

All Saints, Hérault: Chaplain's Report for 2021

Twenty-nine years ago, before I was ordained, but when I had started to wonder about it, vision statements and mission statements (not the same thing) were all the rage. In our church at the time we set about writing our own vision statement. What we came up with was this:

‘Holy Trinity Rothwell exists to know Christ in our midst and make him known beyond our walls.’

This is an aspirational statement, things to be working towards, like a castle on a hill. Something very similar still appears on their website and literature and I think it’s valid for most churches, or should be: so, in this, my report for 2021, I’m going to try to see how well that vision statement fitted All Saints, Hérault in 2021.

One of the ways that we get to know Christ in our midst is in our worship. For the first half of 2021 we could not meet together to worship and this was a great loss. We did our best to make up for it using modern technology, providing services on our own YouTube channel. The ‘Website’ section of our Annual Report & Accounts describes the technicalities, the aim being to provide something as close as possible to our normal worship experience. I was particularly pleased with how the Good Friday service turned out.

‘Normal services’, or rather ‘the new normal services’, resumed in July and that was a great occasion for us all. Christian fellowship is another of the ways that we know Christ in our midst, being Jesus to each other and seeing him in each other. Probably not in some dramatic and deeply meaningful conversation, but in the comfortable meeting between Christian friends.

I don’t think there’s a magic bullet for our services to be effective acts of worship, ones that help us to know Christ in our midst. I think the most important thing is to do everything to the best of our ability, with the principle that only the best is good enough for God. God doesn’t want the impossible, though, so we mustn’t worry about our shortcomings. I can think of two parishes, at the time of our vision statement, one Anglo-Catholic and one Evangelical. They were both very successful and growing. The common factor between them was simply that they both did their best for God.

It was partly with that in mind that we bought our own sound system. We first used it in September, and it has given us better quality sound for both public address and hymn accompaniments (‘karaoke’).

Study groups, for example in Lent, are another way to get to know Christ in our midst. Meeting in person was not possible in 2021, but the ‘Lent Coffee Mornings’ by Zoom worked surprisingly well.

What about making Christ known beyond our walls? The internet is very important these days for getting the message across and for advertising that we exist. After a struggle of some months I managed to get the Diocese to correct our details on the Diocese in Europe website, so that people will no longer look for us in Pézenas! ‘A Church Near You’ has improved a lot and our details there are kept up to date. Our own website, very important during the lockdowns, is, barring mistakes, always up to date and is now easier to use.

There’s a hidden message in the vision statement, in that it mentions ‘walls’. Churches still attract or repel by word of mouth, even if it’s a Facebook group nowadays. That can create interest, but plucking up the courage to enter a church building is hard for many people. If we truly do know Christ in our midst then that will show in the kind of people we are and the welcome we give: a powerful way to make Christ known beyond our walls.

My view of our chaplaincy in 2021, then, is an optimistic one. I think that we got many things right. There’s still a lot of uncertainty about the future, but if we continue to do our best then God will do the rest.

Thank you once again, Patricia and Nigel, for your sheer hard work and dedication in your Churchwarden and other rôles. Thank you Julie, music team and Council members. Special thanks to Andy Marshall, who with Chris is planning to spend more time in England. Andy developed the website a great deal in his time as webmaster.

My licence now extends to September 2024. We really need to grasp the nettle of succession planning again before too long.

Roger Smith
Chaplain

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