

ALL SAINTS, STRANTON CHURCH HARTLEPOOL

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2015



Rooted in God's love,
Growing together in Jesus,
Branching out in the power of the Spirit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PRIEST IN CHARGE AND CHAIR OF THE PCC REPORT	2-4
ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION	4-5
STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT	5
ELECTORAL ROLL	5
FINANCE REPORT	5-6
BUILDINGS AND FABRIC OF THE CHURCH	6-7
DEANERY SYNOD REPORT	7
HEALTH AND SAFETY	7
SAFEGUARDING REPORT	8
LOOK UP	
GATHERED WORSHIP IN STRANTON PARISH	8-9
WORSHIP TEAM	9
PRAYER MINISTRIES	9-10
CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	10
REACH OUT	
BURBANK COMMUNITY CHURCH, YOUTH, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	10-11
STRANTON TODDLER GROUP	11
MESSY CHURCH	11-12
SUNDAY CLUB	12-13
MATT'S MATES	13
BEFREE	13
YOUTH FELLOWSHIP	14
YFC GAP YEAR STUDENTS	14-16
RAINBOWS	16
GUIDES AND BROWNIES	16-17
BOYS BRIGADE	17-18
COMMUNICATION GROUP	18
GROW TOGETHER	
PASTORAL GROUP	18
MOTHER'S UNION	19
HOME GROUPS	19-20
CHURCHES TOGETHER	20
BELLRINGING	20
ST MATTHEW'S COMMUNITY CENTRE	20-22

REPORT FOR APCM 2015

Norman Shave (Priest in Charge and chair of PCC) April 2016

Rooted in God's love, growing together with Christ, branching out in the power of the Holy Spirit

In many ways this has been a really positive year at Stranton. I continue to give thanks for each person linked with the church here. The many different aspects of attached reports reflect the many different people who contribute to our shared community life together. I also give thanks to God for all who contribute financially to our work. Our accounts show that we broke even in a year when we sold two houses and bought one. We recently introduced a pension scheme for our employees as well as continuing all our usual ministries including giving a significant amount to mission. Thank you.

Last year we invested a considerable amount of time into a vision process. In the early part of the year our adult teaching programme focussed on our identity in Christ as God's children and our mission as his people. Following this teaching I visited a number of groups linked with church to explore our shared values. This fed into an away day in September at St Columba's church where we formulated our new short mission statement, 'Rooted in God's love, growing together with Christ, branching out in the power of the Holy Spirit' and discussed our shared values. The latter led to a value statement, attached separately to this report, which was agreed by PCC at its November meeting. To embed these values, after Easter I intend to discuss the statement of values with the same groups I visited last year. We used the short mission statement to formulate our teaching programme through the first half of this year looking at Luke and then Acts.

Perhaps the most difficult decision the PCC took last year was to join the 'Partnership for Missional Church' (PMC) programme offered to a number of parishes by the diocese. In our discussions what was clear was that as a parish we want to remain committed to mission. What was more difficult was discerning whether this programme was right for us. Ultimately PCC voted to join the 3 year programme which we started in October 2015. One of the strengths of the programme is that it encourages a high level of lay participation. Thus far in the listening phase of the programme I have been encouraged to see several lay folk taking responsibility for delivering the events and carrying out the research required. To date the process has also produced some very helpful feedback for further reflection. Thank you to the members of the steering groups and the listening group for their contributions to this process. Next year is a time of missional experimentation. It's very important that we discern together where God is leading us and how we should invest our resources going forward.

As a church we are very much part of Durham diocese. I and the PCC are committed to working with the diocesan priorities of growth, children and young people and issues associated with poverty.

Growth is about depth - whole life discipleship, community involvement and numbers. The life of discipleship often begins with baptism. During the last year we have renewed our baptism liturgy and refreshed our approach baptism preparation revising our New Beginnings evening. We also carried out two separate adult baptisms by full immersion during the main Sunday service. This, however, is only the beginning. Growing as disciples is about growing in prayer, worship and fellowship. I am grateful to all those who continue to lead our various discipleship groups including Mothers Union and the Home Groups. Several people have joined these groups during the year but there is always the potential for further growth. Sometimes growth can involve the pain of pruning. Sadly around Christmas we took the decision to disband the choir, which sang for the last time in February 2016. Thank you to all who have contributed to this area of church life over many years. One surprise this year was when Clive and Angela hall decided to get confirmed. This was a sign of continued personal growth and part of a much longer journey. Clive is now training for authorised

ministry within the Church of England. In the next few months we should know whether this is to be as a reader or if Clive is to be ordained.

We remain very involved in our community, notably through the work of St Matthew's community centre and our links with local schools. St Mathew's continues to be well used by a whole variety of groups. Occupancy of the various rooms has increased significantly over the last year. This means the hall is both able to cover its outgoing costs and invest in refurbishment. We remain grateful for our partnership with The Burn Valley North residents association and the support we receive from our local councillors. We remain involved with several primary schools. As minister my main involvement remains Ward Jackson Church of England Primary School. The nature of the catchment area means that both staff and governors remain committed to providing a good quality education for all the children in a caring and Christian environment. Our thanks go to Angela Hall who has recently stood down from her role as chair of governors after 8 years. Nick Moore now has some involvement with the FE College and I continue to spend part of Wednesday morning as a volunteer at the hospice. These final two examples are only the tip of the ice burg, I realise many of our parishioners enrich the wider life of our community in all sorts of ways. The last year has also seen some significant growth numerically most notably in Messy Church and at the main Sunday morning service where we have been able to welcome a number of people including some families with children.

Children and young people remain a priority for us as a parish. The recent PMC report highlighted the importance of the uniformed organisations for us as a bridge between the community and church. We remain committed to maintaining and developing our links with Boys Brigade and all involved with guiding. Alongside the uniformed organisations we have several groups for a variety of ages: this includes 4 Sunday Club groups in two venues, Messy Church, Matts Mates, Bridgebuilders, Be Free, YF and Stranton Toddlers. As some leaders have stepped down it is encouraging that others have come forward. Thank you to each person who continues to give time and energy to leading and planning these groups. We are also grateful to our two YFC gap year workers for the contribution they make to this area of our church life. Last year we said goodbye to Jill and Daniel but have welcomed their replacements Ruthie and Troy.

The statistics show that we are a church in a deprived area. Ministry amongst the poor and the marginalised remains both a challenge and a priority for us as a church community. We continue to employ Clive Hall as a community worker and Church planter for the Burbank Area. Other examples are discussed above in the paragraph that includes community involvement. We remain committed to working with the foodbank as an active partner in this ministry. I personally have found myself expressing part of my ministry amongst the asylum seekers who live in our parish. Part of our role as a church is both to be beacon of hope and to bring hope to those who often feel a lack of it.

We also remain committed to working in partnership with other churches. Within the deanery this has been expressed by our practical support for St Hilda's during a time of vacancy. About once a fortnight one of our ordained clergy helps on a Sunday. During the week we help out with funerals, often lead the Wednesday Communion service and are part of the team doing assemblies in St Helens Primary School. We also remain active in Churches Together. Recently churches together have moved away from the formal covenant between a few town centre churches. This should allow us to develop a broader churches together group where we are all on equal footing. Our partnership also extends to our mission links including CMS, The Kilimatinde Trust, Tees-valley YFC and Nassau Bay Baptist Church.

We continue to maintain our buildings to allow mission and ministry to flourish. An important stained glass window in the west end was damaged during a break in last year. The process of repair has now started. Tenders have been awaited for the work on the lighting. Last autumn there was some work on the heating at St Matthew's. After Easter this year there is some planned work to

improve the lighting and to sand and reseal the main Hall floor. Thank you to those who work behind the scenes to make these things happen.

I am grateful to all those who have served on PCC and in particular the post holders Angela Craig, David Craig, Maureen Anderson and Kath Webster. A special note of thanks goes to Kath who after 6 years is standing down as Church Warden. Kath thank you for all that you have brought to the role of church warden, your faithfulness, your depth of spirituality and your hard work.

Norman Shave March 2016

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

All Saints, Stranton Church is situated in Church Row, Hartlepool TS24 7QT. It is part of the Diocese of Durham within the Church of England. The correspondence address is Stranton Church Office, St Matthew's Community Centre, Arncliffe Gardens Entrance, Hartlepool TS26 9JF.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is a charity excepted from registration with the Charity Commission

PCC members who have served from 1st January 2015 until the date this report was approved are:

Priest in Charge: The Rev'd Norman Shave Chairman

Wardens: Mrs Kathy Webster
 Mrs Angela Craig

Representatives on the Deanery Synod:
 Miss Pamela Harkness
 Mr Andrew Rogers
 Mrs Sylvia Shepherd

Elected members:

Mrs Maureen Anderson	Secretary
Mrs Barbara Busby	
Mrs Ann Courtenay	from APCM meeting 19.04.2015
Mr David Craig	Treasurer
Mr Frank Endean	
Mrs Diane Greenwood	
Mr David House	from APCM meeting 19.04.2015
Mrs Cheryl Mills	
Mrs Lynda Parvin	
Mr M Peacock	
Mr Alan Robertson	Lay Chair
Miss Mary Robinson	
Mrs Jacqui Rogers	
Mrs Mary Tones	from APCM meeting 19.04.2015

Ex-officio members:

Rev'd Andrew Craig
Rev'd Nick Moore

Co-opted members: Mr Clive Hall

The full PCC met six times during the year with an average level of attendance of 63%. Committees met between meetings and minutes of their deliberations were received by the full PCC and discussed where necessary.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

ELECTORAL ROLL

There are 140 parishioners on the Church Electoral Roll, parish. 9 names were added during the year and 4 were removed.

FINANCE REPORT

Stranton Church ended the year to 31 December 2015 in financial balance with the St Matthews Community Hall Committee reporting an operating surplus of £2,082 and the Church General fund returning a surplus of £316.

This position was achieved after meeting all of our financial obligations including paying more than £1,000 per week in parish share contributions to the Diocese (to help meet the costs of Clergy pay, housing and pensions and contribute to central budgets for staffing, training and mission support), and also sustain overseas and home mission support at a similar level to 2014.

The sale of the two staff houses realised £134,000 in total, and the purchase of 10 Clarkson Court was completed in September at a price of £135,000, the small £1,000 shortfall being met from our limited cash reserves. The excess of sale price over historic cost £85,683 is shown as a revaluation gain in the accounts, not operating surplus, and is recorded under restricted funds because of a condition attached to the 41 Arncliffe Gardens deeds requiring sales proceeds to be reinvested in Church staff housing.

Our 2015 Gift Day was well supported by many, just exceeding the £6,000 target, and so enabling us to meet our 2015 contribution to Youth for Christ mission support, provide bibles for schools and youth work and underwrite the cost of family outreach events. £3,000 of the Gift day was also applied towards the legal and estates agency fees of the three property transactions (£4,745) and minor works (£2,156) incurred in the change in staff housing.

In addition to committing to match “Living wage” for all paid staff in 2015, the PCC has further committed to making employer pensions contributions from January 2016 in advance of the October 2016 staging date for pensions Auto – enrolment. In consequence of these cost pressures, we have agreed to maintain parish share payments to the diocese at 2015 levels rather than make a requested 5% increase in 2016.

Some downward effect on voluntary income is likely to arise when members of our congregation retire or move away: and as the annual income tax personal allowance is raised, the number of people who are able to Gift Aid effectively has fallen. These pressures on regular giving are covered increasingly by one off donations and appeals and the PCC will need to consider in 2016 how to encourage more members of our congregation to experience the joy of regular planned giving

according to scriptural principles, in order to maintain and increase the scope and depth of our ministry and mission.

The accounts were adopted by the PCC on 22nd March 2016 subject to any minor adjustments picked up by the internal examiner.

David Craig

BUILDING AND FABRIC OF THE CHURCH

Main developments this year:

1. **Church staff housing (Sale of 41 Arncliffe Gardens and 161 Burbank Street, purchase of 10 Clarkson Court)**

It had become apparent during Nick Moore's appointment as Curate and in discussion with Clive and Angela Hall that our housing stock was becoming less suitable for supporting current requirements for effective ministry.

As the Diocese had already provided a Curate's house it was possible this year to sell both older properties and reinvest the funds in a more suitable family house at 10 Clarkson Court. The timings of the sales and purchase process were a wonderful answer to prayer and thanks go to Barbara Busby and Andrew Rogers and many other people who worked hard to help achieve a successful move.

Some necessary carpeting, redecorating and work on the windows and garden were carried out prior to the Halls moving in, and costs of the move were met by part of the 2015 Gift Day.

2. **Church Fabric**

A break-in at church caused serious damage to a window at the back of the kitchen and, sadly, to one of the oldest and most beautiful stained glass windows at the west end. These are scheduled to be repaired after Easter when the specialist is free to do the work. Overgrown vegetation at the back of the Choir vestry has been cut back to avoid root damage to foundations.

Minor repairs have been carried out to the roof of the porch and Fulthorpe chapel, along with other ongoing repairs e.g. the inner entrance lower door bolt.

The PCC is reviewing options for improving access and safety in the Chancel, Fulthorpe chapel and Choir vestry.

Further investigations of a drainage problem from a soak away/drain at the East end of the church will be required in 2016.

"Smart water" (marking of Leads) is also to be renewed in 2016, following completion of the insured lead replacement in the earlier part of 2015. This is an insurance condition.

A log book is kept, and all alterations and repairs to the church are entered.

3. **Church Equipment**

The sound system has had some speakers replaced but other work is still required. The Loop system requires extensive repair or replacement in 2016.

Lighting – an outline energy efficient scheme based on LED technology has been agreed and a first tender exercise was carried out, however the response was not adequate and further specifications and tenders are to be taken forward in 2016. In the meantime light bulbs have been replaced as required to maintain adequate illumination.

New candle holders have been made (by Mike Wiemer) for use in the Christmas services. We have serviced most of the fire extinguishers.

A complete inspection of articles belonging to the church has been satisfactorily completed.

Our thanks go to the many volunteers who have faithfully assisted in all the areas mentioned above and looked after the Church, including Sidespersons, Vergers for weddings/Funerals, and others who do cleaning tidying and gardening.

*Angela Craig
Kathy Webster
Churchwardens*

HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

Health and Safety Audit carried out 15th April 2015. Main path step edges repainted. A number of other minor items need attending to when the weather improves.

DEANERY SYNOD REPORT

We held 2 business meetings during the year (September and March) and held 1 social meeting (in July).

The main focus of the year has been updating and refreshing the Deanery Development Plan, as per the request from Bishop's Council. All the 16 Deaneries across the Diocese are involved in this process. David Brooke (Kate's husband), the Stockton Area Dean, has been seconded to oversee and encourage Deaneries in the production of the updated Plans. His gentle assistance, and insistence, has been invaluable.

The new Development Plan is important as we have to grapple with the issue of a reduction in the number of paid posts the Hartlepool Deanery will have. Money is tight, we can't attract clergy to apply for positions in the North and there's a dearth of folk graduating from Vicar School. These are realities that must be faced, planned around and prayed about.

So the first step was to invite parishes to consider the following questions and prepare a 5 minute response for presentation at Deanery Synod. The questions were "What have you got planned for the near future that's developing the mission of the Church? How can the Deanery help you? Finally, how can you help the Deanery?"

The Synod that followed was the first in a long time where all the parishes had a representative. Usually one or two are notable by their absence. So if nothing else came of the exercise that was a result in itself. So, the Development Plan is being updated currently and Area Dean Janet, Norman and I enjoyed the dubious pleasure of presenting the draft Plan to Bishop's Council last month.

What else happened during the year? Well, with great regret we said goodbye to Chris and Anne Collison as they slipped into a well-deserved retirement. The representatives to Diocesan Synod were appointed; House of Laity, Wendy Borthwick, Sylvia Shepherd, Anne Johnson and yours truly; House of Clergy, Area Dean Janet, Norman, Andrew Craig and Leon Rogers.

The new Deanery Standing Committee represents the broad range of churchmanship our Deanery enjoys and comprises:- Rev Janet Burbury, Area Dean (Hart & Elwick), Anne Johnson, Lay Chair of Deanery (Hart), Wendy Borthwick (St Paul's), Rev Paul Allinson (Greatham, Greatham Hospital & Seaton Carew), Rev Norman Shave, Bishop's Council (Stranton & Burbank), me, Lay Chair Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council (Stranton & Burbank), Sylvia Shepherd, Deanery Treasurer (Stranton & Burbank) Rev Graeme Buttery, General Synod Rep (St Oswald's).

Andrew Rogers

SAFEGUARDING - CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION

This year has (in both a good and bad way) been very quiet, with little to report. There have been no safeguarding incidents brought to my attention, and only a few questions.

However we made a commitment with the 'new' safeguarding policy to review it every year, and to offer refresher training /meetings to discuss safeguarding issues at least annually. The report was last updated 18 months ago, and the last training 13 months ago - so ideally we will rectify this before summer 2016.

Of particular importance is the safeguarding procedures regarding 'befriending' young people on social media. Having consulted with some parents, leaders, and young people, we allow young people to initiate online contact with youth leaders. We have stringent safeguarding procedures in place for this (and parents must also consent to the contact), and in many ways this form of contact is easier to hold leaders to account than phone calls. However, recognising that our policy is different to the Diocesan policy and many other youth organisations, we said we would particularly review this within a year. (18 months ago!). If any young people or parents have any opinions to share on youth workers' online contact with young people, please do get in touch.

Peter Hart

GATHERED WORSHIP IN STRANTON PARISH

There is a regular pattern of worship services across the parish, both weekly and monthly. The services are held in Church, St Matthew's Hall and in Ward Jackson Church of England Primary School. Each service has its own characteristics. We hope and pray that there is something for those who have been part of a worshipping community for a long time and those attending for the first time. The pattern is summarised as follows –

Stranton Church

Sundays

8:30	Holy Communion	A quiet said service using traditional liturgy (organ and Hymns monthly)
10:30	Morning Worship (provision for all ages)	Each Sunday has a different characteristic. Generally the services are relaxed and welcoming including a mix of contemporary music and hymns. 1 st and 3 rd Sundays include communion 4 th Sunday, Lighthouse is a good service to try if you are new to church, it includes welcomes for families wanting baptism.

Ward Jackson Church of England Primary School

11:00	Morning Worship	Burbank Community Church is relaxed and informal, includes all ages. The services seek to include members of the Burbank Community.
-------	-----------------	---

St Matthew's Community Centre

4:00 Messy Church A service for families based around craft, story and sharing tea together
third Sunday
only

Wednesdays

10:00 Holy Communion A said midweek communion in a more accessible venue.

WORSHIP TEAM

We aim both to deepen the experience of worship, and to make it accessible to new people. Our thanks to the congregation especially for your willingness to engage in worship. I am grateful to all the team for their commitment and enthusiasm - and it has been good to see how the group support and encourage each other.

Following Mark's move to the Faroe Islands, Paul has been a huge help with the PA and projection systems. He is also singing with us at some services. As I mentioned in a recent service - we need a couple more people to help on the mixing desk.

The PA System itself needs work, as flagged up in last year. The hearing loop is not working - the loop wiring round the church is broken, but also a new loop amplifier will be needed so to give independent control of the loop mix.

It has been encouraging to hear 'the Apple Tree' the young people's group leading the worship on occasions.

This year we came to the conclusion that it was not viable to continue with the choir. Their final service was a mixture of some sadness, but also thanksgiving for their many years of loyal service. I commend their weekly prayer, "grant that what we have sung with our lips, we may believe in our hearts; and what we believe in our hearts, we may show forth in our lives".

Our thanks to Jack Hanlon for playing the organ, and he will continue to do this at the 8.30 service

Kevin Tones

PRAYER MINISTRIES

There is a place in nearly every service for intercessions and a rota of people to lead them. New volunteers to lead intercessions are always welcome. However there is a great deal more than that both in scope and the commitment we have as a church community to practice prayer publicly and encourage private prayer. In fact prayer underpins everything else that we do as a church. Most weeks (i.e. except at certain holiday times), there is a half hour service of Morning Prayer at 8:45 on Monday – Thursday mornings, including reading a psalm and other readings from the Bible. This service is a "legal" requirement for clergy, but everybody else is welcome to take part as well. There continues to be an informal "prayer and praise" meeting on the second Tuesday of each month.

Home groups, including one group that seeks specifically to pray for the Church, provide space to pray with just a few other people in a friend's home.

The Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) programme involves starting most meetings with “Dwelling in the Word”, which involves a brief period of meditation, reflection and prayer on a piece of scripture – Luke 10:1-12 for the first year of PMC.

A group of people meets on most alternate Sunday afternoons to explore Contemplative Prayer. Ask Angela or Elspeth Craig if you are interested.

Stranton’s prayer diary provides material to aid praying (mainly interceding) on a weekly basis and is produced most months. Please let Rev’d Andrew Craig know if there are issues you would like to have included in this, by the last week of the previous month.

Andrew Craig

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER GROUP

This small group has continued to meet through the year about twice a month usually at Claremont Drive on a Sunday afternoon. The group is a restful and deep seeking for God’s word to us in our lives.

This group is a listening group, employing the Ignatian Prayer type of meditation, usually on a passage of scripture. Many people in Stranton Church groups are now familiar with this approach to meditation as it has been adopted as part of the PMC ‘s suggestion using Luke 10 v 1-12 (sending out of the 72).

We have welcomed new members and are growing together, but others who are interested are welcome to join. Please contact Angela or Elspeth Craig or Patricia Vaughan.

Angela Craig

BURBANK COMMUNITY CHURCH and YOUTH, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Burbank Community Church

This has been a very busy year for me, many different things have happened and many other things have been developing throughout the year.

Last year I mentioned how we had lost a few numbers attending the church. We have settled back down to a good 35 members at the moment. With my increased busyness the leadership team have also increased their amount of work and support to both the church and myself. With the help of the Clergy staff they have all been doing a great job of looking after Burbank Church. We also have two members on the PMC programme which helps to keep us involved and up to date with its progress

Foodbank

I have been re-elected as Chair of Hartlepool Foodbank and Andrew Craig was re-elected as Treasurer. We have just been audited and had our AGM which shows things are all going really well for us at the moment. We have employed our second worker and started to offer Debt Counselling. We are also establishing relationships with service providers who work with Asylum seekers. They now have an office in our building.

Bridge Builders

This year there are about 10-20 children attending. They are attending their annual trip Hartlepool United in March. This group is in my eyes a teaching group for the YFC team. Both Ruthie and Troy

now help and they get to see how to help run the groups. Angela leads with them, mentoring them and helps them to develop their gifting's.

Overseer for Youth, Children and Family work

After my initial role of collecting information on who the leaders and volunteers were for all the groups and if all DBS were up to date etc. I organised a trip to Splash on 28th June 2015. This was something of a learning curve but the end result was 80 people went along to Splash followed by a picnic in their gym room. I then met with all groups to help develop the expenses claims and also closer working across the groups. I am in the middle of setting up a First aid course for leaders and we will have a Games day and picnic for all youth groups on the 2nd July

Personal News

In September I started my Reader training with Lindisfarne, based in Cuthbert house in Durham. This does give me extra work with all the reading, essays, residential's and presentations, but through it all I am learning a lot.

I have had several interviews now within my Ordination Process. All the people I have been talking to are happy for me to advance in this process and I have been pencilled in to go to Local Panel and if I am successful I will then go to National panel. If I am successful at this panel I will then start my 2nd year of training but under the heading of Ordinands training and so in summer 2017 I would be ordained.

Thank you for all your prayer support in this process please keep praying!

Clive Hall

STRANTON TODDLER GROUP

The Toddler group continues to be very popular in St Matthews Hall on both Tuesday and Friday mornings, drawing in many families from the local community. The children enjoy small toys, puzzles and crafts in the small hall and particularly the space in the large hall where they have fun on bikes, scooters, slides and see-saws etc. This is a good place for those caring for small children to meet one another, play with their children and encourage them to share and to learn new skills. It is also an opportunity for Christian adults to model God's love and care.

I am very grateful to those who come to help on a Tuesday, both in the setting up and the preparing and serving of snacks. One or two of our helpers have needed to step down over the last year, so if you are free on a Tuesday morning and feel able to help with refreshments – do have a word with Ann Courtenay or me.

Julie Shave

MESSY CHURCH

Messy Church continues meets monthly on the third Sunday from 4-5.30 pm in St Matthew's Hall. It continues to thrive and our numbers have been growing over the last year. Baptism families are always invited and others are drawn in through other contacts: Toddlers etc.

Several of us meet together each month to plan our activities. We begin our sessions with table top games and colouring, and once everyone has arrived, we have a bible story, song and prayer. Then the children choose from the 6 crafts/games linked with the theme, enjoying as many as they can fit into the 30-40 minutes available.

After this we enjoy tea together where there is more time to chat with each other. It's great to see whole families learning, playing and eating together. Many of the families have been coming for some time which means our friendship with them is growing and giving us more opportunities to get alongside them and share our faith. One of our long standing families has chosen to go forward for baptism which has been a great encouragement.

Under Nick and Bekah's leadership we had a summer family fun event, a fireworks evening and a Christmas session last term which drew extra families in.

It is a privilege to share the love of God and our prayer is that many, both adults and children, will come to faith.

Julie Shave

SUNDAY CLUBS

Bubbles is for pre-school-aged children and meets in the Choir Vestry during the Sunday morning service.

From Easter 2015 until September Bubbles joined with Sunday Club in the Fulthorpe Chapel. Many of the children who regularly attended Bubbles at this time began school in September and they therefore remained with Sunday Club. The younger ones moved back to the Choir Vestry in September and we have a bigger team of helpers on a monthly rota: Jill, Ruth, Hayley, Alice and myself. This means that all leaders have an opportunity to be in the 10.30 service at least once a month, plus the Lighthouse service.

We have some new children who join us regularly each week, with their parents usually staying in the service. We have visiting children almost every week who tend to bring their grown-ups along with them. Bubbles leaders very much see their role as looking after the children, teaching them the wonderful truths of the Bible and welcoming new children and their grown-ups to Stranton. Bubbles sessions begin with a welcome, register and maybe a song. We then have a Bible story, a craft to help explain and remember the story, then a prayer and maybe singing, then play time – our new train set has proved extremely popular! We always have toys and mats out for babies to join us. We use the Beginner's Bible because most of the children in Bubbles will have this Bible at home, as all children baptized at Stranton are given one. We write the page number and main point of the story on the craft so that parents are able to recap the story with their children during the week.

Bubbles continues to grow in numbers as well as in knowledge and love of Jesus and is a very happy place to be on a Sunday morning.

Bekah Moore

We continue to offer Sunday club for children aged 3 - 14 during the 10.30 morning service three weeks a month. The children are in three age groups meeting in the choir vestry, Fulthorpe chapel and vicar's vestry. The Sunday club leaders work in pairs which means that we need 6 volunteers every week with some volunteering once a month and others every week. The children enjoy a variety of activities with some groups using Scripture Union material for their lessons and others planning their own sessions.

Barbara Busby

The year 6 and overs have looked at the fruit of the spirit, the story of Joseph and at part of the Easter story - we have a loyal core of 3 members Jessica, Mallory and Josh plus occasional visitors. We miss Lynda's enthusiastic additions but we enjoy our visiting guests' contributions as well

George Bainbridge

MATT'S MATES

Matts Mates meets weekly on a Thursday during term time from 3.20-5.00. Our aim is to provide a group where primary school children can be part of the church, learning about how God wants us to live as we spend time together.

We have had some changes to our team of church members this year. Mel Hutchinson has left us after many years of faithfully helping. His work was mainly in the background, setting up and putting away tables and chairs and preparing and clearing snack. Thank you Mel. You have been a great helper and encourager. Barbara Busby and Diana Wanduragala have been joined by Ruth Anderson and Hayley Taylor. We also have Ruthie and Troy from the gap year team helping us each week. They have developed good relationships with the children.

At the moment we have between 7 and 14 children attending the sessions each week. They are aged between 4 and 10.

Each time we meet we have a bible story, games and a snack. We sometimes have a craft activity or singing. Our themes this year have included the Ten Commandments and the life of Jesus.

Barbara Busby

BEFREE

The Be Free leadership team welcomed myself and David in September, with Elliott staying on and Angus returning. We are also joined by Ruthie & Troy from the YFC team. They have fit in with the group effortlessly and we are looking forward to working with them more over the next few months. We have a strong leadership team and the bond between ourselves and the members of Be Free strengthens week to week with each leader offering something different for the kids. Since taking over leadership in September, our numbers have steadily increased. Some members have started to bring friends and some are already church members who have naturally progressed and moved to us from other groups. We now average approx. 15 members. We have gone from being a predominantly male heavy group to having a nice balance of male and female members. We have continued the work of the last team to not only teach strong Christian values through interaction and but also be there as a source of guidance for the youth as they develop their own faith and beliefs.

This year the leadership team made the decision to move away from just spending the evening playing games to implementing more of a structured evening and we found a more interactive and engaging approach to bible study and learning more about faith and Christianity. We are still in the early stages of this, but are already seeing positive results and hope this is something that we can continue for the remainder of the year.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the PCC once again for the kind donation of Youth Bibles. These are proving to be a useful aid in sharing the message each week and we thank the church for their continued support.

Amy Playfor



This year has been a good year for YF (Youth Fellowship). We have seen great growth in the young people and a deepening commitment to their faith and an eagerness to share that faith with others in person and on their blogs and social media. We have also added new members to the group who have fitted in well. They show a great level of enthusiasm and we have a solid core group. Prayer requests are ongoing and encouraging as they share their walk with leaders and each other.

This year we have looked at creation, de-creation, recreation and new creation. Purity, holiness and service. The big questions we covered included "Is Jesus the only way to God?" and "Are miracles possible?" The last two sessions of this term will be about Easter and excellent games and crafts they may not have done before to get them to look at Easter more.

We went back to the Jonas Centre for four days to enjoy fellowship and learn about God. The Bible studies were led by Nathanael. They were on the basic foundations of faith such as how to study the Bible and how to pray. One of the best things we have been told by the youth about this time is that you can focus on God without distraction and be in a supportive atmosphere, without life's business, to concentrate and spend time with him. They also enjoyed walks, camp fires and visiting the candle shop. A great prayer session was held around the camp fire allowing many different people to pray. Fund raising was suggested by the youth to keep the cost down and was done well by selling off services such as car washing and gardening - we are really thankful to members of the congregation for their support for the youth in this and many other ways.

There has been a lot of growth in the younger leadership. We are grateful for their leadership and pray for blessings on their futures. Ruthie and Troy, our Americans, are as always a great encouragement and a vital part of the leadership team.

Thank you for your continued support and prayers

The YF Leadership Team

YFC GAP YEAR STUDENTS

So far, this gap year has been flying by! The team has moved around quite a bit, but now we have all settled in and things are running smoothly. Monday mornings we have our weekly Youth for Christ wider gap year team meeting in Stockton. Every gap year worker in the Tees Valley goes to these meetings. We meet in groups, sing worship songs, and somebody speaks every week. The meetings are open to anyone and everyone if they would like to come.

Tuesday's we go into Stranton Primary School. We all go in around lunch time, share a meal with the students, and then go out onto the field and play games with them and hang out. Then, we go off into a class where we help out the teacher in whichever way we can. Whether it's helping students along with their work, taking some students out to read, or offering our views on certain topics. We are always willing to help! The students treat you like a celebrity because they are so happy you are there with them and we don't mind it one bit.

Wednesday's we have started visiting St. Hild's secondary school. Each week we sit in on their R.E. classes and offer our perspective from the Christian standpoint. We go in for two classes each week and the students seem to be enjoying our presence. We usually do about two to three assemblies

here a year. Our next one coming up is in April so please be praying for that. On the night we all go to Burbank Community Centre for our weekly youth club, Bridgebuilders. We play games, share snacks, and tell them a bible story each week. We've got our hands full but we enjoy it.

Thursday's we changed it up and started to go into Dyke House towards the end of the week. For the full day we are in year 7. My basketball coach is one of the heads of school there so we've got a pretty nice set up. Two of us are in different lessons for each period and we do our best to help the teachers and build relationships with the students. They even give us free lunch! After we've finished eating, I pop off to help with P.E. and the rest of the team mentor students. I stay after school to help coach a basketball session for the students who want to learn more about the sport. Thursday night at Owton Manor Baptist Church, there is a youth club for primary students that Bethany and I help run. Earlier in our gap year we had as many as 46 students! Unbelievable! We had to shut it down during Christmas and we've since opened it back up and now have a better schedule to help manage the students with their time there.

On Friday's, Troy and I have been helping out at the Food Bank. It is so great to go there and help people in their unfortunate situations by giving them food. But even more than that, we try to give them hope by listening to them and sometimes offering to pray for them.

Stephen Merkey

May I start by saying a huge Thank You for all your financial and prayerful support. This last year has been one of challenges and blessings! The team have had to adjust with a team member arriving and then not adjusting well so returning back to America. This impacted the church and the team but we worked through it and got to know the newest members of our team.

It's been a privilege to work alongside two teams this year Hartlepool and Billingham and meet with them mentor them and encourage them in their work. I am also responsible to mentor five more girls within the wider YFC team. It's been great to see God challenge them and push them out of their comfort zones and watch them develop their God given gifts.

Hartlepool team have built great relationships up with the year 7 head of school in Dyke house and they have started to mentor students in the school. Stephen helps out with an after school basketball team and Ruthie is going to be helping with a dance after school club very shortly. Bethany and Ruthie have started a girl's bible study that meets every other Tuesday and they start with a meal and study the bible together. It's going really well. Troy is looking to mentor one of the boys from YF and is helping out with the Headland Sunday night youth group. They continue to go into St Hild's and Stranton School and both Troy and Stephen are on the foodbank rota.

I have been able to run alongside Bethany three Romance Academy courses, one in Hartlepool Further Education College and one in Yarm Methodist church. We ran a one off workshop with Stranton YF.

The Explorers camp we help lead in the summer asked us to take four workshops with them. It's a great resource that really gives young people an opportunity to talk freely about relationships and pressures they may feel.

After Easter we will be running another course at the Vine church in Stockton and one in Billingham New life church.

Please pray for opportunities to open up to us in schools especially in Hartlepool.

Please be praying for the future of Hartlepool YFC team. Bethany and Stephen both leave this summer as does Ruthie. Troy will be staying on to complete his year till January 2017. We need to know Gods will for the future work here and what that might look like.

Thank you again

Ang Hall



What a difference willing volunteers make!

This time last year we had to accept that changes were inevitable and were unsure where they would lead us. We have had a small established team for 25 years but times were changing and Maureen and I needed to look to the future. We knew that during the summer we had to say goodbye to Kathryn and this summer Emily is also going off to university. We had not seen that Hazel would also have to leave. So we had to appeal for an interested adult to come and join our established shrinking team with a view to eventually taking the lead role. The alternative would be to transfer the girls to other units and close.

Fortunately, as well as Anna coming to Rainbows as a Young Leader, we had Ruth come to visit and she is now currently a Leader in training. We are looking forward to Ruth bringing a new approach and ideas to the unit. Having a third registered leader will reinvigorate Rainbows again. We can safely increase our numbers, after a reduction last year to stay within ratios and we can start to go out again-- no more "outdoor" adventures in the hall. We will soon start working hard for our Queen's Birthday badge. It's going to be really hard enjoying an afternoon tea in our party clothes and crown but we are sure we can rise to the occasion, even growing our own cress for our sandwiches.

So this year our Rainbow report is cheerful and positive. Our basics never change, we "think about our beliefs" and as a Church sponsored group we can believe in God. We do our best and are kind and helpful. Rainbows are also quiet and noisy, full of excitement and enthusiasm, willing to try new things but reluctant to leave out old favourites. They question everything, absolutely everything! We achieve the 4 essentials of Rainbows - Look, Learn, Laugh and Love - without having to try. So as we celebrate 25 years of being Stranton Rainbows Maureen and I can now relax a little and look forward to many more years of fabulous opportunities with new team members and lots more 5 and 6 year olds to keep us going.

Yours in guiding

Christine Robinson



Brownies & Guides

The programme has been varied with much fun and laughter during the year plus many new skills learnt. We have completed a number of crafts - making items for Thinking Day, Mothering Sunday

and Christmas novelty foods. We have been down to the beach to build sandcastles, played crazy golf at the Domes and had the Christmas party at Flix. The joint evening for Sports night was great fun as we had the 'silly' races! At Christmas we had a girls and Family evening playing Christmas Beetle, a great deal of fun was had by all. We joined with the other Youth Groups at a Fayre held in November co-ordinated by Clive Hall. This was the first joint activity we have been involved.

We have been to a number of Parade services at Church during the year but we only found out after the event that one of our Leaders was being confirmed. Congratulations to Amy Wearmouth.

Brownies

We have covered the Cooking and Artists Badges during the year. We have also been involved in Divisional Activities at Summerhill and a Disco and joined with other packs for singing.

Guides

Cooking was the 'flavour' for the meetings. Completing the Cooks badges with lots of other baking. Also completed were the Confectioners and Chocolate Badges. We were also involved in the Division activity of ice skating. We followed on from the Brownie with the singing evening.

Cheryl Mills

(Guiders for Brownies & Guides)



Boys Brigade

Anchor Boys

We have 12 Anchor Boys and they have enjoyed visits from the police, dentist and Michelle Brown's Dance Academy. They made posters for the Harvest Festival Service and are looking forward to Easter Eggheads.

Juniors

We have 15 Lads, they won the Battalion 5 a side and gave a good account of themselves in the hockey competition. They are all working for their badges and learning to play handbells, draughts and chess. They also enjoyed a night at tea @ harts at Christmas. They are also involved with Easter Eggheads.

Company

We have 18 Lads working on the Discovery Award scheme. We are camping at Fanwood Scout Centre, Yorkshire in July.

The biggest change is that the Section is now run by Jack Hanlon and Greg Lee as I focus on the two younger sections. Greg and Jack hope to give the company a new direction with a slight change in style.

Other Activities

Every Tuesday we have badminton and Wednesday we have bell ringing for the year 6 Junior Lads and Company Lads. The aim is for the year 6 Lads to get to know the older ones before they move up to the Company at camp time.

In the summer we rest badminton and programme tennis, pool, swimming and football.

Involvement with Stranton

We encourage Lads and parents to attend Stranton Church by holding bacon butty Sundays, bell ringing and visits for Anchors and Juniors (Many thanks to Mrs Vaughan and Mrs Butcher). We are also looking forward to visits from the clergy team on a monthly basis.

George Bainbridge

Leader in Charge, 4th Hartlepool Boys Brigade

COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

The aim of the group is to enhance the ways in which Stranton communicates with the church members, church organisations and third parties, and to encourage greater congregation participation and awareness of activities and to draw us closer to God.

Since April 2015, my own personal and other commitments has affected our ability to meet regularly, although I expect this to improve following my retirement from full-time work.

Christine Robinson was appointed as the St Matthew's Management Team representative.

The Church Web Site continues to be kept up to date on a weekly basis and reflects the current status of the church functions and groups. The Service Sheet is added weekly and the latest Magazine is added at the beginning of each month.

Stranton was added to the web site www.achurchnearyou.com.

Stranton's Facebook receives regular frequent posts, as well as consistent views from people. We welcome all relevant submissions and we are able to pay for low cost advertising to expand coverage when necessary, e.g. to promote special events.

The key topics which remain to be taken forward during 2016 include:

- web site make-over
- update the web site photos
- agree protocol for taking photos, especially re: DBS
- improve the weddings/christenings/funeral pages
- increase the social events
- improve the youth and children pages

Mike Peacock

PASTORAL GROUP

The group has continued to meet at regular intervals to uphold each other and the members of the church we visit.

The main focus of the team is still to visit those in the church community who are unable to get to church. We have not had many referrals in the last year and feel we may have to remind the congregation that this system is in place to ensure all who need or would like a visit receive one. The next focus point of the team is bereavement follow-up visits when requested, but this is still in its infancy.

It is thanks to the hard work and commitment of the team that we are able to offer these services.

Patricia Vaughan

MOTHERS' UNION REPORT

Our number of members appear to stay static at 18. One member leaving to live near her family, but a new member was enrolled, Sue Coates. We are also starting the New Year with a new member so we are looking forward to 2016.

Branch meetings are once a month with a varied programme. Rev. Shave explaining the `Dwelling in the word` and seeking why members joined Stranton particularly. A visit by Sister Kate from the Catholic Church for Lent was very well received. Occasionally there is a `self-service` meeting. Follow up questions Re Rev. Shave input, Epiphany hopes for the New Year, planting bulbs, and Advent / carol service.

Involvement in the Diocese saw us at the Cathedral twice this year. First for the Indoor Members Eucharist and for the Festival Service with our World Wide President addressing us. Representatives also attend All Committee Days and Diocesan Council.

Deanery sees us joining St. Luke's and Deanery members for a Lady Day Service at Stranton and a Quiet afternoon at Seaton Carew.

We raised funds with support for overseas with soup lunch a coffee morning as well as other projects. These events provide an opportunity to meet new people. Women's refuge and Mission to seaman receive gifts at Christmas and other occasions

Of course like many organisations we like food and friendship so have an outing in the summer and a Christmas meal together. We are a Christian organisation and keep very much to our roots beginning every meeting with prayer, locally and worldwide. Members have helped in many different ways in Church life and those who are able, still do.

We try not to live in the past but look forward to the future. 2016 will have us at the Cathedral celebrating 140 years with a Family Festival looking to the future as well as celebrating the past.

Kathy Webster
Acting Branch Leader

HOME GROUPS

Home groups are a fundamental part of our church, fulfilling a key role in discipleship, fellowship, mutual pastoral support, and service to the wider church. We have a total of eight groups meeting on afternoons and evenings Monday through to Wednesday. Highlights this past year include several people joining groups (well done to them for taking that step, and to the groups for welcoming them!) and a new group starting, especially (but not exclusively!) for under-40s. Each group decides how often it will meet and what material it will study. Most groups have opted to use the material provided centrally most of the time – although not obligatory (because group leaders will know what best suits their group at a particular time), it is encouraging to see a good take-up of this material as it is designed to complement our Sunday sermon teaching series.

In summer 2015 we did a "spiritual health-check" by looking at the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3; in autumn 2015 we used the DVD-based "Fruitfulness on the Frontline" material from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, helping us to think about being fruitful for Christ in our everyday lives; and in spring 2016 groups have either joined the Churches Together Lent groups, used the York Courses material on the Psalms, or followed a short series on Titus entitled "Living Truth".

Looking ahead to summer 2016, studies will be available to help us delve deeper into the biblical basis of our new church vision summary, "Rooted in God's love, Growing together with Jesus, Branching out in the power of the Holy Spirit". I would like to thank those who, in God's strength, enable this important aspect of our church life by organizing, hosting, and leading the groups.

Nick Moore

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN HARTLEPOOL

Representatives from Stranton Church continue to play a leading role in *Churches Together in Hartlepool*, which is the umbrella organization for Hartlepool's Foodbank, the Breakfast Club and Street Pastors (have a word with Norman, Clive or Andrew if you are interested in learning more about these).

There is a joint prayer meeting at 8am on alternative Wednesdays, at various locations including, monthly, at the College of Further Education.

This year, we agreed to dissolve the formal partnership that had come to be known as "Town Centre Churches Together", believing that the informal and more inclusive grouping of churches working together through the (town-wide) *Enabling Group* is the way in which the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed most effectively, and ecumenically, in our town.

Andrew Craig

BELLRINGING REPORT

Recruitment and teaching

We are still recruiting new learners and a lot of teaching in bell handling is given. We have a very welcoming and supportive team who give each other lots of encouragement and make new ringers feel very welcome. This year we have made a good step forward in our change ringing and many ringers have improved bell control and listening skills. Our practises include rounds, call changes and some change ringing. We continue to have support from other ringers who visit us on our practice nights.

Ringling for Sunday Service

Ringling to call people to worship on Sundays is the priority for any local band of ringers. I am really pleased that we are now ringling weekly on Sunday mornings.

Involvement in the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Association of Church Bell ringers

We continue to benefit from the support of the association, with many members attending meetings and receiving encouragement and support from more experienced ringers.

Bell maintenance

The bells, frame and fittings here at Stranton are all in working condition. The bell frame will need cleaning and painting within the next two or three years but no major maintenance tasks are planned in the next year.

Barbara Busby

Stranton Tower Captain

ST MATTHEW'S COMMUNITY CENTRE ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT

I am part of a small group of people, who through the direction of the PCC, are charged with the responsibility of making St Matthew's a sustainable resource for use by church members, local community groups and other groups throughout the town. Most, but not all members of the team

are also members of Stranton Church, others represent community interests and hall users in general. As church members we also believe we are part of a larger team who are delivering Stranton Church's ministry in the community.

Since I became involved with St Matthew's there have been a vast number of changes, so it is good to review our progress and see just how far we have come. We now have a large variety of groups using the halls and all revenue generated from these rentals is invested into the hall to improve facilities as well as the fabric of the building itself. We have also been successful with a number of grant applications which have enabled complete refurbishment of the east end of the hall as well as a much needed new roof for the large hall. After protracted discussions with HBC, and with the support of our local councillors, both moral and financial, we even managed to secure the land adjacent to the hall for our exclusive use as a car park.

Another important development towards the end of 2014 was the appointment of Trish Playfor to work 5 hours a week for St Matthew's whilst continuing with her duties for Stranton Church. This has created a single point of contact for all enquiries and bookings and has resulted in a more professional image of St Matthew's. It has also helped to increase awareness and accessibility allowing all matters to be dealt with in a prompt manner. We also now employ a cleaner who works 4 hours each week, her daughter is a hall user, so she feels very much part of our team. This may seem like a small point, but this ownership and team building goes a long way towards the successful management of the building with limited resource.

This last year, 2015, our strategy was very much one of consolidation, looking to take care of outstanding housekeeping matters, such as reallocation of cupboards, increased security lighting and clearing of drains and repainting. However, we did have a couple of unexpected challenges to engage our minds and time. The first of these was the central heating system which simply appeared to ignore all instructions from programmers and thermostats and eventually stopped working. After some sub terranean detective work and the engagement of a new plumber the problems were finally solved. But not without much time, new components and boiler, not to mention unbudgeted expense.

The second issue we had to address was the crumbling and pot holed tarmac surface outside the entrance to the small hall which had become dangerous. In fact one person had twisted their ankle when coming out of the hall in darkness. This entire area has now been resurfaced and fashioned in such a way as to provide disabled access to the small hall, a feature which was much needed. Without making these repairs and improvements we would not have been able to continue with our rentals to user groups and consequently we would have encountered a loss of regular income. The good news is that because of a healthy rental situation and careful budgeting we were able to absorb these costs and we did not have to look for external funding which would have taken some time. Having said that, we did receive small donations from all three local councillors towards the costs of these repairs.

Over the period January 2015 to January 2016 total hall bookings have increased by 32%, this of course does not necessarily reflect a corresponding increase in revenue, but it has allowed us to plan two major projects for 2016. The first of these is an upgrade of the lighting in both halls. This is much needed, since when we consulted minimum recommended light levels required for leisure badminton, for example, comparatively speaking our users were virtually playing in the dark, and this of course is a potential hazard.

The second project is the renovation of the wooden floor in the large hall. The floor was badly damaged in some parts because of leaks in the old roof and the whole of the top surface was eroded simply due to wear and tear. The entire floor will be stripped back to bare wood and completely rejuvenated and restored. We will also receive training on how to look after the floor

properly once restored. Both of these projects will be completed during the Easter break when most hall users take a holiday, and both will be financed through rental received from hall users.

As well as regular users St Matthew's is also hired for social events such as birthday parties, pie and pea evenings etc. and in December of last year we rounded off the year with three successful events, namely The Boy's Brigade Christmas Fair, St Matthew's and BVNRA Christmas Fair and finally a Church and community social evening where we were entertained by The Michelle Brown Academy's singers and dancers.

Through our work at St Matthew's we have developed very good relationships with our local councillors as well as members of HBC Neighbourhood Development Teams and we know we can always rely on their support. Over time we have also developed contacts with local press and media as well as other service agencies and community centres within the area.

Finally I hope I have been able to demonstrate to you that as a result of a long journey we are making St Matthew's a valuable and sustainable asset to both Stranton Church and the local community. St Matthew's belongs to all of us so please make sure you use it to its maximum potential.

Carol Laud

St Matthew's Community Centre Management Committee