

Once again I start my report with a huge thank you to all our members, staff, visitors, groups and supporters, along with our Reader and Authorised Pastoral Assistants and churchwardens who have given generously of their time, talent and money to sustain ministry and mission of our church. In a parish of nearly 15 000 (and new houses yet to be built) it has proven to have been a challenging year both financially, and in new ideas around ministry. We are moving toward being more missional in, and through, all our activities. We remain a church positive in spirit, and confident in bringing God's blessings to our community.

God is our business, and we are his. The centrality of the Eucharist remains deeply valued. The mystery of God's presence with us is a powerful source in driving us forward. We continue to offer a variety of services throughout the week. Variety and choice is key. We have this year offered many opportunities from a healing service, a silent Eucharist, Tenebrae, The Cross of Christ to the crafting 'journeying' of Creative Faith'. In all we do we encourage members to deepen their Faith while being open to change and adaptation as God calls us to new ways of being and thinking. In this respect we have formed a small Shared Ministry Development Team SMDT (yet to be commissioned) and have signed up to working with the Diocese and CMS in their Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) initiative. Many of our members enjoy responsibilities and roles within worship, bringing depth and freshness to our activities. Intercessors, Welcomers, Vergers, Servers, Administrants, Acolytes, Choir, Bell Ringers, Musicians, Silver Ladies, Flower Guild members, and the Baptism Team all add to our services and are much appreciated.

We maintain good contact with families and children through Play and Praise, Messy Church and 3@3; along with direct access to seven schools through leading assemblies and helping in curricula teaching. We take safeguarding seriously and have recently discussed and adopted a new diocesan safeguarding policy and associated guides (available for download from our website) and are working toward fully implementing our GDPR policy. We regularly review training needs. The number of baptisms, weddings and funerals remain high as compared with the majority of churches. People still seek God's presence and generally find us open, welcoming and understanding. We continue to work hard to nurture discipleship and growth through example, prayer, teaching, music, worship, courses and retreats. This year we hope to underpin this by introducing a monthly disciple nurture group.

Areas for development

- **To develop and embed missional thinking throughout all our activities, via the leadership of our SMDT and PMC groups.**
- **To review and consider how, where and when we 'do' 3@3 in order to broaden its outreach.**
- **To review Play and Praise and how we may best support the leadership team.**
- **To develop Messy Church as a place to help deliver the new Reception to Communion policy and as a way of strengthening 'cross over' contact between the Parochial School and Church.**
- **To implement the Reception to Communion within the Parochial School and the development of a Eucharistic School worshipping community.**

Our Faith is strongly founded. A strong resilient Faith gives us confidence and helps us maintain a strong presence in and throughout Whickham. We work in close partnership with schools, businesses, along with a diversity of local groups and charities. Also, we provide space and good facilities, creating a real 'sense of home' for the many organisations using the St Mary's Centre. The Centre affords further opportunity for outreach, offering large and small halls, smaller meeting rooms, lounge and catering facilities, and is licensed as a theatre, complete with stage. We have been pleased to welcome 'Shoestring Theatre Company' as regular performers. We have invested substantially this year with the installation of a new kitchen refurbishment. We remain central to the village and are supported by its people, for which we are thankful. This coming year we look to improve security and personal safety by the provision of CCTV cameras. Where we can, we help local charities fundraise in direct and indirect ways through our activities.

Areas for development

- **To encourage lay ministries.**
- **To continue to develop mission, discipleship and growth. Develop a monthly disciple nurture group.**
- **To build on community links; remaining active across community groups, businesses and schools.**
- **To continue the development of the Centre and its outreach role.**
- **Install CCTV and increased security.**

We are connected. We have representatives on both Diocesan and Deanery Synods, with reports being relayed regularly back to PCC members for discussion and comment. When offered, members are invited to attend training courses, 'away days' and shared worship with other churches. Currently Deanery Synod is considering the deployment of clergy, seeking to reduce the number of stipendiary clergy to 5.5 by 2020, along with the development and role of its laity. Presently, through the movement of clergy to new positions, there are only five stipendiary priests in a Deanery of nine parishes. This year we will start to work more closely with neighbouring churches to offer support, supervision and help as is needed and agreed. The PCC have indicated that they support this move, though hope that we too may share in the gifts of sharing talent across boundaries.

We visit and talk to people in our community. For example, we have a visiting team. Members are selected, trained and equipped to listen and give support. There is a team that takes Home Communion to those who are now unable to get to church. We offer prayers for those who ask. Sometimes this is within our services or through our Prayer Chain. The Mother's Union also offer prayers through their meetings and support in the raising of funds for people in need both here and abroad. We are full participants in voluntary action groups such as Lighting Up and Planting up Whickham and many civic and community events. We have good and supportive relationships with other churches in the deanery, with our Methodist and Catholic neighbours and enjoy a privileged and historic connection with the Gibside Chapel and Estate, now owned by the National Trust.

Increasingly, we are reaching more people. We have an excellent monthly magazine with a circulation of four hundred plus subscribers, and many more readers who buy individual copies on sale within church and centre. Similarly our website (*stmaryswhickham.com*) this year now reaches an average of 860 viewers per month, with each visitor reading 2-3 pages each visit. This is a high hit rate for a church and it has been commented upon by the CoE website '*achurchnearyou.com*'. The top three pages are Home, News and Events and Contact us. In addition, we occasionally share information on a local Facebook resident's page.

Areas for development

- **To develop close partnerships with neighbouring parishes.**
- **To review and develop our pastoral care and outreach having regard to our need and resources.**

Buildings are important. St Mary's church is a 900 year old Norman built Grade 1 listed building. It is much loved and used, not just for worship but increasingly as a popular venue for professional concerts involving first rate musicians. We are delighted to tell you that we have a new Quinquennial Architect, Mr Chris Blackburn. We are adding new lights to the baptistery and organ recess which will complement the lights added to the nave last year. It is a disappointment to note that remedial works to the damp affected church walls are yet to start. The process has generated much debate between PCC, Architects, DAC members, builders and the Registry. We are confident that the end is in sight. However I'd ask you to appreciate that this process has proven to be a time and resource consuming operation. Consequently we have yet to improve the path to the rear of the church though we have managed to reduce risk through changing the ways we enter the church. Signage remains in place. Every effort is made to ensure sure our buildings are safe and fit for purpose and we remain responsive to problems as they occur, employing inspection, review and prioritisation. We are immensely grateful to members who have volunteered and taken part in churchyard clear up days; with a thank you to the Council as well, who continue to cut our

grass. The Halls Committee manage the upkeep of the St Mary's Centre and develop and maintain it as necessary. A special mention should be given to our vergers, cleaners, handyman, parish manager and assistant who care daily for our church and centre.

Areas for development

- **To complete the remedial work to the church walls.**
- **To improve the rear path, adding a slip resistant surface to the stone.**
- **To redecorate the interior of the church building.**

God gives first and generously. We give thanks for God's generosity, and for the response of our membership in their giving and stewardship, along with the support of the community. The money we receive allows us to continue in mission and ministry. Financial support is vital to our work in serving God and his people in Whickham and in the diocese.

I am pleased to inform you that we have balanced our budget, meeting our expectations for the previous year. We have been able to increase our parish share contribution from £84 500 to £85 000. We pay the fifth highest share in the Diocese. However this increase is not a year on year obligation and is considered and reviewed against resources and need. We achieve good fiscal management, though there is little flexibility within our budget. We are especially grateful for the work of the Finance Committee and the professional guidance of our Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. Following their advice and guidance, we are asking businesses and wedding couples to pay by bank transfer; and wherever possible we are trying to minimise the use of cheques, both, going out and coming in. If successful this can reduce bank charges, which at times can be as great as £100 per month.

The Planned Giving Scheme and collections at services represent our main income stream and we were pleased to see a positive response to our stewardship campaign last year. Other income streams are mentioned in the Treasurer's report, though I wish to give particular mention to the important work of the Events Committee in raising substantial funds through a variety of social events across the year.

Areas for development

- **To make savings wherever possible.**
- **To minimise bank charges.**
- **To continue generous giving among the membership.**
- **To encourage members to become part of our Planned Giving Scheme.**
- **To further encourage 'Gift Aiding' where possible.**
- **To proactively manage, prioritise, and 'plan in' improvements and repairs.**
- **To review our parish share contribution.**

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