



Our aim is to know Christ and make Him known

Parish Review 2017

For the last few years we have produced substantial parish review booklets to summarise the wide range of activities and mission at St John's. However, despite 2017 being a busy and eventful year, I thought a shorter review this time would be more appropriate. Our aim at St John's remains to **know Christ and make him known**, but at last year's APCM I used the acronym **PRAISE** to help navigate us through our 2017 goals.

- P** Pray
- R** Read the Bible
- A** Ask the question, "Who cares?"
- I** Invite others
- S** Share (the parish share and sharing our time and talents)
- E** Expect God to do amazing things.

P - PRAY

Prayer is vital to our life as Christians and an important part of our life at St John's. We meet at 9am on Saturday mornings to pray for the church and the needs of the world. We have prayer in our services and many of our small groups set time aside to pray. After our monthly 10:30am communion services, there is also the opportunity to receive personal prayer in the Gardener Chapel.

Last May we joined the global prayer initiative, *Thy Kingdom Come* - 10 days of prayer from Ascension Day to Pentecost. Each day there was the opportunity to engage in a different style of prayer – such as Celtic Prayer, a Praise & Worship evening, traditional services and so on. In the autumn our small groups then used the 6 week Prayer Course.

The goal of all this was to get us more excited about prayer. We have been given the privilege of being able to talk to God and, furthermore, when we pray God listens. Times of revival in the church are always preceded by a rediscovery of the power of prayer. It was an encouragement to discover how enthusiastic our curate, Ernest, is about prayer. We are currently putting together the programme for this year's *Thy Kingdom Come*. Let's pray with expectation.

R - READ THE BIBLE

Communication with God is a 2 way process. Growing deeper in our relationship with Jesus means spending time hearing him speak to us. Last year I encouraged us to read the Bible – maybe by simply reading a gospel or Acts or another book in the Bible, or by using a booklet of short devotions or Bible notes to start each day. Remember also that many of the sermons at St John's are recorded and can be accessed via our web site.

The best way to go deeper with God, however, is through one of our home groups. These are groups of ordinary people who use a study booklet to help them understand the Bible, and therefore God, a little better. The small group setting is where our faith tends to grow the most. In 2017, many benefited from belonging to a small group – 2 groups met in the evening, one in the afternoon and Mums the Word on Thursday mornings. If you are not already in a small group, do think about joining one.

In 2016, our children and youth work continued – mainly on Sunday mornings in term times. An informal crèche was available for the very young each week with toys. Explorers (4-9 years old) and Pathfinders (10 to 13 years old) continued to meet in their own rooms and CYFA (14 to 18's) met on Sunday evenings at the Rectory. Thank you to all the leaders who faithfully teach our youngsters the Bible each week.

A – ASK THE QUESTION, “WHO CARES?”

Last year, a major initiative called “Who Cares?” kicked off in many churches across Suffolk. The goal of “Who Cares?” is to connect with hurting people and to let them know that somebody does care – we care and God cares. Through some of our regular events, community groups, the holiday club and out on the street, we received over 200 responses to the question “What hurts the most?” from people in Elmswell. As the question was asked, some people were open to talk about issues right away and so we spent time listening. Other folk simply recorded their response anonymously. Through asking the question, we have gained insight into some of the areas where the community is hurting. For example, loneliness and physical suffering are major issues for the older generation. However, in Elmswell, the largest response category of all has been to do with issues of injustice.

Justice is something Jesus is passionate about and, as his disciples, we should be too. I am reflecting on how we can encourage and help those who feel aggrieved about injustice to make a real difference in the world. After all, this is an important part of our mission as the church.

I - INVITE OTHERS

When I ask people how they became a Christian, the most common response is, “a friend invited me to church or a church event.” During 2017 we ran a lot of social events. Such events are perfect for inviting friends along to. This enables them to get to know more Christians and so coming to church or seeking to know more about Christ becomes much easier.

Last year’s programme of events was extensive. Our traditional Summer Fair and Christmas Fair were amazing – thank you to Katrina, Rosie, Linda and everybody else who worked so hard to make them such a success. Santa’s Grotto at the Christmas Fair attracted young families and there were many positive comments about the whole event. Thank you to John Evans for organising a wonderful Quiz Night and the extremely entertaining Variety and Spice concert. The annual Church barbecue was another enjoyable occasion and I was so pleased to see friends being invited. Alongside these special events, the Ladies Lunch, Men’s Breakfast, Coffee Break and occasional Church walks are perfect occasions to meet for friendship and to invite friends to. Many, many thanks to all who made these wonderful occasions happen throughout 2017.

It is worth reiterating that entering an unfamiliar setting such as church or Coffee Break can be scary. Imagine how difficult it would be for many of us to enter a betting shop! Let’s help our friends accept our invitations by going the extra mile - the key is to offer to meet them at the church door or to pick them up on the way.

Last year, a group known as SOFT was formed. SOFT stands for Social Outreach & Fundraising Team. This group’s remit is to brainstorm and co-ordinate St John’s social, outreach and fundraising events so that we can get to know each other better, reach out to our community, whilst also helping to raise funds.

S - SHARE

In 2017, the parish share rose to over £64,000. As a church we pay money to the central diocese each year. This money covers the cost of having clergy – their pay, housing maintenance, training – as well as other central support costs and support for mission. It is very important that we pay the parish share and I am so pleased we again managed to meet this challenge – thank you so much.

However, share is about sharing our other resources too – such as our time and talents. As parts of the one body of Christ, we all have gifts we can share for the common good. Thank you to so many who worked hard last year in serving by cleaning, catering, welcoming, arranging flowers, leading music and singing, doing administration, helping out with the children’s work ... and the list goes on and on.

We still have many gaps, however. If you feel God is calling you to help out in any way, please do please speak to me or to Rosie. We’d love to have you involved in serving the body of Christ here at St John’s.

E - EXPECT

E is for Expect. Expect God to do amazing things. Expect God to do the impossible.

It has been exciting to see God at work in 2017 and we should expect to see this continue. At the beginning of the year, we introduced our new pattern of services – the main difference occurring on the third Sunday in the month. At 9:30am, we have Breakfast Church – a more informal and contemporary service with breakfast available from 9am. This is followed at 11am by a lovely Common Worship Communion service with the traditional organ. This change has proved very successful and I look forward to seeing this continue to thrive. At St John's we have a variety of worship styles and so there is something to suit everyone as we seek to grow in number. A big thank you to all our musicians and singers – contemporary and traditional.

As well as our weekly services, there were a number of special services in 2017- Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Ascension, our Praise Evening with the Battisford Praise Band, Time to Remember, Remembrance Day, Christingle and Christmas services. I was particularly pleased to see 260 in church for the School's carol Service as well as 160 for Little Elms carols. We also welcomed year 5 and 6 into church for a *Discover Advent* experience run with help from the Cathedral. This is all part of our vision to strengthen our links with the school and nursery and to grow younger.

We have welcomed a number of new people into the St John's family during 2017 and many are getting involved in much of what goes on. It is exciting to see God bringing this new growth. We still face many challenges – finance, pastoral concerns, a relatively low number of children compared to a few years ago. However, I do believe we can go forward in faith as we expect marvellous things from our marvellous God.

As well as welcoming new people, we also said farewell to others - in particular the Fife family. Although it is sad to see them go, I am confident the Lord has great things lined up for Miriam and her lovely family in the years ahead.

2017 saw us begin our plans to repair the chancel ceiling. I am delighted the builder's quote is £20,000 than the £54,000 originally estimated. We have raised this mainly by allocating some trust fund money and by obtaining various grants. I am delighted that the repairs are now currently taking place. In late 2017, lead from our roof was stolen, which resulted in significant media coverage. We are grateful to the local firemen for helping to get us watertight. Thankfully, due to the installation of the roof alarm two years ago, we are covered by insurance. This was traumatic at the time, coming on Remembrance Day, but I am optimistic that the new stainless steel roof, replacement carpets and curtains and redecorating will actually mean we end up with an even better place of worship. God works in mysterious ways.

Finally, a reminder about Growing in God – this is the Diocesan Vision for Growth, to which we are 100% committed. The vision is to see flourishing congregations in Suffolk that make a difference. The 4 priorities of Growing in God are:

- Growing in Depth – responding to the call of Christ in every part of our lives
- Growing in Number – drawing contacts we have into the life of God's kingdom
- Growing in Influence – reaching beyond ourselves in our impact on the wider world
- Growing Younger – building churches whose age range reflects our communities

On reflection, I see 2017 as continuing to lay foundations for future growth. I have talked before seeing our vision in terms of 4 streams – (i) going deeper with God, (ii) enhancing our worship space, (iii) inviting people to join us (hospitality) and (iv) going out to engage people where they are. I see God enabling us to make progress in all 4 of these – sometimes using crises such as the lead theft to enable it. Let's continue to expect amazing things from our amazing God, especially as Elmswell grows in size.

Once again, many heartfelt thanks to all who give St John's such a welcoming atmosphere and to all who work so faithfully.

International and Home Mission Committee

In 2017 our main mission partners were Samaritans Purse, CPAS, OMF International and the Stowmarket Foodbank, although donations were also made in response to Hurricane Irma and to Tearfund. We also continue to support Tim Curtis (CMS) in prayer – his latest prayer letter can be found on the notice board in the church room.

a. Samaritan's Purse

Harvest Sunday had a lemon theme to it. Using the title, "When life gives you lemons," it focussed on how God can use the resources we have to produce something wonderful. Money was raised through the service collection and a "lemon cake sale" for the Raising Families project, which helps families in Africa out of poverty through enabling them to make the best use of the resources they already have. A massive thank you and well done to everyone who supported this and Operation Christmas Child in November (we collected over 40 shoeboxes of gifts for needy children abroad).

b. CPAS

The Church Pastoral Aid Society was founded in 1836 and is an Anglican Evangelical Mission working with churches in the U.K. and the Republic of Ireland. For many years St John's has been privileged to support their work of spreading the gospel throughout local churches, youth camps, house parties and the publication of resources for church evangelism and teaching in the Church of England. During this year St John's has supported the work by prayer and giving - £150 from boxes and £1000 donation in recognition of their management of our main trust fund over the years.

c. OMF

OMF International was originally known as the China Inland Mission. It was founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865 with the goal of reaching the people of China with the good news. Since then it has grown to include bringing the Gospel to the millions of inhabitants of East Asia who have never heard or had access to the message of Jesus Christ.

The work of OMF is diverse, ranging from church planting to missional business, student work to medical practice. The aim is to present the gospel, in a culturally relevant way, through word and deed.

Since 2016, St John's has started to build stronger links with OMF. We support Margaret Rugira (a missionary in Japan) by prayer. Her prayer letters are available via email or see the printed copy on the notice board in the church room. In October, we celebrated Mission Sunday and Alex and Vatha Theobald from OMF came to preach, help with the children's work and update us on the work OMF is doing in Japan.

d. Foodbank

We are very pleased to have been able to support the Stowmarket Foodbank again during 2017, giving help to families and individuals during times of need. We are very thankful to all of you who place your donations in the box at the back of church each week. Volunteers from the Foodbank collect from The Rectory on Tuesday mornings.

The Friends of St John's Church

The Friends of St John's was started in 1995 when the chancel roof was in urgent need of repair. Since our first Coffee Morning we have held Sausage Suppers, Garden Parties, Coffee Mornings, Beetle Drives, Concerts and Recitals, Harvest Horkeys, Just Desserts, Craft Exhibitions, Art Exhibitions, Flower Festivals, Poems and Puddings, talks by invited guests and an Annual Service.

For the last few years we have held Lent Lunches, where we had a Bible Study, with question and discussion, followed by a lunch of soup, bread, tea or coffee. The average attendance is 13; a collection for charity is taken.

We are independent of the Church, being a registered charity with a Constitution and a Committee of Trustees. Our Annual Meeting is held in June each year.

The money raised may be used towards maintenance and repair of the fabric of the Church, also for Church insurance. Members pay an annual subscription and over the years we have raised more than £56,000 for the Fabric Fund and Insurance.

Following the theft of lead from the south aisle roof in November and the need for repairs to the chancel ceiling and redecoration in the chancel, funds are still required.

Our events are open to everyone and we are always pleased to welcome new members.

For more information please contact Jean Folkard (tel. no. 01359 242099)

Jean Folkard

Lavenham Deanery Synod Report 2017

The Lavenham Deanery Synod has met 3 times in 2017. Deanery Synod elections were held in parishes at their APCMs therefore we welcomed several new members at our June meeting. Benefice reports were received from Elmswell (February), Lavenham with Preston St Mary (June) and Monks Eleigh benefice (September).

In February Rev David Messer (then Rural Dean of Stanton) spoke to us about the work of the USPG and the Anglican church in India. The Rev Tiffer Robinson updated us about the work of the General Synod

In June the Synod was held in Felsham church, a hastily called General Election taking over our usual venue in the village hall. We had talks from Ruth Dennigan about the support offered to ordained and lay ministers by the diocese, ending with a mention of the 'Party with a purpose' in which Bishop Mike was hoping to attract those considering either ordained or lay ministry.

There was a talk by Richard Stainer about the linked Diocese of Kagera in Tanzania which was very inspirational showing how our donations can go a very long way to helping people out of poverty.

In September we heard from Helen Woodruffe about the Diocesan support to work in schools and the Pilgrim 18 initiative linking curricular items to events concerning the 340th anniversary of John Bunyon's 'The Pilgrims Progress'. The Discovery Centre (the Diocese's educational outreach department) is also working on 'The Emmanuel Project' a complete RE course for schools from the church.

Insurance and lead theft was again a hot topic, the high-profile theft of Elmswell's lead ensuring it remained on the agenda.

Finance: Howard Webb the Deanery Organiser reported at each meeting. Centenary Share payments were still falling short across the diocese but the Lavenham Deanery was still able to meet about 99% of the share requested.

At the end of the year the Rev. Stephen Earl's 5 year term as Rural Dean came to an end and he chose not to continue for another 5 years, he was replaced by the Rev. Tiffer Robinson.

Christians Together in Elmswell

a. General Information

For over 40 years the Churches in Elmswell have met to worship together at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and for the last 13 years or so have run a Children's Holiday Club in the Summer. Our aim is to encourage Christian people who live in Elmswell to share fellowship and we would love to welcome people of any denomination or none to our united services which are advertised in the Elmswell Newsletter.

Last year we held joint services on Good Friday at the Baptist Church and at Pentecost at St John's. The Women's World Day of Prayer Service was also held at St John's.

For more information contact Jean Folkard, (tel: 242099), Christians Together in Elmswell.

Jean Folkard

b. Open the Book

Yet another good year going into Elmswell Primary School during term time to act out such a variety of Bible Stories from the Old and New Testaments, some more challenging than others!. We still have access to additional props from Brian Clarke whenever we need them.

We meet up at 9am in School and open with a prayer before reading through the story (we have a booklet to follow, listing the stories with suggestions for the roles to play, props to use, prayers and other suggestions). We decide who is going to play what role, sort out costumes, props if needed, songs to sing and then re-read the story with each person playing his/her part. If the Hall is vacant we are able to go in to set up and have a rehearsal before the children enter at 10.15am when we sing our chosen song with Tony playing the piano if he is available. We aim to sing songs that have actions so that the children can interact with us.

The team is myself, Tina, Dorothy, Barbara, Mark, Katrina and Sally together with Jackie, Dave and Tony from The Baptist Church which gives us a good number should anyone not be available on the day.

We all find Open The Book such a rewarding project and are always looking for a "new twist" to bring the Bible Stories alive for the children.

Brenda Begg

c. Holiday Club

The Holiday Club in August was superb as 80 primary school children attended plus over 20 Fit Crew (teenage helpers) and many adult leader/helpers.

The title for the week was 'Watt-A-Lott Castle' and it looked at God's Kingdom and His values, covers the themes of endurance, courage, loyalty, hope and the Palm Sunday story. We were delighted that John Hardwick came to entertain and teach the children about God from the front. Once again the children loved it and the Fit Crew were excellent - helping the children with the craft and outside games. Finally, the week closed on Thursday afternoon with the Hot Dog Supper - a great opportunity for families to join us for a taste of holiday club. Thanks to all who worked so hard to make it a super week.

Peter Goodridge