

# ALL SAINTS, STRANTON CHURCH HARTLEPOOL

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2016



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

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## Norman Shave (Vicar and chair of PCC) April 2017

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

*'Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.'* (Heb 12:1,2)

I would like to begin by thanking each and every person who makes a contribution to the life and witness of our parish life. We remain committed to being a church that is rooted in God's love, growing together with Jesus and branching out in the power of the Holy Spirit. God has shown us his love in Jesus Christ and so we fix our eyes on him as we remember all that has happened over the last year and as we look to him for guidance for the future.

As I look back at 2016 perhaps the most significant ministry that emerged was to asylum seekers. What began with ministry to one family of three Iranians blossomed into quite a sizeable ministry in the summer but has shrunk down to a much smaller ministry at the time of writing. The ministry has involved loving service, welcoming and helping those who are new to this country, including helping with learning English. It has also included drawing alongside those who are asking for baptism, enabling them to learn the faith. In the middle of the year we chose to purchase some translation equipment to enable simultaneous translation in our services which helped us minister to the large group of Farsi speakers who were attending at that time. The great majority of those we have been working with have now received asylum and many have subsequently chosen to move to another part of the country for a more permanent place to live and the hope of finding employment. This is a costly ministry for those involved and I am very grateful to Jean, David and Negar who in different ways have continued to be involved. I am also grateful to Roger Say who continues to provide English classes to those who request it three times a week.

As a church we remain committed to working in the Burbank community. I am grateful to Clive and Angela for their ongoing work with the Burbank Community Church. During the year two key families left this congregation which means numbers have reduced but this congregation remains a vital part of our witness. Clive has continued to explore his vocation to ministry. He will attend a bishop's advisory panel in May 2017 and following that decisions will be made about how his ministry is to be authorised in the future. However this is authorised it now seems likely that Clive will continue in his present role as church planter and community worker for the Burbank area. A key part of our work in the Burbank area is with Ward Jackson Church of England Primary School. Our involvement is expressed in a variety of ways. This includes helping and being part of school worship, welcoming the school to church for key Christian festivals, the YFC team working in school on Thursday mornings, including the delivery of the recent prayer day, and a significant input into school governance. In September the school received a disappointing Ofsted result. Seeking to provide a good quality education for every child in the school in a safe and secure Christian environment remains our priority. The dedicated staff, with the support of the governors, are working very hard to move the judgement to good. We are also currently involved in the process of seeking a new head teacher who we hope and pray will be employed from September 2017.

St Matthew's Community Centre remains another significant part of our engagement with the wider community. Trish our church administrator is now well established in her dual role where she combines her work for the church with being the bookings secretary for the Hall. As a church St

Matthew's is a base for our office and for several of our activities: Wednesday Communion, Matts Mates, Be Free, Stranton Toddlers, Messy Church and the church-linked uniformed organisations. Alongside this we have a good working relationship with the Burn Valley North Residents' Association and welcome a considerable number of other community groups and individual lettings for parties. During the year the letting income and support from our local councillors has allowed us to renew the lighting in the two halls and refurbish the floor in the large hall. We are currently seeking planning permission to extend the kitchen and provide a disabled toilet in the large hall. This latter project will need grant funding to proceed.

The church building and the activities based there are the other physical focus for our parish ministry. Church is the base for our regular Sunday services, the asylum English practice on Monday mornings and the various occasional offices (baptisms, weddings and funerals). During 2016 the repair to the damaged stained glass window was completed. A legacy received in 2016 has also enabled us to plan to replace our church lights this year with a gift day. The next 12 months will also see the quinquennial (5 yearly) inspection of the church building which may need to other essential work being identified. Midweek there also continues to be several home groups for fellowship, Bible study and prayer. I am grateful to those who continue to lead and host these groups.

We also continue with the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) process. As the listening year drew to a close in the summer a report was presented to the whole church. Following this we agreed an area of missional experimentation. The agreed focus is to reach out to the isolated and alone in the area around St Matthew's Hall. In seeking to do this we have formed a small team who will seek to work in partnership with others who are already concerned about the issues affecting those who live in this area. Alongside this as a church community we are encouraged to make time for a number of missional practices, notably offering and receiving hospitality, working in partnership with those who share our values and naming where God is at work amongst us. We also continue to support mission at home and abroad through our links with CMS, the Kilimatinde Trust and Tees Valley Youth for Christ. In March we welcomed a mission team from Nassau Bay Baptist Church and in September we welcomed one from Wycliffe Hall. Recently we played an active role in the diocesan wide 'Talking Jesus' mission. This year we will not be hosting a team from the States but I have recently begun discussions about hosting a team in 2018.

Our youth groups and Sunday clubs have continued to provide good quality provision for a variety of ages for several years. Many of them were started by Peter Hart when he was employed as a youth worker around 13 years ago. Many leaders have served faithfully in a variety of roles during this time or since Peter moved on. Thank you to each of you. A number of volunteers are expressing a desire to stand down or review their involvement. Times are changing and we must continue to find ways of engaging with the children and young people of our area, this remains a priority for us as a parish and for the diocese. Through the summer months we will review our youth and children's provision so that we may continue to minister effectively in 2017 and beyond. Please do hold this area of ministry in your prayers in the coming months.

The full financial report is in another part of this report. Thank you to all who continue to give towards the work of Stranton parish. Much of the above would not be possible with your contributions. As a parish we remain committed to the diocese and in the current year we therefore agreed to increase our parish share by the 5% requested by the diocese. This is only possible through your continued generosity. Thank you.

Thank you too to all who have served on PCC and to our office holders Maureen, Peter, David and Angela. Your hard work is much appreciated. Thank you too to Alan Robertson who is standing down from PCC this year. In recent years Alan has helpfully served as lay chair of PCC, and as such he has been great at getting meetings to finish on time. Alan will remain a Reader until he and Catriona move to Scotland, something they hope to do later in the year. I also remain grateful to Mary Tones who continues as a Reader and our associate minister Rev Andrew Craig for their continued contributions to our church life.

Our curate Nick Moore over the last three years has made an immense contribution to a number of areas of Church life. These have included working with the home groups, working as a youth fellowship leader, and more recently planning the Lighthouse services and leading New Beginnings, our baptism preparation group. Nick has recently announced that he will be moving to a new job in Cranmer Hall, Durham University beginning in early May. Nick, Bekah and the family plan to remain based in Hartlepool until the summer when they hope to move nearer Durham. We all wish you God's blessing as you move to pastures new.

In the wider world, in the diocese and in our deanery there seem to be many changes and uncertainties. Some of these changes will doubtless have an effect on us as a parish. However God remains faithful. Jesus continues to be the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. So then as the writer to the Hebrews encourages us, let's continue to fix our eyes on Jesus and run with perseverance the race he sets out before us. Let's remain open to the direction God is leading us as we continue to be rooted in God's love, growing together with Jesus and branching out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Every blessing

*Norman March 2017*

## **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 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 until the date this report was approved are:

*Priest in Charge:*        The Rev'd Norman Shave        Chairman

*Wardens:*                Mr Peter Anderson  
                                 Mrs Angela Craig

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

*Elected members:*

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

*Ex-officio members:*

Rev'd Andrew Craig  
Rev'd Nick Moore

*Co-opted members:*

Mr Clive Hall  
Mrs Louise Ervin

The full PCC met six times during the year with an average level of attendance of 72%. 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. 3 names were added during the year and 3 were removed.

*Ken Shepherd*

## **FINANCE REPORT**

2016 was a year of mixed financial blessings, as Stranton Church returned a surplus of £12,519 (2015: £2,398) on a total income of £177,254 (2015: £161,892): although this is itself cause for thankfulness, the underlying financial position gives rise to some concern as the surplus for 2016 is attributable to two key factors: the first being a good operating performance by the St Matthews Community Hall which contributed a surplus of £1,954 on income (mainly derived from hall lettings) that had increased from 2015 by 25% to £24,908 and also to two generous legacies received totalling £22,000, without which we would have incurred a deficit. Overall, regular giving

was slightly reduced, and in view of the bequests we did not need to hold a Gift Day so although overall income increased by 9½% our financial giving support fell by just over 8%.

On the application of funds, we increased our investment in mission, maintaining our overseas support to Crosslinks and CMS and increasing our support for home mission including the hosting costs and expenses of YFC team which came to over £4,000, and a similar amount expended overall in the new area of mission to Asylum seekers including the cost of simultaneous interpretation equipment. We implemented a living wage policy for administration support and hall cleaning and established a pension scheme for our parish Lay worker and administrator posts in advance of our staging date for Auto enrolment, the additional costs being offset by the first full year of NI rebate for small employers. We met our Parish Share for the year in full, this being pegged at £54,500.

Looking forward to 2017 we have a number of challenges to face and decisions to make. We will have a quinquennial building inspection, and have appointed a new Architect – initial indications are that there will be some minor issues but no major repairs for us to address. Progress had been slow on getting a lighting replacement scheme that the Finance and Buildings committee were happy to recommend to the PCC but this is now progressing to a Faculty and will be funded largely from the surplus brought forward (in other words, we can expect a financial deficit in 2017 as this one off scheme will be implemented out of reserves). Our restricted funds brought forward include a buildings reserve of £85,683 related to the sale of 41 Arncliffe Gardens in 2015 (reflecting a covenant condition in the title deeds that any sale proceeds were to be used for staff housing), and £9,552 which is the cumulative value over a number of years of fundraising and recital income for the upkeep and repair of the Organ.

Early in 2017 we conducted a series of teaching sermons of Generous giving and asked the congregation to make a considered and faithful response in prayer service and financially, as we have committed to a 5% increase in Parish Share in addition to the lighting scheme and quinquennial. We started the year with cash balances of £28,143 so although we expect a small deficit in 2017 as we pay for new lighting and quinquennial inspection costs our financial health especially in the light of our giving campaign is still positive.

My profound thanks go to Maureen Anderson our Assistant Treasurer who carries out the very considerable day to day work of church financial management, and to Barbara Butcher our St Matthews Hall Committee Treasurer: also to those who regularly count and bank our collections and fees under the direction of Ken and Sylvia Shepherd and of course all those who through regular financial support help to maintain the ongoing work of Stranton Church

*David Craig*

## **BUILDING AND FABRIC OF THE CHURCH**

### **Main developments this year:**

#### **1. Church Fabric**

- The windows in the church which were badly damaged last year have now been fully repaired.
- The church notice board has been renewed.

- Overgrown vegetation at the back of the Choir vestry has been cut back to avoid root damage to foundations and in general this will need to be done on a regular basis.
- Minor repairs have been carried out to the choir vestry windows.
- The west door has been treated with Danish oil.
- Guttering has been cleaned and had minor repairs carried out.
- Railings and gates have been repainted.
- The pathway from the steps up to the church has been made less uneven in places, to reduce tripping hazards following the health and safety audit which has been carried out.
- More secure step ladders have been purchased.
- The flagpole has had its stays replaced.
- The fire extinguishers, clock and burglar alarm have been serviced.
- “Smart water” (marking of Leads) has been renewed.

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

The PCC is reviewing options for improving access and safety in the Chancel, Fulthorpe chapel and Choir vestry with the help of the church architect.

The Parish Inspection was carried out, by the Archdeacon, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016. Nothing to report. The Archdeacon is very happy with the general state of the building etc.

At the end of this year or early next year, the church will undergo a routine quinquennial inspection and further works are certain to be required to maintain this ancient holy building.

## 2. Church Equipment

Lighting - an energy efficient scheme based on LED technology has nearly been agreed.

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

## 3. Clarkson Court

Some fascia boarding has been replaced by UPVC and general maintenance work carried out as required.

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  
Peter Anderson  
Churchwardens*

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT**

There are no Health and Safety concerns remaining as various issues identified in the 2016 audit were tackled during 2016.

Improving access for disabled people to the Fulthorpe chapel is something we would like to do but it is a challenge with the space available.

*Rob Butler*

## **DEANERY SYNOD REPORT**

We met at St Oswald's in September 2016, and for an away day at Monkwearmouth & Sunderland. Main business of the year: **updating Deanery Plan** – it is increasingly important that parish profiles are kept up to date so that the Plan is relevant to our skills, resources and needs.

Several events have been held by Hartlepool churches to address **Holiday Hunger** – children who would normally be entitled to free school meals during term time can miss out on a healthy diet, or even any food at all, during school holidays.

**The Generous Giving Project** is meant to raise the profile of financial giving. Many parishes find paying their parish share difficult, and yet insufficient diocesan funds may mean fewer stipendiary posts in the deanery. The distribution of those posts is likely to become a key part of the Deanery Plan.

**Bishops in Mission (Talking Jesus)** 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> March. Many events were arranged for this special weekend, each providing their own opportunities for talking to people about Jesus.

April sees the beginning of a new three-year period of office for new (or re-elected) parish reps.

*Andrew Rogers*

## **SAFEGUARDING - CHILD AND VUNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION**

This year I have had no incidences of safeguarding issues reported.

We haven't yet arranged an annual safeguarding meeting in the church, however Clive informs me we have a new system of compulsory training for safeguarding from the diocese that's being implemented and further training is being offered through the diocese, however not yet being taken up.

Clive's recommending that a new register of safeguarding training and first aiders is established. With the last review of our safeguarding policy in 2015 we established a register, but a procedure to ensure this is updated is required

*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 fortnightly)
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 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sundays include communion 4 <sup>th</sup> 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.
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## St Matthew's Community Centre

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

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

It has been a joy to be a part of the worship team over the last few years, both practising together on a Thursday evening and leading sung worship in our morning service at 10.30. I have always found that singing hymns and worship songs draws me closer to God and this is our prayer for the congregation, that we will all be more aware of his presence as we worship him.

I am very grateful to Kevin and the way he has lead the group over the last five years, both in learning new songs and skills together and in his Godly and prayerful direction.

It is wonderful that the team has worked hard to adjust to the change of leadership and my thanks go to each one. It's been great to welcome Luke back to playing weekly since finishing his degree in the summer and also that Mark is playing too, enriching our guitar section!!

I am clueless with sound systems, so am very grateful to Paul for all his expert help with the PA and for setting up screens and projectors each week.

Our thanks go to Jack for his organ playing at the 8.30 service and for standing in on keyboard when I am on holiday. It has also been good to welcome Apple Tree to play at some of our services throughout the year.

*Julie Shave*

## **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.

A group of people meets on most alternate Sunday afternoons from 4:30pm to explore Contemplative Prayer. Ask Angela or Elspeth Craig if you are interested.

An occasional monthly prayer diary provides material to aid praying (mainly interceding) on a weekly basis. 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 continues to meet through the year about twice a month usually at Claremont Drive on a Sunday afternoon. The group is 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 in a shortened form as part of the PMC ‘s suggestion using Luke 10 v 1-12 (sending out of the 72) and now the passage in 2 Cor 4. We meditate for about half an hour before gently sharing what God is saying to us.

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**

When I think of the church two things come to mind in this order.

1. Our numbers are down to 30 members at the moment which does concern me.
2. We still feel the presence of God encouraging and helping us each Sunday.

Recently a church member said “We are the church God wants us to be today”

A visiting speaker from Talking Jesus said “I have really enjoyed today you can feel the faith of the people here”. I take this as a sign we have been pruned and now we await the start of new growth. There has been a couple join us from the estate recently as which is an answer to prayer.

### **Overseer for Youth, Children and Family work**

In July last year we had a games day on Eldon Grove School field. We had the Axiom Team from Youth for Christ with us. They played games and entertained the children. We are doing something similar this year on 20<sup>th</sup> May. This is to be a joint day with Oxford Road Baptist church and on the field next to their church.

We also had a First Aid course in St Matthew Hall to make sure we have enough first aider manning our youth groups.

What I have noticed is apart from the DBS forms which are checked and dated and recorded this is the only information recorded. So who is first aid trained and when will that certificate run out? Or has the person done the compulsory safeguarding training? That information does not get collected and I see that is another job for me to pick up on! I will be asking all volunteers for this information in the coming months.

### **Bridge Builders**

This year there we have about 10-15 children attending. They did attend their annual trip Hartlepool United in March. This group is in my eyes a teaching group for the YFC team. Both Lindsey and Ashleigh are helping to run the group. Angela leads with them mentoring them and helps them to develop their gifting's.

### **Ward Jackson School**

Norman and Julie and Angela and I regularly lead worship. There is now also a Communion service held in the school, each time this happens it feels like a real blessing from God. A church member who also works in the school gave a very encouraging word to the church. She said “On Mondays I can still sense the prayers that have been said from the service the day before.” The school asked Angela and YFC team to help them with a Prayer station day. This was once again greatly blessed by God. I am also working towards setting up an after school club perhaps a messy church within the school.

### **Foodbank**

I have been re-elected as Chair of Hartlepool Foodbank and Andrew Craig was re-elected as Treasurer. Josie Watson from Burbank Church is the secretary so a strong representation from Stranton church. We have just been audited and had our AGM which shows things are all going really well for us at the moment. We have started to offer a Debt Counselling service.

We now have allocated a room which British Red Cross, Justice First, Open door can work from. These service providers work with refugees and Asylum seekers. This year we employed a new coordinator for Food bank who is doing a great job in keeping everything running smoothly.

### **Personal News**

In the ordination process I went to Local Panel last April. They were not happy to but me forward to National Panel, the main reason being I was not Church of England enough! I did agree with them about this. I have had more one to one's with Norman and also had a mentor from Lindisfarne to help guide me down the C of E path. I have to admit this has been a very busy path, I have continued to attend the Lindisfarne reader course. In January I did attend another Local Panel and this time I passed and I will attend the National panel on 15-17<sup>th</sup> May.

If I pass this panel I will do a further one year Ordinand's training with Lindisfarne. Then in 2018 I would become a Curate. I am working towards being a Non Stipendiary Minister who will be licensed to Stranton Church.

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

*Clive Hall*

### **STRANTON TODDLER GROUP**

The Toddler group continues to thrive in St Matthews Hall. I run the group on Tuesdays and Clare and Lynn run it on Fridays both from 9-11 am. Clare and Lynn have been involved for many, many years and I am grateful to them for their ideas and support. We draw in many families from the local community. We had 70 children and their accompanying adults at the Christmas party. The children enjoy small toys, puzzles and crafts in the small hall and we have a baby area for mums with tiny ones. The children love the space in the large hall where they have fun on bikes, scooters, slides and see-saws etc. We received a council grant during the last year and we were able to buy some new larger toys

The group 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. There is also plenty of opportunity for Christian adults to share 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.

*Julie Shave*

### **MESSY CHURCH**

Messy Church continues meets monthly on the third Sunday from 4-5.30 pm in St Matthew's Hall. Baptism families are always invited and others are drawn in through other contacts: Toddlers etc. A small group 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, worshipping, playing and eating together. Our friendships with the families who come regularly is growing and giving us more opportunities to get alongside them and share our faith.

Several of our families have been coming for a few years now and it was great to see two of those families baptised over the last year in our Sunday morning service and also to see some families coming regularly to the Lighthouse service and others to Christmas services and special events throughout the year.

One or two of our team have moved on to other things and we are pleased to see others coming in to help. We are so thankful for everyone in the team and their commitment to this important work. 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 continues with the format of reading a story from the Beginner's Bible, a craft to help remember and explain the story, a prayer, maybe singing, and time to play. We have had fewer regular children in Bubbles this year, but we continue to welcome visitors most weeks, especially those bringing their child for baptism. We are very thankful to Angela Craig and other helpers who tidied the choir vestry last year and have made it a much safer place for Bubbles children. I have now stepped back from helping at Bubbles and Jill Barrett has kindly taken over, and she and Ruth Anderson are now leading most weeks. We are awaiting DBS and reference checks for two more leaders and would still welcome more volunteers. Bubbles is a very happy place to be on a Sunday morning!

*Bekah Moore*

The primary age group meet 3 times a month in the Fulthorpe Chapel with the same committed group of leaders. We have enjoyed caring for and teaching children from our newer families. Some weeks we use Scripture Union material, and sometimes base our sessions round the scripture readings the congregation are using. The sessions are always a mixture of bible story, games and crafts.

We have between 3 and 6 children in the group

*Barbara Busby*

This year, year 6 and over children, began a journey through the Old Testament starting at Genesis chapter one and stopping at chapter twenty five. We covered creation, the fall, Cain and Abel, Noah, Tower of Babel, the call of Abram and Jacob and Esau. The crafts and pictures can be seen in our Genesis scrapbook in the vestry. We also did a prayer wall where we focused on what we were grateful to God for that week and prayers for others. The young people confidently take turns reading passages of scripture and discussing ideas about what they mean and how it applies to our lives.

For New Year we covered Gods promises and made aims for our walk with God this year. We did a one off topic on books of the bible how to find them what they contain and how many there are. We are currently following Mark's gospel learning about the call of the twelve apostles, John the Baptist and Jesus baptism and the beginning of Jesus healing people. This year I think has seen a good growth in willingness to express ideas and some young people have prayed out loud.

*Michaela Dixon*

## **MATT'S MATES**

Matts Mates meet weekly after school on Thursdays during term time. There are usually between 8 and 12 children, aged between 4 and 11.

We play games together, share a snack and then have a story, usually from the bible, but this year we have been using the church calendar and finding out about different Saints. We often have a craft activity as well. We have had some new families this year, replacing some children who have grown out of the group.

We need more leaders for this group if it is to continue.

*Barbara Busby*

## **BEFREE**

In September, returning to Befree was myself, David and Elliott. The leadership team also welcomed Lindsay from the YFC team. We average approx 12 members a week with a nice balance of male and female members. Our aim as a group is to provide a fun, safe environment for young people to learn more about Christianity and develop their own faith and belief system. It is important for us as leaders to be there as a source of guidance and encouragement for the kids.

We have managed to implement and maintain a good structure to the evening each week. Having time at the start of the evening for everyone to catch up on the previous week and play games before moving on to an engaging and interactive bible study lasting approx 45 minutes. From September to January our bible study time was spent learning about Jesus in the New Testament with particular focus on parables and miracle stories. After Christmas to the present day we went back to the Old Testament. Working through it chronologically learning about key characters. So far we've learnt about Adam & Eve, Noah and are currently learning about Abraham. Since September we've had a fantastic group of kids who have shown such enthusiasm to learn and develop their knowledge and faith. We've found that they love to learn stories, themes and characters from the bible through drama and acting with the group producing some oscar-worthy performances particularly with their modern day versions of some parable stories, with the Good Samaritan being my particular favourite.

As some of you are aware, David and I will be leaving Be Free at Easter. This wasn't an easy decision for us to reach. We have both cherished our time with Be Free and will miss the kids terribly. Elliott will be leaving at the end of the year as he goes off to university and the group will also say good bye to Lindsey in the summer. Looking ahead we are hopeful that whoever takes over the leadership team with support and interaction from the church, will be able to continue and maintain a certain level of pastoral care and show true passion for the kids' development of faith that we feel we have offered to the best of our ability for the last 2 years. Be Free are truly an amazing group of kids and we as the leadership team feel lucky, blessed and so thankful to have met them and watch them grow into a fantastic group of young Christians whom the church should be incredibly proud of.

*Amy Playfor*



YF is a space for fellowship, prayer, Bible study, fun, and silly games. Each term we have had a main theme or focus interspersed with other one-off themes. Last summer it was "faith that works" through the Letter of James; in autumn it was episodes from Paul's life and letters; this spring we have been looking at the highs and lows of the life of Joseph and how God was faithful, even using

the bad stuff for a greater good - just like in Jesus going to the cross. Joseph was also the theme of our February half-term residential, which was held jointly with BeFree at the Jonas Centre in Redmire. In between these main themes we have had time to look at big and hard questions such as identity, sex and relationships, spiritual gifts, and defending our faith; it has been great to get a "God's-eye view" on these topics through the Bible. We have also, with the Apple Tree youth band, led a Regeneration evening service at Oxford Road Baptist Church at least once a term, and have enjoyed parties, sports, pizza, and films along the way. It has been good to welcome new members from BeFree and elsewhere, and - though they are missed! - to send members on their way to work, college, or university when they finish Year 13.

We are grateful for the support of the wider church community in prayer, fundraising, and other ways. It has been good to have a stable leadership team: Mat, Michaela, Chloe, Nick, and Jordan, ably joined in September by our YfC volunteer Lindsey. Please continue to pray for good numbers and good fellowship that builds up our youth into the people God is calling them to be!

*The YF Leadership Team*

### **YFC GAP YEAR STUDENTS**

September 2016 we started with new members of the team Troy felt he shouldn't return and we welcomed Shay who was placed with Headland Baptist church.

Romance Academy side of things slowed down a little but we were able to run five sessions with The Vine church in Stockton.

We ran a talent and Testimony evening that went down well.

We started a lunch time club at St Hild's and continued working with Ward Jackson School. It was with regret Shay needed to go back to the states in December.

In January we welcomed Ashleigh Gyatt. She is placed with Oxford Road, she helps with their youth groups, Sunday clubs, messy church and Bridge builders and works with us all in schools. She has settled in really well and if you see Lindsey and her together you could mistake them for Sister's! God has really blessed the team with unity and laughter and for that I am really grateful!

Lindsey is coaching girl's football in Dykehouse School and is coaching and writing programmes for the strength and conditioning classes. She has built up great relationships with the teachers there. Middlesbrough ladies football team welcomed her onto the reserves team and she played her first match on the first team this Sunday. She also helps out with Matts Mates, Be free, Bridgebuilders and Messy Church.

God has really blessed a lunch time club we run at St Hild's school with the Chaplin Laura Wilde the pupils have called it 'God squad!' This is a group for those who are interested in knowing more about God, the pupils really engage well and ask great questions like "So if you pray it just happens?" "If Jesus was a Jew why do we call it Christianity" It's great to see 10 or more pupils opening the bibles and finding their way around it! This year we are continuing to help out at Ward Jackson C of E school I have had the fun job of leading singing practice! Lindsey as Ashleigh also go in on a Friday to help run golden hour football!

On the 9th March the team and I assisted the school in a prayer station, each member of staff and pupil were invited to attend this. It was incredibly moving watching children with challenging behaviour sit quietly and engage and be at peace.

Bridgebuilders is going well we have around ten children each week. Last term Lindsey taught us all a dance and we invited the parents in to have hot chocolate with us and perform. Three mums came. This term we have been looking at 'love' it was very moving for me as I washed one of the young girls feet to demonstrate how Jesus washed his disciples feet.

I am continuing to mentor my team and four other girls please pray for wisdom and discernment that I will guide them well.

I really appreciate your love prayer and support for us all don't stop!

*Ang Hall*



Just like every other group that depends on volunteers we are yet again looking for a new Leader. Rainbows is fun. Our girls are only 5 and 6 years old. We currently have 18 girls who attend 10 different Primary Schools. We enjoy crafts and small team games. We follow a theme for weeks. Over the last year we have done Easter, our Promise, Peter Rabbit, Harvest and the food bank, Christmas, Australia and World Thinking Day 2017. Just now we are being creative and next term we are aiming to do a science based challenge which will include a day at the Newcastle Centre for Life.

The plan for September is exploration with Captain Cook which will also cover Harvest and lead us around the world to another Country for World Thinking Day 2018. We enjoy visitors including the Clergy and other Guiding Friends and if anyone has some fantastic and safe science experiments or engineering projects we can tackle or someone with loads of patience to support us learning to sew or knit please let me know as we would love for you to share your skills and enthusiasm.

As always, although we are constantly reminded Girl guiding is not and never was Christian and we don't do God. When Stranton Rainbows " think about our beliefs" we mean "we believe in God" who is at the heart of everything we do in our meetings and I love it when we attend joint events and discover that other units still say prayers etc.

Yours in guiding

*Christine Robinson and Maureen Wilford*



On February 22<sup>nd</sup> (Guide Thinking Day), Norman was involved in a Service, crafts and singing at Church with Stranton Rainbows, Brownies and Guides plus other groups from around the town. It was the

first of 4 visits to improve links between the Church and the Churches uniformed organisations. During the year we have had visits from Clive and Nick, which the girls have enjoyed.

During the year especially the summer term we may have joint meetings when there is a leader problem or we are going outdoors. Both groups completed the Fire safety Badge by visiting the Fire Station. It was a good night, being more exciting as there was a call out, not many groups have been that lucky!

During the spring term, Mrs Pat Vaughan came to do Flower arranging. This is one of the most popular activities we do, except for the Guides doing the Chocolate badge which they completed during the year.

We like the rest of the Country Celebrated the Queens 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday in our meetings and as a Division with a fun packed activity day with a tea party at the end.

We have been involved in the Church Parades on Palm Sunday and Harvest and the Brownies go to Eggheads.

There have been a number of other badges completed during the year and we extended one of the badges to include Tesco's 'Farm to Fork' visit. This was a great visit seeing behind the scenes in our Local Tesco shop, the staff were really good. We finished the year by attending to production of Snow white on ice at Billingham Forum.

*Cheryl Mills*

*(Guiders for Brownies & Guides)*



## **Boys Brigade**

### **Anchor Boys**

During the year they have taken part in battalion Fun Night, sand castle, and visit to Stranton Church and received a visit from the Police and dentist. Our Numbers are now over 15 Boys

### **Juniors**

We have taken part in Battalion 5 a side, hockey, beach Olympics plus enjoyed trips to Crimdon, Blue Lagoon and Seaton.

### **Company Lads**

Attended camp at Fanwood Scout centre West Yorkshire plus they have taken part in National Competitions at Masterteam and badminton.

The Friday Night programme is planned and run by our young leaders.

We also ran a series of **Tuesday Night** activities for Company and year 6 Lads so that they all integrate into the Company and everyone knows each other prior to camp.

## **Fund Raising**

We appreciate the support we get from all at the Summer and Christmas Fayres.

## **Staff Visits**

This year we have been visited by Andrew, Clive Nick and Norman on several nights.

## **All Sections**

Took part in the Harvest Festival, Christmas and Palm Sunday parades. The Anchor boys and Juniors took part in Easter Eggheads

## **In general**

We have kept the majority of our young leaders and most have been at our parade Sundays. We hope to get them more involved as time progresses as they are ultimately the future for the 4<sup>th</sup>.

*George Bainbridge*

*Leader in Charge, 4<sup>th</sup> Hartlepool Boys Brigade*

## **COMMUNICATIONS GROUP**

Our communication media continues to support the work of the church in spreading the word of God using several now well established ways, these being:

- Web site - [www.stranton-church.org.uk](http://www.stranton-church.org.uk)
- Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/allsaintsstranton/>
- Weekly Notice Sheet
- Through our monthly Signpost Magazine

An entry is also maintained regularly for All Saints' Church on the web site <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/>. This is a useful web site, particularly for people who live outside the town, since it enables them to easily find a suitable place of worship, when visiting or if new to the area.

Changes are made weekly to update the content of our web site, mostly to reflect the following week's services and add the latest Notice Sheet. Special occasions and events often require more frequent (sometimes daily) updates to be made, especially on the Facebook page for such as 'Generous Giving', '40Acts for Lent' and 'Talking Jesus'.

Recently, some of the 'out of date' photographs on the web site were replaced. Also the right hand side of the front page is now used more frequently to publicise events, news or key messages.

On average, the web site is looked at 60 times per day, that's 21,594 times over the last 12 months.

Of the 255 people who've registered with our Facebook page, only 25 people receive a notification of new posts. During Talking Jesus, this increased to 76.

There is no information held to show how many others viewed the Facebook page, although leading up to Christmas Day, Boost Post was used to promote the festive services and we reached just over 3000 people.

Last year, we experimented using discussion groups on Whatsapp and Facebook to talk about Hebrews and Acts. We may look at using these again in the future as the use of smartphones increases.

The use of Twitter is also beginning to be more popular. Bishop Paul and Bishop Mark of Jarrow both use Twitter to provide updates on news relevant to the Diocese.

Going forward into 2017, we will look to:

- make further improvements to the web site
- improve the weddings/christenings/funeral pages
- and look into new and alternatives means of embracing digital communication to support the growth of our missional aims.

*Mike Peacock*

### **PASTORAL GROUP**

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

The team continue to focus on the members of the church community who are unable to get to church. We are pleased to report that we have had a couple of referrals during the year, but feel we still need to remind the congregation that this system is in place to ensure all who need or would like a visit receive one.

Our focus point from last year was the bereavement follow up visits when requested. A procedure has been finalised and put in place and we can now move forward with it.

Once again 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**

Membership remains static but we always welcome anyone interested in joining us so they can get to know both us, and what Mothers' Union stands for.

Branch meetings continue once a month with a varied topic from Christian to secular. National Marriage week began 2016 with the curate sharing marriage from the Bible and how he sees it today. We like to invite church members to share with us so Jill spoke about her visit to Kilamatindi and how things were improving. Julie shared her ministry to children. Both children and marriage

are the roots of M.U. promises when enrolled. Rev Shave kept us up-to-date with the progress of the P.M.C. with questions and input.

Of course, we attend services beginning Advent with a lovely Advent service at St. Aidan's led by Father Leon, the Indoor Members service at Durham Cathedral and a great Family Festival, with children helping to carry banners from many churches across the Diocese.

Money is raised by a soup lunch and a strawberry tea and this enables us to send funds to help projects overseas. Locally members support the Food Bank, donate gifts to Mission to Seamen and Christmas presents for children. This year we collected pants, socks and cereal bars for Ward Jackson C of E Primary School.

We always have a Christmas meal together at the beginning of December and start the New Year with a social occasion.

*Kathy Webster*  
*Acting Branch Leader*

### **HOME GROUPS**

We are blessed as a church to have a number of small groups that meet weekly or fortnightly, where church members can offer fellowship, pastoral care, and prayer to one another, and can be built up in their knowledge and love of Christ and service of the wider church.

In the past year one of our afternoon groups has stopped meeting, while the Tuesday evening Seed has become a young adults group (rather than late teens and young adults). In total this gives us around eight groups meeting regularly. Over the past year the groups have studied a variety of material. In summer last year we looked at a series of different Bible passages to help us go deeper into the biblical basis for our church vision statement: Rooted in God's love, Growing together with Jesus, Branching out in the power of the Spirit. During the autumn the emphasis across our teaching programme (sermon series, group studies, and personal reading plan) was the Letter to the Hebrews, thinking about that text's key message that Jesus is "Simply the Best!" In the New Year a shorter series of three studies on outreach helped groups get ready for the Talking Jesus weekend of mission events, as well as thinking about wider questions of mission and outreach in connection with the Partnership for Missional Church process.

It has been a privilege to meet with group leaders and co-ordinators, and to visit a number of the groups; huge thanks are due to all who, under God, organize, host, and lead these groups. New members are always welcome, please speak with a member of the staff team

*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). Churches Together also coordinates Soup Lunches during the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (in January), ecumenical Lent study groups and other joint services at Pentecost and Advent.

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

*Andrew Craig*

### **BELLRINGING REPORT**

This year we have continued weekly practices on Wednesday evenings, preceded by bell handling sessions. This format seems to work well and we have taught younger and older ringers, with some making exceptional progress. Our striking is improving due to better listening skills and bell control. We have had support and encouragement from ringers in the district and the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Association.

We are ringing at Stranton on alternate Sunday mornings, with ringing the other week at St Aidan's. We have also rung for special services including Christmas and weddings.

Safeguarding has been an issue which has received a lot of attention throughout the ringing community this year and we are working within the church guidelines to ensure that we are protecting vulnerable ringers, including young people. We hope to have one or two extra suitable people referenced, checked and trained so they can be ready to take responsibility for our young ringers when none of the registered teachers are at practice or service ringing

*Barbara Busby*

*Stranton Tower Captain*

### **ST MATTHEW'S COMMUNITY CENTRE ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT**

During 2016 St Matthew's Community Centre (SMCC) has continued on its journey to make the centre a focus of activity within the local community, providing facilities for many different groups and a diverse number of activities for its users. We encourage all users to feel part of the St Matthew's family and possibly over time part of Stranton Church itself.

The centre was used by over 25 different groups throughout the year, most of whom were long standing regular users, although there were some new users and this reflected in an increase of just over 10% in bookings for the year. This was accompanied by a 5% increase in total revenue for the same period. Excluding holiday periods this number of bookings equates to an average of over 3 bookings every day. Indeed, until recently this year (2017) Saturday was the only day with no regular users, the majority of bookings being for private parties and fundraising events such as coffee mornings.

This stable situation allowed us to forecast income against projected expenditure, thereby enabling us to set 3 major objectives for the year. The first objective was the resurfacing of the wood floor in the large hall. The surface had become damaged through extensive use and there had been incidents, particularly amongst youngsters, of splinters from the bare wood. This work was completed by external specialised contractors within budget during the Easter holidays of 2016.

The second objective was to replace the existing lighting in both halls with new energy efficient systems, thereby reducing costs and decreasing the carbon footprint of the building. The work in the main hall was undertaken by external contractors, and the lights in the large hall now satisfy the

standards set by Badminton England for tournament play. The lights in the small hall were replaced by committee members David Hall and Peter Anderson,

The fact that David and Peter were able to undertake this work significantly reduced the total cost of the project. The benefit of having committee members who can undertake routine maintenance in the building as well as managing other small projects cannot be over stated, and David and Peter are joined by George Bainbridge who has undertaken the never ending task of keeping the external space and hall garden free from weeds and rubbish, thus presenting an attractive outlook to building.

All of this work increases the quality of our offer to existing and potential users of SMCC. In previous years this work would have been contracted out thereby increasing our expenditure and reducing monies available for improvement work to the community centre. Our aim is always to maximise monies available for investment in SMCC to improve the quality of the facilities available to the local community.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank these gentlemen for all their efforts over the last year. Other members of the committee have also helped in many other ways including opening and closing the building for some groups as well as cleaning and other domestic tasks.

The third objective was the resurfacing of the forecourt outside the small hall. The surface was badly eroded and as well as problems with drainage there had been incidents of people falling or stumbling due to the pot holes in the surface. Obviously this was a serious health risk. There was also no disabled access directly into the small hall. This work was undertaken by an external contractor and we now have a well-drained, wheelchair friendly and safe approach to the building.

We continue to enjoy good relationships with staff at Hartlepool Borough Council and particularly Irene Cross who is always available to offer advice and support when SMCC host fundraising and other special events. We also have enthusiastic support from our local councillors Ged Hall, Dave Hunter and John Lauderdale all of whom made donations from their individual ward budgets to various projects throughout the year.

Overall, this has been a good year for SMCC. We have achieved our stated objectives within budget and time scales. In doing so we have improved the fabric of the building and also elevated the standard of facilities on offer to existing and potential users thereby presenting an opportunity to increase the number of people in the community using SMCC.

We plan to do more of the same during 2017.

*Carol Laud*

*St Matthew's Community Centre Management Committee*