



HOLY CROSS ANNUAL MEETING 2021

RECTOR'S REPORT

Last year I started my report by saying, 'It was not the start to a new ministry at Holy Cross that I had envisaged'. In the past year the pandemic has continued and we had another lockdown between Christmas and Easter, but Holy Cross has seen growth and development. I and my family love being here, and love this place and its growing community. The challenge for us as a congregation is to be open to where the Holy Spirit is leading us, to become a more welcoming community and be ready for change and the development of our worship and traditions.

Death and Resurrection are at the heart of our faith and in the past year we have lost Eric Tonathy, Iona Evans and Pat Gunn, long-standing members of our congregation, Jean Patterson, whose family were regulars at the Christingle, Ann Ward whom I have been visiting in a care home, and Theodore Loveridge, the stillborn child of Mervyn and Beatriz. Many of us have also lost family members and friends. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

In the past year our congregational roll has grown from 115 to 123, and the number of communicants from 91 to 97. We celebrated the wedding of Stuart Storar and Alison Mair, daughter of Colin and Sally, which despite severe covid restrictions was a very joyful occasion and live-streamed to four continents. We also rejoiced in the baptism of Alecia Sayers. Since the resumption of worship at Easter, despite some people being unable to resume regular attendance, our average Sunday attendance has been 36 - for the three years before lockdown it was 33. This does not include most of the 90 people who came to services on our Patronal Feast Day in September. New people regularly join us for worship and on a few Sundays I have noted that a third of those in Church are people who did not worship at Holy Cross before the pandemic. Experimental new services, both modern (as with our new children's ministry) and traditional (the Sunday 9am, Compline and an occasional Latin Mass) have also introduced new people to Holy Cross. I don't mention this evidence of growth so we can pat ourselves on our backs, but just to show it is possible even in trying times.

The false narrative of decline, 'we are a small and elderly congregation', can get stuck in our minds and inhibit growth and change. Decline is not inevitable, actually we have new, younger members and a weekly attendance of about 30 makes us a 'medium-sized' congregation in British terms. We have a message of God's love for the world, shown in the Cross of Christ, which responds perfectly with the desires and fears in the human heart – if we don't let our own sins and prejudices get in the way. Our welcome statement, approved by Vestry, exists to help us with this:

"Holy Cross is a Christian church. Everyone is welcome here, whether you are a person of faith or not. We hope that any contact you have with us will be a positive

experience. All are invited to become a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, through Baptism. All the baptised are welcome to receive Holy Communion, the pledge of God's love and sign of our union in the Body of Christ. Holy Cross is an inclusive church: there is no discrimination on the basis of gender, disability, race, age, sexual orientation or social class. 'You are all one in Christ' (Galatians 3:28)"

To be a welcoming, inclusive Christian community we all need to play our part. Some people say that 'there is no place for passengers in a church' but I think it is great that people with busy jobs or big problems can find a space for peace and prayer with us. For our Church to continue to exist as 'a tree where the birds of the air can find rest and shade in its branches' (Matthew 13:32), however, we also need people who are generous in giving both time and money. Thanks to all of you who generously contribute financially to Holy Cross and to those who have moved their giving online, so our Church could continue to function when there was no public worship. Thanks also to those of you who have made provision for Holy Cross in your wills – legacies make a big difference. We will hear more about our finances from the Treasurer and I hope we can reflect on the theology of Christian giving next year – we don't find it the easiest of things to talk about, but Jesus actually spoke a lot about the right use of money and wealth. The boiler appeal showed me that Holy Cross is a generous community and, with inflation and increased fuel costs, you may wish to consider whether you are able to make a small increase, perhaps 5%, to your regular giving next year.

Many people give of their time and skills to Holy Cross and I would like first of all to thank Colin Mair for keeping our finances in order as Treasurer and for running the letting of the hall (unfortunately Rowan MacLeod was not able to continue as hall manager). Tim Sale retires this year after 28 years as the person responsible for gift aid and our investments and, on behalf of us all, I would like to thank Tim for this hidden but essential work. Gift aid administration is now simpler than it was and these jobs will be incorporated in that of the Treasurer. Vestry has been a great support to me in the running of Holy Cross, as have our two Churchwardens, Alan and Kate. This year Kate Hilton retires as People's Warden and, on behalf of us all, I want to thank her for her work. I regularly discuss things with her, I appreciate her concern for my, and my family's, welfare, and I know she was a rock and a wise leader in steering Holy Cross through the vacancy.

Thanks to all who serve on Vestry which is now meeting in person again. At Holy Cross, things wouldn't happen without the, often hidden, work of many. I can't mention all but will thank some on behalf of all: Jean and Neville in the Sacristy; Anne and Ian, with others in the gardens; Sarah and the church cleaners and flower arrangers; the welcomers and readers in Church; Margaret with the magazine and other publications; and those on the coffee rota. Thanks also to those who contributed to our successful congregational barbecue, refreshments at our garden day, and the harvest lunch. Social events are important but we are not tied to repeating what we did in the past, so thanks here to Sarah and Janette for offering to organise a programme of occasional community meals to replace the monthly 'fellowship lunches'.

Looking outward is an essential part of being a Christian community. Despite the restrictions, we worked with the charity Live Music Now Scotland to give work to young professional musicians in two Christmas services last year, raising money for other charities. The Live Music Now Scotland concert we hosted recently confirmed my intuition that Holy Cross is an excellent venue for chamber concerts. We also supported refugees in Edinburgh by joining the Christmas Hamper delivery and will do so again this year. Thanks to Neville for organising this.

When Jesus said 'do not put your light under a bushel' I doubt he was thinking of the internet. To communicate with the widest number of people today, however, a Church has to have an online presence, because that is where most people look to see what is going on. Holy Cross is active on Twitter, Facebook (with a reach of over 1200 for our latest children's ministry post), and now Instagram, and a renewed website is being created. People do come to Holy Cross because they have seen us online (as well as by more traditional means) and it is also a way of sharing our beliefs and values.

This year Vestry agreed to the appointment of Izzy Armstrong-Holmes as Children and Families Minister and this re-launched ministry is growing and experimenting. Last Christmas over 500 saw our Community Nativity video, made with local children, and we look forward to the Christingle service this year and buggy services in the New Year. Thanks to Izzy and her helpers for this. More details are in our magazine.

Care of our buildings is a prime responsibility of Vestry and we are grateful to Brian Wright for taking on the role of property convener, supported by the diocesan property committee and other members of the congregation. If you would like to be involved in our property team, let me know.

Most of our regular congregation filled out the questionnaire to help me and Vestry make decisions about our life at Holy Cross. Thank you. We are a diverse bunch, in opinions and, to an extent, in background. The only thing of which we are 100% in favour is some silence in the liturgy. Your answers are already proving useful, for example in shaping our common worship and bringing back the traditional Lord's Prayer for half the year. Our Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) has extended marriage to include same-sex couples but I didn't want to renew my permission to preside at such weddings until I had the support of Vestry and knew the mind of the congregation. I now have the support of Vestry and the questionnaire showed that less than 25% of us are opposed to this. I believe that this change is an authentic development of Christian Doctrine, a way of supporting couples to live a Christian life, and a witness to God's love and welcome of all. We are commanded by Jesus to love our neighbour, whoever they are, but the SEC recognises a diversity of views on marriage, so Episcopalians are not required to agree with same-sex marriage. I would be happy to speak with any of you about worship, marriage, or any other topic.

At the end of this Church Year, as we turn our eyes again to the great events of salvation in Christ. We can give thanks for weathering the storms of the past year and for being a Christian community that can look to the future in hope. One exciting development next year is that we will, God willing, have a new curate, Ross Jesmont. Ross preached here on

All Saints, and is due to be ordained Deacon next Michaelmas. We haven't had a curate (an apprentice priest) for a long time and they have tended only to go to the big rich churches. With the support of their two Vestries, who have considered the implications of the plan, Ross will serve at Holy Cross and St Salvador's, Stenhouse. I will become Priest-in-Charge of St Salvador's and Ross's Training Rector while remaining Rector of Holy Cross. The SEC will supply 75% of Ross's stipend and St Salvador's will supply the rest, so there will be no extra expense for Holy Cross. I will be mainly at Holy Cross and Ross mainly at St Salvador's, where he will be the local pastor (he is already in his third year as part of the ministry team there), but we will both minister in both Churches. Our Churches will be linked at the level of the clergy but will remain independent, with separate Vestries. Like Holy Cross, St Salvador's has grown in recent years, more than doubling in membership, and it is in good financial shape. It is in one of the poorer parts of town and runs a well-used food bank which we supported at Harvest Festival.

This is a great opportunity for us. We will share the ministry of a young, talented and enthusiastic new Priest. We will, as a congregation, help form a new priest for service in God's Church. We will also be able to work with another congregation in an area of social deprivation. Looking outward is an essential part of being Christian community and this will help us do that. This work for the wider Church also reminded me of Jesus words: "Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands--all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you" (Luke 6:38).

In this, as in all we do, let us step forward in hope, trusting in Christ.

God bless,

Stephen