

Clergy report for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting of the Parish of Gornal and Sedgley 7th April 2019

Parish priorities

Prayer and Children and Young People.

Ole Hallesby (Norwegian Lutheran Theologian) wrote that *'If the labour of prayer does not precede as well as accompany all of your work in the Kingdom, it will become nothing but the work of a human, more or less capably done and with more or less effort and agitation as the case may be, but resulting in nothing but weariness both to ourselves and to others.'*

Our parish like so many in the Diocese of Worcester and the Church of England and the wider church is facing many challenges. Our congregations in many ways do not reflect the wider communities which we serve. We have financial challenges and 2 of our churches have not been able to pay our parish share for 2018.

We have adopted the Kingdom people characteristics to help us be intentional in our mission. There is much to do; but we have many faithful and very hard working people in our congregations and much of this hard work is reflected in the report below.

1. Deeply rooted in prayer and study of the scriptures:

Prayer is THE most important activity we do as Christians and having this as a priority is paramount to everything we do as a church. Our personal prayer life

feeds us and the work of the parish. There are several opportunities for sharing prayer across the parish. Parish Prayers happen three mornings each week; all at 9:15am, Tuesdays at St Andrews, Wednesdays at St Peters and Thursdays at All Saints. Additional prayer meetings are also available during each Month; one in the evening at 7.30 pm and one in the afternoon at 2.30pm; both meetings have been held to date at All Saints Vicarage. We encourage as many people to come as are able. The plan is for these prayer times to continue each month.

As we journey towards Easter to celebrate Jesus' glorious resurrection we must first travel through Lent towards Good Friday. As part of that journey this year we have our Lent course at 2 venues. Mondays, 3:00pm at St Andrews Church Hall, Thursdays at the vicarage in Sedgley at 7:30pm. The course material we are using in 2019 is the Prayer Course based on the Lord's prayer. About 25 people from across the parish are meeting together.

Many churches grow when church members meet to pray and study the scriptures outside of Sunday mornings. As a follow on from one of last year's Lent groups a home group was formed which continued to meet and completed the Alpha course together. Those who attend the group have found this of great benefit, and our aspiration and our prayer, is for more home groups to form. In the parish magazines for February 2019 you can read testimonies from many of those who attended the home group and the Alpha course and how people have grown in their understanding, and confidence. We hope that at least one new group will continue after Lent.

2. Renewed and transformed by regular worship:

The St Andrew's congregation has continued to be very flexible and accommodating in their pattern of services, having fewer services of Holy Communion than they might want but being very gracious and understanding of the wider parish. The small choir continues to deeply bless the congregation and Canon Jan Humphries continues to work tirelessly. The worship of the Singing Angels in the hall on a Sunday afternoon and the regular services with families and friends present is energizing and very encouraging.

St Peter's has made the extremely difficult decision to ask the PCC to petition to close the church building. The congregation has worked through many issues but continues to worship God together through the winter in the hall which has proved to be a warm and intimate space valued by many. The church community face many decisions as to the future worship in the hall as and when the church building can no longer be used. A new electronic organ has been gifted to the church and it is hoped that this will bless the worship in the hall. The committed choir continue to help lead the worship with an uplifting variety of worship. ALM Suzanne Bradley makes a major contribution to leading the services. The mid-week parish service of Holy Communion held at St Peters at 10 am on a Wednesday is growing in numbers. The recent Pet Service and the regular Parade services are a blessing.

All Saints has a small but committed choir which is supplemented by other members for the major festivals. Worship at All Saints has been supplemented at the 10:30 service with the introduction of new Mission Praise hymn books; giving an opportunity for the service leader and congregation to broaden our experience of worship. The introduction of the new hymn books seems to have

had a mixed response; with some people feeling that we need to broaden the hymns and songs we have, to those who are struggling with not using Common Praise. Whatever hymn book we use, are we, as a church congregation, being renewed and transformed? Is our worship attractive to those who are not yet members of the church?

The Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion service has been introduced once a month and has been well received with encouraging numbers attending to worship. There have been issues with the organ malfunctioning and discussions continue as to how to remedy this situation.

What would might a new Worship for All service look like in each of our churches? The recent services on Mothering Sunday were well received across the parish.

It is hoped that we will be able to be creative in our worship services in the future, to enable us to engage with those who are not yet members. We recognize the importance of ensuring that we do this together in a way which supports our current members and also values those who are new to church as much as possible.

Each of our churches have people committed to helping lead our worship and who are members of our parish choirs. The choirs have continued to bless us, but it is fair to say that each would be greatly encouraged if new members could be attracted.

3. Equipped to witness to the Gospel of love, compassion, justice and freedom:

We are conscious that many people in our churches feel ill equipped and are reluctant to share their faith with families, friends and neighbours. A good way of becoming more confident is to meet to pray and learn together. It is hoped that St Peter's would be able to host on behalf of the parish an Alpha course this year to which we hope as many of our congregation as possible will come.

The weekly Coffee mornings at All Saints on a Friday and our new coffee morning at St Andrew on a Tuesday morning are a great way of engaging with our community; are we being as intentional as possible in this engagement? Do we need to review how we attract people, who are not church members? New banners, and perhaps using other means to promote events and when the churches are open?

The Ridgeway Surgery in Sedgley is working hard to counter isolation and loneliness and we hope we can work with them; we have started the conversation and 2 members of All Saints are very involved in the project.

The Craft Club at St Peter's on a Thursday is very encouraging as is the Art Club in All Saints Hall on a Monday and each allows people to meet and share in a safe environment.

What would renewing our connection with the community look like for each of our churches? The Foodbank is a very important contribution, and our concerts and social events across the parish not only raise funds but create positive relationships.

4. Dedicated to helping children and young people to belong and be nurtured in faith:

The Calling Young Disciples (CYD) hub team (Guy, Catherine, Helen Laird (Mission Enabler), Suzanne Bradley, Liz Williams, Jan Humphries, Barbara Price, Laura Robinson, Claire Cox and Jackie Hewlett), have regular meetings to discuss our current and future engagement with young people and families. Earlier in the year we met, along with Chris Williams, to discuss how we can better engage with Baptism families of which there are many and are we looking to invite those that have been baptised in recent years to a Teddy Bears picnic. We have delivered or are planning:

- a half term holiday event at All Saints Hall on the 19th February
- a pancake party at St Andrew's Hall on Shrove Tuesday
- the Good Friday Workshop at All Saints Hall,
- and we are looking to put on a Light Party on 31st Oct, as an alternative to Halloween, we hope that this will be at St Peter's hall and we'll include invitations to the unformed groups.

The Christingle service across the parish again drew many people to come and worship and the school carol services in All Saints saw many hundreds of children in church. The Christmas Tree Festival in All Saints was also blessed with the singing of local children at the opening dedication.

As part of engaging with young people in the parish, particularly the unformed groups at St Peter's, we put in the Pet Service on 10th February, which was very well received by those who I chatted to; we had 54 people attend including 10 children. Its estimated that there were around 10 dogs and two hamsters!

Members of St Peter's uniformed groups also sang at the Christmas light switch on in Upper Gornal, rehearsed by Suzanne Bradley.

The Sedgley Scout Group were invited to a service to mark St Georges day and we had a very positive Scout Group Christmas Carol service which was very well attended.

Mothering Sunday was well attended at all 3 churches with the Scout Group being represented at St Peter and the Brownies and rainbow being represented at All Saints and Singing Angels at St Andrew.

In preparation for the Christmas services in 2018 a new leaflet was designed and produced to outline the children and young people's activities in the parish. Many leaflets were handed out over Christmas, and at baptisms in the parish.

Singing Angels and Archangels at St Andrew continues to attract 20-30 children each Week on a Sunday afternoon, with a third of the St Andrew's electoral role being involved with helping. It is always a joy to be involved and seeing God working in the lives of the children and helpers. Claire and Paul Cox and the growing team work very hard and this work is a blessing to the whole parish. The Singing Angels regularly have a service to celebrate the theme of the work they do together and in March 2019 Archdeacon Nikki Groake came to a very lovely service in St Andrew's.

Another parish activity is the development of a new youth group, based mainly between St Andrews and All Saints. It is planned that the group will meet

monthly and has a small but creative team working with Laura Robinson our parish youth and children's ALM.

Noah's Ark play group at All Saints has continued to be a great blessing to the local community with an extremely dedicated and committed team of 11. The group is always well attended and has a lovely bright and lively atmosphere. We are planning a new monthly story with a Christian message to be shared with the children and their carers.

Little Angels play group at St Andrews likewise continues to be a blessing to the community. It is very well attended with a committed and hard-working team which could be added to if people are willing!

Our Open the Book Team are very active and very well received in 2 of our local schools. The team consists of people from all 3 churches and is a very encouraging and significant part of our mission to the parish. Paul Wilmott a children's evangelist represents the parish taking assemblies in 3 schools and Guy takes assemblies regularly in the Straits School.

5. Devoted to growing deeply as disciples, offering our time, talents and money to God:

We have many committed and hardworking people in our congregation giving of their time and talents in many different ways. A huge thank you goes to all who give so much.

We have struggled to pay our parish share for the ministry of the church in 2018 and only St Andrew was able to contribute in full. This year we are

planning a stewardship campaign, to enable us as a church community to reflect on our understanding of giving and hopefully address the short fall. The parish share for 2019 is thankfully lower for 2019

6. Resourced and released to minister to others:

What would being better resourced and released to minister to others look like across the parish?

A couple of people have undertaken training such as 'Diddy Disciples' working with young children to help them grow in their understanding of the Christian faith. A number of people are undertaking training to develop skills and talents for our ministry both on the Authorised Lay Ministers course and the Bishops Certificate.

In the parish we have several people who make home visits and a number willing to take communion to the housebound. How can we build on this across the parish?

7. Ready to engage with and serve our community:

All our churches work hard at putting on social events to engage with the local community. As already mentioned, we engage with the community through the Foodbank, the Coffee Mornings, Noah's Ark, Little Angels and all the activities for Children and Young People including the Open the Book Team. We have a number of people who give time working with the homeless, volunteer with GP surgeries in various roles and volunteer with a number of local charities. We support CHADD and young mums through the work of the Mothers Union which is an active and strong group.

The Ladies Society and the Men's Society draw some people from the community who do not attend our churches.

An application to ASDA has been submitted from All Saints to fund repairs and developments to the All Saints Hall and John Anderson has worked extremely hard on this – it is hope that the planned improvements to the hall will help our engagement with the community in Sedgley.

The St Peter's uniformed organizations are a very significant engagement with the young people of Upper Gornal very well supported by members from the congregation.

8. Committed to making our buildings fit for purpose as a spiritual and community resource:

The St Peter's church building situation has been extremely upsetting for the congregation but as mentioned above the congregation have been courageous and flexible in reaching the decision to petition the Diocese to close the building. As we consider the future of the church hall as a dual purpose building, we have many challenges which present us with a considerable project as we move forward. However, there are within this many positive opportunities as well.

Our buildings are generally a great resource and the recent quinquennial reports at All Saints show that the church building is well maintained but also needs maintenance which will draw on our buildings account significantly. The quinquennial for St Andrew was reasonable but we must be wise that the age and construction of the building present ongoing challenges.

Are we using our buildings, churches and halls, to their potential in our worship and service of our community? The All Saints ASDA bid is significant in this area.

When we look at the church buildings the majority of the time they are closed and empty, what could we do to make better use of them? What could we do to the on-going church buildings to make them a more flexible space for both worship and community events? Do we have a heart for this?

All in all there is a great deal to be thankful for. All who quietly serve our parish and those in leadership roles in the parish deserve our heartfelt thanks; along with many others our Church Wardens and Church Councils give so much in the service of our Lord within the parish.

Despite this we cannot allow ourselves to be in any way complacent. Our very existence in our current state is in question - our age profile does not reflect our community, and we have much work to do if we are to be a healthy and growing Christian community.

The challenges we face need a prayerful and creative response. Our openness and response to children and young people and their families will be crucial to our future as Christian community in Gornal and Sedgley.

With our prayers and blessings in Christ,

Guy and Catherine April 2019