

# ANNUAL-REPORT OF SAINT MARY'S PARISH CHURCH, BARTON-ON-HUMBER, FOR THE YEAR 2014

## Vicar's Report.

I'd like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to so many people here who give generously of time, skill and resources to continue our mission in the parish, often against a background of indifference and incomprehension. It still offends that, for example, demands on the food bank have increased rather than diminished over the last year or so, and that the huge amount of work done by members of all the congregation in Barton (and beyond) has been factored so effortlessly into what passes for normality - meanwhile, of course we are told non-stop of the irrelevance and stupidity of religious belief. I wonder whether it looks that way to someone whose benefits have been delayed because of a clerical error? Rather like the railway station and the corner shop, I suspect that the Churches are things which people don't particularly value - until they vanish.

If that seems a gloomy backdrop to a vicar's report, it takes its lead from two places: first, the hard statistic that across Europe and North America religious commitment generally is on the slide. I'm tempted to quote Chesterton: *'It's not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, it's that it's been found difficult, so not tried.'* More specifically, in the diocese of Lincoln, we know that Church attendance has declined by more than 20% over the years 2001-11, and I think that's something we see reflected here too. Bishop Christopher is deeply alarmed by this - he said to me the other day that at least it only covered one year of his episcopate - putting us at the very bottom of the diocesan league table. His suspicion is that the whirlwind cutting of fulltime clergy posts in the north of the diocese during those years caused massive damage to what we are about, and that this is part of the problem. We're still waiting to see appointments in our deanery which will reduce the overload: at the moment our Benefice effectively consists of eight parishes, since practically the whole work of looking after the North Wolds group is carried by us here. Ten years ago we were just Barton!

Given that all the denominations (and faiths) are struggling in many parts of the UK, it's clearly not just about dog-collars in Lincolnshire. Bishop Christopher believes, along with many others, that we can no longer expect to be understood automatically by wider society: cue for the story of the Supermarket Executive who couldn't see what business of the Churches Easter might be, or for the research which suggests a large number of children believe Easter celebrates the birth of the Easter Bunny.

Against that backdrop, the diocese has launched its discipleship programme, trying to support people in making the faith their own, rather than something just borrowed or bought off-the-peg. So far it's come up with nothing that we've not been doing in Barton for years, which is perhaps a disappointment, but the change of direction **is** welcome, away from management and towards the Gospel.

Unlike many parishes and groups of parishes, we're fortunate: we have a good building in a good state of repair, we have faithful and willing people who give generously of time, money and effort; we have a far wider range of ministry than 'the vicar', both ordained and lay, and we have a good reputation out in the town for pastoral care, schools work and the occasional offices. We have huge numbers of baptisms, a tolerably healthy wedding ministry, and to date the independent funeral celebrants don't have the upper hand, like they do in some parts of the diocese. I think we have a reputation as being a place of welcome, of loving service and of inclusion. We know that we've been a place of healing and acceptance to those who have been bruised by the random unfairnesses and calamities of life. We've many blessings and advantages, but we can't afford to be complacent.

In a darkened room (a public house in Brigg, as it happened) after the last Deanery Synod, a select group of us (ie whoever turned up) discussed the 'ha-ha' effect: a ha-ha being one of those uncrossable ditches which you can't see until you're right on top of it. We can see where we want to be, but there seems to be a ditch we can't cross in connecting with people, be they members of the wider congregation, or the community, or whatever.

Addressing ways of bridging that ditch, that ha-ha is set to be a major part of planning for the foreseeable future, and part of it does involve the deepening of the roots in the faith of everyone here at St Mary's. We have no shortage of ideas and possibilities, but it needs people to catch the vision and engage with them. It still hurt that we were unable to get 20 people from across the entire deanery so that we could run a deanery weekend next month (at least we got a decent number from St Mary's, but it's worth remembering that 20 years ago we could fill a Christian centre like Scargill at Kettlewell ourselves).

There's much to celebrate here: we seem to be holding fast to our mission statement, and to providing un-embarrassing inclusive worship in which a wide range of people may find a home. We try to care for the vulnerable and broken and take seriously our responsibility to the wider world and community. The challenge to show enough of the love of God in our midst that people sense there is something real at the centre of what we do. After that, it's up to God at work in the human heart - but we've still our part to play.

*Fr David*

## Electoral Roll

The Electoral Roll stands at 116, there having been 2 deletions and 2 additions.

### **Report on the Church Fabric**

This has been a quieter year for the church fabric, perhaps the lull before the storm as our next quinquennial inspection is not far away. Last year's major project, the repair of windows in the north aisle and chancel, left us with a loan to pay back, and a group of about sixteen parishioners has taken care of this through one-off donations or monthly contributions to the fabric fund.

This year has been one of maintenance. David C has cleared the roof and drains of dead leaves in October, re-aligned the down pipes on the north aisle, and removed (for the second time) a persistent buddleia bush growing on the north wall of the chancel. In November Ian Wilson began work on the repairing and paintings of windows and doors in the hall, and hopes to complete it in the spring/early summer of this year.

We had a cold weekend in December when the heating failed, but Steve L was able to restore it in time for Christmas. John F and Ian W braved an alarmingly tall ladder to close an uncooperative window in the clerestory to remove one source of cold air, and in February Ian was back in action clearing the drains.

Brian P has several times come to the rescue when the lock on the aumbry which houses the Reserved Sacrament has jammed. In the end he has been obliged to solve the problem once and for all by changing the lock.

It will be obvious that we owe a debt of gratitude to Brian, Ian, David and John for their work in the church, and also to the seventeen people who helped to clean the church on 31 March. Many thanks to Janet P for organising this mammoth cleaning task as well as the cleaning and care of linens week by week.

*Geof B.*

### **Choir**

The choir has welcomed three new members this year - Kathy, Lily and Faith. Faith has accompanied Julia to choir practices since she was born but at Christmas she decided that she wanted to join the choir for services. At three and a half (as she was when she joined) she may well be the country's youngest chorister. We are delighted to have these new members and would be equally pleased if anybody else would like to join. In March two choir members, Lily and Grace, were among those Confirmed by Bishop Tim here at St Mary's. They did an excellent job of multi-tasking, slipping between choir stalls and congregation, and it was good to be there to support them.

*Liz B.*

### **Home Communions**

Home Communion continues to be administered to those communicants, who are unable to attend church for whatever reason on a regular basis. One significant change during the last year has been moving from the third Thursday of each month, to the third week. Due to the number of communicants receiving, it became too much to do them all on the same day.

Since the last A.G.M. between the three of us we have taken Communion out to various homes over 140 times. Margaret also takes Communion each month to the Willows Residential Home, where as many as 10 can attend the service.

*Mike, Margaret, Peter.*

### **In-Depth Group**

In-Depth is a discussion group which has been going for more than 15 years. We meet at Val D's house about once a month on a Tuesday. Its membership oscillates, but we have a nucleus of about 6 persons, some of whom have been with us from day one. We have moved from a pattern of all meetings being presented by one member to a system in which we volunteer to take turns. No-one is obliged to do any leading: if they just want to listen and discuss, that is fine. In 2014 we worked on several topics: church history, religious poetry and the book of Genesis. People in the parish come to our meetings, some stay and some go, and anyone is welcome to come along to a meeting and see what it is like. Further information is available from me or Val.

*Peter L*

### **Toddler Time**

Toddler time continues to be a large and lively group. We have fourteen mums/carers that regularly attend our sessions bringing with them 19 children. We continue to start at 9.30am, which benefits our mums coming in directly from the school or playgroup run. This start time is very flexible as we usually wait until 10.15am to have the service part of the session to ensure that everyone is included. Mavis and I continue to be the only leaders of

Toddler Time and it still works very well. The parents and children alike appreciate familiarity and that in turn enables us to develop good relationships with one another.

We are one of the few groups that run throughout the year (we only close on Bank Holidays). During the school holidays older siblings often accompany our toddlers to the session making us a much larger and livelier group than in term time. During these holiday sessions, if either Mavis or I are unavailable, we have cancelled the session, as we feel that to run it effectively, when there is such a large number attending, we both need to be there.

We continue to incorporate a craft-type activity in the sessions, which is always well received by both parents and toddlers alike. As a result we have spent a little more money to replenish craft materials. We had a Christmas party, which was funded this year by a donation given in memory of Rosemary and Geoff Lamert and the work they did with the young people of the church. We were delighted to see that half of the group came to the Christingle Service and some came to the Mothers' Day service in church. The poster on the outdoor notice board continues to bring us some new mums along with the smaller flyers at the back of the church. A huge thank you to Mavis for her time and all that she does for the group and special thanks to Auriol for providing the refreshments and giving generously from the money she collects.

*Michelle W*

### **Mothers' Union**

The Mothers' Union have met three times each month - first Wednesday for Corporate Communion, third Wednesday for our afternoon meeting, fourth Wednesday (April- October) for our Prayer time.

Again, we have travelled the globe with our speakers, visiting Egypt twice on two quite different journeys, and around the world in 45 minutes, sharing the experiences of a former Port Chaplain. We were reminded about the origins of the Mothers' Union Overseas, learned about Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, different colours in the Bible, life as a Brownie, and ended the year with our annual afternoon of carols and readings. We joined with ladies of other denominations in Barton for the Women's World Day of Prayer and the Methodist Rally, and with other Mothers' Union members for the Glanford Group Festival in Brigg.

Locally, we have raised funds for St. Mary's by our efforts at the Garden Party and Bazaar, as well as being responsible for the flowers behind Trinity altar. We provided and prepared 140 posies for Mothering Sunday and regularly support each other and the parish through our commitment to prayer. All our annual subscription (currently £20.50) together with any proceeds from special events go directly to Mary Sumner House to further the work of the Mothers' Union worldwide.

At our AGM in January 2015, after much discussion, it was agreed to change our format. A short planned programme will end in May, then the Prayer Time will move to become our main focus, on the third Wednesday each month. From this point there will be a shared leadership of the branch with members taking turns at leading/deciding the format for our Prayer Time each month. There are exceptions; in October we will host the Glanford Group in aid of our Overseas Members and we will have our annual readings and carols in December. This was the preferred option as no one wanted the Branch to close through lack of officers, and we felt we should give it a try, especially as a commitment to prayer is at the heart of the Mothers' Union. It is important to keep an MU presence in the Parish and we intend to continue with the Corporate Communion and providing flowers for Trinity altar. Individually our members fulfil many and varied roles in the church and community. As always, visitors can expect a warm welcome.

*Linda B.*

### **St. Mary's Ladies' Group**

The group continues to thrive, with a membership of 90 this year, still providing an evening meeting for ladies of different or no faith background. Once again we have enjoyed a variety of speakers including the History of Time (Geoff Bryant), David Lee with reminiscences of funny incidents at the weddings he was photographing (especially the one where both the bride and the bridegroom's mothers wore identical outfits) and Liz Bennett telling us about the Ropewalk. The Ladies enjoyed the usual high quality Harvest supper catered for by Cooks of New Holland, and a light Christmas supper with songs from 'Octangle', a branch of the Louth Male Voice Choir.

One of the highlights was a visit from Nancy Birtwhistle, talking about her experience appearing on and winning the 'Bake off'. She brought her trophy (a glass cake stand) to show us too and a Christmas cake to raffle. (We look forward to her return in December to tell us about her busy year).

Local chef Nigel Brown gave us a superb cookery demonstration (with lots of tips and samples) for which we had to decamp to the Lecture Hall to enable us all to fit in!

As you can see, our programme is varied and we raise a lot of money both for the church and for local charities - this year the 'The Women's Refuge', Guide Dogs for the Blind, Jerry Green's Dog refuge, Lindsey Lodge Hospice, and the recent cyclone in the Vanuatu.

We supported the Church by having cake stalls at the annual bazaar and Summer Garden Party. (I am taking over the jewellery stall previously done by Maureen Welch, Audrey Cole and Sheila Atkin so if you have any such items not needed any more, I would be very grateful to have them!), also by helping with church cleaning and making Christingles for the Christingle service in December. The meeting aims to provide something of interest for

everyone, not forgetting our church 'roots' - originally as an offshoot of the Mothers' Union for 'Young Families'.  
New members are always welcome.

*Sue W (secretary)*

#### Parish Magazine distribution

After the editor has finished compiling the *Parish News* each month, the pages are then run off by Newton Printers. Our very own magnificent 7, who have worked together for many years, then take over the stapling and producing of the magazine for distribution around the town. 325 are put together each month by the team, with 250 being delivered to those parishioners who pay the £5-00 a year, also to businesses, surgeries, advertisers, etc. We are very grateful to the team of 21 who are so conscientious in delivering the parish magazine month by month. The remaining 75 are placed at the back of church for any visitors we may have visiting St Mary's that month and wish to take a magazine away with them (50p).

*Mike S*

#### Social Committee

This year has been a very good one; all events have exceeded our expectations. The Summer Fair in July and the Bazaar in November were well attended. Holding the Summer Fair on a Saturday morning in the church grounds was a good idea and we had more people attend than we have had before. The New Year, Harvest and Midsummer Suppers were also well attended. My thanks to all the helpers; we work well together and with good results. I look forward to the coming year and hope we have even better results.

*Auriol T*