

Walmer Baptist Church

a Christian community, for the community, in the community

Annual Report on our Ministry and Mission 2020

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Coronavirus Pandemic – COVID 19

The year 2020 will find itself well-documented by all manner of historical, political and social commentators because of the impact of the **Coronavirus Pandemic** which impacted upon the lives of everyone, in our community, our nation and across the globe.

This report highlights the impact **Covid 19** has had upon our church community and whilst it would be easy to be tempted to accentuate the negative experiences, as is usual, we have much to be thankful for and wish to celebrate together. Whilst an Ever-changing pattern of HM Government restrictions were placed upon all sectors of community life - domestic, retail, business, education, travel, industry - for us the regulations imposed upon Places of Worship (affecting all faith communities) were the most challenging for us.

The enforced closure of our building for both public worship and other activities was introduced swiftly by HM Government and whilst some restrictions were lifted and/or amended throughout the year, Easter, Pentecost, Church Anniversary, Harvest, Remembrance, Advent and Christmas have all passed without observance In the Sanctuary. “**Covid Secure**” measures have been implemented as required by HM Government and in accordance with advice from the Baptist Union.

Whilst the building has stood unoccupied our loyal volunteer Grounds Team ensured that the lawns were mown, hedges clipped, planters watered and displays bloomed weed free.

CONTENTS

2020 – Ministry and Mission before COVID 19

WORSHIP

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

2020 – Ministry and Mission after COVID 19

WORSHIP

BIBLE STUDIES

FRIDAY PRAYERS

PRIVATE PRAYER

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

PASTORAL CARE

IN MEMORIUM

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

FABRIC & GROUNDS

GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

MISSIONS

FINANCE

AND FINALLY

POSTSCRIPT

*(This report is prepared and tabled for the **Annual General Church Meeting** at a post-Covid date still to be arranged.)*

2020 – Ministry and Mission before COVID 19

WORSHIP

The year began like any other with the usual pattern of Sunday worship following the themes and readings of the **Revised Common Lectionary** used by many other churches. We journeyed through the season of Epiphany; were blessed by the Ministry of The Revd Roger North, Retired Methodist Minister, for the Sunday in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; and entered into Lent.

An innovation from our Mission Team was the introduction of a monthly focus on a Mission cause from those we support to help inform our prayer and then giving.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

Socially, our planned events and activities were published and were proving attractational.

The year began with a post-**Christmas Dinner** which proved popular with caterers and diners. (As is now customary, this was followed by a Luncheon for the local Retired Baptist Ministers which was attended by Regional Minister, The Revd Stuart Davison)

Together on Tuesday with **Elevenes with Pastor**, tasty cooked **Lunches** and of course the ever popular and ever-growing **Knitting for the Needy** group continued to flourish.

The Lumo Project Matthew's gospel showings on Tuesdays (morning and evening) were well received.

Lent began with pancakes aplenty on **Shrove Tuesday**, followed by an **Ash Wednesday** reflection and our series of **Lent Conversations** — focusing on Women in Ministry – began with The Revd Barbara Heather as our guest.

The **Youth Hub** attracted a loyal group of young people and **Fun and Games Evenings** brought others together. The weekly **Badminton** group continued to grow and an experimental monthly evening session was trialled. **Tabletop Sales** had local interest and support and in March combined with a **Tool with a Mission** tool collection.

The most significant addition to our programme was the inaugural **Organ Recital** with rededication by Regional Minister, The Revd Jerry Newson. This followed the restoration undertaken by Browne's of Ash which had been generously funded by anonymous benefactors.

In addition, our facilities continued to be appreciated by our regular hirers: Tuesdays **Keep Fit Class**, **Living Lively Choir** on Thursdays and the **Rosamond Club** monthly on Fridays.

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

The **Leadership Team**, **Minister** and **Deacons**, ensure compliance with statutory regulations and the implementation of policies and practices for: Health and Safety, Food Hygiene, Safeguarding (Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults), Privacy, GDPR and Copyright. They prayerfully seek to discern the guidance and prompting of the Holy Spirit to develop our Ministry and Mission.

HM Government's **Access to Work** scheme funding for a Support Worker ensures the continuance of the invaluable contribution of a **Ministry Assistant** until January 2023.

2020 – Ministry and Mission after Covid 19

RESPONDING TO COVID

The wave of transmission of the Coronavirus across the globe and the response of Governments and the **World Health Organisation** was swift and unprecedented. **Places of Worship** were granted no exemption from closure after the **National Lockdown**, which was imposed by HM Government in March, midway during Lent. Very quickly it became evident that, for the Church, a response needed to be equally swift in order to continue to fulfil its Ministry and Mission. The **Baptist Union** along with all Christian denominations (and other faith traditions) began to publish guidance and advice papers in response to the ever-changing regulations and restrictions which have been introduced by HM Government then and since. Careful attention was given to our compliance to legal obligations as well as seeking to be seen to be implementing best practice as advised by HM Government.

The speed, change and dramatic impact has been challenging and difficult for many and understandably there has been some resistance expressed by a minority whose voice it is equally important to hear alongside those, who from the outset, have been conscientiously consistent in compliance.

Whilst initial hopes for a return to “normality” at Easter seemed likely, as the year progressed, such goals came and went and for the church we have adopted a pattern which has become, for us, a “new” normal.

Worship

Very quickly, it was clear that in order to remain in contact with everyone, particularly to facilitate some regular pattern of worship, the use of online resources would be essential alongside material which could be emailed or posted.

Zoom, one of many commercial video conferencing software packages, very quickly established itself as a tool adopted by many churches. The relative simplicity to operate and to access was advantageous in our case, particularly, in view of the demographic of our fellowship and its computer literacy. With **Ministry Assistant** patience and careful guidance, as many as were able, have connected with us for the continuance of Sunday worship, such that around 30 join us ‘live’, each week.

Using Zoom has afforded the opportunity for folk to share fellowship before and after our worship, which has been particularly important for the self-isolating and shielded individuals who miss face-to-face contact. Additionally, this global technology has afforded us the opportunity to invite live and recorded linkups with speakers from our Mission causes who otherwise would not be able to join with us. It has also been a joy to have had visitors to our worship, from time to time, from friends (including from the **USA**), family and neighbours.

As we have gained competency in the use of the software, the musical accompaniment provided faithfully by our musicians, along with readers and intercessors, ensure that, now, with the inclusion of our familiar **PowerPoint Orders of Service**, the worship experience is of a high standard.

YouTube, another Internet communication tool has been used to post a weekly pre-recorded reflection which individuals can access to listen to at their leisure. Additionally, edited archive recordings have been posted on our **Walmer Baptist Church YouTube Channel** for which the skill of the Ministry Assistant is acknowledged. The access log indicates an average of 15 views each week.

Whilst the weekly post is primarily to keep our own folk connected, it is heartening to have heard from those from further afield who have been listening in and benefiting from doing so themselves, during this period of restriction.

Printed Material which has been mailed weekly to those without computer or Internet access has ensured that those individuals receive the **Contact Sheet**, an **Order of Service**, a transcript of the Message and correspondence which are also sent by email. Twenty-two envelopes are dispatched by hand or through the post each week.

For many of those who received a weekly mailing, many have said the receipt of the familiar white envelope through the letterbox has been a heartening reminder of their place in our fellowship and that they are not forgotten. *(Thanks must be recorded to those who volunteer to hand deliver locally each week, those who collect mailings from The Manse, and to those who have generously reimbursed postage costs.)*

Audio-visual skills, long appreciated, have come to the fore with the production of Christmas DVD recordings.

Bible Studies

The familiarity and competency we have developed using Zoom has afforded the opportunity for small group Bible studies to be offered as part of our programme of activities. An encouraging number have joined as for studies of 1 & 2 Thessalonians and an Advent study from Isaiah. In line with our attempts to be inclusive, printed copies of study notes have been mailed to those unable to Zoom.

Friday Prayers

The weekly gathering at Noon on Friday takes place exclusively on Zoom. It offers a much-needed forum to share pastoral joys and concerns for the fellowship and beyond.

Private Prayer *(and return to the Sanctuary)*

The introduction of **Private Prayer**, as restrictions were lifted, afforded the opportunity for individuals to use the Sanctuary for private prayer – the regulations stipulating that no corporate worship was permitted. After conducting a thorough **Risk Assessment** and implementing the findings, a limited number of people availed themselves of the opportunities to pray in the **Sanctuary**, offered twice a month on Sunday afternoon.

A further relaxation of restrictions permitted **Public Worship** but the Covid 19 Secure restrictions limited in-person attendance to 36. After a trial simulcast with Zoom worshippers online and in-person worshippers in the Sanctuary, further changes to HM Government regulations and restrictions prevented further use of the Sanctuary for Public Worship.

The future use of Zoom for inclusion in worship, for Bible Studies, etc. will be explored post- Covid restrictions.

Social Programme

The initial **National Lockdown** and subsequent tiered restrictions have limited, to varying degrees, the level of social interaction permissible for individuals and households. Coupled with the restrictions on the permitted use of our buildings the delivery of our social programme, as we had planned needed some creative thinking. Although, sadly, we could only effectively adapt our programme to accommodate those who could Zoom with us, topical and seasonal mailings have provided resources to share which it is hoped have afforded a sense of connection with others.

Eleveses with Pastor on Tuesday mornings have proved to be popular gatherings for much-needed connection and conversation.

A loyal and productive group of ladies meet faithfully on Tuesday afternoons to continue **Knitting for the Needy**. Supportive of one another, this lively group have taken well to the Zoom technology although as yet the essential tea making and its distribution has proved challenging.

Cake and Conversation introduced at Lockdown affords a further opportunity for informal conversation this time on Thursday afternoons. Whilst attendance has not been as popular as other events it still is a valuable connecting point appreciated by those who join.

Pastor has prepared and delivered a series of **Wit and Wisdom** evenings which have provided some competitive fun for individuals, couples and households. The careful accuracy of our scorer ensures that undisputed winners (and losers) are declared.

Seasonal and Special Events primarily to offer further opportunities for social interaction through the medium of Zoom took place throughout the year.

Friends gathered online for **VE Day Garden Parties**, around their barbecue for the **Big Lunch**, with scones and cream for **Strawberry Tea**, with coloured glowstick in hand for **Spuds and Sparklers**, and with decorated crackers for **Christmas Dinner** (*although meals seemed less than traditional?!*)

Pastoral Care

In these strange and uncertain times, with many anxious and fearful, lonely and isolated along with those Shielding, the maintenance of our pastoral care of one another has been essential. Much of the foregoing report highlight the varying attempts we have made to keep ourselves connected one with another.

Once again, restriction and regulation have made contact challenging but to our great strength, our existing **Shepherds and Shepherdesses** networks have provided a structure for keeping in touch. A number of shepherds and shepherdesses have gone the extra mile and broadened their regular conversations and connections beyond their own flocks. Deliveries of home-baked treats, flowers, "Thinking of You" cards have all lifted spirits as have all the phone conversations that have taken place week by week. (*With justification some have struggled with compliance, stretching gathering boundaries and visitation. Hard as it is, we should remember and respect each other's position*).

Mindful of pastoral concerns for individuals who have long-standing medical conditions and/or those who develop issues, are hospitalised or the bereaved, a **Prayer List** is made available in hardcopy or by email as needs arise. (*This is done mindful of and with instructions for GDPR compliance*.)

In Memorium

At the close of the year the Church Membership Roll stood at 30 members. During the year one member, Margaret Allsopp, was “called home” along with a number of friends of the fellowship: Kath Cory, David Evans, Jean Pendreich, Audrey Robinson.

Community Connections

Zoom has once again proved an invaluable tool in preserving a number of our community connections and has also afforded the opportunity to establish some new ones.

Sadly, restrictions on who can enter school buildings has meant that it has not been possible to offer our regular support to **The Downs CE Primary School**. Visits by the **Young Carers** and class visits to look at the building have not been possible. Seasonal services for the Lower School with their parents attending have also not been possible although Pastor has been able to lead collective worship with classes using Zoom.

Whilst it was disappointing not to be able to present School Bibles to the Year 3 children in person, thanks to generous contributions from **Walmer Parish Churches, Walmer Chapel** and ourselves the Bibles were purchased and given to the children.

Pastor continues as an “**Appointed Governor**” for the Federation of The Downs & Northbourne CE Primary Schools and although Covid 19 Restrictions, again, prevent access to the schools, meetings continue on Zoom and paperwork is circulated through a Secure Email Network.

Church Connections have been important, not least between **Walmer Parish Churches** and **Walmer Chapel** with whom we have shared responses to the Covid 19 Regulations and Restrictions and discussed, from time to time, local plans for Church Openings.

Our **South Kent Network** of **SEBA Ministers** very quickly moved from physical meetings to virtual Zoom meetings, once a month, hosted by Ministers in rotation. These have been valuable meetings to share experiences, to learn from one another positive experiences and, most importantly, to pray for one another especially in times of need and challenge. *(Regional Minister Team Leader, The Revd Stuart Davison has produced a Daily Reflection, circulated by email, offering words of encouragement through the Coronavirus Pandemic. Regional Minister, The Revd Paul Kerley pre-recorded an Anniversary message.)*

An advantage of the videoconferencing technology which has become the popular means of communication for meetings for all groups, businesses and institutions, has been the ability to “attend” from the comfort of one’s own home, opening up the opportunity to engage in discussions otherwise not practical to do so. To this end Pastor has engaged with the **Dover District Council** and its **Walmer Neighbourhood Partnership** bringing together statutory and voluntary sector leaders to share experiences and news of activities and programmes. Pastor also participated in a briefing by **Kent County Council** of its new countywide **Bee Protection and Preservation Programme**.

From the **March Lockdown** it has, of course, not been possible for us to make our facilities available to our regular and loyal **Hirers**. We have been, and remain, in touch with all of them to explore all possible options that might permit a resumption at the earliest possibility. *(Thanks go to the Musical Director of **Living Lively Choir** for allowing access to carol recordings played on the Church Organ and made available online.)*

Members and friends have continued to generously support the work of the **Deal Area Emergency Food Bank** ensuring that regular deliveries of essential supplies are dropped off in The Manse porch. From there, arrangements are made for their collection and ultimate distribution to those in need.

The annual **Friends of Kent Churches Ride & Stride** took place with participants signing in at closed buildings. Sponsorship based on the number of visitors raised a modest £50 for church funds.

Fabric and Grounds

With access to the building restricted from the **March Lockdown**, routine maintenance within the building has been limited to essential measures to make access **Covid 19 Secure Compliant**. All points of entry have been provided with hand sanitiser dispensers which have also been sited at key locations throughout the building. All restricted materials and fittings have been removed, and social distanced seating in the Sanctuary is marked. Lectern perspex screens have been fitted.

The requisite **QR Code** is displayed at main entrances, as required by HM Government's Track and Trace programme.

Regular visual inspections have taken place inside and out, particularly after bad weather, to ensure no damage has occurred.

To aid compliance with ventilation requirements, compromising fire safety, Fireguard doorstops have been fitted.

(Particular thanks must go to those who have undertaken these tasks).

*Our report each year is not complete without an ode.
And this year we could record the finding of a frog or toad.
Such is the lot of our most dedicated caretaking Queen,
That when the unexpected appears she continues to clean.*

*Twenty, twenty, has, for us all, been a very challenging year.
But with the building closed, for one, there's been less rubbish to clear.
Still, at least, a weekly flush of the toilets has been needed,
and on her way home she takes time to ensure planters are weeded.*

*Hand sanitiser and wipes, gloves, apron and mask,
Essential for Covid compliance, the law says, for her task.
Reluctantly conforming, she completes her tasks her own way
For all switches, handles and seats, washed and wiped, THANK YOU, we say.*

As acknowledged in the introduction to this report, regular routine maintenance of our grounds has continued throughout the year. *(Thanks go to mowers, hedge trimmers, planters and weeders.)*

The decision to mark the **75th Anniversary of Victory in Europe Day** with a display on the spire door along with patriotic coloured planting in our planters was made prior to the March lockdown. Thanks go to all who worked to achieve this despite the restrictions and availability of plants.

It was heartening to have these efforts acknowledged by the **Walmer in Bloom** judges who awarded a runners-up certificate, in our category, for the annual competition

Governance and Administration

Beginning the year as normal with our **Annual General Church Meeting**, since then, restrictions have prevented any Church Meetings from taking place. Along with many Baptist Churches our **Church Constitution** makes no provision for online meetings and so, in this instance, Zoom does not help us nor would we wish to exclude those without the Internet from any such meetings.

Similarly, there is no provision made for the **Deacons** to meet virtually although they have, of necessity, met regularly, albeit informally, on Zoom. Thankfully, there have been no major areas of concern beyond efforts to comply with HM Government's regulation and restrictions and to strive for the return to public worship and activities in our building. *(The Deacons' leadership is valued.)*

Wading through pages and pages of HM Government regulations and restrictions, often rolled out at short notice, and the supporting guidance, often produced after some delay, Pastor has made every effort to keep the fellowship fully informed of the ever-changing implications.

We all acknowledge that these have had such a significant impact upon Church Life from which a return to normality seems to continue to be eroded.

Detailed guidance and direction offered from **Baptist House, Didcot**, has proved invaluable in ensuring compliance and dispelling concerns, not least, in **Charity Commission** governance.

All but essential administration tasks have been completed at home – both **Minister and Ministry Assistant** have established an effective and efficient weekly routine without which the achievements recorded here would not have been possible. The initial steep learning curve has seen the development of new skills, particularly in the use of social media, to promote our activities and help preserve the mental well-being of those isolated and shielded who have sought any means of communication to keep in touch. Regular twice-weekly emails keep many informed.

Missions

Our ability to use Zoom as a means of linking up with the speakers from a number of our supported mission causes has, as noted elsewhere, provided us with the opportunity to hear from those who it would be impossible for us to consider inviting to Walmer. We thank **MAF** and **Barnabas Fund**.

Most significantly, the opportunity to learn first-hand from our **BMS Link Missionaries, Louise and Peter Lynch**, both whilst in **Bangladesh** and on Home Assignment, has strengthened our partnership with them through BMS World Mission. Zoom, we hope, will continue to keep us connected in the future.

In-house champions for **Hope Now, Willing & Abel** and **London City Mission** have played their part.

Mission Giving in support of our nominated causes was as follows:

Baptists Together (Home Mission)	£246.24	BMS World Mission	£533.27
Tools with a Mission	£200	Willing and Abel	£100
Barnabas Fund	£340	Mission Aviation Fellowship	£70
London City Mission	£200		

A review of supported Mission Causes carried out by the Missions Team recommends in 2021 we include **Christian Institute** and **Tearfund** and continue with a monthly focus to promote a different cause.

BMS Birthday Scheme subscribers are thanked for their contributions – *NEW subscribers welcome.*

Finances

With due diligence our **Church Treasurer** has maintained careful oversight of the **Church Finances** during a period of great uncertainty and national and international financial downturn.

The faithful generosity, from across the fellowship, which has seen a healthy maintenance of our financial situation, is thanks to those who switched from **plate giving to standing orders** and others who have **regularly remitted cheques and cash donations.**

Additional thanks are proffered for the following gifts:

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church £2400
Other Significant Gifts £3415

Gift Aid claims made to **HMRC** have benefited church funds this year by £5094.50

Financial Summary *(subject to Independent Examination of Church Accounts)*

Brought Forward 1 January 2020	£ 51688.72	
Income for year 2020	£ 51814.55	
Expenditure for year 2020*	£ 52001.21	<i>(*total including uncleared cheques)</i>
Carried forward 31 December 2020	£ 51502.06	

And Finally!

As ever, as the bottom of the final page of the report looms, there are doubtless contributions which have been inadvertently overlooked. For their oversight sincere apologies are proffered.

The closing word is our Scripture Text for 2021:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you HOPE and a FUTURE. (Jeremiah 29.11)

A Postscript from our Ministry Assistant

Someone needs to speak up as **Pastor** is too modest to say himself, how hard he has worked in our current difficult circumstances, even putting aside his own holiday to be available as events unfolded.

To his credit he has tried to ensure that everyone is remembered and that no one has been left behind in terms of communication and care. He has been the one who has followed and digested all the government information so that we know what to do. He has also acted as a mediator and peacekeeper when there have been different views over what should and should not be done.

This past year we have benefited from Pastor's strengths and are reminded of words in the book of Esther: **"And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"**