

Secretary's Report 2014

2014 was an eventful year for London Street as we continued to raise the church's profile as a centre for Christian work and witness in Basingstoke, not just on Sundays, but throughout the week. At the same time concerns were raised about the Sanctuary ceiling following the storms early in the year but, with the Synod's help and support, fundraising for this did not have to hinder the church's mission to the people of Basingstoke and by the end of the year the work on the new ceiling was nearly finished and scaffolding even added atmosphere to one or two events!

Our membership stands at 94. Vera Gerdes moved to Trowbridge and Mary Silver, secretary of the Wednesday Time for Prayer, transferred to Bury Road URC, Gosport. Lizzie John took on her role as Prayer Secretary. We were saddened by the deaths of Muriel Popejoy and Neil Davis. Neil had been the editor of Focus since 1972 and, although a non-serving Elder, continued to take the minutes at Elders' Meetings and serve on the Finance Committee. His sudden death was a shock to us all and we miss him - and his quiet efficiency. Kay presided at the Infant Baptism of Aleysha Moody (her first as minister) and at the Blessing of Zachary Chabva. She officiated at the marriage of Ray Todd and Samantha Honeyball which was very happy occasion. There were 11 Serving Elders for part of the year Chris and Leng Ayland, Owen Collins, Joyce Cook, the Revd John Downing, Alison Jamieson, Liz Lindsay, Jenny McCloy, Isobel Martin, Christine Robertson and Rob Williams but in April John's pastoral service to other churches was extended and, with regret all round, he felt it necessary to resign. At the ACM acting Church Treasurer, Alex Macro, at long last was able to hand over to Karen Bell but continued to support her as she began to learn the intricacies of charity accounting. His experience was not lost, however, as the Finance Committee elected him as their chairman in succession to Derek Anthony who retired after nearly 20 years of service in this post.

Attendance at Sunday services averaged around 65 and we continued to appreciate Kay's innovative Biblical preaching in worship and also the different insights brought by our visiting preachers on the second Sunday of the month when Kay was at Tadley. We also appreciated the music provided through the year by Mark Best, Ian Rees, Peter Dixon, Maggie Morgans and Alex Macro with occasional input from Joyce Cook or David Bath with the digital hymnal not forgetting Kay on guitar.

Our sincere thanks also go to Eira McCaughey who retired as Pulpit Supply Secretary after 17 years including two vacancies, to Mark Best her successor and to Iris Brixton, who until her accident in October, arranged the organists' rota and looked after copyright matters. Holy Communion was held on 12 occasions. These services don't just happen and I would like to thank the many who work behind the scenes to see that everything is prepared, stewarded, and cleared up afterwards. The church flowers continued to be an important ministry. Kay regularly used the data projector in service and with our present ancient screen and various books balancing the projector, even more preparation was needed but it was worthwhile and upgrading the audio/visual equipment remains high on our wish list.

Early in the year work started on producing up to date Health and Safety and Fire Policy documents. The toilet for the disabled was refurbished and carpet in the Hook Room and passageway was replaced with easy to clean polyflor and in the Worting Room with carpet tiles - all in preparation for activities to come.

In February the London St. and Tadley Elders spent an Away Day together at St Mary's, Overton considering the URC's 20-20 Vision for their respective churches. London Street's priorities for the year were Spirituality and Prayer. To this end, in addition to Sunday worship, study

groups were held. During Lent we thought about "What it means to be a Christian in this Place" and by popular demand more followed - a series on "The Lord's Prayer" and the "Book of Ruth"- all under Kay's and Peter Bentall's sensitive and often humorous leading. Attractive pocket sized prayer booklets were produced on our new colour copier with seasonal prayers and space to jot down people or situations needing prayer were given out in September and at Christmas. A prayer corner was also set up, at first in the Sanctuary but, towards the end of the year, in the Concourse near the round window, with green leaf shaped post-it notes for prayer requests. These were included in the intercessions on Sundays. The Ffaldy-Brenin cycle of prayer was offered on most days in the Sanctuary with the front doors open for folk to come in off the street and Time for Prayer continued on Wednesday lunchtimes. The experiment of holding monthly Prayer Breakfasts was tried out on the first Sunday in September and continued to the end of the year with different people leading.

We were well represented at the Alliance of Basingstoke Churches AGM and United Service in the Baptist Church and the Women's World Day of Prayer in Trinity Methodist Church. In March we hosted an ABC prayer breakfast, the Wessex Synod meeting and a Fair Trade debate organised by the town's committee entitled "How Fair are Your Bananas?" The panel included the Bishop of Basingstoke, a representative from a supermarket, a producer and someone from Fairtrade. We had previously held our own event "Let's Go Bananas" and the church was decorated with bright yellow inflatable bananas hanging from string strung between the east and west sides of the gallery. The café had opened on Saturday serving all things banana, including free pancakes to children who took part in the competition. Kay, dressed as a banana, went out into the street to encourage people to come in. On Sunday one of Kay's puppets ended up flying on a suspended banana. As a result I hope we all resolved to buy fair traded bananas whenever possible as it really helps producers.

As always Easter was a busy time. The Hook Room was full to see an enactment and explanation of the Jewish Seder Meal (Passover) and its significance for Christians. Several groups drove to Old Meeting for a joint Maundy Communion service led by Kay. The Good Friday Walk of Witness started from London Street as usual and an Easter Sunrise Service followed by breakfast was again at Tadley led by Kay. Several went from here to that and later Tadley joined us for the Easter 10.30am celebration service in London St.

The elders, Junior Church staff and others attended training courses during the year and gained many certificates. These included safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, First Aid, Fire Safety, Core Skills, Children & Youth Work Forum and Food Hygiene.

The vestry, tidy and clean for Kays arrival in 2013, soon reverted to its old state and we were forced into clearing the top floor store and erect shelving to accommodate all Kay's wonderful "stuff" which had been gradually filling the vestry! (Perhaps there was a bit of Elders' stuff as well) Kay's "stuff" is great though, isn't it? We never know what will turn up next - a puppet or Noah's Ark! Most of the hard work was done by Alison, Chris and Kay herself so, many thanks to them. Thanks also to Bram Corn for his work as property officer. Bram's main love, of course, has been the Child Contact Centre which he and his faithful band of helpers have conscientiously manned for nineteen years. Bram intends to retire in 2015 so new co-ordinators are being sought. Many, many separated families have good reason to thank Bram and his team for their understanding, wise words and actions in sometimes fraught situations.

With the Borough Council keen to bring new life to the top of the town several festivals and activities were held in London Street and the Market Place. The church was much involved supplying changing facilities and electricity but we also opened the café on as many Saturdays as we could

manage. Karen Bell held a felt making workshop and craft display on one of them and Chris Ayland displayed some of his Bibles. On another Ian Scott was sitting quietly in the café and received a severe shock when he was set upon by a very heavily made up and over friendly woman in fancy dress – one of the street entertainers. It took him a while to recover!

Our big event was the Mad Hatters Tea Party when tea was laid out on a long table in the Concourse. Sandwiches, tea and gorgeous cakes were served to all who came in and this time most of us dressed up in fancy costumes. The Blackwell family, dressed as the main characters, went out chatting to all and sundry in London St and the Market Place. Joan Mussellwhite and Eileen Poulter wore very fetching hats complete with price ticket. Quite a lot of people came in and could hardly believe that we were offering it all free! It was particularly good that the Portuguese pastor and his wife who lead the congregation that meets in the church on Sunday evenings came early to join us. It was great fun and a good advertisement for the church.

ABC arranged a Big Hug for Basingstoke which did not quite work but made people ask what we were doing. At Christmas in arrangement with the Proteus Arts Centre local artists also exhibited their work in the Concourse. At the preview we served non-alcoholic mulled wine and mince pies which went down well.

2014 saw changes in the Community Café. Penny Dilley resigned as our paid manager and cook but has stayed on as manager in a voluntary capacity. Her very high standards would be hard to follow and we are blessed that she is still keeping an eye on things while our new paid cook, Heather Redfern, learns about the ethos of the café and gradually takes on more responsibility. As a church we are also grateful for the meals she and her team produced for us on Sundays which were over and above the call of duty.

Penny's heart is for youth work and she continues, with the other volunteers from various churches including London Street, to run the Youth Café with support from Kay, John Eves and the rest of the management committee. It has been a great blessing and encouragement to see several of the lads who have been regulars for five years, overcome many problems along the way, get jobs but still come to visit. For both Oasis and the Youth Café there is the constant need to advertise their presence and both have done this through special meal deals, 2 films made by Megan local churches, church notice boards and ABC. Christ Church, Chineham, regularly supported the venture financially. These and other donations were greatly appreciated. Prayer undergirds all they do. The helpers pray together before they start each morning, the youth café staff before and after each session and there was a prayer meeting on the first Friday morning of the month as well as the commissioning services each term.

Under the leadership of Jenny McCloy and Carol Scott Junior Church was much enjoyed by the children and their work was beautifully displayed in the Sanctuary for us all to see. They now meet downstairs in the Hook Room. Numbers were few and with a wide age range but they are prepared for more and we pray for growth.

Friendship Hour met regularly on Thursday afternoons and has many members not part of London Street's congregation. Joyce Cook with help from Eileen Poulter and Christine Robertson has arranged the programme but would dearly love for more active London Street people to come along with new ideas and contacts.

The 8th Basingstoke URC Scout Group for the most part had a good year with many badges gained and competitions and camps enjoyed. There was a change of leadership in the cubs - Michelle Stroessel became the new Akela and Richard Whitechurch the new Bagheera. Attendance at church

parades began to improve as more encouragement was given by the leaders. It isn't easy to dispel the idea that church is boring but Kay continues to work on it as did Gill and Karen before her.

In September Claire Macro, with the full support of the church and faithful team of helpers, started a weekly group for those with dementia and their carers called The Memory Tree Social Club. The Hook Room buzzed with activity every Wednesday morning. They enjoyed a Christmas Carol Service and an Oasis Christmas lunch. A qualified masseur was often available as well! Kay also arranged a Carol Service for the Friendship Club which meets on Friday and they loved it.

Two drivers and six senior members took part in the Hampshire Historic Churches sponsored Ride and Stride and raised £416 + gift aid. London Street received half the money raised. It was a sort of senior members outing with a purpose.

On the last Saturday afternoon of September, in partnership with All Saints, and, with some trepidation, we held the first Top of Town Messy Church. We had no idea how many would come or what age they would be so we decided to have eight craft tables. In the event fourteen children and eight adults turned up eager to try them all and then to engage in the celebration in the church before sitting down to a cooked meal. For our second Messy Church in November twenty one children and sixteen adults turned up, craft tables were reduced to six and this was equally successful. It is hard but rewarding work. There was a great mix of nationalities some of whom were Hindu but all joined in everything. It was good that families from our Little Angels pre-school Group who meet every Tuesday morning during term time in the Wessex Hall also came. The Little Angels group is led by Leng Ayland, Anne Davey and Kay with help from Louise and has gone from strength to strength with twenty five children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds on the books. They enjoyed a picnic in the park during

the summer and held services, including a nativity one, followed by a Christmas lunch. Between 20 and 25 attend the services.

One of the most challenging outreach events we held in conjunction with ABC was on November 5th. It was the Searchlight Theatre Company's production of "Woodbine Willie". It brought to life the work and witness of the Revd Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, an army padre, who served near the front line in WW1. With the scaffolding for the ceiling repair still in place and the noise of the fireworks going off in the park augmenting the proper sound effects and sand bag set an amazing atmosphere was created for a most enjoyable and challenging evening. Kay was unrecognisable to many until she opened her mouth to welcome everybody. The hairdo and the uniform was rather more ww2 than ww1 but who cares nearly 200 came into the church and left having heard the Good News of Jesus and with a replica copy of the Gospel of John given to the troops in WW1.

Our premises have been used a lot during the year not just by us but hirers too and Peter Bentall has continued to oversee this important source of income. It also means more dirt and we have been blessed by having cleaners who go the extra mile. After 14 years of faithful service Mary Hutchinson felt it was time to hang up her duster and while we looked for a replacement our other cleaner, Graham Owen, cleaned the whole building which is a big job for one person. Thank you Mary and Graham for all you have done. In December we welcomed Roy Bennett onto the payroll as Mary's replacement.

Well, it is nearly the end! Christmas approached and we filled Samaritans Purse shoe boxes. Several of the Christmas events I've already mentioned but the tea provided by the Elders followed by Carols for All was one I have not. The Basingstoke Silver Band accompanied the carols again and a good congregation, most of whom had enjoyed a generous tea provided by the elders, sang lustily. The Christingle on Christmas Eve was not quite as well

attended as last year but it was good to welcome a new family. The Sanctuary decorations were in the form of stars painstakingly cut out by Ian McCloy. Hung below the scaffolding they really sparkled. The retiring collections at the Christmas services went to Christian Aid's Kenya Maternity Appeal and to Off the Fence, a Christian charity for the homeless in Brighton. Other special collections and donations included the Ebola Appeal and Town Centre Chaplaincy while Gift Sunday were given to the Care Leavers team at Hampshire County Council for distribution to young people reaching 18 years and the Women' Refuge.

In a church there are usually one or two people you turn to if something practical needs doing whether it is organising food, making posters, planting Easter gardens, creating displays, sorting costumes, going to the dump, going to Ikea for shelving, fixing shelving, changing light bulbs, putting up notice boards I could go on and at London Street in 2014 it has been Alison Jamieson and Chris Ayland who have made themselves available. Many more of us have done our bit but I am sure you will not mind me mentioning those two in particular this year.

Well, this will be my last Secretary's Report so I do want to say "thank you" to you all for your love, your prayers, your help and support, your forgiveness for my mistakes and omissions over the years. I learnt my trade as treasurer and then secretary in the Youth Fellowship over 60 years ago never dreaming that it would be useful later on. Neither jobs were my line of work. I guess the Lord has his plans and knew that I would have to do whatever it was he wanted me to do in his strength and not mine. I've loved every minute of it really and learnt so much - some of which I probably need to unlearn now! It has been a privilege to work with our previous ministers Julian Macro and Mike Burrell and now with Kay who has brought a breath of fresh air and energy to us. She has been worth waiting for. Thank you Lord for your faithfulness may we trust you for the

future mission of this church and be prepared to step out of our comfort zone and embrace all the new things that you are doing!