

MANAGERS' REPORT FOR AGM, 13th NOVEMBER 2020



SHOP FOR LIFE

Well, none of us could have expected the year we have had (and are still having) – but The Mustard Seed is doing extraordinarily well, thanks to our magnificent team of volunteers.

When lockdown started, towards the end of March, one of the shop managers had unaccountably fled the country on a long holiday (which ended up being even longer), while the other rose to the challenge and did a fantastic job taking orders and delivering them (often on her bike) to many of our regular customers, thereby keeping at least some income coming in. By mid-May, when the wanderer had returned and finished her isolation, we were also able to start some market stalls which also helped cash flow. Many thanks to Rosalind and Sue for helping with these.

The new “warehouse” arrangements are much more flexible which has helped both with receiving and making deliveries.

The shop was allowed to re-open in mid-June but since a number of our shop staff are over the magic age of 70 or still shielding for medical reasons, we only had enough people to open in the mornings (including some of the over 70s, to whom grateful thanks). Surprisingly, however, we haven't done too badly compared to our usual weekly/monthly takings – in the first few weeks, customers were so delighted to be able to shop again that we sold a great deal, helped in part by the enticing new wares that Karen and Katie had ordered from the Birmingham Sustainable Trade Fair in February but which had only been delivered just before lockdown. Even now, we are holding our own, but that will only continue to be the case if we can all remember to remind our friends and neighbours to order through the website.

Staffing

We are hugely grateful to those who have felt able to keep the shop open since restrictions were eased, but absolutely understand why others have not yet felt able to – we continue to pray for the whole team and send very special thanks to Mairead for juggling the rota each month so there are as few gaps as possible – and these are almost always filled by the time the day comes round.

Window Dressers

Thanks are also due to the window dressers, ed by Libby, without whom the shop would be far less attractive to passers-by, with the mix of Traidcraft and Seekers' Light goods. We love the creativity that each brings to the topic of the fortnight/month.

The window will be particularly important during the next month – our busiest time of the year normally, so we can't afford to let things slip. We will be turning the big table round to face the window and changing the stock regularly to encourage people to order online – please tell your friends and neighbours they are welcome to photograph any item they would like to buy (or find out more about) and send it by email to karen@vogt.org.uk.

Orders

We still want to encourage customers to put in a regular monthly or occasional order for e.g. a bale of loo rolls, tea, coffee, cereal. In the present climate, please encourage friends and neighbours to look on the website and email or telephone Karen (details elsewhere in this report). Stamps and greetings cards can also be ordered and delivered.

Along with the order form for food and cleaning products, there is now an extra Christmas food and Advent calendar one on the website. It's more difficult to think of how we can sell gifts during lockdown as we now source from many different companies, not just Traidcraft, so the catalogue does not cover all our stock.

Hampers

It's difficult to know whether hamper orders will be up or down this year – people shopping local versus not being able to meet and share presents with loved ones. Usual choice available: standard (I choose), bespoke (you choose) or specials – Chocoholics, Organic or Palestinian. **N.B. Friday 13th November (AGM Day) is the deadline for hamper orders this year – order forms available on the website www.mustardseed.org.uk or ring/email Karen at 01367 241707 or karen@voqt.org.uk**

Outside sales

We normally have regular outside sales in Blessed Hugh church and Stanford in the Vale, but these has been more difficult to hold this year, with the churches closed for many weeks, and now again for at least another month. Again, online orders from some of these customers have helped us.

Seekers' Light

We remain deeply grateful to Malcolm and Val for the very important contribution that Seekers' Light offers to making The Mustard Seed the successful Christian witness it is in Faringdon. Val comes over virtually every week to check the cards when the shop is open and Malcolm is always at the end of the phone for queries and orders of books. Keith Thrower has been instrumental in keeping the displays up to date at the Faringdon end, including with new shelf labels and book reviews in the church magazines from time to time. Even during lockdown, we have been able to sell a number of books and, of course, the regular orders of Bible study notes, organised by Sue Thrower. The team who do the regular "Highworth run" on a Monday morning are crucial to this liaison, and special thanks are due to Sue and to Brenda Barber who have been keeping this going since lockdown. If anyone from other churches could volunteer to join this team, we would be extremely grateful – it's only about once every 6-8 weeks with a full team, just to take a box from The Mustard Seed to The Lighthouse and return with the new stock and any orders from the previous week – maximum an hour of your time.

Postage stamps

Sales continue to go very well. They are usually delivered to us within 24 hours of putting in the order, so if anyone wants a large number for any purpose, such as Christmas cards, just let Katie know. This year's Christmas stamps are now in stock, all with a religious theme so please take advantage and order yours now – you may have some extra time during the lockdown to order and write your cards and have them ready for posting in early December! This year, we think cards will be even more appreciated by family, friends and neighbours.

Free gift before Christmas

We are again offering a FREE jute bag to any customer spending £20 or more in the run-up to Christmas.

We both continue to be very grateful for everyone's support in these unusual times. Please do spread the word about ordering via the website, www.mustardseed.org.uk or by emailing karen@vogt.org.uk

Katie Foot and Karen Vogt