



“In Touch” Issue no. 5 Autumn 2013



Since our first ‘In Touch’ newsletter was published (April 2012) there has been much progress implementing our Mission Action Plan. In that first letter, I explained that we had identified five goals for the next year or so. I thought it would be helpful to review the progress towards reaching each of these goals, so you have an idea of how we are doing.

Goal no. 1 Reorganise the style, content and times of services, learning from local churches that are growing, so that we start to deal with our decline, and are no longer perceived by most as an ‘ageing’ church.

In Touch letter no 4 (Epiphany Season 2013) explained the changes we had identified to help us to move towards that goal. The new pattern, of course, started after Easter, and we are seeing more families at some of these services. As a church we shall want to each do all we can to play our part in welcoming, befriending and getting to know those new faces that come among us as our guests: doing so will ensure that our congregations grow, and enable us to become a more diverse church, where all ages are represented.

Goal no 2 build on links with schools, children and young families so that more come to some church activity more often

We held a very successful ‘Easter Story Trail’ thanks to combined hard work from members of the Goldington Churches Together, visited by 400 children and widely praised by schools, and featured in the ‘Church Times’. The Vicar developed and piloted, with Goldington Family Centre, a course for young men with anger management issues. Agencies referred clients to us and the Vicar and the Director of the Family Centre held our first course from November 2012 to February 2013. We also now play host to GFCs annual Christmas event, and everyone is delighted to be able to hold this in St Mary’s. Jackie and I, with a team of volunteers, started our new group for adults and babies/toddlers in October, which we pray will bring more families into contact with the church.

Goal no. 3 Re-evaluate our communication methods so that more people-within and beyond our church family- feel they know what is going on

The ‘In Touch’ newsletters came about following a discussion with Revd. Lydia Humphreys, who was our ‘Mission Accompanier’ during the first year or so of the MAP process. (The Accompanier is a sort of ‘critical friend’ whose task was to help us to reflect upon where we were as a church, and to encourage us to make the changes we identified as being necessary.) The ‘In Touch’ newsletters are intended to keep members of the congregation in touch with developments under our Mission Action Plan: to see something of the bigger picture of how our church is evolving, the challenges it is facing, and the initiatives it is taking in God’s service. We also continue to put things in notices, flyers, the magazine, the parish web-site and occasional displays-e.g. Ngozi’s induction as a parish priest in Ireland Knit and Natter craft work. These, and verbal notices, are intended to keep church congregations aware of news and forthcoming events. It is the opportunity for us all, however, to ‘spread the news’ about things that are happening, and to ensure that those who are housebound and those who come more occasionally, hear about and understand what things are being done, and the reasons for them.

Goal no. 4 Build on existing links, and develop new ones with groups in the community, so that we are known by, and involved with, more of the parish beyond our walls.

After much prayer and discussion and planning with **Bedford Foodbank**, St Mary's opened as a branch of the Foodbank on Weds 27th February this year. This has been well supported by volunteers from St Mary's, Holy Cross, Priory churches and beyond. It has played its part in delivering food to individuals, couples and families who find themselves unable to afford food. I have been privileged to see how people are moved to receive kindness and to be treated with dignity. It's a bad thing, of course, that Foodbanks are needed, and it's sad that people are surprised to receive a kindly welcome when they come into our branch in church. Nevertheless, St Mary's have made a start on offering the sort of community care that touches people's real needs in this time. People are coming in who have not been in our church, and leave remembering the care and welcome they received in God's house.

Golden Gardens continues to thrive. *The Elliot Crescent garden* won the 'Water Conservation' award in the Times and Citizen Gardening Competition; do call in and see Jim Robinson who will be delighted to show you round and display the growing collection of awards in the shed! (Thanks to Jim and Diana for an excellent stall at the Autumn Fayre this year.)

Last spring builder Robert Purser (who married Charlotte at St Mary's, and is on our Welcomer's rota, and now has baby Rebecca who will be baptised in January) supervised us volunteers in all weathers to construct a shelter in the other Golden Garden at *Milburn Rd*. This was opened by the Mayor in June and won first prize in the 'Community Garden' category at this year's awards. An article by Kathy Wright, who works on Tuesdays at Milburn, appeared in the August magazine.

I was proud to win the 'Green Champion' Community Champion Award from Bedford Pilgrim Housing Association last year: for me this was recognition that our church's involvement alongside other agencies in this area is valued. The church has to be in it for the long haul; in the midst of so many cuts to services, the Church's faithful, loving, and serving presence is so important. Several members help in aspects of Golden Gardens. Could you?

Goal no 5 Cut out (at least for a while) some of what we do so that our clergy and lay ministers and active lay people have more time and energy to focus on things that build the mission of our church, rather than maintaining all that we have historically done.

A group including PCC members have been looking at this with the vicar. It is even more crucial this year when we have 12 months without a full-time stipendiary curate following Ngozi's departure. Fewer people mean that clergy and lay ministers have to prioritise things, and do some things less often. Under our stewardship scheme we are emphasising the importance of the gifts, time and skills of our congregation, and encouraging the best use of these. With such valuable participation, the ministers can be released to focus more on

- a. What they were trained for
- b. Those things that 'build up' Christ's church through activities that support mission and evangelism.

This is an ongoing project, but already some people have responded to areas of need, and this is extremely encouraging for me and my colleagues.

In the next 'In Touch' newsletter- In January- I shall set out our revised short-term goals under our Mission Action Plan- first presented to the PCC in July.

With my love and prayers

Richard