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Dear friends,

On Wednesday 26th May St Michael and St Barnabas will be holding its APCM for 2020 at 7pm on Zoom. If the church holds your email address, you will be sent a link in the next few days. If you are not on Zoom, please nonetheless read the annual reports enclosed, and I would be very grateful for your comments and questions.

Meeting by Zoom is not ideal, but the best we can do in these circumstances, and we need as many church members to be there as possible. We are at a time of great change in the life of St Barnacles, and together we need to seek great wisdom from the Lord for challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of us.

Looking back, some might say that 2020 was the year when the church stopped meeting. Certainly we could not hold services in the building for most of the year, after lockdown was imposed. Our very successful Open Church project was suspended, and we could not meet in our small groups.

But the church did continue to meet, maybe in smaller groups, maybe online, yet the Lord has been very much at work through the services on Facebook, and through all the church activities throughout the week that have taken place on Zoom. I am so grateful for all those who have mastered new technologies, and so faithfully attended despite the technological glitches. I am so grateful for Revd Sue for "Phone Church" that has connected with those without access to the Internet. I am concerned for those who have access to the Internet and yet for whatever reason have chosen not to engage regularly with the life of the church.

What have we learnt from our experience of church during 2020? First of all, nearly every contact with those outside the church comes through our website or Facebook page. Our Sunday service online regularly attracts over 100 engagements, and whatever you make of the figures, it is clear that those who would not walk through our doors are at least looking at our worship and hearing the word of God. I know that my daily broadcasts are reaching various parts of the world, and some very unexpected audiences. And nearly everyone who contacts the church for the first time does so because they have encountered us online. So as we go forward, we need to work out how to resource, develop and broaden our online ministry. It will remain a vital part of

our mission from now on, and we need more people to take it forward.

Secondly, not being in the church buildings has led us to look outwards more to the needs of the local community. I know some members of St Barnacles have been involved in the regular food distribution from St Aubyn's, but there is more, much more we can do to engage with the local community activities. During 2020 new initiatives such as the Stoke Hub (next to the Blockhouse Inn) opened, and there are many opportunities opening up to serve the parish.

So as we approach our APCM on 26 May 2021, what are the priorities we need to set as we move forward? I want to offer you three simple words - **gather, give, grow**.

**Gather:** At the moment St Michael's has a service in church at 9.30am. It has been good to worship in the building, even under COVID-19 restrictions, although numbers attending have been very low. We also are continuing our online service at 10.30am.

As restrictions ease, and more people receive their second vaccination, we aim eventually to have one service on a Sunday morning at 10.30am with live streaming. We have a real opportunity to relaunch our worship, and if the pandemic has taught us anything, it has shown us how precious it is to meet together physically in Jesus' name. So my prayer is very much that we will make it our priority to gather as one, not only for our benefit, but to draw others in, and to build God's kingdom right here in Stoke and Devonport.

**Give:** I am so grateful for Bob Soutter who has taken on the task of bookkeeping and independent examination of our accounts. I enclose the report I wrote to go with the financial statements he prepared. I know not everyone wants the numbers, but I am happy to send a copy to anyone on the electoral roll who asks!

During the year ended 31 Dec 2020 our regular income exceeded our expenditure, but this was only possible because we sold our much loved Steinway. I am so grateful for all those who contribute so sacrificially, but there are clearly financial challenges ahead. So let me ask - have you reviewed your giving recently? And did you know you can now give online? Just click the giving tab on the church website and you will find a link to the church Paypal account, with all the details you need.

We also, during the past year, employed an architect, because our experience of Open Church has shown us that in order to meet the needs of the local community we need a kitchen that meets food hygiene regulations. Our plan is to extend the kitchen into the storeroom, and we hope work will start this Autumn. We are also seeking planning permission to build an extension, as we know we have insufficient space for meetings,

and we are very grateful that the Lord has given us the financial resources to do this.

Giving, of course, is not only about money. I am so grateful for all those who contribute in so many ways to the life of the church, and we have, for example, learnt during 2020 just how vital are the ministries of welcome, and of cleaning! But for us to go forward, we need every member of the church to get involved with their own particular gifts. We have specific roles such as that for treasurer that need filling, and we have vacancies on the church council. Some of you of course have long retired from active ministry, but we all need to pray for more labourers in the harvest field and the pandemic has only served to highlight the level of need in the local community, which as Ephesians 2:12 reminds us, is “without hope and without God.”

**Grow:** Our current sermon series from Ephesians has highlighted just what makes for a growing church. It is a church that knows the plans and purposes of God, that is confident in the saving power of Jesus Christ, that is united in the Spirit, and that lives out its calling as the body of Christ. That is the kind of church I believe the Lord wants us to be. But as the history of the church has shown, such growth only happens when we are all gathered, when we are all giving to the body of Christ. So even if you are not able for whatever reason to be at the APCM, how can you contribute to the growth of St Barnacles?

2020 was a year when the church took on new forms. It was a strange and difficult year, but it was also a year when the Lord continued very much to be at work. 2021 is a year when the Lord is calling us to build on what we have learnt, and to create a church community that is very much open to where the Holy Spirit is leading us next. Quite what that means, well, hopefully, we will know by the time of the next APCM!

In the meantime, as always, I want to thank you for all your personal support, prayer, and wisdom. It is always an encouragement when people tell me they read these kinds of letters, and please do let me have any comments or questions, either now or at the APCM.

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph 3:20-21)*

Peace be with you all,