

2019



**Thatcham Annual Parish Meeting
Annual Report
29 March 2020**

Parish Office

St Mary's Church

Churchgate

Thatcham

RG19 3PN

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Appendix 1 Minutes of the Annual Meetings 2019

Appendix 2 Summary of Accounts 2019

Thatcham Parochial Church Council 2019/20

<p>Ex Officio Revd. Mark Bennet Revd Nicola Hulks (from June 2019) Revd. Marion Fontaine (until Nov. 2019) Revd Brenda Harland Revd Leonard Onugha</p> <p>Churchwardens Viv Druce (2017) +(CTiT) Glenn Peters (2017) Chris Watts (2016)</p> <p>Deanery Synod Representatives (to 2020) Mary Stagg Chris Watts Tony Collie 1 vacancy</p> <p>Co-options Mark Backhouse (Tower Bells) Peter Harvey De-Gioia (Treasurer) Mike Stevenson (Secretary) Leanne Cox (Safeguarding) Ann Dibble (Safeguarding)</p>	<p>Elected Lay Members Lourdes Cottam (St Barnabas) John Hicks (St Barnabas) Bernadette Ellison (St Barnabas) Linda Beaumont (St Barnabas) Leanne Fowler (St Barnabas)</p> <p>Tony Collie (2017) * (Deanery) Margaret Holmes (2017) Ann Watts (2017) Lynne Starr (2017) Chris Druce (2017) + (Social) Christine Rice (2019) Steve Rice (2019) + (PMC)</p>
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Team Rectors Report

Looking back over the past year I realised how quickly things had moved on. 2019 was, in fact, a year of huge change, though the clergy team has formed itself so well that the joins have become almost invisible.

Revd Pat Jones was inducted into her new ministry in London Colney in February – an event attended by many, at which I was given the task of handing her on as if I were the bride's father at a wedding. Of course this was an occasion of mixed emotions as Pat and Peter had become so much a part of our community in Thatcham. Then we managed to recruit Nicola to 'replace' Pat, and as I write it seems that Nicola and Ben and Luke have been with us for ever – Nicola's own gifts with children have been very evident, not least in our work at Thatcham Park School, and she has brought some fresh ideas and energy to our common life. Alongside that, Leonard was ordained Priest in the summer and quickly found his distinctive sense of priestly ministry. And if that were not all, on the festival of Christ the King, Marion Fontaine retired from the public exercise of her priestly ministry, which she had exercised with characteristic generosity and pastoral wisdom over very many years. And that is just the clergy!

The other reports in our collection bear witness to a huge range of activities and people – some constant over time, others changing and evolving. I want to pick out some features of the year which have seemed important to me.

Prayer and worship

For me, the chapel at St Mary's is becoming a special place. It is at its fullest during Holy Week for the evening communion services on the way of the cross, and often nearly as full at 8.00am on a Sunday Morning for our early Communion Service. Sometimes only two or three may be gathered for personal prayer or prayers for healing – after the 10.00am service, or at our monthly healing services or by arrangement. And regularly on a weekday morning at 9.00am the clergy are joined by an increasing trickle of others who make regular, or occasional prayer a more deliberate part of their daily lives. Together with worship – which is a part of our formal services – these are the times when I find myself most fully expressing and deepening my relationship with God: sometimes in the words, but often in the rhythm and sometimes in silence and solitude. And just outside the chapel, the candles are often alight, representing unspoken prayers and hopes.

If we are to become – as Bishop Steven is encouraging us – a more Christlike church for the sake of God's world: more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous – it is this Godward movement we need to nurture in ourselves, and there are signs that this is taking root in our lives.

Children, young people and families

We always want to do more, but in some ways it is astonishing what we already do. We have groups and teaching for young people on Sundays, and also ABC on a Wednesday morning. Then we are involved with schools – there are many visits to the church over the year, notably at Christmas, but also at the end of the school year and on visits to explore Christian belief and practice and the history of the church.

But more hidden, and perhaps sometimes bracketed as something else, is our work with baptism families and couples getting married in our church. These events often happen rather under our radar, but they represent a huge service to the community and perhaps over 10% of the population of Thatcham attending services at St Mary's during the year, before we even count Christmas.

Notable weddings in 2019 included the marriage of Alexander Jones to Alice Laidler and Matthew Goodhead to Zoe Brooke amongst others. And baptisms included Casey Mercer-Starr and Lewis Maddock, with Jessica Francis being baptised in January 2020. These are huge life events for the people we know well – and likewise for those we see less often and know less well.

With families now busier and more challenged than ever, many churches would relish the extent of the ministry we have and the opportunities for supporting people on these key occasions.

Pastoral reach

The CAMEO group continues to attract good numbers and has a wide range of activities for those who come.

We continue to work with local colleagues on how best to support people with Dementia and now have a regular memory café as well as a monthly music and singing session. With the increasing number of older people now in Thatcham, including increasing amounts of specialist accommodation, this is becoming a significant part of our work (thanks especially to Viv Druce for her commitment here).

We are also working with or alongside schools not only in trying to address the mental health issues widely reported as affecting children, but also in helping parents and families often in distressing situations or crisis. The local school family support workers are under huge pressure at the moment, and building on work and relationships initiated by Pat, we pray for, and try to give practical and moral support, to these workers, who are on the front line with our most needy families.

Working with Thatcham Park School

Our work with Thatcham Park School was implicitly referenced in the Ofsted report published on 7 January 2019. It arose out of our commitment to the school, Pat's personal relationship-building and was hugely enriched by our work with the Partnership for Missional Church. The way in which the school, the church and the community have built living and trusting relationships which enable us to work effectively together in the era of suspicions around safeguarding and the hazards of GDPR has been widely reported – within the diocese, by the national mission agency CMS and in a Grove Booklet on mission "What does good look like?" [Incidentally Grove Booklets can be an interesting way into a variety of subjects of interest – they are short reviews of particular areas of church life]. Personally, as a governor at the school, I find it a joy to work with such a positive set of relationships, and it is really good to see that Nicola has made her own impression too.

Stretching our faith

Leonard, in particular, has been challenging us to stretch our faith and many have grown through his ministry, including the Alpha Course and its aftermath. Our small groups have continued with a sense of life as well. I have found myself having more and deeper conversations about personal faith and commitment with a range of people. These, of course, remain personal and confidential – but they cover ground from personal challenges, through new jobs and opportunities to thinking seriously about lay or ordained ministry. Such conversations are never, for me, focussed on jobs to do in the Church, but rather about the realities and challenges of life.

Our faith is not principally about learning more jargon and getting more bound up with the Church, but rather living faithfully as the people we are in the places we find ourselves – and that can sometimes be tough. It is good that we are becoming more confident about talking about such things.

And we should not forget the confirmations of Judith Bennet, Richard Culpeck, Sarah Goode, Caroline Maddock, Matthew Weekes and Alison Dean.

Serving our community

The Church in Thatcham – ecumenically too – has a long track record of presence in and commitment to community events – and that continues. We give a lot of attention to our schools, and this is important, but our building is increasingly busy – the Thatcham Together community forum meets at St Mary's, we have increasing numbers of uniformed groups, there is the dementia work – and alongside this the various concerts and events to which the community is invited. We pray for our community too, in our prayer diary, and seek to bring God's blessing to the civic events we host – which this year included a special event for Newbury Cancer Care.

Saying goodbye

Funerals are a regular and a special part of our ministry in Thatcham – although death is an ending, for Christians it is not “the end”, and we can speak words of hope and comfort which have stood the test of time, and which tell eternal truths even as the society around us struggles to make meaning at such times. We also accompany people and families in grief – very often it is a strange feeling for people, not because they are odd, but because they have so little experience of grief – just the reassurance that the feelings are normal often helps. But grief can also bring more complex and challenging responses, and we are able to work with that, or to make referrals where appropriate.

During the year we held funerals, amongst others, for Phyllis Platz, Ron Johnson, Bill Dines, Liz Wenham and Norah Strange. And in early 2020 also for Ian Robinson and Vera Setchell.

Episcopal visitors

We hosted a lot of Bishops this year. First Bishop Andrew came on his farewell tour for our confirmation service. Then Bishop Steven visited on his pilgrimage through Berkshire before returning in December to take a service and preach. And finally it was a special privilege to have Bishop Olivia visit Thatcham as part of the announcement of her appointment as Bishop of Reading.

Looking forward

So we end 2019 in good heart – there is much going on and signs of vigour and growth. We even got our finances over the line – which was a major achievement. It is the underlying signs of growth in faith and confidence in various ways which have been most encouraging and which we need to nurture in ourselves and others. Because 2020 and following will have plenty of challenges to distract us – the challenge of raising money for the roof, organ, kitchen, meeting room, floor – will be a big one – but if we want to continue to serve our community in the name of Christ, we will have to face it – it may take some courage, but if we add this to becoming more contemplative and more compassionate we will be living out more fully Bishop Steven’s challenge to become a more Christ-like church, and we will truly be doing it not for ourselves alone but for the sake of God’s world.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to a busy, challenging and fruitful year.

Mark Bennet

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

The 8.00am service on a Sunday Morning is a special place for those who come. I asked people why, and here are two of the responses.

”Where two or three are gathered together in My Name.....”

This quiet service of Holy Communion is held at St. Mary's each Sunday at 8 o'clock - and it is very special.

Margaret Fidler invited me to join her in the spring of 2015, and I have been a regular participant ever since.

When the morning sun shines through that lovely stained glass window depicting Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd, with his herd clustered at his feet and carrying a lamb around His shoulders, there is a serenity that can be felt.

The chapel will seat fifteen people, and I have only known it to be filled on one occasion – when Leonard was appointed as Curate, and he and his wife and family joined us. Usually, we are a few more than 'two or three' - perhaps six or eight.

This service has a timelessness that spans generations. I was confirmed at the age of fourteen in the summer of 1956 at St Peter's, Woolhampton and the Reverend Moule prepared several teenagers like me. I don't remember a large congregation in this little hamlet, but I used to assist him with various duties and held deep conversations with him. He taught me so much while I lived there.

In a conversation with David Winter some time ago, I mentioned his name, and David asked me if I knew how fortunate I'd been. He explained that the Moule family were famous for their various roles in Christian mission in different parts of the world.

My Mr Moule was elderly and married, and I've wondered since if he had served in the mission field and returned to England to serve in this little hamlet – living in a lovely Georgian vicarage – before retiring, I used to visit him on a Saturday morning to polish the Church brass and silver, etc. Only in later years did I realise just how lucky I'd been, and how much I'd learned from this gentle man.

Please do consider attending this gentle act of worship. You will be most welcome.

Janice Baldwin

A very special service – the 8.00 Holy Communion Service at St Mary's

Come wind, rain, snow, or what seems a distance memory, sunshine, a small group of us gather every Sunday at 8.00 for the Holy Communion Service at St Mary's.

When I walk through the door, I experience a range of emotions – joy, warmth, a sense of belonging, friendship, and most important of all, hope.

I have been a Christian all my life but have gone through phases where God has seemed close to me, and then dark times when God seemed so far away, so remote.

Five years ago, I joined St Mary's at a dark point. My mother had recently died and left a huge gap in my life. I couldn't pray and I felt lost and isolated despite having a wonderful husband and family, a good job and lovely house.

The first time I walked through the door for the early morning service, I felt at home. I didn't really want to talk to people, I just wanted to try and reconnect with my faith. I came home that first Sunday, energised, welcomed by the congregation, reconnected and full of hope.

Since that first Sunday, I have learnt so much and have started on a new spiritual journey. I have made wonderful friends and am trying to live my life in accordance with the "three C's" – courage, contemplation and compassion.

So – come wind, rain, snow or sunshine – I will be at the 8.00 service. Come join us.

Anne Renton

Parochial Church Council – Background and Proceedings

Thatcham PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Team Rector and the Team Vicar in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church – spiritual, pastoral, evangelistic and ecumenical.

The PCC met five times during the year, in April, June, September, November and February.

Highlights and resolutions from this year included the appointment of Revd Nicola Hulks as Team Vicar, the retirement of Rev Marion Fontaine, the parish awayday, parish share, restoration of the organ, contactless giving and finances, Parish Giving Scheme and social events.

Arrangements were made during 2019 for 70 baptisms (67 in 2018) and 8 (17) weddings. In addition there were 54 (60) funerals (19 with a service at St Mary's, 35 services at a crematorium)

Membership

Members of the PCC are either ex officio, co-opted or elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. St Barnabas Church is represented on the PCC by up to 5 members elected by their own church meeting.

Committees

The PCC operates through a Standing Committee and working groups, which meet between full meetings of the Council. The Standing Committee is the only Committee required by law; it has power to transact business of the Council between meetings, subject to any decisions made by the PCC.

FINANCE REPORT

Report to the Accounts December 2019

St Mary's General Account (day to day running of church activities) shows a surplus of income over expenditure of £5,500 which after taking account of the deficit of £1,932 at the start of the year gives a positive balance of £3,568 .

The St Barnabas General Account shows a surplus of £765 and a positive balance of £3,397 at the end of the year.

Incoming resources from donors to St Mary's (collections/stewardships/tax reclaims & donations) were £6,000 higher in 2019 than in 2018 after accounting for the one-off transfer of £16,883 from the 'Outreach Fund'. St Barnabas income increased by £7,000 due to a resolution of problems with tax reclaim. This enabled a significant one-off increase of £4,500 to £10,500 towards the Parish Share in 2019.

We again managed to pay the Parish Share (our contribution to the diocese for clergy stipends, housing and pensions) in full. However, the Parish Share goes up by from £95,861 in 2019 to £96,340 in 2020. This means we have to make 12 equal payments of £7,944 each month (after deduction of the 1% rebate for payment by direct debit)

The Fabric fund balance of £35,724 at the end of 2019 includes £12,800 transferred from the Bell Maintenance fund to meet the costs of repairs to the bells early in 2020.

Fundraising for repairs to roof, floor and organ and improvements to the Meeting Room and kitchen will be major feature of the work of PCC in the next few years. Work is in progress to launch an appeal and attract grants.

However the need to increase Stewardship giving continues, especially if we are to meet the running costs of both churches and pay the Parish Share again in full in 2020. If anyone is thinking of increasing their Stewardship payments during 2020, please feel free to come to speak to Peter Harvey DiGioia, Chris Watts or a member of the clergy.

We have a small team maintaining the books and banking the cash. Chris Watts at St Mary's and Bernie at St Barnabas. Particular thanks go to Bernie for her help in sorting out the problems with securing gift aid from HMRC.

Finally, I would like to also thank the PCC, Mark, Ann and the Churchwardens for their support during 2019.

Investments and Fund Structure

There have been no changes to the structure of the St Mary's PCC investment funds during 2019.

There follows a brief description of the history, management and restrictions of each of these PCC managed funds.

Hatherley Fund

224 Beenham Hill sale proceeds.

The capital arose from the sale of a house given to the Church in 1935 for a succession of curates to live in. The income is applied for general parish purposes and so is **unrestricted**. The first call on it is the payment of clergy expenses.

Thatcham Church of England Charity

The original capital arose from two-thirds of the sale proceeds of the Old Infant School in the Broadway; one-third is administered separately by the Diocesan Board of Education.

This charity is governed by a Charity Commission Scheme sealed on the 21st May 1980; the clear income from the permanent endowment is for furthering the religious and other charitable work of the Church of England in the ecclesiastical parish of St Mary's Thatcham and is therefore an **unrestricted** fund. All the income is applied in the parish.

The Church Estate Charity

Charity Commission ref – 00436

This is an ancient charity referred to in the Charity Commissioners Report of 1907; the income is to be applied to the upkeep of the church and the churchyard so this is a **restricted** fund.

Income is derived partly from investments and partly from 6/16ths of the income from Moor Meadow Charity, administered by Thatcham Parochial Charities.

The Rookery Church Fund

The small amount of income arising from the legacy by Mrs Hall who died in 1916, directing that the income should be **restricted** to the fostering of the Sunday school. The Rookery was the name of the house.

Bankers: St Mary's PCC - Lloyds TSB Bank plc & St Barnabas - HSBC
 Independent Examiners: Witcombs, Turnfields Court,
 Thatcham Investment Managers: BlackRock Investment Managers, 12 Throgmorton
 Avenue London EC2N 2DL
 CCLA, Senator House, 85 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4ET

A summary of the Accounts together with the Independent Examiner's Report is attached at Appendix 1.

Stewardship Secretary's Report – St Mary's.

A total of £ 68,063 was given through the Stewardship Scheme in 2019 - £25,505 by Standing Orders. In addition £20,063 was given through the Parish Giving Scheme following its introduction in September 2018. The balance came through weekly envelopes (£16,566) and attributable donations. In addition £16,587 was reclaimed from HMRC (£12,389 in 2018).

47 donors used weekly envelopes and 51 donors gave through Standing Orders. By the end of 2019 there were 20 donors paying by Direct Debits through the Parish Giving Scheme.

Great thanks are due to the faithful members of the Stewardship Scheme who by regular and sacrificial levels of giving keep St Mary's and St Barnabas Churches going.

Please continue to review your giving at least annually – index linking is a principle worth considering. Occasional donations are greatly welcomed, but commitment to regular giving is essential if we are to budget for paying for our priests through the Parish Share, maintain the fabric and support sustainable growth of the church in Thatcham.

'Donate' facilities have been incorporated into the website for St Mary's.

The number of subscribers to the 'Parish Giving Scheme' (PGS) stands at 19 in January 2020 with a total given of £18,500 each month. I can positively recommend this Scheme to all regular givers. Over half the Dioceses in England have joined and together they cover the costs of the small administrative team based at Gloucester Diocese. All the remainder is paid direct to the relevant parishes by the 10th of each month and gift aid is claimed and paid by HMRC about three days later. This significantly reduces costs and administration at the local level. The real bonuses are

- the donations can be index linked if the donors so choose, and
- the donations are paid as a single sum to the parish bank account thus avoiding the checking of multiple pages on Bank Statement entries, and
- it reduces the bank charges (currently £30-£45 per month) for handling cheque or cash donations.

I would again encourage everyone to make a will and to consider making a bequest to St Mary's. It is not difficult to arrange and can make a significant difference to the future of a growing church in Thatcham.

Chris Watts
Stewardship Secretary

Child Protection/Safeguarding report

Firstly, there have been no safeguarding issues to report.

We have been working hard this year to form a very strong team. In September the safeguarding team travelled to Reading to meet the Local Authority Designated Officer, the Diocesan Safeguarding team and other safeguarding teams from other churches in the Diocese. It was lovely to put names to faces.

We have had regular meetings to discuss safeguarding and have made sure that everyone is up to date with training with lots of the pastoral team, church wardens and Cameo leaders completing their training. Safeguarding is also on the agenda of very PCC meeting.

We now have safeguarding booklets with good practice guidelines. Noticeboards displayed in both St Mary's and St Barnabas with photos of the team, their roles and responsibilities. The parish website has been updated to ensure safeguarding is on the front page advising people who to contact if they have any concerns or support needs.

Sue has joined the team and has taken on the role of safer recruitment to safely recruit, train and support those working with children/vulnerable adults.

The training list is going well, so we can see who has done which course and it is now easier to see when refresher courses need to be arranged, making sure everyone is up to date with training and their DBS checks, which need to be reviewed every 5 years.

Leanne is now a DBS Administrator to work with Steve to check and complete DBS checks for people who need them.

Just recently Brenda, Ann, Sue, Leanne and Steve met to talk and work through the Safer Church Action Plan and the Safeguarding Policy. These will be reviewed annually to make sure that we are providing a safe and caring environment in our places of worship.

Leanne Cox

ABCs

ABC on a Wednesday is a very happy and friendly place where adults, children and babies meet for catching up on news while they share refreshments, craft activities and playing with toys. Strong, supportive friendships are made among all age groups. It is a very popular group as sometimes there are over 60 people attending often with new people who have heard of the group from their friends or by following Facebook or looking at our church websites!

The ABC morning begins informally at 10.30am with a really good cup of tea or coffee, juice or water for the children and an essential biscuit or two. At about 11.25

everyone helps with tidying away ready for our interactive service that includes singing, a story and prayers. During this time we are often visited by special friends who include dolls, teddies and puppets, not forgetting Jason the sheep and his excitable friend little Tom.

We aim to finish by 12.00 so that older siblings can be collected from preschool or nursery.

When it is time for some of our members to make the big jump into school, we hold a leavers ceremony. The leavers are presented with a scroll and a book that tells them about how exciting school will be and how much God loves them and cares for them. We look forward to school holidays when the leavers often come back to visit. ABC is open throughout the year; the only exception being between Christmas and New Year.

We really treasure and appreciate our volunteers who give up their time to serve refreshments, tidy up and count heads. Come and join us soon!

Brenda Harland

Children and Young People @ St Mary's 2018

Groups for young people are held on 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sunday of the month during the school year.

We meet during the 10.00 am communion service in the meeting room.

We aim to provide an enjoyable atmosphere where young people can learn the teachings of the bible at their own pace.

Our material is aimed at ages 5-11 years and we study the bible through craft, prayer and games. Time is spent discussing the story and thought given to how the teaching applies to our daily lives.

Jesus reserves a place at his table for all, and this year there was great excitement as six young people were admitted to communion at Pentecost.

On Easter Sunday, we held an Easter egg hunt, which was well attended.

Our child protection policy is in place and is updated regularly.

We are a small team who are committed to helping young people discover the love of God and grow in faith.

We end the year optimistically, looking forward to meeting all young people who come through our doors and thanking the church family for all their prayers and support.

Helen Holman

Pathfinders

(11 – 14+ years)

We meet in the Pathfinders Room on the 2nd, 4th and 5th Sunday of each month.

Together we continue on our Christian journey through our worship finding God through our shared music, drama, quizzes, and games and of course fellowship.

As is traditional in all the best Christian gatherings; we share 'breakfast' on a Sunday morning, though it is not always healthy eating! We also celebrate special events on the Christian calendar, particularly Christmas and Easter, including the start of Lent when we have pancakes with a variety of fillings.

Please come along to visit us one Sunday morning!

Music at St. Mary's

Our organ is very sick. On some occasions it emits an unpredictable baleful wail and on one occasion, to my knowledge, produced a whole series of discordant sounds, excruciating to the human ear, to remind us it needed some TLC! Thank goodness for Tim, playing at the time, who was totally unphased and having taken both hands off the keyboard and feet off the pedals quickly pushed in all the stops. I will leave it to others to let you know what we need to do about it, but in the meantime, the choir would like to express their grateful thanks to Tim who is able to work miracles by bypassing parts of the organ which are now unusable and still produce a wonderful sound. Lucky, aren't we!

In the main, the music at St. Mary's complements the traditional style of its services with choir and organ supporting worship. The first Sunday is the exception with keyboard and singing group and a more modern approach more suited to family worship in the morning and the very traditional formal Evensong in the evening.

Evensong can be traced back to the Book of Common Prayer in 1552 put together by Thomas Cranmer and is a great favourite with the choir. The congregation is small so the service is held in the choir stalls which gives it a wonderful intimate setting. Because it is taken from the original book, the language is expressive and not commonly used today, but we hope this won't stop some of you from giving it a try. We use simple chants so although it will be strange at first you will be able to join in after a few attendances. There is always a full choir to lead and support you.

This year, the choir has continued to move out into the community taking a lead role in the Council's switching on the Christmas Lights community sing as well as our usual commitment to the Civic Carol Service and Hospital League of Friends. We were also asked to sing Christmas music at two further local groups. We also repeated our Harvest Festival Service at Fawley. This seems to have become an annual event as we have already been asked to go there again this year!

We are always pleased to welcome new members. You don't need to be able to read music. Just come and give it try.

Viv Druce

St Barnabas - Church Life

In many ways this year has been a year of change for St Barnabas! The Church began the year in a period of interregnum with Reverend Pat having recently moved on to pastures new. I (Nicola) was appointed in March and joined the church in July along with my husband Ben and our son Luke. Meanwhile the church was ably supported and provided for by Reverend Brenda (who I know the church are extremely grateful for in all that she gave in that time and continues to give through her service to our community).

When I arrived in July St Barnabas immediately struck me as a place of warmth, friendship and community. The rest of the year since our arrival has been a time of getting to know each other and sensing out together the possibilities for our future as a church. We joined together on the Parish Away Day to begin this process and spent some time at our harvest lunch talking about all that we valued about St Barnabas. I'm sure there will be many more similar conversations in the coming months and year as we discern together God's future for us.

Worship

Building and strengthened our community has been important to us at St Barnabas this year. We continue to meet mainly at 10am on a Sunday in Thatcham Park School and have been led by our band each week who have inspired us and encouraged us in our worship. We have also been thinking about new ways to welcome new people amongst us and to spread the message in Thatcham that St B's is a warm, friendly and open place. We ran a family Christmas service which attracted lots of new families and a Café Worship in January where, alongside a delicious breakfast, we had discussions around our tables, getting to know each other more. Our Wednesday night small group and Tuesday monthly discussion group continue to meet and thrive together.

Children

Further change came to St Barnabas this year as our Church Warden and Children's worker, Steph and Glenn Peters, decided to move to pastures new with their family. We are so thankful for all that they have given to us as a community and will miss them very much when they make their move in the coming months. Meanwhile Steph stepping down as children's leader has meant some changes in our provision for children.

As ever a warm welcome for children and families is an important priority for us. As well as making our services a welcoming space for children of all ages we have also begun to consider our programme for the children going forward and we are seeking to build a team in the coming months to support this. In the last few months the children have been enjoying Godly Play sessions together which have been very well attended and our fortnightly children's group that meets during our Sunday services have continued. Meanwhile our worship services have continued to be that warm and welcoming space where children can fully participate in our worship.

Reverend Brenda continues to lead our midweek session of play and a short child friendly service, called ABC, for babies and preschool children at St Marys. ABC continues to attract a wide range of parents and carers and to be a place where strong and supportive relationships are built.

School

Our relationship with Thatcham Park School is at the heart of who we are as a church and has continued to be so in the last year. We continue to lead weekly assemblies in school and our lunchtime Chit Chat club (craft and chat with the children) has two sessions and is as busy as ever! We have also launched a new afterschool Godly Play club with year 3 students which we hope to offer across the years in school over the coming year. This has been a rich and deep time with the children of building relationships and deepening their spiritual lives.

Our community has continued to support the school at their Summer and Christmas Fairs providing the ever-popular BBQ! It is a real joy for us as a church to be connected with the school and we are hugely grateful to the school for their hospitality towards us and thankful for the strong bonds we enjoy.

And so to the future!

And so as a community we are looking to the future with optimism! We trust that God has an exciting future that we are excited to see unfold together. If you've never visited us before, please do, our community is open, vibrant and growing – and here for you.

Nicola Hulks

Deanery Synod Report

Thatcham Parish belongs to the Newbury Deanery – a group of parishes in West Berkshire running as far as Hungerford and Lambourn and up to Compton and The Ridgeway. In some recent documents the Deanery has described itself briefly as follows:

Newbury Deanery covers some 105 square miles of the western part of West Berkshire. It includes the urban centres of Newbury and Thatcham, the market town of Hungerford and an extensive rural hinterland. The eleven benefices (roughly speaking groups of churches overseen by a single priest) encompass 36 parishes ranging in population from over 25,000 to under 100, together with 42 church buildings, and one church which has no building of its own. There are 15 paid clergy in the Deanery and five House for Duty Posts (unpaid clergy) – not counting curates in training.

The Deanery is an administrative unit of the Church of England which is part of its structure of “synodical government” – the way the Church makes decisions about its internal workings where they affect more than a single parish. Traditionally the Deanery has had two functions – (the money function) allocating the parish share which pays for the clergy and support costs (just under £1million for Newbury Deanery) and then collecting it; and (the people function) negotiating the deployment of clergy at a time when clergy numbers nationally have been declining. More recently the people function has been developed into a more positive mode of mission planning – actively supporting parishes and their people to meet the common challenges we face. The Newbury Deanery Synod also maintains a link with the South African parish of Batlharos in the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman.

The Deanery is run by the Deanery Synod. Like the PCC this is a mixture of clergy and elected lay members, but in the Deanery case the members represent the different parishes. The Deanery Synod elects a standing committee and appoints officers to act as an executive, and to progress the various aspects of its work. It may also receive requests from the Diocese of Oxford or from the National Church to respond to matters of interest – this happened with the legislation on women becoming bishops. The Deanery Synod can also raise matters of concern and ask for these to be addressed at a Diocesan or national level.

This last year is the final year of a three year term for elected lay members. On the financial front we have seen a reduction in some of the tensions around the negotiation of parish share, and have continued our record of paying 100% by the end of November, which has earned a rebate for the parishes. The treasurer Philip Read had a major operation this year and had to resign, and has not yet been substantively replaced.

Associate Area Dean Terry Winrow has led the refreshing of the Deanery Plan – once having a major focus on deployment, this has become a rather different document – there are no current proposals for restructuring within the Deanery, so the focus has been on discerning local needs and on responding to Bishop Steven’s Common Vision initiatives.

The Deanery Vision is:

The vision of the Newbury Deanery is the Church of England prayerful and active in the transformation of our towns, villages, region, and culture by the way, truth and life of Jesus Christ.

[The parishes of the Deanery] will pursue this vision as a community of communities, each loyal to their own sense of God's call, generously committed to one another's sustainability and growth, and boldly pursuing partnerships and new ventures that will extend our current capacity.

The plan identifies six areas where action may be required:

- **Age Related Demographics** *(more older people, work with schools)*
- **Rural Ministry** *(small isolated communities)*
- **Insularity & Isolation** *(parishes looking inward and not working together)*
- **Immediate Sustainability** *(facing financial challenges)*
- **New & Unchurched Communities** *(how we respond to large new housing developments in the area)*
- **Discipleship & Christian Growth** *(teaching the faith to new people and growing in our own)*

Some of these are more immediately relevant to Thatcham than others, though we have to be aware that the people we are working with may be facing challenges which are not immediately obvious to us.

More recently the Deanery has also looked at the implications of global climate change and the call to be more sustainable, and this is one of the major issues facing the national church. Also on the national church agenda are continued discussion on human sexuality and welcome (called "Living in Love and Faith), on growing the church in a challenging culture (Renewal and Reform) and in responding to safeguarding issues including the treatment of people who have suffered from abuse and a poor response in the past.

This year we will be electing new members to serve on the Deanery Synod to help to take this work forward. The national issues are also relevant because this year also the newly elected Deanery Synod members will become the electorate for the new members of the national General Synod.

Thanks are due to Mary, Tony and Chris who have served us as representatives over the last three years.

Mark Bennet

St. Mary's Church Bellringers

The last year has again been successful. Numbers ringing regularly have been reduced with health problems for Bill Butler, Ron Christopher, Rosemary Evans and Sue Smith, but we have been pleased to see them all as and when they were able.

Attendance for Sunday Morning Service ringing has remained good. We usually ring all ten bells, although during the summer we rang only six bells on a number of occasions. Methods have been selected to suit the members present and maintain a good standard of ringing. Quarter peals have been attempted prior to some of the monthly Choral Evensong Service. We have rung for all of the special services and all of the Christmas Services. Quarter Peals were often rung on these occasions. We often welcome visitors to our Tuesday night practices, where they have the opportunity to ring more advanced methods than possible at their home towers. We were asked to ring for the funeral of Val Eades, widow of the late Alan Eades, a former ringer, which we readily did and was much appreciated by the family. On a happier note we were pleased to ring for two wedding open days organised by Revd Nicola Hulks.

We entered two teams to the Newbury Branch Six Bell Striking Competition, where we were place first and second. We went on to the Guild Competition at Chalfont St Giles Buckinghamshire in October where we were placed fourth.

John Robinson was eighty on Tuesday 22 October. After our practice that evening we presented John with a Whitechapel Table Bell to mark his birthday. John generously took us to the White Hart to continue the celebration.

A commemorative peal board has been made to hang in the ringing room to mark a record peal of 10,440 Wootton Rivers Surprise Royal in November 1994. Graham John wrote a detailed article for the December edition of Connect.

Our Annual Dinner was again held at The Hind's Head at Aldermaston and organised by Janet. This was a very enjoyable event, which was supported by most Tower Members and our regular visitors.

This year has seen orders placed for Air Conditioning in the ringing room and for bell maintenance. Air Conditioning was installed in the ringing room during October. We look forward to getting the benefit from this in the coming months. An order for bell maintenance to replace worn out bearings and refurbish pulleys was placed with Bellhangers John Taylor & Co of Loughborough to be carried out in January 2020. I thank Chris Watts and the PCC for their help with Diocesan Approvals and placing orders.

I thank all our ringers for their regular and continued support which has contributed to another successful year. I thank my deputy Rachel for her support and taking charge in my absence. I thank Mark for his continuing support of the ringers and together with his fellow clergy for conducting belfry prayers on Sunday Mornings.

Tony Smith
(Tower Captain)

Churchwardens

We have 3 church wardens which is very unusual but in our case very useful. It enables us to assign a specific warden (Glenn) to St. Barnabas leaving two (Chris W. and Viv), the usual number of wardens, to St. Mary's. Glenn and Stephanie have

decided to move away from Thatcham to be closer to their daughter and her family in the West Country. He will be missed for his enthusiastic approach to dealing with the demands of St Barnabas and understanding the intricacies of getting things done in the Church of England.

If you are new to the Anglican Church you may not know that the wardens are the eyes and ears of the Bishop in the parish. They have an obligation to ensure that the Rector and Clergy are doing as they ought, that the business of the church is running satisfactorily and that the fabric is in good order. They are also tasked to keep the congregation in order!

Church life here in Thatcham is friendly and welcoming and appears to offer what the congregation wants. Links in the community continue to grow with many more users of our church building and members becoming more involved with community groups and initiatives outside the church buildings. These include the Village Agents, Thatcham Together Community Forum and the West Berkshire Dementia Forum

All three of the wardens with Mark are trustees for the Thatcham Almshouse and Thatcham Relief in Need Charities, working with other agencies to help those people in our community who have fallen on hard times or with health and disability issues.

We have a faithful band of people working in the background, cleaners, servers, gardeners, sidespeople, coffee makers, the pew removal and service logistics team, singers, little church providers, providers of home communions, hospital visitors....the list is endless. The church would not function without them. If you feel that you would like to contribute to God's work in any way, all help is welcome regardless of how little you are able to do, please get in touch with me or Chris, or Ann the administrator.

Viv Druce & Chris Watts

Fabric

In summary the log of work to the fabric of St Mary's includes:

- Spring and autumn clean and clear
- Monitor water/tree damaged areas to north nave wall and Pathfinders Room
- Test lightning conductor
- Test Fire Extinguishers
- Service heating boilers ; repair leak to kitchen boiler pressure unit
- Tune and minor repairs to organ
- Replacement of the majority of the lights in Chancel, nave and aisles with LED lamps

An additional report on the repair of the organ has been received from J W Walker of Devizes. Detailed discussions on the work to be done is in progress with the help of expert guidance from the Organ Advisor for the Oxford Diocese and our organist, Tim Cooke.

The PCC's architect, Christian Randall of Wantage submitted his first five yearly report on the state of the fabric in 2018. He listed the regular concerns of clearing gutters and repairs to rainwater downpipes, repairs to stonework and flint facing and ivy on the tower. In addition he noted:

- the need to address the repair of the roof and valley gutter to the western end of the north aisle and above the Pathfinders Room

- significant dampness and deterioration to the plaster on the external walls to north and south aisles,
- damaged floor tiles and 'subsidence' to the central and northern aisles and
- rotting of timber thresholds to both north doors.
- a series of minor repairs to stonework

Attention to these items was recommended within 18 months. In addition improvements are required to the Meeting Room and kitchen. Specifications are being prepared, costings negotiated, faculties applied for and funding sought.

An Appeal will be launched in 2020 for funds to cover cost of the organ and roof repairs, totally refurbished kitchen complying to current building and health and safety regulations and further improvements to Meeting Room and storage. A Fundraising Group is being formed and costs of the works clarified.

Thanks are again due to Chris Druce, Paul Bullock and also to Mark Backhouse for help with general repairs and lower level lamp replacements, to Marion and a team of dedicated gardeners for work on the flower borders and to all who regularly clean, polish, arrange the flowers and maintain the brassware.

Chris Watts

Inventory

Two high altar candlesticks were commissioned from Colin Reid of Kent and blessed together with by the Bishop of Oxford in December. These items have been added to the Inventory together with a number of other minor corrections. The Choir music library update continues to be a work in progress and will take a few months to be completed.

Chris Watts

Sewing group and Flowers.

There are still six of us who meet on a Monday afternoon to sew and chat. As well as making linen items for use at communion we also repair items and alter the length of choir robes when the user changes or grows. We have been given over time lots of fabrics, lace, and other sewing needs and these we use to create items for the craft sale and raffle in November. Please feel free to visit us in the chapel at 2pm, and join in if you wish even if all you can do is tacking!

Marion and friends.

There are now a lovely group of flower arrangers with many differing talents all of which are welcomed and encouraged. We work on a rota for Sundays and for festive occasions we work as a team. The next team effort will be Easter when we will fill the church with spring flowers on Holy Saturday morning, anyone is welcome to come and help even if it is only to make tea and coffee, and it is on that day we do the Easter garden, it would be lovely to have children to do that.

Marion and team.

Little Churches, Home Communions.

“Little Churches”

Like many things that go on at St. Mary's, the “Little Churches” work goes on, regularly, tirelessly, quietly.

These churches are made up of people who live in the residential / sheltered housing in Thatcham. Communion is offered along with readings, a short bible verse and narrative and prayers. Some services also have one of two hymns and each is usually accompanied by refreshments either before or after the service. Usually held on a Saturday morning, the service the exact time varies from location to location. Visits are made to: Nevil Court, Ferndale Court, Gilbert Court, Walnut Close and Thatcham Court. This service provides a lifeline to those who are unable to attend a traditional Sunday service or simply prefer the informal setting of a common lounge.

Nothing would happen without the faithful dedication of a handful of volunteers for whom I thank on behalf of the Clergy. If anyone is interested in helping out should speak to any of the clergy team.

West Berkshire Community Hospital

Each Sunday afternoon at 1:45, a short service of Holy Communion led by the Hospital Chaplain, the Reverend Chris Stott, takes place at the hospital. Volunteers from St. Mary's and other churches in Thatcham and Newbury give up their time to sit with patients and other visitors. The service lasts about 40 minutes and over the years numbers have increased significantly. It is not uncommon to have 10 patients attend. Each one is looked after. In some cases, it may be the only time a patient will be able to interact with other people as sadly, some patients receive no visitors at all. The valuable outreach is only possible because of the volunteers who make it happen.

My personal thanks go to Joan Collins and Margaret Holmes for their commitment to this vital ministry.

If you feel able to give up an hour or so every now and again, please come and find me.

Steve Rice

Men's Breakfast

The monthly Breakfast at the Baptist Church continues with a range of speakers and excellent food prepared by 'volunteers' at the Baptist Church under the leadership of Greg Smith. Details are published in the 'Bulletin' or available from the Parish Office.

Chris Watts

C.A.M.E.O. Come and Meet Each Other

CAMEO started in January 2014 with the aim of a weekly meeting place to bring together people in Thatcham who live on their own, who feel lonely after bereavement, or are unable to get out, to come together to make friends, and chat over homemade cake and a cuppa.

Since those early days the group has grown substantially and is self funded with the introduction of a weekly raffle. Joan, Viv, Ann and myself, along with three drivers volunteered to serve the group and our reward has been to see CAMEO flourish. The number of people coming has risen to over 40, but they do not come every week. Cakes and tea are served during the afternoon, mostly home baked cakes, although on special occasions we buy doughnuts and they go down very well!

The programme for the year has been varied e.g. Chair Exercises, Quizzes, Musical and traditional Bingo, Poetry, Singing, Word Puzzles, Adult Colouring, Board Games

etc., which gives a flavour of the weekly meetings. We have special events during the year including fish and chip lunch, cream teas, a special tea at the home of Ann and Roger Dykes, Harvest tea, Christmas celebrations with the U3A choir singing carols with everybody joining in. We also had a special invitation to the Mary Hare School for their Christmas Party with games, singing and food all organised by the pupils. It was lovely.

CAMEO Links –

Thatcham Court Care Home - residents join us most Monday afternoons which is a real joy.

Mary Hare School for the Deaf - Students come to visit CAMEO and we in turn are invited to their Christmas Party.

Mission Direct - knitted blankets and children's woollens are knitted by members and given to Diana and Matt Evans.

West Berkshire Community Hospital Rosemary Appeal & West Berkshire League of Friends - crotchet cot and pram blankets as well as baby and toddler knits for both these groups which are made by the ladies of Nevil Court.

West Berkshire Family Hub – is supported with the Nevil Court Ladies knitting toddlers' cardigans and jumpers which are sold to raise money for the Family Hub to buy more equipment for the centre.

We continue to collect milk bottle tops for The Thames Valley Air Ambulance charity with bags of tops appearing in church from around the parish! To date £110 has been raised from milk bottle tops. **Only milk bottle tops please.**

I believe the success of CAMEO is due to the reliable volunteers, drivers, and the CAMEO members who own and support their weekly group.

Theresa Lucas

The Thatcham Parochial Charities

We have not previously included a reference to the work of the Thatcham Charities, though it is a significant part of the Church's community involvement. The rector and all three churchwardens are ex officio members of the Board of Trustees and I (Chris Druce) am currently one of the two representatives of Thatcham Town Council.

So, what are the Charities? What do they do? There are 2 principal charities – The 'Thatcham Parochial Almshouse Charity' and 'Thatcham Relief in Need Charity'. These were initially based in the 'Ancient Parish' of Thatcham whose boundaries encompassed modern Thatcham, as well as Midgham, Greenham and Cold Ash. This is still so today. Both charities are administered by a board of 9 trustees, with members drawn from the rector and churchwardens, representatives for Thatcham Town Council and the Parish Councils of Midgham, Greenham and Cold Ash. The trustees meet 4/5 times each year, to discuss any matters relevant to the smooth running of the almshouses and to consider applications for grants to people in need within our geographical area. All extra business is carried out by phone or Email. Administrative details are covered admirably by our clerk, who has an office within the Thatcham Town Council building.

Almshouses – the first record of an almshouse is in York, in 986 AD. In Thatcham, the first almshouses were given by Thomas Loundyes in 1446 AD. Some of the current Thatcham almshouses, in Chapel Street (nearly opposite the Old

Bluecoat School) occupy the same site as those original ones and are named after him. Further endowments were made over the ensuing centuries and provisions also made for such items as clothing, fuel, utensils, candles and flax. Records have been found of an 'Almshouse cow', owned by the trustees and providing fresh milk for local residents

A new block of 6 flats was built off Lower Way in 1995, making a total, now, of 14 flats, in 3 blocks. Any vacancies, in any of these, when available, are open to residents of the 'Ancient Parish'.

The Relief in Need Charity was established in 1978 by the Charity Commission. It is an amalgamation of several small legacies left to the community of the old parish of Thatcham over the centuries. All its funding comes from income from those combined investments. We are able to make small grants for items, services or facilities that will provide relief for individuals who meet the following criteria:-

A) A clearly identifiable need, supported by a professional or recognised agency, typically a school, a doctor, health worker, Social Services, priest etc.

B) Must reside within the boundaries of the old Parish of Thatcham.

Typical grants have covered help with travel expenses, specialist disability equipment, help with training expenses to enable someone to earn their own living or help with household expenses. A typical applicant could be someone who has needed emergency re-housing following a domestic crisis and requires help with re-furnishing.

To give an idea of scale, during an average year, the Charity might make 25 grants, amounting to £12-13,000 in total. Back in 2007, following the disastrous flooding in our area, the charity worked in conjunction with local councils to distribute some of the local and government flood relief monies made available – we had the infrastructure already in place to be able to distribute financial assistance to individuals in need.

So, all in all, this work is an important and rewarding extension to the volunteer effort within our local community. If you have any questions, or if you know of anyone who might benefit, please see me, Rev. Mark or any of the churchwardens and we shall be pleased to clarify or take up the case.

Chris Druce

House Groups

Emmaus

House Groups have continued at Withybed Way and Violet Grove over the last year.

There is always room for more participants and/or more House Groups. If you want to join contact details are in the 'Bulletin' or contact the Parish Office.

S A P (Share and Prayer)

Our second year has come and gone and proved to be as interesting and rewarding as the first. We are a steady group of ladies who meet on the 2nd Tuesday of each month. We do have 4 others who dipped in as and when they felt able to.

Each month there is a different topic, So far we have touched on 'Seasons, Temptations, Topical subjects, Favourite hobbies, holidays, places of interest etc., Memories of school to name but a few. Our Christmas Meeting saw us enjoying mulled wine, festive bites and puzzles and quizzes along with listening to festive carols and songs.

We always start with a drink and homemade refreshments and we use that time for a general chat and to share news and concerns. Then the topic is introduced and a prayer concludes our meeting.

It doesn't matter whatever subject we discuss, it always holds God in the centre and his Spirit embraces each one of us in different ways. We rejoice that our thoughts, words and actions are entwined and we know and feel his love.

Anyone is welcome to join at any meeting. Look out on the Bulletin for a topic that you might be interested in discussing.

Linda Beaumont

Occasional groups

For a number of people, meeting in a regular weekday group can be stressful and too much of a commitment in our busy lives. Meeting each other simply on a Sunday is reassuring but that is not the best time to get to know people. Occasional groups bridge the gap nicely. Although often reserved for Lent there have been some for short periods at other times of year.

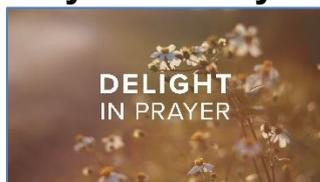
Most recently we were offered the 'Principles of Deep Water Fishing'. A study written by Bishop Steven. The intriguing title captured the imagination and two groups, one in the day and one in the evening, were established. The commitment was for just four sessions.

A session is generally just over an hour and includes refreshment and fellowship. After an opening prayer, we looked at passages from the Acts of the Apostles and in particular the challenges facing Paul and the early Christians as they followed their calling. We identified how being contemplative, compassionate, and courageous applied in their lives. Then we linked these experiences to our lives today and considered whether we were facing the challenges of 'deep water'. We were relieved to find that Paul had no clear goal in mind when he set out and that he was content, or maybe even forced, to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

I would recommend trying out an occasional group if you get the chance. Don't worry about what you can bring to it or what you expect to get out of it. Bite size can often suit our lifestyles. On this occasion, we all concluded that we were splashing about in the shallows rather than facing the challenges of deep water fishing.

Ann Dibble

Prayer Ministry at St. Mary's



Prayer is the breath of life for Christian people; it is our way of communicating with God and He with us. It opens our eyes to the sheer wonder of existence; it teaches

us to be thankful, to see things differently. Prayer opens us more deeply to the transforming grace of God.

Throughout the year members of St. Mary's Prayer Team have been available to spend time after the morning service to pray with anyone who wished to share their concerns, joys and difficulties. The team also pray for the people or situations mentioned in the prayer book which is left in the chapel during the week and where anyone coming into the church may add their prayers or thoughts; sometimes it's just a name. That's fine because God knows the details. The situations and names written in the prayer book are also prayed for during the week at Morning Prayer.

As well as praying with people on a Sunday, the team meets to pray for the clergy team, parish initiatives and activities.

Jesus had a few pertinent things to say about prayer and Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wrote:

'Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, tell your requests to God in your every prayer and petition—with thanksgiving'.

Sometimes we need someone to pray for us and with us and we can be confident that prayer does change things—including our own hearts.

Sue Stevenson.

MISSIONS



Thatcham Christian Aid Committee

Last year we sent nearly £4000 to Christian Aid - a decrease of about £1000 on the year before, but still making a big difference in poorer parts of the world. We were all very moved by the DVD shown of Haiti at our AGM, where a house built by Christian Aid (after a previous hurricane) ended up being a hurricane shelter in the next one. It was the only structure left standing in the village, and it saved 54 lives.

So we are incredibly grateful to all our supporters and collectors in Thatcham, not least at St Mary's.

Events held throughout the year were:

- Beetle Drive + Fish & Chip supper in April – about 100 people of all ages from all the Churches in Thatcham having a great time.
- A Harvest Supper and AGM In October at the URC – eating great food, watching DVDs, learning about the work of Christian Aid, and enjoying talking to each other.
- Lent Lunches: these took place each week during Lent at the Methodist Church and concluded on Good Friday at St. Mary's (with many thanks to CTiT helpers).
- Collection at Tesco's, London Road in February.

Thank you to everyone who supported these events, plus of course the Christian Aid Week Collections.

Forthcoming events are:

- Beetle Drive + Fish & Chips Supper; Saturday April 27th 2019 – 5.30pm for 6pm, at the URC Hall – returning by popular demand, please book the date now.

Sarah Bennet

Fairtrade and Traidcraft

The aim of FAIRTRADE is to secure a better deal for farmers and traders in 74 countries around the world. FAIRTRADE was founded by CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Traidcraft, The World Development Movement and The National Federation of Women's Institutes. The Headquarters is in Bonn, Germany.

The key areas of activity are to:

- Provide independent certification of the trade chain for products and licensing of the FAIRTRADE mark on products
- Help in growing demand for FAIRTRADE products and empowering producers to sell to traders and retailers.
- Work with their partners to support producer organisations and their networks.
- Raise awareness of the need for FAIRTRADE with the public.

The organisation has 1,5 million farmers/workers and 1210 FAIRTRADE certified producer organisations. 25% of all FAIRTRADE workers are women. Products are sold by all 5 of major UK supermarkets and over £23 FAIRTRADE premium is generated from sales in the UK.

FACTS:

- A typical poor family in a poor country spend 70% of its income on food.
- Small holder farmers grow 70% of the world's food but make up half of the world's hungriest people.
- 1.4 billion people in the developing world live in poverty, 300 million children go to bed hungry every day.
- The richest 85 people in the world have more wealth than the poorest half of the world
- FAIRTRADE promote better education and healthcare.

Typical products include: tea, coffee, sugar, sweets, pasta, biscuits, cleaning products, home products, fashion products, toys and stationery.

A stall selling a limited range of food products is held in the Meeting Room every 2nd Sunday each month. Products can be ordered from the TRAIIDCRAFT catalogue.

Relan Clarke

Children's Society

Collecting boxes at St Mary's and St Barnabas are used support the Children's Society in this parish. £645 was sent to the Society in 2019. Collecting boxes are available for anyone wanting to support the Society in its work with children.

The money goes to help the Society and its network of centres and projects to deliver specialist services for children who face disaster and danger in their daily lives; children who are unable to find the support they need elsewhere.

If anyone would like to take on the organisation of events for the Society, please speak to Ann Watts or any of the Churchwardens

Ann Watts

USPG

US is working with the Anglican Church in Zambia to develop healthcare and leadership programmes that will have an impact on the life and outreach of the church and community.

£483 was given to US in 2019.

If you would like to help, please speak to Ann Watts (864567) to arrange for a collecting Globe.
Ann Watts

West Berks Foodbank



The Foodbank is now a well-established part of the fabric of West Berkshire, continuing to support individuals and families in food poverty. Our 5 Foodbank Centres (Thatcham, Newbury, Burghfield & Mortimer, Hungerford and Lambourn) are open on different days of the week.

We are now entering our 7th operational year and you can see from the figures below that demand overall looks like it has stabilised but the Foodbank reporting year ends on 31st March (after this report goes to print) so overall numbers will increase. To date we have fed more children in 2019/2020. The effects of Universal Credit continue to bite hard for people.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE FED		
	2018/2019	2019/2020
Adults	3178	2824
Children	1677	1714
Total	4855	4538

However your sustained support for the work of WBFB has enabled us to continue to distribute 3 days' worth of food and toiletries to those living in desperate and challenging situations.

PARISH DONATIONS	
2018/2019	2019/2020
779.8 kg	859.6

Clients continue to find the Foodbank Centres places of refuge and where they can be confident of a warm welcome and a listening ear.

New Trustees have been appointed with particular responsibilities for Safeguarding and Compliance and a new Warehouse Manager is gradually finding his feet. We continued our 'Hungry Holiday' summer holiday support parcels for local schools for summer 2019 having secured funding to help make up any stock shortfall including the bags needed in which to pack the parcels!

Thank you to everyone who has donated food and toiletries and those who volunteer. A simple food parcel makes a big difference, restoring dignity and reviving hope.

Sue Stevenson

St. Mary's and Dementia

During this year, the Memory Café has settled in very well on Friday afternoons. It caters specifically for people living with dementia and their carers. It offers a safe, supportive environment where those with dementia know they can be themselves at whatever stage their disease has reached and just as importantly, carers can share experiences, worries and information. An offshoot of the café are memory singalongs. These are held on the 4th Wednesday of every month in the church. Singing is one of the activities that make people feel good and stimulates memory.

St. Mary's has agreed to become a dementia friendly church. This entails looking at our facilities - we have been promised an audit to suggest changes we might make -, and also helping us to recognize signs of the disease in the people we meet. To facilitate these, several church members are working with West Berkshire Dementia Forum who are aiming this year to get as many people as possible to become Dementia Friends. The Alzheimer's Society has produced an information session, specifically aimed at the general public, attendance to which entitles you be a 'Friend'. I have recently become a dementia champion and am therefore able to deliver these sessions and so will be starting them shortly. Please consider coming along.

Viv Druce

Thatcham Together Community Forum

Since 2017 local representatives of Neighbourhood Watch Groups, residents groups, and individual residents have been meeting with members and officers of Thatcham Town Council and the local policing team in the Meeting Room at St Mary's to consider issues affecting the local community. These issues have included criminal and antisocial behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse, vehicle speeding, highway safety and parking, homelessness, dementia and what can and is being done by the various agencies to tackle them.

The Forum meets every 6 to 8 weeks and provides a neutral space for raising concerns and commenting on the actions taken. Reports from the police on drug abuse and the availability of seriously dangerous and addictive substances are a major concern in the West Berkshire area. It is apparent that timely and effective police action to deal with this is greatly assisted by better awareness and reporting of suspicious activity by the wider community.

The items raised at the Forum frequently touch on the project being pursued by the Pastoral Missional Church group, in particular the attempts to address the needs of young people congregating in the Broadway.

The Forum has demonstrated the value of improved awareness of disruptive and dangerous activities in the community and improved links between concerned residents and the agencies who have to deal with these activities.

After a review of the priorities the Forum has restructured its approach, adopting full use of social media where appropriate and forming Working Parties to consider :

a) Facilities/Activities for young people

- b) Green Issues (including flood relief measures, electric vehicle charging, carbon reduction, litter and graffiti)
 - c) Health Issues (including cyber crime and dementia awareness)
 - d) Parking
- The Neighbourhood Police Team will continue to concentrate on Anti Social Behaviour (including misuse of drugs and anti-social driving)

Chris Watts

Barfield Handbells

The handbell ringing team was started by a church member, Bill Butler, over 50 years ago using a set of 14 old handbells belonging to the tower bell ringers. Early members of the team were mostly tower bell ringers and practised at Bill's house in Barfield Road, hence the name.

From those limited beginnings the team has grown to become well known in the handbell world, playing specially written and transcribed music on our own set of over 60 bells, as well as the tower bellringer's set (now increased to 29 bells). We still consider St Mary's church to be our home, practising there every week, and performing in concerts and for special services in the church.

The main team of about 14 ringers from all around the local area practise on a Monday evening on the full set of bells, and are affiliated to the Handbell Ringers of Great Britain organisation (HRGB), attending rallies and other events organised by the South Eastern region.

Beginners' practices are on Wednesday evenings, using a smaller set of 25 bells, with help from a few members of the main team, learning basic techniques, playing simpler music, but having fun.

A small ensemble team, formed of six or more members of the main team, practise on alternate Thursday evenings, again on 25 bells, enabling us to perform in smaller venues to interested groups around the local area.

In the last year the main team produced two full concerts in church; a showcase evening for Thatcham Festival; rang in the Civic Carol Service; attended rallies in Sunningdale and Ash; and played at the annual service in Guildford Cathedral. The small ensemble have been particularly busy, including local care homes, clubs and organisations, a number of weddings, and even 2 two days playing on cruise ships anchored at Southampton!

Mark and Rachel Backhouse

Social Events

Once again, our small band of volunteers have been active this year. Though we do not meet formally, somehow all the stops are pulled out to re-arrange the church furniture and to provide a warm welcome, drinks and food at several events during the year.

During Lent the Thatcham churches come together to worship and share lunch. Part of this takes place in St Mary's and people sat down together on Good Friday to share in soup and cheese.

“Marion’s Cream Tea” was its usual roaring success in June. This acts as a sure sign that Summer has arrived !

Then, in July, we had the fund-raising ‘Café and Cabaret’ night. This year saw a serious up-grading of food service, with canapes and finger foods served at the tables by waitresses in formal black and white. (there is no limit to this team’s resourcefulness). The 20-item, home grown entertainment also deserves a mention!

October saw the Thatcham Festival of Arts and Leisure. As usual, the body of the church was cleared and became a craft fair for the day. People from St Mary’s and St Barnabas were on hand to welcome visitors, answer questions about church activities and, of course, to provide suitable refreshments to stallholders and visitors.

There was a celebration of Marion’s working life in November, when she ‘formally retired’ from her role in the ministry. Once again, the church was transformed into a grand party venue to welcome the large number of friends and well-wishers to a wonderful celebration of food and entertainment. A large team of volunteers came forward to ensure the success of the occasion.



After Christmas, at the end of the Week of Christian Unity, we joined again with members of the URC for our annual quiz night. Once again the supper reached its usual standard and this year, falling also on Burn’s Night, we were able to supplement our supper with haggis and neaps! After a hard-fought contest, the trophy returned to St Mary’s this year, the winners taking the result by one point!

These are the highlights of the social year. In addition, people have been on hand to help with a welcome and refreshments after a number of occasions, eg for a Confirmation and ‘Time to Remember’ services, or for any number of concerts held in the church. Everyone enjoys the coming together and fellowship of the team as part of our greater worship in Thatcham. So, our thanks to all those who have helped over the past year. If anyone would like to join this merry team, or help occasionally, please just make yourself known.

Chris Druce

Service Rota Teams



People have regularly helped throughout the year to provide support in various aspects of church life from welcoming each person as they enter the church to reading a set text and a wealth of things in between, including leading the intercessory prayers, serving at Sunday services (and at other special services), administering the chalice and helping at baptisms.

Thank you to everyone.

We are always looking for more people to help so if you would like to try something new or want to find out more about any of the roles please talk to a member of the clergy team or Sue Stevenson.

Connect

Connect, our parish magazine, is published ten times a year, double issues being December/January and July/August. The magazine includes news and information about services and events in St. Mary's and St. Barnabas. All of our clergy team provide a regular article but more contributors are always welcome. Any articles or adverts to be published can be sent to Steve Rice, steverice1@virginmedia.com, or Julie Dunwell, julie@dunwell.org.

Julie Dunwell

St Mary's Church Website

The St. Mary's web site has been on-line now for approximately 18 months.

The structure of the web site has changed a little since the last APCM although the page content has been improved with more information interspersed with graphics and pictures to "liven up" what would otherwise be fairly bland pages.

There has been a change in user activity seen on the web site. In the first six months or so, the visits or hits per day averaged 31 with each visitor looking at an average of 3 pages; the "home" or first page seen, would be included in this count. From last August onwards the visits have dropped significantly to an average of 7 per day and only two pages being accessed which equates to one page being selected after the home page is displayed. Table 1 details the visitor activity on the web site.

There was however a significant peak in the last two weeks of 2019 covering the Christmas period with roughly 300 visitors in 14 days accessing about 400 pages.

It would appear that there are probably a core of users who have now got to know the site and so visit the web site in a more structured and systematic manner. This can be seen from the Christmas period with the large number of hits and the low number of page views.

Date	Periodic Web Site Statistics			Analysis	
	Unique Hits	Page Views	Web Mail Received	Hits per Day	Pages per Hit
23/12/2018 to 02/07/2019	5965	17958	65	31	3
29/07/2019 to 21/02/2020	1529	3731	38	7	2

Table 1 Summary of web site accesses

In addition, web mail messages from users via the web site are delivered to the Parish Administrator and range from general enquiries about weddings, baptisms and funerals to help with tracing family trees and the history of the parish. Web mail messages average just under two a week.

The majority of the standard recurring updates to the web site can be performed in a matter of minutes. Occasionally a change may take a little longer and infrequently the introduction of new pages may take between thirty minutes and a couple of hours. The effort in maintaining the web site is very low and is easy to manage.

The following tables show the most visited pages and the web site that was used to access St. May's web site.

For the coming months the main activity for the web site will be to document the processes and procedures for maintaining and managing the site now that the operational aspects are understood and have bedded in.

A further initiative is to create an on-line parish diary that can be read by many, updated by authorised individuals and potentially incorporated into the web site.



<http://www.stmarysthatcham.org.uk/>

Top Active Pages February 2020

Page Name	Views	vs Previous
/Home	72	+57.14%
/upcoming-events.html	23	+69.7%
/regular-services.html	20	+74.07%
/services.html	19	+90.48%
/contact.html	18	+50%
/whos-who.html	18	+64.29%
/baptisms.html	17	+80.95%
/abc-toddler-group.html	15	+187.5%
/bulletin--connect.html	15	+115.38%
/history.html	15	+83.33%
/service-types.html	13	+92.86%
/st-barnabas.html	11	+84.62%
/cameo.html	9	+100%
/publications.html	8	+47.06%
/choir.html	7	+58.33%
/memory-cafe.html	7	0%
/sos---sundays-on-saturday.html	7	0%
/weddings.html	7	+43.75%

Referring Sites

Referrer	Views	vs Previous
www.google.com	38	+86.36%
www.google.co.uk	13	+68.42%
r.search.yahoo.com	2	0%
en.m.wikipedia.org	1	+100%
lm.facebook.com	1	0%
m.facebook.com	1	+50%
www.bing.com	1	0%
www.searchencrypt.com	1	0%

Google is the most popular means of finding the web site. What's On and our services seem to be the most popular pages. The Home page does not count as it is always the first page shown unless a user has saved the URL of a specific page.

Mike Stevenson