

St Mark's Church Bedford



Annual Congregational Meeting Leadership Team Report

8 May 2005

Ministry

During the last year we at St Mark's have continued to benefit enormously from the continued ministry of Charlie, Joan, Neil and Sam who each bring their own individual skills, experience and enthusiasm to the vibrant life of this church.

The ministers have readily produced excellent programmes for the Lent and Advent courses which are greatly welcomed by both partnership churches and have drawn members of other congregations in the area.

Lay involvement continues to grow ever wider with volunteers from many walks of life giving freely of their time in all aspects of church life, from the very young and their families, the learning disabled, the bereaved and the elderly. We thank God for all who assist our ministry in the Brickhill community.

Deanery and Circuit

St Mark's continues to take an active part in Circuit and Deanery life through the ministers and elected representatives. We are fortunate to also have within our congregation Mike Elliott who has now taken on the role of Treasurer for the Bedford North Circuit.

Partnership Review

The Partnership Review is underway and The Reverend Stephen Heap has attended a number of services and church meetings to familiarise himself with the work of the Partnership. The review is an excellent opportunity for us to look inwardly at ourselves, to highlight areas of success and to work on areas for future development.

Worship

With attendance at Church Services declining nationally we are very pleased to report that attendance at our weekly services continues to grow and on some family/special services we have been delighted to have literally filled "every seat in the church".

Attendance at the two smaller weekly communion services 8.30am Sunday and Wednesday 10.00 am is steady and we are grateful to members of the congregation who regularly prepare the church for these services and to others who read and provide refreshments.

Services at 9.30am alternate between Family Service, Morning

Worship and Holy Communion and each has its own special features. The Leadership Team would like to thank all who participate in the services and in the preparation and clearance of the church each Sunday, the door welcomers and book stewards , the readers, those preparing intercessions, the organists, the flower team, the PA gentlemen, and those preparing refreshments, the list is endless but every contribution is greatly valued. Visitors to St Mark's regularly comment on the warmth of their welcome at our services and we hope that these impressions are always taken into the community as a further means of our outreach. We continue to use clear order of service booklets which are always easy to follow especially for visitors to our services. Our "Partnership News" publication including weekly bible notes and commentary is produced by Charlie and the office staff and this can also be viewed on the website. This publication continues to be extremely popular with people in the community and those who use our church centre.

Special Services were once again well attended particularly Mothering Sunday and Harvest where our theme last year was "Harvest in Industry" .

Christmas and Easter services were all well supported and to proclaim the "Christmas Message" all homes in the Brickhill area received a copy of our Christmas "Partnership News". The church was filled to capacity for the Carols by Candlelight and the crib service and it was lovely that the Partnership Singers performed to their usual high standards. At Easter, cards were distributed by members of the congregation.

We must thank the team who work hard to ensure that regular services are arranged and delivered at Highfield Home, particularly Vera Pearson, Lance Mason and Margaret and John Standley. This fulfils a real need in our community and we are ever grateful for this often unseen commitment.

Worldwide mission continues unabated through the tireless efforts of Charlie in updating and maintaining the "ThisisChurch.com" website. There were 25,000 hits last month alone and these numbers are regular occurrences and have brought us into dialogue with many people around the world with whom we would otherwise never have made contact. Our ministers sermons are regularly used

and delivered around the world taking our mission at St Mark's to new and ever increasing numbers.

Following a period where numbers in our music group had fallen the Leadership Team at the request of the music group entered a period of consultation with the congregation as to how music in our services should develop in the future. It was decided that the music group should stop performing in their current format and we would enter into a period of reflection as to the way forward in the future.

Young people

On Sunday mornings all children join in the morning service which begins at 9.30 and leave after the second hymn to attend Junior Church. Three of our Pre-school staff now run Junior Church in rotation and numbers although fluctuating are steadily increasing. The Junior Church and Pre School regularly take part in special services and their contributions are always enjoyed by members of the congregation. The weekly crèche continues to be superbly managed by Debbie Coppenhall who also runs the weekly toddlers group on a Thursday afternoon. Storybox goes from strength to strength with a regular attendance of about 25 children plus their carers. Our thanks go to the storytellers, welcomers and caterers who make this hour so special. The Leadership Team are delighted with the participation of so many young children and their families in our worship.

Missions

Boxing Day 2004 delivered one of the most devastating pieces of news for many years, the Asian Tsunami Disaster, and the Leadership Team at St Marks's acted immediately by sending £1,500 to the appeal. The administration of our missions giving is now undertaken by Mary Stubbs and we are grateful to Mary for her involvement in this important aspect of church giving.

Pastoral Support

The team continues to visit families who have received the services of one of our ministers for a funeral as well as other pastoral situations. Home Communion is regularly taken to the housebound by Valerie Capon. A weekly Bereavement Group has been running

during the year, supported by the pastoral visitors and more recently the meetings have changed to monthly with a visiting speaker as part of the programme. Our thanks to Joan Crossley for having the vision and determination in bringing this project to fruition.

Garden of Remembrance

The Garden continues to play an important part in the life of the Church with many visitors seen during the week in addition to those who arrive quietly and discreetly to spend time with their loved ones in contemplation and reflection. We have been most fortunate to have been able to secure an additional piece of land from Bedford Borough Council which will enable us to redirect the garden entrance to the front of the church and will give us much needed extra space. Our thanks are due to all who help regularly in the garden, Marion Prior, Colin McNeilage and Alan Cooper and of course Mary Stubbs for her administration of the Garden in which she is now helped by Linda Parry.

Church Premises

The Centre continues to thrive and is well used by the over 40 voluntary and charitable groups which meet here. The amount raised from lettings in the last financial year exceeded £30,000 and Church members need to be aware that the church would not be able to support itself without this income. Whilst many churches are struggling to pay their quotas we are fortunate to be coping with our financial commitments and remain debt free.

Clubhouse is a new and exciting project started this year at St Marks and financed by the European Social Funding co financing. The launch was last month and the group now meet 3 times per week with about 20 adults with learning difficulties attending each day.

The centre has a rolling programme of maintenance and redecoration to ensure the facilities are always of the highest standard. The Centre Management committee meets every 6 weeks and the centre is well managed by Wendy Rider and the team of volunteers and we thank them for ensuring that the office is manned each day during the week from 9am to 5 pm.

Fundraising

We are currently seeking to raise £200,000 to build an extension to our centre to replace the Portakabin. This would provide a new home for Bedfordshire Autism who have outgrown the temporary office which we provided for them. Together with grants and funds given or promised we have about £60,000 and we hope to be able to increase this amount.

The last year has seen numerous joint fund raising events in aid of the Autism Bedfordshire extension, and these have included a Fun Run, and Barbecue, Barn Dance, Wine tasting, Spanish Evening and Swimathon. All of these events have been an excellent opportunity for fellowship both within the church family and with other in our community we are grateful to all who assist in organising and helping at these events. Car Boot sales also provide opportunities for people to come together on a social basis and are now seen as an integral part of Brickhill life.

Conclusion

It is so rewarding to have spent time preparing this report and contemplating on the numerous and varied aspects of our church life here at St Marks and in the partnership. It is exciting to consider what we have collectively achieved in the past year and also to reflect on our plans and hopes for the future, the new Garden of Remembrance extension, Clubhouse, The Autism Bedfordshire building project, and the new Police initiative using the church flat. It is our privilege to serve you as members of your Leadership Team and to strive to further the place of the church and the Christian life here in Brickhill. We are always pleased to receive, comments, concerns and ideas from anyone in the congregation to help the team and the church move forward.

Janet Day

Ian Farthing

