

Proceedings of the PCC

When I look back at the last year of PCC business there have been some important decisions made as well as major changes to personnel within the life of the church. Here are some of the headlines:

Deanery reorganisation – Rural Dean, Alan Vousden, came to visit to share some of the thoughts related to the possible reorganisation of the deanery as a result of all the parishes becoming vacant.

Glenn arriving – In June we welcomed Glenn McWatt and his wife, Irene, as Assistant Minister sharing his time at St. Mark's with St. Mary's Island Church and School.

John leaving – In September, after 11 years at St. Mark's, we said goodbye to John and Judith Saunders as they moved to Buckinghamshire. We gave thanks for their gifts and for all that they had both contributed to the life of St. Mark's.

Way forward within youth and children's ministry – a small sub-committee continued to meet to pray about and discuss the way forward for the growing youth and children's work. This resulted in the exciting decision to appoint a joint youth worker and school chaplain.

Mike King arriving – In September Mike began his role as St. Mark's youth worker and chaplain to New Brompton College. It is exciting to see the opportunities that Mike has already been given, especially at the school.

Sarah Ryan's change in role – After much hard work and commitment in the role of Youth and Children's co-ordinator, Sarah changed from a paid position to working in a voluntary capacity as co-ordinator of the children's work. We continue to be thankful for her faithfulness.

Lucy Wheatley's training – Lucy began to train as a Families Worker with the Family Trust. We look forward to seeing her work in this area develop.

Rod White no longer treasurer – Rod announced that he was stepping down as treasurer at the end of the year. We are grateful for all the work that he has put into the role and for assisting Luke Prankard as he takes over as treasurer.

Buildings

- New cupboards at the back of the hall have improved the storage.
- The playgroup paid for the area adjacent to the car park to be developed as a garden for use by them and other groups.
- There have been on-going discussions about providing a disabled toilet in church.
- Quinquennial inspection of the church resulted in the need for an electrical inspection.

Planning for a new incumbent – this included meeting with Archdeacon, Peter Lock and Kim Hitch from the Hyndman's Trustees who explained the process of finding a replacement for John. We have also been involved in developing a parish profile to be presented to any interested applicants.

John Beck taking on a new role – John Beck has taken on the position of gift aid secretary. Again thanks go to John Waters for his commitment to the role.

Please continue to pray for all the members of the PCC as they seek to listen to God and represent members of the church in their decision making.

Chris Atkins
PCC Secretary

Fabric, Goods and Ornaments Report 2008

We have the following buildings, associated land and other related assets entrusted to us and led by the Churchwardens and PCC; it is the responsibility of us all to care for their upkeep in whatever way we can:

St Mark's Church
Vicarage Hall
The Old Vicarage
The Garden House

The maintenance of The Vicarage is the responsibility of the Diocesan Board of Finance. With Canon John Saunders' departure in October, it is the responsibility of the PCC to ensure the building is secure, regularly checked, protected against damage from freezing and the garden is maintained.

Our buildings are inspected professionally every five years (Quinquennial Inspection), by a Diocesan appointed surveyor, who gives recommendations on repairs and other actions that need to be carried out in the short, medium and longer terms. The Church was inspected this year and inspections on the Vicarage Hall and Old Vicarage are due in 2009.

All of our buildings are in the Diocesan Repair Fund, which we would normally look to draw on to meet the costs of larger maintenance items. This year we contributed a total of £5,007 to this fund and at the year-end have a total balance of £30,417, most of which is designated for the church.

The buildings are insured with the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group, which covers such things as storm damage, vandalism, burglary etc. This year our total insurance premiums were £6,436 and a number of small claims were made.

Church

The Quinquennial Inspection took place in September and the report concluded that the Church is generally in fair condition, both internally and externally. The essential works, identified to be carried over the next two to five years, are primarily repairs to the roofs, gutters, brickwork and masonry. The next step is for the PCC to split all the items listed in the report into minor ones that can be carried out by church members, with outside help if necessary and major ones requiring professional supervision. For the major items a specification will need to be prepared by an architect or suitably qualified person, which will then be submitted to the Diocesan Advisory Committee for its recommendation before going to tender. Depending on the type work involved, a faculty (i.e. formal permission from the Diocese to carry out the works) may also be required. The report also requests us to have an electrical installation inspection carried out as a priority.

Some general repairs have been carried out during the year, including to the roof and guttering due to storm damage and replacement of broken glass in the main entrance door, as a result of vandalism.

Some evidence of mice within the building was observed, which was fully resolved by using the services of a local rodent control and prevention company.

At the beginning of the year, the offertory bag and frame and its contents was stolen from its stand by somebody entering the church and rapidly making off with it, even with members of the congregation close by. A temporary plastic box is now being utilised for offerings and we need to be vigilant to this type of opportunist crime.

In recent months we have been experiencing frequent failure of the tungsten halogen flood lamps inside the building, necessitating the need to change a number almost every week. The reason for this is being investigated and we are considering the option to change to low energy fittings in the future, which will give both a longer lamp life and a reduction in energy costs.

We had hoped to install a disabled toilet this year, possibly located in the 'Choir Vestry'. Having considered this proposal, the PCC agreed that alternative locations, possibly incorporating a new kitchen, should be evaluated before taking a decision to proceed. To this end a feasibility meeting is being arranged with Molyneux Architects. Ultimately there will need to be a balance between cost, location and facilities provided in coming to an acceptable and affordable solution.

Vicarage Hall

The Vicarage Hall has very high usage from a number of regular groups and is generally in a good state of repair.

Through a grant awarded by Medway Council, in support of St Mark's Youth Work as a Community Project, some amenities were added to the hall to further facilitate this work. These included; replacing the main fluorescent lights with a protected design to allow ball games to take place and the installation of a sound system, spotlights and data projector. Due to the high value of this equipment, a security alarm was also installed. The grant also covered the cost a second prefabricated concrete store building, which was erected in the corner of the parking area and the installation of built in cupboards in the hall. These are both used for storage of equipment used by the Youth Groups.

St Mark's Playgroup financed some improvements to enable the children attending to play outdoors in a better and safer environment. These included erecting a fence and gates to enclose the area around the west end of the hall, replacing the Belmont Road boundary fence, levelling and laying turf to form a garden play area and constructing a ramp to allow better access for wheelchair users. In addition, a fence and gate were erected at the entrance to the Old Vicarage garden, to also make this area more secure when used by children from Playgroup.

We were concerned that the condition of the electrical substation at the corner of Belmont Road and Vicarage Road had deteriorated to a dangerous condition. We were particularly worried as the substation is located close to the area used by children from the Playgroup. We are grateful to Ernie Mann for taking this up with EDF and the matter was eventually satisfactorily resolved, which included the erection of a new perimeter fence around the substation.

The large trees along the boundary with Belmont Road were identified as needing pruning or possibly in some cases removing. This is not a straightforward task, due to preservation orders being in place, which determines how any work needs to be

carried out. We hope to be able to conclude soon the best was to address this and take the necessary action early next year.

Garden House

The garden house is generally in a good state of repair, being completely redecorated last year in readiness for Glenn and Irene McWatt, who took up residence in June. We have identified some items that are in need of attention, which are in the process of being addressed.

In an attempt to resolve a drainage problem in the area in front of the study, a small type of soak away was made. Unfortunately, with heavy rain this has not eliminated the problem and we need to consider an alternative solution.

Old Vicarage

The Old Vicarage also has high usage and is generally in reasonable repair. We are expecting that the Quinquennial Inspection, due next year, will identify that some re-pointing of the brickwork and internal redecoration will be required.

A number of small general maintenance items have been carried out during the year on all the buildings located at the Vicarage Road Site, including servicing the boilers and clearing the drains and gutters.

The PCC are grateful to Jason and Stuart Read who again undertook all the grass cutting at the Vicarage Road Site.

We especially thank Pam Alexander, our Church Administrator, Trevor Dyer, Ernie Mann, Andrew Mann, Rod White, Steve Trebill and Mick Aldington for competently dealing with many day to day maintenance matters over the past year.

It is not possible to mention everybody by name, but we do give our sincere thanks and appreciation all those who have carried out the many tasks, seen and unseen, that help to keep our buildings in good order and make them places that are attractive and honouring to God and fit for His purposes.

Glyn Allen and Terry Whittaker
Churchwardens

Gillingham Deanery Synod Report - 2008

The Gillingham Deanery Synod as usual met three times during 2008 in April, June and November.

On 8 April, the venue was St Mary's Island Church. Two principal items were discussed (1) Promoting World Mission in your Parish by Richard Crofts (SAMS) and (2) The Deanery Pastoral Committee Report. In his PowerPoint presentation, Richard Crofts described how Christ was viewed through different cultures and the diversity which is to be found in Christ. He encouraged us all to take world mission more seriously and get involved at local level.

Turning from the worldwide view to something intensely local and parochial, the Rural Dean, Canon Alan Vousden presented the Deanery Pastoral Committee Report (DPCR) and outlined sections of that Report which had changed following consultation. It became apparent that there were a number of points that did not meet general approval which became subject of discussion. These points were to be incorporated in to the DPCR and the revised form sent to the Diocese for discussion and further consultation. This motion was carried by a majority.

The second meeting took place at St Augustine's church on Sunday, 8 June. This was the inaugural meeting of the newly-elected Gillingham Deanery Synod which started with a more formal service of worship. The Rural Dean exhorted us to have a passion to serve the local community and be excited by opportunities as they arose. Refreshments and informal fellowship followed after which formal elections by the House of Clergy and House of Laity were made for the various roles.

The final meeting took place at Rainham on 4 November when the Rev'd Bryan Knapp, Vicar of All Saints, Chatham gave a presentation on community engagement arising from their experience. He described how such a project can take shape and the sources of funding that are available. Opportunities for questions followed which were indicative of the interest stimulated. A further update was given concerning a strategy for the Deanery, this time in the form of a mission statement and proposals concerning the levels of deanery staffing.

The continuing Pastoral re-organisation will, no doubt, feature fully in future meetings as we inch towards an agreed strategy. Action at Deanery level and mutual support show signs of strengthening as some parishes struggle financially and with diminishing resources.

Graham Davis

March 2009

Associate Vicar

Following my licensing at the Bishop's Palace on Thursday, 12th June 2008, I officially commenced my ministry at St Mark's on Sunday, 15th June, which was designated a Service of Welcome to Irene and myself, and was followed by a wonderful buffet lunch, attended by many friends, old and new. The theme of my reflection that day was 'Prayer – the Driving Force', a subject dear to my heart, since I believe that the words of Jesus recorded in John 15:5 "...*apart from me you can do nothing*" will always remain the key to success in any Christian ministry.

My role as Associate Vicar requires the division of my ministry between St Mark's Church and the St Mary's Island Community (church and school). I am expected to work in close collaboration with the team of three leaders, sharing in the ministry of preaching, teaching, visiting and other pastoral matters (including the occasional offices) as appropriate. The link between St Mary's Island Church and School is established through my work as Chaplain to the school.

Since commencing my ministry in mid June, I had precisely three months to find my feet, before the vicar Canon John Saunders announced his retirement. John's wife Judith (one of the four licensed readers) preached her last sermon at St Mark's on Sunday, 21st September on the theme 'Pressing On', while John said farewell to the St Mary's Island Church on the same day. The following Sunday, 28th September John preached his last on the theme 'Farewell, goodbye...' The church presented them both with gifts and greetings to mark their eleven years of faithful ministry.

At the end of August Sarah Ryan stepped down as Youth & Children's Co-ordinator, but continued to serve as Children's Co-ordinator in a voluntary capacity. In September Mike King joined the paid staff as Youth Worker and School Chaplain to the New Brompton College. Mike has proved an asset in both spheres of ministry, and has become a very valuable and respected member of the staff team.

With the advent of the interregnum a Pastoral Leadership Team was set up, meeting monthly on the first Tuesday of each month. The team is ten strong and includes the two Church Wardens, Readers, Pastoral Assistant, Evangelist, Youth Worker, Children's Co-ordinator and the Associate Vicar.

In October a Barn Dance was held on the eve of our Harvest Festival. November 9th marked the annual Service of Remembrance, followed closely by Dave Bilbrough in concert, as part of the HOPE '08 events. On November 30th we marked Tearfund Sunday. After the service, Linda Smith, ably supported by a team of volunteers provided a simple lunch of soup, bread rolls and desserts. No charge was made for the lunch, but donations raised a sum in excess of £500 in support of Tearfund. An Extraordinary PCC meeting was held on the 11th December to set in motion the process for appointing a new Vicar. Your prayers are requested, that the person of God's appointment may be found to fill the vacancy left by Canon John Saunders.

Glenn MC Watt
Associate Vicar

March 2009

Youth and Children's Work

As you read through the next few pages of reports I hope you get a glimpse of how God has been at work amongst our children and their families.

A large group of people continue to be involved working with both our church family children and those outside the church

So much happens amongst our children and families here are the highlights of my year:

- SPLAT! It is such fun and a real privilege to share Jesus' love with these children and work with such a talented team of people.
- Meeting week in and week out with our children as they worship and being challenged by their enthusiasm and openness to God and his gifts.
- ALL AGE services – a real privilege to be involved in leading these as we meet as the whole family of St Mark's.
- Baptism of children we have worked with at SPLAT and Kidz Klub and Sunday groups – a wow for me to see them declare their faith
- Family events such as Riverside family event, The Take Away Christmas and the Black Lion. All which involved a large team and touched a lot of our local community and network of contacts. It is great to work alongside so many talented and committed Christians with a heart for God to touch others lives.

What an amazing, awesome God we have

To all who give up their time a big THANK YOU. Especially to those who have had to take a break from leadership – Caz Read, and Vanessa Chambers. Also to so many of our church family who encourage us and pray for our children. If you wish to be involved in any of these groups please speak to Sarah Ryan.

As a church we are privileged to have such a committed team – read on find out about individual groups.

Creche



We have a team of 6 volunteers who are reliable and CRB checked .We are lucky to have had Karen join our team and Natasha has also returned to our team. We are a friendly group who enjoy looking after the under 2's and we all especially love the cuddles!!

We aim to provide a safe relaxed environment for the under 2's to come and play with a variety of toys allowing their parents to enjoy the service happy that their children are happy.

In September 2008 we started with 3-4 regular children but this has now grown to 4-8 regulars! We have seen them develop into toddlers who are becoming more lively and independent by the week. Sadly for us 3 of our regulars will be moving up to Scramblers in September but we have a couple of new babies who we are looking forward to watching develop and grow!

We have noticed an increasing number of babies/toddlers in church (God's family just keeps growing!!), we are hoping they will soon join us in creche and allow their parents some precious time with God in church.

We will sadly be losing a member of our team in September as she hopes to move on to teaching an older group. We are always looking for new volunteers who are regular attenders of St Marks Church. We are also considering taking on a 3rd person each week in crèche, especially at dropping off time which is when most young children are unsettled.

Lucy, Natasha, Chantal, Karen, Denise and Linda



Scramblers

Scramblers (2 and a half to starting school) continue to meet on Sunday mornings and we now have seven on the register. It is a joy to see the children grow in faith, confidence and enjoy Scramblers.

We follow the same theme of topics as the other children's groups and tell the stories using the Toddler Bible or adapt stories to make them age appropriate. We link the story to a craft, game or discussion relating to the theme. We usually finish with an active game!

It's fantastic to have such a close group of children, who play well alongside their peers and often get the giggles!

Sarah and Rachel continue to lead Scramblers and we've welcomed Sarah Boast and Lucy Miller who provide much needed support and help.

Thank you to everyone for your ongoing support and prayers. We would also like to thank parents for their support and enthusiasm. Please continue to prayer for the group as Sarah Brackley will have to step down from leadership in the summer.

Sarah, Rachel, Sarah, Lucy

Climbers

The Climbers group (infant school age children) have had so much fun this year! Climbers continue to be led by Becky Cooper and Sheena Davidson with the continued help of Duncan Haslam. We have had a stable group of 7 children this year. We have tried to focus our teaching on key stories from both the Old and New Testament with a target of trying to equip the children with knowledge that they will be able to carry with them throughout their lives as younger and older children. This is often done through art and craft, games and stories with a key to having as much fun as possible!

We are very grateful to the continued support of Duncan who will be moving on in the summer as he completes his education and moves on to pastures new! Becky and Sheena are keen to draw in at least 2 more new leaders to the Climbers team. There will be a much bigger group in September as we have a number of younger children joining us from Scramblers. We also require a leader to offer 1:1 support to a child within the group and so we hope that those members of the church family will consider whether or not they may be able to offer themselves to join the leadership team for this group. Please pray. Climbers are a lot of fun and very rewarding and Becky and Sheena are grateful for the privilege of working with such a fabulous, talented and special group of children.

Xplorers

We are a group of those children at Junior School. Over the last year we have had good fun as a group. We start in the Old Vicarage where we can socialise with all the other groups which is really fun. So when we go to the hall we have just enough time for growing and learning in our relationship with God. We like to do this in fun ways that also relate to our everyday lives like, acting, playing games, doing crafts and dancing and singing.

The older children will be moving up to Pathfinders in the next couple of months. We will be gaining some Climbers, so it will be sad to see our Xplorers leaving but lovely to have the Climbers joining.

We like to have socials together as well we recently went on a bowling trip with fun had by all. We hope to have many more socials throughout the next year.

We pray that all the children will enjoy coming to Xplorers each week and feel that they are their own little family.

We finish our sessions each Sunday with Sarah, Jo and the Climbers allowing us to think about what we have learnt and how we can put it into practice. We also use this time to praise God for all that he does for us.

Lucy Wheatley, Angela Bitton, Helen & Trevor Towers, Nat and Jason Read





SPLAT!

It was a joy to reach out to many families during the holiday week in October with a large team of adults and young people. The theme was the 'Psychedelic Sixties' and following the story of Joseph and his so-called 'psychedelic coat' we explored the different highs and lows in his life and how over and over again, God outweighed the evil with good. The children were challenged to look at relationships in their families and how they could be improved with God helping them. Another morning we encouraged them to find, thank God for and use the special 'gifts' He has given them in their lives. One of the strengths of SPLAT is in the clear presentation every year of the Gospel and their need to respond to it and it was very special to be quiet and still for a few minutes and sense God at work on the last morning together. Another strength is in the opportunity we have to chat with parents/carers as they bring the children along to SPLAT and I believe many of them were affected by hearing the children singing and running up to them with excitement and wanting to share what they had learnt or made that day – we need to continue to build on these relationships and to be a real presence in the community. Where next with SPLAT!?

Jeri East on behalf of SPLAT! team

KIDZ KLUB

"I love coming here 'cos I never get to do cooking at home" said an excited little girl last week as she made chocolates for Mother's Day. "We like doing sport best, especially when we can beat-up Simon in a nice way!" yelled another boy as he whacked Simon with an inflatable.

Friday night at The Vicarage is noisy, chaotic and busy with children enjoying a range of different activities – football, hockey, playstation, games room where leaders have a chance of chat more quietly with those wanting to play board games, cooking and arts and crafts. Special events have included a bouncy castle, movie evening, Fourth of July Celebration, old fashioned Christmas party with games and competitions they loved and had probably never played before and many of the children's families came along to the Black Lion Day in February. We are blessed in having a particularly easy and happy group of children this last year who respond well to 'Extreme Time' where we explore Christianity. A series on 'the fruits of the Spirit' made a big impact on many of the kids.

Pray with us for creativity in the programme we put together, good and relevant ideas that will continue to impact these children's lives and their wider families.

Pathfinders

Pathfinders meet upstairs in the Old Vicarage with a varied group of young people from school years 7 – 9. We have a core of about ten, with another half dozen who come on a regularly irregular basis. We have covered various aspects of Christian living, such as choices, consequences, stress (!), as well as looking at the parables Jesus told and the message they have for us today. We use a mix of games, drama (some very dramatic Pathfinders about), activities and bible teaching to try to apply what we know about our faith, to build up our knowledge of the Bible and to help our relationship with God.

We continue to meet for monthly socials with a variety of themes, although food is usually a common thread. Several friends, who would not necessarily come on Sunday, have been along to these, which has been encouraging. We have also had a few occasions when SNUG and Pathfinders have joined for events. With the departure of Adam Staton back to Uni, it has been good for the leadership of Chris, Claire and Mike to be supported by the two GYFC volunteer workers, Phil (from Lincoln) and Jess (from New Zealand), which has meant that we can now have a rota where the leaders can get to some morning services and join in worship there. We thank God for the privilege of journeying with the young people as we all grow in our faith together. We ask again that you would pray for them and us as we learn about what it means to be a young (or not so young) Christian in this modern world.

Chris Atkins, Claire Banner, Mike Haslam, Phil Boyer, Jess Foster

SNUG

This monthly gathering of younger youth grew out of Kidz Klub, offering an early Saturday evening group for un-churched young people alongside some of our own Pathfinder members.

In September fourteen young people went with three leaders to 'Fort Rocky', a GYFC residential, using the excellent outdoor activities of Carrotty Wood. So lots of noisy craziness, terrific games and energetic faith filled teaching along with abseiling, climbing, high ropes and assault course challenges. Along with character, team building stuff, friendship and faith was deepened. Sleep was not

Each month around fifteen young people meet for SNUG (not the best of names...) with games, chill, challenges, café, activity-discussion based learning along with bible verses and short times of prayer.

Themes have included: Dreams, goals and challenges ahead, who do you want to copy? Trusting Jesus, a 'Reel life-real life' movie clip discussion including themes of recognising manipulation and control, mystery in prayer and good coaching for your life. Kerry McMorris handed the baton of leadership to the present team at an evening of fireworks in the Old Vic garden.

The young people have shown a growing consideration and influence on each other and some of the SNUG members are visiting and joining Pathfinders on Sundays.

The present team are considering the shape and direction of SNUG and are in discussion about some options ahead with GYFC leaders.

Mike, Mike (Haslam) Les, Lucy and Trevor

Landmark

Fifteen of St Marks' older youth (14-18's), along with five regular newcomers looking in, meet on Monday evenings at the Old Vicarage. Landmarkers are in the heart of the life of the church, serving with children's groups, Kidz Klub, planning and leading youth-led services, playing instruments, leading in songs for worship, offering café style hospitality. They offer one another friendship and peer-leadership and continue to learn to connect with other unchurched young people (who have links with GYFC and NBC Chaplaincy).

In the summer thirteen young people went with a team led by Sarah Ryan to Soul Survivor Camp for fun, sleepless nights and teaching with an emphasis of being motivated, equipped and telling others the good news of our faith. A Beach trip to the Isle of Sheppey included a loving goodbye to Sarah as leader with cake, BBQ and a hello to Mike as new person heading up the team. Landmark training themes have included: Creation – chance or design? A Parable series comparing 'then and now' cultures; Belonging; Leadership; the Holy Spirit; fruit and gifts; Being and making disciples; (GYFC team visits); Being authentic; looking out for and making ourselves available for others; God-kind of love; Giving ourselves a 'reality check' and having a soft 'heart' for God.

Along with games evenings, meals, occasional home visits, music, humour and chat, the young people also pray, decide and plan for the youth-led services, delegating to each other various roles to serve. This third Sunday in the month Service draws together younger and older youth, 20s, older adults and other groups of new friends from around the town.

Mike, Wendy, Lucy, Rob and Andy

18+

The 18+ group is open to those leaving Landmark, students and anyone else who finds themselves in the 20 something age bracket at St Marks. We mainly meet fortnightly at Martha Prankard's house for socials and Bible studies.

The group is just under a year old and has a mixed membership consisting of those who are at St Marks all year round and students who may leave or return to Gillingham in the holidays. Over this past year we have enjoyed getting to know one another, discussing issues, going to the pub and eating a lot of food, mainly BBQs (provided by the able hands of Lance Hanning) and a lot of chocolate and sweets.

For the coming year we would ask you to pray:

- For relationships to continue to be built among the young adults who attend
- That the group will meet people's spiritual needs
- That God will provide more helpers

Many thanks for all your prayers and support,

Martha Prankard and Lance Hanning

New Brompton College Chaplaincy

This new half-time employed post at NBC started in September 08. I am there to be a caring, encouraging, listening presence for the school community of around 1,000 students and 200 staff. I am encouraged by staff to be a helpful male role-model to students and am part of the Pastoral and Counselling staff teams. These teams consist of a variety of skilled, caring and dedicated people. Around the school corridor, canteen breaks and assemblies I am there to offer a 'hello' and 'how are you?' and celebrate the student creativity, educational achievement, friendliness, energy and sense of community. Lesson involvement has included teaming up with staff for Year 10 'Adult studies' with topics such as 'Life after death' and 'Suffering'. The chaplaincy role dovetails with the work of a good number of other Caring agencies linked with NBC and also GYFC with whom I have an enjoyable friendship.

Each week I regularly meet with students in distress or trouble, facing bereavement, family breakdown and instability and relational, physical or psychological issues. While many NBC students come from relatively stable, loving families, others have a different story. Some have the hindrance and baggage of social deprivation, inadequate or absent parenting, and a variety of confusing, corrosive and destructive influences in their lives.

Every day (I am there Tuesdays and Wednesdays) there are tears, outbursts of anger, walk-outs.....each expressing a young person's frustration, loneliness, fear or feelings of inadequacy. For some, the abusive bravado masks any number of hurts or heartaches at home. For some of these students (and staff) I can offer a listening ear, some helpful advice and experience, a little faith and an offer of prayer. When appropriate I also suggest some challenges to students to change or initiate what they can or are responsible for, along with learning to be aware of the feelings, motives and behaviour of others.

I am particularly joined to the Learning Support Unit, leading two sessions each day in a 'wing' of the school for students excluded from mainstream education. The attitudes and behaviour of these young people is quite a challenge. A few, over the months have been permanently excluded. Meanwhile as we offer training, activities, conversation and challenges there is growing trust, acceptance, affection and their social and learning skills are developing. The excellent staff I work alongside and I have noticed some progress with these kids, worldly wise and yet facing a steep climb ahead towards stability and well being.

Along with activity-based learning we've considered: Coaching skills and motives, Friendship, Forgiveness, the Existence of God.... Jesus. I assure them they are not accidents, but unique, loveable, with gifts and purpose. Our aim is for some of them to have a chance to get back into mainstream. In the LSU at break time students and staff now sit round on sofas supplied by local Christians. They eat toast, talk, get easily distractedgo wild, calm down and talk some more. A 'Chaplain's Fund' donated by Gillingham Christians (especially Bridge Baptist) has so far purchased £300 worth of shoes, coats, underwear, toiletries, towels, refreshments, bus passes, Christmas trips and prizes to lots of young people in need at NBC. On behalf of staff and students I extend gratitude for the loving concern this expresses.

Mike King

Parent Toddler Report 2009

We have continued to provide an exciting afternoon for pre-school children, their parents and carers from within our local community.

Each Wednesday afternoon during term time we play together, sing together, listen to a story, paint and glue together and have refreshments together. We also celebrate special days throughout the year e.g. with sparklers, our own brand of the Nativity, a visit from Father Christmas and our very own Easter Egg hunt. Each one a fun afternoon within a safe, caring environment.

Numbers have remained constant with between 25 and 30 families present each week. Relationships are developing well and we felt the need to go against normal church practise by NOT closing down during the summer holidays. Mums had felt the break too long, missed the friendships and we felt we had to meet the needs of 1. parents/carers with limited finances to entertain children for 6 weeks, and 2. parents/carers with particular problems to discuss TODAY, not in 6 weeks time.

So, we agreed to meet on Wednesday afternoons in August on the Vicarage grass [beautifully cut by my sons-in-law.....Thank you!], Parents/carers could bring older children and we bought new outdoor equipment and games for these sessions. Numbers were smaller than our usual sessions, but were so worthwhile. Beside the free afternoon of fun, the first afternoon I did, three mums came who had specific issues to discuss TODAY!

We have continued our Mum's meals begun last year with 2 further meals out. These have been times of real fun, relaxation and getting to know each other. They have been well supported, but finance is a major problem for many of our parents and we need to find good quality, reasonably priced, relaxing venues. Any ideas?

The team of leaders continue to be excited by the vision God has given us to work among the families in Gillingham and continue to be amazed at how God brings mums/carers to us and the depth of friendships we have developed. Each member of the team brings a special gift to the group and we thank God for them. We thank God too for the team who faithfully provide our refreshments week by week. They are real treasures!

We ask you to continue to pray with us for

- The conversations we have week by week
- The relationships and friendships we are building
- God to make clear to us the way forward
- God to show us how to bring our mums/carers into a relationship with Jesus Christ

Thank you for your support,

With love,

Sheelagh, Nat, Jo, Lucy and Martha

Playgroup

It has been another busy year for the Playgroup with changes to the staff team, a visit from Ofsted, a new statutory framework to follow and also the development of the outdoor area.

- **Staff changes** – sadly we said ‘good-bye’ to two long-serving members of the staff team - Carol Lowe and Lynn Trebil. We welcomed Kelly Voysey to the team and other members of staff have changed or increased their hours so that, together with Darren Thom and some committed volunteers, we have a full compliment of staff to support and work with the children.
- In February the **Ofsted report** recognised the commitment of all the staff in working together to meet the needs of the children in their care. We want to say **thank you** again to all of them for their hard work.
- The introduction of the new **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)** Document has also meant changes being made in playgroup. The statutory framework has an important theme running through it that children are unique and each child has its own needs. Each child has been allocated a key person who aims to meet their needs and make their time with playgroup one that is fun and full of play.
- **Julie** is continuing her Foundation Degree and while this involves a lot of extra work for her, we can see the benefits from her growing knowledge of how young children learn and develop.
- **Garden development** - what a difference this has made! Not only in improving the look of the outside surroundings but also because it allows the children all the benefits of exploring the environment outside as well as inside.
- **The staff** continue to work hard to meet the needs of all the children. This has meant attending further training, working together as a team to provide the best environment for the children and continuing to update both the plans and children's profiles in order to recognise and support the children in following their own developing interests.

Please give thanks for the continued good work of St. Mark's Playgroup and pray that God will continue to use and bless the work that they do in reaching out to children and families in the community.

Gary Atkins
Chairman
St. Mark's Playgroup Management Committee

St Mary's Island Church

Church Secretary's Report for the year April 2008 – March 2009 to St Mark's APCM

Membership: *There are 35 church members (one of whom is a Baptist only member) and a further 15 people come regularly. The average weekly congregation is 35 plus 7 children. Throughout the year there have been five Infant Baptisms, one adult baptism and 3 Thanksgivings. Services of recognition for four new members have been held also throughout the year.*

Events in the life of the church for 2008-9:

Some of more significant events have been: Revd Nigel Uden, Moderator of the URC Southern Synod, came to preach and lead the service in February. The church hosted the Deanery Synod and one of our members addressed the Synod to talk about his recent visit to Peru to visit his daughter who works for SAMS there. After this talk there was a spontaneous financial response from the Synod members, who gave a £75 donation. A church coffee morning added to the amount we were able to send for the work of SAMS being achieved by Brian's daughter.

The Easter Sunrise service was held as usual with members from other Gillingham churches attending. During the Lent period people had been saving spare change for Water Aid and the total was sent as the Easter Offering.

Two members attended the Fresh Visions Day in Ashford (April 08) and were able to share thoughts with Church Council from this day. Other conferences of note attended by various members have been: 'Encouraging Small Churches' (Sept 08) and 'Gaining Charitable Trust Status' (Sept 08) and 'LEP Churches'. Some 12 people attended the Marilyn Baker Quiet Day at Twydall in November. Refresher courses organised by the Diocese have been attended re. Child Protection.

The whole church membership was invited to share a meal after an adult and family baptism and new members were welcomed into the church in June. We were able to join a family 60th birthday celebration in October when several members took part in the entertainment.

Bernie Pinner went to Uganda for three weeks in November to take out some laptops and give specific IT training and to work in the Food for the Hungry Office. Three groups of people now sponsor individual children for their schooling in Bufukhula.

There was a welcome for Glen and Irene McWatt in July and John and Judith Saunders joined the church for a lunch as part of their farewell event. Some members attended the Licensing service for John Saunders at Newton Longville in November.

In October the focus for the month was Mission, when invited speakers came to talk about MAF, GYFC, PYFC and SAMS as part of the service.

Members of the church together with the Salvation Army went carol singing round the island and groups of parents from the school joined as we moved round the island. Some 100 Christmas 'Hope' booklets were handed out to residents. An Advent study guide was used by many church members as part of a whole church focus for the preparation for Christmas and this was incorporated into the worship/ services.

Life and work of the church:

The regular events are: the ladies coffee group (fortnightly), Women's Open Worship – including a bible study focus (monthly). Church members are involved in leading morning worship in the school once a term (every 6 weeks) and there is now a regular commitment to joining the school staff for prayer at 8.20 a.m. on the first Monday of each month. The music group continues to hold weekly practices. The very successful café style Family services on the 4th Sunday of the month continue and are planned by a team (Chris Pinner, John Bloor and Carol Ward). This is beginning to impact on the work with young people and we are beginning to build up a core of families who come to these services. We now have a Youth Work co-ordinator (Carol Ward) and a team of 6 people working with children on a rota basis. Some 19 children have been attending across the year – although not all on the same Sunday unfortunately!! John Bloor is now working in school with The King's Squad (weekly).

The prayer triplets continue and at a recent 'Hopes and Dreams' session for the Church Council prayer was deemed to be the main priority focus this year.

Glenn (and Irene) McWatt attend services on the third Sunday each month and Glenn preaches at or leads some of these services. Baptisms are planned to coincide with the third Sunday in the month, when Glenn officiates.

We continue to develop our outreach work through: Work with overseas students at the Greenwich campus in Dock Road (we supplied 50 Welcome Packs in September for the induction days), support of three children under the Toybox scheme, support for people in Bufukhula and Kumi financially, in person (Chris and Bernie) and as individuals - via Food for the Hungry International. During Lent we supported the charity 'Water Aid' we continue to give monthly donations to GFYC and the Peninsular Youth for Christ and give regularly to Caring Hands (as well as members working for Caring Hands each week). We give our usual donation via St Mark's PCC to the school as recognition of the wear, tear and use of utilities in the building.

There are some 12 members of the church involved with the school on a regular basis either as volunteers in the school, governors or paid members of the staff team. We are actively encouraging the school to join with special services throughout the year and continually explore ways of developing our links with the school. The next initiative will be via a parent survey that Glenn has been instrumental in devising.

Leadership

The support for our leadership team is widening. We still await the finalisation of the re- Licensing of John Bloor, who already enhances the dimension of the leadership team. Glenn McWatt attends the fortnightly leadership team meetings when there is time for a short bible study before the life and work of the church is discussed and then brought forward for prayer. The church is supporting Martin Ferris as he continues his URC foundation training course and the team of three supporters from the church have completed Martin's first (successful) appraisal. Due to the workload the church council agreed to support Martin by releasing him from some of his leadership commitments and this was endorsed at a church meeting.

The recent 'Hopes and Dreams' session has helped the Church Council refocus on the life and work of the church re. 'Where are we going?' The outcome of this time together will be the basis of our life and work in the future.

Coffee Shop Report

On the 19th June, this year, Coffee Shop will be celebrating its 20th Anniversary. Many of St Marks Church folk have been involved over the years, some have gone ahead to be with our Lord Jesus while others have given up because of failing health or have moved to another church. Nevertheless God has always graciously granted our prayer request for others to join the team. We now serve approximately around 50 people from the Gillingham area each Monday.

Over the past year we have put Prayer Request Cards and pamphlets of Christian belief on the tables for our visitors. The Prayer Request Cards have been used, and at the close of Coffee Shop each Monday we sit down as a team and pray over these and also for those with whom we have had conversations with. There is always someone in need of our Lord and Saviour's help, comfort and healing touch, and it is our privilege and joy that we can be of service to those people, by showing we care enough for them to pray for them. We also celebrate and thank God, with those people who have something special in their life that they want to thank God for.

This year, both Celia Dickinson and I have had to withdraw from the Coffee Shop team, and take a back seat, because of failing health. (We both will be celebrating our 78th birthday in July). Celia and I thank St Marks Church for the gift we each received in February and for the thanks and appreciation you have given us for our work in the Coffee Shop. We both feel that we received this on behalf of all those people have been a part of the team over the past twenty years. We will both be involved with the Coffee Shop, in a far less demanding way now. It has become part of our life, and we love those dear people of Gillingham too much to not see them now and again.

I would just like to say, that it was so wonderful for the church to officially appoint Karen Dyer as Co-ordinator of Coffee Shop, in February. I feel that she, with the rest of the team, will continue to show Christ's loving care to the wonderful people of Gillingham. May God continue to bless the work of Coffee Shop through them, with your support and prayers.

Dorothy

As the new Co-ordinator, I am blessed with a good supporting team, and the support of the Church, to continue this outreach to our community through Coffee Shop. I am excited at putting into place some new ideas and strategies that will continue to move this outreach forward into the future and to fulfil its role to the maximum e.g.; a new logo to give coffee shop a corporate identity, revamp of existing advertising board and addition of a banner to go out on the railings each Monday and a regular advert in "The Net" which is distributed to 95% of homes in Gillingham and Rainham. This all helping to raise awareness of where we are and what we do, so as to reach more people and to increase potential customers in the future.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our team of volunteers, both past and present, who have given their time to help make this all possible by showing the love of Christ both in a spiritual and practical way, this really is "Faith Working Through Love"

Karen

Ladies Group Report

Ladies Group has met regularly during the past year at the Old Vicarage at 10am – 11.30am on a Wednesday morning. The group usually has about ten to fifteen ladies present.

In the summer term last year we looked at 'the Holy Spirit – Our Counsellor'. We were looking at different aspects and characteristics of the Holy Spirit and how we can live a 'spirit-filled' life. In the autumn we worked through the book of Nehemiah and this term we have been looking at 'Effective Prayer' which has been both interesting and challenging. Next term we hope to be looking at 'Women in Ministry'. Different members of the group lead the study each week – although this is not compulsory!

Each week we start with coffee and then this is followed by the bible study. We also make sure we have time to share any prayer needs with one another and then have a time of prayer at the end. It is a privilege to be able to share the things on our hearts with one another and to know that others will support and pray for us.

On the first Wednesday of every month we have a 'coffee, prayer and praise' morning. On this Wednesday we do not have a bible study but instead have an informal time of chatting, prayer and praise. Sometimes during this time we sing songs and hymns – with or without instruments.

We are very grateful to Rose who runs our crèche. She comes faithfully every Wednesday morning and looks after our children. Members of Ladies Group take turns to help her but we could do with another regular helper. If there is anyone out there who would be happy to help in the crèche on a Wednesday morning then please speak with Helen Towers or Martha Prankard

We are always very happy to see new faces at Ladies Group. The group is always changing with new people coming and others having to leave because of different commitments. We can promise you a very warm welcome and if you would like any further details then please speak to Margaret Weston or Helen Towers or anyone else that you know who is part of our Ladies Group. We look forward to seeing you!

Mission Support Group

The Mission Support Group, better known as the Missions Task Group (MTG), has continued to meet regularly on the second Monday of each month, to share information and to pray for our Mission Partners. The group comprises a small but faithful bunch of regulars, and it would be good if a few more could find the time to join us for this important part of the church's ministry.

The group had previously been co-ordinated by Canon John Saunders, until his retirement at the end of September, when Glenn McWatt (Associate Vicar) assumed this responsibility, with Chantal Bragg agreeing to liaise with the Mission Partners on behalf of the group.

Apart from encouraging prayer support, the group's remit is also to monitor the level of support being given as a percentage of the PCC's overall budget (currently 10%) for the work of Missions. The amount being given to each of our eleven Mission Partners has remained fairly static for the past two years, but since the giving is based on a percentage of the gross annual income, there is every hope that, with an increase in giving, our partners will reap the benefit.

In the past year there have been some changes.

1. Since the ordination of Rob Ryan in July, the remaining earmarked funds (a sum of £500), which hitherto had supported Rob's work with YCF were then diverted to Lucy Haslam, who commenced working with York University UCCF Relay Team in September.
2. The sum of £500 was also given to Chris and Mandy Tozer to help defray some of the overheads they incurred while working as volunteers with Crossroads in Hong Kong, for a period of nine months.
3. Some questions were raised about whether we should continue to support Joy Thomas, following the death of her husband Dave earlier in the year. However, no action has been taken and the situation is currently under review.
4. Towards the end of the year, Claire Coleman started exploring ministry with OM, and has been successful in all the stages of her interviews and formal preparation. She hopes to commence working as a physiotherapist in one of the Central Asian republics in September 2009.

Below are the names of Mission Partners with serving Organisation in brackets
Katy Barnwell (Wycliffe Bible Translators), Tim & Tricia Barrow (Serving in Mission – SIM), Richard & Carolyn Davey (WEC, UK), Lucy Haslam (York University UCCF Relay Team), Carri MacFarlane (Nehemiah), Lynne Martin (Friends International – Paisley), Malcolm & Abby Smith (GYFC), Brian & Jenny Stutley (CLC, UK), Joy Thomas (OM Ships, UK) Mike & Helen Tozer (Crossroads & Global Hands H.K.), Jan Whitmore (Ministry Encouragement Trust - MET).

St. Mary's Island Church of England (Aided) Primary School

I am pleased to report that St. Mary's Island Primary School has had another successful year in terms of progress and academic achievement, there are now 363 pupils on roll and we will reach two form capacity by September 2009.

We are 'on course for excellence' as borne out by our most recent visit by the Schools' Improvement Partner. I am delighted, as are the Governors of the school that we are continuing to improve, raise standards and provide the children with a good education. Our growing reputation and success is not down to individuals but a partnership between home and school; parents, children and staff.

The Year 6 SAT's tests for 2008 show the third successive year of improvement and I am delighted with the Value Added these results show, which is a measure of the progress children make from Reception to Year 6.

In English 94% of pupils achieved L4+ and 32% achieved L5
In Maths 88% of pupils achieved L4+ and 52% achieved L5 with 26% of our Gifted and Talented mathematicians achieving L6. Which is Key Stage 3 standard! In addition, 100% of the Year 6 pupils achieved L4+ in reading.
We aim to develop the potential of all children whatever their ability but continue to be successful in the number of children gaining places at Grammar school. This year fourteen children are going to Grammar School.

We continue to be involved in significant activities in Medway and the Rochester Diocese. Taking part in the Annual Diocesan Festivals during Lent and Christmas, and this year in the Cathedral's 'Sing Up!' Project. The school has taken part in Heritage Events at the Historic Dockyard, with Royal Engineers Museum, and for the next four years we are participating in Medway's 2012 Project which is very exciting! Sports achievements have included Exceptional Provision of PE in a Primary School and Activemark for 2008. Our table tennis and football teams came 4th and 2nd respectively in recent competitions. Our pupils are always commended on their good behaviour, smart appearance, enthusiasm and sportsmanship when representing the school in the community.

At the end of this month, Mrs Julia Davies, our Assistant Headteacher leaves to take up her own Headship in Dartford, we congratulate her and wish her every success for the future. Julia has been at the school from the start and is an original teacher in every sense of the word! We were pleased to welcome Naomi Clark back from her missionary work in the Philippines in September and hear of her wonderful work with children in a large city orphanage.

We especially value the contribution made by members of the Church of St. Mary's Island to the spiritual life of the school, participating in RE days with great enthusiasm in Acts of Worship, drama and storytelling. Our new Chaplain, Glenn McWatt has got to know us well and we thank him for his pastoral care and support.

After a very long and valued association with the St. Mary's Island Primary, John Saunders relinquished not only his position as Chair of Governors but as a friend and advocate of the school. His presence is sadly missed.

Sharon Day
Headteacher

27 March 2009

Mountevans House

Our ministry to the folk living in Mountevans House continues with the regular once a month Sunday morning service. We are encouraged in our belief that God has called us to demonstrate His love and care for these folk and are blessed as we see their simple trust in the Lord and their interest and care for us and the world in which they live.

They continue to give generously to Tearfund and we seek to update them regularly with newsletters and DVD presentations. In August we all enjoyed an afternoon of music and comedy – 'Down Memory Lane', finishing with tea and homemade cakes.

Graham Davis has joined us on two occasions this past year to share Communion and prayer for healing. Julia Crathorne, representing ASPIRE, shared with us at our service in July and Dave Guard, Youth Worker with Gillingham Youth for Christ, has been seeking to join us month by month since December. He is working to serve the young people in the area around Mountevans House and sees that it is part of God's work to share with the community as a whole and to encourage the young people to serve too.

We would like to record our thanks to those who have helped us as a team on a number of occasions in a variety

of ways and ask for your prayers, that we continue to listen to God as we plan for services and seek to demonstrate His love.

Dorothy Brundle, Wendy Haslam, Keith Sheepwash, Kathryn Thom

Report on Music Worship 2008/9

The story of the music worship teams for 2008 and 2009 at the moment, seems to be one of losing people who are all highly valued, and the increasing difficulty that not many people can be fully committed to regular Sundays because of other commitments

From 2004 until Autumn 2008, we had four teams leading us in music ministry. These were led by Janet Waters, Chris Tozer, Sarah Mann with Vicky Sanders, and Graham Wilkins. The youth services have had their own music ministry team, led over the last year very ably by Simon Thirkell.

In the summer, Vicky and her family moved away; in September Peter Young went to university, and then Chris and Mandy Tozer left for Hong Kong in October. In the coming September Simon will be leaving for University, Claire Coleman is going to the mission field and Duncan Haslam is hoping to join Nexus Christian Music School. Janet's team has bucked this trend recently, with the addition of Robin and Boma on vocals on a regular basis.

This has left us now with 3 music teams plus the Youth team (which mostly consists of members from Graham's team) and the prospect of reducing to 2 teams in the autumn. Sarah and Graham are already having to share people between teams to

make up a small band, which means that for some people, most of the time they are in church, they are playing in a worship team.

Finding new team members tends to be difficult, as an ability to sing or play an instrument is only part of the requirement involved in helping to lead worship. Here is a guide to where our needs are at the moment:

- We don't often need vocalists, as this is the musical gift which is most common, and most commonly offered. However there are occasions when we could do with more.
- We need guitarists, drummers, and especially keyboard and bass players.
- Woodwind, brass etc. would be lovely, but these instrumentalists particularly need to be able to play intuitively and create their own parts. Most team leaders do not have the expertise and/or the time to create parts on a regular basis.
- Team leaders – those with experience in previous churches would be great to have.

If anyone feels interested in joining us, please come forward and speak to one of the team leaders. We don't expect you to be perfect, but ask that you are prepared to let us give an honest assessment of whether you have the musicianship or the heart to be in a team, or have the potential for it. If you are not sure about your skill level, we do try and help improve instrument skills.

We want our music worship teams to bring glory to God, and to be used to draw the people of St. Mark's close to Him in intimacy, wonder and praise. For this we need the support of people with gifts, with prayer, and with understanding. Are you able to support us in one or all of these ways?

Graham Wilkins, on behalf of the Music teams