

Great Brickhill Annual Parish Meeting, Tuesday 4th May 2010

Parochial Church Council Report

Last year's report focused on Church finances but this year I am going to give a general overview of the life within our church over the last twelve months. The Church Annual Meeting took place in March. I am pleased to say that Christine Agambar and Julia Turner continue as our Church Wardens and we welcome Val Beardmore-Baldwin to the P.C.C.

It has been another busy year with lots going on. As well as the monthly pattern of services which are diverse in nature each week, there are various outreach groups which continue to meet on a regular basis:- the weekly Holy Communion and Bible sessions, the Thursday Group, the Lent Discussion Groups, the Drop-In, all of which help to create good fellowship within the village.

Music is an important part of the life of the church and we are delighted that there are now two "Music in the Brickhills" concerts each year, both raising a tremendous amount of money for charities. Our thanks go to Jerry Breslin who masterminds both the concerts and much of the music in the church including the ever popular Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve.

From October there is now one of the churches within the Benefice each month that holds a Special Joint Family Service. Open meetings are held to plan the service and to get as many people involved as possible. These have been very well received, especially the two that have been named "Messy Church" – these services have been held in the village halls rather than the church, and have been geared particularly for families with very young children.

We were delighted that the Archdeacon came to a special service in October, a Celebration of Harvest and Thanksgiving for the Restoration Work that has been completed to date:- the work on the north and south aisles roofs and the re-painting of the north wall.

Turning to the other St Mary's 2000 Projects. The bells were taken down in October and sent to the bell-founders for restoration and the two new bells were cast. Strengthening work has taken place in the tower, a new bell frame has been installed and the bells were delivered back to Great Brickhill last month. The bells are now back in the tower and once the work has been carried out in the ringing chamber the test ringing of the bells will take place. Some people may even have heard the sound of the bells today as the clappers were fitted. It is anticipated that the ringing for services will re-commence in June.

The P.C.C. is extremely grateful to the Parish Council for their support for this Bells project which will benefit not only the church but the community as a whole. The generous grant from the Parish Council was for £58k, based on the estimated cost of the project in October 2008 of £123k. The actual cost has exceeded this estimate due to extra necessary work required on the fabric of the tower to take the new bell frame, plus English Heritage required the replacement of ancient beams, which is deemed to be part of the Bells project cost and not cost of general fabric restoration. The total will now be in the region of £150k. Whilst over budget, the project will provide the village with a great asset for centuries to come.

Fund-raising for St Mary's 2000 will now concentrate on the provision of much required New Facilities, the provision of a kitchen and toilet facilities etc. The church is very much committed to this and in this regard a sub-committee has been set up to begin planning this exciting stage in the development of the church.

While all this fund-raising is taking place, the church still has its every day expenses to pay. Before Christmas there was a major problem with the pipes of the heating system and a firm with expertise in this field was contracted to carry out the work. This was an expensive repair and we were extremely grateful to the Great Brickhill Charity for allowing us to use their very generous donation of £5.5k to fund this very necessary work.

The daily running costs of the Church are currently in the region of £99 per day, excluding any major restoration costs. This figure includes the annual Parish Share payable to the Diocese, which for the year 2009 was £20,262. This figure was 12.4% higher than last year's payment and there will be a further increase in the Parish Share in 2010 to £20,845.

The Church also likes to give donations to Charities both at home and overseas. The total of all the donations sent to charitable causes for 2009 represents approximately 12% of the Income Received for the year.

A copy of the full Annual Report including the Accounts can be collected from the bookcase just inside the main door, or can be found on the Benefice website which was launched in December. I set this site up with ease of use in mind and so it is very easy to navigate. It has a wealth of information on it, with a section dedicated for each of the four churches. It is updated on a very regular basis and so has more up to date information than can be provided in the Parish Newsletter. All service details, information of forthcoming events and reports/ results can be found. There are lots of photos and even a map as to how to get here. The number of hits to the site has been staggering, 6,500 in January with the largest number in any one day over 650 (a hit being each time that a page is viewed).

I will conclude by saying that the Rector will be having a three month sabbatical from 21st June to 20th September. Clergy in the diocese are very much encouraged to take a sabbatical such as this once every ten years of ministry. Plans are being put in place to cover this period and the Parish Newsletter and the website will shortly give details as to whom any queries should be directed during this period.

This report will be posted on the website in its entirety and a summary will be forwarded for inclusion in the June edition of the Parish Newsletter.

Phillipa Cook
(Great Brickhill PCC Secretary)