

VICAR'S REPORT: PETE STOW

'To God be the glory, great things he has done.'

I am so encouraged and heartened seeing all the different aspects of our church.

Church is not just what happens on Sunday; it is active and functioning every day. We are the church, you and me; in everything we do and we say, we represent the church and also our Lord Jesus Christ. I am so thrilled to see St. Mark's is not only operating in Lorne Road but also in many other roads around our parish. We may not be perfect, but as long as we endeavour to seek the direction God wants us to take we are most definitely heading in on the right track.

It was very encouraging to receive honest feedback from you on the church services in the survey that the Worship Group sent out; many of the points that were made have already been incorporated into our weekly services and others will be implemented very soon.

We have some newly formed groups: the Welcoming & Hospitality Group, the Communications Group and the Men's Group, and I am certain our church will be even richer because of these groups.

Both our Christmas and Easter Services were well attended, and having two separate carol services seemed to be the answer to cater for the different age groups that attended. The All Age services and Messy Church seem also to be the way ahead, as there is the right balance again as far as catering for different age groups.

Our church continues to be a part of our local community with our BBQs and open days; local schools visiting twice a year; carol singing at the Old Slate Yard and our stall at the Forest Gate Festival. We also support the work of Faith in Schools who work alongside schools within the Borough.

It is wonderful to see our Prayer Room being used; in our busy building it is so good to be able to offer a quiet space to be alone with God in prayer.

This year in May we celebrate 30 years in the church building. Over the weekend we will be open for people to come and see what happens in the church as well as a display of memorabilia over the last 30 years in the new building; on the Sunday we will have a celebration service and a shared lunch with past and present church members.

I would like to thank all the groups and leaders who give their time, dedication and commitment at St Mark's, and as you read through this booklet I hope you too are encouraged and inspired as much as I am.

Lastly a very big thank you to Peter our Treasurer and our two Churchwardens for all their support and help.

God bless, Pete

CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT: ELLEN KEMP AND SHARON YATES

Churchwardens are appointed to act on behalf of the Bishop in a parish church. They are legally responsible for the building and its contents and must ensure that acts of worship take place in a correct and orderly manner. They support the clergy in their duties and help them to nurture the congregation.

This year it has been an enormous privilege for us to be your churchwardens. As we reflect on the year gone by, we give thanks to God for His faithfulness and provision to us in this parish. The church family has shared in worship, prayer and fellowship and welcomed all who would join us.

The Church Council (PCC) has met regularly throughout the year and the members have really embraced their role in very practical ways. Matters for discussion and decision ranged from the annual accounts for 2015 and budget for 2016, through to our response to the current European refugee crisis. The continued discussions on the Bishop's "Serving with Accountability" questions resulted in two sub-committees being formed to further explore Worship and Welcoming & Hospitality.

A worship survey was put out to the whole congregation and the results have already led to changes to our Sunday Worship: service opener videos are being used to draw the congregation's attention to the start of the service, and the notices have been moved to the end of the service. We have hosted workshops in All Age Worship and Intercessory Prayer which members of the congregation attended, and it is hoped that they will use what they learnt to enhance our worship and prayer life. Other ideas are being developed and will be implemented over the coming months.

The Welcoming & Hospitality Group are planning a 30th Anniversary celebration for this coming summer and will be sharing other initiatives very soon.

Church Officers attended a meeting with our Bishops to reflect upon the "School for Disciples" and we anticipate more inspired discussion during the new term of the PCC in the year ahead. We would like to thank all the members of the PCC for their commitment to the life of St. Mark's and for their hard work this year.

We praise God that our eagerly awaited Prayer Room was completed this year. Please make use of this place for prayer and contemplation any time whenever the building is open.

Also, repairs to the roof were completed and the leak problem in the hall has been remedied. Gratefully, we received gifts towards both of these projects and thank the donors for their generosity.

The kitchen refurbishment is still an on-going project which, though not completed this year, is our highest priority for the year ahead. We very much hope that we will be able to secure a grant for the kitchen white goods which we will need following the refurbishment.

Other building maintenance and extensive cleans have taken place and we especially thank all came to the Work Day in the autumn and worked so hard – watch for details of another Work Day later in the spring!

Our building continues to be used extensively throughout each week and it is amazing to see so many from our community coming through the doors and enjoying the facilities and activities. Thanks are due to all who are committed to lead groups and activities for the benefit of others. Your hard work is appreciated and brings the Light of Christ into the lives of so many.

We are grateful to our Assistants; Ann Arnold, Peter Shiels, Kate Ridaut and Chris Aston for their support and service this past year. In particular we want to extend a special thank you to Chris as he moves to pastures new – his work at St. Mark's has included being a Churchwarden and Assistant Warden, overseeing our Electoral Roll and Prayer Diary and being a very active 'welcomer' of new people. His servant attitude has been a blessing to our church family and he will be greatly missed. We pray for him and Alison as they move, and ask for the Lord's blessing as they settle into a new church family.

It has been a privilege to work alongside Pete our Vicar. We thank him for his support and guidance to us as we have worked as wardens and also for his ministry to the congregation and local community.

St. Mark's Church family is a wonderful body of people, so diverse in age, gender and race yet all joined in our love of the Lord Jesus. As our Bishop has reminded us, we are called to be a "Transforming Presence" in this place. We always use this report to look back at the year gone by but it is also timely to look to the year ahead. Each of us, as a member of the Body of Christ, has a role to fulfil so that the 'Body' is a healthy, relevant 'Presence' in this parish – our prayer for you is that the Lord will guide you as you consider your role and that He will equip you to fulfil that role for His glory.

TREASURER'S REPORT: PETER ARNOLD

As in previous years, I want to thank everyone who gave money – whatever the amount – to St. Mark's during 2016. St. Mark's, like all Church of England parishes, depends on the generosity of ordinary church members who contribute financially towards the running of the church. Without the money which is given to St. Mark's – whether by monthly standing order, by regular envelopes, or in the collection box – most of our work and activities would come to a stop.

Without the money given to St. Mark's we would:

- Have a cold church every Sunday;
- Not have a paid youth worker;
- Not be able to repair or redecorate our building;
- Not be able to pay our Family Purse to the diocese;
- Not have a harvest barbecue or other community events;
- Be unable to publicise our Easter, Harvest, and Christmas events;
- Be unable to give money to support God's work elsewhere.

In 2016 our total income was just under £100,000, but our total expenditure was just over £106,000. Thus we spent £6,878 more than we received, whereas in 2015 our income was £5,171 more than our expenditure. The two main reasons for this were (1) spending the money given in previous years for the Prayer Room and (2) the substantial and successful repairs to the hall roof, which cost over £12,000.

Our income is divided into Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Unrestricted Funds are money which can be used for any legally permissible purpose, whereas Restricted Funds are money which is given for a specific purpose and can therefore only be used for that purpose.

The bulk (82%) of our Unrestricted Funds income is money which is given to the church by you and me. Including the tax refund which we received in respect of money given under the Gift Aid scheme (see below); this amounted to £72,057 for Unrestricted Funds.

The other substantial items of income were £8,057 for the 2016 parish holiday, a one-off £10,000 gift from a church member towards the hall roof repairs, and £1,996 to be passed on to specified charities.

Excluding money given to St. Mark's to pass on to specific charities, we gave away £6,115 in 2016, including money given to support Asha, the Asian Friendship Centre, Newham Youth for Christ, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and the Mugoma Trust.

We spent £32,068 on the church's wider ministry i.e. the diocese and deanery, almost all of which (£32,008) was the Family Purse which we paid to Chelmsford Diocese.

Expenditure on youth work was £14,200.

We spent £7,555 on utility bills (compared to £8,753 in 2015).

Repairs to the building and fittings came to £17,327, of which £12,372 was spent on the hall roof, and £2,559 was spent on the prayer room.

It is an unfortunate fact that almost everything we do as a church costs money: heating, water, rubbish collection, insurance, repairs to the building, paper, photocopying, phones, youth work, services, publicising Easter, Christmas and Harvest, training, Sunday tea and coffee, being part of the diocese – all these cost money.

I said a year ago that in 2016 our expenditure was likely to exceed our income – as proved to be the case. Similarly in 2017, our expenditure is likely to exceed our income, as there will be major expenditure on the kitchen, and because some of our church members have moved away from Forest Gate, which will impact our income.

I would like to remind everyone about using the Gift Aid Scheme, because it is so very beneficial to the church. It truly is money for nothing from the government – and it does not cost you a penny more! Gift Aid is extremely simple and flexible to use, and means, for example, that if you give £10 per week to St. Mark's for a whole year, St. Mark's will receive £130 from the government.

In 2016 we received £14,273 in Gift Aid tax refund!

You can either give on a one-off basis using the orange envelopes, or give a regular monthly amount via standing order. You must pay UK income tax in order to use the Gift Aid scheme. If you want to know more about how to give using Gift Aid, please have a word with me.

SERVICE HELPERS

Approximate number of members: A minimum of 12 every Sunday

Lead People: Ellen Kemp and Sharon Yates

About our group:

Our group consists of Bible Readers; Building and Grounds Maintenance Crew; Communion Administrators; Crèche Leaders; Drivers; Furniture Movers; Intercessors; Those who Pray at Home; Tea and Coffee Makers and Servers; Welcomers.

The Lord has inspired and motivated individuals to volunteer their time and talents to serve the church family.

All of these important roles are about serving the church and the wider community. We hope to encourage others to serve in the year ahead as we express our love for the Lord and His people in Forest Gate and truly work together as the Body of Christ.

SUNDAY MORNING & WEEKDAY YOUTH WORK

Approximate number of members: 50 (Numbers vary each week)

Lead Person: Dan Jeffery

When and where we meet: Tuesdays 6.00 -7.00 pm, 7:15-8:45 pm, Sunday Mornings at St. Mark's

About our groups:

- Tuesday 6.00 -7.00 pm is a group for young people in school years 3 – 6. We play games, do craft and look at the Bible.
- Tuesday 7.15 – 8.45 pm is a group for young people in school years 7 -13. We play games, have social time and talk about relevant life topics from a Christian perspective.
- The Sunday Morning group takes place during Church and is for young people in school years 6 - 9. We study the Bible in a relevant and engaging way.

We have seen great growth in numbers over the last year, particularly amongst the youngest group with a regular 16 young people in attendance. We have also seen the development of a committed core group of young people for the older group.

We have had opportunities for faith conversations in all groups and have been able to teach openly from the Bible. It is great to see the groups grow and open up more opportunities for God to move.

The youth groups are open to all young people regardless of background, culture, gender, race, belief or ability. We try to make sure the youth groups are inclusive and that all the young people feel welcome, and though this still requires work it is important that every young person gets equal opportunity to partake in the activities we provide.

SAFEGUARDING

Lead Person: Ellen Kemp

Last year 10 renewals and seven new DBS checks were completed. This year six members will need to renew their DBSs. At the moment we have 39 members who have current DBS checks.

In September Dan led a training session for 10 people who help him with the Youth work. This year I will be encouraging everyone to undertake the online training as a refresher and I hope more members of the congregation will help with our children and young people's work so that the workload is shared by more people.

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Number of members: 6

Lead Person: Christine Brown

When and where we meet:

Once every 2 - 3 months at a member's home, and regularly via email

About our group:

We support one another in our various roles that involve communicating information through different channels including the magazine, notice sheet, website, social media, noticeboards, posters and flyers, PowerPoint and text messaging. We discuss ideas and processes for how to make communication effective both within the church and outside it.

The formation of this team has brought lots of things together and has allowed us to collect and disseminate information more consistently and in a more organised way. Awareness of the work needed for communication to happen has been raised, and we have been exploring new ways of communicating messages consistently across different channels.

We will continue to communicate information in a variety of ways that are open and accessible to all ages and backgrounds. We will ensure that the tone and style of our communication have the newcomer in mind, by explaining things clearly without assuming knowledge.

ST. MARK'S MAGAZINE

Number of members: 5 involved in production; 2 regular contributors; 12 distributors

Lead Person: Ann Arnold

When and where we meet: Monthly to produce the magazine

About our group:

We put together the magazine, using material provided by contributors and the Parish Pump website, a resource website for parish magazines. It is then photocopied, collated and distributed. We really appreciate the help and support of those who help.

People have expressed they have been encouraged by the content, I am encouraged by the willing support provided by the team who reliably continue to undertake their task and serve God in an unacknowledged way that blesses others.

We seek to reflect the work and ethos of the church and communicate to all what the church does, what it means to be a Christian and to encourage people to come to the church.

ST. MARK'S WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

Number of members: 4

Lead Person: Mike Richardson

When and where we meet: We meet as part of the Communications Team every 2 - 3 months at the home of a member and keep in contact regularly via email and social media

About our group:

We keep the website updated with the latest information and news from St. Mark's, as well as ensuring the website is always fully up to date technically in terms of how information is presented. We also publish news about the church and its events on our Facebook page and Twitter feed.

We have been encouraged that people have come to St. Mark's as a result of finding us via our website or social media profiles. We also know that through these we are able to spread the good news beyond our church and parish.

We will continue to make St. Mark's accessible through these channels and inform people about everything we do to make our motto and welcome statement meaningful.

CHESTNUT AVENUE HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 5

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Thursday at 2.00 pm

About our group:

We study the Bible book by book, discuss it together, pray for each other and people in need. We finish with a time of fellowship.

Many things have come to light whilst studying together that have been a revelation to us. The group has been enlightened by the scriptures that we have been studying and their meaning in our lives.

This homegroup is open for anyone to attend and we would welcome new members to come along and join us. We will use the Sunday service to invite people personally to try the group.

CRANMER ROAD HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 6

Lead Person: Jane Ridout

When and where we meet: Weekly on a Monday at 7.30 pm

About our group:

We usually work through a study which is related to the time of year.

Every one of us has had family concerns which we have prayed together about and have seen God intervene in some way not always in the way we expect!

We will welcome anyone who wants to join us ... but just so you know, we're all around retirement age! However, perhaps we need somebody younger!

GODWIN ROAD HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 5

Lead People: Chris and Alison Aston

When and where we meet: Wednesday evening, approximately every two weeks

About our group:

We studied and discussed the Bible, supported each other and prayed for each other.

We saw growth in spiritual maturity and mutual support. We also learned from some Old Testament history that was new to us.

The group has now come to an end.

LORNE ROAD HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 7

Lead People: Ian and Julie Thomson

When and where we meet: Weekly at our home in Lorne Road on Thursdays

About our group:

We start with refreshments, look at a book or theme from the Bible and its application to our lives and we end with prayer. This year we have studied the book of Ruth, the Beatitudes and recently, a Lent course based on Romans 12. We have the occasional social evening too!

Each week we learn a little more about being a Christian. We keep a prayer diary and note how often God listens to our prayers.

All are welcome, although there will be limits because of the size of our front room.

RIDLEY ROAD HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 8

Lead Person: Geoff White

When and where we meet: Once a week on a Thursday at 8.00 pm

About our group:

We pray with and for each other, study the Bible and try to hear how God is speaking into our lives through what we study. We try to support each other through the ups and downs of life.

This year we were blessed by Ali coming to our group and we really felt God speak to us through him. We saw many answered prayers and felt God led us to organise a 24 hour prayer event for the persecuted church.

We have learnt how God wants to use us to welcome, support and be family to those who have nothing or who have lost everything.

SEBERT ROAD HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 9 - 10

Lead People: Sarah Dale and Nicki Smith

When and where we meet: Wednesdays 8.00 - 10.00 pm

About our group:

Over the past year we have used the Purpose Driven Life study and more recently have started a study on 1 John. The group has decided that we hope to expand our knowledge of the Bible and so have been looking at scripture within the historical and wider context in which it is set.

As well as meeting to study the Bible we value fellowship and building deeper relationships with each other, so regularly have social events.

As well as praying together when we meet we have a WhatsApp group that our members regularly communicate through and use to share prayer requests. We have seen lots of answers to prayer and our faith deepening.

We challenge ourselves throughout our week to actively look for the ways that God is at work in our daily lives, and share this within the group.

As a group, we feel it is important that we are outward looking and hope that we will see our group grow.

We have recently decided that on the first Wednesday of each month we will meet together in the Forest Tavern, using this an opportunity to extend an invite to those who may be on the fringes of the church, or for whom joining a home group feels too big a commitment.

WEDNESDAY LUNCHTIME HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 4 - 8

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Wednesday at 12.00 noon in the church lounge. A light lunch of soup and bread is provided.

About our group:

Our group discusses the Bible, very relevant topics, religion and the church.

Many people have come to know and realise what they believe and think about God. Having to question and discuss what we believe can help to reinforce why we believe it.

All are welcome and encouraged to come along to discuss the Bible in a relevant way and hopefully this helps, encourages and strengthens their faith.

VICARAGE HOMEGROUP

Approximate number of members: 5

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Thursdays at 8.00 pm at the Vicarage

About our group:

We read and discuss various parts of scripture. We are currently looking the Lord's Prayer as put together by Bishop Steven's 6 week course. We also support each other with prayer.

We have all grown in openness and honesty towards each other. As this group consists of 'mature' Christians there is a lot of wisdom to share and learn from. Having said that we would welcome any new members regardless of their age.

We would welcome anyone who wishes to join us; we are a supportive and caring group. We will pray for people to join us as well as actively encouraging new members to come along.

PRAYER MEETINGS

Approximate number of members: 8 - 10

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Wednesday Mornings at 7.00am in the church lounge plus 1st Wednesday of every month at 7.00 pm in the church lounge

About our groups:

We pray! We pray generally and specifically for those in the Prayer Diary and also for any prayer requests received on the wall of the Prayer Room.

Where 2 or 3 are gathered together He is there. We feel God's presence with us and we know He will do much more than we ask of Him.

By praying for individuals, groups, problems occurring around the world and in our community we want Christ involved and to bring about His peace. We want the church to be seen as being involved by lifting these situations before God.

SUNDAY PRAYER BREAKFAST

Approximate number of members: 4 - 6

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Sunday morning 8.00 – 9.00 am: Silent Prayer in the Church;
9.00 – 9.30 am: Breakfast together in the Kitchen

About our group:

We pray together and then have fellowship over breakfast.

It is very peaceful during this time and is a good way to prepare for the services ahead.

We welcome anyone who attends, offering a time of quiet, peaceful prayer in preparation to hear God speak to us in the forthcoming services.

AFTER SERVICE PRAYER

Number of members: 17

Lead People: Barbara Lumsden and Julie Thomson

When and where we meet: After every Sunday Morning Service in the Prayer Room

About our group:

We provide two people each week to offer confidential after-service prayer in the Prayer Room. People can choose to pray with one or both or the pray-ers available. If no-one comes for prayer, the two pray together for the church and issues arising from the service.

We have had 17 volunteers come forward for our rota - an answer to our prayers. The Prayer Room is now complete and we thank God for that.

Anyone can come to the Prayer Room for prayer, and they do not have to have attended the service beforehand. We have tried to balance our volunteer pray-ers in gender and ethnic mix. All are welcome to receive prayer.

AUDIOVISUAL SUPPORT

Number of members: 3

Lead Person: Ann Arnold

When and where we meet: Sunday services

About our group:

We support worship by the use of various media.

The system has worked and people have told us they have been blessed by what we have done, Despite the reduced numbers on the roster we have managed to support most services.

We will continue to make the services more accessible to many different groups of people.

BANNER GROUP

Approximate number of members: 7

Lead Person: Ann Arnold (acts as contact as we are a co-operative)

When and where we meet: Every Monday morning in the crèche area of the church

About our group:

We make wall hangings to decorate the church, which we hope takes the message of the church to our many visitors (soft evangelism if you will excuse the pun). We enjoy using the creative skills that God has given us in his worship. We also help others to learn sewing skills.

We have made a number of new banners, which we hope encourage and bless others, and we have provided some as gestures of friendship to churches elsewhere in the world.

In addition we provide fellowship to our members, supporting and encouraging each other. We have also provided some support to Faith in Schools using our banners as part of telling school children about the Christian faith.

We hope that the banners make the church a vibrant and interesting place that conveys our faith in a non-threatening way. We are an open group that non-Christians come to where we can talk about our faith in a relaxed way.

BROWNIES

Approximate number of members: 24

Lead People: Andrea Lewis-Ryce and Loretta Brown

When and where we meet: Once a week, Monday 6.00 to 7.30 pm at St. Mark's

About our group:

Brownies is part of GirlGuiding UK for girls aged 7 to 10. Being a Brownie is full of fun and adventure, with crafts, games, songs, trips and camps. This is facilitated by volunteer leaders (Owls).

The qualities of kindness and compassion in the Brownies as they interact with each other and the leaders have shown us God at work in our group this year.

We welcome all new Brownies who may arrive as strangers but soon become friends as they get involved in fun games and days out.

CHRISTMAS FAYRE

Approximate number of members: As many as willing to help

Lead Person: Elizabeth Palmer

When and where we meet: End of November every year: Friday evening preparation; Fayre on the Saturday

About our group:

We raise money for St. Mark's. Individuals help by setting up on a Friday, staffing stalls, chatting and clearing up, baking and providing items for others to sell.

Although individuals have their own stalls we are all working together for the benefit of others.

Events such as the Christmas Fayre bring in people who might not otherwise enter a church building.

COFFEE MORNINGS

Lead Person: Helen Palmer

When and where we meet: 1st Friday in the month 10.00 am - 12.00 noon (except in August)

About our group:

The coffee mornings take place in the church hall and raise money for a different charity each month (£1373 in total last year). We also use the lounge which is set up for parents and toddlers. In the main hall apart from tea, coffee and cakes etc. there is also a bric-à-brac stall.

People have just dropped in when passing because the church is open.

Everyone is welcome at coffee mornings.

COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

Number of members: 2

Lead Person: Dawn Walton

When and where we meet: Every Sunday Morning Service

About our group:

We provide British Sign Language and total communication support to deaf/hearing impaired members of the congregation

God has continued to bless us so that we at St. Mark's are able to meet the needs of the deaf community, enabling them to feel part of a religious community and involved in church.

We will continue to provide on-going support to current members, welcome those who are new and encourage them to attend regularly.

CRADLE ROLL

Approximate number of members: 20 children on the Cradle Roll and 22 others who are still a part of the church

Lead Person: Helen Palmer

About our group:

Children who have been baptised or dedicated in St. Mark's are sent a card on behalf of the church on their birthday, at Easter and at Christmas, until the Christmas after their 5th birthday. However, if they are members of our church family (attending Crèche/Scramblers or Sunday School) they will continue to receive cards until they go to secondary school. At present there are 20 children on the Cradle Roll and an extra 22 children who also receive cards.

Sending cards is a reminder that we are here and we care, irrespective of whether the children and their families are regular churchgoers or not.

DEANERY SYNOD

Lead Person/People: Peter Arnold, Janet Bone and Jimmy Dale

About our group:

St. Mark's has three elected representatives on Newham Deanery Synod, at which all the Church of England churches are represented. These representatives are elected every three years.

The Deanery Synod deals with some business matters such as parish finances, but meetings usually concentrate on a topic which is relevant to most or all churches in Newham.

In 2016 these were:

- The setting up of mission and ministry units (MMUs) in the diocese; Newham now forms a single MMU.
- Shrinking our carbon footprint.
- Ministry to children and families.
- Transforming Presence.
- Training in evangelism and discipleship available for Newham Christians.

In 2017 we look forward to a year of challenges as our Borough continues to grow in population. This year, as we finish our term of three years, our church needs representation to carry the work forward.

E7 WOOLCRAFT

Approximate number of members: Anything up to 8

Lead People: Ros White and Rachel Emerson

When and where we meet: Thursdays 10.00 - 11.30 am during term-time on the weeks the Toddler group is running. We meet in the church hall.

About our group:

We knit and crochet together doing individual and sometimes joint projects. There is tea and coffee drinking, conversation and support for each other at the same time. The Toddler toys are also used by any young children brought along.

We have seen God at work through the support and welcome we give each other. Sometimes people have come who are very isolated and we have helped to welcome them so that they feel part of something.

We will continue to welcome anyone who wishes to come.

ELECTORAL ROLL & CHURCH MEMBERSHIP ADMINISTRATION

Lead Person: Mike Richardson

When and where we meet: Two or three times a year

About our group:

We look at the church membership list to ensure it is up to date and use it to produce the church prayer diary.

Over the past year the church membership has grown.

We will continue to ensure that our membership list and Prayer Diary include all who attend and hopefully reflect the local community. We will inform the PCC if we feel this is not the case so that appropriate action can be discussed.

FLOWER GUILD

Approximate number of members: As many as are willing to donate to the flower fund

Lead Person: Elizabeth Palmer

About our group:

Flowers are paid for with donations from members of the congregation. If you appreciate fresh flowers in the church, donations are needed on a regular basis or for specific occasions.

God has been at work as when we are running low on funds (which happens regularly), someone always gives me some money to boost the fund again.

A flower rota is on the main noticeboard in the foyer – please sign it if you would like to provide flowers on specific dates. The more people who contribute, the easier it is to make the church more welcoming.

FOOD BANK

Lead Person: Julie Thomson

About our group:

We collect household goods, baby products etc. for the Food Bank outlet based at Woodgrange Baptist Church. We are not asked to collect foodstuffs. Details of items needed each month are printed in the newsletter and magazine. The feedback is that our donations are hugely appreciated.

People have been generous and the Food Bank has been grateful for the support from St. Mark's. Donations have reduced a little in the past few months, so please keep the Food Bank in mind.

Every item donated is a welcome offering from St. Mark's to a stranger.

GETTING INVOLVED

Approximate number of members: 4

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Three times a year in the church lounge

About our group:

We meet to inform new people who come along to church on how we function at St. Mark's and about the various activities that happen here; we inform them of how they can become a member of the electoral roll and we encourage new members to join a homegroup to help with their spiritual growth.

God has worked through the group, as people attending have gone on to become members of the church.

We will continue to ensure that new members feel welcomed and supported and are able to participate in some of the activities that take place outside of the Sunday services if they want to.

5TH FOREST GATE GUIDES

Approximate number of members: 9

Lead People: Catherine Wilson (Leader) and Helen Palmer

When and where we meet: Mondays 7.30 – 9.00 pm in school term time

About our group:

We do activities linked to the five points of the Guide programme - Healthy Lifestyles, Celebrating Diversity, Global Awareness Discovery and Skills and Relationships They also work on Interest Badges and "Go-For-Its". Girls are encouraged to work as a team and plan their own activities.

We have seen God at work as the girls are friendly and enthusiastic and have good relationships with each other.

The whole ethos of the Guide movement is that it is open to all girls.

JUMBLE SALES

Approximate number of members: As many as are willing to help

Lead Person: Elizabeth Palmer

When and where we meet: Three times a year – Saturday 2.00 pm in the Church Hall

About our group:

We re-cycle and sell unwanted items (clothes, books, bric-à-brac, household items etc.) raising money for the church. After a sale leftover items are given to other charities so that they will also benefit. Items have also been sold on eBay and the proceeds have gone to the church funds.

We have seen God at work as more people have come forward to help – as people have moved away, others have taken their place. We have also had more purchasers and these are not only local people but people from across the Borough.

We welcome all who come to our sales – they not only buy items but meet up with friends and have a chat over tea and cake. We have been told that it is a good afternoon out in a friendly atmosphere.

LADIES WOT LUNCH

Approximate number of members: 20+

Lead People: Karen Paxton, Julie Thomson and Barbara Lumsden

When and where we meet: Every 5 - 6 weeks on a weekday at 12 noon at the Golden Fleece

About our group:

We invited all women from St. Mark's and their female friends or neighbours to meet for lunch every 5 or 6 weeks at the Golden Fleece to encourage friendships. Lifts were made available by Julie Thomson, and discounts were given by the Golden Fleece.

We have seen God at work as we have got to know each other a bit better, been made aware of others' needs and have provided support.

Due to Karen's moving to Chelmsford, Ladies Wot Lunch will not be organised as it has been by Julie, Barbara or Karen, but hopefully it has sown seeds for smaller groups of ladies to continue to meet at the Golden Fleece or another venue.

LISTENING EAR

Number of members: 4

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Monday 10.00 am - 12 noon at St. Mark's

About our group:

We are available to listen and chat over a cup of tea and to offer information and support where we can.

God has moved our work in a different direction from how we planned and we have done more practical things around the parish - often during the week rather than on Monday mornings.

We will continue to try to be open to the way God wants to use us and to care for, value and listen to everyone from the church and the local community who contacts us on a Monday.

MEN OF ST. MARK'S & MEN'S CHOIR

Approximate number of members: 10 per session

Lead People: Joe Yates and Tom Dale

When and where we meet: We have met informally over the past year but will be meeting monthly this year

About our group:

We share in fellowship together, often enjoying food and drink! This year we've had a games evening, a visit to the Global Buffet, a fish and chip supper and a barbecue. At Christmas we formed a choir and enjoyed singing at the Carol Service. For the year ahead we will be meeting more regularly with planned monthly meetings.

God has been at work in the building of friendships and a growing common bond.

The Men's Group is open to all men associated with St. Mark's. We hope in the year ahead to encourage more men to come along whenever possible.

MESSY CHURCH

Approximate number of members: 50 - 60 children and adults attend each session

Lead People: Alison Aston, Sharon Yates and Charlotte Mouzer

When and where we meet: We have Messy Church 4 times per year

About our group:

Messy Church is an hour of Biblically-themed messy craft; glue, paper, paint and sparkles! Adults work alongside the children enjoying being creative. A short time of worship with songs, stories and prayer follows. We finish with juice and cake or biscuit treat, with all returning home with an armful of craft and the Christian message. We are sad to be saying farewell to Alison as she moves to pastures new, Alison initiated Messy Church at St. Mark's several years ago, and her commitment and inspiration will be greatly missed.

Opening the doors we are never sure who will attend, but it is always a delight to welcome friends old and new. The fellowship shared across the tables as the children and adults create their masterpieces gives opportunity for relationships to build and for the love of Christ to be shared.

Messy Church is open to all and will continue to be so in the year ahead. Families who return time after time always express their thanks for the sessions and the welcome they receive.

MORNINGTON HALL

Approximate number of members: 11

Lead People: Annette Daniells-Smith, Roger Daniells-Smith, Jane Ridout, Wendy Tandy. Annette co-ordinates our rota.

When and where we meet: First Sunday of each month (excluding August) at Mornington Hall

About our group:

We take a monthly service of worship in Mornington Hall Nursing Home in Capel Road, just past the Golden Fleece. We sing age-appropriate hymns, have a Bible reading, prayers and a short talk. After the service we greet each resident with a handshake or hug, listen to them and sometimes take them a gift, usually at Christmas, Easter and Harvest.

When we arrive the residents look sleepy and sometimes sad; when we leave they are animated, happy and smiling – I guess because we have shared God's love with them.

We will continue to love the members in Jesus' name, share the good news of Jesus Christ with the residents and staff and treat them with respect, whether they believe or not.

MUSIC GROUP

Approximate number of members: 8

Lead Person: Phil Ridaut

When and where we meet: Every Tuesday 8.00 - 10.00 pm and on Sunday mornings at St. Mark's

About our group:

On Tuesdays we worship together, practise songs for instruments/voice, prepare new songs and plan for Music Group services. At other times we regularly lead sung worship on Sundays and also at joint services when St. Mark's is hosting, and annually lead carols at the Old Slate Yard.

God has been with us as we've planned and led the Music Group services. We've often felt lost and empty when we start preparing, but God has led and filled us in amazing ways. He has also stirred up creative skills like song and sketch writing and helped us step out of our comfort zones.

We will continue to support the motto and welcome statement by not being exclusive, and by encouraging all members, regardless of age and background, to be part of our sung worship. Also by trying to reflect the different cultures and worship styles.

NIFTY FIFTIES

Approximate number of members: 8

Lead People: Flo Cobain, Leader; Elizabeth Palmer, Supporter

When and where we meet: Friday 1.30 – 4.00 pm, St. Mark's Church Hall

About our group:

Each month we have a quiz, a video and subject of interest e.g. poetry reading, readings about wildlife, countryside, personalities, the world, our lives etc. and Scrabble and games. We also have one or two meals out each year.

As in previous years, it has been obvious how God has worked within our group by such love and care for each other.

Since the group was formed over 20 years ago we have always given a warm welcome to everyone, and will continue so in 2017.

PARENT & TODDLER GROUP

Approximate number of members: 13 - 38 children plus parents/carers per session

Lead People: Wendy Tandy with Elizabeth Palmer and Helen Palmer

When and where we meet: Four 1.5 hour sessions a week in the Church Hall and Church during school term time

About our group:

We welcome parents/carers and their children, aged 0 - 4, into a nursery style environment giving a variety of play experiences for the children and a place where parents/carers can come and share with others and find support.

Christ is right at the centre of what we do and people often comment on the lovely atmosphere which we know is His presence with us. They are touched that we give it as a love gift from the church and are open to receive the literature we give them.

We welcome everyone who comes, whatever their nationality, language or religious background. All are welcome, but we do need more people to come and work with us so that it can go on happening.

PASTORAL TEAM

Approximate number of members: 8

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Every three months in the church lounge

About our group:

We go through the electoral roll and prayer diary list and this enables us to see if anyone has not attended church, is in need of some extra support from the church, is unwell or if a visit needs to be arranged.

We are a support group for the congregation and we pray that God will highlight any people and their needs that require us to take on and help.

We value our congregation and want to support them where we can spiritually, in prayer and with practical help if possible. We pray regularly for all church members.

PCC

Number of members: 15

Lead Person: Pete Stow

When and where we meet: Every 1 - 2 months at St. Mark's

About our group:

We govern, lead and manage the working of the church.

We have seen the church grow and develop new ways of being missional and evangelistic in the parish.

St. Mark's PCC is continually committed to seeing St. Mark's be a place of welcome for everyone through the decisions we make around how the church is run and what the church does.

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Lead Person: Wendy Tandy

When and where we meet: Second Sunday of the month at 6.30pm in the church lounge

About our group:

We use news of the persecution that is happening to pray for fellow believers who are in trouble because of their faith in Christ in specific countries and situations. We also pray for those who are persecuting them.

"The persecuted church is the only church that wins all its battles on its knees." Benjamin Kwashie, Archbishop of Jos, Nigeria.

We have been challenged in our own walk of faith by the life and witness of our persecuted family. We have received grace and strength to keep on praying.

It is the duty of all of us to do good, especially to the household of faith; so others are always welcome to come and stand in faith and prayer with us for those who are living a costly discipleship to follow Jesus today.

SCRAMBLERS

Approximate number of members: 12 on the register; average attendance 5

Lead People: Anne Stevenson and a team of helpers on the rota

When and where we meet: Sunday Morning during the Morning Service in the meeting room.
(In church with parents at All-Age Services at the moment)

About our group:

We have toys, books and activities related to the Scripture Union Bubbles section. We have a prayer and story time with refreshments. We also have songs and musical instruments with a CD player. My thanks go to Miranda who puts the toys out for us, and to all those who help with the things I have not been able to do.

God always provides for us with help and guidance and as the children reach 5 they know that God loves them, and they play and work together.

Parents are always welcome to stay with their children and visitors to the area are also welcome.

SHOEBOX APPEAL

Lead Person: Julie Thomson

When we operate: October - November each year

About our work:

We collect 'Family' and 'Elderly' shoe boxes for onward transmission to Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria and Ukraine via the charity Link to Hope.

Every year for the past 20 years we have received between 50 and 80 shoe boxes at St. Mark's.

Feedback has stated that each shoe box is hugely welcomed by recipients most of whom own virtually nothing. Even the wrapping paper is appreciated and put on the walls. We send some 'love in a box' from Forest Gate to these four countries and let people know they have not been forgotten at Christmas.

ST. MARK'S PLAYERS

Approximate number of members: 6

Lead Person: Helen Palmer

When and where we meet: Every Wednesday at 8.00 pm in the Church

About our group:

We choose and practise songs which we will be able to include in an evening's entertainment.

God has helped us to keep going despite illness and accidents.

We hope to put on a show later this year for charity and will welcome all who want to come for an evening's entertainment.

THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Approximate number of members: 24 Boxholders

Lead Person: Jane Ridout

About our group:

We collect small change to put in the collection boxes.

God has been at work in the faithful commitment of boxholders to collecting small change for a worthwhile charity. In 2016 we raised £291.45.

The work of the Children's Society exactly mirrors our motto and welcome statement, and our collection boxes support their work.

SUNDAY CLUB

Approximate number of members: 24

Lead People: Yvonne Tiley, Kathy Lancaster, Jane Ridout

When and where we meet: Weekly except for All-Age services

About our group:

We provide age-appropriate Christian teaching for the 5 - 10 year olds at St. Mark's. We aim to provide a fun and informative approach to the Bible where children become more confident to profess the name of Jesus Christ as their Lord.

The children's group has increased steadily so that our usual group is between 17 and 22 children. They seem to be enthusiastic about the activities we do and we hope that their parents and carers are refreshed by a short time of adult worship.

We welcome any child within the age range and indeed it is quite usual for us to include visitors to the church and children who only come along occasionally.

TRAIDCRAFT

Approximate number of members: 2

Lead Person: Peter Arnold

When and where we meet: We usually run the stall once a month, but more frequently in December

About our group:

We sell Traidcraft fairly-traded foods, and encourage church members to consider purchasing fairly-traded goods as part of their commitment to God.

Last year we sold more than in 2015, which is encouraging.

Most of the people who produce our food are totally unknown to any of us, but by purchasing fairly-traded goods we can ensure that these strangers receive a fair price for their labour.

TRAIDCRAFT GIFTS AND JEWELLERY

Lead Person: Helen Palmer

When and where we meet: After the monthly All-Age Service.

About our group:

We sell fairly-traded jewellery, accessories and craft items.

People are becoming much more aware that fair trade is not just about food.

Fair trade is one way of supporting our church's motto.

TUESDAY FELLOWSHIP

Approximate number of members: 4

Lead Person: Elizabeth Palmer

When and where we meet: Every Tuesday at 8.00 pm. Various venues

About our group:

We play a variety of board games and enjoy a cup of tea and a chat.

God has been at work in helping us get to know each other better.

We would welcome anyone who might like to come along and join us.

WELCOME & HOSPITALITY GROUP

Approximate number of members: Presently 9. Meetings are open to all

Lead People: Janet Bone and Ian Thomson

When and where we meet: Quarterly, in a group member's home

About our group:

We make practical proposals to the PCC about how St. Mark's can address the question, 'What are you doing to ensure your church is a place of safety and welcome for all ages and for people of all backgrounds?'

The group started in January 2017. We are thankful that God has brought together people who really want to see St. Mark's as a welcoming and hospitable church and are prepared to pray and work hard to make that happen.

The group is open to everyone and has the promoting of this year's motto and welcome statement as its primary purpose. We will continue to make proposals about how this might be done and actively support initiatives which demonstrate our welcome and hospitality to all.

ASHA TRUST

Approximate number of members: 8 community workers and teachers onsite plus a team in London

Lead People at St. Mark's: Radhika and Steve Bynon

About Asha:

Asha Trust was set up in 2005 to support a challenging community on the edge of Colombo. Our team of 8 community workers and teachers run daily after-school clubs, computer classes, English language training and regular visits to isolated elderly people. They also offer activities for children with disabilities, many of whom do not attend school, and support for their families, delivered in partnership with a specialist organisation whose trained staff lead the sessions. We also provide family support for these families and, crucially, offer these isolated children somewhere to go, a friendship group, and the opportunity to play and learn.

The after-school club provides help with core subjects for 60 children. As well as the learning, the Centre provides the children with key social skills and gives them structured, safe activity every day. The housing in this community is small and cramped, and many children spend their time outside, with little adult supervision. The centre provides an important alternative, and the staff are able to provide additional support when there are problems at home or at school.

The team also do outreach work - visiting homes, engaging new families, providing a listening ear and advice as needed. The level of need in the area is high – unemployment, alcohol, drugs all feature and many of the men bounce in and out of prison. In recent weeks three young men have joined the team as interns, and they are planning to test out a youth club.

The annual budget for Asha Trust is around £25,000. All the funds raised go to Sri Lanka (with the exception of our accountant's costs – which Arnold Ridout kindly did at no charge last year) and we raise most of this locally, through fundraising events and regular donations.

The Centre is a well-used, valuable resource to the local community. That there is a large attractive community building in the middle of this tough place is a miracle. Getting it built was a huge effort from so many people in Forest Gate and beyond. But a building is only of value if it is used – and the programme of activity requires staff and resources. We continue to be deeply grateful for all the support from many at St. Mark's – all this is only made possible because of your generosity and prayers.

Asha provides a vital lifeline to this community to enable it to continue to improve the lives of its members. For more details go to www.ashatrust.com

MUGOMA TRUST

Lead People at St. Mark's: Ciaran Joyce and Chris Aston

About Mugoma:

It has been an exciting twelve months for the trust which St Mark's has supported since its inception to support the construction of a much-needed health centre in North Western Tanzania in partnership with the Anglican Diocese of Kagera. Considerable progress has been made in the health centre construction under the new Diocesan Secretary Vithalis Yusuph since his appointment a year ago.

Chris Aston and Ciaran Joyce visited the project last October and were able to see the progress that has been made. The Trust has now emerged from the protective financial wing of St Mark's, but individuals and the church as a whole have remained very supportive and generous - most recently in the form of Alison's 70s themed disco and sponsoring Ciaran and his brother-in-law Simon in their marathon run in Barcelona, which together have raised over £4000.

The main challenge now is the construction of staff housing, which has emerged as a priority since meeting with the local medical officer for the district and will have to be completed before the centre itself can open.

We would like to thank everyone who has supported the Trust over the year. There are so many calls on the church's resources but this is a tangible demonstration the commitment of St. Mark's to the wider church abroad and to people in poorer parts of the globe.

I would particularly like to thank Chris Aston for his tireless efforts on behalf of the trust, which have led to a step change in the progress of the project since he came on board.

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www.stmarksforestgate.org.uk.

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