

## Brentor News for January

**Visitors at St Michaels.** We have always estimated numbers of visitors going to St Michaels at about 10 000 a year, based on the entries in the visitors' book. There is an average of 1000 individual entries a year but many of them are for families or groups, and many people don't write anything, so based on the National Churches Trust figures we assumed about 10 000 a year. This autumn we installed an electronic people counter and found that 1300 people came in a very damp November with 400 in the week before Christmas. So we now think 10 000 a year may be an underestimate!

**Small Pilgrim Places Network.** Both churches at Brentor are part of the Small Pilgrim Places network that celebrates small sacred places across the UK. St Michaels featured in the Guardian newspaper in their New Year's edition and was the headline church in their article, following on from articles in previous years in Country Life, Countryside and Country Living and a host of other publications. Being churchwardens of such an iconic church is such an honour (as well as also rather hard work at times!).

**Toilet at Christ Church.** After what seems like years of fund raising and sorting out the details for planning, the new toilet was finally installed in the old boiler house at the back of Christ Church the day before Christmas Eve - well done to everyone who has helped in any way at all.

**Online Worship.** The new year is a good time to look back on things, and reflect. As part of my work teaching veterinary nurses, I have to teach reflection - it's a key skill for any clinician. We consider reflection to be:

1. Considering what went well, what worked, and what was successful.
2. Next, detailing the things that went badly - what didn't work, or was unsuccessful.
3. Finally, planning how we would approach the same problems in the future, in the light of what we have learnt - from our own experience, but also the experience of other (for example, colleagues, or in the published literature).

One of the things that I think we in this Benefice have done really well over the pandemic so far is the provision of online worship. In addition to the Church's National Daily Hope line, Brentor and St Eustachius' have both managed to rise to the challenge and record, post, and even stream worship to those in our congregations who couldn't be present personally.



Here in Brentor, we've even found ourselves touching the lives of people many hundreds or even thousands of miles away as well as our more local congregation - we have had Christmas cards from people in the Netherlands, and letters of thanks from Australia, Kyrgyzstan, and the United Arab Emirates, among others!

It has been a very steep learning curve. From starting with a hastily purchased webcam and video camera (not very effective - either the video was good or the audio, but never both together!) we have gradually developed a system that seems to work really well - and more importantly, to be sustainable within our very limited budget. I am aware that St Eustachius' have a much more professional set up, but I think that's for Peter Rowan to talk about in a different article!

We use a pair of lamps and an iPhone. One early discovery was that the human eye works much better in low light levels than even the best camera! Hence we bought a pair of LED lamps (no mains power up at St Michael's, so of course they had to be battery powered!). Paired with a fairly modern phone - initially borrowed, then purchased when we realised how useful it was - we are able to record good video and

usable audio even without miking up the officiant and readers. This works for us, in relatively small churches - but above all, it is sustainable, with 4 members of the congregation now happy to record services if needed.

The video does then need splicing together. Initially, our wonderful Reader Wendy Roderick recorded the music for all our hymns on her piano and then WhatsApped the videos to us to include in the final videos. More recently, we have been very grateful to the Royal School of Church Music and St Martin in the Fields who have been producing hymns and carols with permissions for us to use - streaming or online broadcast of music needs additional licenses and rights compared to the exemptions that exist for simply playing it in a service. We have also been able to use music from the Rend Collective and iSingWorship, both of whom generously waived the license rights to some of their songs for use in online worship.



More recently, we have at least been able to record the congregation singing - but this has proven much harder to capture clean copies of than speaking or chanting from the officiants and readers, so we have to use it sparingly - and we are still using a lot of pre-recorded music in our online services.

Unfortunately, editing the video and audio together takes time and a fairly powerful computer. That's said, there are now two of us in the Parish who are set up to do so, and to upload the videos to YouTube and thence to our website. Again, we're aiming for sustainability rather than technical perfection.

So why is sustainability so important?

Well, we aren't making videos for entertainment. We want to keep offering online worship into the future, even as - God willing - this pandemic winds down into endemicity. Because...

- many people are still anxious about coming to church physically. So let's include them!
- we have a broader congregation now, stretching across the U.K. and beyond. So let's welcome them!
- so many people are scared of church because they don't know what they'll find. So let's show them!

We are all called to share the Good News of Christ to all the nations - this is only a small part of that mission and outreach, but, I believe, a very valuable one.