

ST MARY'S REPORT 2106

As I comment each year, in looking back on the previous 12 months at St. Mary's, one could dwell equally upon what has taken place spiritually and pastorally in our midst as a church family (a dimension I hope to reflect on more fully in my Chairman's remarks at the AGM). However of particular note were the following wide range of new events and happenings in 2016, running alongside the regular and established features of our Church life:

- As I write this, the first scaffolding is being erected around our beloved building, heralding the start of essential work on our church roof. Much work has been done in 2016 preparing to meet our significant Conservation and Renewal challenge, including successful application for a major grant of £125k (that part funds this initial phase, alongside Archdeacon and PCC loans). I am so grateful to Nigel our Churchwarden and the rest of the C and R group he leads, as we now launch in 2017 the major "Thanks a Million" fundraising campaign.
- We were very sorry to mark the passing of Revd. Michael West, and continue to pray for Florence and the family in their sad loss, while also giving to God our warm and heartfelt thanks for all Michael's loving friendship and faithful ministry among us.
- We were proud that our Curate Jimmy Young was invited to be Celebrant and Preacher at the Chichester Diocesan May Camp for young people, and also at the Horsham ecumenical Service of Prayer for Christian Unity .
- We rejoiced with Liz Jinks who was recommended for ordination training, and pray the Lord's blessing as she undertakes her course of ministerial study and formation.
- A very successful Celebration of 250 years of bell-ringing at St. Mary's was held in April, at the Carfax as well as in Church and Church Centre; and also a well-attended Concert, held in partnership with Horsham Museum's commemoration of famous local ringer Henry Burstow.
- Special services in Lent included a Sermon series on Growing the Fruit of the Spirit; a Maundy Thursday service led by the Bishop of Horsham and a Good Friday 3 hours meditation led by +Christopher Morgan, former Bishop of Colchester.
- The residential visit of our Choir to sing the services at Norwich Cathedral for a week in August, which was very well received. We also were pleased to welcome Chichester Cathedral Choir to sing a special Evensong at St. Mary's. In rather different vein, in the summer we held a series of informal evening services that explored key Christian themes through popular film.
- Other high profile services at St. Mary's included a Deanery Confirmation Service (including eight candidates from our own congregation); a Festal Evensong to

celebrate the 90th birthday of Her Majesty the Queen; and hosting the Sussex County Carol Service for St. John's Ambulance.

- Our 2016 Flower Festival and accompanying Civic Service) was on the theme of "Let all the world in every corner sing", with displays celebrating the diversity and unity of the nations - and also featuring prayers gathered from all around the world. The theme felt well timed with the nation facing the historic referendum, deciding terms for our future relationship with the rest of Europe. As well as hosting this very popular festival of our own, our arrangers were also honoured to contribute a Mondrian themed display at Chichester Cathedral Flower Festival.
- Sunday 3rd June was St. Mary's "Vision Day", at which the whole congregation were invited to help prayerfully discern priorities for our future ministry and mission. In the autumn the Church Council crystallised our understanding of God's leading in a new Mission Action Plan for 2017 – 21. This was launched by the Vicar on Advent Sunday, together with an appeal for volunteers to fill key "situations vacant" that can help St. Mary's grow in coming years.
- A wide range of church family social events included a well-supported Harvest Supper and congregational Talent Show; and hosting "Simeon's Watch", a powerful play by the Riding Lights theatre company that explored themes of ageing, dementia and loss from a Christian perspective.
- Growth in ministry with children and young people has once again been helped immeasurably by the creativity and dedication of Fiona our Family and Children's Worker, and Matt our trainee youth-worker, together with their wonderful team of volunteer leaders. Sunday Lighthouse groups and Friday Little Footprints link up creatively with the fantastic work done by St. Mary's Nursery/Pre-School staff led by Lai and Karen, as well as the support provided by the Parish branch of the Mothers' Union. Youth ministry is strongly supported by the dedication of all involved across our Team Parish, including through TGI Fridays, Cafe Connect and Cell groups as well as residential trips to Soul Survivor and Diocesan May Camp.
- We again staged fully booked and vibrant Children's Holiday Club, and also collaborated with our Church Primary School, in staging a week of "Prayer Spaces" that welcomed all pupils into the building for interactive prayer and worship exercises.
- "Kairos", our twice monthly service for young families, continued to flourish - with many parents as well as children also getting much more involved in a wide variety of St. Mary's activities. This includes serving on the DCC for example, or participating in "DODI" ("Drop-off, Drop-in") the coffee morning that is very popular with primary school and nursery parents, held in the Leslie Room on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings. This has now given birth to three lively Pilgrim groups, alongside our other St. Mary's Homegroups, with enthusiastic participants helping one another to explore and deepen understanding of Christian faith.

- I continue to be hugely grateful to Alison and her office team of willing volunteers who bring great warmth, patience and professionalism to our administrative life across the board; also to Keith Burgess for his dedicated and faithful work in looking after our financial affairs; to Delysia Hill our wonderfully efficient DCC Secretary; and to Jane Gorrie who is a most diligent and helpful verger, providing an unfailingly warm and friendly welcome to our many visitors. Richard Holloway retired this year as centre manager at the Barn, and we have been hugely grateful for his care and diligence in the role (a vacancy which is currently being advertised as part of a newly configured Assistant Verger position). Jeremy and Mike continue to do a fantastic job of leading our musical life as ever, which is such a blessing to our weekly worship at St. Mary's as well as the diocesan and civic special services we regularly host. It has been very encouraging to see a raft of enthusiastic new choristers welcomed this year, ably trained by Val Lintott; and we are also hugely blessed with faithful sidesmen, servers, sacristy, flower arrangers and coffee teams who all enable our worship to run smoothly – as well as a skilful and dedicated band of ringers who call us together morning and evening every Sunday.
- For a fifth year St. Mary's took responsibility for staffing the Sunday shift of the Night shelter for the homeless, set up under the auspices of Horsham Churches Together. This year it was hosted at London Road Methodist Church instead of our own Church Centre and huge thanks are due to Denise Herrington and Manny Holden who coordinated our volunteers, who between them covered evening, night and breakfast shifts every Sunday for 3 months.
- This year the Vicar again served as Rural Dean of Horsham and also as Chaplain to the Chairman of Horsham District Council, involving leading prayers at Council meetings and the administering of a charitable trust for the needy in our district. He felt honoured to preach at the anniversary service of Trafalgar Road Baptist Church; and also to write part of the 2017 diocesan Lent Course for "The Year of the Bible".
- Finally I am especially grateful to Jimmy and Alan, my fellow clergy at St. Mary's, for their wonderful support this year. Having just returned from a 3 month sabbatical a month previously, I began 2016 unexpectedly signed off sick with severe anaemia which took until May to clear properly. I had to be on light duties only for between 4 and 5 months, and couldn't have begun to cope without the understanding and amazing support of everyone in St. Mary's Church family. I thank God deeply for you all, and for the healing and restoration to full health that is His gracious and precious gift.

It is always dangerous to single out individuals, but in particular I would like to pay tribute to Alan Mayer, Karen Ind, Simon Quail and the pastoral visitors for their diligent care and visiting, and to my fellow Leadership Team members : Morag Davies, a wonderfully faithful servant to St. Mary's, now standing down after nine dedicated years as St Mary's Churchwarden and Pastoral Care coordinator, Steve Benson, Nigel Stalley and Jimmy

Young, who are all marvellous to work with and for whom I offer great thanks to God. As well as meeting fortnightly as a team, (when we are joined by our gifted and dedicated employees Alison, Fiona, Jane, and Matt), they also take responsibility for the operation of our 7 mission action teams, each composed of 7 or 8 Church Council and congregational members - to all of whom I am enormously grateful for their amazing enthusiasm and commitment in the Lord's service.

To God alone be the Glory – and please do pray for His continued blessing and leading as we move forward as His pilgrim people and become, by His grace, more and more truly *a Church inspired by God's passion for the world ...*

Guy