

VICAR'S REPORT TO ST. MARY'S AGM 2009

This year has been both a very rewarding and challenging year for St Mary's. There are many things for which to give God thanks including the following (in no order of importance)

- 1) Lively and Spirit filled Sunday morning worship led by both Choir and Music Group which is well attended, growing and welcoming.
- 2) Well supported Thursday morning Holy Communion Services.
- 3) Several Alpha Courses that have led to a deepening of faith under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.
- 4) A blessed Confirmation Course with 10 people being confirmed of varying age groups.
- 5) A recently started Bishop's Certificate Course with 10 members.
- 6) The steady growth of the Mother & Toddler Service on Friday mornings.
- 7) A growing and active Youth Group with increasing participation of young people in the life of the Church, Deanery and Diocese. Also regular Youth Services and involvement by young people in acts of worship.
- 8) The increasing use of drama in worship and involvement of all ages.
- 9) The growth of our Choir with excellent Choir Anthems and Presentations.
- 10) Excellent involvement of the Music Group in leading worship.
- 11) Significant improvements to our Church Building both inside and out. A very positive and encouraging Quinquennial Report congratulating us on how well maintained the church is and the granting of an English Heritage Grant towards the cost of further renovation work.
- 12) Wall plaques restored and secured. Church Notice Boards re-organised and significantly extended making them more interesting and user friendly. Provision of a beautifully constructed outside Notice Board. The way that information is displayed in an encouraging, educational and inspiring way. The high standard of maintenance to both Churchyard and garden areas.
- 13) Complete restoration of St Mary's House following flood damage.
- 14) A continuing high number of Baptisms with Baptism preparation and ongoing contact. Also a continuing large number of Weddings that has led to some church growth.
- 15) Special invitation services throughout the year that are well supported.
- 16) A continuing and active Bell Ringing Team calling people to worship on Sundays and special occasions.
- 17) The introduction of two new Bible Study and Fellowship Groups making a total of four in all.
- 18) Regular meetings for Prayer including an active Healing Prayer Group and the increasing practice of prayer for Healing both during and after services.
- 19) The development of a special, bright and very friendly Children's area reflecting the open and welcoming approach of the church to Families and children in particular.
- 20) The continuing success of the Parish Magazine with an increasing circulation. Also the development of the St Mary's Web Site with thousands of "hits" and the provision of a weekly Newsletter in Church.
- 21) The continuation of our enjoyable and successful Men and Women's Fellowship Groups.
- 22) Increasing involvement with Kempsey Primary School with after school activities and clubs which dovetail into Sunday worship at 6 weekly intervals attracting an increasing number of families and children.

- 23) The development of the St Mary's Flower Guild with beautiful and creative floral displays at all times throughout the year and especially at Easter, Christmas and at weddings and funerals.
- 24) The continuation of good relations with the community as a whole including the Lawns and Firs where regular services are held. The Church is increasingly used for Community activities and meetings as is St Mary's House.
- 25) A very successful and blessed Summer Fete and other fund raising activities notably through the Friends of Kempsey.
- 26) Age Concern continues to have a very enjoyable and well-attended Coffee Morning each Thursday.
- 27) The Church continues to give 10% of its income to charities through The Mission Committee. We also have links with other organisations abroad offering them support and are actively involved in international charitable organisations.
- 28) Average Church giving continues to increase following a successful Stewardship Campaign and Parish Share has been paid in full for 2008.
- 29) Increasing participation of lay people in leading various aspects of worship and the discovery and promotion of lay people's gifts.
- 30) The continued support, involvement, inspiration and encouragement of The Ministry Team of Sheila Cook, Peter Fitzjohn, Libby James and Rev David Hassell.

This is a long list and it is probably, even now, not exhaustive. You may well think of other things and people involved and so apologies to anyone who has been inadvertently omitted. **I am so grateful to each and every person who gives of their time and energies to promote the work of God in any way here at St Mary's and in addition to our Ministry Team this would include the PCC and our Church Wardens and deputy Church Wardens. You all do a marvellous job and THANKYOU to you all.** Thankyou also to those who beautify and clean St Mary's and those who regularly provide refreshments after worship and at other times. Also thanks to Anne Windsor who opens up the church at 8.0am on Sunday mornings and who faithfully acts as our assistant Warden on these occasions. Thanks also to Margaret Childs for the excellent job she does in helping to maintain such an excellent standard of care at St John The Baptist, Kerswell Green where we have regular monthly services.

As you can hopefully see there is so much that we can give God thanks for and so much to look forward to as we seek in the future to spread and share His love and the Truth about our Saviour, Jesus.

Inevitably, of course, as in any Church there are challenges that face us as we seek to grow and move forward.

Clearly there have been difficulties in the area of Music involving the relationship between David Anfield our Musical Director, myself and other members of the congregation. I would not seek to minimise the adverse effect that this has had both within the church and community but would assure you that it is in the process of being resolved and hopefully by Easter. I acknowledge and regret that it has been a particularly painful and difficult period for our Choir but would assure everyone, including them, that this does not in any way reflect a negative approach to the Choir who I hope will play an ever increasing and active role in worship in the future under David's direction.

Another concern has been the continuing decline in numbers attending the Sunday evening services on the first three Sundays. This has been largely due to the death, illness and disability of regular members. These are traditional BCP services that are Choir led and I am concerned that there should be a place for traditional BCP services in the life of St Mary's. Clearly, however, were numbers to continue to decline then there would have to be some rationalisation. It is important in my view that our Choir are given adequate opportunities to lead worship and I would hope that it would be possible

to develop one of these Sunday evenings in a different and experimental direction eg experiencing different types of worship such as Taize or Celtic Worship. There are new and exciting possibilities and we need to develop a vision for these things and to further enhance and enjoy our experience of worshipping God.

There have obviously been significant developments in the direction of more informal and charismatic worship involving the Music Group. I know that these are not to everyone's taste and I am very thankful to those people who continue to support and encourage these services even though they are not their preferred style. I have inevitably been asked "Do you see the church going completely in this direction?" The answer is that I hope that St Mary's will continue to be a Church in which we can experience different ways of worshipping God including the traditional Anglican services involving Book of Common Prayer.

We need to preserve and encourage a breadth to our worship but we are also commissioned with the task of evangelism and encouraging more people to become practicing Christians and it is a fact that the Church as a whole has to modernise otherwise we shall stagnate and diminish. The kind of worship and church experience that appeals to people today is the informal, less churchy, more charismatic and evangelistic and it is for this reason that I promote it at St Mary's. My views are purely pragmatic and not because I feel that one expression of worship is better than another.

It is not that I am asking you to like the modern forms of worship because in fact I'm asking you to do something more difficult than that and that is to give them your support by your attendance. **St. Mary's is really at a crossroads and what will make the difference ultimately as to whether we're blessed or not is not whether we all like the same things, not whether we all agree on everything or always have the same style of worship but whether we are a united church and are willing to support things by our presence (whether traditional or modern) and thus present a visible unity. For too long we have been divided into separate camps based on personal preferences but if we are to grow spiritually and numerically we must be prepared to set such preferences aside for the good of the whole and to ensure a strong active church for future generations. If we achieve this under God's guidance and leadership then it will be nothing short of a miracle because very few churches of any denomination ever achieve a multi-sided church fellowship that is spirit filled and spiritually united. This is our aim and it is this that we must pray for and work towards.**

As you can see there is a great deal going on in the church with new initiatives being developed and explored which is excellent. The danger is that these things will become uncoordinated within the whole and thus there will be an increased need for the PCC to exercise more direct decision making responsibility and for us to make sure that new ventures are channelled through this elected body. The PCC must become more directly accountable and this will mean not only more frequent meetings but more transparency in terms of publishing and displaying all minutes, decisions discussed and taken etc. We all need to know much more about what's going on and what's envisioned as part of our working together as a whole church family and community. I would certainly hope that eventually in several years time we would be in a position to develop a Local Ministry Team in which the responsibility was formally in the hands of a team of lay and ordained people to organise and run the different aspects of parish life. This is taking lay ministry in the Church seriously and promoting it which is the way that the Church as a whole will have to move in the years ahead if it is not only to survive but to grow and develop. These are indeed exciting times if we have a positive forward-looking outlook and seek for the new thing that God is doing among us.

Finally, I thank you all for your continued love and support. This has been a positive year but certainly not always an easy year for me for a number of reasons but I do thank you for your encouragement even when you disagree with me. I will always act in what I consider to be the best interests of the church and in securing and protecting the considerable achievements that we have made under the power and guidance of God. I will at times make mistakes for which I ask for your forgiveness and forbearance but I will always admit it and apologise if necessary. If, however, I feel that there is a challenge being set by God for me personally or for the church as a whole then I will pursue it even at the cost of personal approval or popularity. I can do no more and even though you

have a Vicar who is far from perfect at least you have one who will accept personal responsibility, hopefully have the courage of his convictions and do the thing that I believe is right under God.

THANKYOU

Peter

Rev. Peter Holzapfel

vicar@stmaryskempsey.org.uk

www.stmaryskempsey.org.uk