

Keeping in Touch

The Newsletter of St Mary's Church
Portchester

No 47 December 2018



Rev Ian writes

Some of you were a little bit concerned for me after reading last month's newsletter. Reading it now, I can see that I wrote some bits on a 'down day'. I suppose we all get them from time to time – days when it seems nothing is working out. Negative thoughts get exaggerated and for me include: no one is supporting us, everyone is moaning at us, the wheels are falling off the bus, folk are leaving us or hardly ever coming to church, the building needs a lot of money spent on it, bankruptcy is staring us in the face, and mocking us at the same time!

Challenges still remain, but within a couple of weeks things began to change. Finances improved: some generous donations came in, some increased their giving, we were able to sell the old organ for £6,000; we received a grant of over £3,000 from the Diocese; the Team Room income was above budget (thank you to Judy and the volunteers!) and new people were joining us. What was a real delight was that some local people, not connected with the church, read about our difficulties in getting someone to organise the summer and Christmas

Fayre, and offered to help! Certain events we had been planning were amazingly supported. Others have shown an interest in the various roles in St Mary's which need to be filled, and have encouraged me that good times are ahead.

One of my favourite phrases in the bible is, *'and it came to pass.'* This is like the popular folk adage, *'this too will pass'* which means that our problems are often transitory, and that a solution is just around the corner. Looking back on life, I've discovered that to be true. *'You pick yourself up, dust yourself down – and start all over again.'*

Of course not all problems have a such a positive ending. People get sick and don't get better; folk die; others discover that their health issues are now chronic and are learning to live with new circumstances. But even then, grace and help can be given. I'm reminded of St Paul's admission in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, *"Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* We don't know what this 'thing' was, although most commentators suggest it was a health issue. What's important was, that he was given strength to endure, and in time he realised that there was a purpose in it and good would come from it.

Entering Advent and preparing for Christmas I am reminded of that small group of people mentioned in the first chapters of St Luke's Gospel: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna, who were described as *'they who waited for the consolation of Israel.'* The Jewish nation was not in a good place and so many prophetic visions had not been realised; the clergy were hypocritical, the people were under an occupying force, and although there was lots of 'religion' around, true living spiritual life was in short supply. But the Spirit was beginning to move in the hearts of some, and with the birth of the child Jesus, new hope was given and the excitement of a future.

The message of Christmas is the message of hope – God holds the future: Britain's future, the world's future, St Mary's future and your future. He will not disappoint or fail, even if his timing and methods are sometimes frustrating. *'This too will pass'.*

Or to quote Julian of Norwich, *'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'*

Christmas peace and New Year blessings to you all.

Ian

What a great few weeks we've had!

Those of you who haven't been coming to much recently, have missed out on some really great and inspiring events. St Mary's Church has some amazing talent and is able to put on such a varied programme.

Our World War I centenary began on the last weekend of October with a concert 'Poppies Red, Cornflower Blue' by the folk group, 'Poachers Moon' from Dorset. They presented an evocative evening of original songs, narration and background slides; and the church was full for this event.

The following day Nell was a bit concerned in case her 'event' might not have been so well supported. Peter Bradley had put together an audio and visual presentation of her remarkable musical career. But she needn't have worried – again the church was full and the retiring collection for the building fund raised over £700, and an anonymous donor made it up to £1,000! Thank you Nell, and all who supported.

The weekend around Armistice Day saw a packed church for the morning Service of Remembrance. That evening we planned a special '*Battles Over*' event with an emphasis on young people, but we had no idea how many would attend. Again, the church was packed to capacity with hundreds of young people and adults. It began with a torchlight procession led by the band of TS Tenacity; an informal service in the church saw many young people take part; the Social Team arranged for a free BBQ and there was enough food for everyone; an actor Tim gave a great performance of '*Private Lowe returns from the trenches*'; outside the Mayor lit a beacon and the night ended with bell ringing and fireworks.

Thank you to Rosemary Dunne and Jean Withinshaw who organised this year's Poppy Appeal. Portchester's contributions were included in the £46,000 raised throughout Fareham.

With two concerts having just recently taken place the '**Friends of St Mary's**' charity wondered if there was any money left, and might their concert on 16th November be a disaster? But again, a good support enjoyed the wide repertoire of the West End Singers from Southampton, and several hundred pounds were raised. This brought great joy to David Williams who has had a long recovery in hospital but is improving greatly and hopes to be home by Christmas. At the PCC meeting on 28th November, we acknowledged the tremendous work David had done as Assistant Church Treasurer and also as Treasurer to the Tea Room.

Some sad news

The congregation of St Mary's will be sad to hear of the sudden death of Justin Dempster. Although his home was in Southport, he and Gill and their two golden retrievers '*Duchess*' and '*Lady*' always worshiped with us at St Mary's when they visited this area. Justin was full of love, fun and the Holy Spirit, and his passion for evangelism was seen in his introducing us to the booklet '*Knowing God personally*' which we continually now have a supply of. There have been some lovely tributes on the Facebook, 'Soup Kitchen in Southport' which he helped to start. His funeral was on Friday 16th November at Southport and John and Gwen Meatyard and Ian and Angela Parker from Portchester were able to attend. There will be a thanksgiving

service at St Mary's in June for his Portchester family and friends.

Moved away

In the past few weeks several of our members have moved from Portchester to further afield. These include Greg and Cathy Howard who have gone to Yorkshire; Val Mizzen who has returned home to Merseyside and Catherine Boika who has moved to Wales. We are grateful for the hard work they have put in to St Mary's (PCC, Churchwarden, Tea Room, etc). We wish them God's blessing on their future life.

Evangelists

Speaking of Justin Dempster and World War I commemorations – did you know that there were two evangelists in our church, who quietly get on with sharing the gospel? Although all Christians should share their faith, some are called specifically to the ministry of an evangelist (Ephesians 4:11). Mike and Libby Arthern have taken up Justin's initiative and provide us with a constant supply of the booklet '*Knowing God personally*' which appears on the pews and various shelves throughout the church. These are mainly for visitors and hundreds are taken. Mike and Libby also donated hundreds of copies of John's Gospel, facsimiles of the ones provided to soldiers during World War I. These were given out at every war commemoration. We appreciate their generosity and quiet faithful ministry.

Communications

Peter Bradley, a member of our 8.00am congregation has recently been helping us with audio/video support, but also with our communicating generally. The former St Mary's **Facebook** has now been changed to a new one. We would encourage all Facebook users to look at this and to 'like' the page and various events. This page has the facility for you to make comments which we hope you will do and thus create a Facebook community with lively, and (hopefully!) positive and appreciative comments. The old St Mary's page is no longer in existence and this one has taken its place. Also you may have had a 'friend' request from 'Mary Church'. This is not a scam request, and is a generic name for the Facebook administration and a way of messaging you.

The new e-mail communication called '**Mail Chimp**' has also been sent out each week to almost 300 members and friends of St Mary's who did not disallow their e-mail address to be used for communications in the GDPR form. This will highlight with very brief text, five or six events coming up soon. If you don't receive this and would like to, please contact the parish office. If you don't wish to receive it, you simply press the 'unsubscribe' button at the bottom – but we hope you won't. It is sent out by Peter Bradley and encouraging comments are always welcome.

The new enlarged war memorial

Looking back on 2018, another important feature will have been the creation of the enlarged war memorial to include those who were killed as a result of World War II. This will be unveiled by Sir Timothy Laurence on Tuesday 4th December, and will be dedicated by the Bishop. Some of our members were disappointed that they have not been able to attend this, but the criteria for invites was: relatives of those named on the memorial; individuals, businesses and organisations who donated money for the new memorial; the armed forces;

uniformed organisations and representatives of local groups and organisations. A handful of people who had put their names on the 'reserved' list were able to get tickets. We are catering for a congregation that day of 250.

Matins

Despite the majority of the 60+ people who are the congregation of the 8.00am service, and who voted to have Matins (Morning Prayer) on the first Sunday of the month – the real vote is when people 'vote with their feet'. Numbers have considerably reduced on this Sunday, despite even having hymns and music, and on 7th October when only 23 people (including the choir!) turned up, we realised the experiment had run its course. We will be reverting to having Holy Communion as the service from now on. There might be an occasional service when we will try a modern language form of Morning Prayer with hymns.

11.30am 'Later Service'

This service on the second Sunday of the month continues to be popular with numbers fluctuating between 50 to 80. It is important that those who wish this service to continue, give it their support. We would like to commence this weekly, but as well as a core of a committed congregation, we need extra technical support and musicians. Recently the Diocese's 'Mission Opportunities Fund' gave us a grant of over £3,000 because of the potential of this service to attract new people. We were able to buy the new screen, which being able to be projected onto from behind as well as in front, has been used to good effect in many other services and events. Our service this month on 9th December on 'getting ready for the big day' will be led by Rev Ian and Derek Johnston will be the preacher.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES AND EVENTS

Christmas Trees etc.

The main tree will be donated by the Squire of Southwick (our patron) and will be delivered in time for our first services. Local undertakers usually supply other trees which will be placed appropriately. We hope to have the church floodlit again and are hoping that O Sole Mio Restaurant in Port Solent will lend us their nativity set which was a popular feature last year.

A Christmas card (postcard) will be distributed to every home in the parish – Portchester and Port Solent. That's almost 8,000 homes, so we really do need your support to try and distribute these. This year, only St Mary's services will be on this, as the other churches are not able to help with delivery, and Portchester Churches Together will be putting an advert in '*Stay Local*'.

9th December 4.00pm Christingle

Christmas Services begin with our popular children's service Christingle, a service introduced by the Church of England's Children's Society, and which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. This is supported by the uniformed organisations and the band of TS Tenacity will play us in and out.

Wednesday 19th 6.00pm Carols at the Lych Gate

Portchester Community Choir has kindly offered to sing carols at the Lych gate in aid of its restoration. We are asking for good support for this, when a collection will be taken up. The Tea Room will be open that evening and Judy will be looking for volunteer help. We very much appreciate the support of the wider community, so let's support them.

Carols by Candlelight

Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd both at 6.00pm.

Our popular carol service will again be held over two consecutive nights. As well as the usual carols, mulled wine and minced pies, this year's special feature will be an actor who will read the reflections as '*The Reverend Geoffrey Studdart Kennedy*' better known as '*Woodbine Willie*' who was a famous World War I army chaplain. Members of the armed forces and cadets will read the lessons.

Christmas Eve has two very different services:

4.00pm Children's Nativity Service which will no doubt be the usual chaotic scene, but enjoyed by all. It will be led by Rev Ian and Derek and the residents of Castle Street will be our stewards on that occasion.

11.00pm The Midnight Mass will finish at 12.15am and incense will be used at the service.

Christmas Day also has two services:

8.00am Holy Communion with carols.

10.00am All Age Communion.

Christmas Day lunch will be held at the Parish Hall at 12.00noon. Once again we are grateful to Ron and Lynn for preparing this; the many St Mary's members who help in many ways; and several members of the local community who have donated items and who have offered to help. We don't need any more donations or helpers, but anyone can come along and just chat and be part of things. Lifts can be arranged, but if you are coming you do need to book your place by either calling or popping into the parish office.

Sunday 30th at 3.00pm "Quiet Christmas"

This service is for the bereaved and others who have not had a great year, or who have not been in the mood for a 'merry' Christmas, or for those who prefer a quieter, more reflective service at Christmas.

Sunday 6th January 'The Feast of the Epiphany'

The main celebration will be at 10.00am, which will bring our Christmas celebrations to a close and begin the season of Epiphany. Incense will be used at the service. This will be the final service in the church before we temporarily move into the school.

Midweek services over the Christmas holidays.

There will be no Wednesday services on 19th, 26th December and 2nd January, or Friday services on 28th December and 4th January, and no Morning Prayer from 24th December – 4th January.

JANUARY 2019

Sunday services at Portchester Community School.

From Sunday 13th January our Sunday services (8.00am; 10.00am and 11.30am and Sunday Schools) will be held at the Community School, White Hart Lane, while our new heating system is being installed.

Although we will have to 'travel light' due to storage limitations at the school, we hope to run our services as normally as possible. We are really asking all of our people – regular members, occasional visitors and folk on the fringe – to continue to support our services at the school. It is a good opportunity to realise that St Mary's is not a building, but a living community of Christian disciples who have the privilege of meeting in an ancient building. Please remember that this move and heating was not of our choosing, so please do not 'punish' us by absenting yourself or withholding your giving. It will also be interesting to notice those who worship the building, and those whose devotion to Christ goes a little bit deeper than that. We will be back in the church as soon as possible, and we are aiming for Sunday 10th March.

Mid Week Services and New Room

This arrangement only refers to our Sunday services. All other services will continue as usual. The New Room has its own separate heating system, so the Tea Room will continue to operate. The Wednesday evening service will be held in the New Room at 6.30pm as will Morning Prayer each day at 9.00am.

There are no weddings booked during this period (the first one is Saturday 16th March) and for anyone who requires a church funeral, we have been given the use of **Holy Trinity Church** in Fareham.

Heating

In order to help us get back into the church as early as possible, the present heating system will be taken out on 27th December, which means that we will have temporary blower heaters on Sundays 30th December and 6th January.

Once the new heating is installed it is very important that people do not fiddle or turn on/off the controls. In the past many people have made heating decisions and for the new system these will not impact well. It is suggested by the engineers that the heating be kept permanently on and turned up when necessary.

Portchester's Roman Catholic community

Father John Cooke, Parish Priest for Fareham writes to us

First and foremost is our huge thanks to you and the Community of St Mary's for coming to our aid in our time of need when the Our Lady of Walsingham Church building itself was deemed unsafe and had to be suddenly closed. At a very sudden and painful time, you

provided sanctuary and a welcome so that the parishioners could still gather for a Saturday Vigil Mass.

The closure of St Mary's in the New Year for the upgrading of your heating system has caused us to take review and stock of the Saturday Vigil Mass for Fareham and Portchester. It's been a sensitive few days with everyone concerned, but recognising the hurt of those who have loyally served the Portchester community, I have sought advice from the Portchester Core Team, the Parish and the Bishop's Council. The feeling seems to be that the closure of St Mary's gives us a natural break with the arrangement.

But we want to say thank you to your congregation, and please let us keep and forge our relationship. We would like to invite your PCC and parishioners to join us on Saturday 5th January at our last Vigil Mass and Thanksgiving and afterwards in your Tea Room. You came to us in our time of need keeping us together when we could have been scattered, and we would like to offer you a gift as a token of our thanks.

ST MARY'S LOOKING AHEAD TO 2019

Next year with the move to the school and a new leadership team emerging, gives us the chance to review the life of our church. Rev Ian and Rev David Simpson have been looking carefully at a whole parish renewal programme, which we will be presenting to the PCC and then to the wider congregation.

In the meantime we need to be thinking about new **Churchwardens, Treasurer, Administrator and PCC members** – a whole new team who will be leading us into the next few years. The APCM (church and parish AGM) will be on Sunday 31st March at 11.30am. It would be good to get some real new blood, whose only agenda is the renewal of St Mary's congregation as a community of learning, growing, serving disciples. Availability during the day time would be desirable; it would suit early retirees or those with flexible working hours. Any suggestions for Churchwardens should be given to Rev Ian by the end of January so that they and others will have had enough time to pray about this. In January Rev Ian will hold a meeting for those who have expressed an interest – and those we might approach.

Parish Administrator. We have very much appreciated Wendy's work in the parish office over the past two and a half years, but she has now moved on to a new job with the Royal Navy museum in Portsmouth. We are in the process of appointing a new administrator from (hopefully) January.

"A Different Day

Jan Fuller has done an excellent job in organising three of these in the church now, and they have been greatly appreciated by the wider community. However, Jan would like to give this role up, and if we are continue with this ministry, we are looking for a new co-ordinator (there are usually plenty of helpers). Please see Rev Ian if you are interested.

Fabric and maintenance updates

Maintaining an 12th century Grade 1 listed building, although a special heritage, has its special challenges which involves us in a lot of appeals for money, fund raising and grant applications. The following are some of the immediate and future projects:

- **New heating system.** This is likely to cost in the region of £160,000 and will involve having to take a loan from the diocese. This will obviously increase our monthly expenditure for a few years.
- **The lych gate** was in danger of collapsing and has been temporarily shored up with scaffolding. Costings are being currently looked at, and much will depend on whether the gate can be repaired in situ or whether it will need to be dismantled and rebuilt. It could be the difference between £2,000 or £20,000!
- **Church Road** is the road between the castle's land gate and the church's lych gate. It is now full of potholes. Although no one seems to be claiming ultimate responsibility, we are considering as a goodwill gesture ("without prejudice") in paying for this to be re-surfaced as we are the main user. This could be in the region of £13,000.
- **Porch glass** and cleaning. The smallest item on our list is to have plain glass put in to replace the current glass. This will give more light to the west end and provide a brighter more welcoming entrance. The porch could do with a general freshen up.
- **The four windows** on the north wall of the church have been subject to storm damage over the years and advice is that we need to have these repaired.
- Some **roof tiles** were blown off during a recent storm. Thankfully this is an insurance job, but we are finding it difficult to get a company who will do this work.

Social events

Jan has stepped down from leading the social team, and Ron Prior and Mark Dell will be leading this from now on. As well as being a spiritual family, we also need to laugh and have time together. We would particularly like to encourage our newer friends to start coming to some of these events as a great way to meet new friends. Some of the events are not as well supported as others, and we need feedback as to the sort of things you would like to see more of, and also the sort of things you are not keen on. Some of these events combine a fundraising element (mainly for the heating at present), but others are just socials.

There is a list of many special services and events coming up next year which has been included with this newsletter. Please keep it near your calendar and support where you can.

With all the concerts and events going on, we don't expect everyone to go to everything! But with the great variety we have, surely everyone could go to something? Also, many of these events are planned with non-church friends in mind with a view to introducing them to St Mary's by means of a social rather than a religious occasion. Many of these events also allow

non members to contribute something towards church funds, mainly for all the maintenance to the building.

Burns Supper

The next social event which will also be a fund-raiser will be the Burns Supper on 'Burns Night' itself – Friday 25th January 6.30pm at the Parish Hall. We will have haggis (and alternative!) There will be songs and a poem, a piper and Vicar in kilt! All must be seen, heard and tasted at a cost of just £15 per person.