



The University Church of St Mary the Virgin

High Street Oxford OX1 4BJ

Churchwardens' Report 2011

We began last year's churchwardens' report by describing the year ending as "one of the most significant in the recent history of the parish". At the risk of being repetitive, there is even more reason to begin this year's with the same words.

Not only have Brian and Charlotte been joined by three new associate priests, the Reverends Bill Beaver, David Neaum and Rachel Greene whom we are delighted to welcome, but our long considered and carefully planned second phase application to the Heritage Lottery Fund has been successful and we have been awarded the full amount of £3.4m. This now enables major work of restoration and renovation of the church building and the Old Congregation House to go forward.

In April and May we began a series of parish consultation on how we would like the project to proceed. Craig worked hard to complete the detailed application for full funding from the HLF by the October deadline and we waited until the end of January for the decision. Since the award has been announced, other appointments have been made, Sophie Slade is our new project co-ordinator, Nigel Aplin has become the Building Project Manager, a new architectural firm Caroe and Partners has been engaged as architects and we are looking for an Education and Volunteer Officer with responsibility for opening up the building to our large numbers of visitors.

In October Craig's three year term with us came to an end and he moved to become vicar of a thriving parish in his native Melbourne, taking with him our thanks for his ministry at SMV and a top of the range cassock as our leaving present. In the same month the Reverend Bill Beaver joined us as an NSM and has quickly made himself invaluable, not least in our newly instituted services of Holy Communion at 8.00am and 6.00pm on Sundays.

Early autumn was also important time for another of our former priests: John Henry Newman was beatified by His Holiness the Pope on Sunday 19th September in Birmingham. Amongst the 60,000 strong congregation, were seven VIP guests representing SMV who described the service as simple and moving. Here at St Mary's, the beatification was celebrated at the beginning of October with a reading of one of Newman's sermons and music from our choir.

In August a panel of clergy and laity was convened to interview for Craig's successor. From a very strong short list, David and Rachel stood out as the best candidates. We were very pleased when they jointly accepted the position of associate priest. They each work alternate weeks allowing them time to complete their Phd theses. Having served their notice in their parishes in Dorset, they were able to begin work here on the first Sunday of the New Year. They have hit the ground running and are quickly establishing themselves in the parish. The Sunday lunches in local cafes which they have organised have provided a welcome opportunity for parishioners to socialise, the extra services at Easter, Compline

during Holy Week and an Easter vigil have been much appreciated and amongst the other jobs they have taken on, Rachel leads the Tuesday evening Bible studies and David runs a Christian basic series exploring the drama of salvation. We look forward to their continuing ministries.

In June we had the official blessing and opening of the new church offices at the west end of the nave. They have provided not only more space for parish administration and a pleasanter working environment, but also easily accessible lavatories for everyone using the church.

June 14th saw the Oxford Inter-faith walk from the Jericho synagogue to the Central Mosque via St Mary's. Attracting local religious leaders from the three main faiths and beyond as well as record numbers of walkers, the event amply demonstrated inter-faith friendship in the city. Once again we are very grateful to Charlotte Banister-Parker for the mammoth job of organising the event and steering hundreds of people through the Oxford streets without falling foul of Health and Safety Regulations

The Charities Committee has continued active with sales in the summer and at Christmas and a retiring collection for the Pakistan flood victims in August. A total of about £1300 was raised for Pakistan and for Asylum Welcome, for the Dorcas Trust in Ghana with whom Renny Gye has been working, for Family Links in Uganda and the Basotho Educational Trust.

The past year has been one in which parish life has flourished. The electoral roll currently stands at 111 with larger numbers attending services and up to 145 taking communion on Sundays. The parish list is currently about 360. There has been a range of initiatives to appeal to our diverse congregation and newcomers: during May Brian led two seminars introducing ideas from his latest book under the title *Belonging with Believing*. In Michaelmas Dr Johannes Zachhuber of Trinity College gave a series of talks on Faith Today. Hilary term saw two excellent series, one exploring the relationship between faith and science led by Professors Alister Mc Grath and Paul Fiddes, the other on Religion and Literature led by various academics. The Bampton lecture series was delivered this year by Professor Frances Young of Birmingham University. The Monday Student group has continued to flourish during the past three terms and Alice Willington has run the Silent Prayer group.

Parish hospitality is also operating a high level at the moment. Tony Fennemore and the stewards do a splendid job of welcoming regulars, newcomers and the casual visitors who wander off the street. Under the aegis of Janet Greenland and Julia Reece, those attending the 10.30 eucharist is invited to a free lunch in the Old Library after the service about every three months. Food has been top notch and enjoyed by increasing numbers, about sixty five of us at the last lunch at the beginning of April.

Janet and Julia have also taken on the mantle of the stewardship campaign and done much to rationalise the standing orders and direct debits and have had some success in encouraging more parishioners to contribute regularly in this way.

The Sunday School continued to be run by a several committed families and is now divided

into successful junior and senior classes who periodically make a brief appearance at the end of the main eucharist service to keep the congregation informed of their activities. A series of questions posed by older boys and girls to the clergy was an original and illuminating replacement for a sermon.

Family services have continued in their first Sunday of the month slot an hour before the main service and on special days. There is a core of about twenty families who attend regularly and the church was once again packed for the crib service on Christmas Eve. On Good Friday the Stations of the Cross service attracted about fifty parents and young children. As usual, Charlotte did an excellent job of presenting theology in ways which children were able to understand and ended with the ever popular coffee and cakes in the Adam de Brome chapel.

Donald Reece, another of our long serving NSM's, has continued in to be a very experienced and highly valued support to the vicar.

We have once again been very blessed in the quality of preaching that we have enjoyed during the past year. Our own clergy ably augmented by the chaplains of Brasenose and Corpus Christi have found fresh and lively ways of presenting the gospel. In their differing ways they effectively confirm and strengthen the congregation in the faith. The two University sermons at St Mary's which I heard in the past year were given by Howard Jacobson and Phillip Pullman both excellent and, not surprisingly given their own faith positions, presenting novel perspectives on the Christian message.

It has been another glorious year for music at St Mary's under the consummate hand of our director of music, Gulliver Ralston and ably supported by our organist, James Brown. In addition to the mass settings so beautifully sung by our choir during university terms and for special services, Gulliver conducted the Oxford Mozartium in a concert in December, one of the many occasions in the past year on which St Mary's has been a concert venue. Last July we welcomed back a former director of music, Geoffrey Webber, with his Gonville and Caius choir and in February the choirs of eleven Oxford colleges joined forces to sing a superb evensong to a packed church.

We would also like to conclude by thanking not only our inspirational and apparently indefatigable clergy but also the many parishioners and staff who work behind the scenes to keep the parish functioning, Katharina and Christina in the office, Sam the caretaker, Anthea Madden and the shop staff, Will Pouget and those who work in the Vaults, Gill Harding the sacristan and Julia Trotter her assistant, Adam Hardiman and all the servers, Mary Lewis and all those who provide refreshments after the main Sunday service, Victoria Mort and all the flower arrangers, those who produce the monthly newsletter, serve on the deanery synod, Tony and the team of stewards and Greta Rye (who merits a special thanks as she is now stepping down as rota organiser) and all the readers as well as the PCC. A long list! Without their commitment and energy St Mary's would not function as smoothly and effectively as it so evidently has over the past year.

David Barr and Kate Wilkinson
27th April 2011.