

Church Leadership Team Report 2019 by Edward Parry

At St. Marks we are most fortunate to have both a strong and vibrant ministerial team & Leadership team. I would like to thank them all for their continued commitment and support over the past year. Parish News is the new publication enabling us all to keep up to date with what is happening in the church and the wider community. The inclusion of "A Picture Paints a Thousand Words" has been very well received and long may it continue. During this year we celebrated the Sam's appointment as Chaplain to the Bishop which recognises Sam's wide ranging expertise & dedication to the Diocese in all matters.

In these difficult times stable church finances are essential and therefore particular thanks must go to our Treasurer Ian Farthing and our Gift Aid Administrator Jim Williams. Between them they put in many hours of work every week ensuring our finances are in order and adhering to the current rules and regulations as a charitable organisation. They have also introduced a system for accepting payment of invoices & donations by a card facility.

Our thanks also go to Avril Williams, and her band of loyal helpers, for their fundraising efforts through the Bank Holiday Monday Car Boot Sales, raising £3668 and the Christmas Fayre, which raised almost £3,500. These results, when added together, make a significant contribution to church funds and we are all grateful for this. This year's car boot season has started well raising over £1000 on Easter Monday.

The Leadership Team (and the Church Council) continue to have the appropriate Safeguarding Policies in place and ensure they are up to date with current diocesan and wider policy guidelines. This is an area of church life which the whole church takes very seriously and we are grateful to Janet Day, our Parish Safeguarding Officer for all her work in this area. The opportunity is always available for people to attend Safeguarding courses and training events during the year when they arise.

Mission

. We have been pleased this year to have held a new mission weekend which was a tremendous success welcoming many people to hear Adrian and Bridget Plass. The Hog Roast, Cheese and wine and Sunday lunch were all well attended. This gave the church family a number of occasions and opportunities to listen to the special way in which Adrian and Bridget share their Christian faith. It was quickly decided that we would do the same kind of weekend mission for 2019 with a Church Mission being held on 14 & 15 September with our guest speakers Phil and Di Stone, who are the leaders of the Scargill Community.

This year saw ongoing changes taking place at our sister church Putnoe Heights to develop a more Methodist style of worship, ministry and constitution. As a Church Council we no longer felt able to support these changes and as a consequence Putnoe Heights will become a Methodist Church. Whilst this has been a source of deep sadness for many, St Mark's has offered a warm welcome to those who wished to join our church family here. We pray that Putnoe will continue to flourish and establish itself as a thriving Methodist Church community.

Church Community Centre

The Church premises which are both a vital revenue stream & resource for us and the wider community are well managed by Wendy Rider and her dedicated team of office volunteers. Together with a good number of regular bookings, several new hirers have been secured as well as a regular stream of occasional bookings. This has resulted in very few vacant slots throughout the week.

We continue to maintain a decorating schedule and several rooms have been decorated this year. The car parking lighting has now been installed and we have received many positive comments particularly from a safety point of view. Annual maintenance contracts have been set up for both the lift and the front door. Our cleaners Dave & Janet continue provide an excellent service to that effect with Dave willing to take on board many odd jobs for us

Wendy would like to offer her thanks to all the volunteers within the church membership who set out and clear chairs for Sunday worship, cutting grass and setting up the room for Open House every week.

Children and Families

At Tuesday morning group Janine has about 10 children plus their parents/carers who come regularly. Most of the children are under 2 1/2 yrs old, which is manageable for the size of the room. All appear to enjoy coming and have made friends with each other, both children and adults. A few of these have started to come to Chat Make Play from last September as she stopped running her Monday group at the community centre and they wanted somewhere to go.

At Thursday morning group she has anything from 25-45 children each week. Usually there is at least 35 children plus their parents/carers- it can be quite chaotic, noisy and busy, but it does generally run smoothly. The majority of the children at the moment are under 2 yrs old with only a few being over 3 yrs old. Again all children appear happy to be there and enjoy the crafts and toys provided. The group has been described as 'very friendly and welcoming', and has very much a 'family' feel to it. Our regular mum's will talk to any new mum's and everyone mixes with everyone else.

Junior Church has a core group of sixteen children, with an age range from five to fourteen. Although it is never known how many children will attend each week, they plan for twelve and hope to be surprised., the average being about seven children. Linda Turner usually gives a talk on the subject that is being preached in Church on the same day, but it can vary.

The children/young people love to read the prayers and the Bible passages. Now and again they do some drama too, time permitting, which they really enjoy. They always make something, craft related to the teaching, which always goes down well. It is lovely for them to be able to show off their creations to the congregation at the end of the service.

A small creche area is also set up, with various toys, just in-case there are any little ones that come along. Janine assists with the creche and helps with Junior Church when needed. Our sincere thanks go to Linda, Ian and Janine for their dedication, teaching & enthusiasm.

Story Box

This has been, at times, a challenging year for Story Box. We are so grateful for the loyal and unstinting support and help we have received from all our volunteers and our Mums and childminders. We really appreciate the efforts made by our catering teams, meet and greeters, musicians, storytellers and office support from Rosemary.

We continue with our format of sandwich lunch followed by a story, songs and action songs with the occasional craft session. This works well and the children are always keen to come in. Despite our concerns in July, when several of our older children left to go to school, our numbers have increased. We have an average of about 18 children each week compared to 10 in July. Our donation system continues to prove financially effective. All aspects of Story Box are kept under continual review and we make changes if necessary.

Messy Church,

Now in its ninth year, it continues to attract families several of whom have come via Story Box, or Pre School. The average attendance over the past 10 sessions has been 48 children and adults, which is an increase of 2 from 2017/18. Although the children's age profile appears to have dropped, we still have a few 9 and 10 year olds attending who we try to include in the story telling and other ways. Including a Messy Science activity is popular with the older children. We are very thankful for the dedicated commitment of our talented team of some 20 people. At our monthly planning meetings we have been reviewing how we fulfil the Messy Church values of being: Christ-centred; All-age; Creativity; Hospitality and Celebration. This is proving a helpful exercise enabling us to make slight changes where appropriate. One thought we had was 'How much does the wider congregation know about Messy Church, and if not enough how can we spread the word?

Sadly, Richard Ledger, who has been a key member of our team for 9 years, has decided to step down in June this year. His enthusiasm and inspired input to the story telling and crafts will be hard to replace. In addition his ability to engage with the families has been invaluable. Another key member of the team, Janet Day, will also be stopping in June. Janet has also been a great asset over the past 9 years and will be greatly missed. We hope and pray that others will come forward to join the team. Please speak to Wendy Waters if you feel God might be nudging you in the Messy Church direction.

All this work with young people and families is invaluable and vital to sow the seeds of faith and to play a small part, often unseen, in transforming our community. Without the dedication of so many of our own congregation and others none of it would happen, so our sincere and deeply felt thanks goes out to them all.

Open House

Open House continues to flourish with approximately 30 clients and their carers attending each week. Narinder and her team of volunteers work very hard to provide a safe, stimulating and supportive environment, which promotes independence and respect for others. During the year the group have enjoyed visits from a variety of outside speakers including the fire safety officer, the police, ARK farm, the Bishop as well as members of our own congregation. They celebrate all the key events in the Christian calendar like Mother's Day, Easter and Christmas. A key highlight was Children in Need event where they raised £800 which was a magnificent achievement. This year Open House became a charity and a key aim of the Trustees is to generate funding to ensure the club can become financially sustainable.

Bible Study Group

A small group of 6 -8 people have held regular fortnightly meetings throughout the year, apart from a short break in August, and have been studying Bible passages and themes from both the Old and New Testaments. They begin and end their meetings with prayer and this year, they have used the 'Lifebuilder Bible Study' series on 'Prayers of the New Testament' and the book of 'James'. Each of these study books contains 8 to 9 different studies, which have a theme and a number of questions to discuss. Jean Bank and Martin Fannon have done their best to guide everyone through these questions, as there is always lively and interesting debate, by the end of which a hot cup of tea and cakes and/or biscuits are welcome.

If you would like to join us please speak to Jean or Martin or look at the Regular Weekly Activities entry in Parish News.

Garden of Remembrance

Since the 2018 Congregational Meeting we have had 27 Interments and 2 Reservations. There are two more interments in May. There are now 637 plots being used.

Our Plans to extend the Garden round to the front of the Church are progressing well. The area has now been cleared and we are waiting for the new water feature, granite bench and a pergola. We will then create a new area ready for interments as we only have 11 plots left available in Oak. The new Columbarias have also been installed. We have also set up a donations appeal for planting, maintenance, help towards the water feature, granite bench and Pergola etc.

For the last five months Mick Ovenden who prepares the ground for interments and helps with other maintenance jobs within the Garden has been off sick. We are hoping he will return soon. Jim Williams has been filling in for Mick and I personally would like to thank him for all his hard work in supporting us in the Garden together with Jean & Malcom do a fantastic job keeping the Garden tidy. On behalf of the Garden of Remembrance Committee we would like to thank them most sincerely for all their hard work in keeping it looking so beautiful and well kept.

We always have many compliments about the Garden. It is really appreciated by the community of Brickhill and beyond who visit it on a regular basis.

Woodland Burial

Now going into the 13th year, the St Albans Woodland Burial Trust continues to flourish. Five new glades were opened last year Lapwing, Nuthatch and Siskin for burials also Skylark Rill and Wagtail for ashes. There has been more planting to enrich the biodiversity of the areas and maintenance work to encourage natural growth in the short, medium & long term . The Open Day, in June 2018, was the usual success - this year we had the heat wave , the previous year torrential rain! The 2019 Open Day is to be held on 8th June. Unfortunately Linda had to relinquish her post in October 2018 but we have been very fortunate in the appointment of Sam Ware as administrator. She has been an exceptional choice and works so well with clients who are at a vulnerable time in their lives.

Pastoral Support

Our committed team continues to include members of both Putnoe Heights and St Mark's. We hope this will continue for the foreseeable future, although it will be understandable if Putnoe Heights puts additional support in place. At our Pastoral meeting at the beginning of April, Sylvia Cohen stood down from the team. We thank Sylvia for her commitment, compassion and diligence over very many years. We intend to continue to offer Pastoral Telecare, Bereavement Support, Home Communion and Pastoral visits to both congregations. In addition Margret Appleton, or Valerie Capon take flowers to members of the congregation who are in some form of pastoral need. This ministry is very much appreciated by the recipients. We are grateful to Revd. Jenny Cappleman for speaking so movingly at our Commemoration Service. This year, 67 people attended.

St Mark's Preschool

Preschool continues to be an on-going success with well attended classes. We are all very grateful to Helen & her team for all the hard work & dedication they put into the organisation to make it the success that it is. The many & varied activities and visiting organisations throughout the year have been well received by both the children & parents/carers.

Worship

Over the past year we have welcomed a number of new people into our congregation, some have recently moved to the area and others have chosen to move from other churches. Our 8.30am Sunday worship, which now includes communion every week, and 9:30 am services have increased in popularity, which is most encouraging. The musical accompaniment at the 9.30am service include 3 guitarists, 2 clarinets and the children present on percussion. This is much appreciated by all the congregation and we thank Clive Simmonds for selecting uplifting hymns for this and his dedicated musical input. We are also indebted to Marion Prior and all visiting organists for their contribution to our worship. The high standard of our Bible readers and intercession leaders are much appreciated and of course not forgetting our preachers. Thanks must also go to Marion Prior and her talented team of flower arrangers. The continuing offer of serving fresh percolated coffee and biscuits after each service has led to a further increase in people staying on after the service, thus increasing shared fellowship and improving our welcome. Behind the scenes weekly preparation for our worship goes unnoticed but without which we could not operate. Thank you to all who fulfil the roles of setting out chairs, operate the PA, greet, give out service material, count the offertory and serve refreshments.

Our Christmas services continue to be well received which results in a very busy period for Charlie, Sam, the Leadership Team and others involved. There were large numbers of people in attendance at all the services and events which were held over Christmas and we are grateful for the commitment and stamina of all involved in making this happen for the church & congregation.

The Lent Bible Study series, presented by Charlie and Sam, was well received with a excellent number of people attending each week. Holy Week services of Morning Prayer, Compline, Maundy Thursday Holy Communion and Good Friday Stations of the Cross were also appreciated by those who attended. Easter Sunday was as always an uplifting service for both regular and visiting members of the congregation.

And finally I would like to thank firstly my fellow Leadership Team members; Wendy, Ian, Jim, Laura, Liz, and Mike, Richard Ledger and our minsters Charlie and Sam, for their amazing support given to me. I find it hard to believe that it was 6 years ago that Charlie invited me to join the Team. At that point in time I did commit to serving for 12 months only. However, after serving my apprenticeship I now appear to have come of age. It has proved to be educational and an absolute privilege & honour to serve the church & congregation and I thank you most sincerely.

Edward Parry 28th April 2019