

St Mary's Stretton
Annual Report
March 2016



St Mary's Stretton with Claymills
Registered Charity No. 1130916

PCC Members

23 March 2015 to 13 April 2016

Revd Kim Thomas	Minister - Chair
Revd Dennis Warner	Minister
Revd Stan Vaz	Minister – left the Parish 31 January 2015
Mrs Karen Fearn	churchwarden elected April 2015 & to Deanery Synod for 3 years April 2014
Mr Tim Cox	churchwarden - elected April 2015
Mr Chris Rimmer	Licensed Reader - Treasurer
Mrs Shirley Irons	Licensed Reader
Mrs Carol Wheale	elected to Deanery Synod for 3 years April 2014
Mrs Pauline McDonald	elected to Deanery Synod for 3 years April 2014
Mrs Janet Royall	elected for 3 years April 2013 – resigned April 2015
Mr William Parr	elected for 3 years April 2013
Mrs Dawn Ashton	elected for 3 years April 2013
Mr Paul Spencer	Vice Chair - elected for 3 years April 2014
Mr Neil Davenport	elected for 3 years April 2014
Mr Arthur Ashton	elected for 3 years April 2014
Mrs Louise Burke	elected for 3 years April 2015
Mr Tom Evers-Burke	elected for 3 years April 2015
Mrs Barbara Thomas	elected for 3 years April 2015
Mrs Celia Hogg	Co-opted for 1 year April 2015

Vicar's Report

"Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Romans 10:11-15

The words of St Paul are an encouragement to me as we look back at the journey this church has been on over the last 12 months. St Mary's has always been passionately committed to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in faithful service to the church and community and in inventive and creative endeavours, both within the church building and throughout the community.

I would like to focus on two aspects in my report this year – 'A Church that serves' and 'A Church that is sent'.

A Church that serves

As I look back at all we have done over the last year, I have to thank God for the 'good and faithful people' who have made such a

difference to our community – and often in a way that no-one notices.

Of course, the community I am talking about is not just the village of Stretton (as important as that is), but also the living, vibrant community of St Mary's. The signs that have been collected and are growing at the back of church talk about the church being a family, a 'warts and all' place to be and a place filled with love and I know that is what we are. I would hate people to look at our church and think it was a place where only perfect people come, because I wouldn't fit in to that kind of place at all! The church should be a place where everyone is accepted and loved and I know from the reaction of those coming to our church for the first time, there is a real sense of that. Thinking of our services, I have

to pay tribute to the small army of people who ensure they run as smoothly as possible every week, whether their service is on a Wednesday or Sunday morning or behind the scenes during the week – do you know who fills the oil candles up, makes sure there is sufficient wine and bread, who washes and irons the altar cloths, who cleans the brasses, who pays the bills, who buys the milk, who spends hours over the newsletter? They are just a few things that happen along with those who play a more obvious role and I would like to pay tribute to you all. Your devotion and sacrifice are both noticed and appreciated. I would like to pay tribute to those whose ministry is in other areas, those who plan and work at Messy Church, Lunch Club, Helping Hands, Feeding Station, Sunday School, Marriages, Baptisms, Alpha, Schools work, Pastoral care, Funerals, Services in Hillfield nursing home, the Parish Magazine, Housegroups, work with young people, Community Day and many other things we do for the service of others, driven by the love of God and desire to serve Him through serving others. The danger with listing things is that I will leave someone or something out, but please know even if your ministry isn't mentioned here, you are very much appreciated.

Sadly last year we said 'goodbye' to much loved friends and I know we all

remember Margaret Brown, Joy Harris, Derek Taylor, Enid James and Linda King with much affection, mourning their death but also rejoicing that they are with the Father.

As well as saying goodbye to people, we also decided, after much thought, prayer and agonising to lay down the Parish Magazine. This was not a decision made lightly and I would like to say a personal thank you to June Kirkland the first editor of the magazine and Lesley Bayston who edited the magazine for 5 years after Junes 'retirement' - both put so much into it.

A Church that is sent.

So what of the future? I believe we are on the edge of something truly amazing for this church and that God is calling us and challenging us about where we go from here. Last year our focus at the PCC 'Awayday' we were challenged particularly by the diocesan areas of growth - 'Reaching new generations'. This continues to speak to us and as we go away again as a PCC, we will be looking at what we do as a church; where we are reaching people with the Gospel, and how we can be intentional in all we do. Following Jesus is a great adventure- sometimes it feels as we are on a tightrope with no safety harness, but in fact God's hand is always keeping us steady, and is

ready to guide and hold us when we let go of all that we know that is safe and dare to take risks. Two thousand years of Christian progress show us that God's plans are not frustrated for long, despite all the efforts of His enemies. The power of His death and resurrection continue to sustain and grow His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against us. Thank you for the privilege of leading you for another year, and I thank every one of you for the contribution you are making to the kingdom of God.

Kim

Churchwardens Report

This year we thought it might be interesting to take you through the Church Warden's year, month by month...

January 2015

Due to an excessive amount of wax dripping on the church carpets, we arranged to have an expert carpet cleaner come and give them a good clean. The fire extinguishers had their annual check. All church keyholders had their keys checked, and the alarm code changed. Gutters and hopper heads were cleared of leaves, etc. The disabled ramp was jet washed and treated with an anti-fungal chemical.

February

The annual Church Warden's report was written. Routine maintenance in the hall and church continued.

March

The church had its annual spring clean. John stepped down from being a Church Warden and Tim took over the mantle.

April

Working party arranged to clear the clutter in the church hall. A contractor was employed to keep the church yard grass mown and looking tidy.

May

The Church Health & Safety policy was reviewed. An asbestos survey was done on the undercroft, and some potentially contaminated material was removed, in preparation for the heating pipes to be lagged.

A long running saga with the outside lights began (and ended in February 2016!)

June

Checking of the Terrier / property inventory began. New carpet was laid in the south aisle. A check of drains, hoppers and guttering took place.

July

Both the hall and church water boilers decided to play up, and needed remedial maintenance. The church heating boiler was serviced. A boundary hedge needed to be cut back.

August

The Quinquennial Inspection report was received from the architects, listing all the maintenance work necessary on the church.

September

The intruder alarm was serviced. Electrical work was done in the hall. The hall notice boards were reviewed and an additional board added.

October

Documents were sent to the Stafford Archive for retention. PAT testing of church electrical items was arranged. The drains were checked and unblocked. The church hall floor was varnished.

November

Permission was granted by the diocese for a new intruder alarm box to be fitted. The church toilet started to block. Over the next 2 months 3 different plumbers looked at it, resulting in new pipes and a new liner. A tree fell in the high winds, necessitating it being taken

out altogether. At the same time we applied for permission to take out another that had died. Posts were erected to support banners advertising church events.

December

A tree survey was done by the Diocese's tree expert. Quotes obtained for some of the remedial work necessary. The lightning conductor was tested. The organ was tuned. The baptismal font cover was inspected. The urinals in the hall toilets need adjusting. The majority of the heating pipes in the undercroft had been lagged.

Forward Look

As mentioned above, the Quinquennial Report has now been received. The architects inspected the church building and have listed recommended maintenance and remedial work. So we have drawn up a 3 year schedule of works that we plan to try to carry out with the most urgent work planned for 2016. One of the key projects this year is to get safe access to the bell tower in place; we have some remedial work to be done on the top of the tower, but presently the ladder and hatch that we would use to access the roof, are considered dangerous. So, along with the PCC, we are hoping to get new access in place, so that the work to the roof can also go ahead.

In 2017 we are hoping to get the repointing done, with the remainder of the job to be completed in 2018.

So no-one can say that the life of a Church Warden is not varied. Many thanks to those who have worked so hard alongside us, to keep the fabric of the building sound, and the church yard tidy.

*Churchwardens
Karen and Jim*

PCC Report

A list of your PCC members is at the beginning of this document.

During the past year the PCC has, month by month, a very full agenda. Specific items apart from the regular finance, health & safety, and Churchwarden's reports are as follows:

A decision was made, after much discussion, prayer and congregational input, to cease production of the Crosslinks magazine.

A major focus is the main building and improvement projects in the church and the church hall. Pushing these projects forwards is not about just making decisions. They involve planning, quotations, drawings and for the church projects, faculty applications. We are looking at supplementing the generous gift

money with grant applications. We do strive to bring these projects to fruition as soon as possible. However, we want to steward the money donated wisely and well.

Another important decision made, following communication from the Diocese, was to allow children, from the age of 8 years old, to take communion. This will be following a period of instruction by Dan & Rach Ortis.

The first group of these celebrated communion on Easter Sunday!!

Following the APCM, the PCC have their 'Away Day', this year on the 7th May. This is time out for reflection, prayer, inspiration and looking forward as a PCC to serve the church at St. to The Glory of God.

Please pray for us.

*Celia Hogg
on behalf of the PCC.*

Deanery Synod

The Deanery Synod met four times this year as detailed below:

16th June, St Mary's, Dunstall - Motion from the Deanery Standing Committee on part-stipend posts.

16th September, All Saints, Rangemore – Talk by Lynn Chapman of YMCA.

12th November, St Chad's, Burton – Grave Talk, a discussion on death and grief.

15th February, St Paul's, Burton – Deanery Spirituality Network report and discussion on Parish Shares.

Meetings usually start with prayers and an act of worship, followed by financial and pastoral matters and notices/news from member parishes.

Pauline McDonald

Treasurer's Report

We have had a good year in our accounts and managed to pay all our invoices within a few days of receiving them.

I would like to thank Revd. Dennis Warner for his commitment and work as Planned Giving Officer. He has managed our weekly envelopes and offering plate giving to process our quarterly Gift Aid tax claims which boosts our regular giving by a further 25% for all eligible giving.

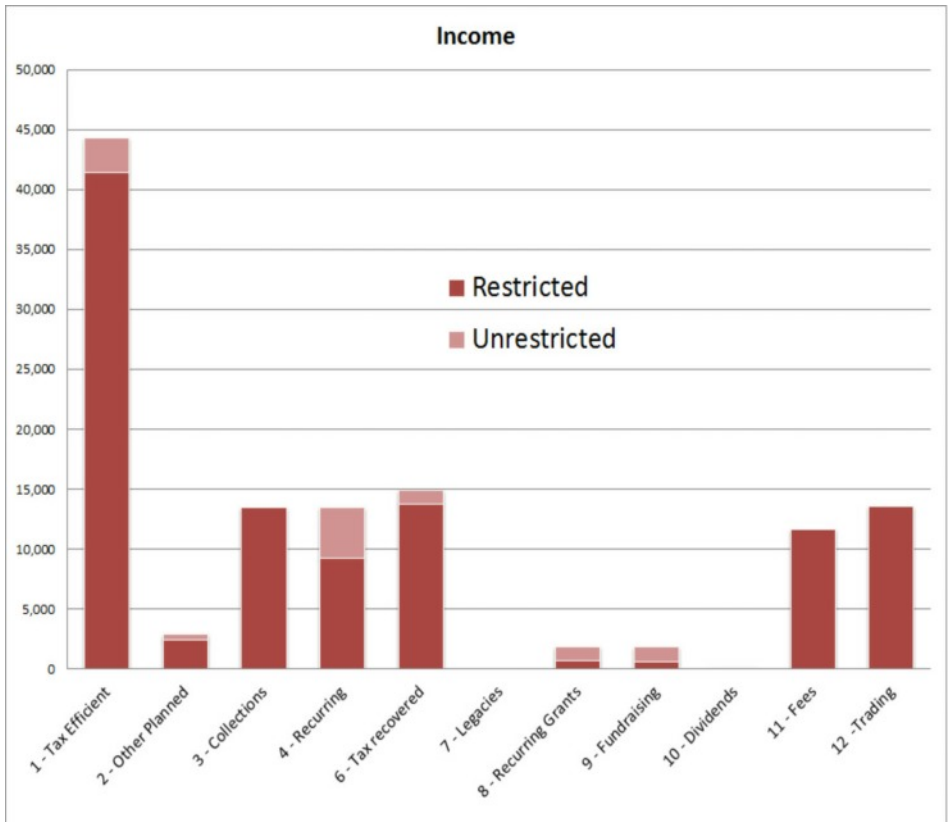
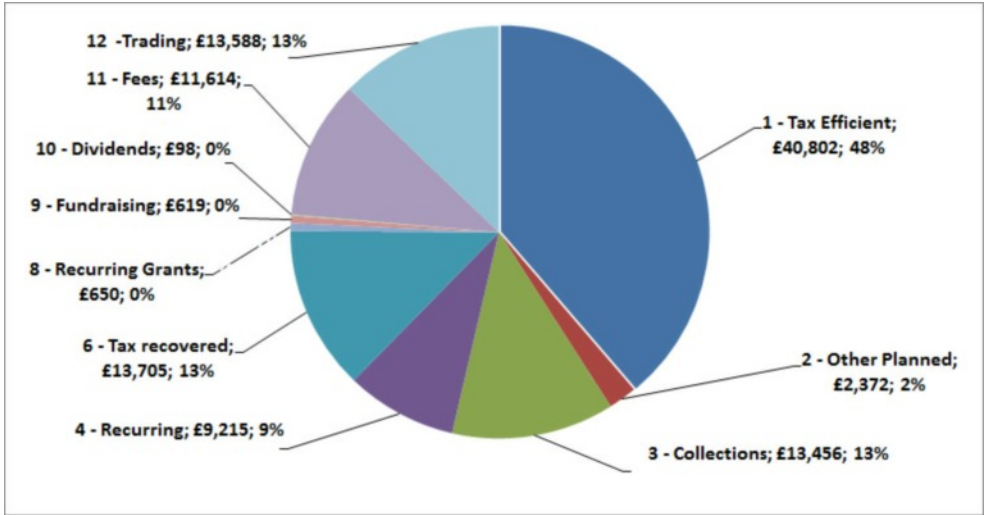
We have had blessings as well as difficulties. We seek to seek to raise our level of income if we are to meet our commitments and hopefully increase our mission in 2016.

We trust in God's provision in these continuing austere times and I give

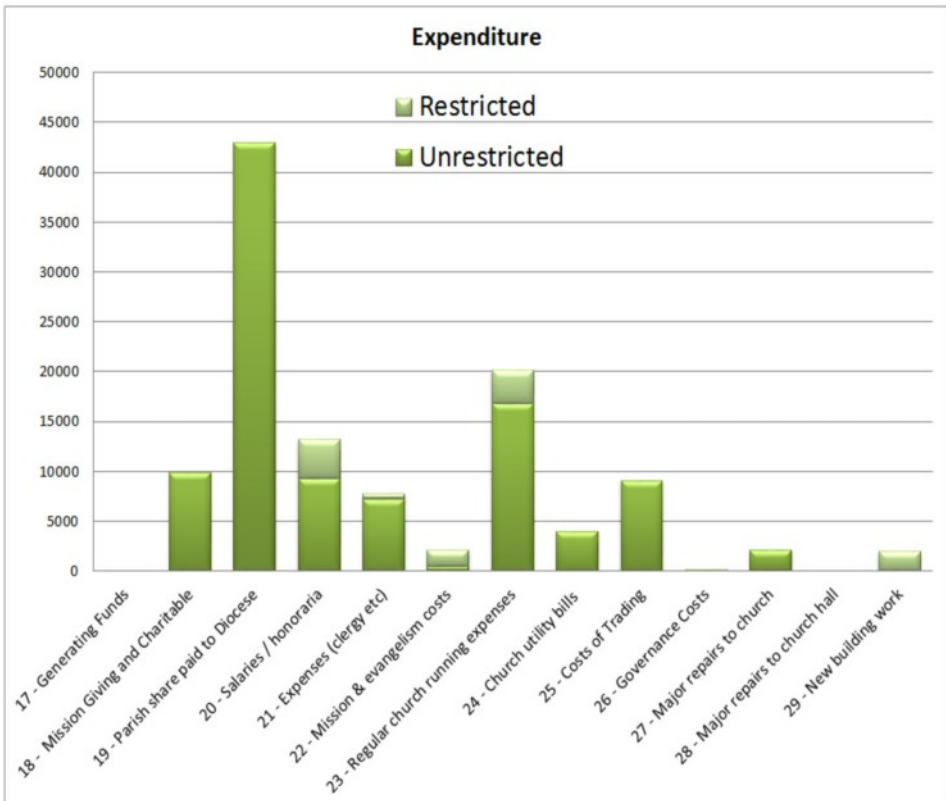
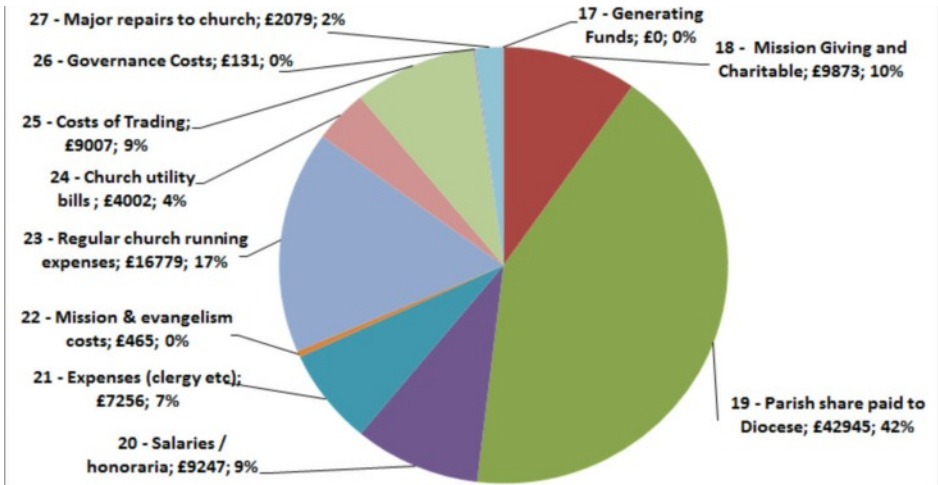
thanks that He continues to never fail us. Often an unexpected financial gift comes in at an appropriate time to keep up our cash flow. Again this year a number of generous donations have been made helping us towards funding our hall and church disabled toilets, church paths and audio visual projects. Currently funding is being sort towards these projects. Our Unrestricted reserves have reduced to £12,066 compared to £16,412 at the end of 2014, £14,362 at the end of 2013, £9,365 at the end of 2012, £9,929 at end of 2011 and £9,781 at end of 2010. This reduction is made up of slightly less 'like for like' income and at the same time a development in unrestricted expenditure. Our Parish Share for 2015 rose to £42,940 from £41,694 in 2014. This is to rise to £43,804 for 2016.

Expenditure for the Youth Fund has been £1,306 higher than income, with final reserves of £3,367 compared to £4,673 at the end of 2014, £7,598 at the end of 2013, £9,205 at the end of 2012. This confirms that giving to the Youth Project continues to be insufficient to balance expenditure and this rate of difference is escalating as giving patterns change and fewer people now give directly to the Youth Fund. As foreseen in previous years the PCC General Fund now needs to prepare for being responsible for our Youth work as the Youth fund becomes exhausted. In preparation for

Income



Expenditure



this the budget and codes are in the process of being restructured.

The PCC tithe their income. This means that we calculate the amount of applicable income during the year and grant one tenth of this to charities. This year this totals £9,273.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank every one of you for your much appreciated giving. Whether it is regular or not, gift aided or not, it is vital to the work of our church.

Without this commitment to Christ's church we would not be able to serve God and our community in the way that we do. Remember that God allows us to keep the rest of his provision beyond our giving for ourselves.

Can I ask you to pray regularly for the financial ministry of our church? I believe that God has responded to our prayers in stabilising and improving our finances. Many of you tithe your income but if you do not already, please prayerfully consider doing so. But especially please also pray for the funds to cover all of our work planned for this year.

Chris Rimmer - Treasurer
February 2016

Electoral Roll

The Electoral Roll was revised after statutory notice period which was between Monday 7 and Monday 21 March 2016.

The new roll lists 125 people as members (which is 7 more than last year): 38 men and 87 women. The roll will open again on 14 April, after the APCM.

Karen Fearn
Electoral Roll Officer

St Mary's Children's Work Sunday School

Sunday school continues to be lots of fun and very chilled (perfect for a Sunday morning!). After a time of toast, drinks, craft and sports we have our story/learning time. Oct – Dec this time was spent looking at the Christmas story from the brilliant book 'Matthew for everyone' by the amazing NT Wright. We've spent the last 5 weeks getting ready for a very special Easter Sunday service where the children aged over 7 will be taking their first communion! There is an example preparation pack at the back of Church for anyone who'd like to see how we've been preparing. As always, big thanks to John and Kate McCall and Jake and Jade for their wonderful leading and toast making skills!

William Shrewsbury

The Y6 girls/boys Feel Good Factor groups are continuing throughout the year with every Y6 child being given the opportunity to participate. These groups give children the opportunity to think about emotions, how to recognize and control anger, what makes us unique, celebrating who we are and lots more positive messages. Thanks to Roy Jones for his continued support of the boys group 😊

HOLIDAY CLUB WWW

(Where's the wonder in our world?)

Holiday club 2015 saw approx 87 under 16 year olds and 21 adults having a fantastic time with Phil Crathorne and team. The theme was WHERE'S THE WONDER IN OUR WORLD so looking at creation and how our incredible world points to an incredible God!

Each day the children divided into small groups the children had 6 activities which they had 20 mins at each of the 3 days. The activities were: bouncy castle and go-karts, scalextrix, crazy chemistry, console games, craft and sports.

We also had times when all of the groups came together for songs, games, competitions, and stories.

To top it off we invited parents and carers on the last day to come back

at 6pm for a yummy bbq and to enjoy a sample of all that the children had been up to during the 3 days

We're all ready again for this year!!

Rachel Ortiz

Planned Giving

The level of giving has increased only over the past year. I am very happy to talk to anyone about giving regularly, using envelopes or Standing Orders, and about Gift Aid especially. If you're a UK tax payer you can Gift Aid your donations, making them worth 25% more to us, at no extra cost to you and with no obligation. We can claim back the tax you have paid on your donation (25p for every £1 you donate) through Gift Aid. This additional income makes a real difference.

We give because God first gave to us, just as we love God because He first loved us. Our whole lives are a response to a loving, generous God as we remember the amazing love of God revealed in Jesus."

PCC

Church members are still giving faithfully over the year, with an increase of about 2½% in the total giving. Still much of the giving is not gift-aided, meaning that we are missing out on some of the income

tax that donors have already paid on their giving.

The number of givers paying by Standing Order at the end of 2015 was 28, and there were 23 using regular Weekly Envelopes, as well as 12 giving regularly by the unnumbered envelopes put out in the pews.

Youth Project

There has been practically no change during the year. There are still 3 donors using envelopes, two of whom have gift-aided the donations. The number of donors giving by Standing Order at the end of 2015 was 5.

Dennis Warner - Planned Giving

Baptism Report

This year there have been eighteen baptisms of young children aged between a few months and six or seven years most of the older children being siblings of the babies.

The development of shortening the service, having pertinent sermons and inviting baptism parties to leave if they wish after the peace has removed a lot of the problems that have so annoyed other regular members of our congregation and we hope that those people will come back to the service on the first Sunday of the month.

Val and Sue would still appreciate more baptism visitors it's not an onerous task and you get first chance to do a bit of baby cuddling.

Val Bestall and Sue Dennis

Feeding Station

Feeding Station has been running now for 28 months. To date we have run 21 events and it has been attracting steady numbers with attendance averaging 38 over the last 12 months. We intend to grow this through prayer and the help of those who regularly attend to invite others along.

Our vision is to feed the church through teaching and worship, to encourage and enthuse Christians in their ministry and faith and we continue to have positive feedback from those who attend.

Some developments connected to Feeding Station are the new electrical sockets in the hall, the repainting of the stage area and in due course the projector to be mounted and data cable to be installed, all of which will be of benefit to other church hall users.

This is a real team effort and I would personally like to thank everyone involved for there continued support and commitment to Feeding Station.

Steve Barnes.

Messy Church

Messy Church continues to be a great outreach and witness. We regularly have more than 30 children along with their parents, grandparents or other adults. We always start with an introductory game or quiz that the older children can join in with when they arrive later and the snacks always go down well with hungry children!

We have engaged in an amazing variety of different activities to help bring alive the bible message; stories, interactive drama, painting, gluing, icing biscuits, making masks etc, all activities are guaranteed to be messy! One of the highlights this year was a re-enactment of the Last supper and the making of a spectacular altar cloth which has already been used in church.

All of this could not happen without a dedicated band of helpers who turn up each month and do all the jobs, both large and small, that enable Messy Church to run smoothly.

Sue Stokes

delivering at the end of March as we were so busy we couldn't keep up with the amount of jobs we had to do. There was a waiting list of jobs at one point. Having Andrea meaning the phone is still effective and works having that personal touch. We lost some volunteers this year so it went down to 3 people delivering and only 2/3 people gardening.

We managed to complete 100 jobs this year mostly gardening, with Visiting and taking people to hospital / doctors appointment. Three of the people we helped last year died, their families were very thankful for the help we had given their loved ones.

We invited all the people we had made contact with so far to tea on the vicarage lawn, back to church Sunday and the Christmas services. Which different people did attend, we also wrote an individual Christmas card and delivered mince pies to everyone on our books.

A great year meeting some lovely new people.

Louise Burke

Helping Hands

This year was a very busy year. We decided to re-deliver the leaflets to every house again at the start of the year, as people move all the time. Didn't want anyone not to know about the service. We had to stop

Justice and Care

Church Mission Society

Jason and Tracy Day and their children Ruby and Libby are based in Chiang Mai, Thailand. They came back to the UK in June 2015 for eight

months, however that has now been extended to July 2016 as Jason is completing a diploma. When they return he will be taking on a larger job as area personnel manager looking after mission partners who work across Asia. The children have been able to spend a school year at Kettlehulme V.C. (A) Primary School near Whaley Bridge.

They came to Stretton in August. Their first stop was at Rider House to see Enid who had been a lifelong CMS supporter. This was followed by lunch at Rolleston Club and tea on the Vicarage Lawn. Kim invited them to stay overnight and they spoke at the service on August 9th, outlining their roles and projects. Lunch at the National Brewery Centre enabled them to chat with members of the congregation and before returning home they visited Janet Wedd at Piltons Farm. I was personally grateful that they attended Enid's funeral in October.

We continue to pray for them as they plan their return to Thailand. If you get chance please read their latest newsletter on the church noticeboard.

Ruth James

SAMS

Mags Southern is our SAMS link missionary. She teaches at St Andrews School (Colegio San

Andres) in Asuncion Paraguay, and has been there for more than thirty years. She is deputy head.

It is a private Christian school. The pupils are encouraged to help people less fortunate than themselves and when one of the workmen had an accident and broke his femur badly, he had to have an operation and then pay for physiotherapy. The kids organised food fayres to raise money for him and their gift more than met his needs.

They have lots of celebrations in school that we don't celebrate, as well as some we do. Teachers day, Workers day, Children's day, Another's day, Father's day many more and of course they have an Independence Day. They also have lots of sports days at the school inviting pupils from other schools who always enjoy going to St Andrews as the food is good.

Last June Mags and Gwen brought six pupils to England. Four of them went to a summer school in Dorset for intensive English lessons. They had a month here and were also able to have a look round London.

The British Ambassador goes into the school quite often and last year asked if they would celebrate the signing of the Magna Carta.

Faith in God and Jesus is always at the centre of what they are taught in school and many ex-pupils have returned to the school and told what a difference God has made to their lives.

Janet Wedd

Footprints

St Mary's and the wonderful people involved have remained loyally supportive, not only to our children at Footprints but encourage and gave me hope in some of the most challenging times I've experienced, from our humble beginnings of my vision up until today. The connection that St Mary's gives us all remains strong and motivating and I thank each and everyone from the bottom of my heart.

Footprints has developed into a 'small village' over 7 years and has grown beyond my expectations. The children it has rescued and saved, loved, cared for and nurtured are a reminder of the amazing support we get from organisations like St Mary's, we strive to ensure that every child continues to be guided through education both academically at Footprints Academy and is encourage morally and holistically with life skills that will help them grow into respectful citizens of Kenya in the future. This kind of opportunity is one of a kind for thousands of children in Africa

and Footprints is blessed to be able to provide our children with the love and care they truly deserve. We are faced with many challenges that are unimaginable but take pride in dealing with them and preparing ourselves for the next, but the happy, contented face of a child is the best reward ever and gives us more strength to overcome the next challenge that's inevitably around the corner. Within our development stage we have constructed our buildings to provide a loving home, a borehole to secure our need for water and a primary school to provide that vital education not only for our children, but another 180 pupils from our community whose parents are desperate in our rural location to get the best possible education for their children. A small fee is required as Footprints can't provide free education but fees are exchanged for commodities such as maize and milk, charcoal and firewood, all products Footprints Children's home needs to survive. We now have 4 of our own children – Bakari, Rapheal, Mary and Jane – who through our support have been able to secure places at excellent secondary schools. A huge financial burden but a remarkable achievement for the children, to help them achieve their dreams for a better life.

Footprints is in a critical state in its development as it endeavours to sustain and maintain the Vision; we can only hope and pray that all our friends and supporters continue to walk beside us financially and keep us in their prayers, to enable Footprints to continue this amazing life changing work.

God Bless You and All at St Mary's, Stretton.

Kerry Watson

YMCA Food Bank

Once again the generosity of the members of St Mary's, the churches of Burton, along with the Rotary clubs and local businesses in Burton have kept this vital work of feeding desperate people with emergency food parcels. November and December saw record numbers of food parcels being given out.

So please continue with your support, donating food to keep this vital work going and adding this work to your prayer list. Funding from Staffordshire council is being cut from April, so it looks like being a challenging year ahead and your prayers are needed. Many thanks.

Val Bestall

Children's Society

Thanks to all of St Mary's box holders who helped to raise a total of £244.65 during the last year. This has

helped to make a small but very essential contribution towards helping 34,000 vulnerable children in the UK last year alone who were living below the poverty line. The Society also influence government policy changes which have impacted upon more than 1.8 million children and young people. There are 270,000 people across the UK who are part of the supporter base with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York as presidents. A future target for the Society is that it would be keen to work with every single parish in the Church of England who it hopes would be inspired to support the work done through prayer, giving and volunteering.

Of huge national interest at this point in time are the issues over refugees and asylum seeking families coming to the UK. The Children's Society was able to help 873 children and young people last year who were extremely vulnerable experience severe mental health difficulties and homelessness.

Anyone who is interested can also sign up for a monthly prayer email containing bible references and prayers to support current topical issues.

Thank you to everyone once again on behalf of the Children's Society for your continued help.

Sarah Lawrie

Christian Aid

The Christian Aid week collection was co-ordinated by the Tuesday Night House Group.

For 2015 the Christian Aid campaign was against oppression of women who in many countries bear the weight of poverty and in addition are abused and exploited.

Thirty-two volunteers covered fifty eight roads in Stretton. Along with a church collection, a total of £30589.32 was forwarded to Christian Aid. Thank you very much to all those who helped in anyway.

Pauline Pidsley.

Tithing 2014

CMS	25.00%	£2318.25
SMS Ireland	25.00%	£2318.25
Footprints	25.00%	£2318.25
Burton YFC	10.00%	£927.30
Burton YMCA	10.00%	£927.30
St Chad's Church	5.00%	£463.65
		£9273.00

Carol Wheale

Alpha Report

Yet again we managed to do another alpha course in September. We had 4 candidates who completed the course, and have continued to attend church, and form a new house group. Mary Jones and Lynette Yates were the leaders and made a brilliant job as I wasn't able to complete the course owing to not being well.

We still hope to run one again this year, so if anyone or you know anyone who would be interested in finding out more about the Christian faith please get in touch with me.

So I give my thanks to all the church members who did a good job of all the talks, and anyone else who helped in any way.

Mary Fearn

Causeway Prospects

The group meets once a fortnight and the programme starts with a time for chatting over a cup of tea/coffee and biscuits or birthday cake to celebrate someone's birthday. Then there are opening prayers, worship songs, Bible stories and either craft, drama or games to enhance the Bible story, followed by creative prayers. All of us participate throughout the meeting and we always close with a prayer and a worship songs. Our new worship song book containing worship songs requested by each member of the group and has been very successful.

We have been very privileged to welcome lots of new members from James Court and our numbers swelled to 20+. I even had to abandon the back room and use the main hall for our meetings because we had out grown the smaller room. This has led to lots more energy in the group. Unfortunately in January Jo, the main carer at James Court, has left to start another job and so our friends from James Court have not been to any of the meetings since Christmas. This is a great sadness to me but I started work as a volunteer at James Court last year and so still have contact with all our friends there.

On February 20th we all went to The Brewhouse to see Sleeping Beauty

with our friends from 17 Main Street and had a great time. Last March we enjoyed visiting Chatterbox's Ceramic Cafe to paint a pot and also visited Scropton Riding for the Disabled and their Special Olympics event in April. This was a great day out as many of our group have riding lessons at Scropton Riding School and were able to catch up with fellow riders participating in the event and also some of the riding instructors. Our annual canal trip with friends from 17 Main Street and James Court took us to Stenson Locks where we stopped to have a picnic on board the narrow boat. In August we visited Beacon Park in Lichfield and enjoyed participating in Crazy Golf. We also visited Sharpe's Potteries for the first time as a group and enjoyed learning all about toilets. The coffee and cakes at the cafe were also very enjoyable.

Our Causeway Prospects Church Service in August was centred around The Good Samaritan with all of us taking an active part - from welcoming people at the door right through to the worship songs, talk and participating in preparing Holy Communion.

We were very excited to organize a Makaton in Worship Workshop in October, which was well attended by our Causeway Prospects group and others from St Mary's Church, the Methodist Church and other

Causeway Prospects groups from Uttoxeter. It was a very successful event and some of the songs and signing we learned at the workshop have been used in our Church Services.

We are regularly involved in community service – distributing and collecting Christian Aid envelopes, helping out at Hillfield Nursing Home and fund raising for Footprints Orphanage. This is an important part of being a follower of Christ.

The three of us – Jo, Heather and myself regularly meet up over a meal to pray, discuss and plan the ongoing sessions and forthcoming outings; and at our last Prayer and Planning meeting we decided to launch a course for our Causeway Prospects group called **Exploring Our Christian Faith** – formulating the contents and length of the course and deciding who would deliver each session. The course started at the beginning of January and runs for 12 sessions until the end of June. This course and the Makaton workshop have been communicated through the United Burton Churches administrator to all the Churches in Burton. Unfortunately as I wrote at the beginning, Jo left James Court at the beginning of the year to work in Lichfield and we miss her very much but wish her well in her new job.

There is now a regular attendance at St Mary's of members of our group and we are very much a part of the community of St Mary's, leading the congregation in prayers signed in Makaton. We continue to share in the life of St Mary's. Our notice board on the south wall of the Church is regularly updated, showing the current programme of events and displaying our work. There is also a folder with a short biography and photo of each one of us, so that people can get to know us and our different ways. There are also photo albums showing the social events we share and the fun we have being together. Please go and have a look at the display.

We continue to value St Mary's support and ask for ongoing prayers for more people to come and join our group and for our friends at James Court to come and join us again.

God Bless

Say Ward

Weddings

We had 9 couples getting married at St Mary's in 2015. Congregations varied from 46 to 130, with the average attendance being 73. The wedding services were conducted by Kim and Nicky Grey from St Chad's, and verger's duties were shared

between myself and Val. Nicky also officiated at a wedding blessing in August. Our worship band provided all the music for two weddings. Thank you to Ruth who arranged flowers for the weddings on request.

At the moment we have 8 weddings booked for 2016, with 1 already having taken place in March. We've also already had a wedding blessing service in March.

Our Marriage Preparation Day was held on 19th March with 6 couples coming to learn more about the wedding service and married life. For the first time George Crossley took part in the presentations as we welcomed couples from St Chads to share the day with us. I would like to thank Sue Dennis and her team for providing refreshments, and also Val & Clive, and Lyn & Stuart for their support on the day.

Please look out for notices about the banns of marriage and forthcoming weddings in the Newsletter and pray for the couples and their wedding services. Any church members would be most welcome at the weddings to support the couples as they make their vows.

Laura Spencer
Wedding Co-Ordinator

Home Groups

I am pleased to report again that we still have 9 groups, most of the groups are studying the pilgrims course, and I have a very positive feed back about it, again it is to early to comment on the lent course, but we have a few people who are not in home groups that are attending for lent, So again a really big thank-you to all of our leaders who do a sterling job.

We are holding a big group party night on June 30th at 7-30 at the Stretton Social Club, so I hope to see everyone there, including friends and partners, so watch the notices for more information later. So again if anyone would like to join a home group please let me know for details.

Mary Fearn

Church Hall

Over the last 12 months the church hall has been in full use by the various community groups including Boot Camp. One Fit Mamma, Zumba, Mother and Toddlers, Scouts, Beavers, Cubs, Art class, Slimming World. Weekends involve children's parties, car boot sale, band rehearsals, family celebrations, Sunday school, feeding station etc.

There's plenty of interest from the community and many enquiries each week to hire this venue.

The fee to hire has remained at £10 per hour for non-regular users and £7.50 for church members or regular hirers.

Last year the side passage had a major clear out and reorganised to create more storage space for the users. There are future plans to make alterations with the kitchen and create a disabled toilet and to change the heating system.

I would especially like to thank Karen for her additional support and help in maintaining the running of the hall and to Tim Cox who has been assisting in any building repairs.

Many Thanks

Liz Coltman

Pastoral Care Team

Firstly thanks to all the visitors they give their time with love and are always so willing. At present 17 church members are on the team. Over the last year we have made approximately 120 visits to between 12 and 16 people. Depending on their need people are visited weekly monthly; some only need one or two visits.

This important work can only be done with all your help being aware of people not well and people missing from church and letting Kim or me know. Thanks again to all

team. God bless you for your willingness to give your time and to share the love of Jesus. Mary Jones

Mary Jones 567055

Bereavement Visiting Team

We have nothing new to report.

I would like to thank the team, all members of St Mary's for providing help at the Memorial Service; it was good to see so many people there.

Unfortunately we have received no referrals, but if anyone knows of anyone that has been bereaved and would like a visit to chat or listen, please contact Sue Jones on telephone 530263.

Sue Jones.

Stretton Lunch Club

This year has seen another year of growth for the lunch club with between 30 to 40 members. We have a strong team working together brilliantly everyone knows the routine and what is quite a busy time now runs smoothly.

We have had several trips out and now that the PCC pays for transport we are able to reach many people that otherwise would not be able to attend so many thanks are due to them.

We have also had a huge change in that because the church hall kitchen is not adequate we were only able to offer soup and sandwiches. Although this answered the need of company to our members several felt that they needed a hot midday meal.

It was decided to approach the William Shrewsbury School and their wonderful head cook Shereen offered to provide a hot two course midday meal every time the school was in session. This she has done and even provided a magnificent Christmas dinner with all of the trimmings we are so grateful to her and her staff for taking on extra work.

We truly hope that the lunch club carries on this year as successfully as it has until now.

Sue Dennis

Crosslinks Magazine

After much thought and prayer, it was decided in the autumn of 2015 to stop producing the Parish Magazine, Crosslinks. The decision was not taken lightly and some people (especially those who do not come to church regularly) were sad about it. The magazine had been going for many years and has provided informative and sometimes amusing articles to many people in Stretton and beyond.

Kim paid tribute in the last edition (December's) to the editors June Kirkland (in the past) and Lesley Bayston for all their hard work and dedication as well as recognising the dedicated team of workers who supported them in getting the magazine produced.

But to quote Ecclesiastes 3:1 'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens' and it was felt that this was the time to put the magazine down.

Services at Hillfield

These continue once a month, with 5 of us socialising and helping residents to find their hymns. Four hymns, a bible reading, a short talk and prayers, all geared to the group. An ex-naval man enjoyed 'Eternal Father strong to save', the son of a church organist enjoys 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'. When we sang the old-age-version of 'Jesus Loves Me' a lady in her 90s remarked it was the first hymn she taught her children. Some who can no longer read the words nod in time to the music. Some who no longer 'speak' join in the old prayers – a blessing for them and also for the service providers. (If you would like the words of the 'old-age-version' of 'Jesus Loves Me' please see June in church one Sunday.)

June Kirkland

Community Day

July 14th 2015 saw the tenth Stretton Community Day. In this time it has become established as a popular opportunity to bring the community together and celebrate the good things that happen in the village. The weather was kind, as it nearly always is and a crowd turned out, though not quite as many as on some previous days. They enjoyed a variety of entertainment in the arena, in church and across the field, while the children could bounce on the inflatables, ride ponies and enjoy other challenges.

About thirty local organisations and charities were represented, many of them raising funds, others just raising interest, giving everyone a chance to see what is going on and perhaps join in.

We must thank the Parish Council for their support and also East Staffs Borough Council for allowing us to use their field as well as our own. But this was only so successful because of all the people who work, many of them out of sight to make sure it all goes off smoothly. This year, the next Community Day will be on July 2nd. Can we make it the best yet?

Dennis