

Diocese of Salisbury

The Parish Church

of

Saint Mary the Virgin

Gillingham, Dorset

The Agenda for the Annual Meetings
Wednesday 2nd April 2008
together with Minutes and Annual Reports for
the year 2007

The Parish Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Gillingham, Dorset

Agenda for the Annual Meetings to be held on

Wednesday 2nd April 2008 at 7.30 p.m. in the Vicarage School Room.

Annual Parish Meeting

1. Opening Prayers
2. Apologies
3. Election of Churchwardens (2)
4. Close of Meeting

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes of the last meeting : Thursday 15th March 2007
2. Rectors Address
3. Elections
 - Parochial Church Council Members (12)
 - Deanery Synod Representatives (3)
 - Sidespersons
 - Independent Examiner
4. Reports
 - PCC Annual Report (presented in this booklet)
 - Electoral Role Report PCC Sec.
 - Fabric Report Mrs M. Sargent
 - Goods and Ornaments Mrs M. Sargent
 - Presentation of the Inventory Mrs M. Sargent
 - Financial Report Mr D. Bryan
 - Adoption of Audited Accounts for 2007
 - Deanery Synod Report Dr. T. Goatham
 - Reports of Church Groups (inc. in this document)
5. Any Other Business
6. Closing Prayers

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, GILLINGHAM

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting and Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) held on Thursday 15th March 2007 at 7.30pm in the Vicarage Schoolroom.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2007

NUMBER PRESENT: 29

01.07 OPENING PRAYERS

02.07 APOLOGIES: Apologies were received from Mr R Clarke, Dr H Clarke, Mr A Clarke, Mrs A Clarke, Mr P Cumberland, Mrs G Harding, Mrs A Pike and Mrs J Puzey.

WELCOME: The Rector welcomed everyone to the meeting. He went on to thank the Churchwardens, Philip Gray and Mary Sargent for their support and encouragement over the past year and for their hard work and faithful endeavours as the Bishop's officers and senior lay leaders in the parish. "The churchwardens carry most of the responsibility, with the incumbent, for all aspects of the ministry and for the fabric of the Church and other property. Churchwardens are called upon to give full commitment to their job/ministry and ultimately to pick up what others often don't do. To be a churchwarden is to hold an ancient and legal office which calls for time and faithfulness to God and a desire to serve and give all of oneself. It is a tall order, which Mary and Philip have exercised with proficiency and dedication."

03.07 ELECTION OF CHURCHWARDENS:

Nominees: Mr Phillip Andrew Gray

proposed by Mrs P Hooker, seconded by Mr J Nash

Mrs Mary Sargent

proposed by Mrs M Gill, seconded by Mr J Nash

There being no other nominations Mr Gray and Mrs Sargent were duly elected.

Close of Annual Parish Meeting

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2007

01.07 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING, held on Thursday 16th March 2006 were approved and signed; proposed by Mrs E. Nash, seconded by Dr T. Goatham.

2.7 RECTOR'S ADDRESS:

"He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters," (Luke 11:14 - 23)

Each and every one of us is made in the image of God and, by virtue of our Baptism, God, in Jesus, through the Power of the Holy Spirit, is in us. Because of this we are called to renew the face of the earth. Living and dying, not for a dream, but for a vision. A vision of what the world could be if we all lived according to God's Plan of self-giving love.

Yet so many live and die without realising the real point of why we are here, of how our lives can be changed and of our calling to change the lives of others. Bringing new life, light and hope into so many dark places in the world.

You and I have been singled out by God for our personal mission in life. The mission is not ours, but God's, and all too often we fail to recognize that truth or its consequences. We fail to let God be God; to acknowledge that He wishes to be born more fully into our world; to stand revealed in the minds, hearts, words and actions of those who claim He is 'our God.'

It is not for us to bring God into the world; he is there before us and present in us. The forces of pride, self-sufficiency and violence which dominate the world scene and inhibit his presence, need to be challenged again and again and revealed for what they are, a recipe for a living death.

We Christians are called upon to challenge evil by our own consistency in living the Gospel of absolute love and willingness to let God take over the whole of our lives.

In this we follow more closely the way of Jesus. Yet too often today, we lack any sense of urgency and purpose in following Jesus Christ. We are often not "fit for purpose". Unlike the first Apostles, we fail to hear the insistent demand that we spread the Good News, drive out contemporary evils and heal our sick society.

We often carry too much baggage from the past and are far too concerned with the maintenance of old and decaying fabric and thinking. We prefer the familiar and all too often mistake it for faith itself.

We expect defeat even before we come to grips with the enemy; we dissipate our physical and spiritual energy in petty squabbles, jealousies and internal dissension. We fail to be transparent. We simply do not expect to be able to change the world.

The end result is that, very often, we are content to accept the lowest common denominator in our commitment to Jesus. To accept the lowest level of commitment to spiritual discipline and practice, pastoral care one to another and evangelistic zeal in the world around us. Faith is regarded as a private treasure, to be savoured in secret, not as something to be shared.

The faith we have is always personal but **never** private. Christ calls us to be positive in action, to be his hands and eyes, ears and heart, in challenging entrenched injustice, wrestling with the powers of darkness and unclean spirits. We are called to heal and restore and that means we have to be involved.

The time has come for all of us to be active to get up out of our pews and GO. God will refuse to accept endless excuses for half hearted commitment and inaction.

Our energies this coming year and into the future must lie in embracing Christ Jesus and making him known.

Jesus said

"He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters."

"Our gathering" must primarily be in our endeavours to make new disciples. Our effort this coming year must be Mission as we address the acute responsibility of ministry to Young Families and children of all ages. There is a need to establish a team of people to engage with this ministry which will involve firstly finding a suitable and dedicated Team Leader.

There is a challenging need to reach out into the community of Gillingham which continues to grow apace. This demands greater involvement from all of us in building relationships and maintaining a high standard of pastoral care. No one can stand idle on the harvest field.

There is also a challenge to us as we face up to our financial responsibilities as a church, our OFFERING to God for the work of the kingdom; I hope that in the next few months we shall be hearing about plans for a stewardship campaign. However it is incumbent on me as your parish priest at this point to encourage you to begin to think and pray about this forthcoming initiative.

'Money is often seen to be a difficult area for churches to address. As Christians it is important that we pay for the running costs of our church and for the ministry that we receive from paid clergy. But we also have to have the financial resources to engage in the Christian witness of showing people in our community that God loves them.'

We need to understand that the resources for ministry and mission today must come from our pockets. We must not find ourselves in the position of relying upon the generosity and bequests of those who have gone before us. The living church must pay for today's ministry and mission. Not to embrace this is to live in cloud cuckoo land.

Our giving, our offering, is an important part of our response to God's love for us. I am asking, as your Parish Priest, that you look at how much you are offering now, on a regular basis, to God. Then consider what you should be giving now and make that commitment NOW. Remembering the Christ gave all to us - he gave his LIFE.

"He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters." (Luke 11.14 - 23)

03.07 ELECTIONS:

Nominations for the Parochial Church Council:

Nominee	Proposed by	Seconded by
Mr I Watson	Mr P. Gray	Mrs E Frayne
Mr R Clarke	Mr J Nash	Mrs S Williams
Mrs S Perrin	Mrs M Sargent	Miss E English
Mr J Nash	Mr M Sargent	Miss P Rolph
Mrs P Hooker	Mr J Nash	Mr P Gray
Mr D Bryan	Mr I Watson	Mrs E Frayne

These were elected en-bloc unopposed. Proposed by Miss F de Monti, seconded by Mrs C Barrow and carried unanimously. The PCC, including the Rector totalled 11 members.

Nominations for the Deanery Synod: Miss F de Monti is standing down. The meeting thanked Fran for her contribution to this post. There being no nominations for a replacement, there remains two representatives to the Deanery Synod, Dr T Goatham and Mrs C Barrow.

Nominations for sidespersons: **Mrs M. Sargent read the list of 23 nominees.** These were elected en-bloc unopposed. Proposed by Mrs C Barrow, seconded by Mrs M Gray.

Independent Examiner: Mr D Bryan proposed that a letter be sent to Mr John Hunt, thanking him for his work during the past year and requesting that he continue for the coming year.

Proposed by Mr P Clarke and seconded by Miss M Grant.

04.07 ANNUAL REPORTS

PCC Annual Report: Copies of the Annual Report for 2006 were distributed. Adoption of the report was proposed by Mrs M Gill, seconded by Miss F de Monti and carried unanimously.

Electoral Role Report: Mrs S Evans reported that there were 159 members on the Electoral Roll. The Rector signed a copy of the roll.

Fabric, Goods and Ornaments: Mr P Gray read the Fabric Report, which is printed in the Annual Report booklet. Mrs Sargent reported that the Goods and Ornaments Inventory had been checked. The British Legion had been asked to return the missing standards, which they had not yet done.

Presentation of the Inventory: Mrs Sargent presented the inventory to the Rector for his signature.

Financial Report: Copies of the Annual Account Summary were circulated. Mr D Bryan explained the main points, emphasising that, although the accounts look healthy, this is due to receiving a legacy and that the members should not rest on their laurels. He thanked Mr P Clarke (Organist) for his contribution in not taking his full salary. In answer to the query about the remainder of the music costs, Mr Bryan said that a large part of it was the membership of the Royal School of Church Music.

Adoption of the Accounts: for the year 1st Jan – 31st Dec 2006 Proposed by Mr I Watson, seconded by Miss F de Monti and carried unanimously. Mr P Gray thanked Mr D Bryan for his hard work as Treasurer during this past year.

Deanery Synod Report: Miss F de Monti presented the Deanery Synod Report, which had been included in the PCC Annual Report and was thanked by the Rector.

05.07 ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

Miss M Grant requested that, as Editor of the Impact Magazine, she had asked for non-confidential information, which had been discussed at PCC meetings, to be forwarded as soon as the minutes had been approved for inclusion in the magazine. This had been agreed and regular contributions had been sent until January 2005. Since then, nothing had been received. The Rector agreed that, as we go into a new year, this oversight would be put right and thanked Margaret and her committee for the valuable contribution that the magazine makes to the outreach of the Church.

Dr Goatham mentioned that she would also appreciate material to update the website. Dr Goatham was thanked for her hard work in maintaining the website and it was reportedly said how lively and colourful it is.

Sunday Lunches were mentioned as very popular and the Rector thanked everyone involved in making this venture a success.

On behalf of the PCC, Mrs M Sargent thanked the clergy for their commitment to us all. She thanked the Very Revd David Frayne, the Revd Jane Hedges and the Revd Canon Alan Gill for their support and encouragement and also Mrs Margery Gill for her work alongside Alan.

Thanks were also reiterated to Mr P Clarke for his valuable contribution to the music of the Church.

The Rector added his thanks to the above and went on to record appreciative thanks to Mrs C Blackmore, the Parish Administrator, for her work. It was agreed that a letter of thanks and flowers be sent to Carole.

CLOSING PRAYERS

**The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Gillingham, Dorset.
Annual Report for the Parochial Church Council
For the year ending 31 December 2007**

Background

St. Mary's PCC has the responsibility of co-operating and working with the incumbent in the ecclesiastical parish of Gillingham, sharing in the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the Parish Church of Saint Mary the Virgin and the Vicarage School Room in Queen Street, Gillingham.

Membership of the PCC

Members of the PCC are either elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, (APCM) in accordance with Church Representation Rules, or ex officio. During the year the following served as members of the PCC:

Incumbent:	Revd. Canon Alan Gill (Chairman)
Assistant Curate:	Revd. Jane Hedges
Churchwardens:	Mr P. Gray Mrs M. Sargent
Deputy Churchwardens:	Mr S. Butler (to March 2007) Mr J. Nash (from April 2007) Mr M. Jones (to March 2007) Mr I. Watson (from April 2007) – (also PCC Deputy Chairman from April 2007)
Deanery Synod Representatives: (<i>Eligible for 3</i>)	Dr T. Goatham Mrs C. Barrow
Secretary	Mr M. Sargent
Treasurer	Mr D. Bryan
Elected Members: (<i>Eligible for 12</i>)	Mr. D. Bryan Mr R. Clarke Mrs P. Hooker Mr J. Nash Mrs S. Perrin Mr I. Watson
Parish Administrator and Electoral Roll Officer	Mrs C. Blackmore

Churches Together in Gillingham Representatives:

Canon A. Gill, Mrs C. Barrow, Dr T. Goatham, Mr I. Watson

Christian Aid Committee Rep.:

Mrs H. Clarke

Review of the year

Church Attendance:

Average attendance for the two Sunday morning Eucharist services combined is 106 with Wednesday morning Eucharist average attendance at 16

The Fairer Share Count in 2007 showed that over the 5 week period 22nd April to 20th May the total number of regular attendees was 138; it also showed that 32 might have attended but did not and 35 received home communion because they are never able to get to church. Over that same 5 week period visitors numbered a maximum of 41 and a minimum of 1.

Statistics of weddings, funerals, baptisms and confirmations:

Baptisms:		25
Confirmations:		0
Weddings:		8
Funerals:	Church	19
	Crematoria	17
Thanksgiving services:		2

Lent:

- Lent Study Course 'Journey to the Cross': was led by the Very Revd. David Frayne.
- Lent Offerings were for USPG.
- Passover Meal on Maundy Thursday preceded the Eucharist of the Last Supper.
- Holy Week: Guest Preachers were:-
 - Fr. Martin Budge
 - Rev. David Bridge
 - Jackie Simmons (of Street Kidz Direct – previously known to us as Sister Jackie)

Special Services:

- The Eucharist of the Last Supper.
- The Solemn Liturgy of Good Friday
- The Great Vigil of Easter, Easter Ceremonies and the Eucharist
- 14th April - Civic Service for the 'Freedom of the Town' to the Rifles Regiment.
- 10th May – St. Mary's school – admission to Holy Communion.
- 13th May Stewardship Service
- 15th July - Songs of Praise with Flower Festival and dedication of the new altar frontal.
- 12th August – dedication of disabled access to south door
- 1st September - Service of Thanksgiving for Richard Hedges.
- 30th September - Harvest Thanksgiving with Harvest Supper.
- 4th November - All Souls Tide Service with afternoon tea
- 11th November - Remembrance Sunday with children involved.
- 2nd December - Advent Service of Light
- 9th December - Christingle Service.
- 23rd December – Parish Carol Service.
- 24th December – Crib Service

Other Events:

- Epiphany Dinner
- Brass cleaners and Dusters thank you evening at the Rectory.
- The Parish Retreat took place from 9th – 11th February at Abbey House Glastonbury, led by Jeremy Davies, Cathedral Precentor.
- 24th February – Snowdrop Walk.
- 27th April – Newcomers welcome at the Rectory.
- 30th June – Readers and Intercessors Workshop.
- Dorset Historic Churches Annual Cycle ride took place in September with 3 riders from Saint Mary's.
- 17th November – Music and Liturgy Day with Jeremy Davies
- December – Christmas Tree Festival
- 14th December – staff, churchwarden and LPA thank you evening at the Rectory

PCC Committees

were as follows

- Standing Committee
- Housekeeping and Finance Committee
- Christian Confidence and Worship Committee
- Christian Action Committee
- Social and Fundraising

These committees have met between full PCC meetings and their reports follow here.

During the year 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007 the full PCC met on 9 occasions, of which 3 were 'extra' meetings dealing with specific issues. The average level of attendance was 82%.

The Annual Church Meeting and Annual Parochial Church Meeting were held on Thursday 15th March, 2007. The number attending was 29.

Standing Committee:

This is the only committee required by law. It has power to transact the business of the PCC between meetings, subject to any directives given by the council. This committee did not need to meet during the period.

Housekeeping and Finance:

The Housekeeping and Finance Committee consists of the Rector, the Rev. Canon Alan Gill, the Churchwardens, Mr. Philip Gray and Mrs. Mary Sargent, the Treasurer, Mr. David Bryan and elected member Mr J. Nash. Mr. Michael Sargent (PCC Sec.) acts as secretary and the committee also co-opted the Stewardship Recorder, Mr. Alan Norman.

The committee has met formally six times during the year 2007.

Much of the business conducted at these meetings is covered in the Fabric Report and the Church Accounts. However, items covered during the year that do not come under Fabric or Finance were:-

- The Parish Office computer was upgraded and broadband installed to speed internet access and to free up the telephone line for incoming calls; further a firewall was installed to eliminate virus and spam.
- The Parish Office photocopier contract no longer covers spare parts due to machine age.

- Vicarage School Room
 - Hiring rates were reviewed and found to be competitive
 - Boiler was serviced
 - Extra cups and saucers were purchased
 - Hooks were placed in the ladies toilets
 - The oven was professionally cleaned
 - The drains still occasionally get blocked although user guidelines have improved the situation.
 - No smoking signs have been posted to conform to law
- The church lawn mowers have been sold as the Town Council now maintain the churchyard.
- Following complaints of rats in the churchyard, Wessex Water have been involved as they come from broken sewers from adjacent properties.
- A new mobile phone has been purchased for church emergencies.
- A chalice and ciborium have been purchased for use at Saint Mary's school and in church.

M. Sargent (Sec.)

Worship and Christian Confidence Committee

Revd Canon Alan Gill, Mrs C Barrow, Mr R Clarke and Mr I Watson (PCC Members). Mrs C Armstrong, Mr J. Porter, Mr M Sargent and Mrs S Williams (ordinand) were co-opted and occasional input throughout the year from Mrs M Sargent and Mrs M Gill.

The Committee met on five occasions. Special services, study groups and other events were discussed and our focus was again directed towards our ministry to young families.

The main points of note for the year were:-

- Mike Sargent was appointed by the Rector as an Enabler for Ministry to Young Families.
- A presentation of the diocesan initiative 'Learning for Discipleship'.
- Planning a 'Songs of Praise' to complement the Flower Festival.
- Organising an Autumn Study Group based on the gospel readings over the period.
- Organising the 'Those who sing, Pray twice' when Jeremy Davies, the Cathedral Precentor led a music workshop.
- Charlotte Armstrong and Sandra Williams attended a Child Leaders Training Day.

- Planned an open air service (aborted due to inclement weather) with barbecue (which still went ahead)
- Supported the Rector with an amended 'Evening Worship' schedule.
- Planned the Lent Study course for 2008.
- Recommended to PCC that £500 from the Diocesan Mission refund be spent on a church lending library.
- Proposing the use of a psalm instead of the gradual hymn for Lent 2008.

C Barrow

Amendment

It is regretted that the House Study Course based on "Drama in Scripture" masterminded by Miss Maureen Atkinson and run over 6 weeks in January / February 2007 was omitted from the Annual Report.

Christian Action Committee:

The committee started the year with three PCC members Teresa Goatham, Sylvia Perrin and Richard Clarke with Hilary Clarke as co-opted member. Richard was made chairman and secretary.

We had several successful fund raising campaigns throughout the year, ending with a well supported appeal for the Children's Society in the run-up to Christmas (£466). Harvest Thanksgiving provided £500 for the Christian Aid Darfur campaign, and food offerings went to the North Dorset Women's Refuge. It was decided that the 2008 Lent Appeal is for the Church Missionary Society.

Considerable time was put into drawing up two drafts for a replacement Welcome leaflet for outreach, particularly for newcomers to town. It is hoped the matter can be resolved during this year.

Teresa has continued to develop the church's website and would press parishioners to keep her informed of all events organised by and for the church. Hilary has distributed Children's Society collection boxes throughout the town and fetched, counted and banked the money. Christian Aid Week was well supported by St Mary's and other churches. The Traidcraft stall continues to develop with Teresa's hard work.

In 2008 the church will be present at the 'Welcome to Gillingham' event at the Olive Bowl on 17th May, organised by Gillingham Rotary.

Richard Clarke

Social Committee:

An Epiphany Dinner started the 2007 social calendar on Friday 5th January with entertainment from the Wyndham Music Men.

My year, however, began with effect from April when I was appointed Chairman of the Social Committee but soon after that the Secretary resigned and we were unable to form a committee with non-PCC members - but with the help of the two churchwardens we managed to set a programme for the year.

Coffee mornings have been held regularly and are now arranged until May 2008. Another regular and popular social and outreach event is the Parish Lunch with an attendance of around 40 each month.

The first event on 'my watch' was a well supported Beetle Drive with a jacket potato supper in the Vicarage School Room and the next major social gathering was for yet another enjoyable and enlightening Passover Meal organised by Fran de Monti who has unfortunately left us for pastures new in Cornwall – her enthusiasm is sorely missed.

The Spring Fair was held on 26th May and was quite successful and this was followed in June with a very social barbecue held in the Rectory garden.

In early July a Flower Festival, organised by those other than the Social Committee, was a true extravaganza of blooms and a great success, raising a lot of money for Practical Action, whilst at the end of July we had another barbecue following a Family Celebration Service.

The annual Harvest Supper was again well attended and all enjoyed a cooked meal and a little home grown entertainment. This was followed in November with a very successful quiz and curry evening.

In December the Christmas Tree Festival was a great success, although the weather was not very kind to us. Significant proceeds were shared with St. Mary's and the Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance. The Grand Christmas Coffee Morning held in the Vicarage School Room on the Saturday morning was also well attended with proceeds to St. Mary's.

Finally it has to be said that, whilst 2007 was socially successful, it was hard work – a real struggle because of the lack of people involved. If you enjoyed all or some of these events, do please consider helping us to form a strong social committee, more able to share the workload and, by the way, when there is a good number involved, it can also be lots of fun!

Sylvia Perrin

Gifts:

- Diocesan Flag
- Oil filled candles for the pulpit candelabra
- Pulpit lectern light
- Altar frontal
- Lectern fall
- Books for the children's area

Fabric Report:

2007 saw some significant changes with regard to the church fabric, the first two listed requiring a faculty. All significant fabric changes are listed below:-

- South Door disabled access – on the recommendation of the church architect the whole ground area was raised to eliminate steps (and avoid unsightly ramps).
- A further row of nave pews were relocated to create more space at the head of the nave
- The reredos in the Good Shepherd Chapel was restored (repairing, cleaning and feeding the green oak from which it is made).
- The Children's area has been refurbished with new carpet and furniture.
- The outside notice boards were restored
- The vestry floor was repaired (old and dangerous fire damage)
- A new portable altar/table was installed in the Good Shepherd Chapel in memory of the late Gwendoline Allen
- A retaining wall in one of the heating ducts (under the iron floor gratings) was found to have collapsed and was repaired
- A pulpit lectern light was installed (see under Gifts)
- The tower steps had marking paint added and the lighting was improved for safety reasons.
- Cupboards in the vestry were treated for active woodworm.
- Sanctuary floodlights were replaced.
- Church clock received routine maintenance
- Church boiler received routine maintenance
- Lightening conductors received routine maintenance

Finance:

Over the year, payments exceeded receipts by £6,769. This was principally due to the PCC's decision to authorise several badly-needed expensive projects, mainly but not exclusively financed from the Fabric Fund. These included the creation of disabled access to the church, the cleaning of the reredos in the Good Shepherd Chapel, repairs to the vestry floor and the purchase of a portable altar table. In addition, our parish share of £45,222 was paid in full. Nevertheless, the General Fund showed an increase of receipts over payments of £1,808.

A stewardship campaign was launched in May, resulting in an increase in planned giving for the year of £947 or 2.6%. This was offset, however, by a decrease in receipts from collections of £623. If this trend had applied over the full 12-month period, additional income from the campaign for the year would have been £555.

In comparison with 2006, the church suffered a loss of income in fees received for marriages, funerals etc (less than 50% of that for 2006) as well as income tax refunded, due to a change in the period over which the refund is calculated. The latter should balance out in 2008, but it should be noted that the changes in taxation rates due in April 2008 will mean that the tax refund we will be able to claim on gift aid from that time will be reduced from 28% to 25%, resulting in a significant loss of income. Prominent receipts during the year were a refund of £617 of VAT paid on eligible work carried out on the church over the past few years and a refund by the Diocese of £2,500 of our parish share for 2006. We have been urged by the Diocese to use the latter sum for missionary projects.

The overall cost of providing Christian ministry from St Mary's Church during the year was £65,481. This figure includes the parish share, which goes towards providing stipends and accommodation for the diocesan clergy, but does not include the cost of the various particular projects mentioned above, all of which were related to improving our ministry but which were incurred as one-off payments. These would have added over £10,000 to the total cost. Our parish share for 2008 has been increased to £47,247 or 4.8%.

David. Bryan
Hon. Treasurer

Lay Pastoral Assistants:

The Lay Pastoral Assistants have regular monthly meetings with the Rector, the Revd. Canon Alan Gill and the Revd. Jane Hedges, and assist in their ministry in several ways. These include welcoming members of the congregation as they arrive for the 10.00am Sunday Eucharist, attending meetings for marriage and baptism preparation, visiting the sick and bereaved, and being responsible for Evening Worship at Rawson Court about three times a year, taking their turn with the Methodist, Roman Catholic, Baptist and New Covenant churches.

The Monday 'Tea with St. Mary's' has continued to be a most encouraging initiative; numbers have been maintained and the informal atmosphere generates a feeling of real fellowship. Although it is not a fund raising group, it decided to support the 'Christmas Shoe Box' appeal of the Trussell Trust. Eleven boxes, plus the cost of despatch for each, were delivered to the Trust's headquarters in Salisbury in November. This was a very tangible example of outreach in our parish from a small group of committed people.

There is always a welcome for new faces; please make this sphere of the LPA's work known in your area of our parish.

Maureen Atkinson

Ministry to Young Families:

Holy Week 2007 was another successful outreach to children by Saint Mary's with 36 children (and abundant helpers) attending on one or more days for many varied activities and crafts. Each day culminated in a song and a story that led the children from Palm Sunday through to the Resurrection.

However, for some time a conviction has been building that it was no longer feasible to simply encourage children into the church, rather that we must look at a whole family approach. Thus during this last year an initiative was launched to attempt to understand what Young Families were looking for in today's church, particularly here in Saint Mary's and to learn from them of their experiences both here and elsewhere.

With this end in mind a few 'relaxed lunches' were organised where Young Families were invited into our home where they would be encouraged to speak freely!

It would be an understatement to say that these lunches were fruitful – they were a real eye-opener!

They shared their concerns quite openly and with understanding. What were their 'key' demands – 'we want to feel part of Saint Mary's Eucharistic Worship' – 'we want to feel included in the church family' – 'we need something to focus the attention of our children so that they do not become too boisterous or noisy' – 'we want something that will encourage our children to want to come to church'. And yes they had ideas to help us achieve all of this.

This has enabled us to focus more on Family Services on the third Sunday of the month and the process will continue to evolve, but what have we achieved so far?

Well, the children have their own guide to the Family Eucharist (that describes, with pictures what is going on in the service - do have a look at one these booklets). We organise an activity that is relevant to the gospel/presentation and runs from the start of the service until the gospel reading and this is where the refurbished children's area, with new carpet and furniture (with more welcoming features still to arrive), is coming into its own. A good supply of new books donated by the church family keep the children occupied at other services. The presentation (aimed at children and adults) attempts to relate to all or part of the gospel as set by the lectionary and is organised by a Family Worship Group (who in the process themselves benefit from sound Christian study and fellowship). The Family Worship Group currently consists of Charlotte Armstrong, Jo Hall, Gillian Harding, Camilla Heron, Mike and Mary Sargent.

However, one of the highlights for the children is the recognition they get from receiving a sticker at each church attendance (you will probably remember getting stamps to stick in a book when you went to Sunday School; well, they don't print those anymore, so we sort of invented the next best thing). As they collect stickers so further recognition comes with token prizes and if this sticker policy continues probably annual recognition.

You might then ask 'why don't you see more young families' – well, we recognise that there is still much to do, there are a lot more young families to reach out to – and we do have plans, so 'watch this space'.

Mike Sargent

Deanery Synod:

Deanery Synod met the usual 3 times in the past year: May and October 2007 and February 2008.

The main topic at the May meeting was spirituality and the importance of prayer. Sue Rawlinson (from Shillingstone) described some of her experiences, from being director of retreat houses, to her current work with "Prayer Works" – promoting Diocesan Workshops on the understanding of prayer. She spoke about different types of retreat, and had a few leaflets about retreats etc. The meeting also gave the "Pilgrim Benefices" (the southern part of the Deanery) permission to proceed with plans they had drawn up for ministry in their area – rescinding the obligation of the earlier plan for the whole Deanery.

We hosted the October meeting when, after a report on the Gillingham and Shaftesbury show tent, Mark Zammit handed out a "draft mission plan" – a snap shot of what is happening. This covered 4 areas and we split into 4 groups to discuss one section each. Comments were then shared and collected to be collated. Most of the possible actions are at a parish level, where potential and strengths / weaknesses will vary, and I have yet to understand what this plan is trying to achieve – maybe just to satisfy some diocesan requirement? We may get ideas from what others are doing by reading through it, though it is at a high level.

A Lent meeting in February reduced numbers, which was a shame as the topic was to my mind an important one – a presentation on climate change: the evidence, why we as Christians should care and a little on how we might take actions as individuals and as churches. All PCCs are being asked to discuss this, a pack should have been received with material to aid this. Whilst listed buildings could be imagined to prevent many actions we learnt that the DAC looks favourably on "green" initiatives (solar panels etc.). Actions could be at a community level, though, e.g. some churches have set up recycling schemes; in one village oil deliveries have been co-ordinated. As usual the meeting finished with Parish notices. William Ridding spoke of a day they have arranged about work with youth and children, where 2 Diocesan advisers will be present, open to other parishes but this notice also acted as a reminder of resources that are available for us to make use of.

This was not only the end of a Triennium but there will be other changes in the Synod, as the Rural Dean, Mark Zammit, moves to Durrington in April and the lay chairman is standing down. The treasurer, Sue Chandler, is

willing to stand as lay chairman; her election would leave a vacancy for a new treasurer – so if anyone is interested ...(it's a much less onerous role now that the Parish share is set / worked out at a Diocesan rather than Deanery level).

Teresa Goatham

Churches Together in Gillingham:

The activities continued much as in previous years.

The WPCU service was hosted by the Community Church in January and was well attended. Talks were arranged in Lent looking at the tradition of each of the member denominations of our Forum; the intention was to learn about the others but I understand people were more inclined to go to hear the speaker from their own church! Study groups were held successfully in Advent, though again the mixing of denominations could be better. However, the Good Friday procession of witness was very well attended as usual (a slideshow is viewable on the internet), with members from all the churches. We haven't been too lucky with the weather for the annual picnic in recent years; an exceptionally wet day meant very few went to Forest Farm where the Mackain-Bremners had offered to host the event – I understand those who did enjoyed the time undercover.

Another successful quiz evening was held in October, and the carol singing in the High Street one Saturday morning before Christmas seems to gain a little in strength each year (but could still do with more good voices – please try to attend this year). Christmas Cards with the service times for all of the churches were again distributed throughout Gillingham.

We had hoped to arrange a special event at Pentecost – despite starting the planning early (in 2006) it didn't happen through the inability to find people from each church willing to take part. We are finding this difficultly with several potential events (there was nothing in One World Week for the same reason). Perhaps we should look at a single church or even individual arranging an event for all, but it can be useful to have a contact person from each church so that we don't end up with date/time clashes, publicity is arranged etc. When a Passion Play was produced in 2000 as part of the "Walk of Witness" on Good Friday this was intended to be repeated every 5 years but this hasn't happened, in this case not a lack of people willing to be involved but due to lack of a producer – someone with both the time and knowledge to bring to this task.

Financially we are well off as events not happening mean we have spent less than budgeted. The subs were consequently less last year and we are also looking at giving books to school leavers and more to the library (the latter for youth).

The Forum meetings continue to provide an opportunity to hear what is going on at each other's churches – whilst mostly only attended by Forum members they are open to any to be present, so do watch for the date if you are interested.

Teresa Goatham

Groups and Organisations:

INTRODUCTION from the Rector:

The last year has seen a lot of activity in the life of St Mary's as these reports from the committees and groups bear witness. A large debt of thanks must be given to a number of people who lead these committees and groups and are responsible for so much of our life, ministry and activity. Without their initiative, drive and sheer hard work St Mary's would be in a sad situation.

We must all be reminded of the fact that what we are engaged in is the Lord's work. He relies on all of us to engage with His mission. At the moment He needs many more of St Mary's family to say "Yes" I will do that, not, as so often the case, "No" or "I have done it before and need a rest". The church will only fully be the Body of Christ when we are all active in worship, prayer, making new disciples and doing the thousand and one jobs that need doing in an active and alive church.

Together, with continuing effort to work with young families and encourage the young, this year every effort must be made to deepen our spirit life and commitment to Jesus Christ who is our Lord.

For what has been we say thank you.
For what is, we rejoice.
For what faces us, let us say "YES"
Here I am Lord, use me.

Alan Gill

St Mary's Mothers' Union

The MU theme for the year 2007 was "FAITH IN ACTION".

Our year began with the AGM in February and apart from the March 'Overseas' Meeting, when the speaker cancelled due to family problems, the monthly meetings followed through as printed on the blue programme card.

Just picking out a few highlights:- in April, I am sure all members will remember Sam Woodcock's presentation of a 'Diary of a Gillingham Victorian Lady'; Beryl Knapton's beautiful wild flower slides in June and our speaker in September, Annabelle Spencer, who travelled from Wells to show slides and talk about the Falkland Isles and the Islanders. She brought many items to view and some, made by the islanders, were for sale. How appropriate to have this speaker, as 2007 was the 25th anniversary of the Falklands War.

In February there were forty-seven registered members of the branch. Unfortunately, some of our members are housebound and others unable to attend the monthly meetings. We were very sad to record the deaths of two members: Mary Bleach and Ray Smith. These lovely ladies will remain in our memories at all times and we shall miss their warmth and humour which they brought to our fellowship.

Our year's programme concluded with the annual Advent Service in church with the Rector presiding. Members of the Deanery had earlier in the year expressed the wish to hold a service in St Mary's and we were delighted to welcome them to the Advent Service, after which they joined our members in the Vicarage Schoolroom for a hot drink and hot mince pies.

In concluding this report, it is important that the committee is thanked for their support and help over the last six years; four members now having to step down, having completed the allowed six years in office. If there is anyone amongst our members willing to take on the leadership of the branch, but who hesitates at the thought of doing so, here is some suggested advice for public speaking:-

"If a sea of faces frightens you, imagine they are rows of cabbages, or roses, and smile at them!"

Barbara Powell

St Mary's Under 5s

2007 has been a year of great change for St Mary's Under 5s. After many years of running the group, Angie and Arthur Hunt retired and, in July, their role was taken over by us - a group of mums who attend with our children.

Thanks to Angie and Arthur's great fundraising efforts over the years, we inherited a healthy bank balance which enabled us to purchase a very large amount of new equipment for the group. This has gone down well with parents and children alike. We were also able to hold a Christmas party at Climb Aboard, a soft play centre, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Attendance is generally very good, with numbers of children attending each session ranging from about 15 to as many as 43! Both mums and dads bring their children, as well as many of the childminders from the area. The majority of families are from Gillingham, but we also draw from surrounding towns and villages. We continue to meet twice a week, on Wednesday and Friday mornings during term time.

Our committee consists of a play leader, a deputy leader, a treasurer, two assistant play leaders and an arts and crafts co-ordinator. We are very proud of what we have achieved with the group and hope it will continue to run for many years. However, as some of us have increased work commitments and some are pregnant, continuing to run the group is increasingly challenging, and we are always on the look out for new recruits to keep the group open and thriving.

Tamzin Rowe

St Mary's Under 5s Fun Praise

Fun Praise is a monthly 'Pram Service' that gives parents and carers with under 5's the chance to meet together in the week to worship God. We have been meeting at St Mary the Virgin Nursery at the Primary School. The day alternates each month between Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to accommodate the different children at each session. The session has not been restricted to the Nursery children and we are very pleased to welcome anybody with under 5's.

Our themes covered well-known stories from the Old Testament, stories that Jesus told and people Jesus met as well as covering some of the major festivals in the year.

Fun Praise starts with the children (with a lot of help from the adults!) making something that is relevant to the theme, we may then use it in the

story and the children have it to take home as a reminder of the story. Our service has lively choruses followed by a visual story, prayers and even more lively singing accompanied by tambourines, shakers and bells!

This will be the last report from Fun Praise in its current format. There are plans within the Ministry to Young Families to develop something similar in Church and it does seem the right time to try something different.

If you wish for any further information please contact the Parish Office or Mike Sargent.

Sandra Williams.

Child Protection

There is a leaflet produced by the Diocese about 'Child Protection in the Diocese of Salisbury' some of which reads:

'Children are precious in the sight of God and it is our duty to ensure the church protects and nurtures children and the church is a safe place for children to grow and explore their faith. Everyone within the church has a responsibility to work within both the ethos and the structure of the House of Bishops Child Protection Policy Document, which has been adopted by the Diocese. The church must be seen to own its responsibilities to children. The promotion of the well being of children and young people is one of the church's most fundamental tasks.'

In order to accomplish this everyone needs to understand and adhere to the procedures. The PCC have adopted the Diocesan Guidelines, have a Child Protection Policy. All those who come into contact with our young people and vulnerable adults on a regular basis e.g. Young People's groups, Bell Ringing Instructors, LPA's etc have filled in the necessary forms to provide the safest care.

For any further information please don't hesitate to me or Mike Sargent (PCC Sec.) until a new Local Child Protection Administrator is appointed by the new PCC.

Sandra Williams

Choir and Music Group

The musical highlight of the past year was the visit in November of Canon Jeremy Davies of Salisbury Cathedral who led a 'Music in Worship' day. His insistence that everyone can 'make a joyful noise unto the Lord' left everyone who attended with a new confidence in their ability to contribute to their worship in song.

Earlier in the year we were very much saddened by the loss of Richard Hedges, which also deprived us of our only tenor voice. We also miss the strong soprano singing of Fran de Monti. We are grateful to the additional singers who enabled us to fulfil our commitments over the Advent-Christmas period. Are there any more singers out in the congregation? Please come and join us on Tuesday evenings. We all thank Peter Clarke for his leadership and wider commitment to the church music.

The music group has had one or two changes of players, but on a 'good' Sunday we can have up to ten people taking part. For this we are dependent on people who are not regular members of the congregation but nevertheless enjoy being with us on our Sunday morning. If you know of younger people who are becoming competent on an instrument, please point them in our direction. Recently I have noticed how some people now refer to us an 'orchestra', which seems to suggest some sort of progress!

John Porter

The Flower Arrangers

The 'Flower Team' of eighteen ladies continued to work the rota very willingly and generously. In addition five others gave additional help at festivals, either by arranging or by letting us cut greenery from their gardens. Contributions to the Flower Fund were gratefully received and we kept a constant supply of oasis for all the arrangers and supplied flowers for all the festivals. Lloyds Bank holds an account and Anne Pike has continued to keep a careful watch on all the transactions. Mary Gray has agreed to be the co-ordinator for wedding flowers as and when they are needed.

The highlight of the year was the Flower Festival in July, masterminded by Mary and Philip Gray. We welcomed nine groups of flower arrangers from the local community and with special help from Daphne Bryan secured sponsorship for all the arrangements on the theme "World Togetherness". All the hard work paid off and the Festival was enjoyed by all, arrangers and visitors alike. Generous donations were made and we were able to send over £1300 to Practical Action, a charity devoted to helping people in the 3rd World to make the very most of their local resources and conditions and so greatly improve their lives.

So our thanks go to all the arrangers and suppliers of greenery and especially to Anne Pike and Mary Gray for their continued help during the year.

Liz Frayne

Traidcraft

Having started the St. Mary's Traidcraft stall in May 2006, this was the first full year. I was a bit anxious when Traidcraft asked if I thought we could – sell £500 worth of goods in year; we more than doubled that in the remaining part of 2006 and in 2007 the sales exceeded £2000 (by a whisker).

The stall has continued with the norm being twice a month (1st and 3rd Sundays), and has also been at the Spring Fair and Christmas coffee morning.

Whilst we get a discount the goods are purchased from Traidcraft, a small part of this has been used on sundries and some goods have had to be sold off at reduced prices.

There are 2 causes – trying a product which proves not of sufficient interest (this should lessen with time) and changing tastes (difficult to predict). Some goods have had to be reduced as past their “best before” date (all of the produce has “best before” rather than “eat by” dates and is safe after the date, but quality could be impaired). I hope we are not trading at a loss (I can work out stock values at cost or sale price, but not what the goods will actually sell for).

It may be possible to work with 1 or 2 other churches to share orders and so have a wider range of stock – or at least not reduce what we are stocking.

Catalogues are available and taken, but few orders have been received. On a more positive note, the Christmas cards were a great success last year.

After much of the stock occupying my dining room for 20months I was grateful to be allocated cupboard space in the Stable Room and to Mike Sargent for putting shelves in the cupboard. This also reduces the set up time and problems of keeping the stock dry on a wet day.

Whilst I am very pleased at the success of the stall the greater sales than I expected means that it takes more time so I am also very pleased Mary Gray has offered to help. I have not produced as much information as I have intended due to not finding enough time, so this should now improve. We are not yet a Fair Trade Church (which the PCC agreed to), we will be seeking to work out what actions are needed to achieve this and hopefully soon we shall be able to boast the certificate.

Teresa Goatham

Tower and Bell Ringers Report

This year has been one of progress and achievement for the tower.

After the Rector's supper evening last spring several people came forward and expressed a desire to learn to ring. After getting over their initial fears and apprehensions I am pleased to report that they are now ringing unassisted and they are all enjoying it. The result of this enthusiasm is now apparent on Sunday mornings where we are now able to regularly ring six bells and occasionally the full eight. This is not to say that we have enough ringers - far from it. Due to personal commitments, holidays etc. there is always room for others, so please give it a thought - we are always practicing on Monday evenings if you would like to come up.

The bells and fittings are in good order; there was a small mishap over Christmas when a stay was broken on the 2nd bell and this was replaced with a spare that we held. Attempts are being made to obtain a replacement for this. At the same time routine maintenance was carried out involving some tightening of bolts, adjustment of rope lengths and other minor adjustments.

Last autumn the outside roof of the tower was cleared of debris left by birds (6 sacks full!!) and the drainage channels cleaned out. The clock continues to keep Gillingham on time with no problems to report.

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the entire band and also to those not actually listed as tower members for their support and dedication in helping to keep St. Mary's bells ringing out over Gillingham.

*Paul Cumberland
Tower Captain*

IMPACT

Our monthly magazine 'Impact' gives information about services and other activities in the two parishes of St. Mary the Virgin, Gillingham and St. Simon and St. Jude, Milton-on-Stour, so it is a useful means of communication regarding regular events, especially for members of our community who cannot attend services regularly. It also contains other seasonal and thought provoking material.

Our circulation has decreased slightly this year. We would welcome interest from more parishioners, especially younger people, so everyone is asked to show copies to their friends and neighbours. Extra free copies may be obtained from the Parish Office for this purpose.

The magazine always contains a wide range of attractively presented advertisements. The contribution of so many local businesses has enabled us to sell each copy at less than its real cost. It is encouraging that so many firms from the surrounding area are supporting us; we hope that our readers, in their turn, will make use of them whenever possible.

We are always grateful to everyone who is involved in the preparation and distribution of 'Impact'. Several people have commented on the magazine's professional appearance and content; we are fortunate to have an enthusiastic and able production team, and good 'in house' printing facilities.

Margaret Grant

Serving Team

This year has seen some changes to our serving team, we have lost a few people and gained a few. We just need one or two more servers to help us out with our rota. It is particularly nice to have two young children.

We have managed to have a full team at most of the festivals and holy days this year.

I would like to thank all the servers who turn up week in week out to enhance the service at Saint Mary's. This is an important part of the lay ministry here at Saint Mary's. If you would like to join this team please come forward and speak to one of us.

I would like to thank the Rector for his help & guidance throughout the year and also to Mike who helps out with training of new servers and helps keep things running to schedule when I am away.

Steve Butler