



The Benefice of Upper Wensleydale

News Sheet: Jan 10



Celebrating the Good things

Hello to you all and my very best wishes to you for the New Year. I trust that you have been able to celebrate Christmastide with joy despite the restrictions placed around us and upon us.

The New Year has seen our 3rd National Lockdown implemented swiftly and I'm sure we all share a mixture of emotions at the thought of enduring another raft of restrictions on our lives. One thing is for sure; we must all play our part in working hard to keep ourselves and one another as safe as we can. 2020 brought sadness and great difficulty to so many in the area and in our nation and our prayers and practical support must continue, but as we begin 2021, it is right that we also remember and celebrate the blessing of God upon us and be thankful for His faithfulness. So here are some of my 'reasons to be cheerful' amongst what we faced, and continue to face together.

We have had to contend with a great deal but the church in the upper dale has continued to minister in the name of Jesus Christ and bless those around us as we have worked for and with the community. So many of you have been ensuring that neighbours are safe, cared for and loved through practical and emotional support such as shopping and regular telephone conversations with them.

The ability to provide weekly online services so swiftly throughout the first extended National Lockdown was a major achievement and our thanks go to Andrew Cumpstone and Mike Hirst for their hard work in this regard. The 'Church in the Home' publication was established and circulated via email to over 180 homes alongside printed copies for those unable to access the internet and a blanket of pastoral and prayer support was also quickly established and manned by so many of you. Thank you to Sarah Clark and Karen Jones in ensuring that this cover and help was in place within the first week.

The 'Open Pantry' has continued to be very busy. When the lockdown was announced the supplies were moved out of the church buildings and stored inside the Vicarage from where the parcels were then organised and delivered. I am extremely grateful to Terri Foggin who took on the co-ordinating role in the early summer ensuring that regular deliveries were maintained across the dale. In the autumn we partnered up with Wensleydale's 'A Good Life Project' in order to ensure that we were reaching as many in need as we could. This has opened up access to some extra funding and also help in deliveries. We are to meet as a group again later this month to determine how we might ensure the longevity and success of the support that we are engaged in but many in the community continue to support us in this venture through financial aid and the giving of food into the sealed box at the end of the Vicarage drive.

Finances have taken a considerable hit with the closure of our buildings but our treasurers have maintained their careful scrutiny on our behalf. I join with them as they continue to encourage us to give through a regular monthly bank transfer, or, where envelopes are used, to maintain the custom of putting aside our giving which can then be submitted as and when we are able to do so. Our financial commitments and regular monthly bills remain and so anything we can do to secure a more regular monthly income is to be appreciated. There is much I am sure that we miss about life before Covid, but we can be grateful to the Lord for blessing us in so many ways.

Our regular monthly service, 'The Gathering' in which we were enjoying the encouragement and growth of coming together as a Benefice, is still on hold as we cannot safely gather in such large

numbers until the situation improves; *however*, thanks to the help of a determined team, we were able to open our buildings for worship in a safe manner as soon as the government said we could. This was a considerable achievement and one in which many other churches have been unable, as yet, to enter into. The preparation of the buildings before we opened involved a great deal of time and effort in clearing away books, family areas, fabrics, displays etc and thoroughly sanitising all the surfaces. Thank you to all of you who volunteered your services in this regard and to those who also regularly engage in the cleansing of the buildings once worship has concluded and the buildings are empty after a service has taken place. A large number of materials were purchased and created to enable this to happen (copious quantities of sanitiser, paper towels, towel dispensers, rubber gloves, disinfectant, new signage etc) but we have managed together, to create an environment that meets all the government stipulations and is as safe as we can possibly get it.

The number of people attending worship has steadily increased but there are many who still remain cautious about venturing into environments where groups gather. I understand this and would like, (despite me missing seeing you) everyone to know that it is perfectly alright to stay at home until the situation improves. *We will* get through this and we *will* meet together again, but in the meantime we need to look after ourselves and one another as best as we are able. **There will be opportunities for everyone to engage in corporate worship in one of our church buildings *or* from your own home during the coming weeks. More on this later.** We continue to do what we can to ensure that as many people as possible feel and remain connected with the church through a weekly printed and emailed news sheet. Mike Hirst also did a great job in putting together a recorded Christmas service specifically for the residents of Sycamore Hall.

Our inability to meet with families in the dale has been upsetting but contact has remained through online events and videos sent to our schools for Easter, Harvest, Halloween and Christingle events. Andrew and Heather Cumpstone, Chloe, Ruby and Theo have been such a key part of our family work for some time and who can forget the wonderful 'Lighthouse' challenge video in the spring, but in November they moved out of the area to be closer to the girl's school.

We look forward to being able to thank them for all they have brought to the church once life returns a little closer to what we had before but until then we bless them on their way with love and gratitude. In September and October we trialled a new Covid friendly and secure family service called 'Praise in the Pen'. Families booked a 'Pen' (a gated pew in St Oswald's) and remained there for the 50 min celebration of music, prayer, dance, story, snacks and craft. It was different in style and content to our 'Family Together' services, but was well received by the 15 families who booked a pen and attended. Thank you to the wonderful team who worked so hard in creating individual family packs, overseeing the booking, seating, visuals and craft activities. It was a joyful and much awaited gathering. We were looking forward to offering this once again in January, but in light of the current lockdown this is now suspended until the situation improves in the Spring. The new banner that we were so happy to display at the time will be used again!

Some of you may have noticed the large wooden cross which now stands in the grounds of the old church in Stalling Busk. St Matthew's had been planning this for quite some time, but thanks to the 'Family Cloughton' and a prototype design from David Aspinall, 'The Cross' (Mark 1) was finally created and erected at the start of the November lockdown. We pray that it will be a focus for prayer and reflection from the many walkers and visitors to the dale.

The Christmas Memorial service had to be handled differently this year. Personal invitations were printed or emailed and the event publicised across the region. Numbers were, inevitably, lower but it was clear that this remains a very important and significant opportunity for many in our communities. Names were still written onto the stars and placed upon the tree for those who were unable to attend. Pictures were then taken and posted to these families in order that they could see the name of their loved ones remembered.

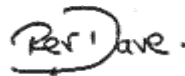
The Online Art Auction in aid of St Oswald's Tower was a great success despite the numerous challenges that the virus restrictions presented us with. My thanks to the hard work of Piers

Browne, Karen Jones and Hannah Gibbs in making this happen and to all of you for your wonderful generosity. I hope the walls of your homes are now enjoying the new displays.

The **outdoor community events** that as a church we were able to organise over the Christmas season were well attended and appear, from the many comments on social media platforms, to have been greatly appreciated. The appropriate risk assessments were completed and implemented and physical distancing adhered to. Thank you to you all for your help and support in enabling these to take place. A special thank you to Mal Carruthers who worked so hard to provide some wonderful organ music for our '**Candlelight Celebrations**' in Askrigg and Hawes. The music and readings lifted our spirits just when we needed it, as did the outdoor tree festival at St Oswald's, masterminded by Elizabeth Fawcett. The trees looked so beautiful with their lights twinkling gently in the dark. There are some fine pictures capturing the event on our website

So ... there is much to be thankful for. The church is alive and well and continues to look forward in hope. As we begin the New Year we do so under increased restrictions and heightened personal and corporate vigilance, but with the knowledge that the vaccination programme is now moving forward swiftly. Let us continue to hold in prayer all those who are having to make decisions on our behalf and for those providing us with essential health care and practical support at this time. As we do so, we embrace the beauty of being 'small' for a little longer but praising God that there is *nothing* small about His love and presence for us and towards us.

May the Lord bless you and keep you safe and secure in the knowledge of His presence and love; today and in the year ahead.



New Pattern of Services

There will be a single celebration of **Communion this week** on Sunday January 10th at 10:30am in St Oswald's, Askrigg. St Oswald's allows us the physical space to ensure that anyone who does attend can be seated safely, observing appropriate physical distancing regulations. There will also be a service of **Evening Prayer** every Sunday at 4pm offered through a conference telephone facility. We hope that this will enable many of you to engage with an act of worship together.

This Sunday 10th January

Holy Communion Service at St Oswald's at 10.30am

Evening Prayer by Telephone at 4pm

To access the conference service you simply telephone this number at 4pm on Sunday:-

Tel: 03330 164757

you will be prompted to enter the

Room Number: 89327700# and PIN: 2772#

The **Evening Prayer Service sheet** and **Readings for January 10th** are attached for you to follow along with.

You will be able to listen to the service and join in the responses which everyone will hear. Calls to 03 numbers should be free as they are included in most UK landline or mobile minute packages.

These details are also available on our website <http://upperwensleydalechurch.org/services-2/>