**Church Report to the ANNUAL Village Meeting 16 May 2017**

Financial Year 2016/17 was a VERY busy year for the St Mary’s Community! Looking back over the past year, I can confidently report that we made some changes!

With grant funding from Listed Places of Worship, the Church has undergone a massive maintenance works programme, which included the replacement of a major beam in the nave roof, repairs to buttresses in the nave roof and plaster work on the walls of the SW corner of the nave, external re-lining of the lead roof covering and guttering on the roof above the South Aisle, correction of subsidence and re-building of the walls surrounding the internal South Door, repairs to the lead roof covering the nave and reconstruction of roof water drainage dispersal in the Churchyard in front of the South Door. The total cost of the entire project amounted to £72,456.

During the year, the Mission of the Church also expanded. Thanks to exceptionally hard work by its Management Committee, we have seen the opening of the new Wesley Centre, created by the refurbishment of the Methodist Chapel. This magnificent achievement will provide a modern and much needed village and Church Community meeting place with catering facilities for a host of activities in support of stewardship, charity and fellowship in the village. Amongst a wide variety of other activities and event in the Centre, we have begun to provide regular Friday morning coffee mornings and monthly community lunches, which are proving to be popular and successful. We are conscious that car parking is restricted in the Schorne Lane area around the Wesley Centre and we are actively seeking resolution to this challenge, at least during summer months.

There have been an amazing variety of fund-raising activities in the village, all of which were open to the entire Village Community and which many of us have enjoyed; we have hosted a Bring and Share Harvest lunch; a group of parishioners travelled to Iona for a retreat; we ran a remote format Remembrance Day Service at the Village Hall and we were entertained wonderfully by a concert of Christmas music brought to us by the Stewkley Singers. We arranged a highly successful Easter Egg Decorating and Egg Rolling Event, which was very well supported by the Village Community. As well as financially supporting itself, the Church has been able financially to support a number of charities, including the Children’s Society, the local Autism Centre, Water Aid, most recently, Christian Aid and we provide regular contributions to the local Food Bank.

We have also conducted a major overhaul of the Church’s administration. This has included a comprehensive Fire Risk Assessment and upgrading of fire safety procedures, a revision and updating of our Health and Safety policy, a review of actions to take in the event of terrorist activity within the Church, a review and update of Safeguarding policy and safeguarding training for selected members of the Church, updating of DBS clearance policy and a comprehensive Church inventory check.

We were unanimously sad to be told of Rev. Jim Gorringe’s impending retirement later in 2017. Both Jim and Pamela will be a great loss to the Village and they will be missed by all of us but we wish them well in retirement. Church Rules do not allow us to begin the recruitment process for Jim’s successor as our Village Vicar until after he has left post, which will be at the end of August or early September. Inevitably therefore, we are faced with a gap or Interregnum of indefinite duration but Church life will continue during this period, we are making arrangements to conduct weekly services as normal and hope that the position will be filled as soon as possible.

Finally, it would be remiss not to mention the voluntary but extremely dedicated work that goes on ‘behind the scenes’ in the Church. Amongst these ‘unsung heroes’ are the organist, the choir, those who provide coffee and cakes each Sunday, the people who clean the Church, the flower ladies, the bell ringers, the sextons who maintain the Churchyard, those who keep notice boards up to date, the folk who clean the leaves from the gutters, the clock adjusters, Michael Morton, who allows us to use his field for car parking on big occasions; the list seems endless, yet without the voluntary contribution of all these people and others in the congregation who work quietly in the background, our Church would be a much lesser place.

St Mary’s Church plays a vital role at the centre of North Marston’s village life and the Church Community very much intend to keep it that way.

Thank you!