

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, North Marston

Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2023

Clergy Report

In preparation for this year APCM, I have looked through photographs of the various events that took place during the last year. You can view the slideshow here <https://youtu.be/HWO0TXuzwbE> . These photos capture just a small portion of the activities that we get involved in throughout the year. There is so much more that goes on, but we still can tell from these photographs, that we have a lively and engaged church community, with many committed members who offer their time and gifts for the benefit of our church and our village.

This year we have finally reached some stability as life returned to “normal.’ We experience that in terms of numbers we are perhaps not back to what our attendance was pre-covid, a trend that is experienced by many churches across the diocese and indeed the whole country. But we see new faces with families which we welcomed to join us in worship through Messy Church and children who now also participate in Family Services run by David Heffer. We continued to enjoy the ministry of Keith Edwards and also our lay leaders; David Bayly and Mark Payne from our congregation as well as Peter Evans, Richard Webster and Robert Kemp from Granborough. We had also run couple of successful Café church services which enabled us to experiment with liturgy as we have set to do in our vision day and subsequently discussed in the steering group meeting.

At Ester we joined with Granborough congregation for a special Good Friday service.

We should also remember the special services we held as part of Platinum Jubilee Celebrations in June and then sadly the services following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. in September. The church was also open for quiet prayer and the Book of Condolence was available for people to sign, and we help a special memorial service.

In November we held the Service of Light and Thanksgiving, which was very well attended. And special services leading up to Christmas, the Lights of Friendship, Christingle, Nativity Service and of course the Carols by Candlelight brought many from the village community and the Christingle and Nativity service was run together with Messy Church.

Substantial amount of preparation always goes to any of these services, and I am grateful to Janet for her participation and to our churchwardens for setting the church for those special occasions.

In 2022 we held funeral services for Annabel Trueman, June Swain, Joan Duncan and Alison Finnemore.

Burial of ashes of Sandra Turner, Vera Higgins and Barbara Logan.

We had one service of Blessing of Marriage for Lydia And Elliot Gray.

We had 8 baptisms (Nora Dancer, Miharu Minnitt, Sebastian Purchase, Timothy Du Plesis, Jaxon Grant, Rory and Alfie Bond, and Rory Dunmall).

At the end of the year, we have launched our new website, that we use jointly with Granborough Church and the Wesley Centre. I hope that you log on to it from time to time. I do my best to keep it updated, weekly. You can find sermons there, information on all our activities, Pew News, so please, do check it out.

I would like to finish with some thanks.

I am grateful to those who participate in services, those who read, write prayers, lead us in singing, especial thanks to Jennifer for her ministry in playing the organ. Many thanks to those who provide us with refreshment, those who set up the church every week and tidy afterwards. Lots of work goes into enabling us to gather and worship regularly and enjoy our fellowship, so thank you for all that you do in the service to God and our church. Thank you, of course to those who prepare our fundraising events and help us to connect with the wider village community.

I am very grateful to Janet Bayly for her ministry, her support as a colleague and for all that she does within this parish through her pastoral work. She has faithfully served this community for many years, and it is a privilege for me to work alongside her.

It is also a privilege to support Mark Payne as he started his ordination training, seeing his progress and enjoying his ministry. We continue to pray for him and wish him every success in his studies.

Many thanks to all those who serve on the ECC, for their time as they prayerfully oversee the running of this church and take on the responsibilities that serving the ECC involves.

A big thank you to Aly and Tricia as the churchwardens, for all their hard work and their commitment to our church.

May 2023

Rev Petra Elsmore

Churchwardens' Report to the Annual Village Meeting 9th May 2023

As we approach the end of another year, St Mary's Ecumenical Church continues to play a central role in our North Marston village life and community. Special services have appealed to a wider congregation than our stalwart regulars, notably the Remembrance Service at the Memorial Hall, and the Christmas Eve 'Carols by Candlelight' Service, which both attracted large numbers and are important events in the village calendar. We were pleased to host the World Day of Prayer service in March, and all the Schorne Team services in Holy Week. The mission of our church has also included the provision of Advent and Lent courses, shared with Granborough Church, with whom we enjoy a strong partnership, strengthened during lockdowns. In the twelve months to our APCM in May, we held one wedding blessing, two funerals and five baptisms in the Church. We are very grateful for the faithful commitment of our Clergy and Lay Leaders. Sadly, in May, we will be bidding farewell to our Methodist minister, Rev. Keith Edwards. We wish him well as he moves to continue his ministry in rural Wales.

We held services for North Marston School to say farewell to the Leavers in July 2022, at Harvest and at Easter. The Christmas service was cancelled as the school was closed due to flooding. We also held special services at the request of the Young Farmers at Harvest and Christmas. They gave generous donations to the Aylesbury Foodbank at each service. We have marked with a special service the Platinum Jubilee of the late Queen Elizabeth II in June, and also paid our respect with a special service following her death in September, for the occasion the church was open for private prayer and a Book of Condolence was made available for people to sign.

'Messy Church', held once a month on a Sunday afternoon, aimed at primary school-aged children, who can enjoy craft activities, worship and refreshments together, has grown steadily over the past twelve months, attracting new children and parent helpers.

The members of the 'Eyes and Ears' team have provided excellent support to our ministers in their pastoral work, dropping cards and paying visits to those around them in need, and those celebrating joyful events.

Our safeguarding and data protection policies have been updated.

Outreach, within the North Marston community and beyond, has continued to flourish. The regular weekly coffee mornings and monthly community lunches are popular. The Fundraising Committee has staged a wide range of events enjoyed by the village community. In the last year this has included the 'Bubbles and Bangers' party on the green outside the Wesley centre, and the Scarecrow Trail, to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee; the Poetry, Prose and Song evening; the popular Beaujolais Evening, and Lights of Friendship. The traditional Easter Egg Rolling, Decorated Egg Competitions and Easter Egg Hunt were enjoyed by many – the Wesley Centre was packed, and we ran out of bacon butties!

As part of our wider outreach work, we have supported a number of local and national charities this year: The Royal British Legion, The Children's Society, The Salvation Army, Crisis, Link for Hope, Youth Concern (Aylesbury), the Aylesbury Foodbank and Water Aid. We are always mindful, practically, and in our prayers, of the poverty and injustice in the world outside our village.

St Mary's Church Building and Churchyards

For some time now, and over the last 12 months in particular, the condition of our Grade 1 Listed Church has caused us concern, due to significant and ongoing movement in the south aisle south wall. In an effort to combat shrinkage of the clay soil, a tree specialist carried out extensive pruning of the copper beech tree adjacent to the tower.

On the advice of our church architect, in July last year we commissioned a structural engineer to investigate and report on the movement. Following this, external trial pits were dug, exposing the church wall to the east and west of the porch for inspection, and a soil analysis was carried out. More extensive investigation work is needed to establish the cause of the movement. It appears likely that underpinning of the affected area will be required and this will be costly.

The cracking in the wall runs across an important stained-glass window, and we are very concerned that this is now under threat; both the structural engineer and our architect have concluded that the affected glazing should be removed by specialist glaziers. The window could thus be preserved, repaired and readjusted, ready for installation following the further structural investigation and remedial works.

The funding of the investigative work already carried out, and that to come, together with the costs of preserving the window and carrying out the remedial work, are, and will be, hugely challenging to our modest congregation and community. It is very likely that in the next 12 months, in addition to applying for grants from numerous sources, we will approach the village community for help in preserving our beautiful church.

The main churchyard and the 'new' churchyard have continued to be maintained to a very high standard by our team of sextons, who mow the church grass. We are desperate for more volunteers, however, to trim and strim around the graves.

Our church bells, much admired by bell ringers across the diocese for their lovely sound, continue to ring out three times a month, and for special services. We rely heavily on ringers from other parishes though pleasingly we have three new recruits who have been in training since last summer. We hope to train more this summer, and would love to hear from anyone who would like to give ringing a try!

Our teams of flower arrangers and cleaners have continued to ensure that our beautiful church always looks its best for Sunday services and special occasions.

The Wesley Centre

The Wesley Centre Management Committee is committed to promoting this attractive venue to potential hirers in order to generate more income. We are working on advertising, including revitalising the website.

We remain immensely grateful to the volunteers who continue to support the work of the Church in the multiplicity of ways outlined above; we could not do what we do without them. We would like to add sincere thanks to the members, and ex officio members, of the ECC for their hard work and dedicated support.

We look forward to another year of shared worship and church family life together.

Tricia McSweeney

Alyson Perrett

