

Combs and Finborough Benefice – 2021

2021 was a challenging year for all our parishes in the Combs and Finborough Benefice. The Revd Chris Childs and Wendy left on January 24th 2021 before moving to a new post in the Forest Heath team. Services were still being held on zoom because of covid 19 and pandemic restrictions.

The Benefice faced several challenges including the reintroduction of services in our churches as regulations allowed but with a different timetable, the continuing use of zoom services, the search for a new Rector. Pew sheets and sermons were posted out to keep as many of us in touch as possible and the Messy Church team sent out 55 activity packs as well as liaising with Gt Finborough C of E Primary School to provide items for their on-line work. The Pew Sheet and Zoom links for services and meetings were emailed to many people. Work in Chilton Meadows Care Home, Finborough Court Bible Study and Hospital visiting continued to be suspended.

Rules about numbers attending weddings and funerals were constantly changing which was difficult for the families concerned and we had to use a great deal of ingenuity at the services which were held. Fifteen weddings were held and on May 4th 2021 the law of the land changed and churches were no longer permitted to issue marriage Certificates at the time of the wedding. Instead the local Registrar has to be notified of a forthcoming wedding in our churches and a Marriage Document prepared by the member of the clergy officiating at the service. It is then up to the officiating clergy to deliver the Marriage Document to the Registrar as soon as possible and subsequently for the couple to apply to the Registrar for their Marriage Certificate.

As we were allowed back into our churches more and more we used a timetable of services which Revd Chris Childs had adopted after the first “lockdown” had ceased rather than the full timetable of services which had been in use prior to the pandemic. This was done to enable our new Rector to come to be able to exercise more flexibility and to have a more free hand to consider timetabling of services and meetings. We also continued to have some zoom services and meetings. Many people said how much they appreciated zoom services as well as actual services in church and how much these things had contributed to a much closer “Benefice feel” which has led to people attending different churches in the Benefice and supporting each other’s activities even more.

On the 6th July 2021 our Lay Reader Derek Ames died peacefully after a sudden illness although he had had one or two signs of ill health for a while. Derek contributed to Church life and to Community life in many ways. He was a great ecumenist and started the bi monthly Men’s Breakfast, he was also one of the instigators in setting up the Good Neighbour Scheme in Onehouse with its weekly coffee mornings open to all.

For several months of the year meetings took place in the different parishes to consider the salient points which should be included in our Benefice Profile in the search for a new Rector. Each parish had a representative through whom thoughts and ideas were sent and Lesley Steed then collated all the information so that the Benefice profile was ready to be sent to any interested parties. In addition prayers were said regularly at services and individually for our new Rector. Interviews were held at the end of July and the Revd Sarah Jenkins was appointed to the post.

At the beginning of November two services were held for All Souls and we discovered the depth of the sadness there was and still is amongst many who have lost loved ones with all the pandemic regulations preventing them from visiting or being with their loved ones. Many have suffered in other ways during this most difficult and challenging time.

Our new Rector, Revd Sarah Jenkins, was licensed and installed by the Bishop of Dunwich on 4th November at St Mary’s, Buxhall. A full church appreciated the hard work undertaken by many to prepare for this service and, together with those who took part in the service, enjoyed the delicious refreshments served afterwards.

Remembrance services were held in every parish on the 11th or 14th November and the patronal festival for St Andrew's, Great Finborough was held on 28th November.

With a sharp increase in the number of cases of the Omicron variant of Covid, it was agreed that refreshments after services would be temporarily suspended. Congregations were requested to continue to wear masks during services, especially whilst singing. An extensive rota of services for Advent and Christmas was prepared and undertaken by members of the ministry team, supported by church wardens, musicians and members of our congregations. In addition, 2000 Christmas cards, listing all services in the benefice, were delivered by volunteers throughout all parishes.

RECTOR'S COMMENTS

Although only able to comment on the final two months of the year, I would like to thank everyone for the wonderfully warm welcome I've received, together with my appreciation for the support and hard work of our ministry team, church wardens, musicians, volunteers and congregation members. There's no doubt that 2021 has been a year of transition for the benefice but the positive responses when considering our performance, and looking forward to the future, are heart-warming and encouraging as we move through 2022. The new year has brought regular meetings with the ministry team and church wardens, a review of our safeguarding training needs, organising the recommissioning of Elders and finalising our regular pattern of services and there's much more that we have to look forward to.

With blessings

Revd Sarah Jenkins, Rector

April 2022