REPORT TO SHRAWLEY PARISH COUNCIL – ST MARY’S CHURCH IN 2020 Version 3

The church operated normally until 21 March 2020, at which point it was closed in line with Government guidance and remained closed until 31 December; we are only now in the process of fully reopening. It had been hoped to keep the building open for private prayer, but in practice this could not be accommodated within the COVID rules. The churchyard, however, has remained accessible at all times.

Whilst open, the church held 5 routine Sunday Services and 1 Funeral Service. 2 Internments, with strictly limited outdoor attendance, were held after closure. An outdoor Service, again with very limited attendance, was held on Remembrance Day; and socially-distanced Carol Singing was organised in the churchyard.

Scheduled Wedding Services were affected, all being for couples with Receptions planned at Curradine Barns, which was forced to close. Most were simply postponed into 2021/22, but some couples chose to have simple, private Services within their home Parishes instead. The church was opened for 1 Wedding Service, that was attended only by the couple and their witnesses.

The Incumbent, alone, said Prayers in the church on a couple of occasions, which were video’d for broadcast. Throughout the Parish of Shrawley and Witley, all churches being similarly affected, a regular pattern of Services was provided online.

A Food Bank box was operational at the church through the period. Organisers would like to thank everyone who continued to support it during lockdown; a steady and significant flow of produce was available to the distribution centre.

Financially, 2020 was a bad year for St Marys. Most outgoings were unavoidable, but the lack of Service collections and Wedding Fees severely cut the normal income stream, which goes in part to meet Parish needs and in part towards the cost of providing Diocesan operations in the Parish. The Diocese itself had cash problems.

Fund-raising activity by The Friends of St Marys was badly hit. Contributions to the Restoration Fund from Weddings etc ceased, it was not possible to deliver our own fund-raising events and annual events run jointly with other village groups were similarly hit. Although we did not undertake any new restoration work in the period, funds still fell by over £2000. We were able to keep publishing the Parish Magazine, but 2 issues were abandoned for lack of content.

CHRIS MARTIN

Churchwarden

14 May 2021