**St Mary’s Church Report to Annual Parish Council Meeting 15 May 2018**

As we approach the end of another full year in the life of St Mary’s Ecumenical Church, the Church is active, vibrant and in a prime position at the forefront of North Marston’s Village Life and Community. Thanks to brilliant support from our Clergy and Lay Leaders, we have maintained our regular services and activities across the spectrum, despite an ongoing Interregnum.

The third series of advertisements for the post of House for Duty Priest for North Marston and Granborough is in progress, with a view to interviewing potential candidates in early June – sadly, we are not optimistic!

The Mission of the Church continues to flourish. Average attendance at regular weekly services has increased slightly: the focus on young people during the monthly children-led services and the re-branding and re-vitalisation of Sunday School into “X-Stream” have been major contributors to this. Special services, such as Remembrance Day, the Christmas Eve Carol Service, School services, weddings and funerals, have been well attended and managed, notwithstanding exceptional attendance numbers on some occasions. Weekly coffee mornings and monthly Community lunches in the Wesley Centre have proved very popular.

The Church would not survive without the magnificent support provided by many, many volunteers. The jobs are too numerous to list here but without that support, the Church would be a much lesser place.

Thanks to the generosity of the congregation and the Village Community as a whole, Church funding is stable. There is still around £19K outstanding on the loan we took to refurbish the Wesley Centre but fund-raising is successful and ongoing and the Church Council is confident that it can and will be repaid in reasonable time.

Structurally, as 13th Century Grade I Listed Buildings go, St Mary’s Church is sound and generally in good shape. During the last year, we have fulfilled legal obligations to conduct costly Fire Safety, Health and Safety and Asbestos surveys of the building and we have introduced a number of measures to comply with contemporary legislation in these areas. Volunteers have conducted a root and branch inspection and update of the Inventory of Church Property.

In the foreseeable future, the Church Council has ambitions to install a toilet in the Church and to restore the Reredos Screen behind the main altar but both these projects will be costly (estimated £35K to install a toilet and up to £95K to restore the Reredos). These latter two projects cannot be considered until the loan taken out to create the Wesley Centre has been repaid.

The Main Churchyard continues to be beautifully maintained by our trusty band of volunteer sextons. During the Autumn, we held a DIY Churchyard Maintenance Day, when another band of volunteers set to pruning churchyard trees away from the crossing telephone wires and clearing gutters and numerous overgrowing shrubs. Much was accomplished but, like the Forth Bridge, there is plenty more that could be done. The “New” Churchyard is well kept, again by volunteers tending the grass, trimming the hedges and clearing drainage ditches. There is concern that cars repeatedly being parked on the verge are damaging the foundations to the South boundary wall of the Churchyard beside Church Street. The Parish Council has been informed of this concern.

Since its restoration and re-opening, the Wesley Centre (WC) has been well used for meetings, coffee mornings, community lunches, Wesley Flics and occasional Sunday services. The Centre acts as an excellent “Church Hall” facility, which is well used and well managed by the WC Management Committee.

The forthcoming year will undoubtedly see its changes and challenges, not the least of which will be the recruitment of a new Parish Priest. However, we start the year in a good place and look forward to embracing those changes as they occur.

Thank you.

Peter York