**Churchwardens’ Report to the Annual Village Meeting 17th May 2022**

As we approach the end of another year in the life of St Mary’s Ecumenical Church, the Church remains active, vibrant, and plays a central role in our North Marston village life and community. Thanks to the faithful commitment of our Clergy and Lay Leaders, we have maintained regular services throughout the pandemic, at times on Zoon; at times face-to-face.

Attendance at regular services is gradually building and approaching pre-Covid numbers. Special services have appealed to a wider congregation, notably the Remembrance Service and the Christmas Eve ‘Carols by Candlelight’ Service (on Zoom), which both attracted large numbers and are important events in the village calendar. The mission of our church has also included the provision of a monthly discussion group, and Advent and Lent courses, which have drawn steady numbers. In the twelve months to our APCM in April, we held 2 weddings, 3 funerals and 6 baptisms in the Church.

‘Messy Church’, held once a month on a Sunday afternoon, has replaced our former Sunday School. It is aimed at primary school-aged children, who can enjoy craft activities, worship and refreshments together. We are keen to attract new volunteers to help run Messy Church.

The members of the ‘Eyes and Ears’ team have provided excellent support to our ministers in their pastoral work, where the pandemic has allowed, dropping cards and paying visits to those around them in need, and those celebrating joyful events.

Outreach, within the North Marston community and beyond, has continued to flourish. The regular weekly coffee mornings and monthly community lunches are popular. The members of the Fundraising Committee work extremely hard to provide a wide range of activities to be enjoyed by the village community, and many more are planned for 2022, including the forthcoming Scarecrow Trail and ‘Bubbles and Bangers’ event to celebrate the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. A memorial tree was planted in February behind the bus shelter to kick-start our Jubilee celebrations. The traditional Easter Egg Rolling, Decorated Egg Competitions and Easter Egg Hunt were enjoyed by many – over 80 bacon butties were distributed!

As part of our outreach work, we have supported a number of local and national charities this year, through a variety of fundraising initiatives. We are always mindful, practically, and in our prayers, of the poverty and injustice in the world outside our village.

**St Mary’s Church Building**

Following the Quinquennial Inspection in September 2020, which highlighted the cracking in the south wall of the church, a site investigation was commissioned by Ecclesiastical Insurance in April 2021. A survey of the drains in this area, and also those near the vestry, was also carried out as the Vestry has been flooded on two occasions after heavy rain.

The report’s conclusions were that the cracking was due to subsidence caused by the desiccation of clay under the Church foundations, probably resulting from the copper beech tree drawing water during dry weather. Subsidence is specifically excluded from the Church’s Ecclesiastical Insurance policy, therefore there were no grounds for a claim.

Having taken professional advice, it was decided to commission significant pruning of the tree. This is pending, as we are awaiting permission from the Council as the tree has a preservation order on it.

We have also been advised to carry out a movement monitoring survey of the south wall of the Church.

Once the work has been carried out on the tree, this will be considered, as will the next steps to protect the Holden window, suggested in the Quinquennial Report. The ensuing work will almost certainly be very costly, so we are immensely grateful to the Parish Council and the village for support in maintaining our beautiful Grade 1 Listed Church.

The main churchyard and the ‘new’ churchyard have continued to be maintained to a very high standard by our team of sextons, who mow the church grass. We are desperate for more volunteers, however, to trim and strim around the graves.

Our church bells, much admired by bell ringers across the diocese for their lovely sound, continue to ring out twice a month, and for special services.

Our teams of flower arrangers and cleaners have continued to ensure that our beautiful church always looks its best for Sunday services and special occasions.

**The Wesley Centre**

The Wesley Centre Management Committee has been revived, and is committed to promoting this attractive venue to potential hirers in order to generate more income. We are working on advertising, including revitalising the website.

We remain immensely grateful to the volunteers who continue to support the work of the Church in the multiplicity of ways outlined above; we could not do what we do without them. We would like to add sincere thanks to the members, and ex officio members, of the ECC for their hard work and dedicated support.

We look forward to another year of shared worship and church family life together.

**Tricia McSweeney**

**Alyson Perrett**