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*I will give thanks to you, Lord,
with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
Psalm 9:1*

godmanchesterbaptist.org

2020 has been a year of great change for all of us in all sorts of ways and in the midst of that we celebrated a significant change in our team at GBC when Daniel was appointed as our Lead Pastor.

Peter Nodding, our moderator, writes,

"In our discussions as a Leadership Team during April and May 2020 it became clear that Daniel Beckett should be considered as Lead Pastor. In the previous 12 months since John Smith had retired, Daniel had grown in his leadership and, as moderator, I had observed that Daniel had abilities over and above his excellent youth minister gifts. The leadership agreed that we could not wait till COVID-19 allowed us to hold normal church meetings, and the BU provided helpful guidelines about how we could still complete the process. During June and July the church shared together, praying and asking important questions, and Daniel's candidature was thoroughly considered. It was such a joy when the votes were eventually counted to know that such a large majority had discerned that Daniel was God's choice as the Lead Pastor."



Daniel Beckett

Daniel writes,

"Hello everyone and welcome to this year's annual review.

It was a real privilege to be called to be Lead Pastor here at Godmanchester Baptist Church in the last year. It wasn't the most straight forward year for this to happen but in the whole process I felt very clearly that God was calling me to the role. As the discernment process went on, I found myself becoming very excited about all that I felt that God had in store for the church in the coming months and years.

This year has been very different for us in our personal lives and this has also been the case as a church. We have been forced to do things differently. By doing things in a different way, I believe that we have learnt how to be church in new and creative ways.

While we have done things differently, we have wanted to keep the reasons for what we do the same. We want to encounter God ourselves and we want our communities to encounter Him as well.

One of the forced changes has been that throughout most of the year our building has had to be shut. What this has meant is that church, in the full sense of the word, has opened up in many places: in each of our homes.

In 2020 we have said goodbye to friends and family members. It has been even more tough than it might have been as we haven't been able to gather together to say goodbye. We do thank God for their lives, their faithful service to Him, and that we knew them.

As you read through this review you will see the many ways that church has been expressed and the places that God has been present, as we have done things differently in virtual and remote ways, in people's day to day lives, when people have shown God's love in practical ways in their families and communities."

As Daniel has said, 2020 has been a year where we have really missed the freedom to gather together physically with family, friends, neighbours, community groups and our church family. We have also had to adapt to the challenges of daily life being very different from 'normal'. We recognise that at times that has brought frustration, disappointment, loneliness, excessive demands on time and energy, and sadness. For some the impact on emotional well-being, physical health, work situations and education has been far reaching.

However, it has also been a year when we have known God's presence with us and when we have been able to encourage each other to hold on to God's promises and the hope that is central to the gospel message. We have found new ways of doing things in our families, our work-places, our communities and at GBC. We have found that many of us have been able to use our gifts, skills, creativity and time to do things differently and this has brought blessing to us and to others.

Our Annual Review of 2020 is inevitably very different from previous years – in content and layout, but we hope it brings a glimpse of God at work in our lives and the life of our church throughout this unusual year.



Live worship

The priorities in March 2020, when we needed to stop gathering together in the building, were to make sure we could continue to worship God and learn together, that we could continue to care for each other and that we could develop new ways of reaching out to our community in ministry and mission.

Our brilliant tech team stepped up to the challenge and have made it possible for us to tune in to our Sunday Morning Celebration broadcast at 10.30am each week on our YouTube

channel. As the level of restrictions have varied during the year, this has sometimes been pre-recorded and sometimes the broadcast has been live from the Worship Area.

Ian Heaton has written the following account of 2020 from the perspective of the Sound and Visuals Team!

"What a year, eh? 2020! Some things are just so different now. One of those is that the GBC 'Sound Team' is now the 'AV team' (Audio-Visual) team. Maybe if the 'Messy Room' is now the 'Craft Room', and Godmanchester Primary School is now the 'Godmanchester Community Academy' the 'Sound Desk' can be 'AV Mission Control'? Maybe not – probably better to manage expectations. Anyway, the 'Visual' side of things has been a lot of fun but also quite challenging.

We've had cameras in the church for years now – unfortunately, just not the right kind for broadcasting on the internet (they were analogue, not digital). When the building was first closed due to COVID, we were suddenly stuck with having to adapt very fast – fortunately we happened to have an adapter. ☺ This adapter took our dodgy analogue signal and made it into an even more dodgy digital one. It did sort-of work, but we knew then that we'd have to start over. During the first lockdown, the analogue cameras came down and digital ones went up. There's a bit of a story there: it turns out we got a bit of a bargain. We wanted a very specific type of camera and found some "old-new stock" cameras in Germany for 40 Euros each. I thought that must be about a fifth of their original price so we bought four. A few weeks

later one camera decided not to talk to us on the network so we tried to get a replacement. The place that sold it didn't have any left and gave us a refund. When we finally did locate one, we were quoted £1095 as an "end of line special" – I think the original price must have been closer to £1200. Wow. That's surely a God thing that we got them so cheap – we've stuck with three cameras and it's been OK. Although, if you do happen to have a spare HD PoE IP camera that you don't use, be sure to let us know. If it's a PTZ camera with NDI-HX2, even better! I've been learning a lot of new TLAs (Three Letter Acronyms) - NDI-HX2 is a cracker! Double barrel with a number! You probably also get extra points for the 'X' although I don't think the HX2 actually stands for anything – they probably just thought it sounded cool. Obviously, with such good acronyms as PTZ and NDI-HX2 they had to be fitted in somehow. Anyway – back to the plot...



Mission Control

The video setup we have now is very different to the one we had this time last year – we were only able to re-use some of the cable and camera brackets – everything else is different but surprisingly little of it is new. It's a bit of a hairy beast with lots of different types of wires in a bit of a tangled mess. It took several weeks of persuasion to get all the bits to talk to each other – unfortunately, they still don't always talk the same language and we have ended up with squashed video or, as happened once, audio that decided to go off in a sulk as soon as we started broadcasting (after having co-operated during the sound check).

Some of our gear is quite old too. Just before the special church meeting in February, the fan bearings in the computer graphics card decided they'd had enough and started clattering and threatening to stop. We ended up turning the computer upside-down so the fan didn't fall off – it still sounded a bit like a fridge, but it survived the meeting. (We didn't tell Daniel until afterwards!) Despite all this, it has (nearly completely) worked (eventually) every time and the service has gone out. Just sometimes it needed a bit of prayer and several reboots.

Now with another lockdown we're back to pre-recorded services and have been able to dismantle the broadcast system and replace some of the key components (including the computer). We're going to have another go at taming the beast for the long haul of Oikodom 2 - broadcasting from the small hall (or is it 'Studio 3?'). Stay tuned!"

Ian mentions a 'studio' and you will have noticed from the photo of 'Mission Control' that the Worship Area doesn't look like it did when we left it in March 2020! Stephanie Brown writes about the realisation that with

skills, creativity and hard work, a different group of people could turn the Worship Area into a space that worked much better as a studio for our broadcasts.

"We have loved staying connected with church family via the Sunday broadcasts but watching a screen provides other distractions. The day we went live on YouTube several of us were concerned about the main speaker and how pale he looked. The technical team explained it was related to colour contrast. It was agreed to do something, and we found ourselves painting the back of the stage grey, making grey background curtains, and constructing studio 2 with wooden screens, plants, blackouts, and a green screen so the angels could fly in the Nativity."

Of course, not all of the recorded content has been able to be filmed in the 'studio' and one of the highlights has been the involvement of so many of our church family who have contributed to our broadcasts in various ways from their homes. We've had glimpses of people's kitchens, lounges, dining rooms, studies, gardens and even garages (most notably Martin's purple bat cave!) We are grateful to Tony Goodwin who has done so much of the planning for our weekly broadcasts – bringing together service leaders, preachers, worship leaders, prayers, readers, mission representatives and testimony givers.



The Nativity

While many of us have missed gathering together on a Sunday – and look forward to the day when we will be able to do that freely again, others in our church family who have previously not been able to worship with us each week, for example because of ill health, have rejoiced in being able to worship with us far more regularly than before as well as to 'meet up' in online gatherings too! Ann Newman, who has been a church member at GBC for

nearly 30 years, has told us how good it is to be able to be part of Sunday mornings again as well as to be part of a mid-week Bible Study group online and to 'attend' church meetings again!

Janet Townsend, who is relatively new to our GBC church family, has written the following appreciation of our Sunday broadcasts,

"Over the last year I have enjoyed getting to recognise a few faces, albeit on screen only but it's really helped me a lot to identify a few people and families. If I'm doing a sitting down job I sometimes put on one of the past services and today I watched the Advent Service with the Warton family. Such a lovely family. It took me some while to "marry" Beth and Joe into one family. I first remember Beth when she sang for us at one Tuesday morning meeting, she has a beautiful voice and met the challenge we set her with aplomb. I love listening to Joe speak, he is so gifted and so easy to follow, no fancy words, simply always speaking God's truth. I have thoroughly enjoyed the series on Nehemiah and look forward to hearing more."

And here are the rest of the Warton family and a note from Joe that illustrates how the children's Sunday teams have been involved in finding new and creative ways to help the children worship and learn.

"It's not just the adults who have missed out on being able to meet together at the building – the kids have too. Thankfully, the amazing Little Stars teachers have sent us a short video every week, along with activity packs so our kids can carry on their discipleship journey in that way. We are so grateful for the passion and creativity of all those involved."

Liz and Martin Webb have also expressed appreciation for the Little Stars Team and their provision and have contributed this account of how Joseph (aged 4) has grown in his relationship with God over this time.

"God working in our lives has been evident in many ways, but it's been particularly delightful watching Joseph's relationship

with God start to blossom. At the beginning of watching online services Joseph was not impressed, but after a few weeks he'd sit with Martin and me for a short while, then take himself off and play. We gradually noticed he'd stay longer for the services and would often be the person to arrange the chairs around the computer and would stop what he was doing when the countdown began (as an aside, we think he'll be starting school able to count backwards from 60!) and sit in front of the computer ready. He now tries to join in with the songs and when it's time to pray he'll put his hands together and lean forward, not just following our lead but getting in to 'position' before us. He picks up on words or phrases he recognises too and asks us about what is being said. He has really enjoyed his Little Stars videos and activity sheets, calling them his homework! When there was a break over Christmas he was asking for his homework! So, whilst we dreadfully miss going to GBC to worship and miss our church family, the situation has given Joseph the opportunity to begin a relationship with God in a way that he perhaps wouldn't have done."



Joseph Webb



The Warton children

The Kids Kingdom Team have been busy too and Debbie, William and Edward Mickelburgh have written this for us,

"Over the past year both William and Edward have continued to take part in Kids Kingdom. Early in lockdown this was a lifeline to see their friends as well as learning more about the Bible. It gave them time to chat and share how they were feeling. It has led to thoughtful discussions about God and our beliefs. There has been a mixture of teaching methods, using videos, resources dropped off to use at home, a variety of games, quizzes, origami, science experiments and challenges that have kept them engaged. Edward particularly enjoyed making a bible story using Minecraft."

"I enjoyed the challenges" Edward "The games are fun" William



Edward's Minecraft

Our Sunday morning Furnace group, for 11-14s, and our Sunday evening Generation Rising congregation have continued to meet during 2020 – online when necessary and also in person (outside and in accordance with social distancing guidelines!) when that has been possible. In addition, three new small groups for teenagers have sprung up in 2020. Suzy Monk writes,

“During 2020 we took the opportunity to start 3 youth small groups which we had been planning for a while. With everyone’s other activities paused, schedule clashes were less and going online made it easier for the young people (and leaders!) to attend. Each group has its own flavour as we look to disciple the young people and help them to develop the skills they need to put their faith into action. It’s gone so well that we’re hoping to continue online long after lockdown and to grow the groups too.”

While virtual meetings were an unknown quantity for many, if not most of us, at the start of 2020, we have been thankful that they have provided a way for many different individuals and groups to meet during 2020. They really have been a crucial component of our ambition to ‘stay connected’. We have prayed together in prayer triplets and in wider prayer gatherings; we have chatted with each other in breakout rooms after the Sunday morning broadcasts; we have held our church meetings virtually and, with a combination of broadcasts, written material, and Zoom gatherings we have discerned the mind of Christ together; we have shared communion together in a Zoom room; lots of us joined in with the whole church Alpha Course in the Autumn Term; and some of our small groups have continued to meet in this way during the year.

Cheryl Hirst gives us a flavour of Alpha,

“One of the most useful aspects of Alpha is the openness and freedom to tackle gritty subjects in an environment where anything is ok. It is facilitated in small groups where trust is inherent and validation assured. Even Christians of long standing battle with ideas at times and I loved that we could all bounce these off each other. It was a time of acceptance, warmth, love and reflection.

I also appreciated that the videos were up to date and culturally relevant, set in different parts of the world and included people of varied heritage and colour. Being a creative person, I found the settings inspirational, calming and enlivening in the same moment.

I would recommend Alpha for everyone.”



The Stukeley Meadows Wednesday morning small group have continued to meet and Richard Owen writes,

“We are a small group who meet on Wednesday mornings. Up to COVID-19 coming along we were meeting in a home for fellowship, Bible study and prayer. The group also cares for each other. So, when the first lockdown came along and we could no longer meet up, the phone came in handy to keep in touch. Then we discovered we could use Zoom and so in June we started having virtual meetings of Bible study, fellowship and prayer. We began looking at some of the minor Old Testament prophets, for example, Nahum, Obadiah and Haggai. In the Autumn our focus shifted to becoming one of the many Alpha groups. At the end of the Alpha course we began studying the shorter letters in the New Testament in our time of fellowship (which includes fun), Bible study (not dreary), and prayer (conversing with God).”

The Sunday evening men’s Beer and Bible Study group and the Churches Together Men’s Breakfasts have also been meeting and Paul Hamilton writes,

“During lockdown we continued our BABs small group for men. The need for men to share encouragement and prayer together has never been so apparent. Having to meet virtually on Microsoft Teams is definitely not the same as being able to meet ‘in person’ and we long for the day when we can meet up in the pub again. But it has meant that we could be more flexible. One of my personal highlights was a virtual BABS one Sunday evening where one of our number joined us from hospital! Andy Blakey said: “On a Thursday in July, I went to work as usual but, by the end of the day I had seen the inside of two ambulances and two hospitals and their scanners! I had suffered a brain bleed and was told that the bleeding covered an extensive area on the right side of my brain. This was a scary situation but I felt at

peace. I often meditate on Psalm 23 and the still waters. I knew Jesus was with me and he placed his hand on my head and I felt all would be well. By the Sunday evening I was well enough to join in with the BABs group virtually (but without the beer!)"



"Throughout 2020 GBC men supported the Churches Together Men's breakfasts. Again, just like the rest of church, they have had to go 'virtual' (so the breakfasts weren't so good, certainly not with my own DIY effort!) Charlie Newcombe (vicar at Christ Church) did a good job in leading and facilitating on Zoom, and helping us to stay connected - a good expression of church unity in the local area and especially important during this time of isolation and dis-connectedness."

Microsoft Teams and Zoom meet ups helped us have fun together in other ways too. Early on, Hayley Beckett organised some great quiz nights for the whole church family – and some of us turned out to be surprisingly competitive!

Hayley writes,

"March 2020 was the start of the first lockdown and in my opinion came as a shock to the system. Suddenly we were in a place that most of us had never been before. The surge of online video based activities was astounding as we all tried to adapt to this way of doing things."



I love quizzes and with the help of Brett Mickelburgh found a website that could allow us to host a quiz for folk from GBC and give us the ability for a little bit of chat too. AHASlides became a platform that we used to host a quiz every other week. In total we hosted 10 quizzes and ranged from 17 teams to 10 teams each time. Teams were made up of individuals, couples or families. Each quiz was made up of four rounds of 10 questions, rounds included East Anglia, History, Numbers, Sport, Disney, Film, Cadbury and Board games with picture rounds that included Bridges, Flags, Mr Men and Little Miss and Fruit. Answers were gathered through the web with the programme automatically keeping score and adding points for speed of answering the questions."

It wouldn't have been fun without those of you who joined in each time. I know I had fun developing and writing the questions and chatting to those who came. Special thanks must be added for guest question writers William Mickelburgh, Mark Beckett and the Duncanson Hunters."

Friendly competition also featured strongly in some of the Friday Night Project online gatherings too. Stephanie writes,

"I love Friday evenings even during lockdown. There may not be the noise and physical contact. There is still lots of laughter as we get used to Zoom, try and please Holly with our finds in the scavenger hunt, listen to Graham's jokes and try and work out what the picture is being drawn on Skribbl.io. We also had a few challenges including 'dressing up in as many items of clothing as you can' which was hot work."



Stephanie's FNP challenge



James' FNP challenge

Many of us used Zoom to stay connected with those in our families who we have been unable to see in person for a very long time. Here is Liesl Houghton's family's very own nativity play!

“Christmas 2020 wasn’t how any of us had imagined it would be, and seeing our family from Chicago and Hong Kong, as well as from Leicester and Godmanchester is quite a treat for Christmas. This year for all the right reasons we could not meet together, so one of our nieces had a plan in early December – let’s act out the Nativity from our various houses and meet this way. So on Christmas Eve our time, Christmas eve afternoon for the Chicago family and early Christmas morning in Hong Kong, the fun began. We had been sent our Characters and had been given time to order / make our costumes, write our scripts and to share them with others in that scene. The Birth of Jesus was acted out (with a few additions / amendments). There were reindeer in the fields with the shepherds, and Jesus was Suki in Hong Kong & Mary was in Godmanchester – work that one out! We remembered the real meaning of Christmas and enjoyed our family time in a way that if COVID 19 had not existed, we may never have experienced. Family is family whether we are together or apart.”



Liesl's nativity

While we are grateful for the help that online platforms have provided for our worship and learning and for staying connected, we also recognise that not everyone has the facility or ability to make use of these technologies and we have needed to use other creative ways to stay in touch. As we mentioned in our introduction, continuing to care for each other was one of our priorities and in March we understood the urgency of setting up a new kind of pastoral framework that would ensure that every individual or family had someone who was responsible for being in touch and caring for them in whatever way was needed. Fortunately, our GBC family is full of people who naturally care for each other and, while it was important to organise this centrally at such a time of crisis, this involved formalising links between people – many of which already existed.

Jo Hitchins did an amazing job of creating and implementing this new framework and she writes,

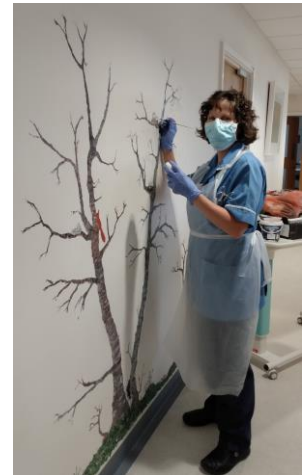
“One of the things people have really missed throughout the pandemic and associated restrictions is the lack of personal contact with friends and family, so something that I’ve found really exciting is the way new friendships have been formed, whether through contacts mentioned above, or in other ways, for instance through breakout rooms after church services and Alpha. There has been much more, for instance, of a mixture of ages in these situations than we might otherwise experience having a cuppa after services. The impact that this could have on our church family when we are at last able to meet physically together is enormously positive. In fact, the impact this is having on our church family now is enormously positive!

I think that another positive thing to come out of the pandemic for us as a church is the increased awareness not just of the need for pastoral care, but that we are all responsible for caring and supporting each other. It’s been obvious that this couldn’t possibly be done effectively by a single Pastor – or even two and I’ve been so touched by all the different ways, big and little, that so many of you have been

showing care for each other. Helping with practical tasks, offering to pray with others, being a listening ear, baking and distributing cakes, responding supportively to messages on Facebook are just a few examples. Whole Church pastoral care isn't just the whole church family receiving it, it's also the whole church family giving it - it's been wonderful to see this happening and I'm excited to see the impact this has on us not just through the pandemic, but on into the future.

Jo also used her creative skills, in her workplace, to paint a mural on the wall at Hinchbrook hospital to bless patients, staff and visitors.

Just one example of the hundreds of friendships deepened over the last year, and the creativity in caring, is that of Pat Reed, Kath Pickersgill and Jude



Jo Hitchins

Lechmere. Right from the beginning of lockdown last March, Kath phoned Pat every day at 11am – and, so that they could see each other through Pat's window while they were talking, Kath walked to Pat's house at this time each day to make this phone call. Pat was shielding and therefore not able to leave her flat at all for quite some time. Jude used her creativity and handy person skills and built a bird feeder station outside Pat's window so she could enjoy watching the birds.



Pat Reed

Also early on in the Spring last year, Stephanie sprang into action with a really innovative way of keeping in touch and showing people they were cared for and thought about.

"After watching a live craft event with my daughter, we learnt how to make origami butterflies. She wanted to send them to family to stay in touch which made me consider who I missed most. My church family. Everyone named in Blue Pages received an origami butterfly by post during the first lockdown to show they were not forgotten."



Jude with bird feeder

Others have shown their caring for each other by phone calls, sending cards and letters, e-mails, arranging walks, conversations on park benches, doing shopping, collecting prescriptions – and the giving of gifts.

Different teams of people have put together distributions to go out to various GBC groups:

"Youth packs have brought a few of us closer as we plan them and post them. We are spurred on by comments heard at doors such as 'Wow, sweets' which still ring in our ears and by messages from parents thanking us."



Origami butterflies

Families received an activity box for October half-term and then all GBC households received an Advent box in December which Trudy Allan writes about here,

"With all of the restrictions I did wonder what sort of Christmas 2020 would bring. It would certainly be different. I didn't expect to receive an Advent box as it's just Terry and I living at home now that our children have grown and flown. What a happy surprise it was when Trish delivered our box. Our 3 year old grandson Oliver (we childmind



Advent box



Oliver & biscuits

him) was very excited and couldn't wait to explore this package of wondrous things! We talked about the pictures whilst Oliver coloured them in. Baking and eating the biscuits was great fun and a little messy! Transforming our box into a stable was brilliant. Oliver particularly enjoyed making a starry sky for the background. We filled our stable with a pinecone nativity set and Oliver added his dog, cow and duck finger puppets to complete the scene! Our box contained something for everyone to enjoy and provided opportunities to share the joy and wonder of Christmas. Thank you GBC family for bringing light and love into this rather unusual Advent season."

Another group who have enjoyed frequent distributions – often delivered with the opportunity to enjoy face to face chats on doorsteps, are our friends from Songs of Praise and Tuesday Treat. Ruth Blakey writes,

"As part of the Pastoral Framework and, more recently, the Care & Connect initiative, we have stayed in regular contact with 100+ friends who are part of our Songs of Praise congregation and our Tuesday Treat coffee morning. As well as frequent phone calls, we have been able to organise monthly distributions to nearly 90 households comprising cards, newsletters and gifts."

We started in May with a pack of colouring sheets, colouring pencils and pencil sharpener and a chocolate biscuit! That was followed in June with plants in colourful pots. The plants were grown by David Rootham who has also produced a beautiful card each month for our distributions. June's distribution also included a fabric face mask generously made by Dorne Watson.

Janet, who has been shielding during the pandemic, has really appreciated these doorstep deliveries and writes,

"In some ways I feel that it's always been part of God's plan to help us get to know one another but in a completely different way, especially those perhaps feeling a little on the outside. I'm hoping that once we

are all able to meet together again as a fellowship I will

recognise people I have made friends with in the past year – but in the flesh this time! Helen Bourne has been a wonderful friend. She always comes knocking, not just with 'goodies' but with a bright smile on her face and a willingness to stand, sometimes in the cold, just to make me feel that her visit was worth it. We have had so many lovely conversations which I've always appreciated but always felt very guilty that she's had to stand out in the cold, wind or rain, never complaining – just being a good friend. I hope one day that I will be able to invite her into the warmth and remedy the situation. I have also enjoyed many telephone conversations with various folk and feel very blessed."



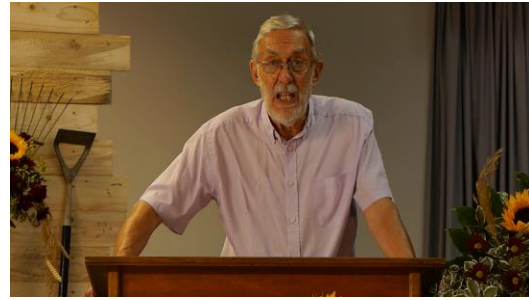
Colouring



Plants & masks

July and September saw gifts of a cream tea and an afternoon tea – to enjoy while watching the Songs of Praise broadcast on our YouTube channel. Thanks to Anne Ambler for heading up the team of bakers and assemblers for these teas! Anne delivered one of these September teas to Ann Newman and was very happy to have a 'spare' with her which she was able to give Ann's son who had joined her to celebrate her birthday on that Sunday afternoon! Thanks go also to David Taylor and Philip Thompson for so willingly embracing the new technology and continuing to plan and lead our Songs of Praise services. Philip explains that

"We have adapted the format of the service but still included some hymns chosen by members of our regular congregation, testimonies to God's faithfulness and provision, prayers and a short Bible-based talk. We are delighted to see that a number of others joined us month by month (with an astonishing 900+ views for our Harvest service in September and our Christmas service in December) but are sorry that we cannot enjoy our afternoon tea together afterwards as we used to do!"



Philip Thompson

We are also so grateful to Sam Heaton whose photos of Godmanchester and media skills have made our Songs of Praise recordings both so local and so professional. Sam shared some testimony during a recent Songs of Praise broadcast and Janet was pleased to put a name to a face, writing,

"It was so good to be introduced to Sam Heaton on Sunday. I have long admired the way everything is put together for us and it works so well. It was so nice to actually put a face to one of the 'backroom boys' and what a magnificent hymn he chose – one of my favourites. Thank you Sam for always making our service so special. It was good to hear other names mentioned too although at this point in time I have to confess that I didn't recognise them all. Nonetheless, what they all do is very precious and so much work is put in to making everything very special for us. So many people over the past year have gone out of their way to give their time and put in so much effort to help us enjoy so many things."

While the majority of our Songs of Praise and Tuesday Treat friends are able to watch YouTube, for others we have been able to provide either a DVD or CD so that all can access the services. In December everyone received a beautifully decorated individual Christmas Cake – lovingly made by Denise Hogg.



Garden gathering

While we haven't been able to get together for our Songs of Praise services and teas or our Tuesday Treat coffee mornings for most of last year, we did make the most of good weather and easing of restrictions in the late summer. Philip writes,

"We arranged three occasions when 8 or 9 groups of six people met outdoors in different gardens, on different days of the week, at different times, at the end of August and into September. Tea and cakes were served by the hosts and enjoyed by those attending while observing the guidelines of social distancing and hygiene. Conversations flowed freely and they were great opportunities to meet up with old and new friends, enjoying each other's company and sharing in each other's lives. Many expressed their appreciation of being able to meet like this, enjoying the pleasant surroundings. Thanks to all those who opened up their gardens and to all who took part in any way."

Others have also enjoyed the good weather in 2020 and have used the relative safety of meeting outdoors when that was allowed as a way to stay connected with friends. Jane Fasham writes,

"The members of Monday Club, a mutual support group, have been able to keep up communications in a variety of ways during the last year. During the summer we were able to meet in the Park to share news

and enjoy cake round the picnic tables. Helen Bourne has been able to support several members by offering them lifts to hospital appointments in her role as a volunteer driver. A service most appreciated by some members of the group. Other members have been able to go on a walk with one other member of the group, good for physical and mental health. During the last lockdown there has been weekly communication by texts and telephone calls which will continue until we can meet safely together."

Also making good use of outdoor space, and adapting creatively to the restrictions on meeting indoors, was the introduction of the Littlefoot Toy Library. This initiative allowed pre-schoolers and their grown-ups to book a slot on a Wednesday morning to come and borrow a toy to take home to play with while it wasn't possible to come and play at GBC. We are grateful for grants from Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council that enabled us to purchase suitable toys and books for this initiative.



Toy library

Much of what we have written about so far outlines the ways in which we have worshipped, learnt and prayed together and how we have cared for each other – those who are part of the GBC family – whether that is on a Sunday or as part of one of our mid-week activities.

We have also learnt a lot during 2020 as we have needed to adapt and to explore new ways of reaching out to our community in ministry and mission as well as how to 'be church' wherever we are and whoever we are with.

For some of us, a combination of having more 'spare' time with fewer external demands or opportunities has enabled us to become more involved in community initiatives – many of which sprang up as a direct consequence of the impact of COVID-19.

Some have been street co-ordinators for the COVID-19 Mutual Aid initiative, others have been busy volunteering for the Godmanchester Community Time Bank, and others were kept very busy early on sewing scrubs for the NHS and then moving on to producing fabric face masks. Stephanie writes,

"Many of us joined Godmanchester COVID-19 Mutual Aid as street coordinators and helped support surrounding neighbours with errands during lockdown.

Some of us helped "For the Love of Scrubs"/ "The Butterfly Legacy Project" and have made scrubs for staff at local surgeries, community dentists, Papworth hospital and care homes. The Godmanchester Cluster has also stayed linked by Facebook and made masks for the local community for free including for FoodBank."



Scrubs

Our FoodBank has been considered an essential service throughout the whole of 2020 and while various members of the team have had to step back at times, or take on a different role than usual, due to age or health related government guidance regarding levels of self-isolation, provision of food for those in need has continued week after week. We are so grateful for the faithful service and very hard work of the whole team.

One of the new projects that sprang up early last year was our involvement with Love Food Hate Waste. At the beginning of the pandemic, supermarkets lost many of their existing networks whereby they were able to pass on food that was reaching the end of its shelf life. GBC were asked to help out and, headed up by Mark Beckett, ably helped by a team of volunteers, our involvement in this project began. Food is collected at the end of the day from various local supermarkets and brought to GBC where it is kept overnight (in fridges

where necessary) and then sorted the following day and distributed to families for whom this additional food has been a real blessing.

Some items received have needed some creative thought about how best to pass them on! Unbeknown to us, a child had expressed a wish to her family about how lovely it would be to be able to have some chocolate cake. When one arrived shortly afterwards as part of a LFHW package, surely that was a God moment! There does seem to be a bit of a cake theme throughout this Review. Here's another cake story! Just before the lockdown in November, we received a call from a local hospitality business who had to close again the following day, asking us if we could use large amounts of eggs, butter and flour. Of course we could – they went to some of our bakers who made cakes for us to distribute and bless people! And it's not just cakes either – there's a garden theme too! Stephanie writes,

"We worked together with one of our neighbours to sort out a wilderness in our immediate neighbour's garden who was shielding and whose gardener had stopped coming. We were delighted when 'Love Food Hate Waste' contacted us and asked if we could use some dahlias they had been given. God is good! We planted them in full view of her kitchen window so she could enjoy them."

We've already written about the joy many of us found in spending time in gardens together last summer, and Stephanie writes about how the need to adapt the Godmanchester Open Gardens initiative in a time of COVID brought unexpected blessings to the community.

"In May It became obvious my best laid plans for Godmanchester Open Gardens needed to be cancelled. I was so grateful to John Smith who helped create Godmanchester Virtual Open Gardens. It was a hit and this comment made me realise how we can reach those stuck at home even when we are not shielding or in lockdown. 'Thank you for all your work co-ordinating the Open Gardens. By sending my family the link it is the closest many of them will get to our garden for years to come! I'm especially happy that my Mum saw it! She visited last September. She turned down our offer to live with us in Lockdown and has been in her Home for the Elderly with no visitors since early March.'"

Others have enjoyed the outdoors in different ways and have found other expressions of 'being church' where they are. Helen Healy writes,

"As I look back on a year we never dreamt of, it has challenged me to look for the blessings. The biggest for me has been lots of dog walks and getting to know some dog walkers better. Leading up to Christmas I discovered one person I meet regularly was going to be on her own. So, I organised for us to meet very early on Christmas morning to walk the dogs, then we sat near her husband's memorial bench (it was flooded!) near Hartford church and drank coffee, watching the sun rise. I made her a care package, which she loved. What a blessing to enjoy that time with her. It really made her day, and mine! I pray for continued opportunities to be Jesus to her. I am also grateful for the many links we have been sent during the year which I have shared with so many people. Where so many have lost jobs I am so grateful that Cliff and I still have our jobs, and although we have faced many challenging situations, we are grateful for the opportunities that arise. As we look to 2021, yes we long to see family and friends who are further away, but have been so thankful for creative ways we have kept in touch! We are so thankful for the creative ways we have been encouraged to be/do church! May we not lose this but continue to grow in creating ways to be church!"



Dog walks



Open Gardens

Another creative way of being church in the community emerged in December, with the wonderful Advent Windows Trail. Stephanie writes,

“You are the light of the world’ Matthew 5:14’

As we entered cold dark winter, I had the absolute pleasure of putting together a team of people willing to sort out and create 24 windows. They were a beacon of hope for Godmanchester community and helped us express what we felt Christmas was about. I thoroughly enjoyed my ‘daily exercise’ in December tramping the streets to see the windows and say thank you. My highlight was chatting to a little boy on his scooter with his mum. We realised we were following them for the same reason and were able to explain to her why we had done this for the town. She was delighted to have something so special to share with her son.”



Advent window



Carols by Carlight

And then there was Carols by Carlight. What a brilliant event!

At a time when we thought we may not be able to enjoy a Carol service, this big screen event – with people safely in their own cars, enabled us to sing carols ‘together’ and to enjoy the music, the videos and the gospel message in a brand new way. It drew people from local churches and others from the community – family, friends and neighbours, and was enjoyed by all. Charlotte writes,

“I just wanted to drop you a note to congratulate you on this event. It was a really fab evening, and we all sang our hearts out in our car. I thought the live band and sermons were wonderful – I’d expected a pre-recorded thing. The sound was great, and the screen plenty big enough to see (which hasn’t been our experience in other big screen experiences). Well done to everybody concerned – great creative approach to such a strange problem. You definitely created a sense of community. Take care, and hopefully next Christmas I’ll be singing my heart out back in the church.”

Of course, many other charities and organisations have also had to adapt very significantly during the last year. Funding has fallen while demand for their services has often never been greater. This includes the work, supported by GBC, of the Huntingdon Area Money Advice charity and the Cornerstone Care in Confidence charity for those who need support in pregnancy.

It also includes the work around the world of the Mission Agencies we support: Anglo-Indian Concern, Cambodia Action, Mission Direct and Rehoboth Children’s Home, as well as a family working in Central Asia. Kathryn Thompson, who usually lives and works at the Rehoboth Children’s Home in the Philippines as their Overseas Volunteer, writes about her work and how that has continued even while she has been based in the UK.



Rehoboth

“The Philippines entered a period of community quarantine due to the impact of COVID-19 in March 2020 and I returned home early and was not able to return later in the year as I usually would. Schools and colleges closed and much of the country went into lockdown to try and prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Some of the Home’s residents spent time with their families while others stayed at Rehoboth. Travel was severely restricted and some staff were unable to attend work for a few months. Education was delivered online or through a modular approach using workbooks. The children returned to the Home by August to start the new school year, which was

delayed again until October and then teaching support was given to the residents. I was able to continue my educational support via Zoom lessons as well as my usual administrative support from the UK. I was also able to keep supporters and sponsors updated about what was happening at Rehoboth. Thankfully all stayed well at Rehoboth and although it was a different year the youngsters continued to grow and learn, albeit in a new way."

Another charitable initiative that had to happen differently in 2020 was the Operation Christmas Child Shoebox Appeal. Liesl writes,



"Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child was done in a slightly different way this year, but we were told that Christmas wasn't cancelled and neither was sending a box discouraged. Many boxes were chosen and bought online this year. Boxes already filled were taken to Buckden where they were collected from. Thank you to those of you who felt able to do this in a different way this year."

Restrictions on face to face meetings have seriously affected many volunteer initiatives – but individuals and organisations have found ways to continue to offer support . Peter Harris has written this contribution about his work as a prison visitor,

"As many know I am a regular visitor to selected inmates at Littlehey Prison. At the beginning of 2020 my existing inmates were transferred to other areas and I took on 2 more prisoners. Before lockdown I met one man for the first time and since then no more visits. During the next few months I was concerned about lack of contact and after Chaplain agreement I was allowed to send monthly letters to both inmates. Both were offered the chance to send replies via the Chaplain. I had no replies until January 2021 when out of the blue I received a short but interesting letter from the man I had met in February 2020. I was really pleased and despite certain problems he was able to write to me with help from one of his fellow prisoners. He completed his letter indicating he was looking forward to the next letter. It's amazing what a small step of faith can achieve on both sides and I hope this communication will continue until we can physically meet in the future."

Restrictions have also affected use of buildings. Where we have been able, in accordance with current guidance at any given time, we have made use of our premises in ways that have been safe and helpful. We are grateful to Stephanie Brown who has worked so hard to provide a regularly updated prayer window and prayer room for people to use. She writes,

"When the first lockdown was lifted the government told faith groups they could open for private prayer. I felt God urge me to explore this because church as a building had been closed for so long. For our church it is not our normal pattern of prayer. But nothing was normal at that moment. A couple of comments and events confirmed my thoughts that this was something we could do for the community. We started with a prayer window visible from the car park for all to access. This has been an inspiration to my prayer life as I explore different ways to pray and communicate with God. We then opened Room 5 as a prayer room which was used during the summer. We opened 3 times a week until November shutdown and it stands ready to open when we can!"



Prayer room

We hope this review gives a glimpse of the very many ways in which God has been with us through an unprecedented and challenging year. We are grateful to all who have sent us contributions to add to our story. Ruth and Ian Lasseter have contributed the following testimony of God's faithfulness to their family in recent years. They have both worked over the last year in what might be described as key worker or frontline roles and they write here about how God has been with them, not just 'at work' but in all aspects of their family life and their faith journeys,

"Who is in control?"

We all like a sense of control – planning helps to ease anxiety in me.

Many aspects of our family life over the last few years have looked different to any plans we had! With this comes challenges but also blessings as we learn to trust God amidst the messiness and madness of family life!

God has proved faithful time and time again through surgeries, endless hospital appointments and the challenges of navigating education support with our youngest. Hannah is such a joyful blessing to our family and has taught Tom, Amy, Katie so much love, care, and empathy – no small side effect of growing up with a sibling with extra needs. As parents, we have worried, cried but have also seen many answers to prayers. Her joyful and loving spirit brings so much laughter and joy to our home and we regularly say ‘every house needs a Hannah!’

I remember Daniel, at the last service we would have before the first lockdown hit, reminding us that God is ultimately in control and that we do not know or have control to plan what is ahead – I remember feeling that this has been our experience over the last couple of years and feeling that this was somehow part of our ‘normal’ already but desperately asking God to answer our prayers for job security and the fulfilment that that can bring.

Well, God answered many prayers in 2020 – as ever, not quite how we expected!

The whole family were acutely aware of the impact of Ian being made redundant the previous year and the pandemic brought opportunities. As lockdown hit, new opportunities emerged for Ian, new volunteering options in the community, night shifts at Tesco on the first day of lockdown. Ruth was thrown into redeployment and the kids were home! Life was messy but we have, amidst the relentlessness of family life, many precious memories, many answered prayers and family moments that we can treasure.



Lasseter family

Our prayers for God to provide work for Ian have not been answered in a way that we had hoped or planned, but God has provided 2 part time jobs, and a new role with increased hours for Ruth (not something we prayed or asked for).

Less activities and schooling have given us more time to read and pray with the kids more regularly and we have had the joy of answered prayers with them. At the Alpha course recently, I asked for prayer, for energy to keep going with praying and spending time with the kids and was blown away by the answers to prayer that week as the kids initiated special ‘God’ moments, asking me to pray or read with them and sharing their answers to prayer. I find these moments so special and it feels like God’s reminders that He has us in the palm of His hand, even when we don’t know what is next or have the energy for the next step.

So, who is control? He is in control, and His plans are higher than ours.”

And finally, for those who can remember as far back as last February, here’s a happy account of one of the last events we held at GBC before life changed! Richard Owen writes,

“One of the more joyous occasions to take place at the church was on 29 February 2020 – it being a leap year. It was a Saturday. This was the day of our wedding, that of Richard Owen and Sue Houghton. For us it was the culmination of months of work and putting things together. We were very fortunate in having, it seemed, an army of people helping us. There was the music group, the food ladies, the flower girls, the transport couple who acted as chauffeurs, the setting of the room and dismantling of it, and John Smith who performed the ceremony. And it would not have been such a wonderful day if there had not been the guests there. It was



Richard & Sue

a day when we felt God close to us and even before the day, we saw His guidance in bringing us together. We were not contemplating such a long honeymoon! Three lockdowns during the first year of marriage – and we are still speaking to each other!”

Some final thoughts now from Daniel,

“It has been a tough year for many people, but as we can see through this review, God has been present with us.

Over this last week the words of a song have been going round my mind; “He’s not forgotten us, he’s with us in the fire and the flood”. It is not that I thought God had forgotten us but to be reminded that he is with us gives me confidence to face each day and I pray the same for you too.

God is with us, he hasn’t forgotten us. I pray that you know that to be true for you, God is with you, He hasn’t forgotten you!

God is continuing to be present in our lives in new ways. I’m excited to see what will be in the review for 2021!

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