THE PARISH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, HENLEY-ON-THAMES
REPORTS TO THE APCM 27TH APRIL 2008

CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT

Report on the church fabric and the churchyard
prepared for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, 27th April 2008

1. Introduction

The separate reports compiled for the APCM form an Appendix to this Report and should be considered a part of it. They describe much of what happened in the parish and there is no need to do more than to highlight a few matters of special note.

2. Ministry

The ministry which St Mary's offered in 2007/8 continued to be comprehensive, with Morning and Evening prayer every weekday and a Eucharist service every weekday except Monday. An additional informal service, Praying Together, has been instituted at 09.30 am each Friday morning. In addition there were 26 Baptisms, 6 Weddings, and 19 Funeral or Memorial/Thanksgiving services. The monthly Baptism Preparation Evenings and Wedding Classes continued. The number of Easter communicants was 273 and Christmas communicants were 402. We continued the tradition of a Pets and Teddy Bears service in October. We continued to welcome Bishop John Bone to celebrate and preach, and the Methodist minister Revd. John Ogden to preach at our main Eucharist on several Sundays during the year. We have recently also welcomed Canon John Ratings, Rector Emeritus of Wargrave Parish, as a guest celebrant.

3. Consultation On Parish Renewal

The PCC held an extra meeting in October to discuss aspects of mission in the Parish. Three subjects were considered – communications, liturgy & worship, and mission. After general discussion it was agreed that communications were a priority. A group was formed to look at the notice boards inside the church, and the setting up of a website was approved. Fr Martyn will be proposing a Parish Renewal programme in the near future. The PCC will be considering how to implement other ideas during the coming year.

4. New Bishop

In November 2007 we were honoured to be chosen to host the Henley Deanery for the first visit to the Deanery by the new Bishop of Oxford, the Right Reverend John Pritchard.

5. Pilgrimages

Members of the congregation went on their travels again this year, with a five night pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi in June 2007, and a further visit to Walsingham shortly afterwards. Preparations are far advanced for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in May 2008.

6. Parish Feasts

Parish feasts and parties continue to be an important focus of our communal life. The monthly Parish breakfasts are especially valuable in bringing attendees of the 8 and 9.30 a.m. services into regular contact. The Christmas Day lunch was well attended and much appreciated. Special thanks are due to Anne Griffiths for her unflagging enthusiasm for arranging these events, and to all who contribute ingredients, culinary skills and joie de vivre.

7. Link Diocese

Our fundraising for our link **Diocese of Lima** (Peru) continued through the year, with a well attended Christmas Fair in the Chantry House (largely run by Rosemary Duckett and Mary Wood). Obtaining up-to-date information about the Diocese is difficult, but in the aftermath of last year's earthquake this is to be understood. Some information can be viewed on their website : www.anglican.peru.org

8. Christmas shopping night

At the request of Henley Town Council, the church was open on Christmas Shopping Evening (Friday 7th December). The church was decked out with candles and a vast Christmas tree (donated by the Town Council) and was a lovely haven of peace amid the high street mayhem. Alan and Christine Tang generously donated the tree decorations and took their lives in their hands when decorating the upper branches.

9. Royal Regatta Service.
Once again the church was full for the annual Royal Regatta Service on the final Sunday of the Regatta. The preacher was the Dean of Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA. The Rector will be the preacher at the 2008 Royal Regatta Service. The parish is indebted to the Stewards of the Royal Regatta for a substantial donation to the Organ Fund.

10. Website
St Mary's has a website : www.stmaryshenley.org.uk This is now close to the end of Phase I of development, at which point it will provide a central diary for all parish activities and reports. It is important that it be kept up-to-date, and hearty thanks are due to Stephen Nichol for his hard work in setting it up, and to Andrew Fletcher for agreeing to maintain the site.

11. Statue of Our Lady
The Rector has received a promise of a sum of money sufficient to buy a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary for installation in the Church. The PCC has agreed to this in principle.

12. St Catherine's Arts
St. Catherine's Arts has hosted a number of very successful concerts in the church, notably the King's Scholars of King's College, Cambridge, which raised close to £2,000 for the Organ Fund. The legal status of the St. Catherine's Arts vis-à-vis the PCC has yet to be formalised. This will be rectified soon, and certainly before the planned Son et Lumiere in November 2008.

13. Piano and Petrus van Schendel picture
The valuation of the Victorian piano from Bonhams had been precisely nil. The PCC has therefore, in faith, approved its sale. The sale of the Petrus Van Schendel painting is being considered by the PCC.

14. Losses
This year has seen a few deaths from our congregation, namely Phyllis Evis and George Cranford. We miss them a great deal.

15. Building Matters

i. Quinquennial Inspection
The Quinquennial inspection of the church fabric was not carried out in 2007. With the appointment of a new architect, Mr Richard Oxley, it is hoped that this will be done as soon as possible.

ii. South Aisle flooring problem
The South Aisle flooring problem appears to be resolved. The floor was taken up and relaid in November 2007. Special thanks are due to Richard Fletcher for all his work on this.

iii. The organ
During the year it became obvious that the organ needed serious repairs. In the autumn a group was formed to spearhead the fundraising of £75,000. This will be enough to pay for all the work needed at present, including the replacing of the present console with a new one, and leave sufficient for the creating of an organ fund. So far £44,000 has been raised which nearly covers the immediate work.

iv. Lease of ground floor of Chantry House to Red Lion
The Red Lion Hotel has recently changed hands. The Rector has signed a document to assign the lease of the ground floor of the Chantry House over to the new owners, and the legal costs were paid by the Red Lion.

v. Churchyard
Plans for the renewal of the churchyard have been placed on hold until sufficient funds have been raised for repairs to the organ.

vi. Heating
The heating system has been serviced and the radiator which stood alone in the north aisle has been removed and 'cannibalised' to repair the faulty radiator in the Lady Chapel. Geoffrey Taylor attended the Bishop of

Oxford's consultation on climate change in February and will report back to the PCC on energy-saving measures to be considered.

vii. Stained glass windows

The stained glass windows vandalised in 2006 were repaired and reinstalled by Chapel Studios between November 2007 and February 2008. The work has been superbly done and the cost will be covered by the insurers.

viii. Car parking in the Churchyard

"Fly parking" in the churchyard is a perennial problem. The PCC has agreed to investigate erecting bollards, and the Rector will also be considering concrete flower planters as a possible solution.

Carol Brook-Partridge Geoffrey Taylor
April 2008

The Chantry House

The Chantry House has had a good year both financially and in its use by the Community at large as well as by St Mary's congregation. Slowly people are getting to know what a splendid environment it is for functions such as Baptism and Wedding parties as well as small concerts and seminars. The new owners of the Red Lion have also used it for a Seminar in conjunction with the Hotel. The Chantry house is of course being used by all the Church Organisations and the Parish Breakfasts are very well attended and much enjoyed.

The Sunday cream teas were a great success and brought in over £5000 which helps towards the running costs. Thanks are due to all those who make the teas such a success both by helping and also making scones and cakes. It is a well worth exercise and shows the outreach of the Church to the local community. We are proposing to continue this year and will be looking for volunteers so that the same people do not have to come too often.

Now that the Chantry House has been open for a few years it is thought the Installation of a Lift would help the elderly to make more use of the Upper Floor so a Lift feasibility study has been commissioned from Oxley Conservation who were involved with the Restoration Work.

I must of course thank Elspeth for all the hard work she does to welcome everyone Caroline for cleaning and keeping the Building so clean and Julie for all she does on the Letting and welcoming side

George Constantinidi

The Children's Society

As usual, the main activity this year has been the four days of Regatta refreshments. We now pay 25% of the proceeds to the Chantry House, which means a reduction on what we can send to the Society, but it is still worth doing. (We do appreciate the dishwashers and the coffee machine).

I am grateful to members of St Mary's, in particular, who are a constant source of help and supplies. I do appreciate offers made voluntarily, wherever they come from. Arrangements are always flexible, and help for even a short time is valued.

The home-based boxes are also a steady source of funds, and at present are organised by Avril Brent.

Ceridwen Cranford

Christian Aid

During the last year by means of selling refreshments at the sponsored walk, church collections, a quiz evening combined with a fish and chip supper and most important of all the house to house collection during Christian Aid Week in May (rapidly approaching again), the Henley area of churches have raised just over £10,000 for the charity.

Of this £7341 was from the house to house collection. Thanks to the excellent response to my appeal for volunteers to cover the roads allocated to St Mary's we collected £1380 of this total.

Michael Christmas

Church Cleaning

Thanks to Caroline, Sylvana, Hazel and Ann Bird, also not forgetting Father Martyn, the church looks lovely. But now we are missing Elspeth hugely, she kept St Leonards, the Lady Chapel and the Jesus Chapel pristine. So, we really need 3 more helpers. If anyone could spare the odd hour to polish and dust, it would be wonderful. We do it when it suits. If you can, please contact Sheila Constantinididi, on 578566 – thank you.
Sheila Constantinididi

Church Flowers
Each week we make three or four flower arrangements, rising to fifteen or more at Easter, Harvest Festival and Christmas. In the Chantry House posies were made for distribution on Mothering Sunday. The opportunity at Easter to donate a lily in memory of a loved one continues to be well supported.
Poppies were used in arrangements for Remembrance Sunday.
In November Sheila Constantinidi invited all the flower group for a delicious lunch. We discussed and decided to use white and gold for Christmas and to use greenery only during Advent in time for school Christmas carol services. The angel banners were also used. In December Father Martyn and Anne gave a Christmas party for all the flower ladies and partners which was a most enjoyable evening.
We thank all who donated and provided flowers during the year.
Blanche Wiliams

Churches Together
Margaret Johnson and Stephen Nichols are the church's representatives for Churches Together in Henley. The group meets four or five times a year to discuss current activities in each of the churches, and plan joint activities and services such as the Good Friday Walk of Witness.
This year we heard talks from, among others, Andrew and Kath Lonsdale of Christchurch, who took a sabbatical and went on a series of pilgrimages around the UK and Europe, visiting Iona, Lindisfarne, Pendle Hill, Walsingham, Spring Harvest, Lourdes and Taizé. At the recent AGM we heard from Mike Ray and our own George Constantinidi on the work of the YMCA amonst the young people in Henley.
Churches Together is a good opportunity for us to share ideas and inspiration with our friends in other churches in the town, and concentrate on the similarities between our churches, rather than worrying about the differences. The joint services always seem to be well received by those who attend - these include various services in Holy Week, one to mark Christian Aid week in May, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, and the Churches Together service in October.
All are welcome at the meetings and services, which we'll advertise on the newsletter and website. The next meetings will be Wednesday June 25 at Christchurch URC, Monday September 15 at Holy Trinity (Social evening), and Monday November 10 in the Chantry House. The Christian Aid week service is on Sunday 11th May at 5.30pm in Christchurch URC, and the Churches Together service is in St Mary's at 6pm on 19th October.
Stephen Nichols

Deanery Synod
An interesting, if patchy year, with the new Bishop taking up the reins. On 22nd May the meeting at Whitchurch Hill began with a Eucharist at St John's Church, at which the Revd David Winter preached. After refreshments at the Village Hall, the meeting proceeded with Deanery Accounts and a notice that the new Bishop of Oxford would be at Dorchester in June (Visitation). Jean Griffin and I decided we were 'gatekeepers' and went along. We were impressed by the friendliness of the new Bishop. He then had a day in the Deanery, beginning with a Eucharist at St Mary's , in October, and in November the Synod met at Manor Farm Barn in Nettlebed to welcome him and to hear him speak.
I would like to say that anybody may attend a Synod meeting, though only members may vote. Perhaps the subjects could be made known in the Magazine if there is sufficient notice. It can be quite exciting: try finding South Stoke Village Hall in the dark. We do not appreciate how rural an area we are, apart from Henley itself. David Winter has resigned as Chairman of the diocesan Communications group, of which I have been a member. The latest news I have of it is that the Bishop is giving it his consideration.
Ceridwen Cranford

Julian Group

This ecumenical group meets monthly and we have a nucleus of about a dozen members. Because the Henley 1 Group meets in the morning mid-week at Harpsden, Henley 2 meets in the evening on the first Tuesday of each month to be available for those who work in the daytime. Numbers of those attending have varied from 4 to 10 depending on those who are able to attend, as many members have other commitments. Those not able to come are silently and prayerfully included in our session and a few people stay at home, particularly in the dark winter evenings, and join with us in spirit.
The group has continued to meet monthly whenever possible, mainly at Forge Cottage, but also in other venues and it is hoped to increase the number of meetings in other houses as every establishment has something special to offer. In September we held a very enjoyable meeting at the house of Jacqui and Brian Pritchard in Marlow.
Leadership of the group has broadened and we have benefited from the variety of leaders and their imaginative contributions in terms of both reading and choice of music.
Cleone Augur

Junior Church
Junior Church continues to be made up mostly from the choir youngsters, and a growing number of 'under sevens'
We are so fortunate to have the Chantry House as our venue where mothers and toddlers, young children and teenagers create a family atmosphere.
Following a call from The Children's Commissioner for England Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green, leading institutions and organisations were asked to celebrate the importance of children in our society.
Accordingly on Sunday 25th November 2007 our Junior Church and Sunday School participated in a children's Eucharist. We were requested by the Oxford Diocese to allow the children to 'takeover worship' as part of the nationwide celebration of 'Takeover Day' when 11 million children and young people took over schools and churches. Takeover day also formed part of the celebrations of the 18th birthday of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was born on the
20th November 1989.
Our youngsters were very enthusiastic and performed their duties admirably – reading the first lesson – singing the responsorial psalm and leading the intercessions, which were written by them. They also enjoyed greeting the congregation and taking the collection. The smaller children were invited to stand with Fr. Martyn around the altar during the Eucharist – this was a special moment indeed.
On Good Friday morning we held an Easter workshop which was enjoyed by youngsters aged between 2-12 years. This involved some instruction – a great deal of cutting, sticking and gluing – but most importantly the group joined in with 'Stations of the Cross', which Fr. Martyn slightly adapted for them. We were delighted to host the 'grown ups' to coffee with hot cross buns after the service.
In 2006 an outing to Windsor Theatre to see 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat' was very popular. How nice it would be if money could be found to part fund a similar outing to 'Oliver' early next year.
Children particularly visitors continue to enjoy the children's corner whilst younger children play happily in the Chantry House.
New children are always most welcome and we hope to continue and grow during 2008.
Geraldine Crippen

Mothers' Union
We have a current membership of 22. We were sad to lose two members who died this year: Mrs Betty Butt and Mrs Audrey Swallow. Mrs Jean Evans, former Deanery Leader for Henley, moved away from the area in July.
We welcomed three new members: Mrs Dorothy Ackerman, Mrs Jane Hayes and Mrs Suzanne Mattingley who has transferred from Northleach, Gloucestershire.
We meet usually on the first Monday of the month in the Chantry House. January 2007 began with our annual New Year lunch.
We have had a variety of speakers throughout the year, including Rosemary Pierce who came to talk on our current theme 'Faith in Action' – suggesting how it can enter interests and endeavours, leading members into a variety of activities.

One of our members, Dorothy Ackerman, is closely involved with a church in Kimberley, through Watlington church. This is not a Mothers' Union link, but Dorothy's three visits to Kimberley have brought her in contact with MU members there, and also a care centre for HIV/AIDS patients. She gave us a very interesting talk in May following one of her visits.
In August an outing was arranged to Dorney Court, near Windsor, which was greatly enjoyed by members. Fr Martyn celebrated the Eucharist at Dorney Church which adjoins the estate.
We support diocesan projects – as the 'Make a Mothers' Day' project which was supported individually by some church members. This raises funds for MU work Overseas and we hope to support this further in 2008.
The 'Under Ones' group, which meets weekly in the Chantry House, continues to draw new mums and babies, and is a pleasing activity for the rota of helpers.
We have sent donations to the Overseas Fund and to Away From It All (holiday project),totalling £360
In October following a request to MU (received by email from the office) from Canon Andrew White, St Mary's donated £324 from a collection, which was forwarded direct to the office of the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East.
The year closed with an Advent lunch and Meditation led by the rector, Fr. Martyn.
Jean Griffin

Organist and Choir Masters Report
During the past year urgent work has been carried out on the organ to fix a serious leak in the high pressure bellows, and to repair a long-standing problem concerning one of the pedal reed pipes. In turn, this has led to the commencement of an appeal intended to fund the replacement of the organ console, and to re-leather the remaining two bellows. Once this project has been completed, we should expect our fine organ to give reliable service in the future, and to become increasingly valuable in concerts, recitals, and all forms of worship.
The choir has, once again, remained stable in number; we have been pleased to welcome a few new faces, and saddened to lose one or two youngsters. Membership of our choir is of course a significant commitment, requiring a willingness to attend rehearsals and services; to recognise that the choir works as a team; and to do one's best to support services which may not be at personally convenient times. Increasingly, perhaps, youngsters especially may find this commitment hard to sustain and reconcile with conflicting family and social ties. The rewards of choir membership, of course, are rich indeed.
My hope over the coming year is that initiatives in recruitment may be forthcoming, and in so doing we may rebuild junior numbers to recent levels. Visits to local schools, and strategies to attract new choristers via the Website may result in useful outreach. However it is also vital for the existing congregation to support and value the juniors, and that some of our own churchgoing families may consider the choir seriously for their own children.
I continue to enjoy my work at St Marys and appreciate greatly the support of Clergy and Congregation, the loyalty and enthusiasm of our choristers, and all those who offer assistance to Charlotte and myself in the day-to-day running of the choir. We are particularly indebted to those who so kindly help to look after our children during services.
P. M. Aspden B.A., F.R.C.O.

Sacristan's Report
There have been four volunteers in the sacristy this year Angela Reeves,
Jan Rowland, Mary Wood and myself. We were very sorry that Vera Ashford decided not to continue in the group but we were very grateful to her for the work she did for us. We all agree that we enjoy helping to take part in the work of St Mary's. If there is anyone who would be like to join us we would be very interested to hear from them.
We are very grateful to Geraldine Crippen for keeping the altar linen in such good order.
Diana Dew

St Francis Mission
This is a difficult report to write this year, when we are praying that the forces of intimidation will not prevail, and that bloodshed may be avoided.
The Mission is based in a corner of the hills, and has always had a reputation as a place of peace. In hard times people flock there for help, physical and spiritual.

The policy of St Mary's has been to help mainly with the education of young people, and as an emergency fund. We once helped a girl called Gladys to stay at school and college, and she is now a qualified teacher. Gladys is a positive person, and when she found that her salary could no longer cover her sons' school fees, she turned to us directly, and we have helped to top them up. (Secondary education is not free.)
Darlington's position is less happy. He did well in his examinations, but it now looks as if the funds for his scholarship have gone astray. There is a member of the Zimbabwe Senate, a friend of Miss Chater's, who is looking into this, but I am not hopeful in present circumstances.
Certainly the help we can send is much appreciated, and we get a full account of what is spent. I pay any cheques into Miss Chater's British bank account, and it is transferred annually with her pension, to minimise bank charges.
Ceridwen Cranford

Sharing Life Groups
At the beginning of the year we were still studying King David. When we had finished that course we embarked upon St Matthew's gospel which we are finding stimulating and thought-provoking.
In Lent we were very fortunate to have Bishop John lead a Quiet Day for us. The theme was `The Garden` and everyone agreed afterwards that it had been a very special day.
In the summer a group had a day out and we visited Millet's Garden Centre near Abingdon, where some of us picked fruit, some spent time amongst all the plants and others enjoyed a leisurely meal and cup of coffee. It was a great day for getting to know one another better.
Just before Christmas Fr. Martyn gave a talk and answered questions on baptism. This came about because the Friday group found in one session many issues about baptism, and all of us learnt a great deal from the talk. This was followed by the Eucharist, and then a shared lunch. It was a quiet day in the build up to Christmas and appreciated by everyone.
If anyone would like to know more about the Sharing Life groups, please contact Carol on 575505.
Carol Brook-Partridge