Vicar’s Letter for May 2016

Dear Friends

Update on the St Matthew’s Children’s and Youth Worker

In my letter of April 2015 I gave an update as to where this project had got to, and as things have moved even further along in an exciting way I thought it would be of interest to you all to know the next stage!

As you will remember, in May 2011 St Matthew’s Church was a left a substantial legacy. It was felt very strongly that a proportion of this gift should be used beyond the 4 walls of the Church building, and therefore I encouraged the congregation to suggest what it could be used for. People’s responses showed a desire for a Youth Worker. This seemed highly appropriate as the benefactress had once been deputy head of St Matthew’s School. So began a period of exploration, with presentations to the PCC from Susie Mapledoram, the Diocesan Youth Officer, small group meetings and a final PCC resolution that we would put £35,000 towards a Youth Worker for a 3 year initial contract. Since then we have been successful in obtaining a grant of a further £35,000 from the Manchester Diocesan Mission Development Fund, and the outstanding £15,000 has been covered from the legacy as well.

You will also remember that I stated that almost a quarter of St Matthew’s Parish, Stretford, is classed as an area of economic deprivation. 30% of the population of Stretford consists of one parent households. These statistics are echoed in St Matthew’s C of E (VC) School. (There are 211 pupils in the school and the school was rated Good at its last Ofsted of 2015, and more recently the school achieved the highest rating in its Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) which looks at the provision of religious education and spirituality in the school and the children’s understanding of it). These statistics act as a microcosm of the whole parish. As a governor, I am aware that a high proportion of children come from households without anyone in employment, where there are Looked After Children (4), 3 families receiving support from Child in Need social services, and 2 families receiving school led Family Support. In addition there are children from the nearby Women’s Refuge as well as those with a multiplicity of educational and social needs. 49% of children are eligible for free school meals, which is 23% above the National Average.

The Parish consists of 17% 0-14yr olds and 18% 15-29yr olds, but at St Matthew’s Church we are aware as a congregation that we are not connecting with this large proportion of Stretford’s population. Despite our small and growing work with children, we have no provision for work with young people, and no regular attendees who are teenagers. We both need to and desire to connect with them, to raise aspirations, to help them grow in self-esteem, to provide Christian values and good role models, to give them a chance in life, to offer them a future.

It was announced in October 2014 that youth services in Trafford Borough are to be slashed, and this makes it more imperative that we do something for our young people, many of whom have poor prospects for the future, including living on benefits and being chained to debt.

It is for these reasons that employing a youth worker would reach out to and support young people in our parish in making better life choices.

We therefore seek a youth worker to be employed in 3 areas:

Church: to support and encourage our existing children’s work in the church, as well as to develop youth work and encourage us as a parish to be involved in engaging with young people in and beyond our church community.

Schools: to strengthen the already good links between St Matthew’s Cof E school and the Church, but also to provide transitional work between primary and secondary schools and create links with secondary schools. St Matthew’s School is very supportive and excited about this proposed ministry. There is also a possibility for the worker to be trained in behavioural coaching through TLG (The Education Group) at St Matthew’s.

Community: to provide support for young people, working in partnership with the small, voluntary, existing youth project LoveStretford. This will involve young people’s and family orientated events and activities

LoveStretford is run by the Life Church is Sale. Members live in Stretford in a house-share. They have been running weekly clubs, but due to changes in personnel, are moving to event-based activities for the community. We would also like to develop further relations with uniformed organisations.

We would love to be able to assist our youth worker to have some kind of place where young people could drop in, to provide them not only with a safe location to be and hang out, but to provide a listening ear, information on a range of subjects, and help them make decisions and take responsibility for their own lives.

Now we are in the position of advertising for this post. So it is an exciting time! The advert has gone into the main national youthworker magazine for the May edition, and the closing date for applications will be Friday May 6th. Along with Susie Mapledoram, myself and Simon there are representatives from the Church, Community and School who will be shortlisting on Thursday 10th May and then involved with the interviews on Sunday 5th and Monday 6th June. We then hope to appoint for a start date in September.

I hope this keeps you up to date with our vision and the practical steps that we are now undertaking to make this a reality. Please support us in whatever way you can. If you are interested in helping or being involved practically, financially as well as through prayer, please do contact me.

I ask you please to pray:

* for all those who will apply and for those who are responsible for shortlisting to make the right decisions
* for those who will be interviewed
* for the person who will be appointed, that God will be preparing them now to answer God’s call to work with us
* for those from school, church and community who have willingly agreed to be the support and monitoring group for the children’s and youth worker
* for our children and young people in Stretford and the challenges they face in today’s world.

With every blessing

Kate

**Christian Aid Week – 15th – 21st May 2016**

Christian Aid 2016 focuses on families in Bangladesh whose lives have been destroyed by flooding. We consider women like Morsheda, a young mother of four, living in Bangladesh. She has no land, few assets and no savings.

For Morsheda’s family living on low-lying islands in the Brahmaputra River, floods are a terrifying part of everyday life. Morsheda can’t even count on having a safe place to call home: the single-room, corrugated-iron house she shares with her children has been flooded four times.

Morsheda and her children live a precarious life. They know that the floods will come again, and soon. But we can lift our neighbours like Morsheda to safety.

Just £250 is enough for a Christian Aid Home Safety Package. It could flood-proof Morsheda’s home, raising it eight foot on an earth plinth, so that she has a safe place to rebuild, keep livestock and grow crops. It could also buy a goat, seeds and a wormery to help produce compost – all of which will give her a long-term income and a solid foundation for a new life.

What we can do:

This year at St Mathew’s we have taken the decision not to do door to door collecting. This decision has not been made lightly, but it is due to the drop in number of people able to deliver the envelopes and collect them. Also collectors are finding it increasingly difficult to find people at home when trying to collect the envelopes.

So this year we are asking you all to think of ways you might be able to raise money for Christian Aid. Here are some ideas:

* Ask you family, friends and neighbours for donations
* Arrange a collection at work
* Hold a raffle or a coffee morning
* Invite some friends round for a meal or drinks, to watch a film or enjoy a quiz night together and ask for a donation
* Do a sponsored event and raise money that way.

We hope that if everyone does something – however small – we can still give to the work of Christian Aid. More information will be given out nearer the time and in the May magazine, but this is just to help you get started! How many Home Safety Packages will we provide from St Matthew’s?