

Vicar's Letter for May 2017

Dear Friends

Our Annual Parochial Church Meeting was to have taken place on 2nd April, but we then learnt that the Greater Manchester Marathon would be taking place that day. This means that access is disrupted due to many roads being closed for parts of the day. This year we decided to take advantage of the Marathon and embrace it! We cancelled our 10am service and had a short act of worship in the Hart Room of the Hall, after a most enjoyable morning in the sun with cups of tea and bacon butties whilst we cheered on the runners. Although we were only a dozen or so in number as spectators we were able to offer hospitality to others who were watching the marathon, some of whom joined us with our free refreshments.

So, our Annual Meeting was postponed till April 30th, and as has become my custom I share some of my report with you in my letter this month:

'However much we wish life might remain smooth, consistent and predictable, it never is, is it! I feel two crucial events have begun (perhaps forced?!) a change in direction for St Matthew's:

Firstly, with the sad and sudden death of our dear friend Philip Holt and the subsequent changes to the choir we have had to look at our Sunday patterns of worship. Mattins is no longer tenable and has had to be suspended for now. The worship planning group, have been working hard to explore other forms of worship. So beginning in May our 3rd Sunday will be a non-Eucharistic service at 10am (replacing Mattins and FRESH) and we have called it 'Worship @ 10'. It is a Service of the Word, for everyone, which everyone of all ages can attend, and it has been designed so that people will enjoy it and want to attend and bring their friends. We have also recently introduced our 5th Sundays as All-age Eucharists. It was felt by the PCC that it was important to have services at which our J-club children would be present so that all of our church members of all ages could worship together. So you will have noticed that we are encouraging our children to be in the choir a little. The Worship Planning Group have therefore been kept creatively busy and we hope you will all enjoy these new forms of worship which are still very much in keeping with the tradition of St Matthew's.

Linked to this, we are looking at the use of the Choir Vestry, which is where the J-club now meets on Sundays. The big increase in Hall bookings require that the Choir Vestry be used more and more during the week for community groups. So it is having a thorough clean and will be having a bit of a make-over. It does need work done to it - running hot water, better heating, new flooring, new kitchen and a disabled toilet put in. This is a big project and one that needs consideration if it is to be user friendly and accessible. It is an important part of our church.

As you know this past year we had been looking to appoint a children's and youth worker. However, that has not worked out and after two attempts at the advertising and shortlisting process, we interviewed only one candidate and decided not to appoint. That way seems not to be the way God would want for us, so we have had to think and pray about another use for the legacy left to us in 2011 by Barbara Bailey.

Then suddenly through several different circumstances coming together, it felt right that the PCC take the decision to look at the possibility of employing an organist and musical director. Nothing is finalised as yet, but it is a potentially exciting opportunity to build up once again the musical tradition of St Matthew's in new ways and be a means of outreach into the community. So watch this space.

Secondly, our Away Day in January was, I think we all agree, a most enjoyable, positive, uplifting, and fruitful day together, so ably led by Revd Andy Salmon. The Mission Action Planning group has been working since then to discuss and work with your ideas for implementation through and with PCC's agreement. Simon, I believe will be speaking more fully on this in his report, but I wanted to pick up on one thing that is of interest, significance and relevance as we consider mission, and that is that the two value words which came out top in our votes with dots at our Away Day were 'inclusive' and 'welcoming'.

Already we value our shared worship with the Deaf Church and its development, our children and schools, our new and more accessible Baptism service, our links with and support of the Refugee and Asylum seekers project, Fair Trade and the Food Bank. Some of us were involved in the Deanery Dementia Awareness training and look forward to the service in May to celebrate that achievement. To explore this more our next Bible study course will be on inclusiveness and we hope this will stretch us and challenge us as we continue to be an actively welcoming and open church to everyone in our community.

One area that will need due consideration is the possible reordering of the back of church to include a toilet and kitchen area so as to make greater use of our church building. This has huge financial implications but it is something I believe we need to think about seriously and work towards as we consider the needs not only of our own regular congregation but of those who use our church building for baptisms, weddings and funerals, school visits and potentially wider for community groups.

As we look towards celebrating 175 years of our present building on Sunday 17th September, we give thanks for the past, but in doing so we also commit ourselves to step out in faith for the next 175 years. So, may our worship continue to grow in quality, may we continue to grow in the joy of what it is to be a follower of Christ and may we all grow towards doing the best and being the best we can as co-workers with God who is faithful and who calls us all forward to be his witnesses to his risen life in our world.'

As you can see from the above, there is plenty that needs our prayers and consideration, and I would greatly appreciate your prayers at this time in the life of St Matthew's.

With every blessing
Kate

Christian Aid week 2017

This year Christian Aid week will be **14-20th May** and focuses on Refugees. British churches founded Christian Aid in 1945 to support refugees who had lost their homes and possessions in the Second World War. Twelve years later, Christian Aid Week was launched to help fund this ongoing work.

Sixty years ago, Christians refused to stand by while people suffered in refugee camps. Our generation is rising to that challenge again. We are asked this year to act again now, to help relieve suffering and build a world where everyone has a safe place to call home. Here is one story of Nejebar who doesn't have a safe place to call home:

Nejebar fled Afghanistan with her family after the Taliban threatened to kill her husband, Noor, who was a teacher. It wasn't an idle threat - the Taliban first blinded, then murdered, another member of their family.

'The last days and weeks in Afghanistan were the hardest,' says Noor. 'When I went to work, my heart was beating harder. I didn't know if my family were going to be alive when I got back.'

When the family arrived at the refugee camp in Greece, they thought they would only stay for 10 days. But they've been there six months now and there's no end in sight. The only protection they have against the wind and rain is their tent. There's no school for their children. Five-year-old Sudai, their youngest, is ill, but Nejebar and Noor don't know what's wrong with him because they can't communicate with the camp's doctor, who is Greek.

Nejebar is the rock at the centre of her family, holding them together throughout all this uncertainty. She has even welcomed Faraidoon and Farzad into the family, two brothers who don't know where their parents are, or if they're even alive.

'We still have some hope for our children's future,' says Nejebar. 'We only want a peaceful life. We want our children to go to school. The most important thing is our children.'

Sadly, this story is all too horribly familiar to us, isn't it?

St Matthew's church is committed to support Christian Aid and year after year we generously give. Last year we took the decision not to do door to door collecting, due to the drop in the number of people able to undertake this and that collectors had reported that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find people at home when they tried to collect the envelopes. Instead we invited people to find creative ways to raise money and awareness of the work of Christian Aid. And people held coffee mornings, raffles, sponsored events, invited friends for a big breakfast, made crafts and so much more. **We raised £1455.10, which was more than the year before!!**

This year we are asking if you would be willing to do the same. **What can you do to raise money for the work of Christian Aid in their Diamond Jubilee year?**

So we are asking you once again to find ways to raise money among your families, friends and work colleagues:

- Ask for donations
- arrange a collection at work
- Hold a raffle and/or 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
- Host a breakfast for friends, families and neighbours
- Do a sponsored event and raise money that way,

Again, we hope that if everyone does something - however small - we can still give to Christian Aid.

Thank you
Kate