

ST MARY'S SUNDAY CLUB REPORT 2020-2021

The spring term at Sunday Club in 2020 was progressing well when the UK Government made the announcement of a national lockdown in March. Sunday Club leaders were immediately faced with the challenge of finding a solution to being unable to meet in person with our members in the Church Room. We wanted to continue to provide spiritual support for our young people who were suddenly faced with home schooling and little contact with their friends. Roots, whose materials we have been successfully using for a number of years, immediately began to provide worship resources online for us to email to families for their use at home. Messy Church, whose ideas we have also been using for a long time for special occasions, came up with the idea of preparing bags of materials to be distributed to families or collected from a pick-up point together with notes and an outline that families could follow.

We considered both these options briefly but were blessed by the fact that one of our parents, Chevaun Greenhill, had been using Zoom meetings in the course of her work and could see its potential use for Sunday Club. At this point Zoom was almost unheard of and certainly not something that most people were familiar with at that point. A Sunday afternoon was spent online with Chevaun patiently showing Jane, Mary and me how Zoom works and the possibilities that a Zoom meeting could offer. We didn't take long in making the decision to go ahead with Sunday morning meetings via Zoom, initially with Chevaun kindly hosting the meetings using her Zoom license.

First we approached Tony for permission for us to change to this way of working, after which we contacted parents with our proposal and received their full support. Then the planning began. At this point the Diocese issued guidance for Children and Youth leaders about running online meetings and almost overnight we found ourselves having to write a detailed risk assessment and produce new consent forms for parents to complete before their children could join a Sunday Club Zoom meeting. Once all the requirements were in place we began a new way of meeting with our members that soon became the new normal.

Since children and their families were confined to their homes and we were all struggling to adjust to the restrictions imposed on us, we consulted with our families and then made the decision to meet weekly instead of twice a month. To try to maintain some sort of normality for the children our meetings continued to follow our usual outline based on our Roots materials. The big difference was that we were planning a meeting to suit a wide age range, with children from 6 to 14 years of age. The three of us took it in turns to plan each session. This involved adapting the materials and suggestions in our Roots materials, finding ways to play games together and being inventive in finding craft activities that could be done using the materials that families would be likely to have at home already. One big advantage of meeting online was that with access to the internet and the possibility of screen sharing we had endless possibilities when it came to the musical aspect of our worship time. We sang along, signed and danced to a whole host of new songs.

Sunday mornings became something that we all looked forward to in the difficult times we were experiencing and the children responded in an amazing way. As leaders we are very proud of them all and the way in which they have coped during the past year with all that has happened and the anxiety that we have all experienced.

We had no idea back in March 2020 that we would still be meeting on Sunday mornings via Zoom over one year later. We broke for the school summer holidays resigned to the fact that we would have to continue via Zoom in September. However, we were expecting to be able to return to the Church Rooms sometime during the autumn term. The Church Room management committee had reopened

the building and ensured it was Covid19 secure. So we read up on all the latest guidance from the Church of England, Guildford Diocese and NYA (National Youth Association), wrote another Risk Assessment, made a socially distanced seating plan, decided how we would run our meetings back in the hall, purchased the necessary supplies and prepared individual pencil cases for each child to avoid cross contamination and waited. Our first meeting in person was due to take place after the October half term but we were to be disappointed as a new lockdown was imposed. We had also planned and prepared to start our second Youth Alpha course starting in November but that also had to be postponed again.

With Christmas fast approaching we were determined to celebrate properly. Mary had written a wonderful, topical and amusing "Lockdown Nativity" for us and in September the children were each allocated a role. Lines were learned and costumes fashioned. Each cast member was then filmed at home via mobile phones. The video clips were sent in and with the expert help of our two technological experts/ Junior Helpers, Ethan and George, a video was put together. We then organised a Friday night at home film premiere for our families. Hot chocolate and popcorn were enjoyed as we watched our special Nativity play. Although Tony could not be there to make the presentations, parents stepped in and each SC member was presented with a book from St Mary's. After the preview the video was then put on general release via the church website and many compliments were received.

Another thing we did not want to forego at Christmas was our usual party but this also had to be a party with a difference. Meetings indoors were not permitted but outdoors activities were, so Risk Assessments drawn up and approval granted, we went to the Ski Centre at Christ's College for a donutting party. It was a resounding success and enjoyed by everyone who could be there. Sadly when the big day arrived a number of our members were isolating at home and had to miss the fun. By way of compensation Jane and Mary organised a Zoom Party that afternoon for those children who had missed out and that was also great fun. Father Christmas had to miss both parties because of Coronavirus regulations, but he very kindly sent his gifts for each SC member by special delivery.

As St Mary's was open for services, with Tony's support we planned a special Sunday Club Crib Service in church on Christmas Eve for all our families. Yet again we were in for a disappointment as a number of our children and their parents, including one of our leaders and her family were in isolation at the end of the school term so the difficult decision to cancel the service was made. However, families were still able to join in the Crib Service that Tony led online via Facebook later that afternoon.

With another lockdown in place we continued with our Zoom meetings in January 2021. We held an afternoon Christingle at Candlemas celebration with our families at the beginning of February. Everyone proved very proficient at making their own Christingle orange and we all enjoyed the fun and games. For Mothering Sunday we made post it note holders as gifts and cards for all our mums the previous week, and then held our own online family Mothering Sunday celebration on the day. Both of these sessions were facilitated by the distribution of bags of materials for each family – all materials prepared in advance and quarantined for 48 hours of course.

Since worship outdoors was permitted we celebrated Easter with our SC families in the churchyard on Easter Sunday morning. We were blessed with good weather and delighted that permission to sing outdoors had just been given. We wrote our own short act of worship and chose "Thine be the glory" as our hymn. In advance we encouraged everyone to practice signing in Makaton to accompany the chorus of the hymn and some of us even learned to sign the whole hymn. Josh, one of our Junior Helpers, brought along his drum kit to play as we sang the hymn and his mum Chevaun and sisters Eliza and Darcey were our choir. It is lovely having such a talented musical family to help

with our singing. I think it must have been a first for St Mary's having drums to accompany the singing instead of the organ. Of course our Easter Sunday worship would not have been complete without a socially distanced Egg Hunt.

On Sunday 25 April we are returning to the Ski Centre for a second donutting session with hopefully every child able to be there this time. Our plans are then to have two more meetings via Zoom before returning to the Church Room in June for a further two meetings before we celebrate the past year with our annual family picnic.

We have 11 Sunday Club families at present. We were delighted to welcome two new families early in 2020. We also were very happy to welcome a new member when baby Archer joined the Edwards family. Our leadership team remains the same – Cat, Jane, Mary, Rachel and Sally. Cat has been missing on some Sundays over the past year because of her new baby but has joined our meetings as often as was possible and Rachel was unable to join us as she was needed in her role as Church Warden in church on Sunday mornings, but hopefully we will all be back together in the Church Rooms on Sunday mornings in September this year. We also intend to have a third attempt at starting up our next Youth Alpha group on Sunday evenings in the Church Room.

Thank you to everyone at St Mary's for your support, your prayers and your donations during the past year. Please continue to remember us in your prayers.

Sally – on behalf of Cat, Jane, Mary and Rachel.

MUSIC REPORT MAY 2021

This last year has seen a fluctuating musical presence in the church according to changing guidance. Whenever possible Jenny Brockless and Ian Tulloch have provided uplifting music with or without a choir. The choir has been able to maintain a steady presence throughout the last year when restrictions allowed. They have been able to sing in the balcony, initially unaccompanied, but then with the organists. The hymns chosen have been familiar favourites to support the services and give comfort and a sense of normality to the parishioners.

Mindful of their health and well-being, several choir members have been unable to attend throughout this period but have supported the choir with love and prayers and hope to return soon.

The Christmas service of lessons and carols was beautiful in its simplicity and thoughtfulness. All those who were able to attend expressed gratitude for the service and also for the Easter Day service.

At the time of writing the services continue with the choir and organists supporting the worship. It may be that eventually the post of Organist/Choirmaster will be filled but until then grateful thanks are given to Jenny, Ian, the choir, the extra voices that have assisted on occasion and especially the congregation for their kind words and encouragement.