

**St Marks Church Leadership Team
Report to the Annual Congregational Meeting
May 4th 2008**

A review of the year 2007 -2008

This year's report highlights the ongoing diversity and inclusive nature of ministry at St Marks.

Ministry

As a church we are blessed with our clergy and thank Charlie, Joan and Sam for their commitment, support, skills and stamina which enhance not only our worship but the whole of our lives within the church family.

We shall be sorry to lose Joan in September but we also wish her well in her exciting and very important new position.

The involvement of the Laity in all aspects of church life is invaluable and to all those who contribute we give our thanks and pray to God that this work may continue.

The Lent course this year, which focused on 'The Prophets', was held at Putnoe Heights and was extremely well attended and included varied, informative and often amusing presentations. We were fortunate to be addressed by Bishop Christopher for the final session. We thank Putnoe for hosting the course.

Deanery and Circuit

St Marks continues to be involved with both Deanery and Circuit matters through the ministers and elected members. Mike Elliott is the Circuit Treasurer, Delia Shephard is a Circuit Steward. Audrey Elliott and Linda Parry represent us at the Deanery meetings.

A new joint Circuit/Deanery project has been set up this year - "Friends For Life" - which is facilitating worship within the care homes around Bedford. Chris Izzard has been appointed as Project Director and Wendy Waters our Church's representative /coordinator.

Worship

The weekly Sunday service continues to be well attended, as do the services during the week, Wednesday morning Communion and Storybox. Partnership News is a valuable resource for all to use throughout the week and is appreciated by many within the congregation and the community who use the church premises.

A big thank you to all who take part in Sunday morning services, both 8.30 and 9.30 and those who prepare before and clear away after the service, your help is greatly appreciated. The welcomers, book stewards, readers, those leading intercessions, floral arrangers, coffee team, those who work the PA system, chair movers, the organists and Sacristans.

Highfield continues to be visited by a dedicated team of volunteers and we thank them all for their commitment. I believe that they came up to church for afternoon tea one Sunday recently.

Our Christmas and Easter Newsletters have become a regular and welcome addition to the church year. The people of Brickhill now await their arrival. This year we also have delivered a welcome booklet to the new houses off Tyne Crescent, inviting families to join us, and we have seen a number of new faces through the doors as a result.

William Harpur House receives Holy Communion on the first Monday of each month - all are welcome.

The church website is continually being updated and has many visitors, we are well respected on the World wide web.

Our Special services are all very well attended numbers at the Crib service this year again exceeded all expectations and was a real treat for children - of all ages- Carols in the Car Park was another success as was the Carols by Candlelight, both accompanied by Bedford Town Band. The Guides and Brownies took part in the Harvest and Mothering Sunday Service and Preschool were a very special addition to Mothering Sunday. The Commemoration service this year was a real highlight at which Martyn Hounsfeld spoke. The Easter services were very well attended with a large number on Easter Day and the usual Sunrise Service led by Sam.

Young People

Junior church has been taken on by Jaana Swaby recently assisted by Wendy Waters, we thank them both for their commitment and enthusiasm. Debbie Coppenhall continues to take charge of the Creche each Sunday and we value her dedication to the young visitors and their parents.

During the week Storybox continues to flourish, run by Emma Strangwick and ably assisted by members of the church. Again we thank them all for their continued hard work, we could not do it without these volunteers. Emma also runs 'Chat and Play' and this has become a very popular group where at times she has had over 60 Mums and toddlers.

Missions

This year our main fundraising focused on - BECHAR - and raised £2015.80. We also contributed to the Methodist Fund for World Mission and the Ministers Retirement fund.

Pastoral Support

Mary and her team have an on-going mission to support the ministers visiting those in need in the Parish and we are very grateful for their time and commitment.

Telecare is valued and is going very well, we thank all the volunteers who give of their time and of themselves.

Garden of Remembrance

Following the extension last year this continues to be well used, an important place within the church and it is valued and respected by all who visit. It provides a place of sanctuary and solace for all. The Lych-gate, generously paid for by Putnoe Heights Church, has made the entrance more defined and it fits in well with the rest of the building line. We thank Mary Stubbs for her administration and her team of workers who keep the whole thing 'ticking over', Alan Cooper, Marion Prior, Jean Cole and Colin McNeillage. To those who have 'adopted a plot' thank you and keep up the good work! The memorial wall plaques are increasing gradually and the Columbaria has been used by two families.

Woodland Burial

The site was consecrated on June 7th last year. A very special day was enjoyed by some 58 people. Bishop Richard managed to overcome the brambles as he 'beat the bounds'. Since then we have been kept busy with 13 burials, 8 interments of cremated remains, and 23 reservations. We have 23 Friends of St Albans Woodland Trust who are supporting us. Linda Parry completed a 14 week Bereavement Counseling Course run by Cruse last September to November.

The main road and Car Park has been completed and the new access road to the glade will be complete very soon. We have been able to pay off the required amount to the Diocese and also half of our debt to the Methodist Circuit.

Chapel

A place of quiet during the week may often be hard to find but our chapel continues to offer this to anyone who wishes to use it - and it is used. Communion on Wednesday morning is held here and we have had a number of funeral services during the past year. Mary occasionally uses it for her pastoral work with families who wish to use the Garden of Remembrance. The Diocesan resource centre is thriving and is used particularly by schools in the area.

Plaques have been placed on the new chairs.

Community Centre

Our vibrant centre is a very important part of the Church family and many people who use the facilities here feel that they "belong" to St Marks. We thank Wendy Rider and her team of volunteers, Milly, Rosemary, Janet and now Jean and Roger Bank for their unstinting work which enables the centre to run so well.

Particularly we must thank Milly for stepping in as office manager while Wendy has been 'out of action'. We wish Wendy a speedy and full recovery. Dave and Janet play an important part in the upkeep of the premises, maintaining the standards of cleanliness which we have all come to expect. For that we thank them.

Clubhouse is now into its' 4th year and is providing an important service for the clients. Karen and her team are doing fine work.

Pre school is a shining example and achieved an excellent Ofsted report. Good with outstanding features.

The Police surgery is valued by our community and Dave Hawkey is often seen around and about.

The Brickhill parish Clerk operates a 'hot desk' in the upper office.

Fund raising and Social Events

Avril and her dedicated team have carried on their work running the Car Boot Sales all year and have raised over £4,000. The Christmas fayre was a great success raising even more for the church and the 'Evening from the Shows' was enjoyed by all who attended.

Bookstall

Milly makes sure that we always have a good choice of cards and books for any occasion - thank you Milly.

Coffee Shop

As part of our Vision for Action it was decided to run a coffee shop on Sunday afternoons. Many people visit the Garden at that time and there was nowhere for them to go and meet up and to be welcomed by our church family. It has become a very popular meeting place for many groups.

Environmental issues.

As a church we are ever mindful of the earth's environs and to that end Mary and Linda worked together to produce a display which hopefully asked the question "What can we do?"

This is only a part of the positive strategies which are in place day by day at St Marks, recycling of glass, plastic, paper, mobile phones and ink cartridges, water and energy reduction and our support of Fair Trade products.

Conclusion

There are so many groups which meet here at St Marks - one can only touch on some of them - ongoing activities which form an equally important part of church life. I do apologise if I have omitted something which is important to you or a person who makes a contribution.

It is always uplifting to see new faces within the congregation and we welcome them and hope that we include everyone with God's Love.

I feel privileged to be a part of St Marks Leadership Team. I have another year to serve and will continue to work alongside the other members and support Mike in his role as Senior Leader.

There will be new challenges and opportunities in the future, always exciting (Charlie will see to that), but I have no doubt that we shall rise to them and enjoy every minute of them. The strength of St Marks is in the people who 'do' and continue to take an active part in the life of the church a big thank you to you all.

And a very big thank you to everyone who has made my year as Senior Leader so enjoyable, your friendship is invaluable.

Linda Parry - Senior Leader St Marks Leadership Team 2007 - 2008