

# Keeping in Touch

The Newsletter of St Mary's Church  
Portchester

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*West door of St Mary's Church by James Hair*

## **Rev Ian writes,**

The Rev James Hair's drawing this month of the west door of St Mary's reminded me of a verse in the Bible. If Jesus was to turn up at St Mary's one day and tell us what he thinks of us, or perhaps writes us a letter, I wonder what he would say. I would imagine he would start by encouraging us to keep doing the things which please him, and then he would challenge us to work on what is still lacking. This was certainly the case when he sent a message to seven churches in Asia in the first century, as recorded in the last book of the Bible – Revelation. In 3:8 he tells the church at Sardis that he has set before them 'an open door.' I think that means he has given them a unique and special opportunity to do good, share the gospel and advance his Kingdom.

The congregation of St Mary's are, as individuals and collectively still 'a work in progress'. We are not what we should be, and are very conscious of our failings, but by God's grace, his Spirit among us, and our obedience to his word, we can become nearer to what he intends.

We have an 'open door' before us this year – but will we go through it? You will be seeing a logo appear increasingly of an open door, but more about that later.

### **.... further reflections: The Christmas Services**

If positive comments made, and numbers attending are any indication, then this year's Christmas services have been the best in recent memory. Between schools and church services, around 3,000 people came through our doors to enjoy a great variety of services, ranging from the boisterously full children's Nativity to the Quiet Christmas, for the bereaved. There was something for everyone. Both the Christingle and the Carol services were the best attended on record and generally numbers were up overall by over 100 on last year. In many ways this was probably due to the greater use of social media, particularly Facebook.

I think the majority of our congregation (who were around) came to at least one service. It was a real delight for me to welcome many friends we don't see that often. Some clergy and church members moan about those who only come to church at Christmas – I don't! I'm delighted that they come at all; for let's face it; there are over 15,000 people who live in Portchester which suggests that the majority did not go anywhere. The 3,000 who came represents around 20% of the population of Portchester. These people, and I would like to think that most of them, hold St Mary's in much affection and goodwill. They are our friends and potential members. The interesting challenge is - is it still possible that many of those who come once a year, could be drawn to worship Jesus the Messiah and Son of God more often?

The challenge is, how do we change once a year attenders into regular attenders? And how do we change attenders into believers? Thank you again to Mike and Libby Arthern who provided (from their own money) thousands of evangelistic leaflets which were given to all who attended our services, let's continue to pray that they will be read, pondered on and acted on. But how do we change believers into disciples of Jesus, who reflect his life and serve his people? Obviously, we can do nothing – only the Holy Spirit can draw people into God's Kingdom, 'many are called but few are chosen.' But in most cases, the instruments the Spirit uses are us!

Every blessing for 2019. Rev Ian

## **Facebook**

Talking of social media, we hope that those who use Facebook, will look at our new St Mary's page. We commenced it on 5th November and in less than two months we have 183 followers! (We appreciate that several in St Mary's will not have a clue what we are talking about!)

It is administered by Peter Bradley and Ian Meredith ("Mary Church"). We hope to update it every couple of days, so there will always be new stuff on it. As well as news items and events, we want to include lots of POSITIVE inspirational quotes, prayers and pictures. It has great potential, and in the week after Christmas was read by over 800 people!

Please feel free to share it, and to comment on it, and to like posts. It would be good to have a Facebook community out there, so let us know what you think about events and issues. Please also send us photos of events, but have the permission of people first.

We are taking the risk of allowing open comments. So far this has not been abused so it would be good to keep it open, but if we get rudeness, negativity or personal attacks we will need to limit its access.

## **Mail Chimp**

This is our second form of social media also administered by Peter. It is an e-mail mailing list of over 300 people which gives an overview of the five or six events we want to highlight that week. During busy times it will come out weekly, but in quieter periods, less often. If you are not on the mailing list for this, simply e-mail the parish office giving us your permission to email you. If you want to come off the mailing list, you simply click the button 'unsubscribe.'

## **Website.**

We are aware that our website needs updating and simplifying. Neil Pugmire the Diocesan Director of Communications is arranging for an audit of it, and will be suggesting ways of making it more effective.

## **New Parish Administrator.**

We are delighted to announce that we have appointed a new Parish Administrator, **Emma Capps** who started work in the office on 7<sup>th</sup> January. Emma lives in Lee-on-the-Solent with her three children, Zoë, Ashby, and Ezra, as well as her husband of 15 years, Justin. She was born into an RAF family in Buckinghamshire and has lived in places far and wide, including Germany, Wales, Alton, Philadelphia, Texas, and even Las Vegas!

In America, she earned an Education degree and worked in Christian schools as both teacher and school leader, gaining experience of administrative and pastoral responsibilities. Since moving back to the UK to be near family, she has worked as a customer advisor, trainer, and manager for a Lloyds Bank Customer Service Centre and served as a school governor for a local junior school.

She writes, "As a family, we enjoy hiking, geocaching, exploring the country, working down on our allotment, and attending music festivals – especially if Justin is playing with his band. I am

absolutely delighted to be joining the St. Mary's team as the Parish Administrator, and I look forward to getting to know the congregation and the local community. When we moved to England, our first family outing was to Portchester Castle and St. Mary's. So the Church and grounds have always held a special place in our hearts."

Emma is a member of St Faith's Church, Lee-on-the Solent, where she will continue to attend. However, we hope that she will pop in from time to time to St Mary's. Please pop in to the office and say 'hello'. But please don't sit down for a long time and pour out all your woes! Please remember that Emma is paid by the hour and will have a lot of work to do.

### **Move to the school**

From Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January until (hopefully) early March, our Sunday services will be held in Portchester Community School's assembly hall. We hope to keep the services (8.00am; 10.00am and 11.30am) as near as possible to the styles held in the church. There may be some teething problems for the first week or so, so please be patient. We have every confidence that the majority of our congregation will continue to support St Mary's Church during this time of exile.

### **The New Room**

As this has its own separate heating system, all events and services currently held in this will continue, which includes the Tea Room. The Wednesday 6.30pm Communion Service and the 9.00am Morning Prayer will be held in the New Room instead of the church.

### **Update on finances**

We are pleased to say that the year ended with a healthy financial surplus, due to some of you increasing your regular giving, some very kind donations given; and above-budget takings from the Tea Room. The heating system will cost £160,000 (including £20,000 VAT). Our building fund as well as some reserves have given us £140,000 which means that we just need to get a loan of £20,000 from the Diocese. As we hope to reclaim the VAT, this means the £20,000 can be paid back sooner than expected. We thank God for his marvellous provision, and we also thank Jan, the financial team and PCC for their good stewardship. Of course, having emptied all our reserves on the heating, we need to build up our reserves again.

### **Update on the lych gate.**

Again, the news on the lych gate is better than expected. Quotations suggest that the gate can be repaired in situ, and the amount to restore is quoted as around £6,000 - £7,000 (there will also be architect's costs). We haven't even started a proper appeal yet, but already donations of over £4,000 have come in for this! One member of the church gave £2,000; the Portchester Community Choir raised £300, and other individuals have also been generous. At this rate, we should be able to afford the restoration, and hope that the gate will be repaired by the first wedding – on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Portchester Roman Catholic community**

Around 20 members of St Mary's attended the Roman Catholic service held in our church on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> January. This was in many ways a sad occasion for the Catholics, as it was their final service at Portchester. Since they moved out of their building on White Hart Lane around ten years

ago, they have held a Saturday evening service at St Mary's, but now it has been decided that the Saturday Vigil Mass will be held at their Fareham Church. Their Parish Priest, Fr John Cook spoke movingly as he thanked St Mary's for their hospitality during these years. He presented us with a card which included a cheque for £2,000 writing, 'Thank you so much for hosting us these last few years. I hope you will accept this token of our thanks so that as well as investing in your living stones (1 Peter 4:2) you can maintain the material stones of this beautiful and historic church you are stewards of. Yours gratefully in Christ. Rev John Cook on behalf of the Catholic Parish of Fareham and Portchester.'

## **JANUARY EVENTS**

**Exploring Baptism.** The next course for parents considering Baptism (Christening) for their children will start on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> January and will meet over 4 Fridays. There will be a new optional 5<sup>th</sup> week – for Godparents.

**Portchester Churches Together** united service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> January 6.30pm at the Methodist Church.

**Burns Supper.** This will be our next social and fundraising event held on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> January 7.00pm at the Parish Hall. We are delighted to say that this has been a sell-out and there are no tickets left. Thank you for your support, and thank you to the social team for organising this.

## **FEBRUARY EVENTS**

The speaker for the February 9<sup>th</sup> **Men's Breakfast** is Eric Standen. We appreciate Eric's ministry on the keyboard and leading in worship, so it will be interesting to see him in a different ministry role this time.

**Skittles Night.** Our February family social occasion will be on 10<sup>th</sup> at 6.30pm in the Parish Hall and will be a skittles night for all the family. There will be a ploughman's supper as part of the evening, and the cost for the evening is £5 per adult ticket; £3 per child, but special offer of £10 for a family ticket. Please come and support and encourage other families to come also, although the maximum number we can cater for will be 60, so please get your tickets soon.

### **Quiet Day, 16 February 2019**

Did you know that the Sisters of Bethany are a small Anglican religious community devoted to prayer and providing opportunities for exploring the spiritual life? Based in Southsea, they welcome guests to their programme of retreats and quiet days.

On Saturday 16 February, the Revd David Simpson from St Mary's will be conducting a Quiet Day at the Convent. Starting with coffee at 10.00am and finishing with tea at 4.00pm, there will be two addresses, periods for silent reflection in the house or garden, and a short act of worship. The theme will be 'When you haven't got a prayer.' Participants will be invited to explore their concept of God and to examine or re-examine how we face the difficulties on our spiritual journeys. It will be a day for anyone who's curious and not necessarily for those

who've attended quiet days in the past. All that's required is the willingness to listen to God and to experiment with the silence.

For information about the Community visit [www.sistersofbethany.org.uk](http://www.sistersofbethany.org.uk), or any questions about the day speak to David direct. Participants are asked to bring a packed lunch and invited to make a donation to the Community of £6. To reserve a place, you are asked to contact the Sisters in advance on 023 92833498 or e-mail: [ssb@sistersofbethany.org.uk](mailto:ssb@sistersofbethany.org.uk). Address: The Sisters of Bethany, 7 Nelson Road, Southsea, PO5 2AR.

**A Beetle Drive** will be held on Sunday afternoon of the 27<sup>th</sup> February at 2.00pm in the Parish Hall. This is also a family event and there will be tea and cake and games. There is no charge for this event.

### **MARCH APCM**

The annual meeting of the church and parish will be on **Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March** after the 10.00am service, at around 11.30am. Reports and balance sheet will be on circulation beforehand.

**Electoral Roll.** Every few years those wishing to be on the Electoral Roll are invited to make a fresh application, and 2019 is one of those years. Although we try and keep the Roll up to date annually, this official revision clears out any deadwood and offers members the opportunity to decide if they are in or out of St Mary's. The Electoral Roll is the nearest we have to a membership and currently stands at just over 300. Everyone on the current Roll will be receiving a letter from the Vicar with a new form. These will be issued with this edition of newsletter and must be returned to Denise Simmons before 15<sup>th</sup> March.

Being on the Roll is seen as membership of St Mary's, and this implies responsibilities which include attendance at worship and financial contributions. Only those who have worshipped with us in the last six months are eligible and only they will be invited to renew. This means that sadly we will be losing around 20 members who have not worshipped with us for over a year. We hope that some of them may return in the future, and the door of the church and our hearts are always open to them. We also have around 50 regular attenders who are not on the Roll, but still consider St Mary's as their church. We will be inviting them to transfer onto the Roll. After 15<sup>th</sup> March, the revised list will be displayed on the notice board in the New Room and will be available at the school. Only those on the Roll are entitled to vote at the APCM or stand for office.

Members who are in nursing homes or housebound, if they continue to show an interest in St Mary's, are kept on the Roll for pastoral reasons.

**New Churchwardens.** We will be electing two new Churchwardens as Hazel has come to the end of her five year term, and Tony has indicated that he does not wish to stand for re-election. We are therefore looking for two new Churchwardens. Already some have expressed an interest and the Vicar will be having a meeting with these and any others sometime in January, in order to go over what is involved and to ascertain who would be prepared to stand for election.

**New PCC members.** In addition we will be looking for new PCC members, and there will be at least six vacancies needing to be filled. Some of the current PCC members may be willing to stand again for another term, but we will announce names in February.

This will be a very important APCM as we will be electing a new leadership team to lead St Mary's into the next few years. There is a parish renewal programme being considered, as well as the possibility of looking at Phase II of the building project, which had been put on the back boiler until the heating was paid for. It is important that we get the right people. The PCC is not for everyone – it is for those who have a vision for the life and mission of the whole of St Mary's (as opposed to personal agendas, issues, etc). It needs people who enjoy planning and decision making, and who can work well as a team even with those disagree with them. There will be other opportunities for different sorts of leadership in connection with the parish renewal programme.

### **LOOKING AHEAD TO MARCH AND EASTER**

**Shrove Tuesday.** The Shrove Tuesday service and pancake party will be held at the Methodist Church on 5<sup>th</sup> March at 6.00pm and will be under the auspices this year of Churches Together in Portchester.

The **Ash Wednesday** Eucharist on 6<sup>th</sup> March will be held at the Methodist Church at 7.30pm, and will include the imposition of ashes.

If all goes to plan, we are aiming to be back in the church by **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March**, which will be the First Sunday in Lent.

### **Confirmation**

Those who have recently come to faith, or started to attend St Mary's from another church, might want to consider being confirmed, which in the C of E is our form of public profession of faith, and (if strictly adhered to) is the means by which people can take Holy Communion in our church. The next service of Confirmation will be on the Saturday before Easter – 20<sup>th</sup> April 8.00pm at Portsmouth Cathedral. Have a word with Rev Ian and we will arrange for some study groups in preparation for this.

## RENEWING THE VISION

### A fresh start

After 31<sup>st</sup> March we will have a new leadership team in place at St Mary's. We already have a new administrator, but will also have a new treasurer, Churchwardens, Standing Committee, and several new members of the PCC. Several issues and challenges from the past year will then be over, and this gives us the opportunity at St Mary's for a fresh start.

Being back in the church building and with the heating project and lych gate (hopefully) completed, we can turn our attention to projects which we have thought of before but which had to be put on hold. These include looking at the possibility of Phase II of the building project, and additional staff to specialise in areas like families and children's work.

As part of that, we are laying some foundations by looking at **children and young people** and some meetings are being planned.

- Tuesday **22<sup>nd</sup> January 7.30pm** at the Vicarage, a meeting of those interested in doing something for our older children, who are becoming teenagers. This is the time when they will be potentially lost to the church or own the faith for themselves.
- Thursday **31<sup>st</sup> January 7.30pm** at the Parish Hall, there will be a meeting for Christian parents at the Parish Hall led by Rev David Simpson. This will be a listening evening when parents can talk about the spiritual development of their children, and how we as a church can help towards this. We are not just talking about Sunday School. Parents we know of, will get a letter explaining more, but the meeting is open to all parents.
- Sunday **3<sup>rd</sup> February** after the morning service, from 11.30am – 12.15pm we would like to have a meeting of all Sunday School teachers in the Conference Room of the Community School. This will be to report on the two meetings mentioned, and to suggest some ways forward.

### Parish Renewal

After April we will be launching a parish renewal programme in connection with the 'new start' and future ideas at St Mary's. It will be based on the book and programme 'Divine Renovation' by James Mallon. We'll not tell you too much yet, but just to let you know that things are happening.

2019 may feel 'different' and we trust that God is at work through his Spirit, renewing the church, equipping us to better serve him and our community, and opening a door of opportunity. Let's respond positively to the various changes.