

April 2024

**This report has been shared at this year's APCM (AGM).*

Dear Friends

This report reflects the activities, services and events between the period of January to December 2023.

Having just celebrated Easter, it is wonderful to be reminded of the hope that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers us as we seek to serve the mission and ministry of All Saints and St Barnabas churches. Springtime gifts us the promise of new beginnings, as we observe the beauty of God's creation burst into colourful song and bloom. In my mind, this is echoed in the life of our worshipping communities. There is much to be thankful to God for over the last APCM year.

There are so many people who support the activities in benefice and we are grateful to everyone who gives their time, effort and energy to the work of God's mission in Gorse Hill and Ferndale.

On behalf of the churches' communities, I offer my thanks to Revd Barbara Sheppard, Brenda Young, Revd Judy Ashby, Revd Gill Behenna and Joshva Raja for their ministry. We are grateful to our Churchwardens Jenny Roe and Julie Hailstone who work tirelessly to ensure that our buildings are safe and maintained. I am thankful to Malcolm Williams and Richard Hailstone for all they offer through music and worship. St Barnabas Choir has been a tremendous asset this year. Our Treasurers, Judith Garratt and Jean Richards, are so incredibly appreciated, ensuring that our finances are in good order. The hard work of Judith Garratt and Revd Barbara Sheppard in coordinating our busy hall bookings is appreciated.

My thanks goes to our Safeguarding Officers, Brenda Young and Jenny Bassett, and I am grateful to Janet Sullivan and Jenny Bassett for all the administrative and other support they offer. Thank you to all who are dedicated every month to planning and delivering All Age Worship: Raymond Rowlad, Jean Richards, Julie Hailstone, Janet Sullivan and Gloria Lane. Raymond Rowland has been an invaluable blessing through his ministry at All Age Worship, stepping in with assisting with cover for music and Contemplative Prayer. The ministry of our servers, Adrian Mears, Gill Lovatt, Janet Sullivan has been invaluable. David Robinson remains faithful in ensuring our website stays updated. I am immensely grateful to the contributions of all our PCC members for their wisdom, insights and contributions as we have sought God's will and direction in our church's activities this year. Lesley Duffy and Richard Hailstone's ministries as Chairs at PCC meetings has been very much appreciated.

I take this opportunity to thank every single person who has supported all our worship events and church activities: those who assist with refreshments, flower arrangers, those

who offer lifts, tidy the churches - inside and out, Messy Church volunteers, and all others who help in any way. May God continue to bless you abundantly in your ministries.

Reflecting on 2023, there is much to be thankful to God for. On Sundays, we have about 25-30 people at both All Saints and St Barnabas Church and it has been great to see new people join occasionally or more regularly. Our Morning Prayer has continued on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and sees between 4 and 6 people. Life events (funerals, baptisms and weddings), although low in numbers, remain an important part of our ministry in the benefice. We also offered Messy Church Fun during the Easter and Summer break at both St Barnabas and All Saints and these saw about 10-15 people.

The Benefice Magazine remains an important ministry and it has been great to see the stimulating engagement of contributors and readership. Janet Sullivan's hard work with this magazine is valued by all. The schools work (Ferndale and Poppies) in the benefice remains strong. We hope to continue to have a strong relationship with the schools moving forward. My thanks goes to Revd Barbara Sheppard for her efforts in maintaining these relationships. The Chaplaincy to Gorse Hill Shops has progressed positively and business owners have communicated their appreciation of our churches and all Brenda Young does in support of local shop keepers and business owners. The worshipping communities in our benefice continue to give generously to the charities we support: Food Bank, Women's Refuge, Safe Families, Harbour Project and Threshold.

Highlights of last year include the following. It was a blessing to welcome Revd Jeyapaul and his son, Charles, who shared about their incredible ministry Kathryn Mercy Home (India). It has been good to support the Kathryn Mercy Home ministry with donations from the benefice. The relationship between Fernbrook College and the benefice community continues to strengthen with Fish & Chip lunches and Afternoon Teas, with normally 40+ people in attendance. The discipleship course, *Pilgrim Course: The Lord's Prayer*, attended by 8-10 people, was an incredible time of fellowship and encouragement. I met with the Headteacher of Gorse Hill School on a few occasions to explore opportunities for building relationships with the school and I delivered an assembly.

Looking ahead, there are many signs of hope and I am optimistic about all that the Lord will gift us in 2024. Things that I am looking forward to in the coming year include:-

- Progressing our Mission Action Plan priorities.
- Exploring opportunities to network with local businesses, charities, schools.
- Seeking ways in which to connect with families and young people in Gorse Hill and Ferndale.

Will you join with me in praying for our communities this coming year, as we endeavour to be a people who "learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, [and] plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1.17).

Blessings,
Revd Dr Catherine Mark Okoronkwo
Vicar, All Saints and St Barnabas