

St Mary's Church, Winesham- Church Report Jan-Dec 2016

The Rev'd Alan Forsdike continues as a non-stipendiary Parish Priest for the benefice. He leads a Ministry Team of a self-supporting Assistant Priest, two Readers and an Elder. Local retired priests or members of other Ministry Teams have officiated at services when our priests have been on holiday. Having an ordinand who is training at Westcott House, Cambridge attached to us is a privilege and a pleasure. Sarah Jenkins is training at Westcott House, Cambridge. She is fitting in well and contributing much.

Benefice-wide special services were held daily the first week of Advent, rotating round the three churches in the benefice. This was the pattern used successfully earlier in the year in the week of Pentecost as part of the Archbishops' national call to prayer "Thy Kingdom Come".

Our regular worship has followed its usual pattern of All-Age Worship, Family Communion, Morning Prayer and Family Communion on the first four Sundays of the month. On a fifth Sunday the service rotated between our three benefice churches and the Westerfield Baptist church.

Regular monthly communion services are conducted at Winesham Nursing Home. These are much appreciated as was the visit there of a group of us to sing carols before Christmas.

In addition to the formal services in Church on Sundays, the 'Kingdom Kids' continue to meet monthly. They join us in church after their lessons and share with us what they have been doing. The Benefice Youth Group meets twice monthly.

During the year we had one funeral service, one baptism, one blessing of a civil marriage (together with a thanksgiving for the birth of their child). The funeral service was for our Reader Keith Jillings whom we greatly miss since he made a huge contribution to the life of the church not least since he oversaw both the repair work to the outside of the church and the planning of the recent internal repairs and improvements.

The fabric of the church is in good condition, for all its antiquity. After many years in the planning we were granted our faculty for the interior re-ordering and work commenced in September. The parochial church council is immensely grateful that it was able to access funds in a bequest made to the church some 60 years ago by a member of the Meadows family. Those funds have enabled great improvements to be made to the interior of the church but their use is now limited strictly to maintenance. Contrary to popular opinion, the church receives no funding directly from the national church. Therefore we rely entirely on voluntary donations to raise the £28,000+ it costs to run the church in this community. The annual church fete and gift day are a part of that appeal to the village to support the church which is there to support the village.

We have three benefice priorities for our work as a church:

- 1 Doing Festival Services well and inviting the community to participate.
- 2 Providing opportunities for people to explore faith
- 3 Encouraging the involvement of congregation members in community life

The festivals of Christmas, Mothering Sunday, Easter, Remembrance Day and Harvest have indeed seen good attendances and engagement. The church in Westerfield is there to serve the people of Westerfield.

We provide opportunities outside of Sunday worship for people to explore faith particularly

during Lent and Advent. We had a very good Benefice Away-day last November where we learned a lot, we discussed a lot, we had good food and fellowship and time to talk with each other.

Many of our congregation are involved in community life where they live out their faith: God at work again.

Our Bishops recently undertook a Lent Pilgrimage walking from Dunwich to Bury St Edmunds and stopped off along the way to visit businesses, communities and churches. They had time for fellowship and conversation; opportunities to see God at work. One thing which really struck Bishop Martin was people talking affectionately and thankfully about their church buildings; he described them as buildings soaked in praise and adoration of God.

He asked the question, "How do we keep them going?". We ask ourselves the same thing. But, as Bishop Martin went on to say, "God has given us everything we need, skills, gifts, materials, money, time... we just need to harness it. We need people to be generous back to our generous God."

I know that in our parish we have those same gifts; gifts that enable communities and churches to work. I know we have people who serve the church and serve the wider community so that church and village intermingle. Those who give unstintingly and generously and without fanfare and are rewarded richly. As the Bishop said, 'generosity is a divinely natural way of being'.

Finally, if you have not yet seen the improvements to the interior of the church, you are welcome to join a special thanksgiving service being held on Sunday 18th June at 11am.

Rev'd Alan Forsdike