



# **BLOOMSBURY CENTRAL**

## **BAPTIST CHURCH**

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**Annual Report**  
**October 2021**

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## Secretary's Report

What a difference a year can make! This time last year, we were about to enter an autumn lockdown – we were meeting online, looking into an uncertain winter, and hoping a COVID vaccine might be found. Today we are able to meet together in person and the vaccine has been offered to all adults and has saved many thousands of lives. The pandemic is still with us but the future seems brighter, and we look forward to the opportunities and challenges ahead of us, while mourning the loss of the last eighteen months that continues to affect us in so many ways.

One of the privileges of serving as secretary is learning just how hard many people work to serve our community. Our ministers give tirelessly of their talents among us. I particularly want to thank Simon for his leadership, technical skills and imagination as we moved over to online church and a new way of doing things. A great strength of our diaconate is the commitment and diversity of the deacons who have grappled with the challenges of the pandemic, particularly with respect to the church's finances. I salute each one of them, and especially give thanks to those stepping down from the diaconate at this time for their service to the church.

Libby Brown has faithfully supplied us with *News and Views Not From the Pews* for over a year now – catching up on news from members old and new, and looking at pictures has been a weekly highlight, especially during the lockdown! We have all enjoyed hearing a variety of voices in our services as new folk have stepped up to lead, read, and pray. This continues as we meet in the building with services streamed online and we are grateful to those who look after the technology desk and keep us all connected and hearing each other.

We have all learnt in the pandemic the value of appreciating each other and reaching out to those around us. I have received and heard of many expressions of love, concern, appreciation around the church. Simple messages and phone calls can really brighten someone's day. Let's all spur each other on in this – there are those among us who mourn, who find life difficult, who cannot leave home, who struggle under the daily stresses of life. All of us are cheered when someone takes time to think of us and greet us. Who can you contact today?

I have heard the analogy that, like Europe after the ravages of the Second World War, we are moving into a post-war phase, a time to rebuild. In Britain, that time led to the post-war consensus, to the creation of the NHS, the widespread building of decent social housing, and the development of the welfare state, things which lifted millions out of poverty and

disease. In the church, our challenge is to rebuild in a similar fashion – not to try and return to a 2019, but to look to our faithful God as we seek to meet the needs of 2021 and beyond. Imagination and courage are needed, as are love and patience. The church over many centuries, and our own church over 170 years, has faced deep crises from within and without, yet the light of our witness burns still – the message of God’s love for all is as necessary and true now as at any time. What part can each of us play in telling of that love in our words and our actions?

## **Nigel Redford**



## **Minister’s Report**

This past year has seen Bloomsbury continue to grapple with the complexities created by the Pandemic. We returned to in-person worship on Pentecost Sunday in May 2021, after over a year of meeting almost entirely online, and we have been running weekly services both onsite and online since then, to create opportunities for people to engage with the ministry of Bloomsbury as widely as possible. The task before us now is to rebuild our congregation as a place where God’s love is made known to all, where faith is nurtured, where injustice is challenged, where community is built, and where relationships are deepened.

The appeal to church members for funding to support the church during the pandemic resulted in a very generous response, both in terms of one-off donations and also increased regular giving, as the depth of commitment and love for Bloomsbury took tangible shape in practical support. We welcomed Tim Clifford as Church Treasurer, and he has worked hard with others on the finance team to keep the church stable through a difficult time financially.

The Deacons devoted themselves to a thoroughgoing review of the church’s commercial strategy, to address both the financial impact of the pandemic, and also to provide a firm basis for future ministry. I want to pay tribute to the hard work and seriousness with which the Deacons took this task, assisted by Alexandra Cran-McGreehin who was co-opted as a facilitator for the process. This has resulted in a change to the way the building is used to generate funding to support the church’s ministry, with the new partnership with Impact Dance a significant part of this. It is encouraging that we now have a deep structural

relationship with a black-led organisation focussed on inclusion and justice for teenagers and young adults.

The restructure, which was agreed unanimously at the Church Meeting in July, has regrettably led to two redundancies. We bid a sad farewell to Solvita who has been our receptionist, and James will be leaving us as Church Manager at the end of November, having been a greatly valued part of the team for many years. I want to pay tribute to these two colleagues for all that they have brought to the life of the church at Bloomsbury, and to wish them well in their future endeavours.

Dawn re-joins us following her time on maternity leave and then furlough. Her role has also changed through the discussions, and she is returning half time (3 days per week) and is no longer living in the manse at Naoroji Street. We wish her, Simon, Nova, and Ember much happiness in their new home in Ealing, and we look forward to the contributions Dawn will make to church life as she picks up the reigns of Communities Ministry in a dramatically changed context of post-pandemic London. Almost all of the projects and programmes that were in place previously have come to an end, and the way we relate our church community to the wider communities in which we exist will be a journey of discovery and creativity.

Our Lockdown Choir sustained our worship through its time online, and I am grateful to all those who sent me their voices to be edited together. You can re-live these on our website <https://www.bloomsbury.org.uk/church-life/lockdown-choir/> and it is lovely that we can once again sing in person to the accompaniment of the Bloomsbury Beast, played for us so superbly by Philip and occasionally John.

It has been a pleasure to welcome new people to Bloomsbury 'virtually', and also to find that some of those who joined us online are now discovering us in real life too! We rejoiced to baptise Lanze in August, and to welcome him as a member in October. We look forward to the contributions that all those who are entering into the life of our fellowship will make over the coming years.

Pastorally, we have marked a number of significant deaths within the life of the church over the past year, including Bill Somerville, Michael Porter, Chris Green, and Florence Finch. Our prayers are with all those who are bereaved. Others have carried less visible burdens over this past year, including some who have been very lonely during the long months of lockdown. We pray for all those who have found this last year difficult and sad, and ask that God's healing love will draw near to those who long for comfort.

Our online study group tackled a number of issues, from Bible studies to a book looking at racism and church culture. Bloomsbury has committed itself to becoming an anti-racist organisation, where the structural injustices of racism are challenged. This work will be long, and continues with the event to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King preaching at Bloomsbury, to be held on 29 October 2021.

Our membership of London Citizens has meant that we have participated in a number of key justice initiatives over the last year, from the campaign during lockdown to get public toilets re-opened in Central London at the height of the pandemic so that homeless people could access these essential facilities when all other places including day centres were closed, to the Just Transition climate change campaign to call on the Mayor of London to prioritise the upgrading of 100,000 homes to lift people out of fuel poverty and the creation of 60,000

good green jobs. A team of people from Bloomsbury have been taking part in monthly training with St James' Piccadilly, to look at how we can use the tools of community organising to strengthen and deepen the relationships we have across our own fellowship.

One of the personal highlights of the last 18 months has been the online Biblical Studies class I've been teaching through HeartEdge, with a good number of Bloomsbury people attending. We have worked our way through the entire New Testament, and the discussions have extended our reach around the world as people have either joined live or accessed the recordings online afterwards.

I am looking forward to the task of rebuilding, and re-growing our community and congregation. Bloomsbury has a great gift to offer, with our broad understanding of God's love for all, and our desire to live that love into being in our lives and in our world through acts of mercy and justice, and through caring for one another. Please pray for me, and for the other leaders at Bloomsbury, as we hold one another before God.

## **Simon Woodman**



## **Communities Minister's Report**

Hello all! As you can imagine, there is not an awful lot to report about Communities Ministry from the last year. I started back with reduced hours from the beginning of October after the furlough scheme came to a close. It is apparent that the work that had previously been happening under the title of Community Ministry is not going to restart and we are now looking forward with anticipation as to what opportunities may be ahead of us.

A small word on the things that have historically been part of our ministry: Luke and I have decided to rest Soho Gathering as it has been - the needs that we were engaging with when we started have shifted, and others are filling the gaps. There has been much fruit over the years and God has blessed us, Bloomsbury and others through the Gathering, but it seems natural after such a break to move away from the model we had been running.

The Night Shelter has happened and is happening albeit in a different format to previous years; the guests are staying in one place with a rota of volunteers supporting the work of the staff of C4WS. If you would be interested in getting involved do let me know and I can link you up with C4WS for this season.

The Simon Community have, throughout all of the lockdowns, worked hard with those who fell through the net of the government provision. They are aware that we will not be able to restart the Evening Centre as we are needing to hire out the basement for income.

Dragon Hall have hosted a number of online groups and have worked hard to stay connected to some of the most isolated in this area, and a number of the groups that we were hosting have also started to reopen in other venues. Life continues to move forward!

As I begin to minister from Bloomsbury again, I recognise that we must mourn what has been and what will not come back, reconnect with each other, and build new connections as we respond to a call to minister to this part of London as a community. What needs are there to engage with moving forward? What are our capacities, and what has God put on our heart? How are we to be Jesus to West Central London? There are, as there always have been, many, many needs before us, a number of which we have a history of engaging with, and some that we have not. Now is not the time to rush into the first opportunity but to listen to God and to each other. My prayer moving forward is that we will have the patience and wisdom to listen to God and the energy to respond to the prompting we hear.

## **Dawn Cole-Savidge**



## **Treasurer's Report**

During the last twelve months the pandemic got even worse than the previous year and then we started to have hope that maybe better times are at last beginning. Last January as we went into lockdown again the deacons and leadership also started a process of discernment planning ably facilitated by one of our members. This was and continues to be a helpful process to identify the key areas to develop and concentrate on. Part of that included our finances. The pandemic has disrupted many parts of the economy and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church is no exception, with our rental income from hiring out rooms in the building completely collapsing for eighteen months and unclear how it might recover. The deacons and leadership met many times and invested much time and energy in coming up with plans to navigate through this. It has been hard for all involved. And at the church meeting in July'21 the membership voted and agreed on a way forward. Parts of the building are now again generating income, this time on a longer-term basis. Staffing requirements and arrangements have had to change. Critically the plan is that when we start the next financial year the church's finances will be on a more sustainable footing.



As I approach the first anniversary of being in this role, I would like to thank the following:

- all who give to the church in so many ways
- the ministers, all the staff team and the deacons
- a previous treasurer, whose able assistance has made this last year possible

Lastly we ask, that in the coming year, we be even more an expression of God's inbreaking kingdom in our city and to the ends of the earth.

**Tim Clifford**



**Bloomsbury in the snow, March 2018, Dawn Cole-Savidge**