

## **St. Michael & All Angels, AGM**

### **Rector's Report - 5 December 2021**

Having just read last year's Rector's Report again, two words in the first sentence are Brexit & Independence – they were actually a reference to my report in 2019. At the end of 2021, we have been thinking more along the lines of Covid (of course) and for the latter half of this year, COP 26 which was held just 25 miles from here in Glasgow. Covid has changed the world indeed, COP 26 is trying to change the world for the better. Many think our global leaders could have achieved more – that as it may be but there are now few on this planet who don't at least have environmental issues on their radar. Whether they wish to act or not is another matter – but it's an issue which is certainly here to stay.

In our collection of islands in the North Sea, we live outside Europe; the independence debate trundles on and I think I'm right in saying Scots are fairly consistently divided over this – we're getting on with living with Covid, receiving jabs and wearing facemasks. We're striving as a society to be 'greener' than we have in the past. This is the context in which the Church across the British Isles now finds herself.

From a Church perspective there is no doubt that we face substantial challenges. We certainly want to address issues facing the UK, but there are also substantial issues facing us internationally. At home it's not that all Brits are a rampant bunch of atheists – there are a few but we're talking about a small minority. Many believe in a creator God of some description but they don't necessarily equate this with being part of a worshipping community. Indeed those who are part of a church are an ever decreasing number and we are now, to use the words of a previous Archbishop of Canterbury, a religiously illiterate society.

Inevitably this brings concerns for those of us who take our Christian discipleship seriously and are active members of a church. It's all too easy to focus on dwindling congregations and the closure of churches such as 2 recently in our own diocese, St. Andrew's, Irvine and much closer to us, St. Mungo's, Alexandria.

As I said quite recently, in a wider context, I don't think we should be quite so concerned as some are. If we look at the Early Church, it was never meant to be something for the masses. It was during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (AD 306-337) there began a

transition for Christianity to be the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity expanded hugely and eventually was such a dominant force in Europe and indeed around the world. The Nazarene carpenter though really wasn't about the likes of Holy Roman Emperors and the message certainly wasn't about power and authority.

A smaller, more vulnerable Church may well be closer to what the Gospel is about and here in Scotland we are returning to more of a New Testament model of Church. When we look at the churches in our own part of the world, the world of Helensburgh and Lomond, the Church isn't finding it easy but I would argue we are alive and well and doing our bit to proclaim the Kingdom. What I think is important here is that as a collection of churches, in an ecumenical context, we all bring something to the table and offer different but I hope, complimentary visions of the Gospel message and what it means to be a disciple of Christ today.

At an AGM, a good question to ask is, what do we bring; what is our distinct ethos; how do we interpret the Christian story and live it today? Here at St. Michael's, we stand firmly under the Anglican umbrella; and in Scotland we are committed to being part of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Our style of worship I would describe as 'middle-stump Anglicanism' but as Piskies, invariably that tilts slightly to a more High Church tradition with our robust sacramental/liturgical practice. We are first and foremost a Eucharistic community as the Eucharist lies at the heart of all that we do. This is a stand out feature of what we bring to the Helensburgh Church table – out of the Reformed tradition yet thoroughly focused on the Eucharist.

Choral music is key to our worship – we do things traditionally with a robed choir sitting in the chancel and we have Mass settings; responsorial psalms; anthems – the choir is a integral part of our worship, embellishing our Eucharist and now once a month, singing the Prayer Book Choral Evensong. For those who choose to worship at St. Michael's, we offer a very distinct form of worship which is quintessentially Anglican/Episcopalian.

If you're talking about worship at St. Michael's, you would have to mention our building. As we all know, the only Grade A listed church in Helensburgh – it really is a delight to worship in this place. What isn't quite so tangible but I know it to be true, is the quality and commitment of this congregation. What do I mean by that? The building speaks for itself but if you observe this congregation, I'm particularly thinking of a pastoral context, what is clear to me is we look out for each other as we're

instructed to do in parables such as the Good Samaritan. In 3.5 years I've seen it time and time again, a seriously caring congregation.

As we make our way through another Covid winter, I want to say to you as your Rector, take heart; we are actually doing remarkably well. With our well maintained organ; three excellent organists and an expanding choir. Numbers at our Sung Eucharist and Sunday evening services haven't been substantially dented and so far, at Evensong actually numbers have never been healthier. At this AGM, there is much to give thanks for and I can look Bishop Kevin in the eye and say these are challenging times but we are weathering the storm; it has actually helped us grow spiritually and helped us see new ways of being true to the Gospel in Helensburgh and the surrounding area.

Changing tack, I wish to mention the St. Michael's Standing Committee, which doesn't actually exist except in my head! This so called 'Standing Committee' consists of Kevin our Lay Reader, Nick our Secretary, Janina our Treasurer and Reay our Property Convener. On a day-to-day basis, this is the team I work closest with and Covid has made no difference to that at all. Even during those ghastly lockdown days, it was this team I was constantly liaising with; monitoring our progress as we navigated our way through frankly subhuman conditions, i.e. not allowed to have any contact whatsoever with each other.

Kevin and I continue to share leading our worship; preaching and spiritual care of this congregation, what you might call the bread and butter of what we do. I'm immensely grateful to him and Joy for all the unnoticed things they do in the background and what they bring to St. Michael's in time; energy and commitment.

Nick remains Vestry Secretary and does an awful lot in the background and of course; with much support from Jane. I said we were a caring congregation – Nick is a good example of that. Yes, he's very efficient with Minutes and is an able lay leader. What I see though is a man who takes the trouble to befriend people often when he knows they are struggling and as we'd expect from Nick, has a very hands on approach. It's not just, lets have a blether over a coffee – it's, would it help if Jane and I got your shopping! That's typical and we're very grateful to have them not just as members of this congregation but Nick as Vestry Secretary.

Another part of the team, which I'm delighted I inherited, is Janina as our Treasurer. The word efficiency comes to mind. I send an email and the answer bounces right back which is incredibly helpful with a busy schedule. I love it! As with Nick, Janina does so much more than her

considerable role. Mark and Janina between them continue to contribute to the work of this plant – the expertise they offer is much appreciated. It goes without saying that as two professional musicians they offer much on the music front and now Choral Evensong has been hugely enriched by the Duncan clan!

I didn't inherit Reay – he took over from Derek as Property Convener and has made valiant efforts in not just maintaining but enhancing this considerable plant. It's a big job and Reay with his engineering background and many years experience has great transferable skills to keep this plant in good shape. Our most recent project in the upper hall which I'm sure you'll agree is a great success! The floor will be done soon to complete the job. As part of our Eco Congregation project we are looking into making our facilities more environmentally friendly – the work of a Property Convener is never ending – thank you Reay (and Jean) for all you do for us.

One person I must mention is, Sheila Baker who during lockdown constantly kept in touch with the 'whole' congregation – passing the information onto to me to respond as necessary. I do not know what we would have done without you Sheila and people have commented on numerous occasions how grateful they were to receive your phone calls!

There are many people who make significant contributions to the life of this church: Richard Horrell as Lay Rep and the Mothers' Union Leader, two of the more official things Richard does for St. Michael's. Richard Smith does a huge amount of printing, editing and producing our magazine, also the monthly filming to name but a few. Maureen as hall convener; Andrea for taking on the flower rota; Nigel for getting our readers organized and Joan Sadden for our intercessors list; Kitty Fleming for running the bellringers; Nick and Carol Parry for sacristan duties; those who are sides people; those who open and close the church daily through the week; those who clean the church; serve teas and coffees; organize the Ramblers and not least keep the outside of the church tidy; my heartfelt thanks to all of you who give your time and talents to our community. The Body of Christ in this church is healthy and that is down to individuals who do a great deal of hard work ...

One remaining person I always mention by name is Anna – she lives and breaths St Michael's with me. We are the classic Rector and unpaid curate combination – I do the up front stuff and Anna beavers away behind the scenes. Anna has been the driving force behind the

Wednesday morning exercise class which continues to go well and I dare say will be a good focus for some as we make our way through another Covid winter. With our Eco Baby project we met some disappointment with the shop at the Drumfork Centre not materializing. However, Eco Baby is still alive and well and we see this as part of the recycling that we do at St. Michael's, so we've joined forces with two large groups at Glasgow City Centre and Drumchapel. We wanted to continue with Eco Baby, particularly in the light of COP26 and clearly it serves the wider community in a practical way. Anna, for these two initiatives and so much more – many thanks to you for all your creativity and hard work.

We've lost some dear people from our congregation in the last year. We feel that deeply but give thanks for their lives and with faith we believe that they have now been, 'promoted to glory'.

It's a great joy to welcome new members to St. Michaels as we have done in 2021 and a particular pleasure to watch our choir expand and gain confidence as they return from a very difficult year. The Advent Carol Service last Sunday was excellent and we look forward to our 9 Lessons and Carols with our customary mulled wine and mince pies.

I'm also heartened by the considerable generosity of people who have given substantial sums to St. Michael's this last year. With a plant of this size you can certainly use it! For me though the real meaning is, that when people give generously to this church it's making a declaration that this institution is worth investing in. For all of us, it's a vote of confidence that we're on the right track and doing the right things.

As 2021 comes to a close, I look forward to 2022 with confidence that we are a church with a purpose; who are confident in what we're about and can play our role in Helensburgh and Lomond proclaiming and living the Kingdom of God.

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Rector