**St Mary’s Ecumenical Church Report to the Annual Village Meeting May 2020**

The year to May 2020 has been an unprecedented one in the life of St Mary’s Ecumenical Church, as it has in the life of the country as a whole: we have life before Coronavirus, and life as the virus continues to disrupt the normal pattern of our daily lives and influence its future course.

**Pre-Coronavirus**

For the majority of the year, we maintained our pattern of regular services, including a lay-led service on the third Sunday of the month in the Wesley Centre. Thanks to Petra, Janet, Keith, David and our team of lay-leaders we enjoyed a variety of opportunities for worship and prayer.

We held two weddings, three funerals, and two baptisms this year; the ashes of one person were interred.

Attendance at regular services remained steady, with the congregation at all-age worship on the first Sunday of the month particularly robust, often with more than twenty children participating. Special services drew in 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 also included a monthly discussion group, and Advent and Lent courses, which drew steady numbers, the Lent course unfortunately disrupted by the lockdown beginning in March.

The members of the ‘Eyes and Ears’ team 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, continued to flourish. The regular weekly coffee mornings, monthly lunches, Wesley Flics and Scottish Country Dancin’ all grew in popularity. Donations received contributed to reducing the amount outstanding on the loan to develop the Wesley Centre. The members of the Fundraising Committee worked extremely hard to provide a wide range of social activities, which were enjoyed by the village community.

We supported a number of local and national charities this year. 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 generally sound. However, due to a series of dry summers and winters, there has been movement in the south wall, extending to the Holden window, and affecting the inner door to the church. Informal advice from a structural engineer led to a decision to monitor the cracks until the Quinquennial Inspection in April, when a more detailed assessment would be made. Due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus, the Quinquennial Inspection was postponed. Leaks in the church roof and the heating system were repaired. The main churchyards 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.

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

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

The Wesley Centre continued to be well managed. The skylight in the kitchen was repaired to exclude drafts. The Quinquennial Inspection was carried out on 22nd April, and the building found to be sound and in good repair. The cracks in the walls will shortly be filled and all made good.

**Coronavirus**

The effect of the Coronavirus and the resulting restrictions has been significant and far-reaching. In a very short period of time we moved to greeting church members at the door with hand sanitiser, changing the way we administered communion and shared The Peace, and, ultimately, ending shared worship and locking the church building.

Worship locally, at the Diocesan level, and nationally, has moved online, with clergy adapting quickly to the new circumstances. The livestreaming of services has become the norm, and increasingly accessible and professional. One advantage of this is that these services have attracted a number of people who were not regular attenders at St Mary’s, but who have enjoyed church in a different way.

Our ministers have provided worship materials which have been emailed out to anyone requesting them. Morning Prayers have been reinstated via Zoom, and are open to all.

At this point in time, we do not know what the future holds, or have any idea of the timescale which will be put in place for the reopening of churches and the return to shared worship. What is certain is that when we are allowed to come back together as a church and congregation, it is going to be a very measured and lengthy process, perhaps with the church being opened for private prayer, and services with restricted congregations allowed first. Our priority will be to bring the members of our church back together, with the safety of all central to our thinking.

As we look towards the coming year, we have this, and other priorities, in mind.

* We will continue to work to ensure that we meet statutory requirements for safe-guarding and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations).
* We will continue to examine the way we present ourselves through the various channels of communication available, with particular emphasis on improving our website.
* We will be imaginative in our devising of social and fundraising ideas with the social distancing restrictions in mind.

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.

We thank our ministers and lay leaders for their compassionate leadership in these challenging times, and we look forward positively to the future.

**Alyson Perrett and Tricia McSweeney**

**Churchwardens**