

REV. ALAN FORSDIKE'S 2017 REPORT for ST. MARY'S WITNESHAM to the PARISH COUNCIL 'S ANNUAL MEETING on APRIL 19th 2018

As Self-Supporting Priest- in -Charge I head up a Ministry Team of five people to serve the Benefice of Westerfield, Tuddenham and Witnesham . This team includes my wife Catherine as Associate Priest , two Readers, one being Paul Laughlin, and an Elder, Julia Farmer, all volunteers. In 2017 we have enjoyed the additional support of Sarah Jenkins, on attachment to the Benefice whilst studying at a Cambridge theological College.

Our regular worship each month has followed its usual pattern and , on a fifth Sunday in the month, the service has rotated between our three churches and Witnesham Baptist Church. In addition to the regular services in each church our Sunday School meets monthly in the side chapel in the newly glazed room and the Benefice Youth Group meets twice monthly on a week night under the able leadership of Julia. With the Baptist church members we have continued "Messy Church" events for families three times a year. The Gospel seeds sown there will , we pray , take root in years to come.

We have a total congregation of 110 amongst our churches, each week having a regular 65 attending congregation , although many more attend at festival services through the year. As we don't always see the same people regularly, one effect is a loss of continuity and contact . We ordained ministers cannot be in the same church every week and it can be a month or more before we catch up with local people so we rely on our members keeping in touch, helping people around them and actively showing their Christian faith.

The fabric of St. Mary's church is in good condition following the maintenance and internal reordering work , which was completed in April after many months work. In June we held a special service when the Archdeacon of Suffolk dedicated the work. The Diocese is using Witnesham as a model for other churches, even in Norway, to show how ancient buildings can be adapted to make them more accessible for worship nowadays and community use. The Church has been used for several Diocesan events as well as a carol service for Witnesham Primary School and community concerts.

We are committed to contribute £9,000 .00 as our Parish Share for the work of the Diocese and the national Church. As this has been lowered recently because we have no paid vicar , we have been able to increase our giving to others: supporting impoverished people in our link diocese of Kagera in Tanzania as well as several local charities which help people facing difficulties such as FIND(Families in Need) and those facing abuse.

We value our links with the village through our monthly communion service which is held in Witnesham Nursing Home and involvement in the school's governing body and in several other groups. We appreciate the support and goodwill of the community, for example the Village Hall Committee 's cooperation in the use of the car park for services and events and the community's support at our annual fete.

A warm welcome awaits you at St. Mary's every Sunday at 10.00am with time afterwards to socialise over coffee . Do drop in just for coffee at 11.15am. if you wish . As a Ministry Team and church members we are here for the whole community , whatever the occasion or need.

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