



“In Touch” Issue No 4 Epiphany Season 2013



Our worship

You will, hopefully, remember that our Mission Action Plan (MAP) set five key priorities and five goals for St Mary’s for the next five years. (Do ask for a copy ‘In Touch’ of Issue no.1 April 2012 if you want to refer to this.)

One of our five key priorities for the year ahead was ‘to make more of our worship attractive and accessible to younger people and families, including those of little church background’ To work towards these priorities, MAP encourages parishes to set ‘smart’ goals. SMART is an acronym: goals should be ‘specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed’. Our first smart goal therefore was : ‘ to re-organise the style, content and times of our 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. Last summer, a number of church members visited nearby churches that seemed to have a growing ministry among children and younger people, and brought back suggestions about what they thought St Mary’s might learn from how those churches welcomed people, conducted worship and ran their hospitality.

Mindful of this, and of the expressed desire that we no longer wish to be perceived as an ageing church, I put before the PCC two options for change. Option ‘A’ offered, in summary, that we made one of our main services non-Eucharistic once a month , and made another Eucharist more family-centred e.g. as we have done with our ‘Orange Book’ services at times like Mothering Sunday. Option ‘B’, retained Eucharistic services each week but made two of the services Family Communion- using either ‘Orange Book’ or the pink (baptism with Holy Communion) every other week. After a month of prayerful consideration, the PCC voted in November by a large majority to support option ‘A’.

So what happens now? The PCC Worship Committee will be working through January-March to develop new services in line with our MAP goal. The new services will come into operation following Easter 2013. This will be a significant step for our church, and everyone involved will need your support and your encouragement as there will be significant extra work involved to bring all this necessary work about in pursuit of our Mission Action Plan and our vision for St Mary’s church.

So how will the service rota look after Easter?

Sunday	First service	Second service	Other service	Comments	Notes
Wk. 1	8am HC	9.30 ‘Family Praise’		(with encouragement for baptisms). There is no Communion in this service.	First Sunday service at 11.15 ceases. Basically FSS Format, re-launched as ‘Family Praise’.
Wk. 2	8am HC	9.30 am ‘Blue Book’ Choral Communion	5pm Evensong	As we do now	
Wk. 3	8am HC	9.30 ‘Family Communion (with encouragement for baptisms)		Second service in month specifically ‘Family and child oriented’	Cease 3@3
Wk. 4	8am HC	9.30 am ‘Blue Book’ Choral Communion	3pm baptisms	As we do now	

There was a good turn-out at our open parish meeting on MAP last January. Amid the many ideas put forward, one overriding message came through clearly: that we were united in not wanting our church's continuing story to be one of gently managed decline. (Hence our First Goal under MAP).

I have been impressed by the PCCs determination to follow this through. We have noted that the pattern of attendance at First Sunday Service was declining, and that the 'regular' congregation was not much in evidence at this 11.15am service, beyond those undertaking specific tasks in supporting it. The move of the All-age Worship service to 9.30am was a bold decision, but I believe the right one if we want to offer non-communicant parishioners mainstream worship at least once a month.

There is now a clear opportunity for regular worshippers to support the church's mission and outreach to the remainder of the parish. Will you choose to worship at 9.30 once a month at a service that is less familiar? If people will do this, we can give visitors who are not familiar with the ritual of Communion- and particularly families coming for baptism- a chance to worship with a main Sunday congregation, and to feel part of the church family. Those who look forward to Communion will, I hope, take this at 8am or on Wednesdays at 10am, so that they are resourced to be there on first Sundays and to reach out to visitors.

Finally

One or two people have voiced fears that this will represent what they term a 'dumbing down' of what we offer. I would argue that nothing is further from our minds. The rich resources of Common Worship are at our disposal, to help us to intelligently and imaginatively celebrate our faith together. Please therefore help us to change from being a church that is mainly elderly by supporting changes to enable St Mary's to attract new people and become more representative of the whole community. Your presence, your prayers and your support will play an important part in helping this come about.

With my love and prayers

Richard