

St. Mark's Church Hitchin



Annual General Meeting
4th March 2018

REPORTS

Contents

- 2 Vicar's Remarks
- 3 Report on the Fabric, Fixtures, Fittings and Furniture of St Mark's for 2107
- 5 Churchwardens' Report
- 6 District Church Council Report
- 7 Safeguarding Report
- 8 List of St Mark's Members with DBS, Deanery/On-line Safeguarding Training
- 9 Curate's Remarks

Committees reporting to the District Church Council

- 10 Communications and Publicity Group
- 10 Mission Committee
- 10 Pastoral/Bereavement Groups
- 12 Worship Committee

All other St Mark's Reports

- 13 Alpha
- 13 Baptism Visitors
- 13 Bible Reading Fellowship
- 13 – 15 Children's and Young People's Groups: Crèche; Sunday School; Pathfinders; Travellers; Hot Chocolate Club; Group With No Name
- 15 Fellowship Groups
- 16 Flower Arrangers
- 16 Little Lions Baby & Toddler Group
- 17 Messy St Mark's
- 17 Music at St Mark's
- 18 Prayer Group
- 18 Sacristan's Report
- 18 The Tea and Coffee Fund
- 19 Thursday Group
- 18 – 20 Uniformed Groups: Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Rainbows

Reports from beyond St Mark's

- 20 Parochial Church Council
- 20 Churches Together in Hitchin (CTH)
- 21 Hitchin Deanery Synod

22 Annual Report to APCM

Vicar's Remarks

If you have ever been into my study in the Vicarage, you will know that one wall is completely book shelves from floor to ceiling, with these shelves being full, mainly with books. This may give the illusion that I read a lot, but in fact, I don't actually read a great deal. If truth be told, I'm a rather slow reader and have never properly learnt the art of skim reading. Therefore, for all the books on my shelves, if I read 3 or 4 in a year, I'm doing well. There is also another reason I don't read a lot, and that is simply the busy-ness of life!

Therefore, you might understand my inward groan when, a few months ago, Bishop Michael presented all the Rural Deans and Deanery Lay Chairs with a book to read (please don't tell him I've said this!). The book, which I duly read because my bishop had told me to (!), was called 'The 4 Disciplines of Execution'. An interesting title for a book given to you by a bishop!

In the end the book was actually nothing to do with the gallows etc. but about a particular model of working, taken from the business world, which sought to provide a way of focusing on what they termed as, 'wildly important goals' whilst also juggling the 'whirlwind' of normal life. Inevitably, some of the theory would not translate well into a church setting but some of the basic points gave food for thought. The basic premise was that unless you are determined to have clear goals, which you then make space to see through, your life just gets swallowed up by the 'stuff' of life. They describe the everyday tasks as the 'whirlwind', and the danger for us all is that the 'whirlwind' can fill every moment of time, meaning that the 'wildly important goals' can get lost and squeezed out.

This is very true of my lifestyle. I could spend every minute of my day answering emails, going to meetings, responding to immediate needs, taking services, supporting people, dealing with the practicalities of church life – essentially, being completely reactive. The same is true of our life together as a church family. We are a busy church family, with lots of valuable things going on. The 'whirlwind' could, if we let it, be completely all-encompassing, with us being completely occupied with very valuable 'whirlwind' activities. But there is a danger that the 'whirlwind' becomes everything and we never take an opportunity to step back, to ask what our 'wildly important goals' are and what action we can take to make sure those goals happen. And even if we've done that, there is an even greater danger that, having decided on our 'wildly important goals' and the action that will take us there, the whirlwind will stop those actions happening.

Therefore, in my own ministry I've tried to do a bit of a shift, to make sure that I allow time to make sure the actions which will lead to the achievement of the 'wildly important goals' happen. I had long thought that one way to reach into Westmill in a more effective way was to run Messy Church at Oughton Primary School, using the good and well-established links that the church already has with the school to begin to introduce families, many of whom have no church background, to the very basics of Christian faith. In other words, move from sharing God's love purely by serving to sharing all the good news of God through continuing to serve but also to be more explicit about it. The problem was that the 'whirlwind' of church life just consumed all my time, therefore the idea in the back of my brain never got put into action.

Simply resolving to make sure that this one action happens, in order to begin to move towards the 'wildly important goal' of introducing more people to a faith in God, has meant that we now are beginning to make contact with many families in the very earliest stages of introducing them to the stories of the Christian faith, with the hope and plan to offer those who would like to look a little deeper the chance to take part in an Alpha course in the autumn.

This is not rocket science! If you want to make something happen, you have to prioritize it. However, that is easier said than done when everything in the 'whirlwind', all of which is very important, needs to be attended to as well.

This year we will be reviewing our Mission Action Plan. We will be asking ourselves 'what is our wildly important goal', 'what is our vision for the future?', and 'what are one or two actions that we need to commit

ourselves to in order that we can begin to move towards that goal?’ I hope you’ll join us on this imagining together about our vision for the future and discern with us the one or two things which will move us there.

I can’t end these Vicar’s Remarks without saying a huge ‘thank you’ to you all. The whirlwind of which I’ve written continues on every day of the year, and so much of that whirlwind is vitally important for our life together. There is only space in the whirlwind to focus on the ‘wildly important goals’ because so many people do their bit in attending to aspects of that whirlwind, from the behind-the-scenes whirlwind to the up-front whirlwind. There would be absolutely no point in launching new actions if everything else crumpled behind. So, thank you all for maintaining the whirlwind of our life together and for being part of it and for all your support of me, particularly on those days when I look like I’ve been literally swept up by the whirlwind. Thank you also for seeing beyond the whirlwind and for your courage as we’ve sought to take steps towards sharing God’s love with our whole community.

As Edward Burns famously wrote in his hymn, ‘We have a gospel to proclaim’. I look forward to continuing to proclaim that gospel with you in thought and word and deed, as we journey forward together.

Jane Mainwaring

Report on the Fabric, Fixtures, Fittings and Furniture of St Mark’s Church for 2017

In 2017 the fabric committee has comprised Bill Poole (chair), Kevin Banks and Clive Rogers (the assistant fabric wardens), Louise Wills, and Neil Dodds. Mike Davies and Roger Sandy were the health and safety officers and members of the fabric committee until the end of March when, having completed the annual health and safety inspection, they resigned from that position. In 2017, the committee met on 13 March and 14 June. The DCC wishes to record its thanks in particular to Mike and Roger, who served as the health and safety officers for many years.

A health and safety inspection was undertaken by Mike Davies and Roger Sandy on 13 March with the fabric committee, and they prepared a report which was presented to the DCC on 2 May. Most of the recommendations were minor and have been implemented, but two were not accepted by the DCC. They were:

1. Re the steps inside the church, which are a potential risk particularly to casual users and the disabled, the report suggested removing the red carpet strip from the section in front of the choir stalls and replacing it with a contrasting colour, or leaving the area totally beige. This would make a visible and distinct contrast between the two sets of steps and decrease the risk, at a minimal cost. The DCC did not accept this recommendation, which would considerably alter the look of the church, although it was agreed that, when the time comes to replace the church carpet, consideration will be given to the possibility of having carpet of a contrasting colour on the choir stall level. It was felt that by installing the ramp, having signs both outside and inside the church and having people stationed at the steps to warn people of the danger when appropriate, the church is doing everything it can to alert people. However, it was agreed to highlight the edges of the steps with brighter tape, and this has been done.
2. To have the pavement kerb dropped at the church entrance, to assist less able people alighting from cars, thus minimising trip hazards. The DCC took the view that, on balance, this would raise more health and safety issues than it would solve.

The Church of England requires every church building to undergo a full inspection by an approved architect every five years (‘the quinquennial’). The last quinquennial was done in July 2015 by Michael Dales. Many of the recommendations he made related to the roof and areas that required repointing, and were undertaken as a single project by one contractor, Lodge & Co. The work commenced in late April and continued throughout May, under the supervision of Michael Dales and Trish Reed. The works were satisfactorily completed. The one year retention period expires in July 2018 and so we will soon be organising an inspection before that is paid, but no problems have been identified to date. Trish Reed started organising the project while she was

a warden, and continued close involvement with it after she had stood down to ensure its successful and prompt completion. She provided detailed reporting to the DCC and put an enormous amount of time and effort into the project, for which the DCC is very grateful.

With the completion of that project, all the substantive requirements of the quinquennial have been met. Other significant pieces of work this year:

- As the Lodge & Co work has resolved the problems we were having with water ingress on the liturgical north (funeral door) side of the church, by late summer it was possible to repaint that wall, which had visible water damage. This has much enhanced the appearance of the church. There is still marking on the carpet but it is not sufficient to warrant the cost of replacement.
- In November 2016 the bell rope broke, so the bell was silent for some months, but the rope has now been replaced.
- The front door lock was deteriorating and so has been replaced, which has been a considerable logistical exercise because of the need to get keys to all who need them; it has also served as a useful audit of key-holders, and given us the opportunity to create a proper log of key holders.
- The trees outside the funeral door, which were contributing to the damp problem, have been cut down or right back, and work is ongoing to create a small wildlife garden there.
- For many years, the organ amplifier has emitted a continuous hum when switched on but not actually playing; efforts to resolve the problem this year have so far been unsuccessful but it is hoped that a change to the amplifier's electricity supply will rectify this.

At the end of 2016, the DCC decided to engage a commercial cleaning company (Thomas Cleaning) to do a weekly clean of the kitchen, hall, foyer and toilet areas because we were struggling to get sufficient volunteer cleaners. Thomas do not clean the church itself; that is still done by a rota of volunteers, supplemented by regular 'spring cleaning' days. Although there is a cost to using Thomas, it seems to have worked well, so the DCC intend to continue with a paid service for the foreseeable future.

The Church Property Register was renewed in 2017 and the new version was presented to the AGM in March 2017. The goods and ornaments of the church remain as listed in that inventory, which is updated as necessary.

The role of assistant fabric warden was created in 2017 and has worked well. The fabric committee has also been a useful forum, and we want to make sure that it continues in 2018 and 2019. With the completion of the quinquennial work we hope that there will be no major fabric issues until it is time to organise the 2020 quinquennial, but it remains a useful framework, so it is anticipated that the fabric arrangements will be as follows:

1. The role of assistant fabric warden will be renamed "fabric officer" to reflect the fact that it is the DCC which is responsible for the maintenance and repair for the church, not just the wardens.
2. But otherwise the role is essentially unchanged – the fabric officers are to be people who are regularly in the church, so that they can keep a regular eye on things and people know to go to them if they spot something that needs attention. They will do the jobs on the maintenance schedule and any other minor repairs, liaise with tradesmen as required and record what they do in the church log book. They can, of course, get others to help them, whether members of the fabric committee or any other willing helpers but having the fabric officers means that efforts are not duplicated, and work is discussed before it is done.
3. The fabric officers may incur expenditure for necessary items (paint, hardware etc) to a maximum of £200 without permission (note that the standing committee of the DCC can incur expenditure of up to £500 without prior approval of the DCC, so that can be used if necessary for fabric items).
4. The fabric committee will continue to meet as required to discuss fabric issues. A warden will be on that committee and will be responsible for ensuring that the DCC is kept fully informed.

The DCC wishes to record its thanks to the fabric committee and also to Michael Walters, who has been a willing helper many times this year.

Looking forward:

- A draft maintenance schedule and fabric handbook has been produced. It requires further work but should be of considerable use in drawing together collective knowledge about the building and its requirements.
- The DCC has discussed the possibility of installing a screen and projector in the church, and considerable work was done on this in 2016. That work has stalled but it is hoped to re-invigorate it in 2018.
- The DCC has resolved to put aside £500 each year towards the eventual replacement of the organ which is now 29 years old. A discretionary fund for this purpose was established at the end of 2017.

Louise Wills, Warden

Church Wardens' Report

Louise Wills and Joy Bennett were officially sworn in as St Mark's church wardens at a service on 16 May 2017 at St Mark's church. It was Louise's fourth term as warden, and Joy's first. The wardens are the lay leaders of the church, as well as officers of the Bishop, and work closely with the clergy, Readers and the DCC. They undertake to serve the best interests of church members, to ensure that the Ministry team are fulfilling the requirements of their roles, and ensure the maintenance of the building, all in accordance with church law. Throughout the year they have been grateful for the continued support of the assistant wardens Roy Dixon, Sandra Stokes, Melvyn Redd, and Daphne Wakefield.

The annual Archdeacon's Visitation was conducted on 23rd August 2017 by the Archdeacon's representative, Royston Jones. These inspections follow a regular cycle, and the focus of this year's inspection was the church buildings. He concluded that the church building is in good condition with no major issues and that the church appears well serviced and cared for. Further information about the building and its contents this year are in the 'Report on the Fabric, Fixtures, Fittings and Furniture of St Mark's Church', which immediately precedes this report.

The annual 24-hour gate closure (which prevents the car park becoming a legal and permanent right of way to the public) took place on 10-11th April 2017.

All the wardens of the four churches in the parish are, ex officio, trustees of Church House Trust, which owns the building beside St Mary's church which is used both as a hall for St Mary's and also as offices for the parish admin work. The land on which the building stands is unregistered, and Louise has worked with other trustees to get it registered so that the charity's old and outdated constitution can be renewed and updated. This is continuing very slowly, but progress is being made, and we expect that papers will be filed in the Land Registry Office in the first half of 2018.

In January 2018, Louise joined Jane, Jim Weist (treasurer), Maggie Mellersh (electoral roll officer), Eddie Callum (gift aid secretary) and Kate Goodwin (DCC member) to conduct an audit of the way data is held by St Mark's DCC, in preparation for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which will come into force in May 2018. This was done using guidance issued by the Diocese, and the group prepared new forms for members of the congregation to give their consent to the DCC using and holding their data. We are confident that St Mark's is ready for the GDPR and will comply with its requirements.

We have spent a considerable amount of time putting together a paper entitled 'Running St Mark's – Roles and Responsibilities', which has been discussed in draft with the Ministry team and DCC. It accompanies the AGM papers as a separate document and is also available on the church's website. We hope that it will provide a useful tool for future planning and work and be the basis of a church handbook which will be kept updated. We also hope that it will inform the congregation about the practicalities of church life and, as part of the

annual stewardship exercise that will start soon, encourage them to consider new ways in which they could offer their time and talents. We commend it to you and are happy to discuss any aspect of it.

It is customary at the end of the wardens' report to thank individuals who have made a contribution to the practical running of the church. This year, we think the 'Roles and Responsibilities' document says it all – when you sit down and think through precisely what happens to make St Mark's function as a church and as a community, you realise that there are so many people who serve in so many ways, some very visibly but most not, some regularly and others giving time as and when they are needed in a surprising range of roles, contributing a huge range of gifts and skills. We thank them all and feel very privileged to serve alongside them.

Louise Wills & Joy Bennett, Church Wardens

District Church Council

The DCC has met five times in the last year to discuss items ranging from the very practical, such as the replacement of a faulty lock on the main door or how to deal with the organ's irritating hum, to the spiritual, such as how to share the gospel with those in our local community who have no contact with St Mark's.

Yet again, a huge amount has been achieved on the practical side by the Wardens and Fabric Committee who have brought their proposals to the DCC for discussion and approval. This work is detailed in the 'Report on the Fabric, Fixtures, Fittings and Furniture' on page 3 of this document.

At its final meeting of the DCC year, the council discussed the Wardens' excellent document 'Running St Mark's – Roles and Responsibilities' which is included with the AGM papers. It also received and discussed the recommendations from a specially formed working group on preparing for the General Data Protection Regulation which will come into force on 25th May this year.

At each meeting, reports were received from whichever sub-committees had met since the last meeting of the DCC (Fabric, Mission, Pastoral and Bereavement, Communications and Publicity, Worship) and from the PCC, CTH and Uniformed Groups via our representatives on those bodies.

One of the main tasks of the DCC is to make decisions on spending. The Treasurer's report is, of course, a standing item on the agenda and the decisions taken by the DCC over the year will be seen in the financial statements presented to the AGM.

A further DCC task is to set in motion the process of seeking the necessary diocesan permissions for introducing new items into church whether the items have a purely practical purpose, such as the stainless steel 'cups' which have made the lectern much easier to move, or whether they are items which will enhance worship such as the wooden cross and candle stand for the side altar given in memory of Philip Chamberlain or the 2 silver patens for the 10am service given in memory of Harry Gibbs.

Both Safeguarding and our Mission Action Plan (MAP) continue to be standing DCC agenda items. A separate Safeguarding report is now also a standing item on the AGM agenda and immediately follows this report. Our MAP will be reviewed this year but to the 2 goals which were implemented last year, the introduction of an informal evening service, which now takes place quarterly, and the delivery each week of prayer cards to one or two streets in our parish, we have been able to add the furthering of relations with people living in care homes or sheltered housing; in addition to our long-established link with Westmill Lawns we have also established links with Westbourne Lodge and Nightingale Day Centre. Two of our main MAP priorities were 'To serve our community and to show we care' and 'To provide flexible ways for people to learn more about faith' and the DCC has been pleased to approve two exciting new developments this year which seek to realise these priorities namely Messy St Mark's at Oughton School and the introduction of Alpha courses.

Correspondence is another standing item on the DCC agenda and usually doesn't merit a specific mention in an annual report but, to the Council's surprise and delight, November's correspondence brought a very generous £1000 cheque from Hitchin Christian Centre who wanted to support St Mark's work in sharing the

Christian message with those who live in our parish. The DCC warmly welcomed the Vicar's proposal that this money be used to establish a designated fund for outreach.

Each year, four members of the DCC come to the end of their three-year stint; this year we say good-bye to Carol Fishlock, Gill Hadden, Michael Orton and Emma Sullivan and also to Sandra Stokes who is not seeking re-election as our PCC representative. We are grateful to them all for their contributions during their time on the council.

This means we come to the AGM seeking 4 new council members and a new PCC representative. Anyone who decides to step into one of these places can be assured they can look forward to interesting discussions as members of this very positive and supportive council.

Deirdre Parr, DCC Secretary

Safeguarding

Current measures in place

1. We have policies for keeping children and vulnerable adults safe which have been discussed and approved by the DCC within this year.
2. All those who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults on a regular basis have been checked via the DBS process. Records are kept by the church's Safeguarding Officer, Pauline Banks, to ensure that individual's DBS checks do not become out of date.
3. The parents or carers of all children and young people who access our activities are required to complete a form with emergency details and to give permission (or not) for photos and videos to be taken of their child for social media, church website etc. Separate permission is requested for each form of media.
4. Safeguarding Officers, those who work with children, young people or vulnerable adults, church wardens and DCC members are required to undertake the diocesan safeguarding training every three years, which is both an on-line course and a face-to-face training session (DCC members only have to do the on-line training). The Safeguarding Officer has kept a record of who has attended the training and the date that they will need to be re-trained.
5. All clergy and Readers undertake separate training every three years, as well as the on-line training.
6. Posters highlighting the need for people to be vigilant regarding safeguarding, along with details of the safeguarding officer, are displayed in the church and the hall.
7. The Safeguarding Officers and clergy across the parish meet together, along with the Safeguarding Officers and clergy of St Paul's Walden and Preston, twice a year, to ensure that actions needed with regard to safeguarding are taking place and to support those who take on this important role within our churches.
8. A register of those who have current DBS checks and of those who have undertaken the training is presented to the church's AGM and to the Parishes APCM annually. (See page 8)

Actions which need to be taken or check have been taken

1. A 'Domestic Abuse' Policy needs to be adopted by the DCC and PCC this year.
2. Those who have not yet completed the safeguarding training to do so. Assistance, if needed, to access the on-line training or booking on the face to face training to be offered by the Safeguarding Officer.
3. New members of the DCC (elected at the AGM) to undertake the on-line training.

Jane Mainwaring

List of St Mark's members with DBS, Deanery/Online Training

| Name | Current enhanced DBS | Deanery Training | Online Training |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Marie Polley | X | X | |
| Spencer Polley | X | | |
| Ben Mellersh | X | X | |
| Val Chamberlain | X | X | X |
| Ann Brown | X | | |
| Sandra Stokes | X | X | X |
| Linda Nunn | X | X | |
| Deena Jenkins | X | | X |
| Louise Wills | X | X | X |
| Gail Young | X | X | X |
| Gail Litterick | X | X | |
| Jane Kutowaroo | X | X | |
| Ann Wakefield | X | X | |
| Naomi Morris | X | | |
| Mark Lally | X | | |
| Clare Redd | X | X | |
| Maggie Mellersh | X | X | |
| Glenda Darby | X | | X |
| Philippa Lally | X | | |
| Pam Davies | X | X | |
| Mike Davies | X | X | |
| Patricia Jeffrey | X | | |
| Rachel Stone | X | X | |
| Edward Stone | X | X | |
| Valerie Conetta | X | X | |
| Helen Richardson | X | X | |
| John Richardson | X | | X |
| Andrew Parr | X | | X |
| Judy Page | Renewal due | X | |
| Pauline Banks | Renewal due | X | |
| Melvyn Redd | | X | |
| Tracey Higginbotham | | X | X |
| Louise Wills | | X | X |
| Peter Watson | | | X |
| Frances Fisher | | | X |
| Michael Orton | | | X |
| Kate Goodwin | | | X |
| Carol Fishlock | | | X |
| Gill Hadden | | | X |
| Deirdre Parr | | | X |
| Daphne Wakefield | | | X |

Curate's Remarks

After some years of failing to do so, I am writing my first Curate's Remarks in what is my final year of training. In many respects I can't quite believe how quickly the time has gone, especially considering I took an additional year for maternity leave. On the other hand, St Mark's congregation are now our family and I feel as if we have always been here. But this is not my goodbye letter, so I shall save my 'thank yous' (and no doubt tears!) for that.

It has been the most extraordinary four years. I feel that, with the help and support of all at St Mark's, but particularly Jane, Andrew and John, I have grown and changed considerably during that time. My experience of the church, and my understanding of God, has radically expanded, and I am grateful beyond words for that. Coming from a charismatic evangelical background, I initially found St Mark's to be completely out of my comfort zone. Therein lies the blessing of this placement. I have learned so much more than I ever would have done staying in my own context and I would recommend changing traditions during your curacy to any one in my position. In fact, I would recommend it to anyone full stop. Getting out of your comfort zone and experiencing another facet of God's character is a deeply enriching experience, and good for the unity of the church.

During my time here, I have had the privilege of being involved in many aspects of church life, and I am so grateful to Jane for permitting me to get as involved as I have while protecting me as I learn and grow. The initial hurdle was learning how to lead worship on Sundays in this particular context. Having led worship in my own context in large settings, it was humbling, and very good for me to go right back to basics and (in the early days) stumble my way through services! Thank you for your patience with me. It has been a real joy to follow the liturgical year through more closely than I was used to. Walking the journey of Christ's life through the course of the year is not something I had ever done before and it has been a wonderful experience. There are so many things from my time at St Mark's I will be taking with me in ministry.

One of the greatest joys I have had during my time here has been my involvement with the Daytime Fellowship group. We started out as a small group of four or five ladies and have over the years welcomed many new members and lots of babies! The support we offer one another in prayer, exploring the Bible together, and in practical ways has been such a blessing to me. I have also enjoyed leading the Hot Chocolate Club through two Youth Alpha courses and many, many Sunday evening chats over... hot chocolate of course. Attending the confirmation service of three of our members while 40 weeks pregnant with Will is one of my happiest memories of my time here.

I have loved being involved in Little Lions and welcoming my own two babies to that group and watching them grow there, sharing tales of sleep-deprived woe with fellow sufferers. It has been a privilege to be involved in the In Loving Memory services, and, of course, Easter and Christmas services.

Latterly I have been hugely impacted by Messy Church and the power it has to reach outside our church walls and into the community. It is a huge act of love and service to the very people we wish to impact with the good news of Jesus. It is, without doubt, something I intend to take with me into my future ministry.

As many of you know, I am an 'Alpha-Baby', having come to faith in Christ on a course at HTB in 2004. Prior to coming to St Mark's, I have seen the impact and life-changing potential this course has (not least on me!) and so was absolutely delighted when Jane asked me to run it here. Our first course was attended by 7 guests, all of whom stayed for the duration of the course, and some of the feedback forms I have received have been very encouraging. We launched two new courses on 23rd January, with 13 guests registered at time of writing. What I find most exciting is that 6 of these guests are entirely from outside the church.

I shall say no more for now but know how grateful I am to you all for all that you have done to make the above possible.

Jeni McQuaid

Committees reporting to the District Church Council

Communications and Publicity Group

The group was set up in January 2006 with the overall aim and objective of exploring how best we could improve the communications with regard to church activities/functions etc. for our congregation and the wider community and, in particular, to improve the quality of the church website and the use of FaceBook/Twitter accounts, making them relevant and above all user-friendly.

Although we reported at our November 2013 meeting that we believed we had, to a large extent, achieved this outcome, we agreed to meet on an annual basis to review communications.

It was noted at our last meeting on 2nd November 2017 that Deirdre Parr was standing down in her capacity as co-ordinator of the weekly church news sheet. The group expressed their thanks to Deirdre. The post has been taken up by Tricia Reed who was warmly welcomed to the meeting.

Pauline Banks, Chair, St Mark's Communication and Publicity Group

Mission Committee

The main responsibility of the Mission Committee is to propose what mission and charitable organisations the church should support, using 10% of its central giving and any special appeals.

Its recommendations for the amounts to be given in 2017 from central giving, all agreed by the DCC, were as follows:

| | |
|---|-------|
| International mission agencies | £ |
| - Church Mission Society (CMS) | 750 |
| - United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG) | 750 |
| Local organisations | £ |
| - Churches Together in Hitchin (CTH) | 220 |
| - Keech Cottage Hospice | 220 |
| - The Living Room – drug rehabilitation centre | 220 |
| - Herts Young Homeless | 220 |
| - Ormiston Families – Bedford Prison | 220 |
| - Asylum seeker befrienders, Yarls Wood | 220 |
| - Triangle Community Garden | 220 |
| - Toilet Twinning | 180 |
| - PHASE – Hitchin Churches Schools Worker Project | 2,200 |
| - Assigned for new or emergency needs | 170 |

The 2017 Lent Appeal was devoted to *Healing Syria's wounds* and £1,481 was raised for the work of Médecins sans Frontières among Syrian refugees in Syria itself and in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

The Committee was sorry to say good-bye to one of its faithful members, Patricia Livings, on her family's move to Hexham. A replacement would be welcome!

As always, the Mission Committee is grateful for the ways in which the St Mark's congregation responds so generously to the many needs that confront us.

John Richardson

Pastoral/Bereavement Groups

a. Pastoral Group

2017 has been another eventful year for your Pastoral Group, serving to keep a watching brief on the life of St Mark's people. We warmly welcome our newest member, Pat Jeffrey, who has also joined the Visiting Scheme. New members always welcome! (Speak to Jane or Mike Davies)

We hope that, in conjunction with the other church groups, we have been able to make any newcomers feel welcomed into the family of St Mark's. As in other years, we again must stress that we need the commitment of the whole congregation in this important welcoming role. Your help is pivotal to our success.

Our Pastoral outreach continues with our support of the Christmas project 'Somewhere to Go' for the homeless (presents from the congregation) and also of the North Herts Sanctuary; again this year, the Harvest non-perishables and the Christmas hamper were given to this very worthy cause. This report gives us the opportunity of saying a big 'thank you' to all at St Mark's who so generously support these ventures each year. Our Hitchin Sanctuary link person is Helen Richardson who also co-ordinates the Taxi Rota.

We receive news of many who are ill and/or housebound as well as those in hospital. As far as possible we try to follow up all those we hear about but we stress again we need the help of you all to ensure that we do not miss anyone. To assist this process, we rely on the church 'prayer sheet', where people requesting prayers for individuals, are asked to fill in the 'requested by' column, enabling the Prayer Co-ordinator, Judy Page, to contact you with regard to any follow-up which may be needed. Please do help Judy by continuing to respond in this way.

On the 4th Sunday of the month, we continue to print in the weekly newsletter those named on our 'continue to pray for' list, and you will have also noticed that there is a 'Prayer Tree' where prayers can be written on leaves and then placed on the tree; both the list and the Prayer Tree can be used in your own personal prayers. The Prayer Tree leaves are taken to the altar and are blessed monthly.

In February 2017, we commenced a home visiting project for people (at present 7) who receive a fortnightly visit. We have seven additional members of our congregation who assist the pastoral group to carry out these visits. (15 visitors in total.) New volunteers would be welcome and would enable us to extend the visits to others. (Contact Val Conetta or Mike Davies.)

Six members from the Pastoral/Bereavement Group assist Jane (Vicar) and Andrew Parr (Reader) to administer home communions. This has also helped us to maintain contact with those who have been unable to attend church.

Val Conetta continues to co-ordinate the Care Scheme and sends out appropriate cards and flowers to the sick etc. Again, this will only work provided we get the necessary information.

Members continue to support the monthly communion service at Westmill Lawns residential home. This is held on the first Thursday of each month, and special services are held there at festival times, e.g. Carol Service and Harvest. We also support the newly-introduced Carol singing at Westbourne Lodge and Nightingale House Day Centre. It would be great to see more members of St Mark's family at these events, which are very rewarding and really appreciated by the residents.

Pastoral Group membership: Pam and Mike Davies, Val Conetta, Judy Page, Jane Kutowaroo, Gail Litterick, Val Chamberlain, Helen Richardson.

b. Bereavement Visitors Group

As many of you will know, St Mark's has a group of bereavement visitors, who follow up the families of all funerals conducted by the staff of St Mark's and will also follow up those funerals taken elsewhere if the families live in our parish. Visitors make contact and offer a visit, some just one off, others requiring further follow-up. We presently have a total of seven active visitors. Sadly we have had to say goodbye to Linda Nunn who will soon be moving from the district. We wish her well and give thanks for her contribution to the group. Visitors can make the decision to have time out when required.

To assist the visit, visitors are given client information sheets and, where possible, a copy of the funeral eulogy. This enables our visitors to be more informed prior to their contact/visit with the bereaved person. The visitor also issues a 'Bereavement Support Booklet' to the bereaved; this gives helpful information including the Memorial Service details. These initiatives, we believe, enable us to feel more confident in our role, and allow

those being visited to understand what we are able to offer in the way of support during this difficult period. (There are also several contact numbers of outside organisations, which they might like to make use of.)

Bereavement Visitors are able to follow a training programme of topics related to loss, grief and bereavement, which they are encouraged to request. We hold group support meetings five times a year. This enables us to cross-fertilise experiences and adds to our knowledge base, equipping us with the necessary skills to carry out our role effectively and thereby helping the bereaved through this difficult time.

The annual Memorial Service, held on the last Sunday in **June**, to which our visitors invite all those contacted during the year, continues to serve a very positive need and fosters a feeling of belonging in those often very vulnerable members of our community. It is particularly rewarding to see so many of the families returning each year. It is good to see that this service continues to meet a real need. This year's Memorial Service will be held on Sunday, 24th June, at 6.30pm with tea being served beforehand. More details later in the year.

As always, our grateful thanks are extended to Ivan Page who fixes the plaques onto the memorial plinths. The memorial book continues to have names added and we are grateful to Michael Orton who maintains this book. We also appreciate the work that Peter Russell does to keep the Memorial Garden looking so special. Those visiting and using the memorial garden seat, which affords them the opportunity to quietly sit and reflect in very peaceful surroundings, welcome this.

We also support Jane at the two Chenery's 'In Loving Memory' memorial services held at St Mark's in January and February each year.

Bereavement Visitors: Pam and Mike Davies, Austin Smith, Val Chamberlain, Gail Litterick, Jane Kutowaroo and Helen Richardson

New: We now have a group photograph of the Pastoral and Bereavement visitors displayed on the notice board at the rear of the church, which enables the congregation to more easily identify the visitors.

On behalf of the Pastoral/Bereavement Groups, I thank you for your help and support throughout 2017.

Mike Davies, Co-ordinator, Pastoral/Bereavement Group

Worship Committee

The Worship Committee has worked with the Vicar to plan the pattern of services at St Mark's over the past year. It has been particularly involved in the following:

- Helping to arrange services for Holy Week, Easter, St Mark's Day, Harvest, Remembrance, Christ the King, Advent and Christmas
- Continuing to support informal services on Sunday evenings
- Welcoming further 'In Loving Memory' services organised by Chenery's
- Encouraging a series of sermons on 'calling to ministry'
- Rejoicing with Austin Smith on the 50th anniversary of his ordination
- Identifying new people to help in services – servers, intercession leaders, readers and eucharistic assistants
- Acquiring new numbers for the hymn board – particular thanks to Michael Walters
- Preparing large print versions of individual service orders
- Helping in the provision of a silver paten in memory of Harry Gibbs and a new side altar cross and candle-stand in memory of Philip Chamberlain
- Continuing prayer ministry at the end of services
- Underlining the need to welcome newcomers to St Mark's services

The Committee gives thanks that attendances at Sunday services are more than for many years. It believes that the quality of the worship is a key factor in this growth and it looks forward to maintaining this in the coming year.

John Richardson

All other St Mark's Reports

Alpha

St Mark's launched its first ever adult Alpha course on 19 September. Alpha is an opportunity to explore the meaning of life, to ask all the questions you have never had the opportunity to ask such as 'what is the historical evidence Jesus lived, died and rose again?' and 'where is God when we're suffering?'. The course was attended, beginning to end, by all 7 guests. There was a real sense of growing friendships and open exploration together as a group. One guest commented on their feedback form 'now I know I belong'.

On the basis of the success of last term, this year we are running two courses in the spring term, a daytime course and an evening course. At the time of writing, (mid-January) there are 11 guests signed up, and I look forward to starting this coming Tuesday. We have been talking about the possibility of building bridges between Messy Church and Alpha as a long-term goal.

Jeni McQuaid

Baptisms

In June 2017, Linda Sandy took a well-deserved retirement from both baptism visiting and co-ordinating the team of visitors. St Mark's owes her a debt of gratitude for her many years of visiting and co-ordinating and I am personally grateful to Linda for her very helpful handover. I am also grateful to the team of experienced visitors, Gill Hadden, Joy Hukin and Gail Young who have ensured families have received a visit before the baptism and who have then been in church on the day to welcome the baptism party. I am grateful, too, to Anne Watson who has joined the team as a welcomer and has been able to stand in if a visitor is unable to be at the service.

At the time of writing, the team has just met with Jane to plan a 'Celebration of Baptism' to take place on 18th March and to which all the families who have had baptisms in the years 2015 to 2017 will be invited. The celebration will take the form of a short service followed by drinks and cake in the hall.

In the year since the last AGM, Jane and Jeni between them have baptised 16 children with most of the baptisms taking place outside the regular Sunday morning service. For many of the baptism families and their friends this service represents a rare contact with church so the welcome they receive is very important. For Jane and Jeni it is very useful to have an additional pair of hands to help with the logistics of the service. We'd be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to join the team either as a visitor or a welcomer. Please talk to any of any of us in the team or to Jane if you feel this is something you would like to do or if you would simply like more information.

Deirdre Parr, Baptism Co-ordinator

Bible Reading Fellowship

We remain a small group committed to using the Bible Reading Notes which are sent three times a year. These notes help each of us to spend a short time daily (or as often as we can manage) reading and reflecting on God's word. It is surprising how personal and moving these readings and reflections can be. I am grateful to my fellow readers for their continued support and for keeping me motivated. Bible Reading Notes can also be emailed or sent to your mobile phone. If you think you might be interested, please have a word with me.

Karin Dodds

Children's and Young People's Groups

a. Sunday Groups

We have 4 teams providing activities for young people on Sunday mornings: Crèche (until the children choose to join Sunday School), Sunday School (up to the end of Year 2 (6-7 year olds), Pathfinders (Years 3-6/ages 7-11) and Travellers (Year 7 up). The Crèche and Sunday School run in the church hall and the Pathfinders and

Travellers go to the Vicarage. We use resources from Scripture Union which provide a structure and ideas for each week, for the relevant age groups, making planning a manageable task for our leaders.

We'd all like to say a big 'thank you' to all those who are on the rotas for these groups. If anyone feels that they would like to get involved with any of these age groups, please contact Maggie, Pippa, Mark or Spencer. We have had a few people step back this year and could really benefit from some extra pairs of hands. It's lots of fun and, with the materials provided, doesn't take too long to prepare.

Crèche (Co-ordinated by Maggie Mellersh)

We currently have 5 helpers in crèche - Anne Watson stepped down from the rota last summer, but Emma Sullivan has just joined us, which is good news. The numbers of children vary, but there are usually 4 or 5 each week, and some of the slightly older children move between crèche and Sunday School. Many parents stay with their children but welcome the opportunity to go back into the service, if their child is happy to stay in crèche with the helper.

Sunday School (Co-ordinated by Pippa Lally)

The Sunday School rota is arranged so that there is one person who leads the session and another adult who helps them. This allows time for two different activities to be run simultaneously when we have a wide age range attending. The sessions usually involve a bible story, prayers, craft and often singing and dancing. Our leaders plan different and interesting ways to explain ideas. We are very happy for parents to stay with their children if they feel that they need to but, equally, are delighted when the children become confident enough to join in without their parents. Many of the children move between Crèche and Sunday School, often joining us when we do our craft activities. Our primary aim is to make the children feel welcome and to teach them that church is a fun, safe space for them to play and learn. We try to convey simple messages about God's love for them and pray for one another when the children share times of happiness, sadness, apprehension or celebration.

Pathfinders (Co-ordinated by Mark Lally)

Pathfinders continues to be a quiet success. It is a privilege to be able to teach young people of this age as it is amazing to see them develop so fast and to be able to help them advance their understanding of the bible and what it means to be a Christian.

The material we use is a blessing as it provides a wealth of varied activities for each week and means that preparation time is kept to a minimum which helps Rachel and me to be able to squeeze this into our busy schedules. If anybody would like to join us in helping out, please speak to either Rachel Drury or me.

Travellers (Co-ordinated by Spencer Polley)

We have a small group at Travellers at the moment, comprising the regulars of the two Alexs, Ben and me. We have stuck faithfully to the subjects in the Grid magazine, covering a variety of books in the Old and New Testaments, all of which are made relevant to situations you can find yourself in today. The topics covered boil down to two essentials, how we live our lives in a God-centred manner and how we interact with those around us. The context that these questions are framed in includes questions such as, 'What do we think is important in life, power, money, status, security or self-worth?', 'What do we want others to think about us?' and 'How would we help friends, acquaintances, or even strangers who look like they are in trouble?'. These are usually introduced in a fun way such as building a house of cards (which I'm sure I was much better at as a kid or maybe cards generate significantly less friction nowadays) doing a dramatic reading or having a role play situation. Overall, I'm always amazed by how relevant they manage to make even the Old Testament reflect upon modern life and that's no mean feat since I'm sure it never looked relevant when I was younger!

Hot Chocolate Club

We continue to meet on a Sunday evening and support one another in fellowship and prayer and in the drinking of hot chocolates with all the trimmings. Rather than focusing on a particular study programme this term, we have decided to take each week at a time and respond to the needs of the group particularly as the exam years begin in earnest!

Jeni McQuaid

b. Weekday Group

The Group With No Name

This group has remained strong throughout the year, with a good proportion of members coming from outside our church congregation. We always welcome young people from year 4 upwards. We meet twice a month on a Thursday. We have a solid programme of activities to provide relief and relaxation as an antidote to the pressures and rules of school life. We rotate around having an art workshop, physical activity, junk modelling and creative stuff, games, cooking (followed quickly by eating) and always some time to check in with our precious young people. This year has seen some of our members journey on to secondary school, but still come to GWNN...which we consider a real sign of success. We end each session with prayer, as our way of ensuring God fits into our evening somehow, at some point. As we have 16 young people on our books, we ask for a £5 donation per term which ensures we cover the costs of resources needed for activities. We would like offer our gratitude and thanks to Clare who has been helping out in the kitchen and to Frances who masterfully runs the art workshops. We also welcomed Caroline who led a yoga workshop to get the young people stretching and relaxing. A final 'thank you' to Edward who continues to support GWNN with every meeting, and also to Susie Murray and Farah Thompson from St Mary's church who also alternate at being adult leaders.

Marie Polley

Fellowship/Study Groups

There are currently four groups catering for the needs of as many of the congregation as possible. The function of the groups is partly to form and cement friendships among members and partly to engage in study and discussion either of scripture or of topics of concern to Christians.

Daytime Fellowship Group

This year we have sadly said goodbye to Patricia Livings; she will be much missed. We have been delighted to welcome Beckie Barlow and Amber, and Sulu Nuwell, Ferne and Jonty to our group. It continues to be a noisy, busy, meeting but with a real depth of friendship, study and discussion. We have been focusing in particular on how to hear God's voice, and the group led the family service in January.

Jeni McQuaid

Exploring Christianity with Croissants and Coffee

Our Exploring Christianity group meets on Saturday mornings during the autumn and spring terms, usually meeting six times each term. We begin with coffee and pains aux chocolats, plus some fruit for the more health-conscious amongst us (or indeed for those who need both!), and we then spend an hour or so using the Pilgrim course material produced by the Church of England. In the autumn of 2017 we looked at The Eucharist, and during the spring term this year we are looking at the Creeds. One of the advantages of using the Pilgrim material is that all the reflections are in a book which everyone has, so if people can't make a week, then they can catch up on their own. We will be taking a break for the summer term, but then will resume in the autumn. New people are always welcome to come and join us. Please contact Jane for more details.

Jane Mainwaring

Tuesday Evening Fellowship Group

Our ecumenical house group is still going strong, covering a diverse range of teaching material. We have recently finished a DVD from Jeff Lucas ('who else?' you might well think since he seems to pop up in every report I write) covering the prophet Elijah – 'A prophet at loss.' This very interesting series of four video clips followed by group discussion covered the very colourful life of Elijah including alternating despair and triumph in his dealings with Ahab and Jezebel, being fed by ravens, a never-ending pot of oil, killing 400 prophets of Baal and railing against his lot in life to God. There was certainly never any shortage of discussion following these sessions! We have now started a Scripture Union course on the 'I am' sayings of Christ, very challenging and provocative in their own way. We meet at 8pm in our house at 19 Wilbury Way on the first and third Tuesday of every month for an informal chat, drinks and cake, and then the bible study. We aim to finish about

9.30 so that people can get off home at a reasonable time but sometimes there's so much to discuss we don't quite manage that. There is always space for more people if anyone is looking for a Tuesday night house group, so if this report has piqued your fancy be sure to have a chat with Marie, Frances, Edward or me about the group and feel free to come along and join in.

Spencer Polley

Thursday Evening Fellowship Group

Our group has maintained a fairly regular pattern of twice-monthly meetings (on the first and third Thursdays), taking breaks over the summer and at Christmas. We meet at 7.30pm (aiming to finish at 9.30pm) currently at Gail Litterick's home, for coffee/tea, cake or biscuits and a chat before settling to our study topic.

We have spent several sessions doing bible studies on the first few chapters of Luke's gospel. We also spent some time considering the miracles of Jesus and on whether we thought the devil existed or not! Most recently, we have started reading Rowan Williams' short book *Being Disciples*, a challenging task but a thought-provoking one.

We have also held two social evenings during the year and continue to place great importance on fostering the friendships we have been building up for many years.

We are always ready to welcome new members, whether on a trial basis to see whether they like us and what we do, or to be really bold and commit straight away.

Andrew Parr

Flower Arrangers

Diane and Joy have enjoyed another year of organising the flower arrangements and rotas and want to thank all members of the flower team. It's a special time in Advent leading up to Christmas and in Lent leading up to Easter when just greenery is arranged in the pedestals. The team gets together on the Saturday morning prior to whichever celebration and transforms all the pedestals with beautiful flowers of the chosen colours. Thank you, Jane, for the very welcome cups of tea and coffee for our breaks on these occasions.

If anyone would like to join us, you would be very welcome. You don't have to be an expert – just enjoy the beauty that can be created. We all work differently with our arrangements and give confidence to those who need help and advice.

Very grateful thanks to all those who have generously donated money to the flower fund in memory of loved ones.

Joy Hukin and Diane Porter

Little Lions Baby and Toddler Group

Little Lions toddler group meets between 9:30 and 11:15am on the first and third Friday of every month. We also meet throughout the school holidays, for those parents with pre-school children. Our gatherings start with a play session, followed by refreshments and then songs and nursery rhymes chosen by the children.

Numbers throughout the year have averaged 10 adults plus children, some adults having two or more children. We have lost a few children to nursery this September, so numbers are a lot lower than they have been in the past. As it was getting very crowded at some sessions, this has made it a lot more comfortable, especially during the winter months when we don't spread out into the church due to the cold.

We continue to charge fifty pence per family, with all profits going to St Mark's Church, either to contribute towards the facilities we use, or helping to fund new purchases. Our profit at the end of October was £180 after purchasing a new indoor trampoline and replacing some of the older toys. This includes additional income from Phoenix cards sales during the year.

It still remains a very friendly, informal gathering; the Mums (and Dads) are happy to help tidy up and hand out the teas and biscuits during refreshments. A big 'thank-you' to Daphne Wakefield (the biscuit lady) for continuing to provide the drinks and biscuits, and for washing up all the kiddie cups afterwards.

Sadly, after helping to run Little Lions for about 8 years, it was my last one in October, as I have started working on Friday mornings. I shall miss getting to know all the new parents and children but am happy to leave the singing to Jane's and Jeni's more tuneful voices!

Deena Jenkins

Messy St Mark's

Last October, we launched Messy St Mark's, a version of Messy Church, for families at Oughton Primary and Nursery School. We are running once each half term, straight after school. In October, we themed Messy St Mark's around Harvest, in December we looked at the Christmas story and in February we took the theme of Joseph and his multi-coloured coat. We begin with squash and cake and then have a story from the Bible and singing before heading into the school hall for a series of craft activities based around the story. In October we had no idea how many people would come, if any, so were bowled over when 114 people turned up! It was manic, to put it mildly! We adapted things for the next session which was much calmer and more enjoyable for everyone with 76 and 66 people coming for the second two sessions. Slightly smaller numbers have meant that we can have conversations with the children and adults rather than just managing chaos! We have seen lots of families come back for return visits which has meant that gradually relationships can be built. This is the very first step to introducing the Christian faith to people. The planning team is conscious that it must not just become an after-school craft club, but that gradually we must enable people to explore faith at a deeper level through things like Alpha etc. For now, I am very grateful for all those who have taken this great leap of faith with me, not quite knowing how it would work out. We have a growing team of people who help in all sorts of ways from planning to publicity, from baking to cutting up endless bits of card! We also have a big team of people who help on the day. If you'd like to get involved in any way do let me know as there's always room for more! Finally, thank you to everyone who has prayed for Messy St Mark's. It makes all the difference!

Jane Mainwaring

Music at St Mark's

a. The Choir

No new members have joined us during this year but the Director of Music (DM), – for thus he has been described in a recent DCC document! – is, as ever, very grateful for the loyalty, hard work and patience of the choir who achieve very creditable standards on no more than an hour's rehearsal per week. Without wishing to do other than celebrate the longevity of our membership, it is a fact that our average age rises by one year every year and we really do need some new blood. We realize that the choir demands a commitment which, unlike many church activities, means attending a practice every Wednesday evening for an hour and this may not fit easily with work and family pressures. However, we would welcome anyone who can sing in tune and wishes to participate in any of the specific services, most notably those at the two major festivals of Christmas and Easter. This would allow them to give a finite block of time rather than the whole year.

Singing in groups is not only a wonderful experience but is one of the most beneficial activities for both mental and physical health as has been recently reported. Why not give it a try for a few months? Just speak to the 'DM'.

The year has been much as previous ones in most respects. At the request of Bishop Michael, we put on an additional Taizé service in March 2017 as a taster for young people from the diocese contemplating going to Taizé itself on a pilgrimage with him in July. It was good to have additional instrumental contributions from Naomi Morris (violin), Garvin Wills (cello) and James Mainwaring (flute). A visiting cantor provided extra choral colour since we do not usually include the solo lines in our services.

We continued to offer our SIX:30 service through the first half of the year but, while we had a small but loyal body of folk attending, from the musical point of view, once our two young singers, Megan and Kerry, had to concentrate on their GCSEs rather than help to lead the singing, we did not really have the number of people

singing nor the ensemble of instruments to match the style of the worship songs. We will keep trying on a quarterly basis but at the earlier time of 4pm, since our hope has been to draw in those who might appreciate a less formal worship style. None of this is to detract from the dedication and hard work of Marie Polley leading the singing nor, of course, the wonderful teaching, preaching and imaginative leading of Jane and Jeni.

Easter, the annual Memorial Service, Harvest, Remembrance, Advent, the Christmas Service of Lessons and Carols and the Midnight Communion all found the choir hard at work and singing well.

The DM's new song to celebrate 'Christ the King' was given its first outing on the last Sunday of the Christian Year.

At the time of writing our next Taizé awaits us on 28th January (season of Candlemas) and then, in a flash, Easter will be upon us, after which the DM is taking a three-month sabbatical from all church activities except Sunday services. He may even write some music!

Andrew Parr, Director of Music

b. St Mark's Music Group (a.k.a. church orchestra/band)

The Music Group has continued to play at family services, with varying numbers of players of different ages. We meet to set up and practise the music 45 minutes before the service. There are several adult members who play regularly and to whom I am very grateful for their support. We send our thanks and best wishes for the future to Linda Nunn who has enjoyed playing clarinet with us and took part in her final service in January before her house move. It is always nice when people who have moved on come back and join in so it was lovely to have Jamie Stockbridge playing his saxophone with us at the Christmas services.

New players are always very welcome; membership is open to all abilities. Music is arranged at a suitable level for the individual's knowledge and experience. As I write we look forward to Robyn Brett joining us to play her flute with the group for the first time. Do speak to me if you are interested in joining in.

Naomi Morris

Prayer Group

Our little prayer group tries to meet fortnightly on a Monday afternoon. Current members are Carol Fishlock, Frances Fisher, Joy Hukin, Valerie Hurlston, Jane Kutowaroo, Ann Peacock and Clare Redd. The group is very informal and we have discussed all manner of things to pray for. We still pray for people and situations that crop up and are of concern to us but our fellowship with each other also is key. We finish with the Grace, a cuppa and a chat. All are welcome to join us.

Clare Redd

Sacristan's Report

Once again, I would like to thank my fellow servers for all their help: Frances Fisher, Kerry Higginbotham, Joy Hukin, Ann Peacock, Diane Porter, Sue Prentice, Clare Redd, Paul Sandy and Alex Smith.

This year we have lost the services of Kerry (hopefully only temporarily) and I would like to thank her for her contribution. We hope that she will be back with us in the future. For all her time in laundering the altar cloths, another big 'thank you' to Diane Porter whom we welcome back as a server.

My final 'thank you' is to the eucharistic assistants, amongst whom we welcome back Gail Litterick after maternity leave.

I am looking forward to another successful 12 months of working with you all.

Melvyn Redd

The Tea and Coffee Fund

Another busy year has passed and it is good to see the hall and kitchen facilities continuing to be well used by our church family and the general public. The coffee money continues to fund the necessary provisions for the refreshments on Sundays as well as other services during the year. It also provides some sundry items

which, this year, have included a new kettle and cafetière, replacement mesh filters for the existing cafetières, a tray, a new lock and keys for the main entrance door and a lamp to be used with the organ and keyboard. Our teams of helpers on Sundays average three in number and duty is only one week in seven. We will always welcome new helpers, especially on busy weeks so, if you would like to join our happy band, I will be pleased hear from you. Perhaps you could help out on special occasions such as the Taizé services. Last, but not least, a big 'thank you' to our hardworking helpers for their loyalty and continued support. We could not enjoy our Sunday chats without you!

Judy Page

Thursday Group

2017 has been an excellent year for Thursday Group. Our attendances have once again numbered twenty plus at each meeting. The positive response towards our booked speakers and the various activities that the committee had arranged for the year was very encouraging. In particular, a visit by Lois Palmer from the Medau Movement (a form of light exercise to music) proved very popular and a return visit has been arranged for October. We have supported several charities and also made a donation to St Mark's flower fund. Grateful thanks once again to Val Chamberlain for her dry flower demonstration and workshop. Our programme is planned during autumn when we invite members to give us suggestions, ideas etc. and this allows us to respond to a variety of topics. New members are very welcome and we always have time to chat over a hot drink. Thank you to all who have supported us during 2017 and we look forward to our 2018 meetings, details of which can be seen on the notice board in the church hall.

Val Conetta, Treasurer

Uniformed Groups

Beavers, Cubs, Scouts

5th Hitchin has continued to do well this year with the usual great efforts from our leadership team and exec team. We are currently at full complement of leaders with Deborah back as assistant cub and assistant scout leader and with a new assistant beaver leader. The three sections continue to provide an amazingly varied programme for the young people and it is good to see that all three sections are always at full complement. The scouts continue to do their four camps a year, including the now regular Group Family Camp which has proved to be very popular, bringing together young people from all three sections with members of their family and totalling seventy odd people at this one camp over one weekend. A big 'thank you' to everyone who has helped out over the last year.

Mark Lally, Group Scout Leader

Brownies

We are very pleased to report that last term we had a new volunteer join our pack. Christina has since agreed to undergo leadership training and go into uniform. This is with the aim of her taking overall charge of the pack once qualified, as Carole hopes to retire from leading at the end of the summer term after many valued years as Brown Owl.

We currently have 15 Brownies with Rainbows due to move up in the future. We may have to open a waiting list. Although we are well staffed with 4 adults we are trying to keep the pack numbers lower than maximum at about 16 girls to give Christina a chance to settle in and for us all to gel as a team; we may increase the numbers once future pack leadership is well-established.

We have had quite an exciting year at Brownies. The highlight for me personally was having some of the girls attend my wedding and be in my photographs after the service.

The girls have enjoyed writing to their pen pals in a Brownie pack in Ealing in London which is run by a friend of our unit helper, Joanne. They have exchanged badges with each other as well as Christmas cards and we hope to be meeting up with them on a day trip this year.

Our Brownies have enjoyed various outings in the last year to Pots of Art, Fabio's ice cream parlour and recently to Air Space Trampoline Park in Stevenage.

Another Pack meeting which was thoroughly enjoyed was when we had a visit from a live owl and his owner and the girls all got to hold the owl. This was part of the Wildlife Explorers badge that the girls had been working towards and also involved various outdoor activities such as looking at trees and making bark rubbings.

Emma Nuttall

Rainbows

Rainbows continues to be busy, with a full unit and a very long waiting list. This year, the girls have worked on challenge badges. They have done challenges such as the sea horse challenge, festivals, 'boost dem bones' and are currently working on a fairy badge. They enjoy adding new badges to their collections!

Several of the girls have been to church parades and the district Rainbow Carol Service was held at St Mark's. The girls looked lovely, dressed as characters from the nativity (mainly angels!). Some of the girls attended the Thinking Day craft afternoon and the Rainbow 30th birthday party.

At the moment, we have one leader and one leader-in-training. We are always on the lookout for more adult help which would enable us to take the girls out more and enable more girls to join.

Glenda Darby

Reports from beyond St Mark's

Parochial Church Council

The PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Team Rector and the other team clergy in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish of Hitchin the whole mission of the Church pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical. Each of the four churches in the parish - Holy Saviour, St Faith's, St Mark's and St Mary's - set its own objectives for the year.

During the past year we have welcomed The Hub Church into our team. The formal agreement is under a Bishop's Mission Order. Dan Drew, who is part time curate at St Mary's, is also leader of The Hub Church. Dan was priested in July 2017.

Also during the year, St Mary's has become a member of The Inclusive Church. The other churches are still discussing the possibility of joining this association.

Finance is always on our minds and much debated at our meetings. The Treasurer is Barry Smith. I am pleased to report the parish is up to date with its payments.

Sandra Stokes, St Mark's PCC Representative

Churches Together in Hitchin (CTH)

CTH continues to be a network of 17 churches which support each other in presenting the Gospel in our town. During the past year, Jane, our Vicar, has been its Chair and has particularly encouraged us to make good links with key people in our community. At CTH Council meetings, there have been presentations by a GP, a secondary school head-teacher, a local police officer and those involved in caring for the homeless. We have also strengthened our relations with the emergency planning team at North Herts District Council with a view to ensuring that churches are ready if there is a major disaster in our area.

Alongside this, initiatives which CTH helped to start have continued to serve the neighbourhood, especially the Foodbank, Street Angels, Christians Against Poverty and Phase. Newer projects have begun or are being considered, including the Miller's Café for those with life-changing illness, a town centre venture for young people, action to combat loneliness, and new ways of helping the homeless in our town.

One particular 'community' event organised by CTH was the General Election hustings in June, a lively gathering when six candidates and a 300 plus audience were kept in order by our friendly but alarmingly firm Vicar! Issues raised included support for education and the NHS, fair treatment for EU citizens in this country,

nuclear weapons, the green belt and the development (or non-development) of Hitchin Museum. Our new MP, Bim Afolami, was left in no doubt about the strength of feeling about these issues in the Hitchin part of his community and he requested a further conversation with CTH Council members, which was held in October at St Mark's – a quieter but very fruitful meeting.

Some other CTH things that have happened since the last St Mark's AGM

- Good Friday walk of witness and united service
- Christian Aid Week, raising over £16,000
- A Prayer Tree (prepared by Ann Wakefield) at the Holy Saviour Christmas Tree Festival
- Sadly – cancellation of Carols in the Market Place due to inclement weather
- 'Somewhere to go' at Christmas and New Year
- Pulpit exchanges during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- An uplifting united service at Our Lady's, also a reflective Taizé service at St Mark's in the following week
- An Ash Wednesday lunch for Christian Aid held at Our Lady's
- Lent groups based on *Fleeting Shadows* by Malcolm Duncan
- Women's World Day of Prayer service at the New Testament Church of God
- A CTH Prayer Link used in most churches Sunday by Sunday
- A youth and children's forum bringing together those involved in this important work
- A regular ministers' meeting

John Maguire of Tilehouse Street Baptist Church is the new CTH Chair and his emphasis is on 'bridging age gaps', helping young and older people understand and support each other.

A questionnaire has been circulated to gather data on this issue and we look forward to following up its results.

John Richardson continues as Secretary and Helen Richardson as Faith and Learning Officer. Alison Smith, John Skeeles and Anne Watson are our representatives to the Council but CTH Council meetings are open to all, the official reps only voting when there is something formal like the adoption of the accounts. All St Mark's members are welcome to attend and the Council meetings are usually good value!

John Richardson

Annual Report of The Hitchin Deanery Synod 2017

The Hitchin Deanery has seen significant change in Officer and Committee makeup in 2017. Mike Davies, Lay-chair for many years, stood down to be replaced at the Pirton meeting of the Synod by Neil Greatorex of St George's, Norton. Dorothy Grieves also stood down in May as Synod Secretary. The Rural Dean extends thanks and appreciation for the hard work both Mike and Dorothy have put in. The Deanery remained without a Secretary until September when Mike Kershaw of Holy Saviour, Hitchin, offered his services. Edmund Wood remains as Treasurer despite his wish to stand down - **to all Parishes, will anyone step up to up the plate and allow Edmond to retire?** Many new names joined the Synod as Parish representatives replacing many familiar old faces.

The format of the Synod meetings remained broadly the same as in previous years with opening prayers and worship and an open forum on topics relevant to the Church's ministry and mission and interaction with the community in which we operate. In 2017, there were open forum presentations on:

- **A Common Word – how far can Muslims and Christians go?** – Ali Sheriff and Austin Smith (North Herts Interfaith Forum)
- **Inclusive Church** – Mandy Brown (Holy Trinity, Bishop's Stortford)
- **How can the church respond to the spiritual needs of people living with Dementia** – Sue Stilwell (MHA Hatfield)

There was also a discussion about the success of the *Thy Kingdom Come* workshop '5 at 5' which was held in the Diocese between Ascension and Pentecost. A strong YES was the feedback. In 2018, the Rural Dean is keen

to see if the Synod meetings can be re-energised and be very much a forum for 'Living God's Love' and a meaningful place for Diocese to meet Parish and vice versa.

Safeguarding remains a key issue and the new requirements have been a source of considerable discussion during the year. For 2018 the changes to the Data Protection Act demand proper audits of all data sources currently or potentially to be held and consent sought from people held on various sources as required.

In terms of clergy, the vacancy in the Holwell/ Ickleford/ Pirton Benefice was filled by Revd Mary Fane de Salis and the Revd Trevor Sharp was appointed vicar for the Parish of Norton. Sadly, St. Paul's Letchworth fell into vacancy with the departure of Simon and Louise Moore. Dan Drew, part-time curate at St. Mary's Hitchin, and minister of the Hub Church, was ordained priest in July and in December his wife, Alex, gave birth to a baby daughter, Isla.

The treasurer, Edmund Wood, liaised with all parishes to achieve a Parish Share Factor Review. It was notable how constructive and reasonable all Parishes were in reaching a fair and appropriate conclusion.

The Rural Dean has been working hard to get the Parishes imagining about the 'Fantastic Church' concept as a key to the 2018 Deanery Mission Action Plan. The results of many meetings and 'blue sky' thinking should culminate in a hopefully uplifting Synod meeting on March 5th, 2018.

Bishop Michael is preparing to do a series of visits to parishes in the Deanery during 2018.

Mike Kershaw, Hitchin Deanery Synod Secretary

ST MARK'S CHURCH, HITCHIN - ANNUAL REPORT TO APCM – 2017/2018

Background

St. Mark's DCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, the Revd. Dr. Jane Mainwaring in promoting in the ecclesiastical district the whole mission of the church pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibility for St Mark's Church and Hall, St Mark's Close, Lancaster Avenue, Hitchin.

Membership

Members of the DCC are either ex officio or elected by the Annual Church Meeting in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. During the year the following served as members of the DCC.

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| <i>Team Vicar:</i> | The Revd. Dr. Jane Mainwaring | <i>Chair</i> |
| <i>Curate:</i> | The Revd. Jeni McQuaid | |
| <i>Readers:</i> | Mr Andrew Parr | <i>Lay Vice-Chair</i> |
| | Mr John Richardson | |
| <i>Wardens:</i> | Mrs Louise Wills | |
| | Mrs Joy Bennett | |
| <i>Elected Representatives on the PCC:</i> | Mrs Sandra Stokes | |
| <i>Elected Representatives on the Deanery Synod:</i> | Mrs Louise Wills | |
| | Mrs Gail Young | |
| <i>Treasurer</i> | Mr Jim Weist | <i>Co-opted as non-voting member until AGM 2018</i> |
| <i>Secretary:</i> | Mrs Deirdre Parr | |
| <i>Elected Members:</i> | Mrs Emma Sullivan | <i>Until AGM 2018</i> |
| | Mrs Carol Fishlock | <i>Until AGM 2018</i> |
| | Mrs Gill Hadden | <i>Until AGM 2018</i> |
| | Mr Michael Orton | <i>Until AGM 2018</i> |

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| Mrs Emma Greensted | <i>Until AGM 2019</i> |
| Mrs Deena Jenkins | <i>Until AGM 2019</i> |
| Mrs Deirdre Parr | <i>Until AGM 2019</i> |
| Mrs Daphne Wakefield | <i>Until AGM 2019</i> |
| Mrs Kate Goodwin | <i>Until AGM 2020</i> |
| Mrs Val Chamberlain | <i>Until AGM 2020</i> |
| Mrs Frances Fisher | <i>Until AGM 2020</i> |
| Mr Peter Watson | <i>Until AGM 2020</i> |

Committees

The DCC operates with responsibility delegated from Hitchin PCC, through a number of committees, which meet between full meetings of the DCC; Standing Committee, Worship Committee, Pastoral and Bereavement Visitors Committee, Mission Committee, Communications and Publicity Group, and Fabric Committee.

Church Attendance

There are ??? people on the Electoral Roll, representing ??? households. The average Sunday attendance in 2017 was 86 adults and 19 children and young people under 16.

Review of the Year

The full DCC met five times during the year. The various sub-committees met between full DCC meetings and minutes/reports of their deliberations were received at the latter and discussed where necessary.

Support and follow-up of the occasional offices has continued to be carried out by the bereavement visitors and the baptism visitors. During the year, St Mark's welcomed 20 people through baptism, celebrated 1 wedding, and held 4 funerals in church with an additional 18 funerals being conducted by clergy and Readers from St Mark's at crematoriums or the cemetery.

The Pastoral Committee, as always, maintained a watching brief on those within the congregation in need of pastoral care, while also continuing to support the North Herts Sanctuary and to maintain and develop its links with Westbourne Care Home and Westmill Lawns, including a monthly communion service at the latter. The Visiting Scheme, whereby a team of people make sure that the lonely or housebound are visited every two weeks, has continued this year and is enjoyed by recipients and visitors alike.

Our links with our local care homes and day centres were increased this year with a harvest and Christmas service being taken at the Nightingale Day Centre and a carol service at Westbourne Care Home.

The Worship Committee have planned the services marking the major festivals. The committee has also reviewed the church's worship following each major festival as well as discussing patterns of worship and congregational participation in more general terms. A second crib service was run on Christmas Eve in 2017 after the success of a pilot version in 2016. Our main Crib service remained full, whilst attendance at the second crib service, designed to be quieter and not so overwhelming for smaller children or children who don't cope well in big crowds, doubled.

The Mission Committee has continued to oversee the charitable giving made on behalf of the church, which aims to be 10% of our income. Charities, both local and international, are supported, with a major appeal for a particular charity in Lent. Additionally, the church's three toilet cubicles were each twinned with a toilet in a developing country where sanitation was urgently needed.

The Communication and Publicity Group met once in the year to review the effectiveness of communications, including the website, *Facebook* page and *Twitter* account.

The Fabric committee has continued to work with the Wardens to ensure the maintenance of the church and hall. The Church Wardens and Fabric Committee have continued to work to address the issues raised within

the quinquennial inspection report, with major external work having been carried out in May 2017. The majority of the day-to-day maintenance issues are seen to by the Assistant Fabric Wardens, providing a much-needed lifting of some of the workload which the church wardens have previously carried.

Staffing and officers have been consistent throughout the 12-month period, the church being served by the Vicar, the Curate, two Readers, and two Church Wardens, assisted by four Assistant Wardens. Revd Jeni McQuaid returned from maternity leave at the beginning of July. We have also been very grateful for the help of the Revd Austin Smith during the year. The Readers and clergy meet together each month to help planning, and also meet to study through a Theological Book Club. They also participate in the Wider Preaching Team bible studies from time to time. The Vicar and Wardens also meet each month. We have begun to meet quarterly as Wardens, Readers and clergy together to aid forward planning.

During the year, we have moved forward with our Mission Action Plan.

Our monthly informal evening service was reviewed this year and it was decided to change the service to become a quarterly event, with the addition of two Taizé services each year.

In the autumn we launched two new initiatives. Firstly, Messy St Mark's at Oughton Primary and Nursery School. This is a version of Messy Church which is running after school six times a year for the families at the school. The positive response and numbers attending took us all by surprise and we are continually learning and adapting from each experience. Secondly, in the autumn, we had our first Alpha course. This was well received and consequently, from January to March this year, we are running two courses, a daytime and an evening one.

Since September 2016, we have been delivering prayer cards to roads in our district with a promise to pray for those particular roads in the following week. The prayer cards also offer people the opportunity to request prayer for particular circumstances. Within 12 months, all houses had received a prayer card and, due to the positive response, the DCC felt that we should repeat this for a further year.

During the year, we have continued to nurture all age groups in the Christian faith, encouraging one another on our faith journeys through worshipping together on a Sunday morning and during the week, through Fellowship Groups and Prayer Groups. We have run various groups and activities to help children and young people to engage with the Christian faith at appropriate levels. During January and February, four young people have been preparing to receive communion.

Financially, St Mark's met all its commitments during the year. This was aided by the generous response of people to the annual renewal of giving as the substantial majority of our income is from pledged giving. St Mark's has no fabric fund and, therefore, we need to budget out of general income for buildings expenditure. The major external work carried out in May 2017 meant that we had to use some of our reserves to enable us to meet this expenditure.

Our strong links with our local schools continue, with involvement in Oughton Primary and Nursery School, Wilshere Dacre Junior School, Strathmore Infants' School and Pre-School, and York Road Nursery, with visits to the schools to give assemblies and RE lessons, to hear children read, and to provide support with governance. Pupils from the schools also visit the church for services and for RE sessions. One of the Readers led the three Remembrance assemblies at Hitchin Boys' School in November and is president of its Former Students' Association; the Vicar leads assemblies at St Francis' Girls School in Letchworth.

We have continued to offer services of thanksgiving for the gift of a child, baptism, marriage and services at the end of life for all who seek our help. Links with St Mark's Scouts, Cubs, Brownies, Beavers and Rainbows are maintained through Parade services and through many church members being involved in leading the groups. Links between the church and the Angels pub are good and many encounters with people are shared within the pub including the regular monthly Sunday Social on Sunday evenings and after Alpha sessions.

The church and hall have been used by community groups during the year, including the District Rainbows' Carol Service, school services, and two 'In Loving Memory' services planned with Chenery's Funeral Service. Exercise classes, toddler groups, Beekeepers, and children's classes all use the hall on a regular basis.

The music tradition of St Mark's continues to be eclectic, embracing both modern and traditional music and forms of music-making. We are fortunate to have several good musicians who offer their services to enhance our worship in church and in the community. A number of young musicians have their first opportunity to participate in a musical ensemble at our monthly Family Service and thereby have an important role in the worship of the church. There has been valuable participation by teenage members in the technical and musical aspects of the SIX:30 service.

St Mark's has continued to maintain links with other churches through the Hitchin and St Paul's Walden Team, Churches Together in Hitchin and the deanery. Church members have been involved in holding offices and responsibilities in all of these groups, making sure that St Mark's voice is heard, as well as making sure that St Mark's generally looks beyond itself and is involved in the many projects which are run across the churches. This year, a number of St Mark's members have become involved in the launch of Millers' Café, an ecumenical project providing support for those who have been through life-changing illnesses. We are fortunate in the number of clergy and Readers which we currently have and so have been able to provide support and cover for other churches within the town and deanery, both Anglican and other denominations. The DCC has given its approval to the discernment of the calling to be Lay Leaders of Worship among members of the congregation who feel so called and it is hoped to progress this new initiative after the AGM.

*Jane Mainwaring and Andrew Parr
Chair and Vice-Chair of the DCC*