much else besides.

St Marylebone *has* been what it, and indeed, every parish church in England *should* be: a place into which the community can come and go to cry and to rejoice, to wail and to lament, to pray and to worship; a place where the rumour of God is not just whispered apologetically, but seen and heard and felt tangibly through reconciliation and conversation, through the offer of wholeness and healing of body, mind and spirit, through education, music, the Church's sacraments; through being out and about in the community for which it, uniquely, has responsibility and care.

Everyone in this community, regular worshippers, and those who simply walk past, without giving a second thought to what we do or why we do it, should be really proud of what has been, and is being achieved here.

Much of the burden to keep a place like St Marylebone open and functioning, worshipping, praying and serving, falls upon very few shoulders. Far too few shoulders! If St Marylebone is to keep on worshipping and praying and serving, then more people are going to have to engage with this task and lend their shoulders to the enterprise.

For some people this will mean, if they can, giving more; giving more financially, and giving regularly and realistically. No-one pays for what we do except those who give. We have sold our last capital asset, 38 Nottingham Place, and we can only pay stipends and salaries, heating lighting, music, repairs – and everything else – from our own income and resources.

I hope that everyone will at least try to pray more regularly and realistically; come to worship more often; and I hope that some people will volunteer to help. The list of ways in which *everyone* can play their part is almost endless.

Despite appearances, St Marylebone does not exist just to give *me* something to do. It is only together, that we are the Body of Christ and each and every one of us has a real job of work to do even if that is no more than gathering together with others regularly around the altar. There are plenty of seats - even at a good safe social distance!

So, what is *your* vision for St Marylebone? What is your vision for the Kingdom of God? What are you Churchwardens, PCC members, members of the Electoral Roll going to do about it?

I have quoted R S Thomas' poem *The Kingdom* several times in sermons over the past ten years and eight months. I do so, because it helps to remind me of why I do what I do.

Here are the wise Welsh priest-poet's words again:

## The Kingdom

It's a long way off, but inside it  
There are quite different things going on:  
Festivals at which the poor man  
Is king and the consumptive is  
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look  
At themselves and love looks at them  
Back; and industry is for mending  
The bent bones and the minds fractured  
By life.

It's a long way off, but to get  
There takes no time and admission Is free, if you purge yourself  
Of desire, and present yourself with  
Your need only and the simple offering  
Of your faith, green as a leaf.

As we go forward with the building works and the Changing Lives project takes shape, and, as we ease gently out of months of lockdown and restriction, may we all – each and every one of us – present ourselves afresh to the God who heals and mends and turns things upside down and inside out.

All that God asks of us, is to come to him in faith, to present ourselves simply, green as a leaf – everything else will follow and God's Kingdom will come.

**The Revd Canon Dr Stephen Evans**  
**Rector of St Marylebone with Holy Trinity, St Marylebone**

**26<sup>th</sup> May 2021**