

The Ecclesiastical Parish of St Mary-the-Virgin, West Malling

Activities and reports from St Mary's church

Mid-Week services

Each week, we hold a Morning Prayer service on Tuesdays at 10.00 am. Evening Prayer is said alternate Tuesdays at 7.00 pm at Lavenders' Residential Home. In the intervening weeks, Lavenders' have welcomed us to conduct a service of mid-morning Communion which is regularly attended by around ten residents and led by myself or David Green.

Margaret Moore

St. Mary's Group

St Mary's Group met at Harvest and Christmas at St. Mary's Court. Residents and parishioners were welcomed.

Margaret Moore

Churches Together in Malling

St. Mary's belongs to *Churches Together in Malling* and is represented on its committee which meets three times a year. A second member is needed to arrange events.

Carol Singing for charity takes place each year; prayer and a service in the week of Christian Unity; a Good Friday Walk of Witness, a hunger lunch during Christian Aid Week in May plus other variable events These events are open to all.

Margaret Moore

St Mary's Choir

St. Augustine said, "He who sings prays twice" - an interesting thought for all choir members and a timely reminder of the importance of music in worship.

Week by week the choir put in a lot of hard work to produce music for our Sunday services. This is not as easy as it used to be because of our reduced numbers and because we have no tenors. At one time we had three and were the envy of other choirs but, alas, all have moved to East Anglia. Consequently, it is now impossible for us to sing some much loved anthems such as Mozart's *Ave Verum*. We really do need more singers in all voices but especially men. If you would like to join us, or know someone who would, do have a word with me. It is not essential to be able to read music but it helps if you can. We were all delighted to hear of the safe arrival of Katy, Claire and Mark's daughter. Maybe one day she will be one of a new generation of choristers! One of our choir having a baby is a new experience for us, for obvious reasons!

The carol service went well and was well attended. On Good Friday we sang Stainer's *Crucifixion*, a fitting end to the day. We are much indebted to all the friends who join us on these occasions, even if one has been heard to say that he only comes for the tea! I should like to thank the choir for all their hard work and dedication. *Audrey Attree*

Music concerts at St. Mary's

Maidstone Singers kicked off the concert season in March with their 'Pre-Italy Tour' concert in aid of Spadework. This was followed on Good Friday by a performance of *Stainer's Crucifixion* by St Mary's Augmented Choir. Thanks to all who came to boost the choir's ranks and to Audrey and Colin Attree for its organisation and for Gavin Williams who stepped in as organist.

Junko Kobayashi returned in May for another stunning piano recital. Jake Smyth arranged a welcome return by the *University of London Chamber Choir (ULCC)* who gave us a stunning choral concert. *West Malling Community Choir* together with a visiting Czech choir entertained us in July.

The *Music @ Malling Festival* kicked off with an Animal Safari linked to the wonderfully successful concerts for children, centred on Saint-Saens' Carnival of the Animals. Children from numerous primary schools throughout the area attended the three back to back concerts which were organised with military precision. The other concerts had mixed audience levels which was a shame because the standard was consistently excellent.

The Heart of Kent Hospice hosted a 'Light up a Life' concert in November. Unfortunately some glasses were broken during the course of the evening and not cleared up; we will tackle that if future concerts are suggested.

West Malling Community Choir together with two local schools held a Christmas Concert in early December and the season rounded off with *Music @ Malling's* Christmas Concert which, despite the outstanding tenor, Nicky Spence, only had a small audience.

The PCC has now has a Concert Policy. In the light of the additional traffic generated by concerts we will consider how to adapt the policy to ensure the Churchyard is protected from damage due to the increased usage of the church.

It would be good to have a small team of people to oversee the concert schedule. I'm happy to do the initial liaison and provide information for the promoters but I'd be grateful if some individuals could volunteer to be the main point of contact and be around for the rehearsal and concert itself. If you would like to help for the odd concert, please let me know! Full training will be given. *Becky Clifford*

Sunday School

This year has been another year of change. Primarily because in 2012, a Benefice Youth Group for those between 14 to 18 years old was established and, in turn, the age of those who attend Sunday School has shifted downwards. In addition, some of the previous Sunday school leaders have either stepped down altogether or are now supporting rather than leading sessions.

The children have taken part in a variety of activities that remain consistently popular such as celebrations for Mothering Sunday and Fathers' Day with breakfast provided for mothers on Mothering Sunday and fathers on Fathers' Day. The children also decorated eggs to be given out on Easter Day and prepared the Easter Garden for the church as a Sunday School.

We have continued to work hard to ensure Sunday School happens each week that is not a family service, including half terms. Because of the development of the Youth Group and the downward shift of ages, numbers have fluctuated. For most of the year, we would regularly see a group of 13 or more, although during September, October and November numbers were generally between six and twelve.

The monthly breakfast before the Family Service at the Church Centre has not been so well attended and so, at the moment, we are taking a break and exploring our options, although we are keen to do something similar. We are very thankful to Gail Crutchfield and others who have made this breakfast possible for as long as it has been running.

2012 provided special opportunities for celebrations. We made paper flower posies for the Diamond Jubilee and created a Welcome Banner inspired by the Olympics.

We have also introduced some events to engage with a wider group of children, some of whom attend Sunday School but many who do not. At the church's Christmas Fair, we included a room of Christmas Crafts for children to take part in and a number of families came to take part. We hope to develop this idea further in 2013 with more craft-based outreach events.

Our enormous thanks to all those who are involved in Sunday School and the wider work with children, such as running the breakfasts. We particularly thank Claire Morton who has taken on the responsibility of Child Protection Officer and worked tirelessly to further ensure the protection of the children and all those involved in working with them. Deb Sutch and Jill Rutland also did an amazing job once more at organising the Nativity which took place within a record-breaking Christingle Service.

We offer a special thank you this year to Frances Meek and Anne Gibbins who have offered years of dedication to Sunday School in various roles and have now stepped down. A number of other people have stepped down from the leading of sessions, but are still assisting in running the sessions. We are grateful for their continued support. However, with only Jane Loxton and Kerry Green now willing and able to *lead* sessions regularly, we are short of one or two key people who can help with the overall leadership of Sunday School. If anyone feels able to plan and lead sessions following the resources we use, we would love to hear from them!

We are also conscious that we would like to develop work for the 11-14 year olds. At the moment they are often not engaging with the Sunday School; too old for that group and too young to access the Youth Group. We are excited about the year ahead and the opportunities available. We hope and pray for more people to help.

Kerry Green and Jane Loxton

Youth Group

In 2012, a new Benefice Youth Group began that meets at the Vicarage every fortnight during term-times. Led by myself, Kerry Green and Christie Ransom, the group aims to support young people in school years nine through thirteen, to explore the Christian faith in a way that is relevant to their age group and give them space to both make friends locally and ask questions about life. Young people from St Michael's, Offham, St Mary's and West Malling Baptist Church come together and we consistently see around 10 teenagers each time. Last September, we welcomed some new teenagers as they became old enough to attend and said goodbye to three young people who left for university or vocational training. Christie ran a special course for them in the Autumn to help prepare them for living away from home and a new chapter in their lives.

We hope to build on this exciting new group in 2013 and are keen to find more leaders with interest and concern for young adults and their spirituality.

David Green

Mothers' Union

Mothers' Union at St. Mary's meet on the second Monday of the month in the Church Centre with the aim of promoting the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life. It is a worldwide society and charity with hugely vibrant membership in many parts of the world. Our meetings through the year have included three outside speakers and three of our members led meetings. We also visited our indoor members, which was a new initiative.

2012 proved to be a good year for our branch as we welcomed 4 new members and welcomed 1 member from another branch. Unfortunately one of our members moved away. On the social side we enjoyed our summer garden party and Christmas lunch at Spadework. Our outing and lunch at the Blackthorn Trust was also enjoyable.

Our branch organised two nursery services for the Pre-School Nursery group from the Church Centre We also attended the Spring and Autumn Council meetings, which are Diocesan events. We continue to support a local women's refuge with toiletries and at least two loads were taken in to them. The Church is trying to improve the children's area and we have done some fund-raising towards this project. We look forward to another year in which we will try and boost our membership with the support of the "Help us Grow" campaign being promoted in the Diocese.

Gail Crutchfield

St. Mary's Guild Of Flower Arrangers

Currently we are fortunate in having a steady group of 13 flower arrangers, who continue to display their creativity with lovely arrangements at the altar. During Easter, Harvest and Christmas the church is full of the colour and scent of flowers.

Last year the Flower Arrangers, under the leadership and encouragement of Lesley Iannidinaro, put on a wonderful display of flowers for the Jubilee, which seemed well received by those involved and by the local community.

Jane Loxton

House Groups

After an interesting and thought provoking Lent course in 2012, two housegroups launched in the Summer for those from the Benefice who wished to continue to meet regularly for Bible study, prayer and fellowship.

Since then, groups have met fortnightly during term-time in Offham and Kings Hill. The Ransom/Higham group meets fortnightly on Tuesday evenings in Kings Hill and the Betts/Cooke group meets in the evening of the first and third Wednesday of the month in Offham.

Both groups have grown and now have a steady membership. There are regularly about ten people at each session although the total number who participate is greater. Membership is comprised of people from St Michael's, St Mary's and St Gabriel's and it has been good to get to know one another better across the three churches. Ages and stages also vary, and this diversity in experience of life and faith has enabled some excellent discussion.

Meetings focus on study of God's word, with opportunity for discussion of what we are reading, reflection and application to our daily lives. As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." It is our prayer that through the housegroups we will know and love God better and be equipped to serve our churches and communities.

At Christmas, the two groups joined for a Christmas meal, attended by close to thirty people. This was a time of celebration and was thoroughly enjoyed by all. It was clear that housegroups have been of great blessing to those who have attended, and we warmly welcome any who feel they would like to join one of the groups at any time.

For more information on either group, please speak to one of the leaders, or telephone or email Christie Ransom on 01622 721369 or at c.ransom@rochestergrammar.org.uk.

Christie Ransom

Bell Ringing

We maintained ringing for all Sunday services, weddings and our Monday night practices with a band of approximately 12 local ringers. However some of these ringers are attached to other churches locally and therefore we continue to be grateful for their support at St Mary's. We have had one new recruit in the year but we have also lost two ringers. New ringers are always welcome. The only requirement is that ringers need to reach the bell ropes so the minimum age for ringers is about 11 – there is no upper age limit!

Of particular note this year was a peal of Plain Bob Triples (continuous ringing for about 3 hours without any repetition of the order of the bells) rung for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. We would benefit from more ringers at St Mary's and anyone who may be interested in learning is welcome to come along any Monday evening between 7.45 and 9pm or just have a word with me. Ringing is from the ground floor so no climbing is required.

Nick Crutchfield, Tower Captain

West Malling Church of England Primary School

West Malling Church of England Primary School has a formal relationship with St Mary's as a voluntary-controlled Church School present within our parish.

The school has had a good year which has built on much of the recent success at the school under Headteacher Darren Webb. The school roll has increased again to over 190 pupils and academic results continue to improve.

In 2012, there were two major changes at the school. The Governors made the difficult decision to apply for Academy Status as a 'sole converter' (criteria only available to Good or Outstanding schools). The Secretary of State agreed the application and from 1 September 2012, the school became an Academy. With Academy Status, the school has a great deal of autonomy and this independence has already proved its worth. However, the danger is isolation and so the Governors and Senior Leadership Team have begun to deliberately form partnerships and links with other schools and also taken seriously their new position as part of the Rochester Diocesan Family of Schools; an umbrella group for Church of England Academies in this diocese. Given our formal relationship, I am pleased to say the school kept the PCC fully informed and we thank the school for their desire and willingness to consult.

The second major change pre-dated the Academy move. After many years of planning, the new McGinty Language Centre opened as an extension to the main body of the buildings. The Centre is 'state of the art' for pupils with speech and language difficulties and makes an important statement of inclusion for such pupils by now having their facilities within the main school complex.

Church services take place at St Mary's at the end of each of the six terms each year and an increasing number of parents are attending and joining the rest of the school community in worship.

As minister in the parish, I lead one assembly each week and sought to build links between the school and our Family Service on the first Sunday of each month. I have also taken RE lessons, participated in the Diocesan Schools Festival with year 6 in Rochester Cathedral and worked with staff to answer their questions about the Christian faith and teaching RE.

Alongside myself as Priest-in-Charge and ex-officio Foundation Governor, Bob Veitch and Lyn Sargeant have also served as Foundation Governors for St Mary's. One place was still vacant at the end of the year. David is a member of the school's Strategy Group and, along with Lyn Sargeant, forms the Governors 'monitoring pair' for family and community concerns.

David Green

From David:

Since the end of the year, I am pleased to say Kathy Griffiths has agreed to take the remaining spare slot as a Foundation Governor for St Mary's and will start shortly.