

ST MARY'S RECTOR'S REPORT 2018

This time last year we were anticipating the ordination of David Poyner. Through personal conviction, the approval of the church and, we trust, the Lord, David managed WEMTC and came out the other side! But when we came to celebrate his ordination on 1st July, David was joined by another curate coming to the benefice.

A good number came to Hereford to witness the ordination of Tom King along with David, to the diaconate. Since then their individual ministries have enhanced the church to the glory of God and in the building of His Kingdom. Tom is by gifting, a teacher and, with Vikki and the family, has been present at the Severn Centre most Sundays doing just that. At the same time, David, who is generally more comfortable with traditional worship, has been developing his ministry at Billingsley and at St. Mary's Highley, with his gift of sermons and pastoral care.

Here are my high points in the year:

- Church week-end away at Cloverley Hall, Shropshire on 11-13th May with David Bartlett (THRIVE). A group representing our benefice from Highley and Chelmarsh, enhanced by younger members on Saturday, enjoyed time sharing and thinking through what it means to be 'Better Together' a theme reflected in the following:
- Best of Both services which began in February 2018. The intention being to bring the church family together at alternating venues for worship and learning, enhanced by being the best of both congregation styles. This has proved largely successful, particularly when it is acknowledged that many have put down personal worship preferences in favour of their brothers and sisters in Christ for the sake of the unity experienced through worship together once a month. That, I sincerely commend.
- A sense of movement towards a fresh start for the church in Highley. Since arriving in Highley (via a sojourn in Bridgnorth), Tom King sensed that the church had got stuck and needed to move on, especially at the Severn Centre. An awareness of loss and reluctance to accept the necessity of change was also apparent (as it had been to me for some time). This was not shared by all, especially those who have arrived in the church family more recently, but, nevertheless needed addressing. So, in Advent, with PCC approval, we went on a journey of Lament – celebrating good from the past, but acknowledging a lack of vision or movement towards the future and seeking to begin to address it by putting the past behind us. This was to be followed in January/February 2019 by a period of prayer culminating in the launch of a new initiative, Holy Habits – from the book of the same name, written by Methodist minister, Andrew Roberts. This course is based around the characteristics of the early church as found in Acts 2: 42-47 and tackled in periods of six weeks each, which will take up to two years to complete. This course of action was the outcome of a staff day away in Alveley on 31st August and approved by the PCC in September.
- The Charity Shop continues to be our spearhead into the wider community and is well-received in the village. In 2017 the Shop made just under £14,000 with £3,900 going to local and regional charities and a considerable amount to the Church Restoration Fund (see Gay's report). For much of this work Gay is to be commended along with her colleagues who work week by week there in these, often cold, surroundings.
- The Parish Hall. We are beginning to redress some of the imbalance in terms of expenditure on the hall in relation to income. In addition to Friday Event, Catalyst (Men's Group) and monthly Prayer we now have regular use by Highley Companions and a stretch exercise group. It looks likely that other groups will want to use the facilities we provide looking to the future. However, problems remain, especially with the fabric of the building and it could do with a good lick of paint! Thanks to Janet and David Crossley (in the Office) Pat Whitefoot, David Rayner and cleaners for making it more user-friendly, tidy

and safe. Tom King is undertaking a review of the use of the Hall and its potential, seeking to further balance costs with income and more fundamentally, if it has a future.

- Farewells. The loss of respected members of God's flock here is always sad and we paid tribute to the lives of Delphine Brown, Frances Wall and Glad Rosie during the year. We also said farewell to Bill Rosie as he left to live with one of his daughters near Ross-on-Wye. However, we received a surprising and welcome bequest through Delphine's legacy, which will assist with the restoration project as well as enhance the churchyard with a Garden of Remembrance in years to come.
- Children, Youth and Family Outreach continues through Messy Church, Friday Event, Children's Sunday and now STIR, a group to inspire young people on their walk with Jesus, served by John and Louise Prockter on a Monday evening. We are grateful to them for inspiring our young people on their way. I attend Friday Event once a month and always come away encouraged, even when I go in tired! We have some good conversations and lots of fun. These gatherings form a point of welcome from the church family, especially on a cold, wet Friday night! Thanks to Chris and Mary for their vision and to all who help (see the Report). Sundays are beginning to change with plans for a broader network of children's leaders, organised by Tom and with a focus on Holy Habits as 2019 comes into view (see report). Our connection with Highley School continues to grow with Open the Book and several church members, including me, on the Governing body with Emma Lloyd as Chair.

Low points:

- HELP! It is amazing what can be managed by relatively few people with a sense of commitment. However, it really needs a good number of committed people to power change and escape from 'just about managing'. Just think where we could be with another Churchwarden alongside David! I cannot sum up all that David Rayner has managed to do over this last full year as well as being in effect, Warden at Billingsley and Project Manager for the Restoration. However, the church will not function to its potential whilst he is our sole Warden and I find that sad, especially when there are people around who can play a part and share the load. What is there to fear except fear itself? God will provide and we wait in anticipation.
- At one point during the year we might have been without a Treasurer. Linda bravely took over from Val & Keith who had borne this extra weight of responsibility during the vacancy, but she soon recognised that this was a complex operation. Due to poor health she had to give up in the latter part of the year; but we thank Linda for her efforts. Mary Rayner is a competent accountant, but has resisted taking on the role in retirement as she longed for freedom to serve the church as a Reader and in pastoral care. Sadly this aspiration has been somewhat limited by the need to find a Treasurer. Mary had already been assisting Linda with the new software and, later on in the year, became, reluctantly, our new Treasurer. I am very relieved and Mary has already shown just how competent she is in this role – thanks be to God!
- Editing the Forum still takes up to 2 days of my time each month. It is time I could be doing other things. Like others I am waiting for someone to step in to relieve me of the role or, of course, the magazine just dies. I have always resisted this, partly because I actually enjoy doing it (though would enjoy it more if I had the time to do it well), but also because there are some 350 people a month who appreciate it – especially older people who would not access anything like this on a laptop/computer. There are still months when it is difficult to complete in time.
- Severn Centre Worship. At our first Best of Both service in 2018 I commissioned a team of worship leader and preachers: Stewart & Shirley Page, Mark & Amy Williams and Angie Forster. The intention was that they would spearhead the future of this service until I was in a position to assist properly when not taking Communion services round

the benefice. You will know the demands and struggles each of these people have had to contend with over the year and it was with some sadness that this team was disbanded towards the end of the year; though not before they had contributed together to the life and worship at the Centre, elements of which continue. Tom King has taken up some of the responsibilities along with children's work and I truly believe that there is scope for further development as we look to the future, whether that be at the Severn centre or back in the Parish Church.

- Restoration. It has been said that we ought to give up St. Mary's and allow the building to deteriorate whilst we worship elsewhere. The fact is that I have a legal obligation for its welfare as a Grade 2* listed building which is shared with the PCC (Trustees); 900 years of the history of Christian worship is wrapped up in it. The pots of money for places like these are drying up rapidly and applications are outstripping fulfilment many times over. Thanks to the generous bequest (see earlier comment) and shop money in addition to donations, there is real hope that work on the tower can begin this summer and heating may be in place by next winter (see Restoration report).
- The Churchyard continues to make demands on time and energy. In March the Consistory Court took place and, eventually, we learnt that permission to Reserve a plot had been granted to the petitioner by the Chancellor. That is not what we wanted, but we took it with grace. There is a sting in the tail however in that permission has to be applied for again in six years! David R and I continue to press the Council for movement forward in provision of an extension to the churchyard. The PCC did agree that we would manage this if the Council paid for the land and access, continuing to share the cost of maintenance with us. We are grateful to RJM, the contractors who took over the maintenance of the churchyard from HALO mid-year. They are doing a good job, though we still get complaints about dog mess!

2018 has been a year of transition. In order to steer a large ship from harbour on its journey across the sea, a Captain needs to allow a lot of space for change in direction; up to half a mile is not unusual. It has taken me three years to begin to see something of the way ahead here and I know full well that to change direction requires a shared vision and sense of unity. It also requires a team and with our new curates, Readers/PTO and Val & Keith back in action, I'm hoping we can achieve real progress in 2019. I'm grateful to them all for the important part they play in the life of St. Mary's along with many unspoken heroes who do so many of the little and big jobs that help keep us true to our calling. For example: safeguarding, Gill Rees; Health & Safety, Richard Thomas; Flowers and food, Bev, Jacky, Lin and Gay along with cleaning the church with others. Then there are the musicians, sound and projection people; provision of Notice sheets, etc. We can now also anticipate a brand new web site produced by Stewart Page and we give thanks for our Pastoral Care Team and Coffee Morning crowd organised ably by Yvonne. There is also much quiet work for which no-one is thanked – thank you all so much!

I close with my appreciation of all who recently provided feedback (at my request) for my ministry as part of my year 3 Ministry Development Review. Thanks to you I'm still here!

'If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come!' (2 Co. 5:17, RSV).

Yours in His service, **Mike**

ST MARY'S CHURCH HIGHLEY CURATE REPORT 2018

Since our arrival in June, we have felt very welcomed here in the Severn Valley Benefice, particularly in Highley, where we have spent most of our time. Thank you to all those who have helped us along the way. The sense of God's providence for our move from Durham, first to Bridgnorth, and then to Highley, has been in great measure down to the kindness and generosity people here have shown to us. The children have settled very easily and well into several good friendships and into the school. They are enjoying their time here already in a way that they did not in Durham.

Since moving to Highley in November it has certainly been easier for me to get stuck into the things of the church – ministries and meeting with people. Life has already thrown up many challenges for people in the church since we arrived and it has been good to have walked alongside you in these. Also, it is clear to me that God desires good things for the church, and the community of Highley through the church. There is a definite sense of this being a moment in time when we can participate with him to see his blessings touching many people in the village through the Gospel.

Tom King

ST MARY'S ASSOCIATE MINISTER'S REPORT 2018

Last year my prayer for the church in Highley and indeed the whole Benefice, was that we, as a church, learn to be the people of God that we are called to be – looking to create healthy, Christ-like relationships within ourselves as individuals and together as the church family; looking upwards to God to grow in relationship with Him and to hear Him more clearly; looking outwards with a vision to live 24/7 lives as Christians in our community.

I believe we have begun to do just that during this year, despite the usual amount of difficulties and set-backs in visible and practical things – such as the trials and difficulties in the Restoration project for St Mary's Church building. As spirit-filled, faith-living people, we know that the enemy will always attempt to divert and distract us. We have to get better at spotting when he is doing that and focus our attention of where God is leading.

I also spoke of how my role of as Associate Minister can be seen in many different shapes and sizes. When I was ordained, I was very much a Minister in Secular Employment – which meant that although I worked in the parish, particularly with regard to preaching and service leading and occasional offices (weddings, baptisms and funerals), the other focus of my ministry was at Willowdene Drug Rehabilitation Centre, where I taught basic life skills to those who had been stuck in a cycle of addiction and crime. Many of you will remember the successful Alpha course, which several of the men attended and Sunday mornings when they would appear with me at church, wherever I was taking a service.

Those were exciting days indeed. We do well to remember them and thank God for what he was doing. But we can't live in the past. Over the last year we, as a church, have been learning to let go of the past, however wonderful it was, and to look forward to see what God is doing now.

Letting go isn't always easy, as we tend to remember only the 'good old days'. We look through rose-tinted glasses and forget the hard stuff. But God is good. We have been greatly blessed by having not one, but two new curates since July 2018. David Poyner is our 'home-grown' SSM and, with just 5 weeks notice, we heard that we were to be joined by Rev'd Tom King as a stipendiary curate. God is indeed doing a new thing.

Isaiah 43:18-19 Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

Both our new curates have been involved in the new way forward. God went before us and prepared a way that we had no idea He was doing. Since his ordination, David has been working hard in Billingsley. He has been tasked with finding out if there are any seeds of hope that Billingsley could thrive again as a parish, having lost almost its entire PCC and congregation overnight, through people moving away. He has bravely trodden where few have gone before and knocked on every door in the village, offering prayer and reminding people that the Church is there for them. On Remembrance Sunday, he took a wooden cross and had a pop-up service on the green outside Lincoln Fields. It takes courage to step into the unknown and we commend him for that and all the other ways he has sought to engage the folk of Billingsley and Glazeley, through his gifts and interest in the area and its history. We hope that his work will continue to bear fruit.

Despite having to commute from Bridgnorth for quite a few months, due to difficulties in moving into the curate's house, Tom has quickly settled into the parish and taken on the remit of assisting the growth and development of the children's work at the Severn Centre, amongst many other day-to-day tasks in the life of a newly ordained curate.

Curacy is a learning experience, but Tom brings with him an astute eye for the here and now. He quickly identified the feelings of loss and unfulfilled expectations which many were still holding on to, from the situation we have found ourselves in over the past years. To this end, he led us in an Advent series, focussed on the biblical act of Lament. We were encouraged to call out to God and acknowledge those feelings, to allow God to bring healing where it was needed and to set us free to look to the future, knowing that God knows and understands all things and that He alone is judge.

We have built on that in the first few months of 2019 and are looking forward to further biblical teaching as we come to the end of a time of intentional prayer and commence a 2 year commitment to the Holy Habits discipleship course.

For myself there is also change, as my contract with the Diocese came to an end in December 2018. As I said at the beginning, the role of a non-stipendiary minister is diverse and can be interpreted both in relation to personal gifts and interests, not to mention God's call and direction. As I ended my diocesan role in December, people were naturally asking 'what next?' My answer was 'whatever God calls me to do'.

This is not a get-out clause, it's something we should all be asking of ourselves individually and as a church family/body.

- What is God asking of me /us as a church? Do I/we need to change and if so, how?
- What gifts/skills has he given me that I can use?
- What is God saying to me/us to do or be in this moment, today?

Our prayer could well be one, which became well known through the 12 steps programme for Alcoholics Anonymous.

God grant me the serenity

To accept the things I cannot change
Courage to change the things I can
And wisdom to know the difference

My prayer this year is that we shall all know God's peace, courage and wisdom, as we move ahead into the future and the unknown, confident that God is surely doing 'a new thing'.

Send us out, in the power of Your Holy Spirit, to live and work to Your praise and glory,
Amen

Revd Val Smith

ST MARY'S ASSOCIATE MINISTER REPORT 2018

My working agreement is that, as a self-supporting minister I will spend one day and one evening in the benefice. Since ordination, most of my activities have been outside of Highley, particularly in Billingsley. I have conducted one 9.30 service and preached at one of the united summer services at the Severn Centre. I have attended meetings of the pastoral affairs committee and the PCC, contributing to the discussions where appropriate and have occasionally been to coffee mornings. When I am not officiating, I attend the 9.30 service at Highley as a member of the congregation.

I have no formal role as an ordained minister in my place of work, which in any case has a number of Christian chaplains. However, I do have an informal, pastoral role, with both students and staff. I have attended a number of scientific meetings wearing my clerical collar, as a visible sign of God's presence. This has led to some interesting conversations, where individuals have been able to discuss their faith with me.

I would like to thank all members of St Mary's, Highley for their support, particularly their prayers, since my ordination.

David Poyner

ST MARY'S SECRETARY REPORT 2018

St Mary's continues to move forwards with exciting new developments in the children's work, release of the holy habits home groups and our two new curates Tom King and David Poyner. I feel God is laying down our solid foundations in him ready for the new season ahead of us. I pray that in 2019 we all can just have a glimpse of what we can do through christ and what he can do through us, so we can release our full potential through him.

Challenges with the church building and parish hall remain as well as the desperate need for another church warden and a treasurer as Mary and David Rayner hold the forte. There does appear to be a positive increase of the use of the parish hall by the village and church and hopefully this will continue. We also plan for some positive steps forward to be made on the church building work in 2019.

Jane Macnaughton

ST MARY'S CHURCH WARDEN REPORT 2018

I continue to be surprised at the number of rotas there are that keep things working; many thanks to those drawing up the rotas and those serving on them. Without you very little could happen. But this is only part of our amazingly complex organisation that includes the music group, children's activities, setting up for and running services, home group leaders, those running Alpha, and the organisers, helpers and donors at the various events, shared meals and many others. At the same time I am concerned at the workload on the clergy team and on myself that could be shared if more people were willing to volunteer and commit to doing things. We really need a second churchwarden; and a hall management group to look after the hall, to manage bookings and maintenance and to report to the PCC. With two curates to look after the load on Mike has increased rather than decreased at this stage in their training. Please think and pray about whether there are areas that you could take on; whether you have any knowledge that is not being used etc. and talk to either myself or Mike.

I would also like to thank those who help in the shop, this provides an important resource and form of outreach in the village; those who provide outreach through the pastoral care team and in other ways.

The joint Severn Centre/St Mary's series on "Heroes of the 20th Century" over the summer school holidays was very well received, and gave an opportunity for the two congregations to worship together. In addition the first Sunday of the month joint "best of both" service has generally been well received but has yet to develop a real character of its own, and may have suffered from being over busy making many of the service quite long.

I remain frustrated that we have not been able to progress the restoration of St Mary's, and that progress with heating has been very slow as this is an unfortunate distraction from the work of the church in the community, but this is covered further in the restoration report. I hope that in 2019 we will be able to make a significant jump forward with work both on the tower and internally including heating.

David Rayner, Sole Churchwarden

ST MARY'S FABRIC REPORT 2018

There have been no changes to the fabric of the building since the last report. At the time of writing due to the absence of a second Churchwarden it has been impossible to check the inventory. We continue to use the portable radiant heaters together with a gas space heater in the absence of permanent heating.

For the first part of the mowing season the churchyard was maintained by HALO/Severn Centre with costs shared between ourselves and the Parish Council. They performed so badly that the work was re-tendered and RJM Contracts took over from July and performed very well.

The Parish Hall continues to be a very useful resource to the church as the parish office, for meetings, Alpha, meals, the Friday Event etc. A low level of lettings provides some assistance with running costs. The hall is generally looking rather tired and could benefit from

some decoration, some cleaning of chairs and recovering of others to make it more attractive to users. For 2019 Tom King has been tasked with looking at the maintenance needs and how to finance them.

We continue to be grateful for the use of the premises for the Charity Shop, though we are aware that the owner is seeking to sell the site. Work is ongoing to identify alternative premises in which to continue this important work.

Maintenance around the church has been limited to general checks and replacement of failed bulbs etc.

I would like to thank everyone that has helped around the church and churchyard including those who clean, prepare for services, and who lock and unlock every day.

David Rayner, Churchwarden

ST MARY'S RESTORATION GROUP REPORT 2017

Despite the ongoing efforts of the PCC and two failed applications for Heritage Lottery Fund assistance we have still been unable to start the repairs listed as urgent in the 2014 Quinquennial Inspection (and we are due another in 2019).

In January it was agreed that a bid be made to the HLF "Our Heritage" scheme to include all the work on the tower including some historical investigation and recording. If successful this would allow us to complete all the high level work that requires the expense of scaffolding circa £100k plus VAT of work. The disadvantage of this scheme is that we have to have all design and preparation work completed before applying including obtaining the faculty. This was progressed and application for the Faculty will be made in early January 2019 for work on the tower and porch.

Towards the end of the year the PCC received a substantial bequest for spending "on the fabric of the church or churchyard in accordance with proposals approved by Keith Smith". It is hoped that some of this bequest will allow the work to be completed without recourse to the Lottery, but a decision is awaited.

We would aim to do the other essential work as a series of smaller projects approaching other grant bodies for specific elements such as the glass, the porch stonework, the French drain etc.

We were also lucky enough to receive a donation of £30k towards the heating. Having obtained costed options it was agreed that we should go for a gas fired radiator system and the information passed to the architect to draw up the detailed specification, obtain a faculty, and tender. This was progressed and application for the Faculty will be made in early January 2019.

Fundraising has been difficult as rejections dampen enthusiasm. We continue to be grateful for donations from the shop. We hope that by making a significant step forward we can invigorate efforts, especially if we can look to fundraise for small project elements with short-term deadlines.

In January the Garfield Weston Trust announced a new Anniversary fund, and amongst the things they wish to target are toilets and kitchen facilities in churches. The Restoration Group and PCC agreed that we should make a bid for funds. As with the new HLF fund, all specifications and permissions had to be in place before application, some £3.5k of Architects fees. Unfortunately the fund was oversubscribed by a factor of over 40x and we were unsuccessful. We do however hold a valid faculty valid initially for 18 months, should funds become available.

Communication has been limited to articles in the Forum.

David Rayner, Restoration Group Chair and Churchwarden

ST MARY'S ALLSORTS REPORT 2018

It has been another great year for Allsorts with inspirational speakers and lots of fun. The membership is on the rise, we now have in excesses of thirty.

In April Elaine Moore talked about the work of Co/Co (community care), in May the ladies from 'Open the Book' came and demonstrated the wonderful work they do in schools bringing the Bible to life.

We had our Annual day out in June spending some uplifting time at Oak Farm in Ditton Priors, which is a working farm sponsored by the Council, The Farm is run for the use of Adults with learning disabilities. The service users really enjoyed showing us around and they are very proud of what they do. We then moved on to Ruthal Manor Gardens which is the home of Mr and Mrs Linda Clark. We had a delicious afternoon tea and also time to have a leisurely stroll around the beautifully manicured gardens.

During the rest of the year we enjoyed handbag making, an Indian Cookery demonstration and we also welcomed Mervyn Smith who gave us a very interesting talk all about his sponsored fundraising trip to the Artic Circle. And finally, in November Alison Wakeman gave us a talk on the old British tradition of Bee Keeping.

Unfortunately, our Christmas Dinner had to be postponed until February. In place of our Christmas Dinner we had a games night. We always have great fun at Allsorts and we look forward to the next twelve months.

Lin Evans

ST MARY'S EAGLE'S NEST REPORT 2018

This is a ladies group which meets on Wednesday during term time from 10:30-13:00. We start with a chat and coffee (until most of us have arrived) and then sing along using worship CD's. We pray for the needs of each other and the wider church family and then spend time reading scripture with the help of bible notes. This year we have used a booklet 'Discovering God in our everyday life' and an advent one 'A strange Christmas' which we still haven't finished! We never seem to cover the whole topic in one session, but we do have some very good discussion which hopefully gives us a good outlook on living our christian lives.

Liz Smith

ST MARY'S CHARITY SHOP REPORT 2018

Firstly, we must thank all our volunteers, who week by week give their time and effort into making our charity shop the success that it is. Most of these people are church members and we have a few new ladies who help out as well as the regulars, particularly Chris Edwards who steps in to 'fill a gap' on a frequent basis. We must say a big 'thank you' to Roy Adlington who has turned up every Monday to help put out the bags of surplus textiles for the Oxfam van to collect. We also need to thank Alastair for repairing the window cill at the front of the building.

It seems that Bob and Mabel Cowley are not able to sell their premises at the moment, but we are still cogniscent of the need to find somewhere else if our shop is to continue, beyond any sale. Our vision for the future is to have somewhere with more room and space for a small area for serving tea and biscuits for our customers, with maybe someone from the church community on hand to talk through their many concerns and problems. Our current premises are not ideal in that there is no water supply or toilet facilities and we appear to have a leak in the corner of the roof. However, a very kind person by the name of Stuart came into the shop and asked if we'd like the outside painted for nothing in his spare time. We readily accepted after clearing it with the Cowleys and the shop is beginning to look nicely spruced up!

The facility is an enormous benefit to the church and people of the village alike, many of whom rely on us for clothing their families and is certainly a great outreach in that many interesting and sometimes quite profound conversations are held (when time permits). Indeed, many villagers have taken ownership of it and will gladly give their opinions!

We are often offered good electrical items and in order to take advantage of this, so are looking for someone who is able to PAT test.

At the beginning of the year our staff had a well-earned rest to recuperate from the busy lead-up to Christmas, including running a stall at the village lights switch on, which raised additional funds. During the year, we held two rummage sales of merchandise we needed to clear. These were a success in that many villagers looked in and shared tea and cake, but not so good for selling, which resulted in trips to the tip! We also ran a stall of bric a brac at the village fete day, where we would have raised a considerable amount, had it not been for a freak wind which blew our tent over and a lot of our takings with it! Yet again we held our Christmas stall at the lights switch on and had a prime spot. We raised a large amount from this and are again very grateful for the team who gave up their time to man it. We ended the year on a high with a 'thank you' dinner at the Bulls Head which all agreed was very enjoyable.

During the year we raised almost £14,000.00 of which £9,723.00 is going towards the refurbishment of the church building with additionally many local, regional and international charities benefitting by almost £4,000.00; a board showing the monthly amounts is displayed in the shop window in which the villagers are very interested and sometimes give extra for a particular charity. In addition, elderly pensioners often pop into the shop with a bag of small change which they've saved for the 'tower'. We are very grateful to our customers for their support in both donating and purchasing.

We feel truly humbled by God's 'perfect provision' and look forward to what he holds for us in the future.

Gay Lilley

Catalyst Men's Group



The Men's Group, known as Catalyst, met every third Saturday in the Parish Hall for a full English breakfast, a time of fellowship and a talk. We had a number of visiting speakers, including Keith Bowley from the Bridgnorth Filling Station, Alan Vincent from Chorley Chapel, Roger Littleover from Willowdene, Adam Bhardwaj and his father who run a multi ethnic church and social centre in Bilston and Paul Rylance among others.

We didn't get the opportunity to go out this year, but despite that, it was a year of strengthening relationships and personal growth. We were also fortunate enough to see a couple of visitors come from outside of the church and we hope this trend will continue. On average we had twelve men attend, although we have had as many as eighteen men and we have been privileged to have some of our young people both from Friday Event and church attend.

In January this year we trialled a continental breakfast instead of a full English, and it was received well, so this may become a feature of the mornings.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of Gay Lilley and Shirley Page who get up at 6:00am ready to cook the breakfast and have it on the plates at 8:05am. They work quietly in the kitchen, cooking and washing up because not only do they enjoy it, but they see it as part of their service of God's family. A wonderful example to us all.

Stewart Page



The Friday event report

The last 12 months have once again been a continual blessing to us as St. Mary's, with the committee being focussed on the vision to bring the gospel to the young people of Highley through a fun, safe environment which allows growth both from those coming and those who are leading.

I have seen such encouragement in the last year, that I know God will continue to bless us, as long as we continue to seek him and listen.

In terms of numbers who attend, we are currently looking at an average of 18-22 each week, this however is completely irrelevant as we are looking to form meaningful relationships with each person who walks through the door on a Friday evening. Building relationships is impossible if we are unable to open, so I would like to thank all of those who volunteer 2 hours of their Friday's to help to honour and value the young people of our village.

Vision:

Our vision continues to be that we grow, with St. Mary's Church, in relationship with our group of young people and with the way in which we get the Gospel of Jesus is communicated to the youth of the village.

Volunteers / Young leaders:

I am very please to say that our core team of volunteers has continued to be very healthy in number, where some have needed to drop out others have always stepped in to fill their space, offering different valuable skills to be able to function smoothly on a weekly basis.

Our group of young volunteers has grown massively, as we look to increase their confidence and skills in leadership. We now have 8 young people who have made a choice to offer their time and skills to help us on a Friday evening. They have been so enthusiastic and are always willing to help out whether that be to run a competition or make toast, wash up or run the tuck shop. It is now great that we have young leaders at differing levels of their volunteering, essentially, we are now at a point of leaders growing leaders... the basis of discipleship – this I think is very exciting!

We had three young people take part in the BYSP Young Volunteers Programme in October and we are looking for the rest to attend another session that will be put on in the near future.

Spiritual Content:

In July of 2018 Mary lead a trip to 'Spree West Midlands'. Along with Mary Nelson, 3 Friday Eventers embarked on a great weekend exploring faith, God and the Gospel in new ways. Mainly through a rapper (Jozzy) and dance group (Stance), who shared their stories with the groups and made 'being a Christian' cool.

It gave us the opportunity work in a small group and get to know each other, what God means to each of us and how he works in our lives each day.

We are looking ahead to the next Spree trip in July 2019, looking to take as many young people as possible and are really encouraging them to go to get an experience of God that we can bring back and grow in our environment of the Friday Event.

Activities:

This year we have produced an extensive activities programme for our young people, allowing them to know what is coming up within the term time of us being open. We have used all of the resources that we have in order to provide something a little different to the normal pool, table tennis and games console that are on offer every week.

We have some great leaders who produce some excellent craft ideas, that the young people really enjoy, increasing their culinary skills with our cooks and there is usually a 9 o'clock challenge of some sort for those who like to stretch their brain a little at the end of the week.

We have had the privilege of taking 17 of our group to the Pioneer Centre in December where we had an amazing amount of fun, in the freezing cold, zooming around the high wire course, flying down the zip wire and bouncing on the huge inflatables. All of this and then washed down with a fabulous 'all the trimmings' Christmas Dinner.

Finances:

We have very rarely asked the PCC for funding, however, please pray that God will provide plentifully as we continue to seek His will with the young people of the village – 2018 report.

Prayers Answered!! – we must give thanks to God for all that he has provided for us this year... it has been plentiful.

I am pleased, again, to report that the Friday Event is in a very healthy position and has continued to be in a place where we can look to the future and plan some big things, through mission and also for a whole lot of fun.

With zero funding from the Local Joints Committee this year it has been wonderful to see us be in the financial state that we are in. Never have we had to be looking over our shoulder or gone without what we need. This is in part to our wonderful treasurer, however a huge contributor to our success is the St. Mary's Shop funding that we received, so a massive thank you to the shop, their volunteers and also all of those who use the shop.

Being in the position that we are, means that we have been able to bless some of our wonderful young people by subsidising some of the cost to the Pioneer Centre. The Committee will be looking to use their finances to bless as much as we are able to in a variety of ways.

In summary:

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

In time
In prayer
In gifts
In finances

Are we ready to give all that we can for the young people of this place? I am very excited at the enthusiasm they are showing for everything that we are offering. Now is the time for us to shine, bright and on a hill, visibly different to the world and ready to answer the questions they are burning to ask.

Thank you to all on the committee, the volunteers, St. Mary's shop, PCC and the young people for all contributing to what is a huge asset to Highley Village.

Chris Smith

Friday Event Chair.

ST MARY'S CHILDREN'S WORK REPORT 2018

This year has been challenging for the C&YP work in the church, but things are beginning to move in a very positive direction. By summer last year the people doing the C&YP work in the church were suffering from general demotivation and uncertainty about the way ahead.

In the last eight months in conjunction with the whole church emphasis on the use of the Holy Habits material we have begun to implement a plan for good discipleship of the young people and their leaders. The Holy Habits programme affords us the opportunity to plan well in advance, which in itself lends greater stability and predictability for the children. There have been a few changes to the way in which the children will be included in the services that they attend; first among these being that the children will be present at every 4th Sunday of the month, except in August and major Festivals. During these meetings, the children will begin to take a more active part in leading, delivering and participating in the services. All other Sundays will see them learning in their groups.

With grateful thanks to the PCC we have now a budget that will allow not only provision of material for such sessions, but will also enable the training and equipping of those who have renewed their commitment to leading and helping with the children on Sunday mornings. There are now eleven people helping which is fabulous (and we could still do with one more!), as it spreads the investment of time and effort more effectively.

Alongside Sundays, and what is happening with the Friday Event, there has also been a weekly, term-time discipleship group on a Monday afternoon, called Stir. This is for those in Year 6 and above. It has seen some very positive and enthusiastic engagement with matters of faith on the part of the young people.

Going forward with the material of Holy Habits, things are developing in a positive direction that hopefully will see God doing marvellous things with the children and young people as their faith in him grows and flourishes.

Tom King

Messy Church Report 2018

As in 2017, Messy Church met 4 times this year in March, June, September and December. On each occasion the numbers of both children and adults were up considerably on the previous year. In both years the same month (March) had the largest attendance, the same month (June) had the smallest, and the other two months had very similar attendance. Strange! In 2018 the average attendance has been 46 children, 30 adults and 13

helpers. In 2017 it was 32 children, 18 adults and 14 helpers. Families are definitely returning; new families are coming each time to see what this Messy Church is (16 in March, 2 in June, 5 in September, 4 in December) Perhaps grateful to have something to do on a Saturday morning, or for whatever reason; and a number have not returned. This is amazing, exciting, terrifying and humbling. God is working through Messy Church in Highley as in many other places here and abroad and we are going on this journey with him.

Our themes this year were: Easter; The Real Me; Harvest; saying 'thank-you' (based on Jesus' healing of the 10 Lepers) and Christmas; Angels and Messages. We had some good crafts such as; String Art Cross, a large Footprint Cross (hung in church thereafter), Garden Tomb Biscuits, Pipecleaner model of double helix DNA, 'God made me special' Badges, Fingerprint Fun, Soap Carving, Invisible Ink Prayers, Local Harvest Produce to touch/smell/ taste, Paper Angel, Morse-Code Messages, Silhouette Nativity and more.

Celebration times were varied and interactive. In June we showed an imaginative 'Highley' filmed version of Max Lucado's book 'I am special' with all parts acted by the older church children. It was brilliant.

And we again enjoyed some very tasty meals which gives a good opportunity to chat and get to know new folk.

In last year's report I asked for more men to come and help and Alastair Macnaughton responded. He's been a great asset, thank you, Alastair.

As I also said last year, preparing for each Messy Church takes a lot of time, energy and work. We have a great team of dedicated helpers. Many, many thanks to each and every person who has helped to bring Messy Church to life in 2018. There may be 12-14 helpers there on the day, which sounds a lot, but each one is needed and we could really do with more help: to cover for those who need a break or can't make it on the day; to do the washing-up; to chat with Mums (and Dads) as they sit with babies and toddlers in the under 3s area; to chat with children as they colour in; to help with a craft or activity; to serve food; to prepare food; to do what you can. Please come and see what happens, and join in. The activities are not just for children to do!

More information on all things Messy Church can be found on the website:

www.messychurch.org.uk. It's worth having a look.

Moira Harris

ST MARY'S OPEN THE BOOK REPORT 2018

Open the Book volunteers continue to visit Highley and Kinlet Primary Schools on a weekly basis where 273 children hear the Christian message. Children at both schools participate enthusiastically and listen attentively to the stories.

This academic year we are following Open the Book Year Two. This consists of six modules :

1. The First Christians

2. Trusting God
3. More About Jesus
4. Men Who Dared To Do Right
5. Children Play Their Part
6. Adventures In The Old Testament

We also cover Christmas and Easter.

Liz Smith felt called to join the team this year.

The team have made use of the recently acquired Christian Values publication. We used the Christmas poem and then the presentation of Jesus at the temple story during St Mary 's Service in Highley School Hall during February.

2019 sees the 20th Anniversary of Open The Book. The team will be attending a service in Gloucester Cathedral in May.

All teams are being encouraged to hold a fund raising event this year. Although teams going into school are unpaid there are obviously costs to cover such as: paid staff in the organisation, premises, printing and delivery of training. We hope to plan a fund raising event in either the summer or autumn term.

Jill Mansell

ST MARY'S PASTORAL CARE REPORT 2018

The Pastoral Care Team met eight times during the year to review needs and look at other areas where pastoral care might be given. Support for those who are isolated, particularly those who are ill or older, and unable to come to church has continued to be important. A number of people receive regular visits and Home Communion is available if requested.

During the year the Team have also undertaken some in house training, using a video course entitled "Reaching Out – A Practical Guide to Pastoral Care" produced by the Diocese of Oxford. It aims to help those involved in Pastoral Care to see how we are perceived through the eyes of those we meet. Sessions included bereavement visiting and mental health issues. We acknowledge the need to keep up to date with good practice.

Sometimes it is helpful to be able to leave a card or printed copy of a prayer when visiting. During the year various sources of suitable cards have been considered and a selection of suitable ones are now available in a pack on the vestry table for those who need them. Bev continues to take a card to those who have been bereaved on the first anniversary of their loss. This is often an opportunity for pastoral conversations. She also ensures that special birthdays are recognised.

Sadly dementia and other memory problems are becoming an ever pressing problem as the population ages. CoCo, an organisation Bernadine is already involved with, hold fortnightly meetings at Rhea Hall and at the invitation of the group Mike and Mary went along to a session in March. Highley Companions also support those with dementia and their carers, and from May began to hold regularly fortnightly meetings in the Parish Hall offering a time to chat, a light lunch and a variety of activities. Thelma often attends these meetings to help and some of our church family have been able to attend as participants.

Elaine Moore is interested in starting a group, meeting on alternate Thursdays, for those who are lonely, but she is looking for others to organise and run it. At the present we felt that as a church, we did not have the resources or volunteers to take this on at present.

A Memorial service was held again this year in November, to recognise and support those who had been bereaved during the past year. As previously, personal invitations were sent out to each family but a general invitation was also issued to anyone who had been bereaved. Everyone attending received a little booklet "In Loving Memory" together with a sprig of rosemary. The service was again well attended and seemed to be helpful.

As always there are many and varied needs within both the church family and the wider community and these cannot be met by the Pastoral Care Team alone. The daily acts of friendship and support given by all the church family to each other, friends, neighbours and others they meet continues to be the underpinning core of pastoral care in the community.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers
and sisters of mine you did for me" (Matthew 25:40)

Mary Rayner

ST MARY'S COFFEE MORNINGS REPORT 2018

We are still so fortunate to be able to meet together in the home of a different Host/Hostess, each week on Tuesday mornings. It brings us together, not just with the regulars, but with local neighbours and friends, and occasionally with people who just 'pop in' because they saw the invitation board standing outside someone's home. We always aim to offer a 'right good welcome', and they often, they then, return as regulars to the family.

We are totally thankful to our bank of Hosts and Hostesses, but would like to encourage more Church members to think about having an occasional Coffee Morning, on a Tuesday, from 10.30 am - 12 MD, with very little effort involved, and great satisfaction derived, just tea/coffee and biscuits, (except on 'special' occasions). There is lots of fun and companionship too. We would gratefully welcome any new additions to the list of venues.

The Optional Donations soon mount up, and now the total given to the Church Funds for various projects has reached £12,200, since it was started by Mary and Francis Bidlecombe, 24 years ago. For the last 4 years we have been supporting the challenge for St. Mary's Church Building Refurbishment Fund, so important to us all at present, as well as paying for occasional equipment replacement needs in the Parish Hall.

As many of our regulars are not getting any younger, our greatest need is for help with Transport. We are so grateful for the generosity of drivers especially, at present. Roy and Thelma ensuring that all our regular 'oldies' are ferried to and from each venue, and sometimes continue on to have lunch at a local 'eatery' afterwards, too.

If there is anyone with a car, who feels they could help in that area, please do have a word with me (Tel. 861723).

A really big 'THANK YOU' to all Hosts, Drivers, Helpers and Givers, who have contributed to this important Christian outreach to the whole village. We are hoping to reach out to new incomers to the area, too.

Thank you all for your wonderful company,
May God bless you all.
Yvonne Shaw

BRIDGNORTH DEANERY SYNOD REPORT 2018

Synod Meetings

- March, Severn Centre, Highley – The meeting began with new Rural Dean, Mark Daborn being commissioned by Bishop Richard who gave a short address. Then, Val Smith – one of the Parish Giving Advisers for the Diocese, was on her home turf, - with video input from colleague Richard Jones, - to describe the scheme to us. She described the mechanics of joining the scheme, how it worked in practice and the possible benefits it could bring in terms of increased income, easier budgeting and simpler administration.
- June, Tuck Hill Village Hall – Sam Pratley, the diocesan secretary came to speak on the topic of Diocese and Deanery. He gave us some statistics about Hereford diocese and how these compared with national averages. He discussed the challenges and opportunities we faced and how the central diocesan team could help us particularly with projects and training and finished by describing some of the developments and highlights of recent months.
- September, Ditton Cleobury North Village Hall – This synod took the form of a forum – Celebration! Sharing the Good News around the Deanery. We looked at the Deanery MAP and then discussed it in groups. The groups later submitted suggestions for new projects and, where appropriate, requests for training.
- December, St Peter's Worfield – We welcomed Speaker, Bishop Mike Bourke whose subject for our Advent Reflection was the 7 Great 'O's of Advent which he explained to us and led us in a service based around them and around the hymn, O come, O come, Emmanuel.

Changes in Synod – Steve Jones, having stepped into the breach, after the death of John Raybould, as Acting Treasurer, continued for the first half of the year when Martin Elcock took over, again as Acting Treasurer so the search for a permanent replacement continued.

Pastoral Developments. Highley welcomed two new curates, Tom King and David Poyner. In Bridgnorth, Reverend Clive Munday was priested in June and Jane Peeler was licensed in September to join the team as Reader. Intergenerational missionary, Kate King took up her post in January. Children and Families Co-ordinator Emma Lambert is currently on maternity leave (baby Zara has safely arrived) and Kate will stand in for her till her return. Permission was sought and granted to merge the parishes of Ditton Priors and Wheathill with Loughton. Ditton and Wheathill were to remain as parish churches while Loughton would become a Chapel of Ease.

Safeguarding – The deanery ran a series of well-attended Safeguarding Training Sessions over the second half of the year led by Mandy McPhee, Diocesan Safeguarding Officer. This is now mandatory for some parish officers and recommended for all so please make sure that training is up to date where appropriate.

Lent/Easter Project 2018. There was no official project this year but for 2019, we have been asked to support the Starfish clinic in Namusaala in Uganda.

Finances. – The Parish Offer system was in its second year of operation and all parishes were able to pay in full. Several parishes in the deanery adopted the Parish Giving system.

Marjorie Brooks, Secretary, Bridgnorth Deanery Synod

ST MARY'S TREASURER'S REPORT 2018

We are ever grateful for God's abundant blessing bestowed upon us both as a church and as individuals. These gifts of time, talents and treasure underpin all that we are able to do and thanks are due to all those who give of these freely.

During the year receipts from planned giving increased on 2017 by almost 9%. This appears to be directly due to those who chose to change to regular planned giving through the Parish Giving Scheme reviewing the amount of their gift. However, giving weekly on the plate at services declined to 90% of the previous year and, more significantly, giving through the envelope scheme halved. The net effect of these changes was that total planned giving fell by 3% (£1,400) on the previous year.

Whilst the uptake in donating through the Parish Giving Scheme has resulted in an increase in the level of giving, the other outcome is a significant increase in our income from Gift Aid in the current year. This is because the scheme allows for the gift aid on each donation to be received in the same month as the donation is made, and not reclaimed annually in the following year. In this calendar year £2,200 was received by this method and will therefore not be part of the annual claim in 2019. A further important feature of using the Parish Giving Scheme is that there is an option to automatically increase the amount gifted each year by the rate of inflation. This will effectively add £150 to our stewardship income in 2019, which in real terms will pay for one month's insurance of the church. Thank you to all those who have agreed to make this automatic increase.

This year amounts collected on behalf and due to third parties (Agency Payments) have been excluded from the General Funds available for day to day expenditure. Some £4,700 was collected on behalf of the Diocese in respect of fees for funerals and weddings and this accounts for the decrease in fee income reported between 2018 and previous years. This income varies from year to year as the numbers of funerals and weddings cannot be anticipated.

St Mary's Charity Shop continues to generate income at a similar level to previous years and the surplus, after operating costs have been covered, is shared between local charities and organisations (25%) and the remainder has been held this year as designated funds for the major church restoration project.

Income from Parish Hall lettings has increased with several groups now hiring the hall on a regular basis and income from advertising and sales of the parish magazine continue to exceed the cost of production. A small increase in advertising fees was made this year and a small increase in the subscription is planned for next year to ensure that this valuable means of communication and outreach continues to cover its costs.

We felt able to increase our Parish Offer to the Diocese to £40,896 (£33,000 in 2017) for the year and have met the quarterly payments in full. This year the PCC decided to give financial help totalling £1,800 to be shared between three chosen Christian charitable causes abroad. £1,200 was paid in the year with the third charity receiving the donation in January 2019. It is hoped to continue this level of support to charitable causes in 2019.

Other costs have been broadly in line with previous years and expectations but there were several items of note. Ministry costs, which include clergy travel and telephones, have increased due to the two new curates who began working in the parish from July. There will be a full year cost of this to cover in 2019.

The church incurred some additional maintenance costs which include an inspection of the lightning conductor and repairs to ensure that it was effective. The organ was tuned and fire extinguishers tested and where necessary replaced. The cost of churchyard maintenance was lower than in previous years due to a problem with the contract and the work falling short of the level and quality agreed which resulted in reduced payment.

At the end of the year the overall financial situation shows a surplus of income over expenditure of £2,784, which whilst looking favourable, is the result of an increased amount from the change in Gift Aid receipts as detailed previously, together with reduced churchyard maintenance costs and the delay in the charitable payment to the third external charity. Without these factors there would be a slight deficit.

The requirement for extensive restoration work to the church has been an ongoing financial burden for a number of years and whilst part of the shop proceeds together with other gifts has slowly increased the money available for the work this is still insufficient to cover the costs. Previous applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund have been unsuccessful. An application to the Garfield Weston Trust for a contribution to install a much needed toilet, together with a kitchen area, was made in the year but again competition for limited grants meant that we were unsuccessful.

However, during the year the church received a most generous legacy from a former church member of £125,000. Under the term of the will this bequest is restricted to be "spent on the fabric of the Church or Churchyard in accordance with proposals approved by Keith Smith". It may be that God has now provided a way forward and that we may be able soon to lay aside the burden of church buildings and renew our focus on outward giving, mission and evangelism.

With this hope in mind some £7,500 was paid out of restricted monies during the year for a structural survey of the tower and to a heating design engineer in order that specification documents could be drawn up in preparation for faculty applications in 2019. Part of this expenditure was also for the drawing up of plans and specifications, together with a faculty application, in order to apply to the Garfield Weston Trust for a grant towards a toilet and kitchenette. Whilst our bid for funding was unsuccessful this faculty is now in place for work in the future.

As we move into 2019 we pray that we may continue to be good stewards of all that God so generously blesses us with and to respond with generosity to his love, in whatever way he lays on our hearts, in order that his Kingdom may grow in our community and we may bless others in doing his will.

Linda Ross, Treasurer for 2018