

## Annual Review '08

The following article reviews the life of St Peter's Church, Didcot over the year 2007-2008:

On the afternoon of 6th June 2007, St Peter's Church was peaceful. The sun shone through the south window, lighting up the chancel beautifully, but no-one was there to enjoy the stillness. A short distance away, at Northbourne Church of England School, excited voices could be heard in the newly created circle garden, at the heart of the building.

The garden was being blessed, and Father Edward had been joined by Bishop Lawrence of Nandyal, in India, for the ceremony. The Bishop was visiting Oxford Diocese, and having enjoyed a cup of tea he asked to see St Peter's as well. After a short walk he was welcomed to the church, where he sat to rest and to pray in the quietness. So began our new link with Nandyal, and in particular with the town of Kalasapadu, where there is a church dedicated to St Peter & St Paul. At our harvest supper, and in Advent, money was raised to send to India, and our news has been shared with our fellow Christians in Nandyal Diocese. We have been in their prayers, as they have been in ours. Our horizons have been extended, and we have known new blessings from God as a result.

St Peter's is not always quiet. On Sunday 20th May the church was full for the 10.00am Sung Eucharist, when we said farewell to Sister Pat after almost seven years. In the congregation was Mother Winsome CSMV. It would be impossible to capture in words the wonderful blessing that Sister Pat has been for St Peter's since she arrived in the year 2000. Suffice to say that many were in tears as the final goodbyes were made, and gifts presented.

Then on the evening of 29th June – St Peter's Day – the church was full once again as Bishop Stephen presided at a confirmation service. Ten candidates from St Peter's were confirmed: Clement Collins-Rice, Alex Emery, Jenna Field (who was also baptised), Nicky Gregory, Samuel Hall, Henry Leighton, Emma Purling, James Purling, Claire Rolstone & Lianne Wilson. It was indeed a memorable occasion, as had been the afternoon visit to Windsor Castle the Sunday before for the eight younger candidates, led by Fran Childs and Father Edward, which included a ride in first class on the train back to Didcot.

Just two days later, on Sunday 1st July, our new curate, Father James Baker, was ordained at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford. Various representatives from St Peter's were present, along with other supporters of James, and he was welcomed formally to our church at Evensong that day. His ministry amongst us is already highly valued and will doubtless continue to flourish over the coming months and years.

Another busy afternoon at St Peter's, on Saturday November 10th, saw people visit from far and wide to look at all the old church registers, and to spend time in the church praying and reflecting. Other moments when visitors have also been welcomed in substantial numbers have been for baptisms, weddings and funerals, as well as children from local schools making educational trips, worshippers at the Townswomen's Guild Christmas carol service, and members of the Town Council attending the Civic Service on 22nd April prior to the elections, presided over by Jenny Loder who was just finishing her term as Mayor's Chaplain.

Advent Sunday was a significant one for the Choir. After a number of years Hannah Pitman stood down as Head Chorister, and was replaced by Clement Collins-Rice. Various RSCM medals were also received by other members of the choir. Advent Sunday additionally marked the twelfth anniversary of the moment when Marilyn Mitcham and Mark Stanley took over as co-leaders of music here at St Peter's, and they received a warm and appreciative round of applause from the congregation.

Continuing with the musical theme, the choir from Northbourne School, ably led by Sarah Tenant-Flowers, a member of our church choir, sang two gospel songs at the annual Church Schools Headteachers' Service at the cathedral on 5th October. Parents and other supporters from St Peter's were filled with pride as the children helped to lead the worship with great skill, and were commended by Bishop Stephen, who was presiding. Amongst those present was Hugh Collins-Rice, who had just stepped down as Chair of the Governors at Northbourne after over a decade in the role. He was thanked formally at the School with a reception and presentation, and with a gift from St Peter's presented at a PCC meeting.

Our ministry at St Peter's to children has strengthened and developed over the past year, with growing numbers attending both Tuesday Club and Sunday School. In the autumn the Youth Group was completely re-launched, and a new group of 10-12 year-olds began enjoying a slightly new format of meeting. Some of the older previous members became young leaders, allowing Judith Harris to step down as a leader after several years, with grateful thanks for all that she had done. Several people from St Peter's also helped at the annual ecumenical holiday club in August, held once again at Northbourne School.

The public face of St Peter's has been spruced up this year as well. The website has continued to be developed,

and is an increasingly used point of access for enquirers and those who seek information. Also, from the October issue, the church magazine has been re-designed and transformed. Now containing an interesting selection of pictures and improved news items, the editor, Margaret Meardon, broke new ground by also including a series of free gifts (the Triptych postcards) through the winter months. The reaction to these changes has been positive.

A number of visiting ministers, preachers and people on placements have been part of the life of St Peter's in the past year. On 29th April Steve Short preached at the Sung Eucharist, just prior to his ordination as a deacon. Then on 13th May The Revd Beren Hartless visited to preach. She is the Principal of the OLM training course, and so Joy Carter is one of her students. One of the most thought-provoking evenings of the year had been when Joy gave a presentation about her placement at Christ Church Abingdon, which has a very different tradition of worship. Joy's placement also gave rise to an evening 'workshop' about caring for one another as Christians, which once again provoked some serious thought in this vital area.

At the start of July Hannah Barr, a student at Didcot Girls' School, spent a week on work experience with us, and then through the autumn and winter Mark Jones and Lynda Pugh, both in training for ordination at Ripon College Cuddesdon, have been worshipping at St Peter's for their Sunday placement. Also, as part of his visit to the Wallingford Deanery, Bishop John of Oxford came to St Peter's on the evening of 16th January, at the invitation of Father Edward, who had become the new Area Dean of Wallingford Deanery in September. In addition, ministers who have visited to preside at St Peter's over the past year, when Father Edward has been away, have been Father Ernest Adley, Canon Robert Teare, Revd Joan Impey and Revd Tim Hewes.

Behind the scenes, St Peter's is in a much stronger position than it has been for years. 2007 was the first year for some time when we paid in full our 'parish share' to the central church. This reflects the cost of our ministry and the provision of a vicarage. This was only possible thanks to the wonderful generosity of our congregation members, and the impressive results of our social and fund-raising events, including a stall at the Street Fair this November. The generosity of our church members came to the fore again in February 2008, when our Gift Day, expertly overseen by Church Treasurer Mark Bayliss, attracted pledges of almost £10,000 for important work on the lighting and internal decorations at St Peter's. The work should be done this summer. All of this commitment will help to ensure St Peter's thrives into the future.

But although St Peter's needs substantial offerings to keep going in its service of the local community and in its witness to God, a steady stream of donations has been sent from people at the church to a whole variety of charities. In 2007 the total was £5,902, including £1,000 to the Didcot TRAIN youth worker project, and a very creditable £219 for Christian Aid raised entirely by the members of the Youth Group. Through these acts of generosity St Peter's found itself increasingly bound to its neighbourhood and to the wider world, ensuring that it became more and more outward looking and genuinely caring towards those who do not yet know God.

Although as Christians we are filled with hope for life beyond the grave, some of the saddest moments in the life of a church are when people die. This past year, amongst the members of St Peter's, funerals have been held here for Gordon Marsh, Nancy Davies, John Frederiksen and Ivy Reed, all of whom were committed Christians at our church. In addition, Bill Gandy, who had recently moved to Brackley, died in the autumn, and amongst close family of St Peter's congregation members, funerals have been held here in the past year for Shirley Beadle and Rosemary Parsley.

A different kind of ending arrives at the 2008 AGM for Mark Stanley, who is stepping down as churchwarden after three years in the post. Mark's dedication to the tasks in hand has been extraordinary, and he has made particular contributions in overseeing important repair and improvement work to our church building over the past three years. Written permission from the Diocese is required for all such work, and Mark has co-ordinated it all perfectly.

But as one person steps to one side, so, in a lively place such as St Peter's, do others emerge. Throughout the winter the congregation have been praying earnestly that God would send us three new people, to help lead ministry and to oversee our plans to improve the visibility and accessibility of our church building. Any names of those who have been 'prayed out' will have been announced on Easter Day, and so another very significant step in the life of St Peter's will have been taken.

As can be seen, many notable things have happened in the life of St Peter's over the past year. A huge range of people has contributed in many different ways to the work and witness of our church. Some are higher profile than others, but all are important, and all are thanked for the part they play.

On 6th June Bishop Lawrence of Nandyal visited a quiet St Peter's, and felt immediately at home in a place full of prayer. On other occasions people who seem to have nothing to hope for in life have also entered a quiet church and found peace with God. It is this ongoing ministry to all who pass by that makes St Peter's the church it is, and is perhaps the most significant thing that happens here.