**St Mary’s Church, North Marston**

**Churchwardens’ Report to the Annual Village Meeting**

Despite the fact that the Church has been closed for services for most of the past fourteen months due to Covid-19, we have maintained close contact with our congregation via weekly online Zoom services. Thursday Morning Prayers have continued on Zoom, daily Zoom services took place in Holy Week, and we held a Lent Course. Petra’s *Sunday Reflections* and Janet’s *Candle of Hope*, have been emailed out weekly, to the congregation and beyond.

We were able to gather together outside the Church for *Lights of Friendship*, the traditional turning on of the Christmas tree lights, and our usual *Carols by Candlelight* Service on Christmas Eve was well attended online.

The funerals of Alec Evett and Colin Price were held in 2020. The burials of Doreen Hankins and Graham Fisher took place in 2021, and the ashes of Ian Wilkinson were interred.

We have been very appreciative of the time and effort Petra and Janet have devoted to their ministry in North Marston during these testing times; we cherish their unstinting consideration and care. We remain immensely grateful to the huge number of volunteers who continue to support the work of the Church in a multiplicity of ways; we could not do what we do without them.

The Quinquennial Inspection was carried out in September, which highlighted two main areas of concern regarding the structure of our 13th Century Grade 1 Listed church, namely the cracking in the south wall, which is threatening the Holden window, and the significant flooding in the vestry, which has happened on two occasions. Site investigations have been carried out; at present we are awaiting the outcome of these, and advice as to the next steps. The costs of any work to address these problems are likely to be high, and the church has suffered a reduction in its revenue this year due to the loss of the weekly plate collection, and our inability to hold any fund-raising events, other than *Lights of Friendship* and the Easter Raffle. We are therefore very grateful to the Parish Council which awarded us grants of £300 in 2020 and 2021.

We are also grateful to the Scouts, who have swept and cleaned the church and carried out some clearance work in the churchyard, as part of their community service. We hope very much that this will be an on-going relationship!

The membership of the ECC has undergone some changes in the last year. We are very grateful to the following, who have stepped down: Carrie Smythe, Jane Dell, Julie McKinlay, Anne Nicholson and Claire Norman. We also lost our much loved and respected Treasurer to cancer. Colin led the Church to a position where we were able, for some while, to pay our Parish Share in full, and to feel confident in taking out a substantial loan for the refurbishment of the Wesley Centre. We miss him greatly.

Des Quinn has joined the ECC as Treasurer, and Mark Payne and Nikki Day as new members. Anne Ketteridge has kindly agreed to take on the role of Bookings Clerk for the Wesley Centre.

In April 2021, we liaised with the Parish Council in marking the death of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh according to previously agreed protocols. The church was open every day between Prince Philip’s death, and his funeral, for private prayer.

Our Fundraising Committee has planned a series of social events, which we hope will take place later this year, including “Party in the Playpark”, in conjunction with the Parish Council, a special Big Plant Day, in preparation for the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee in 2022, a Poetry Evening in October, a Beaujolais Evening in November, and a Stewkley Singers’ Concert in December. We also look forward to the return of the popular Wesley Lunches and the Coffee Mornings.

Whatever this next year brings, we look forward to the riches of shared worship and church and village family life together.

**Alyson Perrett and Tricia McSweeney (Churchwardens)**

**May 2021**