

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST BARNABAS, GILLINGHAM

**Annual report of the PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014**

Hon Assistant Curate to the Rural Dean of Gillingham with Pastoral responsibilities for St Barnabas Gillingham:

Rev T Randall (until 12<sup>th</sup> January 2014, when he retired properly)

The PCC responsibility includes the financial management of the church fabric and property directly owned by the PCC.

The PCC is a corporate body established by The Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measures.

The PCC is exempted by order from registering with the Charity Commission.

During the year the following have served as members of the PCC.

Mr S Marsden	Chairman
Mrs B Beckhelling	Secretary
Miss N Beckhelling	Treasurer
Mr P Walkiden	
Mrs D Nesbitt	
Mr J Bitton	
Mrs B Bridger	
Mrs J Abrahams (née Montgomerie)	
Mr R Abrahams	
Mrs P Stears	
Rev P Guinness	Acting Rural Dean in the absence of Rev B Appleton
Rev B Appleton	Area Dean (from June to December)

Representative on the Gillingham Deanery Synod:

Mr J Bitton  
Mrs B Beckhelling as an observer from June 2014

## Financial Report 2014

Despite the Church being under the threat of closure, the financial position for St Barnabas continues to improve. Net incoming resources during 2014 were around £17k – again, a substantial increase on last year.

Voluntary income over the year is slightly up on last year, helped by donations made towards the toilets. Collections at services have increased as well. The Social Committee's tireless efforts have borne fruit with fundraising increasing again. Overall, the total incoming resources for the year are significantly up on last year, though a large part of this gain relates to the grant towards the toilets. However, even excluding this the incoming resources increased on last year.

Expenses over the course of the year are also up on last year, mostly due to the increased spending on Church maintenance with some of the tasks delayed from 2013 being completed this year, including a repair to the roof, investing in new LED bulbs for the church to increase the light within the church. We have also spent funds on employing the services of an architect to plan and design the new toilets and kitchenette facilities within the church, which will hopefully let us explore creative uses for the church.

Church House has been let on a long-term basis for the entire year and has provided a regular income stream for the Church with only minimal expenditure required.

The halls have proved profitable over the year with income generated from the regular bookings by SureStart and the new Ladybirds Pre-school, along with several one-off bookings for children's parties etc more than off-setting the expenditure on the hall.

The number on the electoral roll: 42 at APCM; 42 on roll in December 2014.

## The Year 2014

2014 began with St Barnabas under continuing threat of closure.

The PCC held an extraordinary meeting in January to put together the final submission to the Church Commissioners, following representations to the Archdeacon and the Bishop himself. In April a delegated representation of the Church Commissioners visited all the churches within the Deanery keen to find out some pertinent and common information about each of the Churches. In early May, the Church Commissioners deliberated on the proposed scheme at a meeting in London which was attended by a large contingent from St Barnabas, as well as representatives from the Diocese and the other churches. The Church Commissioners listened to both sides of the proposal and then arrived at their decision based on the large number of representations received and the untested possibilities that had not been considered by the previous plan. That decision was to refer the proposal back to the Bishop for further consideration. Unfortunately, while not the outcome we had hoped for, the church was still open for business and had a further opportunity to show what could be achieved. The large banners were removed and the PCC started planning and making decisions with a view that St Barnabas would be open long term. The removal of the banners has sparked renewed interest in the church, with fresh enquiries for baptisms and weddings being received.

Also in January, Rev Tony Randall who had kindly for five years ministered to the congregation of St Barnabas with tenderness and great empathy, that he has become a fond friend to many, retired properly. The congregation said goodbye to Tony and Sheila with sincere gratitude, tinged with sadness for their loss.

But every cloud has a silver lining, and the close ties we were developing with St Luke's blessed us with a team of retired priests, who by invitation began ministering to us, very soon settling into a pattern of support so that St Barnabas was able to offer a Parish Communion Service for every Sunday in the year, with only two being by extension. Eight additional services were offered including our patronal feast day Eucharist, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Eucharistic Services and four Christmas services. We were proud to continue our traditions of having some well-attended special services such as Mothering Sunday, Easter Sunday, Remembrance Day and Harvest. The annual Good Friday workshop from 11-2pm which is enjoyed by children and adults as an all-age activity was particularly successful this year.

Average Church attendance on 'normal' Sundays rose to around 36 adults. There were 13 baptisms in the year (more than double the number in the previous year), almost one a month from May to November (significant because in May following the meeting of the Church Commissioners, our canvassing against closure banners were taken down) and then in December we had a baptism of six (two families). Preparation for the baptisms involving children was undertaken by Elizabeth Walkiden and the priests conducting the baptisms undertook the preparation for adult candidates. Peter Walkiden is thanked for soliciting congregational views on music in church and for planning our hymns Sunday by Sunday, Jon Bitton for his work as Sacristan (and for managing hall bookings) and the sidespeople for the welcome they offer all who enter our Church.

Other regular activities through the year enjoyed by parishioners included the Friday Fun Club (for the youth in our Parish), Wednesday Tea/Coffee Afternoon (for the elderly, disabled and lonely of the Parish) and a Monthly Parish Lunch (which now regularly serves around 30-40 people). The post-service tea and coffee is well-received and most of the congregation stay to chat, often needing to be encouraged to go home even an hour after the service. Most notable is the fact that each of these activities is run by a different group of congregation members, each doing their little bit and each of the members is owed a debt of gratitude for the work they undertake collectively on behalf of the Church, a true team effort. Therefore rather than capitulating without an incumbent to lead, with God as our guide and our patronal namesake as our example, St Barnabas has begun to grow from strength to strength, drawing encouragement from inspired ministry from a variety of priests, each bringing their own personality and personal message, and each of whom has enriched us uniquely.

The Social Committee has undertaken some significant social and fundraising ventures including a Christmas Fayre (which was the most successful compared with previous years), regular jumble sales and indoor boot fayres. Regular leaflet drops have maintained the profile of the active Church within the Parish and St Barnabas now has a Facebook page set up by one of its very own young people, Timothy Walkiden, and a new look website to make us much more accessible to the wider public.

Given the levels of deprivation in our Deanery and the high numbers of children attending schools in our parish, a holiday club in the summer holidays was set up to provide some activity for the local children. This was well received by parents and children alike. Many expressed an interest in seeing this continue for future years, and some indeed hoped to see it offered in other holidays as well.

Maintenance and repair tasks have been undertaken as needed in a timely manner, including the repair of a leak in the roof to the left of the nave altar, cleaning of low-level guttering and repairs to the guttering above the vestry. No further water ingress has been noted. The high level bulbs have been replaced with LED bulbs which are not only brighter than the previous bulbs, but also more energy efficient. Thank you to Jon Bitton and Dave Hanning for fitting all the bulbs for us one Sunday.

A small group of parishioners get together once a month to undertake cleaning and maintenance jobs in the church and its premises. Flowers adorn the church at special events, as a result of the efforts of this group at special services in the year, with the church looking more spectacular each year.

The halls are now used full time during the daytime each week in term-time. This has led to a reduction in the number of occasional lettings, however the regular income has been welcome. The Church house long-term letting is progressing well, and again provides some regular monthly income.

A faculty for re-ordering works in line with some of the recommendations of the Church Buildings Council has been applied for. This will see the church becoming more accessible with toilets and tea-making facilities located within the body of the Church and some space freed up through disposal of surplus pews for new types of ministry and also increased use of the building throughout the week.

### **With other churches**

From June 2014, following attendance at the Great Chapter meeting, St Barnabas became aware of the Medway food bank and started contributing on a regular basis – the generosity of our congregation is limitless.

This year, St Barnabas, given a new lease of life by the ruling of the Church Commissioners, has doggedly refused to 'extinguish itself' and has made it its mission to engage with as many churches as possible within the Deanery. Invitations have been extended to the Deanery Churches and details of services shared. As a result, St Barnabas has worked with St Luke's with its readers and priests as regular providers of our Sunday Eucharist, and members of our congregation also access the mid-week services at St Luke's when not available at St Barnabas. St Barnabas Church has worked with members of St Mary's Island Church and with St Augustine's and St Barbara's, Brompton, and we are now looking for increased opportunities to work together in true partnership.

A fine example of our churches working together was our nine lessons in carols (by candlelight) service which was led by Reader Ian Jeffery from St Luke's in Advent, was well attended and brought together many of our local churches, with many represented either in leading the service or reading one of the lessons. A special thank you to Sandi James, for preparing and leading our own band of singers, and to the choir from St Mary's Island for their support. It was lovely to have a choir once again singing along to the organ, expertly played by Father John Thackray. The Crib and Christingle led jointly by St Barnabas and the Reader at St Mary's Island and involving many of our local youth was simply awesome – 173 people attended.

St Ann's Music Group, 'First Light' from London performed an inspiring concert at St Barnabas Church, which was well-attended and supported by attendees across the Deanery. The evening opened up a number of possibilities of what might be.

Once again St Barnabas remained open throughout the day for bikers and striders in aid of the Kent Churches Ride and Stride. Sponsored members of our Church managed to visit 12 churches within the Deanery and in the process raised £335, the best in the Deanery, half of the proceeds going to the Kent Churches Trust and the other half to our own Church.

### **With the wider community**

Surestart continues to meet in the halls, and were pleased to be offering their outreach to children and families from a strategic position for greatest access to its reach areas and schools.

In collaboration with Medway Council Early Years, a new committee-run Pre School, Ladybirds at St Barnabas (re-located from another local Church which had reclaimed its premises) has started to use the Church Halls on a regular basis, bringing much needed regular income for the continuation of our Church. This came with a grant to develop the facilities within the Halls to meet their needs and included installation of new kitchen units, redeveloping the Ladies Toilets, providing disabled access to the halls and redesigning the storage cupboard. It was lovely to see a Pre School holding their nativity in the Church again, nearly a decade since our own St Barnabas Pre-school closed.

An off-shoot of making ourselves available to meet an identified need within the community for 2-year funded Pre-school places was the successful application for a sizeable grant towards re-ordering the Church so it could continue to offer mid-week outreach while earning money through letting its halls, thus ensuring that the Church building does not sit empty for the most part of the week. The PCC has successfully applied for a faculty and is working with an architect to realise this project and open up possibilities. Work is scheduled to start in the new year.

MHS Homes, as part of their community work, with a working party of 20 or so people took one morning to give our Church grounds a much-needed prune-back and tidy up, clearing the ivy and bushes from the side of the church, trimming down the trees, clearing rubbish collected over many, many years and generally sorting the outside of the church. The result is that the Church building looks used and cared for.

A Pentecostal church has started to use the halls on a Saturday evening on a regular basis.

The Life Champions Academy used our Church, as a training venue for a group of 20 undergraduates, honing and learning life skills while raising funds for a large charity.

Bryony School once again had their Speech day at St Barnabas, to a packed church. Napier School visited for Harvest, and brought with them a huge collection of tins, packets and produce to add to our own Church contributions for collection by Caring Hands, distributing to the needy of Medway. Children from Napier visited each term to play games with the elderly at the Tea/Coffee hour. Several children from Napier also attend the Church Youth Group on Friday. Leaflets were distributed to the schools regarding Christmas services and the Crib and Christingle service had its best attendance this year.

The halls continue to be a popular and affordable local venue for children's parties.

The Church has contributed extensively to the Shoebox appeal (21 boxes), donated its Christmas collections to the Children's society (in excess of £300) and held a Harvest supper with proceeds to Footsteps, an overseas charity, supported by the Rev Tony Randall.

## **Future Ministry**

Two members of the PCC have embarked on the Mission and Ministry Course, we pray for them and that God will reveal through this the way forward for our Church and its community.

Members of the PCC have begun to engage with Rev Mark Brown who has been commissioned by the Bishop of Rochester to undertake a review of the Deanery Mission and Ministry Plan. Again we pray for God's guiding hand in shaping ministry for the people of the Parish of St Barnabas, Gillingham.

Finally, sincere gratitude from the Officers to all members of the congregation and parishioners for stepping up in our absence, but most of all for your encouragement, prayers and communion with us in carrying out our role this year. It has been a humbling privilege and a pleasure.

Belinda Beckhelling, PCC Secretary

Natasha Beckhelling, PCC Treasurer