

Rector's Report for the APCM

Sunday 14th May 2023

Review of the year 2022

Overview

Rooted in God's earth, we envision a just society and a creative, open-hearted church.

St James's Piccadilly is a physical place; the church is a worshipping community that gathers in Christ's name around the altar, and St James's also exists, more than ever since the pandemic, as a virtual place, a shared vision and set of values that draw, convene and inspire people from all around the world. These co-existences are complex and multi-layered. St James's means a lot of different things to large and varied groups of people, but what binds those who feel they belong to St James's in some way, is the conviction that this public sacred space matters as much in contemporary society as it did when it was first conceived in 1684. That the practice of religion, the gathering of community, the focus on prayer-and-action, the Christ-shaped living all matters and is worth committing to in a fractious and hurting world.

The 7 day a week counselling project, the new cultural programming piloted during 2022-3, the expanded food market and partnerships forged through the Wren Project (for example with the Heart of London Business Alliance) have been brought together in 2022 in a coherent strategy that aims to build 'a larger, more inclusive, imaginative and influential SJP community'. Five Programmes have been developed to make steps towards realising this ambition. Programmes One and Two ('Voice and Community' and 'Faith, Earth and Social Justice initiatives') are the two that most closely relate to the life of the congregation. Each have programme groups drawn from the congregation, and PCC champions. The whole of 2022 was spent with a lot of hard work by PCC, wardens, Senior Management Team and staff colleagues putting together the strategy. The Programmes are 4 months old (started in January 2023) and finding their feet; a good start has been made, and much has been achieved already.

The structure and engagement of St James's has changed and grown in the last year. In moving towards the vision of challenging ourselves to be more closely reflective of the love of God in a hurting world: more inclusive, more engaged, being of more service to those in need, building mutual community, and developing the Wren Project so that it is managed well, a greater degree of organisation and structure has been needed. Living through this change, which is what has happened in 2022, has not always been easy, but in a highly volatile and precarious set of societal, planetary and church circumstances, it is our conviction that we should try to do this well together. We have been 'building the road as we walk it'.

The greatest challenges are really twofold: the first is prayerfully staying close to the vision, when turbulent social, political and church circumstances encourage quietism, reduction and playing it safe. The second is income generation. Finding ways to generate income for ordinary running costs and infrastructure when all of those costs and obligations are higher is still extremely challenging. It costs £3,500 per day to keep St James's open, staffed, safe and active in service. In these circumstances, it's especially important that the values of St James's of Contemplation, Courage, Action, Adventure and Kindness are held up by all who are engaged in the programmes and groups that gather in the name of St James's.

Our Congregations

On Sundays, people gather in person and online from across London and beyond. The 11am Eucharist service is the main gathering for the worshipping community, from which all other activity, projects, contributions, and our mission in the world, flow. In 2022, emerging from the disruption of the pandemic, the Sunday congregation experienced a lot of 'churn', with some having moved away, or found a place at local churches during covid, some staying online, and many others arriving, having discovered St James's as a new place. The Sunday Forum continued to be hosted online every week immediately after the service and immensely faithful and consistent leadership from churchwardens and assistant church wardens, meant that teams of volunteers, although often depleted, were maintained: welcomers, Feast and Sunday breakfast volunteers, Traidcraft, and rotas of readers, intercessors and servers were re-started.

With the arrival of the new Associate Rector on St James's Day 2022, a full time clergy person was once again focussed on the wellbeing, pastoral care and building up of the congregation, much needed and warmly welcomed. In her first few months, Ayla has dedicated huge amounts of time, energy and love to getting to know the congregation, running Advent and Lent groups (see below under Congregational life and learning) taking up responsibility for the safeguarding team, and supporting some 15 groups and teams of congregational activity. The Pastoral Care coordinator Petra Griffiths works closely with Ayla and significant prayer and pastoral support is offered and given to individuals, sometimes in times of crisis, sometimes as ongoing encouragement. The Associate Rector role is also the main support for the Prayer Group which continues to hold members of our community in prayer and meets quarterly for encouragement and mutual support.

Social and Environmental Justice Activity

The Associate Rector began line management responsibilities in 2022 for the Food Outreach Coordinator and the Asylum and Refugee Support and Advocate, both working with teams of volunteers from the congregation, the latter offering ongoing support and advocacy for members of our congregation experiencing the hostile environment of the immigration system. The Eco Church group launched, with the whole congregation, a followup to the Wheat growing and Pioneer Plants growing projects with 'Food for the Ecozoic', working with our link church of St Bart's NYC on this project too.

A new paid post of Volunteer Coordinator has been created for the recruitment, training, encouragement and strengthening of our volunteers for all our projects. This will help the specific challenge of 2022-23, which is that the pool of volunteers listed is large but the number of active participants much smaller. There is to be honest, a level of exhaustion and precariousness, alongside the great enthusiasm and dedication, among some volunteer teams

for, for example, Feast and Sunday Breakfast. Incalculable thanks must go to the volunteers for both these projects, who, at the moment, often step in at short notice. We are hoping to stabilise and embed these projects more effectively with the dedicated work of a Coordinator. Mr Mac Olagoke is warmly welcome and started work at St James's in April 2023.

Liturgy and Prayer

As the words of the hymn go, 'the voice of prayer is never silent, nor dies the strain of praise away'. Prayer is the beating heart of the life of St James's. Each morning at 8.30am Morning Prayer is said in the side chapel, open to the public. The Eucharist is celebrated on Wednesday mornings and Thursday lunchtimes in addition to the main Eucharist on a Sunday. The new 'Sanctuary' Eucharist on Tuesday evenings, has grown, and provides a sacred space in person and online for silent prayer (30 minutes from 6pm) and a contemplative Eucharist with reflections and music from our own congregation.

Holding the Silence is led by members of the congregation online three times a week. Contemplative Space is held online during Advent, Lent, and now inbetween times too. The Prayer Group holds the space for intercessory prayer, each remembering a group of names of people who have asked St James's to hold them in prayer each week. A group from St James's hold an online space for compline each night, and the Sunday intercessors team lead us each week in praying for the world, the church and for all who have asked for our prayers. The American theologian Walter Wink wrote that 'History belongs to the intercessors, who pray the future into being'. The rhythm of prayer at St James's is held 7 days a week and everything we do flows from this life of prayer.

Congregational Life and Learning

During the pandemic, we learned to gather online and so most of our courses and learning is held both in person and on Zoom. Several courses have been run in 2022-23: 'Light Perpetual' Advent 2022, 'Fasting and Freedom' led by Ayla with Audrey Sebatindira for Lent 2023. The Camino course has re started, with a new syllabus for 2022-3 and will run until Ascension Day 2023. A new 4 week 'Inclusive Church' course will run in the summer led by Ayla and a group from the congregation working on the 'Programme Two' part of the 3 year strategy that looks at congregational life. And meetings during 2022 with the Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler Revd Preb John Beachamp has highlighted some key action points for St James's. A survey and report will be considered at the PCC meeting in July 2023.

Development of Programmes Three, Four and Five during 2022

A huge amount of work was done in 2022, emerging from the pandemic years, to get St James's not only back up and running again physically but, as mentioned, to bring a greater degree of rigour, organisation and planning that was necessary. The PCC invested a surplus in the recruitment of a new Senior Management Team that was charged with developing a new strategy according to the direction of the PCC, and then developing programmes to take steps towards the ambition of creating a more inclusive, more influential and imaginative SJP community.

Programme Three is the Creative programming. 2022 was a year of piloting this new work, led by Richard Parry. We said goodbye to our fantastic Concerts Manager David McCleery in the summer of 2022, after 8 years as a wonderful colleague and friend. The step change made by

the appointment of Didier Rochard as Producer during 2022 has been that St James's has been curating its own programmes and selling its own tickets. And that the quality of the performers and partners has been intentionally set as high as St James's can afford. The Embark Festival, the Blake Festival and the installation of Jesse Darling 'Miserere', with associated events and conversations, were highlights of this during 2022. Following this piloting of St James's being a 'provocateur for good', and receiving strong endorsement from the music industry and the art world in terms of the quality and scale of this programming, the current challenge is to build the inclusive community and new audiences that is outlined in the strategy, embedding a sense of belonging as well as developing St James's 'voice' in the public square. This requires investment in the collection of data and the intentional development of new audiences, inviting people who don't believe that church could be a place for them.

Programme Four is named Transformation and is the work needed to make the Wren Project a reality. 2022 was a year of intense activity and preparation: including trial pits dug in the garden, according to the advice of Westminster City Council tree officer, the submission of papers for Listed building consent, planning permission and faculty permission. All of these submissions were made, and in 2023, all permissions were granted. 2022 was also a year that was hugely challenging for the Development Department led by Brian Willetts. Recruitment of fund raising teams was difficult across the charity sector, and St James's was no exception. In the second half of 2022, it was wonderful to welcome Venetia Iga and then at the end of the year Joanna Thompson and Charlotte Orell-Jones so that the team had a chance of raising the funds necessary to keep the momentum of the Wren Project going. The death of HM Queen Elizabeth in September meant that months of preparation for events over the autumn had to be put on hold. Much was necessarily and rightly cancelled both here in London and in New York City. This had a greater effect than the cancellation of the events themselves, in that because of capacity, much other effort had been put on hold, so the unravelling of the events was only one cost to St James's of this event beyond our control. The team re-grouped and planned for 2023's timetable of PCC decision making. A huge number of new relationships are being formed through this work and the connection of St James's church with our parish is truly transformational.

Programme Five is, in many ways, the most important, as it is the activity that enables everything else. 'Supported and Sustained' is the effort led by our Operations Director Nick Thasarathar which keeps the church, site, garden open and safe for all our activities. The Verger team, administration and finance, estates, gardener, cleaners, contractors, are a really effective team who work immensely hard every day to support and sustain the mission of St James's. One of the key principles of the strategy is to develop 'Mission-aligned income' strands, and to this end, a new partnership began in 2022 with Redemption Roasters. St James's is now a key partner in their reduction of reoffending rates from the national average of 50% to something closer to 22%. The food market has re-started with our partners 'Foodish' which replaces the former gift market and the hire of the site for various events and activities is possible with more impact now that St James's has a premises license to sell alcohol at concerts and events. Preparation for this during 2022 was a large piece of work in itself, investing in the infrastructure in order to generate income and improve our facilities. Tendering processes were also held for new auditors and new solicitors, both of whom were appointed in 2022. Both firms have proved a great addition to the professional advice given to the PCC and SMT, and have offered proactive and consistent advice as St James's considers whether to set up a limited company to handle non-primary-purpose income for instance. The Operations Director is also Project Sponsor for the Wren Project,

working closely with the Project Co-ordinators Ingham and Pinnock who have served St James's brilliantly, steering us through the process of planning successfully.

Final Reflections

Words from psalm 127 are written above the Rectory, rebuilt after the destruction of World War Two. 'Unless the Lord builds the house'. The full quotation is

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labour in vain.
Unless the LORD guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives sleep to his beloved*

2022 for St James's has been a year of emerging from the anxiety and suffering of the pandemic, with a refreshed vision, rooted in the character and values of St James's held for decades, and renewed commitment to build church together that is inclusive, imaginative, and determined to keep moving outwards from the altar around which we gather - to reach communities and congregations that are alienated from church but who need the sustenance symbolised in the Eucharist that is offered in the broken body of Christ. All we do, all the maintenance, fund raising, music, cultural programming, income generation is an extension of this liturgical action.

I spoke in a recent sermon about 'FutureShock', and that this could be a way to describe the disciples after the new truth was dawning on them about resurrection, and the life of Christ that was transforming the world. There is a level of 'FutureShock' in society. Old assumptions have rightly been challenged in terms of human identity, how we are to live interdependently with the natural world, who belongs and how, and the truths exposed and accelerated by the pandemic that scientists insist will happen again. It is not yet clear what these old assumptions are to be replaced with. We are not able to 'see around corners' but St James is the pilgrim saint, who travels with us, and points us to the one who will never leave us, who forgives all our many mistakes, and encourages us to dust ourselves down, get up and start again.

My final word for this APCM report has to go to thank every single one of you, whether you are involved in projects or not. You are essential as members of this community and you are seen by God as beloved people, just as you are. Great and heartfelt thanks to my clergy colleagues, who give so much of themselves in following their vocation as priests, for this season in this place. I learn from each of my clergy colleagues every day more about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Great thanks to every single one of our paid staff too. While of course not being anywhere near perfect, St James's tries hard to be a great place to work, and a lively, collaborative, and effective staff team bear witness to the purposeful and kind ethos of St James's as such a place.

And finally, thanks to our PCC members and wardens who are stepping down, their terms having finished. Wilson Wong has served St James's so brilliantly as the Lay Vice Chair for over 3 years, and on the PCC for six. His leadership and compassionate professionalism have guided a huge amount of the strategy formation and now delivery. He has been intimately involved in the detail and will remain so as part of Programme Five and Programme One groups. Lia Shimada will

begin ordination training in the USA next year, and has allowed us as a community to accompany her and her family through the intensely significant life events of the past year. Her experience as a professional mediator, trainer and author has been colossally helpful and much appreciated on the PCC and deanery synod. Monica Bashade is so valued as a member of our PCC over the past three years, also a key and active member of the International Group, Sunday Breakfast team, and leader in campaigning against the hostile environment. Shirley Dixon resigned during the year due to ill health. Shirley has been a key and active member of the congregation for over 40 years. Her prominent voice, reading of the gospel, and commitment to St James's has been unswerving and moving. Now she holds St James's in prayer each day, and is a vital part of our ministry of prayer.

And our two wardens, Trevor Lines and Deborah Colvin. It is hard to quantify what they have given of themselves, their professional expertise, their leadership and pastoral support. But we know in our hearts what they mean and how they have both given freely and generously of themselves in a role that they couldn't have imagined would be so challenging. Trevor's commitment to Scripture during the pandemic in the 'Gospels Aloud' project, his championing and support of the music scholars and fair trade will live long in the memory, alongside the hours of meetings and strategizing that has been necessary during 2022. Deborah has been instrumental, highly influential in the shaping and formation of the whole strategy, with its vision of 'rooted in God's earth' and with a whole mission focussed on spiritual, scientific, practical advocacy for the greatest challenge of our time. Deborah has taught us and led us to see that action on the climate emergency is not an 'add on' activity, but the context, root and branch of what church should be concerned with. St James's owes both Deborah and Trevor a huge debt of gratitude and it's generous beyond measure that they are both willing to stay involved and advise us as we embed the vision they helped to create further.

I have ended my last few reports with both thanks and a request for forgiveness as your priest in these days. I do so again. The past year has been another immensely challenging one, as we continue to attempt our building of Christ-shaped community in a church that is nationally in decline, and often fractious, and in a city and society that has such amazing potential while remaining so unjust. I am so perennially hopeful for the world God has made, and our place in it. Because this hope isn't bland optimism but, honestly, a deep and joyful curiosity about what on earth will happen next. And a belief in the principle outlined by the Russian monk St Silouan when facing the suffering in the world, and living through it ourselves. You'll have heard me preach about this before: his encouragement was to 'Keep your mind in hell, and despair not'. Both of these are important: facing the depth of the suffering of the world, our own suffering too, and at the same time, always resisting despair, always leaning into hope.

Living this way, together, is really challenging, because we live with a sometimes-hard-to-bear level of what seems like permanent uncertainty. In this context, trust is key. For all the times that I have simply got it wrong, not met your expectations or caused you grief, please forgive me. And please pray for me, as I pray for you, every day.



The Reverend Lucy Winkett, Rector