

Dear Friends,

As we near the end of this year and journey the final days of advent towards celebrating the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, I wanted to take the opportunity to write and offer a brief reflection on the year gone by. I don't think anyone knew what 2021 would look like as we entered with restrictions in place. Whilst the country began to reopen, we too shared that experience of getting back to "normal" or at least something that felt a little bit more like that we've known in years gone by. Equally, we have been courageous in stepping forward in new ways of being Church and may we keep being bold to follow God leading and shaping us.

I give special thanks to all the church stewards who responded to the extra duties they took on with such care and without complaint to ensure everyone entered a covid safe place of worship. And thank you for everyone playing their part in keeping each other safe.

We have continued to provide worship at home written and recorded services. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to producing these and especially to the tech team who do a tremendous job at editing the videos and producing the end results. I give a special thanks to those who have faithfully continued to distribute the worship at home services. This began back in early 2020 and you have kept people connected and enabled so many to access worship with a local flavour.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff team and circuit stewards. It has been said that at certain times of the year are busier than others, yet the current climate is that each month is as full as the next. The staff team have risen to this challenge and whilst I am not condoning ministry and work that is in a constant overdrive, I thank the staff team for their dedication and diligence in sharing their ministries. This year as seen a high number of additional church meetings and at all these the circuit stewards attend. I want to give a special thanks to the circuit stewards who already give generously of their time, yet this year have given even more. Our circuit stewards show a great deal of love, care, and encouragement.

I haven't enough space here to thank everyone naming the specific ministries which so many give to the life of the circuit, from the different secretary roles to local preachers and worship leaders. We have so much to be thankful for with the wealth of gifts and services that so many give in love and service of God. I am thankful to each person and appreciate each person that gives into the life of the circuit family.

This year those churches within the circuit that are registered for marriages have come together to discern re-registering their church buildings to make it possible for same-sex marriages to take place. All church council meetings in those churches held a vote and the outcome of those votes is that some will be re-registering to include same-sex marriages, and some will continue under the current registration for marriages. This journey is not done, we are to keep listening well to one another as we seek to ensure all churches are safe spaces for all people. After all, *'the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.'* So, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, may each know God with us and may Christ rule in our hearts and minds.

I pray everyone with know the love and peace of God this Christmas and always.  
Merry Christmas!

*Gareth*

Revd. Gareth Baron