**Churchwardens’ Report to the Annual Village Meeting 14th May 2019**

We were delighted to welcome Reverend Petra Elsmore, who was licensed on 24th September 2018, as our minister, after what had seemed a very long-interregnum. During this difficult period, due to the faithful commitment of Janet, Keith, other visiting ministers and our team of lay-leaders, we maintained our pattern of regular services, introducing a lay-led service on the third Sunday of the month in the Wesley Centre, which has continued throughout the year. This has resulted in a variety of opportunities for worship and prayer that we hope our congregation has found beneficial and spiritually fulfilling.

We have held one wedding, one funeral, and four baptisms this year; the ashes of two people were interred. Four young people of our parish were confirmed.

Adult attendance at regular services has, once again, risen slightly, with the number of children attending remaining about the same as last year. Attendance at all-age worship on the first Sunday of the month has continued to be robust. Special services have attracted a wider congregation, notably the Remembrance Service and the Christmas Eve ‘Carols by Candlelight’ Service, 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.

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

Outreach within the North Marston community, and the Schorne Team of Churches beyond, has continued to flourish. The regular weekly coffee mornings, monthly lunches, ‘Bring and Share’ lunches, Wesley Flics and Scottish Country Dancin’ have all grown in popularity. The monthly lunches and Wesley Flics often attract between forty and fifty participants. Donations received have contributed significantly to reducing the amount outstanding on the loan to develop the Wesley Centre. The members of the Fundraising Committee have worked extremely hard to provide a wide range of social activities, enjoyed by the village community.

As part of our outreach work, we have supported a number of local and national charities this year, through a variety of fundraising initiatives. Whilst we are all pulling together successfully to pay off the loan which has provided the church and the village with the Wesley Centre as a venue for meetings and events, we are always mindful, practically, and in our prayers, of the poverty and injustice in the world outside our village.

Structurally, as a 13th Century Grade 1 listed building, the church is sound. The insurance surveyor in his assessment of the building, put it in the top 10% of churches he had visited in terms of its condition and the way it has been consistently well-managed. This year we commissioned an energy survey, for which we received a grant of 50% of the costs from the Diocese; we await the report. A leak in the church heating system has been repaired. The main churchyard and the ‘new’ churchyard have continued to be maintained to a very high standard by our team of sextons, and other volunteers, who trim and strim around the graves. The electrical equipment in the Wesley Centre has been PAT tested. The Church Inventory is in the process of being updated.

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.

As we look towards the coming year, we have various initiatives in mind.

Further work is needed to ensure that we meet statutory requirements for safe-guarding and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations).

The new ‘Welcome Team’ will begin work supporting the churchwardens with communion services.

We will be setting up a working party to examine the way we present ourselves through the various channels of communication available.

A new head mic for ministers was donated, which has gone some way to improving sound in the church. The ECC remains determined to make improvements to the acoustics in the Wesley Centre but this represents a complex project with multiple possible pitfalls. It has recently been agreed, therefore, to postpone the project until the refurbishment loan has been settled.

We were very glad to host the Team Ash Wednesday Service, with the Venerable Guy Elsmore, Archdeacon of Buckingham, delivering the address: this was a moving occasion, which added weight to the start of Lent. We will continue to work constructively supporting the Schorne Team’s initiative to provide and promote such opportunities for shared worship.

We remain immensely grateful to the huge number of 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.

The long interregnum period ultimately brought us closer together, but collectively we breathed a huge sigh of relief when Petra was finally appointed. We have been so impressed by the time and effort she has devoted to getting to know us all, and establishing her place as leader of our church community, alongside Janet, whose compassionate leadership we continue to cherish and enjoy. We look forward to another year of shared worship and church family life together.

**Clare Hurrell**

**Alyson Perrett**