

St Mary the Virgin Handsworth & St Catherine of Siena Richmond

Children, Youth and Family Worker report for 2020.

When I started work in the position in February who could have thought that it would be such a strange and difficult year.

February started with an amazing opportunity to join with Ballifield Primary school for Diversity week. I spent a morning in school speaking to the children from nearly all of the year groups about faith. Each class had questions they wanted to pose about Church and faith, some of which were very challenging – it was a wonderful opportunity to speak to 240 children in one morning.

Sunday school and Youth Cafe at St Marys continued to be well attended and we enjoyed Messy Church at both Churches exploring Candlemas, St David's Day and Lent.



Plans were being made to launch new sessions at both churches, at St Marys a new after school club for 8-10 year olds was planned to start in April, the existing Tuesday club for those aged 4-7 was to be revamped and relaunched, and Youth Cafe would become a weekly session rather than every other week. At St Catherine's plans were being made to launch a similar pattern of sessions with

after school clubs for those aged 4-7 and 8-10 years old and a weekly Youth session and we were looking to move Messy Church to a different day, however finding volunteers to assist in running these sessions was proving difficult.

With the advent of lockdown in March all plans were put on hold and I was furloughed full time between 6 April and 3 July. Sunday school packs were delivered for families of both churches for April and May prior to Furlough (23 children reached). Unfortunately the planned schools work for Lent had to be cancelled – sessions of Godly Play at Ballifield school for two year groups (60 children) were postponed and I was most disappointed that a new contact that had been established with Athelstan Primary school for Lent visits for Year One classes had to be cancelled (90 children).

With lockdown lifted but children youth and family work still very much on hold due to social distancing I returned to work for 2 days a week from the 6th of July. With a new challenge to deliver the Gospel in different and safe ways it was time to get inventive.

Messy Church in a bag was born – these activity bags have been created and delivered to families from both churches, full of craft, games and of course sweets! (31 children reached)



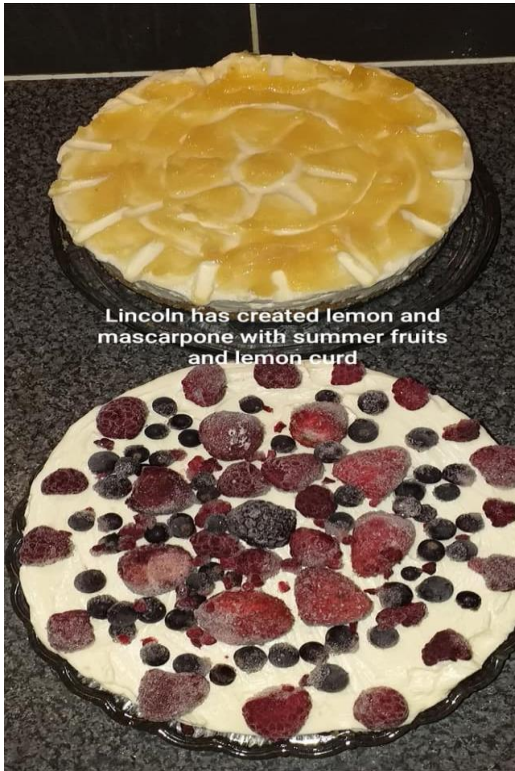
Resources for Sunday school for both Churches have continued to be delivered to families with an accompanying Youtube clip published on Facebook video clips. This has created a great opportunity to make socially distanced door step visits to the families which along with What's App groups has helped to continue and grow relationships with the parents as well as the children.

August saw the launch of Forest Church at St Marys. Working alongside Father Joe Cooper a new way of worshipping in the outdoors became real. Working within the guidelines issued by the Church of England we created an outdoor Forest Church which included some of the liturgy from the mass service, a nature led activity such as leaf or bug hunt and a craft activity. The worship concluded with a socially distanced picnic and a prayer activity. This was an incredible opportunity to reconnect with the families that had not been attending Sunday church with twelve different family groups attending over the sessions.



Socially distanced picnics were arranged for the families for both Churches during August but in true English summer tradition both of them were rained off!

Understanding the need for Youth work to be re-established after the break in Lockdown I launched Ready Steady Zoom – a fortnightly interactive session with our young people on Zoom, each session the young people were provided with a basic bag of ingredients and a cooking challenge. The sessions include time to catch up with one another, a chance to talk about the challenge and share the results. We have had some amazing creations including pizza, cheesecake, something Christingle related and cupcakes. This has made a great impact enabling the six young people who are attending to reconnect as they have not been able to meet in person since March but also to ensure the Church relationship is nurtured and for the young people to know they are in our thoughts and prayers.



Advent and Christmas posed a whole new set of challenges as we looked at new ways that we could connect through this important time in the Church. Traditionally at St Marys we have completed a travelling nativity journey – passing a nativity set between church family members throughout Advent. This kind of activity was clearly not going to be Covid secure so a new form of nativity trail had to be created and was very well received. Each family taking part received their own miniature paper nativity along with a prayer for all of the family, a knitted angel and a Christmas poem. Members were encouraged to make a phone call to connect with the next family in the trail to replace the usually meeting. I was amazed that we had forty two Church families sign up for the trail this year, each providing a photo of their nativity set to share on social media.



I was also blessed to work alongside Fr Joe during Advent to create an Angel Trail around the Church grounds. Different parts of the Christmas story were displayed around the church and the church yard for families to find. There was narrative to read and a suggestion of a song to sing as they moved to find the next angel. Invites to the trail were sent to our church families, to Ballifield Primary school and the local Beaver group. The trail was very well attended and 21 certificates were issued for completion (although we know that many more families completed the trail)



Christingle and Crib services created the next challenge. At both Churches I created Christingle in a bag resources for the families (to be used in Church at St Marys for those who had booked to attend) and for those watching on facebook for both churches a bag was delivered, which amounted to 80 Christingle packs.



At St Catherines a combined Christingle and Crib service was filmed with the help of Father Phillip Knowles and Tracy Leadham which was scheduled to facebook for Christmas Eve.

The Christingle service at St Marys was booked to full capacity (36) and live streamed and included a surprise visit from Father Christingle himself (thank you to Father Keith Johnson for being such a good sport) Orange prayers were placed on the Christmas tree next to the crib which looked beautiful.



The Christmas Eve crib service at St Marys was attended by pre-booked family groups (31 attendees) and was also live streamed. The usual chaos of the children dressing up and leading us in the story was not possible but the nativity story was told Godly play style and the figures of the nativity were moved in to the crib.



Considering 2020 has been such a challenging year and I have not been able to start new groups or attend the schools in either parish as we were planning, it has certainly been a year of growth, adaptation and learning new ways of working. I am thankful for the support that I have received and the enthusiasm and creative thinking of Father Joe has certainly been a blessing. I hope to be able to continue to nurture the relationships with the church families that are in place and when restrictions allow in 2021 being able to reach out into the wider communities and see growth in numbers and faith.

Alison Powell

Children Youth and Family Worker.