

St. Mark's Church Leadership Team.
Report to the Annual Congregational Meeting
26th April 2009.

This year's report reflects the continuing work of God in our Church and in the Brickhill area of Bedford. At a time of global uncertainty, St. Mark's offers hope, stability and a sense of belonging to all those whom we welcome throughout each week. The diversity of activities that take place here reach a wide cross-section of the community.

Ministry.

It is the tireless energy and enthusiasm of Charlie and Sam that continue to bring this about; we thank them for their ministry, friendship, care, enthusiasm and vision. We were sorry to lose Joan last September; whilst she was with us, she was a tremendous asset and we were able to wish her well and bid her farewell at a packed valedictory service at Putnoe, led by Martin Hounsfield.

Wendy Waters, well-known to us all of course, continues as Reader; and from our congregation, we have also been pleased to hear Richard Ledger, Chris Izzard and (as today) Paul Fricker preaching to us. We are indeed very fortunate at St. Mark's to have so many who give freely of their time and talents to support the work of the Church; we thank each and every one. May God continue to guide and support them in all they do.

The Lent course focused on the Life, Meaning and Teachings of Jesus, led by Paul Fricker, Charlie, Claire Peck and Sam. Our thanks to Putnoe for hosting the course.

Deanery and Circuit.

Our involvement with both Deanery and Circuit continues. Mike Elliott is the Circuit Treasurer, Delia Shephard is a Circuit Steward and Linda Parry & Mike Cooper are our representatives at Deanery meetings.

Since Joan's departure, the Circuit has been involved in a very lengthy stationing process to find a suitable replacement; watch this space. Our grateful thanks go to Audrey Elliott for her work on Deanery during the last year – and to Morag too who is now on the circuit.

Worship.

Our 9.30am Sunday service is generally well attended. We are very grateful to both Debbie Coppenhall, Jaana Swaby and Wendy Waters for their much appreciated work with the children.

“Back to Church Sunday” coincided with Harvest. In November, the Commemoration service, at which Charlie spoke, was as well attended as ever.

Our Christmas services, including the ever-popular crib service, Carols by Candlelight and Carols in the Car Park (actually inside due to the weather!), brought seasonal joy to everyone. We were pleased, as ever, to welcome Guides and Brownies to our Mothering Sunday service. We have recently celebrated Easter and both the Stations of the Cross and Easter Day services were uplifting and thought-provoking. (The “Stations of the Cross” was duly posted on “ThisisChurch.com”). A good number set alarms early on Easter Day to attend the Sunrise Communion at St. Mark’s – and also to savour Janet Day’s bacon butties!

We continue with the pattern of holding the 8.30am Communion on alternate weeks at St. Mark’s and at Putnoe.

Our “outreach” ministry at Highfields and William Harpur House continues with regular services and Communion. The weekly Storybox and Chat & Play continue to be popular – our grateful thanks to Emma Strangwick and all the willing volunteers.

Communication is central to our mission. I have already mentioned “ThisisChurch.com” – the St Mark’s website. It has been upgraded during the year and is constantly being updated. Weekly prayers, sermons, Bible readings and notes, as well as a “What’s On at St. Mark’s” diary – and much more; it’s all on our website! There are literally thousands of “hits” and we receive messages from places far and near.

Mission.

Our main fundraising effort this year was focused on MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) and we were able to contribute over £ 3500.

Pastoral Support.

Mary Stubbs and her pastoral support team continue to provide valuable care in the community. Our grateful thanks to them all for their dedication. Telecare is a vital link that continues to provide regular support and a friendly voice on the end of a phone. We thank all of the volunteers.

Garden of Remembrance.

The extension, Lych-gate, columbarium, remembrance wall are all now well established along with the water features, shrubs and plants. Mary Stubbs continues to administer the Garden of Remembrance and she is supported by a splendid team of loyal volunteers who keep it in such good order. We thank them all – Marion, Jean and Colin – and especially Alan Cooper for many years of service on the Garden. Mick Ovenden is now working with Mary on plot preparation.

Woodland Burial.

Set in 60 acres of peaceful woodland, our consecrated site continues to develop. Two new glades “Robin” and “Wren” have been opened with a further glade “Curlew” planned. We have received enquiries from far-afield. Linda Parry is doing an excellent job, managing the reservations and interments. It is a task that requires very special skills. Linda – we thank you. Access, upkeep and signage are all things that have occupied our thoughts, alongside the need to get ourselves known! There is a website – and don’t forget the Open Day on 27th June! The Trust has been able to repay a considerable proportion of the initial loans. We are now on to the 44th burial or interment and there are almost as many reservations.

Community Centre.

One glance at Partnership News – or the new screens in the entrance is all that is needed to confirm that St. Mark’s is far from a one-day-a-week Church! It is at the heart of the Brickhill community. Managing the Centre is a huge task – a big thank you to Wendy Rider and also to Milly, Rosemary, Janet, Jean and Roger – our regular team of volunteers; and Elizabeth Bean has also joined the team – thanks.

Dave and Janet keep the premises clean and tidy; the upkeep of a busy centre is no light task – our thanks to both of them.

Major refurbishment has taken place during the year – the large hall has been decorated, with new flooring and lights; it is altogether much brighter. The entrance has also been reconfigured, creating a larger office space.

Clubhouse is still going strong. It is fair to say, however, that the future is always rather uncertain, in terms of funding. Our thanks go to Karen and her team for their commitment.

Pre-school provides excellent care for the young children of busy, working families.

If you see a police car in the car park, it's because the Church flat is used by the police; there is a regular Police surgery held at St. Mark's.

The Brickhill Parish Clerk and also Autism regularly operate from St. Mark's.

The Diocesan Resource Centre is based in the Chapel.

Fund-raising and Social Events.

The car-boot season is once again upon us! Avril's calm efficiency always seems to bring things together successfully. There is a regular band of dedicated helpers, setting up, doing refreshments, manning stalls and clearing up – and of course, collecting the money! The same applies to the ever-popular Christmas fayre. (Let's not forget Richard Ledger and Colin McNeilage – alias Father Christmas!).

We held a well attended "fish & chip" quiz night in the autumn; "watch this space" for news of our next evening!

Our thanks to Milly for her quiet and efficient management of the bookstall; it is well stocked and popular.

We took a decision to discontinue the Sunday afternoon coffee shop; whilst it did serve a purpose, it became difficult to staff.

In the Autumn, as part of the Vision for Action initiative, Mike attended a Vision for Giving presentation at St Andrew's. The evening explored the notion of Stewardship and raised the profile of the whole concept of giving.

Carbon Footprint!

In spite of our best efforts, we have not been successful in finding funding for "making our Church greener" – photo-voltaic cells etc. Charlie does not give up easily however! We are however concerned about the energy we consume – especially when the bills arrive!

In conclusion.

I shall finish where I started, with reference to the diversity of activities and the work of God in action at St Mark's. It is not possible to thank everyone by name, the list would be enormous. To all those who arrange the flowers, lead the prayers, do the "P.A.", make the coffee, do the Bible readings, prepare Partnership News, run the crèche and Junior Church, help with

Communion, tend the Garden of Remembrance, count the offertory, stack the chairs – especially Max!, visit those in need, manage the finances, play the organ, or in any way contribute selflessly to the life of the Church, we thank you. I would not wish to omit anyone or anything from this report; if I have done so, please accept my apologies.

It has been an interesting six years serving as a member of St. Mark's Leadership Team; so much has happened, so much has progressed. As a Church, we never stand still, and that is largely due to the drive and vision of Charlie. It has been a privilege to work this year with Linda (who has been a great support), Delia, Avril, Laura and Morag. A special mention for Ian Farthing who manages our finances with great professionalism; his contribution to the Leadership Team however goes beyond that; thank you Ian.

I wish Delia well in her role as Senior Leader in the Year ahead. A sincere word of thanks to everyone at St Mark's who has been so supportive over the year. It's been rewarding and great fun – but then that's St Mark's!

Mike Cooper Senior Leader, St. Mark's Leadership Team 2008 – 2009.