

ST. MARK'S PARTNERSHIP CHURCH

LEADERSHIP TEAM REPORT

**By Mrs Margaret Appleton
on behalf of the Leadership team**

ANNUAL CONGREGATION MEETING 24-04-16

On behalf of the Leadership Team and the Congregation of St Mark's, I would like to begin my report by thanking Charlie, Sam and Jane for their Ministry to us. We are richly blessed and we thank them for their spiritual leadership, commitment and faith and for their guidance and inspiration. In February, it was a real joy to celebrate Charlie's 25 years with us and I for one will not forget the look on his face when he realised what was happening and his astonishment that we could keep a secret.

Another highlight of the year was Bishop Richard's Mission week with us Last July. He visited local schools and a number of church groups and several of us will remember him on his hands and knees during the Messy Church activities!! I hope he enjoyed his time with us.

The Archdeacon's inspection was carried out in August and once again we received an excellent report. We were informed that St Mark's is a model Church.

I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to my fellow members of the Leadership Team for their support and their tireless work throughout the year on behalf of the Church. It is fair to say that we have worked as a genuine team giving each other considerable support when needed and always being there for each other. It has made my role so much easier. I would also like to thank all those who have been on the Leadership Team with whom I have served over the past few years. It has not been the easiest of years especially when we were faced with the very difficult decision about the future of the Partnership and St Mark's with many meetings being called at short notice.

This year we were advised by the Methodist Circuit there would be changes to the ministerial deployment in the Partnership. Although the Leadership Team worked hard to bring forward proposals which preserved the existing Partnership arrangements these were not accepted by the Circuit and after much heart-searching, discussion and prayer it was decided that we would seek to become an Anglican Church. You have seen recent communications that indicate that the situation is still not fully resolved for Putnoe Heights. Despite the difficulty of the decision and although it was not easy for some people to accept, we are confident that we have a sustainable ministry and I thank you all for the support we received. As you will see from Partnership News following the recent announcement by the Circuit, Jane moves on to a new post later this year and we wish her every success.

Our services continue to be well attended and our membership numbers are being maintained. As usual our services at key festivals such as Christmas and Easter continue to be very popular. It is encouraging to see the numbers of children attending Sunday School increasing with 12 young people present last Sunday. Our thanks go to Linda Turner for her excellent leadership and for so generously giving of her time. Thanks also to those who help with the crèche. I would also like to thank Marion Prior, Clive Simmonds and all visiting organists for their contribution to the musical life of the church.

This year our Partnership Autumn Mission Project was to support the Karibuni Trust, a charity helping the most disadvantaged children in Kenya and the magnificent sum of £3,000 was raised. A donation was also made to the Syrian refugee Crisis.

Our church continues to be used by many outside groups and whenever you visit the church, no matter the time of day it always appears to be busy. This is due in no small way to the work of the Centre manager Wendy Rider and her excellent team of volunteers who work in a very busy office. We thank them for their commitment and dedication. Without their time and efforts the Centre would not function as well as it does. More than 60 groups use the Church every month as well as the occasional bookings. The hire charges have increased this year but they are still lower than any others in the area and represent excellent value for money. The toilets have been refurbished this year and the lights have all been replaced with LED lights. The Halls are due to be repainted in the summer. The Clothing Bank is proving very successful and brings in additional revenue. Our gardens are also very well looks after and we thank those who help in any way.

There are other key players who are vital in the smooth running of our Church; Ian Farthing our Treasurer who keeps a tight rein on our finances and Jim Williams who support Ian and administers the Gift Aid and we thank them for all they do.

Many Church groups take place during the week which are run by teams of volunteers who generously give of their time and efforts without which the groups would not function. We thank them most sincerely. I do apologise that I will not be naming them all, not because I do not want to, but because I am afraid of leaving someone out. We are hugely indebted to them all.

Storybox has had another busy year and we have been so fortunate in the loyal and unstinting support received from all the volunteers who serve in a variety of ways. A special mention must be made of the oldest volunteer Doris Cooper who sadly had had to give up her role. She is greatly missed by everyone. The format is the same and 20+ children attend each week although numbers might change when several go to school in September.

Messy Church is now in its 6th Year and continues to thrive. The average attendance over the 11 sessions was 55 children and adults and about 15 helpers. The Leadership Team purchased a fridge freezer to alleviate difficulties of providing sufficient food for over 60 people. An extra session

was held in July which was attended by Bishop Richard and a craft area was held in the Church marquee at the gathering on the Green and this will be repeated in July. 54 shoe boxes were sent to the Samaritans Purse Operation Christmas Child and thanks go to the wider congregation whose generosity paid all the cost of transporting the boxes. Sadly, a very loyal helper, George Burton died just after Christmas and he is greatly missed. We thank God that he was an active member until a few weeks before he died. The continued success of Messy Church could not be achieved without the dedication and enthusiasm of a team of 20 plus male and female members of the congregation. However, there is always room for more volunteers.

Open House continues to meet weekly and the many people who attend greatly enjoy the activities provided for them. The group again raised a considerable sum of money for Children in Need by making and selling cakes, preserves, jewellery and knitwear. The looks on their faces was a joy to behold. Sadly, they also miss George Burton who did so much for the group.

The Tuesday afternoon House Group continues to meet on alternate Tuesdays and new members are always welcome.

Chat and Play and Chat and Make continue to take place on Monday afternoons and Thursday mornings. The Thursday morning group is very well supported with numbers often in the upper 30s and lower 40s. The Monday group is not so well attended. Janine ran sessions during the summer holidays which were well attended showing a real need for the group in holiday times.

The Pre-School is still well attended with the Mini Marks for 2 year olds being full with 12 children in each session. Pre-school is full in the mornings with only a couple of spaces in the afternoon. Top Marks is also full every day. Staff is now at full strength. Fundraising has been good with £900 being raised between September and December and there are more events planned for later this term. Ofsted is due at any time now. The last inspection was in October 2014 when a Good rating was achieved. Staff are well informed of all new legislation and all have been trained in the new legislation around Prevent Duty and Safeguarding. Bespoke training for Basic awareness is due in June and Helen will book this for all staff and members of the Church Council. A Business plan is being produced for next year to increase the numbers of younger children attending daily. It is hoped to update the garden which is slowly becoming in poor disrepair and two quotes have been received to date.

The nine members of the Pastoral Team continue to support members of the congregation in several ways. Telecare make fortnightly calls to 44 homes. Contact has been made with 41 people who have been bereaved and a service taken by a minister within the Partnership. During the year Jean Bank, Valerie capon and Wendy waters attended Pastoral training courses. Delia Shepherd who is well known to us all and who is a Civil Celebrant at Bedford Crematorium gave an excellent address at our annual Commemoration

Service. The afternoon tea held in September was enjoyed by 35 people and is to be repeated on 14th May. Helpers and bakers are welcome.

During 2015/16 there were 36 interments in the Garden of Remembrance and 9 reservations. A further 4 interments are booked up to the end of May. The garden continues to look good under the expert hands of Jean and Malcolm for which we are extremely grateful. It is hoped to landscape the front by the entrance and possibly create a new area. It is planned to erect a bench in Oak shortly.

We are also very grateful for all the volunteers who regularly cut the grass and look after the Church grounds.

The Woodland Burial Ground is still flourishing and it continues to attract clients from far and wide who are amazed by its natural beauty. To date there have been 314 burials/interments of ashes along with 267 reservations for burials and 107 for ashes. There are 5 more planned in the next few weeks. The AGM will be held on Sunday 8th May and the Open Day is planned for the 17th September. Thanks are extended to all who support Woodland in any way.

It is a privilege to be part of a thriving and vibrant Church and we thank God that by His Grace we are part of this Church and are able to be called His people.

However, despite all our successes we must not allow ourselves to become complacent. There is a lot of work still to do but I am sure that through prayer, God will guide us in the right direction, and we must be ready to respond to His call.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your unfailing support.

Margaret Appleton