

## JOINT CHURCHES REPORTS

### Vicar's Report on 2009 – Revd. Andy Jolley

We can look back on 2009 with great thanks to God for all that He has done amongst us and through us. It was year which again saw considerable numerical growth in our churches (usual Sunday attendance is up 10% on 2008 and the number of people on our Electoral Roll has increased for the second year running, this time by 7%) and many people taking new bold steps of faith in service to our communities. For myself and my family, there was the privilege of an extended sabbatical over the summer. It was also a year, particularly for St James, of losing some dear friends through death, but we can look back with thanks for their lives and the memories we have made with them.

Before you read my thoughts and those of the many others who have contributed to this booklet of reports, take some time to remember and give thanks for what God did in you and around you in 2009. Here are a couple of my highlights in pictures and words.



**Easter** - The battle with Football's Premier League and Setanta (remember them, now out of business?) about the scheduling of an Aston Villa match at lunchtime on Easter Sunday. It was a great opportunity to declare the real



meaning and significance of Easter on radio and TV, and a great opportunity to build on the previous year's Easter Pageant to share the Easter message with the football fans.

**Fun Days** - Working together with other local churches,



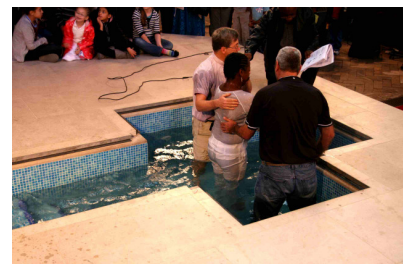
we started with a fun day at Deykin Avenue School in May and finished with the Nechells fun day in July at St Matthew's school. In between, there was the event planned for



Manor Park School in June, which at the last minute had to move to the dryer surroundings of Aston Parish Church Centre. Once again we helped make something of the

Aston Community Festival held at Villa Park (the free fun in the Churches Tent once again being in marked contrast to other "attractions")

**Baptisms** – The new baptistery at Aston Parish Church was finally finished last year (though the final leaks were only cured last month!) It has had more use in its first year than the previous temporary pools had in the preceding five years. Rajwinder Kaur was the first to be baptised in it last March, with Fiona officiating. It has been great that we have been able to use it during our shared services in May and November.



## **The Parish of Aston & Nechells**

It has been wonderful to see relationships deepening between members of our three churches over the past year, and the forging of a deeper shared identity as the Parish of Aston and Nechells. Our shared mission events in the parish, as well as mixed Alpha courses and Triangle groups mean that when we come together for worship it feels like one congregation rather than three. My visits and study during my sabbatical time showed that there are not many other parishes with multiple congregations and churches who have the unity that we enjoy – so let's be grateful for what we have!

I am very thankful for all who serve on our PCC and the church committees. Over the past year our understanding has deepened of the different responsibilities of the PCC and the separate church committees that we have for each church. The PCC has overall oversight for mission, shared worship, employment and finances. It delegates to the individual church committees oversight of their congregation's worship and services, pastoral care, church building and fabric, and local financial matters. This delegation of responsibilities has reduced duplicated decision-making.

Trilogy, our Parish Magazine, and our website ([www.astonnechellscofe.org.uk](http://www.astonnechellscofe.org.uk)) are great places to find our shared emerging story as a parish. I am grateful to Jackie Burton for editing Trilogy, to our webmaster, Stuart Middleton, for his continued invaluable support, and to Stephanie Fletcher who does a great job managing the website on a day-to-day basis. Do send news, pictures and information to Jackie and Stephanie so they can share them with the rest of us.

Since September, we have been looking at the Diocesan initiative, Transforming Church, helped by Bishop Maurice Sinclair. This will continue this year, and in particular we will be working at how we develop discipleship and leadership in our congregations and specifically with our young people.

## **Encountering God**

Our Sunday services aim to offer space to meet with God, to sing His praise, to hear from Him and to be resourced to serve Him. Hence it is most encouraging to see more people coming to them. I have been delighted to continue leading MORE on Sunday evenings. MORE was originally intended to refresh those people who help ensure that our worship and ministries take place on Sunday mornings. However, it is also becoming a place where newer Christians can meet more deeply with God, learn to listen to Him and find additional teaching to help them in their early growth as followers of Jesus.

Our three church buildings are places where we expect to encounter God. We must thank the many people who help ensure they remain beautiful, clean and well-maintained. Much further repair and improvement work has taken place this year, and thanks must go to everyone who has helped with these. Our buildings are also a resource for other Christian groups to use. However, by the end of 2009, the three churches which had been using St Matthew's had, for various reasons, moved on. Happily, a new church, the Without Walls Fellowship, has started to meet at St Matthew's and wants to reach out to the local community and to work alongside us. St James continues to be used by the Congregation of Yahweh, an Ethiopian Church (Ebenezer Evangelical Church) and Pastor Douglas' fellowship. Aston Parish Church, now its new platform is complete, is being increasingly used by other churches for large funerals, and we are also attracting more weddings which are shared with other fellowships. This additional usage of our buildings is good stewardship, meaning that they are being used for the purpose for which they were built, and also bringing

helpful revenue for the parish. Managing the differing needs of these churches alongside our own presents some challenges and I am very grateful to those who help with this difficult balancing act.

### **Doing Evangelism**

Doing evangelism together can be both fun and effective, as more and more of us have discovered in the past few years. After the extra effort of Hope 08, 2009 was always going to be a slightly quieter year. However, with our experience of running “out” events such as the Easter car wash and fun days, we now see these as annual events. The Easter Pageant was repeated for the benefit of the football fans on Easter Sunday – but we hope that is not going to have to be repeated! Healing on the Streets is also becoming an established feature, both during the football season with Villa fans, and also at the community fun days. We hosted a second training event in May with Mark Marx, who has pioneered this ministry and seen it start to spread far and wide. The Lord also keeps bringing new people to our churches. This was especially true of Back to Church Sunday in September. Many of these people have gone on to our regular Alpha courses. We are also seeing growth through the growing number of couples coming to be married in one of our churches.

### **Creating Community**

It is wonderful how many people from the local community come to our events and the way that we can help build community in our neighbourhoods. The government recognises that “community cohesion” is vital, but doesn’t know how to make it happen. Hence, we have been able to easily access grants for our events. We have also fought on behalf of the local community in Aston, taking on the footballing authorities over their disturbance of Easter Sunday.

Our attempts to foster community cohesion in the parish must emerge from the loving community that we have amongst ourselves (which in turn flows from our being invited into the loving community of the Trinity). Our worship together, eating together (it is great to see people from all our churches at the First Sunday shared lunches), and the fellowship shared at New Wine have all helped in this. This year’s parish weekend at Hothorpe Hall from will be another great step in deepening our relationships with each other.

### **Becoming Disciples**

At our recent parish away day Alpha, Triangle Groups and MORE were highlighted as three great ways to help people grow as followers of Jesus. It has been great to see so many people moving on from Alpha into Triangle Groups. If you aren’t in one of the growing number of groups, why not join one? Here you can work out and apply Jesus’ teachings to everyday life, and develop deep, honest relationships to be accountable to other followers of Jesus about your life and lifestyle.

Our Transforming Church aims include developing our ministry with children and young people. Last year’s fall in the numbers of children coming to our churches on Sunday mornings has been arrested, but we now need to give greater attention to helping our children and young people grow up as followers of Jesus. One way that has been developing over the past year is through involvement in music and leading worship. Please also pray for and support the wonderful people who lead our children and young people’s groups.

## **All Involved**

Following Jesus is about being a participant, not a spectator. So thank you to everyone who serves in any way in or through our churches. As part of Transforming Church, we are trying to find ways that new people can easily find ways to get more involved in serving. One implication of this is that all of us must be ready to make space for someone else to get involved with things we are doing. The many reports in this booklet show just some of the ways that people are involved in and through our churches week by week. There are many more ways either unreported, or (as yet) not imagined.

## **St Matthew's**

Much thanks must go to our two wardens, Dave and Bill, and also to Joan, Hilary and Geoff, who enable so much mission and ministry in Nechells. Thanks too Bill, Joan and Marcia for their roles in strengthening the links with our church schools, St Matthew's and St Clement's. Last Easter Bev Thomas finished as Head of St Matthew's, and in September Paulette Osborne arrived as her replacement. Both schools work hard for the children of Nechells, often struggling against a seemingly endless tide of difficulties. St Clement's and its Head, Joy Howell, especially need our prayers as they seek to emerge from special measures.

Sadly, there has been little progress on resolving the responsibilities of ourselves and the Diocese for St Matthew's building, and also on attracting grant funding to renovate the Church Hall. However, after years (literally!) of waiting, the insurance claim was agreed to enable the foyer to be replastered and repainted, and the building is now much more welcoming. Further letting opportunities are needed to generate income to balance the books and also to realise my continued dream that St Matthew's will be "a church of the community, in the community, for the community."

## **St James**

Thanks especially go to Cephas for serving as sole warden for the past year. Thanks too to Jackie as Church Centre Co-ordinator, to Sue Martin who has served as Secretary for the Church Committee and is now standing down, and to those who help lead services and Junior church.

A major event was Ziaul Islam's departure from the Advice Centre in September after 24 years of service. A special party for Zia in October heard speeches from three vicars of St James who had worked alongside Zia. The Centre continues to serve the local community though and met nearly all its targets despite the transition caused by Zia leaving. It also was reawarded its Quality Mark. Changes in funding regimes and uncertain local government priorities make these challenging times for the Advice Centre, and praise is due to David Fletcher for bearing a much greater load than he bargained for when he took on the role of office manager.

There was much sadness due to the deaths of Jean Allen, Pearlita Brown, Ezekiel Bent, Joe Gerald, Juanita Jeffers and Florrie Smith during the year. It was Susan Robin's sudden death though which was the greatest shock. Susan played such a large part in the life of St James, especially in her role as Reader in leading worship and preaching, and this makes her loss all the more apparent. She though was delighted when Jackie was trained and licensed as a Reader in 2008, allowing her to pass on her mantle. In the midst of this sadness, however, the Lord has continued to bring new people to St James, and this was especially evident on Back to Church Sunday in September. Our challenge now is to help these new people to find the roles that they can play in the life of the church.

## **Ss Peter & Paul**

'Thank you's' are due to so many people: our wardens, Gloria and Joe, the triangle group leaders, the readers, the finance team, children's and youth leaders, the welcome team, musicians, singers ...

Aston Parish Church's new platform and baptistery were finally completed in 2009. This is a fantastic achievement, and it has certainly strengthened the church as a base for mission, but much remains still to be done. The quinquennial inspection was completed. It revealed no great surprises, but the identified repair works will cost a great deal. £118,000 has been offered by English Heritage, but the church must still try to find a further £80,000. This is as well as the money required for our plans to upgrade the floor, heating and seating as well as hopes for a new entrance and visitor centre. Great thanks are due to Nigel Cripps for his dedication in keeping the restoration project moving.

## **Staff**

I continue to thank God for the privilege of leading our talented and dedicated staff team, and for the fantastic support we receive from our office staff. I am especially grateful to Jenny for her leadership of the Parish during my sabbatical, as well as to everybody else who picked up an extra load while I was away. We are truly blessed in the range of gifts and abilities we enjoy here, not to mention the rare privilege of having two curates.

There have again been quite a number of changes during the year. Michele Taylor started as the Deanery Pioneer Minister in January. In July many of us celebrated with Beverly as she was ordained as presbyter / priest. Finally, in December, Anita Brown retired as the Aston Parish Church Administrator and we welcomed Stephanie Fletcher as a very capable replacement. I have really appreciated Anita's dedication, good humour and wisdom – not to mention the knowledge that comes with having worked alongside three different vicars at Aston Parish Church for well over 20 years. I wish her and Dave a long and very happy retirement together.

## **Conclusion**

2010 is already showing continued growth in each of our churches, with growing numbers at our Sunday services and on our Electoral Rolls, record numbers on our Alpha courses and many people deepening their relationship with God. These are exciting and encouraging times, and we must keep thanking God for His goodness as He continues to bring fruitfulness in His work with us.

Let's keep pushing on upwards, inwards and outwards. Upwards - let's keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), because that is how we will become more like Him – which is our destiny (Romans 8:29). Inwards - I am looking forward to our first Parish Weekend at Hothorpe Hall, which I am sure will be a great time for deepening our relationships with each other. We also need to keep consolidating the changes in our parish of the past couple of years, especially in our finances and governance. Outwards – we must keep working for the coming of God's kingdom and way of doing things to Aston and Nechells and also keep looking for those whom God is calling to Himself, being always ready to invite and welcome them. May this year be another year in which God works amazing things in us and through us together.

## Associate Vicar's report - Revd. Jenny Arnold

As I look back over the Sunday services over the past year I am reminded of the many blessings. Thank you to all our Readers and others who help with leading services and supporting in other ways by welcoming, leading intercessions, reading lessons and helping with communion. An increasing number of people have been involved - reflections of the "a, all involved", the "b, becoming disciples" and the "e, encountering God" values. Later this year we will be offering training in reading and using the microphones in church as well as leading intercessions so that will give confidence to others to use their gifts in worship. It has also been great to see more people involved in music – but I'll leave that to another report.

In the spring of last year we preached a series based on Richard Foster' book, - Celebration of Discipline, and then over the summer we followed a series on the book of Exodus – the journey from slavery to freedom as God's people, - a journey that we mirror as Christians from slavery to freedom in Christ. Having focussed on "up" and "in" we then took a more outward focus in the autumn as we looked at the book of Acts and saw how God used his people to grow his church. Since Christmas we have been preaching on the journeys of bible characters, including Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and learning from them about our own Christian journey as we mature and become the people that God intends us to be, reflecting his glory.

So many things have happened in the last year that it is hard to select any for special mention; but I'll choose a few that have made a particular impression on me.....

- The constant flow of new people into all our 3 churches with the challenge it brings for all of us, of "becoming" - of maturing as disciples of Christ and growing into his likeness.
- Andy's sabbatical over the summer, - with the extra workload - but thank you to all of you for your support in sharing the load
- The sad loss of Susan Robin, both for her personal family and also for the family at St. James; but also the way that the congregation has pulled together and from the initial wondering of *how are we going to continue* to realising that *we have come through by God's grace* and others have picked up the baton that Susan handed on
- Back to Church Sunday and the way it was embraced by St. James; the result was captured on film that will be seen throughout the country next year in the promotional DVD for 2010's Back to Church Sunday campaign
- The recent pancake party at St. Matthew's – with so many people from so many cultures chatting together; what a privilege to be part of multicultural churches!
- The ongoing day to day transforming of people's lives as they come to know Jesus and experience his love and grace.

And for the coming year? Coming up soon is our parish weekend away at Hothorpe Hall with Bishop Andrew 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> June. I hope and trust it'll be a really enjoyable and refreshing weekend together, - a chance to meet with God and also to get to know those who we only briefly chat to over a cup of coffee after the service. This will draw our 3 churches even closer together.

And, on a personal note, another big event coming soon is the wedding of our daughter, Sarah, to Dave on 17<sup>th</sup> July at APC. Andy is taking the wedding, - so I can be the mother of the bride that day, - and who knows... I might even wear a hat!

Thank you all for your love and companionship as we share the Christian journey together in Aston and Nechells

### **Curate's report: Revd. Fiona Robertson**

'Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.' (Ps 36.5) God's love and faithfulness is something that we have also been reminded of at First Sunday in 2009 as we have looked at the lives and journeys of different characters in the Old Testament. It's also something that I'm aware of as I look back at 2009 at my own journey, but also at our journey as a parish. We've seen God's love and faithfulness in the good times – as we have celebrated the baptism of a number of new members, had fun together and welcomed new people, as well as God's faithfulness in the harder times as we've grieved for those who have died and faced challenges.

I have also been aware of God's provision – in sustaining and supporting us during Andy's sabbatical and in continuing to bring new people to each of our churches. I have been particularly struck at how God has been bringing people who are hungry to meet with him and to be involved in the life of the churches. It has also been great to see God provision in the everyday. I'm reminded of the times when we have prayed and God has answered our prayers even while we have been praying. I'm also reminded of the stories we've shared of God's presence, provision and sustaining week by week in 'what's God been up to?'

During 2009 I have continued to be responsible for many of the areas that I was responsible for in 2008 and have written about them elsewhere in this report. I have also continued with study over the year and completed the next stage of the registration process for my PhD in July. It has been really encouraging to have time to read the bible and reflect, though I am also aware of how big a project it is and how much more I have to do. I have really appreciated the way the parish and the team have made it possible to take time each month to study – so thank you.

As many of you will be aware I have also come to the point in my curacy when I am due to move on. So I am in the process of praying and considering various possibilities and very much value your prayer as I seek to discern where God is leading me next. I continue to enjoy and value being part of the team in Aston and Nechells and part of what God is doing here and would like to give thanks to God for all that he has taught me here and the ways that he has prepared me for what is next (even if I don't yet know what that is). But I do know that I will continue to know God's love and faithfulness in the next step as I continue to follow him and as God carries on to completion the work he has begun in me (Phil 1.6).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your love, support and prayer over my curacy. It has been a blessing to be part of this community over my time with you and to have known God's love through his body here in Aston and Nechells. It is my prayer that God will fill each of us more and more with his Spirit, that we may know him, and that as his Spirit works within us, we may reflect Jesus to one another and to our community more and more.

### **Curate's report – Revd. Beverly Watson**

2009 has been rich and fulfilling year for me. When I wrote my 'curate's report' this time last year I'd only been here for a couple of months; now I feel much more established in my role as a curate here in Aston and Nechells, and as part of the clergy team. Our family is now much more settled in Birmingham too, with each of us having found a place and a role. Most of my year has been taken up with getting to know people, finding my way around the parish and Birmingham generally, and with learning the nuts and bolts of ordained ministry. Preaching and leading services in each of our three churches has been one of the main focuses of my year. I've also really appreciated taking baptisms, funerals, weddings, home

communions etc, and found it a great privilege to be with people in this way at the most significant moments of their lives.

A high point of the year was my Priesting in Birmingham Cathedral on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> July, and it was great that so many people from our churches were able to be there. Some of my family and friends were able to come too, and I had a wonderful sense of being gathered into the Lord's presence, receiving his blessing on my life, and knowing his equipping for the work he has called me to.

Other aspects of my work include 'Aston Link' – a meal for people on the margins of society which happens twice a week. I've enjoyed taking part in 'God Link', which is a service which we run for the people who come, and is often a very moving occasion. I've been playing a part in the music in our churches, mainly with the aim of seeking to draw new people into the musical side of our worship. It's been encouraging to see new people join in the music at 'First Sunday' and the Band on third Sundays. I've also been working on improving our musical equipment and hope to have a new keyboard in place at Aston Parish Church very soon. Since October 2009 I've been co-leading Alpha with Dennis Cluley and Flo Howells. It has been great to see how the team has come together, to welcome a whole variety of people onto the course, and to watch them grow and develop in their faith.

I've found a small amount of time to study and have enjoyed learning some Hebrew – which is surprisingly not as difficult as it looks! I'm also taking a course in 'Spiritual Direction' which is helping me to understand better how we can support and enable each other to grow in our faith.

So it's been a really good year, and a big thank you to everyone who has welcomed and encouraged me along the way. Special thanks to Jenny Arnold for continued support and guidance in her role as my training incumbent.

### **Aston Link - Revd. Jenny Arnold**

Aston Link continues to provide a meal and place of welcome on a Tuesday and Thursday lunchtime with the 2<sup>nd</sup> hand shop open on a Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. In addition to Shirley, our excellent cook, we rely on our volunteers who help in the kitchen and serving meals as well as in the shop. So a big Thank you to all of you. The experience the volunteers gain has helped in many finding paid employment and so there is always a turnover in volunteers. If you feel able to help - please speak to Jenny or Beverly. And you are always welcome for a meal - a filling 3 courses for only £1.50!

We have increased the frequency of God Link over the past year and the 8 or so who regularly come appreciate this time to meet with God. Jenny and Beverly who lead God Link also appreciate the time... it is a privilege to see what God is doing in lives and how He is meeting people at their time of need.

Aston Link meets in Lichfield Methodist Church and over the past year the worshipping Sunday congregation has closed and currently the building is in the process of being sold. Do please pray that whoever buys the building will want to carry on the work of Aston Link.

## **Triangle Groups - Revd Jenny Arnold**

Triangle groups are key to our growth as disciples in Aston and Nechells, - so thank you to all those who lead groups and serve in this way. It is in a small group that we grow in our understanding and worship of God (up), we receive support and prayer (in) and we discover and use our gifts as we witness to our neighbours (out). So it's been very encouraging to see how our triangle groups have been growing over the past year. There has been a growth in numbers of those belonging to groups and new groups have formed as people have progressed from alpha into triangle groups. Some groups now have members from more than one church which is helping to draw our 3 churches together. The groups currently meeting, and their leaders are as follows:-

Wednesday evening, Witton - leaders Ivor and Gail Lewis  
Wednesday evening, North Birmingham - leaders Rosemary and Nigel Cripps  
Friday evening, post alpha - leaders Fiona Robertson and Hilary Miller  
Monday afternoon, Nechells - leaders Bill and Joan Perry  
Tuesday evening, Women's group - leaders Ricky Jolley and Glenys Veitch  
Tuesday evening, Nechells - leaders Geoff Miller and Ken Costley  
Tuesday evening, St. James - leaders Maureen and Cephas France  
Wednesday evening, post alpha, - leaders Jackie Burton and Dennis Cluley.

Do speak to myself or one of the triangle group leaders if you'd like to join a group ... or indeed start another group at a different time or another location.

## **Diocesan Synod Report – Revd Andy Jolley**

The Diocesan Synod met three times in 2009. The March Synod was at the new church building of Christ Church Selly Park. The new building demonstrated both what can be achieved in fundraising by a local congregation and also (particularly in terms of acoustics) the importance of not skimping on costs. The first main business concerned Transforming Church, the Diocesan Initiative looking to foster growing churches in every parish and local community. The second major item was a presentation of the findings of PROMOTE, which had reviewed children's and youth ministry across the Diocese over the past 3 years. The final minor item of business was to reduce the previously agreed increase in clergy stipends from 3.2% to 2%.

I was on sabbatical for the July meeting, which was the final gathering of the Diocesan Synod elected in 2006. This meeting was held yet again at St John & St Peter's Ladywood (as it had been in 2008). As usual, this Synod was taken up with the business of receiving the annual reports for 2008 and agreeing the budget for 2010. The approved budget would increase clergy stipends by 1% from 1 April 2010 and increase Common Fund by 1.45%. At this meeting the annual vote was taken about support for our link Dioceses in Malawi, with parishes being asked to contribute £70,000 for the support of the four Anglican Dioceses in Malawi in 2009. This item included a presentation by Bishop Christopher, the recently retired Bishop of Northern Malawi (and former vicar of Castle Bromwich)

July also saw the election of members of the new Diocesan Synod for the 2009-2012 triennium. This was the first election since it had been agreed to greatly reduce the number of positions on Diocesan Synod in the interests of both actually generating elections and economy. As a result, Aston Deanery has filled its reduced allocation of 3 clergy and 2 lay representatives. Following an election, myself, Freda Evans (St Barnabas, Erdington) and Nigel Traynor (St Mary's Pype Hayes) are the clergy representatives. Sue Ordidge and Steve Willetts (both of St Barnabas) were the only people who stood for the lay places.

The November Synod was thus the first of the new Triennium. It included a fine Presidential Address by Bishop David with his thoughts about what Synod will concern itself with over the next three years, and then separate meetings of the Houses of Clergy and Laity to inform members of the different posts, Councils and committees for which elections would take place and to encourage them to stand. The meeting took place at another shiny new church building, St Luke's Lee Bank (another venue recently visited by the Synod). The morning concluded with an excellent presentation about stewardship (giving) by Nick Hutton of Sheffield Diocese and Jayne Grunnill our own Stewardship and Income Generation Officer.

### **Aston Deanery Synod meetings 2009 – Mr. Geoff Miller**

Last year was a really active time with 3 meetings were planned during 2009 in different locations around the Deanery.

**Tue. 3rd Feb** we were to have met at **St Margaret's Short Heath**, but this was cancelled due to the extreme weather conditions – little did we know what to expect at the end of 2009.

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June** meeting was held at **St Margaret's Short Heath** [not so well attended with it being Fathers day and with clergy either on or planning to be on sabbatical]. The Autumn meeting was held on Wed. 7<sup>th</sup> October at St James Aston.

There was a presentation from Christ the King, Erdington [St Margaret's and St Martins] on Mission and Ministry as the 2 church congregations begin the process of merging together.

Michele Taylor the Aston Pioneer Missioner has given regular updates of her work around the Deanery and how through small encounter groups people have come to faith.

St Chad's which was in an interregnum provided updates on their search for a replacement for the Very Revd Julius Wanyoiki [and we are jubilant over the recent appointment to this post earlier this year by Revd Daniel Ramble, appointed to St Chad's Erdington and also as Chaplain to Aston University].

**Wed. 7<sup>th</sup> October at St James Aston** Rt Revd Andrew Watson Bishop of Aston gave a talk about 'Transforming Church' at the Autumn meeting based around a quiz about church membership. The answers for Birmingham Diocese being:- 14,000 Christians attend worship on a Sunday: 59% of people responded in the 2001 census to being Christian. 13,000 children are in Cof E schools: 2003-2008 saw average attendance at church up by 2½% , 26% of UK citizens visit church once a year:  
In Birmingham 3500 people responded to back to church Sunday invitations.

Transforming church is the idea of Bishop David to remind parishes of the need to revise/change according to the needs of the community. We must seek to put prayer into action. A distinctive, inspired vision might be slow to get going but could prove very fruitful.

Following the launch, parishes now have the framework to focus on areas that may need change. 80 consultants have been selected and will be individually appointed to parishes to give outsider insight and encouragement. The consultant will meet the PCC and/or congregation and then follow up with a review for a clear sense of future mission.

**Elections to the Diocese** were held during the year. Our new representatives are:  
Laity: Sue Ordidge and Steve Willetts.  
Clergy: Nigel Traynor, Freda Evans & Andy Jolley

**Sabbatical** was taken by 3 members of clergy during the year: Revd Andy Jolley, Revd Gregg Mensingh and Revd. Nigel Traynor. We have great expectations of refreshing new insight within our Deanery for 2010 and beyond.

If you are interested in knowing more, contact one of our Deanery Synod reps and we can always arrange for you to attend a meeting as an observer to see first hand.

### **PCC report – Mr. Bill Perry**

In July, Nigel reported on the conference attended by approx forty churchwardens from the Diocese concerning Church Building Maintenance organised by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. This was a very helpful conference and some good information was obtained concerning the maintenance of our churches. It has also been good to see the new baptistery being put to use, In fact, the whole area at the front of Aston parish Church not only looks excellent but is also much more manageable and useful.

In the summer, quite a number of us from the three churches went to New Wine and had a thoroughly enjoyable, but rather soggy/wet/muddy week together.

In October Bishop Maurice spent some time with the PCC, talking through “Transforming Church”. This took up most of the meeting. In February, the three churches met at the Trinity Centre in Sutton Coldfield, again with Bishop Maurice, where we spent the day going through the points coming from the PCC meeting in October and this proved to be a very enlightening experience. We all have work to do during this year to improve, particularly our children and young people’s work, how do we improve our music, how do we improve the welcome that we give in our churches, and how can we keep and look after newcomers to our churches; and a whole lot more.

In January, the foyer at St. Matthew’s was at long last re-wired and re-plastered and then in February the decorating was completed, making the entrance to the Church a lot more welcoming. Progress so far concerning the Leasing Agreement is disappointing as we have yet to see a revised agreement.

The Men’s Group at St. James now has 10 members and they contributed £250 into Church funds. A collection for the Haiti victims of the earthquake raised £308. The exchange with Colwall was an excellent time of worship and sharing and food!!!

We have run two more Alpha Courses at St. James this year which have been quite successful and a new daytime Alpha is planned to start at St. Matthew’s on 21<sup>st</sup> April.

We have continued to celebrate together as three churches and these have been particularly uplifting times. It has been good to see so many from all three churches worshipping together. A mention of MORE – our Sunday evening worship and teaching - would not go amiss here. Personally, I just don’t want to miss it!

The link with St. Clement’s Primary School is now much stronger. The school is going through a very difficult time at present and we need all your prayers for the Head, her staff, and the Governing Body. Being put into ‘special measures’ is quite stressful on everyone involved at the school, so please pray for us. For those who don’t know, St. Clements is the second Church of England School in Nechells that St. Matthew’s has some responsibility for.

Let’s look forward to another exciting year as we seek God’s will for our three churches.

## **DIAL 2009 – Cliff Griffin**

DIAL –the Aston Churches telephone prayer scheme – exists to offer prayers for urgent matters. You phone Margaret and Cliff on 240 7853, or email at [cliffordgriffin@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:cliffordgriffin@blueyonder.co.uk) and the request gets passed down the chain as quickly as we can. This year we have prayed about bereavements, hospital appointments, illness etc. The bit I don't understand is this.

We have 92 people going to the weekend away in June. Most of those presumably believe in the power of prayer, and these days most will have phones and / or computers.

**So why have we only a third of this number who have joined the prayer chain?**

I don't recall Jesus saying "Blessed be the apathetic, for they will be allowed to do nothing for Me." Don't just sit there – phone or email now for me to add you to the list of those prepared to pray.

### **Electoral Roll Officer's Report: Aston Parish Church – Mr. Vanico James**

The Electoral Roll for 2009/10 was 124. The Electoral Roll for 2010/11 is 133 (52 residents and 81 non-residents)

### **Electoral Roll Officer's Report: St. James – Mrs. Jackie Burton.**

The Electoral Roll for 2009/10 was 71. The Electoral Roll for 2010/11 is 73.

### **Electoral Roll Officer's Report: St. Matthew's Church – Mr. Bill Perry**

The Electoral Roll for last year 2008/9 stood at thirty eight (38). Two of those on the roll are no longer worshipping here and have therefore been removed. However, we have eight new members and so the roll for 2009/10 is now forty four (44).

### **Alpha Report - Revd. Fiona Robertson and Revd. Beverly Watson**

During 2009 we have run two joint Alpha courses across the three churches: one in the Spring at St James led by James Hicks, Mary Semper and Fiona Robertson and one in the Autumn at St James, led by Dennis Cluley, Flo Howells and Beverly Watson.

The Alpha courses have continued to be a great opportunity for people to explore the Christian faith, to grow in faith and to ask questions. Each course has been quite small, enabling people to get to know one another and to feel free to contribute. It has been really encouraging to see individuals grow in their faith over the course with some coming to baptism, renewal of baptismal vows or confirmation. The Autumn course members enjoyed a day away in Alcester, Warwickshire, and have continued to meet after the course finished as a new triangle group. The Spring course members had their day away at Aston Parish church centre!

Alpha couldn't happen without all the people who do many different jobs - including those who faithfully pray (and we have certainly felt supported by your prayers and seen God at work answering them), those who provide food on Sunday evenings for us to eat and come and serve it and those who are involved in leading. So thank you to all who have made the Alpha courses possible over the past year.

## Community Fun Days – Revd. Fiona Robertson

Following Hope 08, where we had Hope weekends with litter picks, bulb planting, clearing maisonette stairwells and fun days (to mention just some of the activities), we scaled back slightly in 2009. We had three community fun days (with food, bouncy castles, sports, craft, main stage, prayer for healing etc) as well as being involved in the Aston Community Festival at Villa Park. We again saw God's provision with funding. When our initial application was delayed, Thomas Dole provided funding for the first fun day and then Birmingham Foundation for the rest of the fun days with enough to provide for two 2010 fun days as well. In both Aston and Nechells we worked as part of the local churches together (Aston Churches Together and Churches Together in Nechells).

### Witton Community Fun Day

In May we had a fun day in the playground at Deykin Avenue School. We interviewed a number of local people and also had the Witton Flood Action Group, Witton Community Association and the councillors there. The Smoothie bike was again a hit and everyone enjoyed the food. We had similar numbers to last year with 570 people coming and 53 volunteers involved.



### Manor Park Fun Day in the Church Centre

In June we were due to have a fun day in the grounds of Manor Park school, however the weather was very wet and windy, so we took the decision to move into the Aston Parish Church Centre. It was really encouraging to see how many people came (226) despite the weather and the way that the 55 volunteers adapted and worked together to cope with the situation. We interviewed a number of people about their hopes for their lives and the local community and had Sammy G performing, which was great.

### Aston Community Festival

As in previous years, we had a tent at the Aston Community Festival, with craft, music, literature and prayer for healing. Lorraine Dixon, the Yardley and Bordesley Deanery Missioner, aka DJ Ayo, came and DJed for us for some of the afternoon and a number of people asked for prayer. Children really enjoyed the craft activities and some them spent most of their afternoon in the tent making things.



### Nechells Fun Day

In July we had our Nechells Fun Day with local groups involved as well as tradecraft stall. Main Stage saw a variety of performers including local schools and as ever there was a long face painting queue.

Thank you for everyone who took part in these events and worked so hard to make them possible.

## Schools and Assemblies – Revd. Fiona Robertson

Within the parish there are twelve primary schools and four secondary schools. Two of the primary schools are Church of England schools and during 2009 we have continued to sustain and grow our relationship with both St Matthew's (who have received a new head teacher) and St Clement's. Each Friday morning, some of the clergy and members of the St

Matthew's congregation go in to pray with the head teacher for the school (alternating between St Matthew's and St Clement's). We have continued to provide regular assemblies in both schools and to host them in visits to church. Both schools were due to come to church for their Christmas Carol services, however due to bad weather, the St Clement's service took place in school.

Our contact with local schools is not limited to our two church schools and several of the local schools bring their children to visit one of our churches when they look at 'Places of worship' in RE as well as bringing children to sing at the Community Carol service. This year there were pupils at the Community Carol service from pupils present from Aston Tower, Manor Park, Heartlands Academy, St Clements, King Edwards Aston, Prince Albert, Deykin Avenue and Broadway. Occasionally the clergy are asked to take one off assemblies and to contribute to RE lessons.

At Easter and Christmas, a team from Aston Churches Together (ACT) offers to go into local schools to do assemblies. Over 2009 our team has continued to grow. Ivor rejoined the team (and we rejoiced). We also had new members - Olly Thorp (Salvation Army), Mark Van Beeumen (Cordate Community) and Kenny Dubnick (Baptist), which meant that together with Peter Little (URC), Andi Thomas (Salvation Army), David Fletcher (Lee Abbey), Andy Jolley and Fiona Robertson, we had a team of 9 people – more than any of us can remember.

At Easter we went into 6 schools with a drama about a TV producer and reporter interviewing characters from the first Easter. Then at Christmas we took 'The Christmas Factor' into 7 schools, where we were looking for the best song for the angels to sing to the shepherds to tell them about Jesus' birth. In each school after the drama, Andy did a talk explaining why Christians celebrate Easter or Christmas.



The Christmas Factor: Rudolph the red nosed donkey is rejected as a song...

We continue to give thanks to God for the opportunity to go into the local schools, the way that God provides the volunteers to be involved in the Christmas and Easter Assemblies and the welcome we receive. Do continue to pray for the staff and pupils at our local schools and for those who are going in to share something of our faith.

### **Website – Miss Stephanie Fletcher**

Since becoming the administrator for Aston Parish Church, one of the bigger challenges or tasks was getting to grips with the church website, to such a degree that I felt confident enough to begin editing it and keeping it up-to-date myself. Thanks for this of course must go to Stuart Middleton, without whom this would not have even been possible to begin.

Since learning how to edit the website, and with the encouragement and backing of several individuals, new stories, upcoming events and photo albums have been added to the website, as well as some new pictures to take out some of the blank spaces that were there before. Please check out the website at regular intervals as the website will be kept as up to date as possible. Changes and suggestions are welcome.

## Healing on the Streets – Revd. Andy Jolley

Healing on the Streets has two “seasons”. There is the football season, when we offer prayer before Aston Villa’s weekend home matches outside Aston Parish Church. Usually, this means once or twice a month, though fixture changes and Sunday lunchtime kickoffs have provided challenges for our team. Most people continue to walk past us, and it is frustrating seeing many with obvious physical conditions decline the offer of prayer. Nevertheless, over 2009, we have seen a steady increase in the number of people requesting prayer for themselves or others, and also in people choosing to sit down in the chairs to be prayed for in person. Typically we are now praying for 5-10 people each time.

Many people ask us to pray for friends or family members, or share something of their worries or sadnesses about family breakdown, bereavement or redundancy. Others ask for healing from physical conditions. With many people being regular visitors to Villa Park, we have been able to see many of these people again. One man we prayed for had angina, and was struggling to walk to the stadium. The next month he was walking briskly and freely to the match. Another had high blood pressure. When we next saw him, his blood pressure was normal. Other men have wept as they sat in our seats and been touched by God’s love. Over the months, there has also been a detectable improvement in the atmosphere before the matches and also a shift in the composition of the crowds, with many more families with children now walking past the church.

The other “season” is the summer when we are available to pray at our community fun days. We see much greater openness among local people to being prayed for, especially amongst Muslim women.

It has been encouraging too to share with others who are involved in healing on the streets. Following the conference which we hosted at Aston Parish Church in April 2008 with Mark Marx, Dennis Cluley and I went to a conference at his church in Coleraine in March. We saw some amazing things and heard really encouraging stories from teams from elsewhere in the country. At the beginning of May we hosted another training day at Aston Parish Church, again with Mark Marx. This time, however, we were hosting the conference alongside the growing number of other churches who are now involved in offering healing on the streets of Birmingham. Over 100 people came to the training day. After a morning of teaching, we went into the city centre and offered prayer for healing outside the cathedral and also St Martin’s in the Bullring. Many people were prayed for, several remarkable healings were seen, and some people decided to become Christians having sat down in one of the chairs.

I would like to thank the regular team members, who are drawn from each of our three churches: David Fletcher, Bill Perry, Joan Perry, Hilary Miller, Geoff Miller, Dennis Cluley, Herma Lewis, Ricky Jolley, Gloria Powell, Fiona and myself. We are also regularly joined by Belinda Wadsworth from B1 church. We continue to learn more of the privilege we have in the authority that Jesus has shared with us. We would welcome others who would like to join us in this exciting ministry. Thanks too to Joe Lewis, who has again kept us supplied with hot drinks to keep us warm through the cold weather of the football season.

## REPORTS FROM ASTON PARISH CHURCH

### Youth Worker's Report – Mr. Ivor Lewis

#### Introduction

My work over the last 12 months has been divided up into two key areas.

Firstly to continue to...

- a) Build new forms of church among the young people of Aston which will enable them to make connections with God in their own contexts;

And secondly to...

- b) Undertake youth and community development work in the neglected Witton area of Aston and re-establish the Witton Community Centre as a community resource.

This years report looks at progress over the last 12 months.

#### OUR WORK IN ASTON

#### Young People's Discipleship

##### *Hope Unleashed...*

A key part of last year was encouraging young people to take on more responsibility within the group – leading sessions, providing refreshments as well as continuing to serve the teas on the second Sunday of the month.

In the autumn term the young people started the Youth Alpha course. At the time of writing, the group have just taken part in the 'Alpha Away-day' and will shortly complete the final session on the 'church'.

The group has grown in numbers with an average of 12 young people attending each week. What is particularly encouraging is that the growth has been in the 16+ age range. A number of these are young people who have come back to church.

##### *'Growing Leaders' course (Youth Edition)*

The 'Growing Leaders' course (Youth Edition) is for young people who are 14+ and who want to grow in their ability to lead. It is currently being piloted in the diocese through the Bishop's Youth Council and I am presently mentoring James Spare on the course. We are planning to run our own course in partnership with the Salvation Army (Aston) which will start in June 2010 and finish in March 2011.

##### *The Lounge*

'The Lounge' is a bi-monthly event for young people aged 11+yrs (it takes place in the Higgins lounge – hence the name). It's an opportunity for them to grow in their experience and understanding of God through worship. A key element of 'The Lounge' is that the young people are encouraged to contribute to each event in ways which are relevant to them. Last year we focussed on the following themes

- 'Jesus in the Wilderness' (Lent);
- 'Light & Darkness (Halloween)
- John 1:14 (Christmas).

Last summer the young people were also encouraged to organise themed evenings which could be developed to invite friends along to.

The dates for this year are

- Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> April (Easter)
- June/July (Themed Evenings)
- October (Light/Darkness)
- December (Christmas)

Over the course of the last year the Lord has provided fantastic co-workers in Paul Lacey and Hannah Watson and I would like to thank them both for all their help. I also want to thank James Spare for everything he has brought to the group and I hope that he, like Hannah, will always feel welcome to join us when he is home from university.

### ***New Wine 09***

Quite simply ‘...a mud bath!!!’ But besides the mud and the sludge, God met powerfully with many of our group. This year we will be going to a new site in Newark and a couple of the young people are planning to help out on the NW children’s teams.

### ***The Salvation Army (Aston)***

A key part of ‘Building church around young people in Aston’ has been working with the Salvation Army to establish youth ministry with young people from Manor and Salford Park. Andi Thomas is building a great team and establishing a fantastic programme and we are working closely to develop work with children and young people in Aston and Witton (See Witton below).

### ***Schools work***

I am still helping out at Deykin Avenue for two dinnertime sessions a week supporting the supervisors with the older aged juniors and doing school assemblies. This has enabled me to have more contact with the school and with members of the local community.

The Aston Churches Together team has developed a Christmas assembly for our local schools in Nechells and Aston. The schools include Manor Park, Aston Tower, Mansfield Green, Deykin Avenue, Yew Tree J/I, St Matthew’s, St Clements’ and Prince Albert’s J/I. At the time of writing we are about to do our Easter assembly.

## **OUR WORK IN WITTON**

We believe that the Lord wants to revitalise Witton spiritually, socially and economically. This includes being involved in developing Triangle Groups in the area and also working to re-establish the Witton Community Centre and its Association so that it will become a focal point for the local community.

### ***Witton Triangle Group***

Over the last year, our group has grown in numbers and there is the feeling that a number of the group are also growing into leadership and I’m sure will be leading a Triangle group by this time next year. Over the next 12 year we will be focussing on ‘little outs’ in the Witton area. We would like to say a huge ‘thank you’ to Dennis Cluely who is now leading a Triangle Group out of the Autumn Alpha course.

### ***Witton Community Association***

For some time we have been working re-establish the centre as a community facility for the Witton area. This has meant joining the Community Association and encouraging the

involvement of local people. The thing which has dominated the last 12 months has been the WCA and the future of the Community Centre.

### ***The Community Centre***

Last June we gave the keys to the community centre back to the Landlord (BCC Education). In the meantime, COFSS (Communities and Families Support Service) an organisation set up by the Aston Pride Health Theme have taken over the building and are currently refurbishing the centre in order to develop a Health and Social Care project. This project will have a particular focus on offering maternity care but with the proviso that the building is made available for community groups to hire it in the evenings and at weekends. The refurbishment is scheduled to take 12 weeks (June 2010). Aston Pride will seek to establish a board made up of local groups, residents and health professionals to oversee the running of the Centre.

Here are other areas of work over the last year...

### ***Kids & Youth Work***

Between the Monday 27<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> July (8-11yrs) and Monday 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> August (12-16yrs), the WCA in partnership with The Salvation Army (Aston) delivered a programme of activities to over 80 children and young people (aged 8 – 16yrs) from Aston and Witton. The project was based at the Salvation Army building in Gladstone St, Aston.

The programme consisted of a number of arts based workshops; sports coaching and challenging activities. The Workshops offered were drama; DJing and VJing; a media project; art & crafts; a graffiti wall; sports coaching and a healthy eating project

We also took the children and young people out on trips which included a trip to the Woodlands in Walsall to do abseiling, canoeing, archery and the assault course as well as going to the Snowdome in Tamworth to do Swimming, ice-Skating, tobogganing and tubing. The older group also went Go-Karting in Walsall.

A positive outcome of the scheme was how the two groups from Aston and Witton (particularly the younger ages) mixed together and some of these friendships have resulted in young people from Witton now attending some of the provision based at the Salvation Army. This is particularly important as there is currently little or no provision locally.

### ***Witton Boxing project***

Since 2008, WCA supported the development of the Inner City Boxing Club based in the Aston Events Centre and run by Ex-World Champion Richie Woodhall in partnership with West Midlands Police. The project started as a 10 week programme, aimed at addressing helping young men to address issues around anti-social behaviour. During this time it was able to be sustained by funding from Aston Pride Community Chest, Birmingham City Council and Connexions. Whilst the scheme was widely seen as a success, however at the moment there are no plans to run another course.

### ***Witton Women's Keep Fit group***

The Witton Women's Keep Fit Group also received funding from the Aston Pride Community Chest fund to get an instructor to do a session each week. Last summer these sessions moved to the Witton Methodist Church but at the moment they are on hold.

### ***The Perry Barr Youth Pod***

In February we became aware of the availability of the Youth Pod (a shipping container which has been adapted to run activities for young people). The Perry Barr Ward are responsible for it and the Ward Tasking Group, which is made up of the police, the fire

service, local councillors, residents and officials from Birmingham City Council have voiced their support for it coming to Witton.

Depending on where it is sited, it has the potential to offer a number of possibilities such as:

- After-school/homework clubs
- Councillor's Surgeries
- Parents Groups
- Youth and kids clubs
- Police Surgeries
- Holiday Schemes
- Flood Action Group Meetings

We are currently talking to various bodies including Deykin Avenue School about a possible location for the Pod. I will be making a presentation to Governors on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April.

#### THE NEHEMIAH PROGRAMME

“The Nehemiah Foundation has arisen out of a desire to see regeneration happening in areas of urban deprivation in ways that connect with people at a neighbourhood level. Building on our partners' collective experiences of the past 20 years, we have been developing a programme to equip people and organisations operating at a local level.

The Foundation works with local organisations in the supporting and training of regeneration workers over an 18 month period who will develop a plan for their neighbourhood and communities to enable lasting transformation...”

The Nehemiah Programme, set up by Anthony Collins Solicitors, has been running for three years. I joined the second intake and have been focussing on the Witton neighbourhood. I am currently putting together a baseline document which will provide a snapshot of life in the area with statistical information and the perspectives of local residents and organisations. It will also include the results of a community consultation I started in the autumn.

We are also developing a network of regeneration workers.

#### CONCLUSIONS

As I stated earlier, there is much to give God thanks for with regard to our youth ministry. The growth of the group on Sunday mornings and potential to develop future leaders is an exciting development.

With regard to our work in Witton, well... last year was dominated by the issue of the future of the community centre. Handing back the keys and clearing the centre last summer was certainly the lowest point. However, being able to function without it, whilst not always easy was made bearable by the opportunity to make use of Witton Methodist Church and I would like to thank Christine Chick for all of her help particularly during the summer scheme. Whether or not we are able to get hold of Youth Pod, I am greatly encouraged by what seems to a greater sense of commitment and energy on the WCA committee.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has given up their time and energy to support this work over the last year.

Please continue to pray for us...

- As we seek to 'build church around young people in Aston'.
- As we seek to 'put the heart back into our neighbourhood in Witton'.

Thank you

## **Aston Parish Committee Secretary's Report John Huzzey (Hon. Sec.)**

A largely uneventful year from my point of view!

The main item of interest was the completion of the platform and baptistery, although the baptistery was not signed off as complete until Feb / March 2010 due to leaks, which proved to be troublesome to cure. Eventually all concerned were happy to agree that watertight integrity had been achieved. Perseverance won in the end!

The majority of meetings were started and finished on time. Several items were discussed very fully and, in most cases, were resolved after due discussion.

### **Worship group report 2009 – 2010 – Mrs. Rosemary Cripps**

In worship and PA we have continued to see changes. We said thank you to Philip Griffin in January for his work over the last 4 years in leading the monthly band group as he and Cat move to Plymouth after their wedding at Aston Parish in May 2010. Luckily Beverley Watson and Stephanie Fletcher have stepped into the gap leading from keyboard, flute and guitar. Through their encouragement a number of our young members including Lydia, Laura and Emily are singing with the band and also supporting first Sunday. Ricky, Matthew and Beth have continued to support across both.

We are also looking to refresh the singers membership who support leading worship on other Sundays. Mitzi can only sing occasionally because of a change in her work shifts and Louvina has twice been away for lengthy periods at her holiday home in St Kitts. Grateful thanks go to Gloria and Ricky for their loyal support and to Margaret, and Brian for their playing commitments.

Combined events with St Matthews and St James have continued with the Carols by Candlelight and other group services. The 2009 Christmas Eve candlelight service saw Hannah, Sarah, William and Chris home for the festivities. They were joined by Edmund and James, relatives of other members of the congregation and all made a glorious orchestral accompaniment to the rich voices of the combined three churches choir.

The range of music, power point, video and film in regular use has continued to expand with very flexible use in the evening "More" sessions and as always with continued introduction of new congregational singing material interspersed with more traditional hymns and use of the organ.

The PA Team have grown in numbers in particular thanks to the enthusiasm and expertise of Ali with support from his friends, Gee, Chris and others. Video cameras, and portable PA for use in the hall and outside worship have significantly strengthened the type of presentation available and have been invaluable for enabling all of the congregation to see the detail of the baptisms in the new baptistry. The teething problems with the new platform have gradually reduced. In the last few months several of the teens and twenties James, Beth, Kirstie and Stephen have led aspects of the PA for first Sunday and other services.

The key needs for 2010 and moving forwards are for two or three more singers of any age to help lead Sunday morning worship and anyone at all who would like to be part of the band playing instruments or percussion.

We hope to purchase a better keyboard and to extend the PA speaker system into the south aisle. This is crucial for use by local schools and for the large funerals (congregations of 300 and many more!!) that happen at least once or twice a month.

## **Band report – Revd. Beverly Watson**

The band has played on third Sundays at Aston Parish Church over the past year, under the leadership of Phil Griffin. Members of the group include Ricky, Beth and Matthew Jolley, along with others who have played from time to time. The group has met to practise on Wednesday evenings, and has been able to introduce new songs and hymns into our usual repertoire.

Phil and Cat left in November to prepare for their forthcoming wedding, and leadership of the band was taken on by Beverly Watson, along with Ricky Jolley and Stephanie Fletcher. New members have been welcomed and we are pleased to see some of the children and young people becoming part of the band. And a big thank you too to the PA team, without which the music could not happen.

## **Project Officer's Report – Mr. Nigel Cripps**

**Aston Parish Church** - 2009 has been an interesting year. The baptistery in Aston Parish Church has been successfully used on a number of occasions but it was extremely frustrating to have problems, now resolved with water leakage.

A quinquennial inspection of the building was undertaken and the outcome was the architect identifying around £500,000 urgent repair work. An immediate application to English Heritage resulted in a grant of £118,000 towards the cost of the most urgent repair works. This is the biggest single grant the church has received.

During the year the Campaign for the Preservation of Ancient Churches held a conference at the church on church maintenance. You can guess the reason for choosing Aston was that the Church is an excellent building to illustrate all the classic maintenance problems the organisers wished to show to the delegates.

In the spring Aston Pride funded a feasibility study and public consultation on the improvements that are needed to make the building fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An outcome that needs immediate action is to improve the 'unloved' meeting room in the church. This is a complex task where there are many options that need to be considered as the Church Committee works towards an agreed solution.

**St Matthew's, Nechells** - The church hall at St Matthews is a poor building. It has problems that seriously inhibit its use. During the year there have been two schemes developed to improve the building. Unfortunately we have been unsuccessful in securing grants for the works but we are persisting and making more funding applications.

## **ACTS (Aston Church Trading Services) Cliff Griffin and Nigel Cripps**

During 2009 there were 3 significant changes,

1. Nationally the recession has caused a reduction in the growth of sales of fairly traded goods. We have become used to a growth of over 100% each year, in 2009 it slowed to only 70% still a fantastic increase.
2. At Aston we found that the stall's location in the South Aisle was not ideal and during the year it was moved to its current position by the meeting room door. This has proved to be more convenient
3. During the year a commercial organisation on the south side of the City that regularly purchased tea and coffee from us found a more local source of supply. This could

have made a significant difference to sales activity but in the event the impact was not that significant. This was because activity at the stall increased during the year.

In comparison with last year the activity was only 4% down on 2008. This is a very encouraging bearing in mind the recession and the loss of activity mentioned in 3.

### Balance sheet

<b>Income</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£</b>
Bank (Opening)	390.72	Bank (Closing)	637.37
Cash (Opening)	88.65	Cash (Closing)	118.15
Stock (Opening)	348.85	Stock (Closing)	271.44
<b>Sales</b>		<b>Purchases</b>	
Books	361.51	Books	361.51
T Craft	2365.92	T Craft	2092.92
		To reserve	74.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>3555.65</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>3555.65</b>

**Finally.** Thank you to our families who have to deal with boxes stored at home, to Pauline for help running the stalls and most importantly thank you for supporting ACTS.

### **Aston Parish Church Centre Management Committee Chairperson's report - John Huzzey (Chair)**

The main item of note this year is the decline in resources, caused by a lowering of regular bookings and the cost of maintaining the building to keep it at a comfortable state for various user groups. The heating system has been a cause for concern, particularly over the winter months. Towards the end of 2009 the boilers needed a repair in order to get them working properly. Even so, the level of heating is still inadequate, and so the question arises: can the system be returned to its original performance level after almost 30 years? Food for thought.

The floor maintenance carried out last year was a good job thanks to volunteer labour not costing anything but the price of treatment material.

### **Aston Way Parent and Toddler Group – Shirley Rodway**

Since taking over the playgroup, the numbers have been down. We have our regular mums and dads. I have put up leaflets at our local shops and down at Tesco's. I think we are finding it hard because some schools in Aston start nursery at 3 years. I think playgroups like ours help young children interact with other children and when they leave, they settle into nursery very quickly.

### **Explorers report – James Hicks**

Current childrens church leaders are James Hicks, Dennis Cluley and Lilian Marshall, with Sharon Moore standing in on a temporary basis. Annette Young has stepped down from helping due to other commitments and we really appreciate her hard work for the group. We have on average 5 or 6 children in the 7-11's age group although this does vary considerably and different kids may come each week, which makes planning interesting. We've mostly

adapted the Scripture Union Xstream material for this age group, with extra ideas coming from the leaders or very often from the children themselves. They were very keen to support the Haiti earthquake appeal, putting together their own poems and prayers to encourage support from the wider church.

We had a special Christmas event run with help from Hope Unleashed. This attracted more children than usual thanks to promotional flyers and word of mouth. There was a good mix of different activity stations all helping the children to think about the meaning of Christmas. We hope to repeat this sort of event several times a year, working around seasonal themes. We're also encouraging our kids to go to the x:site children's bible teaching event that takes place in the centre of Birmingham.

### **Churchwarden – Report – Gloria Powell and Joe Lewis**

Once again we just want to say, it has being a privilege doing the Lord's work. We have so much to thank him for it's hard to know where to begin. We have seen the work completed on the baptistery and we must say how marvellous it looks. You could almost say it's been in constant use and we hope it will continue to be in constant use as more and more people turn to the Lord.

We have also seen the roof completed over the vestry, and a new cupboard in the meeting room. Much of the work has being carried out with minimum disruption, and we were still able to carry on with most duties i.e. Sunday service, worship, wedding, christening and other duties. We know there is a lot more work to be done because we know the Lord not finished yet so we just want to thank everyone for being so patient and hope they will still be patient in the future.

There were some exciting times with our fun days and activities, the Lord has being kind to us and we would like to take this time to thank everyone who has made our job much more rewarding. We would like to thank all those who turned up for the leaf clearing and also the cleaning of the church and a special thank you for Nigel, he knows what he does and he does it well.

Now once again we are privileged to have four clergy who do such wonderful work, we just want to pray Gods' blessing upon them and may they continue to do what they do best: bringing people to the Lord with their teaching and preaching. We'd like to thank Andy, Jenny, Fiona and Beverly, and it is lovely to see that Beverly has finally found her feet. We pray God's blessing upon each and everyone and thank everyone for as little as they do or a much as they do.

God bless you all.

### **A report from 4<sup>th</sup>. B'ham, 1<sup>st</sup> Aston Manor, Guide Company, 2009-2010. – Mrs. Margaret Griffin**

A truffle treasure hunt started the summer term, each patrol being awarded an ingredient or piece of equipment to make truffles, as they completed a task based on the Promise and Law.

The company received an invitation to the new hospice in Sutton Coldfield, as part of our Change The World challenge, so 6 girls went to inspect the building and equipment. They enjoyed trying out the lifting seat and admired the purpose-built bath. It was good fun, too, planting vegetable seeds at our meeting, with the Unit Helper. I was able to show my 40

years badge, with its *real diamond*! The last two weeks of that term were taken up with a campfire (toasting marshmallows) and a water fight.

Two girls took part in the Symphony Hall centenary launch, in September, and the whole term seemed to focus on celebrations. We held a Black History party, and then the Baden-Powell candidates worked out a party for the Brownies, involving apple-bobbing, face-painting and fancy dress. Go-for-its and badgework continued as always, but we punctuated work with cooking sessions and, with the Brownies in our District, a visit to Tamworth's park and the Snowdome ice-skating rink. Three girls managed to finish their B.P. challenges around Christmas time, with another well on the way.

Our helper Vicky began her leadership training in the New Year. Snow closed our meeting at the start of 2010, but then we began our look at each decade of our company's 100 years (one decade each month, leading up to our grand reunion party in October). We plan to take part in the half-term costume-making and the Drayton Manor carnival as part of this very exciting year.

### **Boys' Brigade Report – Jennifer Martin**

It has yet again been a very busy year for the 1st Birmingham Boys' Brigade. As you all know, early last year I had the crazy idea of taking the boys to Switzerland for our centenary. Our centenary year is of course this year and the actual date was 19th February 2010. Well with lots of faith, prayers, hard work and support, we are getting nearer to realising my dream. I believe in doing my best in giving the boys opportunities to do things they might not otherwise get the chance to do. The boys and staff have worked so so hard the past twelve months to fundraise to pay for the trip. We have been gardening, spring cleaning, held a sponsored wide awake night, and auction with raffle, football friendly day and a skittles evening. We have also had donations from companies sent to us. Lots of other things are still planned for us to do, including the sponsored abseil, more gardening, hopefully a church breakfast, another wide awake night and our all important community fun day on April 24th.

In between all of this we have had a day trip to the space centre, took part in uni hoc, pool, table tennis, athletics and football, held our annual display, with the guest of honour being Ayoub Khan and went to our annual divisional parade.

I would like to, on behalf of the company, thank everyone at Aston Parish Church for all their help and support, especially over the past 12 months. We are proud to be part of Aston Parish Church and to have been for 100 years.

### **Asian Fellowship – Giyanow Kaur**

*“Jai Masih Thee”*

This year the Asian fellowship has been again thankful for the continued teachings. Also the growth in depth of the members as they continue coming each Saturday to listen to the teaching. To be able to share and care about each others concerns to see growth in numbers. We have had some of the folks including my self going to the Punjab this year. The good news that Resham & Anant have also started to plan for a church in Anant's home village. Further news from the church in the Punjab Khotran is that they now have a permanent preacher, Bishop Dil Masih. We thank God that since his arrival there has been more calm and peace within the fellowship. So please continue to pray for him and the whole of the Khotran church and village. Also pray for the Asian Fellowship as we ask God to reveal more of His will in each one of our callings as we follow Him.

*“Jai Masih Thee”*

On behalf of the Asian Fellowship

### **Bell Ringers – Don Finnemore**

Nothing much really to report this year. We are in desperate need of people to come and learn how to bell ring, as we currently only have a very small number of bell-ringers and so would really like to encourage new members to come and join. Please contact me if you are interested or know of someone who is.

### **Social and Catering – Mrs. June Huzzey**

This year we have not been to busy

11 April Burgers Hot Dogs and drinks for the Car Wash.

12 April Hot Cross Buns for the passing Villa Fans

5 May Refreshments for Beverleys Ordination

1 Nov Refreshments for the Bereaved Service

9 Dec Mince Pies and drinks for Community Carol Service

24 Dec Refreshments for Carols by Cande light

At the moment we are sure we will have more events to cover this coming year.

### **50th Brownies 2009 – Virginia Adams**

Brownies have continued to be busy and meet each week. Our numbers have varied considerably, with several of the older girls joining Guides at various times during the year and only recently gaining several new Brownies to swell our numbers again. We have welcomed Josephine and Catherine as official Young Leaders and have enjoyed Ellie's help as a new Guider during university holidays.

During the beginning of 2009 we worked on several activities from the 'Changing the World' Hospices project, culminating in a 'Yellow Evening' to which we invited Guides and parents. We wore yellow, played yellow themed games, sold yellow raffle tickets to win yellow prizes and served yellow food and drinks! The profits from this were sent to Acorns Hospice.

In the Spring we were in gardening mode and grew cress and herbs. We also planted carrots and potatoes, which we harvested in the Autumn. Of course we had to cook with some of these too! We sewed felt 'purses' for Mothering Sunday and made long legged chickens and had an egg hunt at Easter.

We joined with Brownies from across the division for a circus themed Brownie Revels which we enjoyed and we also participated in the Division Service.

September saw the launch of Guiding's centenary celebrations and two of our Brownies took part in the Centenary launch at Symphony hall. Our two YLs sold programmes and blew up balloons. We started the Autumn term with our own unit party and a cake with 100 candles. We've since been having some evenings themed on different decades. This included finding out about Remembrance Day and making felt poppies.

We enjoyed a trip to Tamworth and learned how to ice skate during half term. Since then we have been to a Halloween party organised by the Guides and have been working on the Adventure 100 badge, making upside-down cakes and enjoying activities in the dark as well as learning how to knit.

We wore yellow scarves to take part in the Reindeer and Lantern parade, meeting the Mayor and Mayoress, and walking with a roller-skating bauble (who needed the Brownies to 'lend a hand' on the uphill sections.) The term ended with Christmas crafts evening.

## **Crèche – Glenys Veitch**

Over the last year, it has been difficult at times due to lack of staffing.

I thank God for those on the rota. We are all blessed by the number of children joining us in crèche. This however creates a greater need for more staff. We really need to keep praying for more of the right people to join us. A big thank you to you all.

Thanks go to Rachael and Shelley for their help and to Annette and Margaret for stepping in when needed. We are blessed.

## **First Sunday – Revd. Fiona Robertson**

First Sunday is the fresh expression, cafe style service that happens on first Sundays at Aston Parish Church. It is an all age service aimed particularly for those who would not usually go to a traditional service. Over 2009 we have looked at life issues and God's character through the lives of various Old Testament characters including Abraham, Hannah and the widow of Zarephath.

During 2009 we started to produce invitations for First Sunday, to remind people that it is happening and for people to give to friends and family. I have really been encouraged at the way numbers at First Sunday have grown, both through the invitations and more generally through the way that God has brought new people to each of our three churches. We have also seen more people stay for lunch and more people come from St James and St Matthew's for lunch. I know that this has been a challenge for those in the kitchen and we are grateful for all they do and the way that God continues to provide for all who come.

The team involved in First Sunday has also grown. Andi Thomas has continued to meet with Ivor and myself to plan and Beverly has also been with us for some First Sundays. This has meant that we have been able to continue to try new things with the music and we now have a number of the children and young people who join the small band to sing. Hope Unleashed have continued to be involved in a number of ways and Ally has been involved in developing how we do PA. We continue to encourage others to be involved in First Sunday in different ways.

I have really been encouraged by the way that new people have found First Sunday a place where they can participate, by the stories people have shared in 'What's God been up to?' and by the stories I have heard about how people have learn and grown through the topics we have covered.

The post lunch slot has seen baptism preparation, talks and photos shows (including the Jolleys reporting on their time on Sabbatical in Kenya and the Cripps on their travels) as well as the usual games and chatting.

At the beginning of 2010 we had lunch together as a First Sunday team, which was both an opportunity to thank those who are part of the team, but also to think about how we can improve First Sunday and involve more people in it. Some of the suggestions are already in place. For other suggestions we are continuing to think about pray about how we may move forward.

I would really like to thank all of those who contribute to make First Sunday happen.

Thank you very much.

## **REPORTS FROM ST. JAMES', ASTON**

### **Report on Fabric – Cephas France, churchwarden**

Early in 2009 we had some minor repairs done to the roof, which had been highlighted in the last quinquennial. Later we also painted the external woodwork and the entire metal fence around the church. I would like to thank everyone who volunteered to help with this. Well done!

We also had some repairs done to the heating system to make the fans that move the heat around the hall more efficient.

Some minor electrical jobs were carried out, including new light fittings in the Sanctuary.

All the usual safety checks were carried out including Gas, Electric, Fire extinguishers and alarm. The CCTV was also serviced.

I'm pleased to report that there was only one act of vandalism, which occurred in May 2009, when an internal door was kicked off by intruders who followed a member of Staff into the building. The door was repaired and the insurance covered half the cost. There was also one accidental damage to the gents' toilet, which has also been fixed.

In general the building is in good repair.

### **Church Committee Secretary – Sue Martin**

St James has been holding its own with special services rendered once more by Cephas France and his team who care for the building and gardens. We have fresh painted fences and a gate/fence. Also thanks to Jackie Burton who, as Co-ordinator has been confidante and secretary and a support to Andy, Jenny, Fiona, and Beverly. Also to the rest of us and the public who often call in to consult her. Also thanks are due to Maureen France, Juliet Fletcher and Lynette Alleyne and their helpers of Junior Church for their work.

Our Advice Centre, as for the last 25 years, has been a vital help to local people. We have resolved the matter of local folk blocking our gate into the car park. In an effort to recognise and encourage anyone sick in hospital, we are sending flowers to them now.

A huge blow to us all was the sudden death of our Reader Emeritus, Susan Robin, who died on 9th August and is still sorely missed by everyone.

Sandra Rogers continued to run Quiet Days, the last was in November which always refresh all who attend. We look forward to more.

The Alpha Course has been running successfully at St. James, supported by the Triangle groups. Some members of St. James came to Mark Marx's introduction to healing, after which we went out to help any of the public who wished outside the Cathedral in Town.

We held a Caribbean Variety Evening in the Autumn and it was, as usual, very well attended with a beautiful meal presented afterwards.

Many groups and organisations use St. James premises and there are lettings for functions also. We host the Harry Watton House Assertive Outreach drop-in sessions, The Ebenezer

Evangelical Church for Ethiopians, Pastor Douglas and the Church of God, and the Congregation of Yahweh.

Altogether rents come in totalling nearly £17,000 annually.

There have been visits to and from our sister church in Colwall in the Malverns: on 26th July they gave us excellent hospitality. Both Colwall church and Dorridge church members are invited to the Hothorpe Hall away weekend planned for June 2010.

We are meeting regularly as part of the three churches together with services, support and new friendships happening more as time goes on. Pancake Day 2009 on Shrove Tuesday was very sociable and well attended. Confirmation Day was on 23rd May and we held a baptism for our junior member Ramone McDonald plus a renewal for his mother Sharon on November 29<sup>th</sup>. These were both very well attended and a great inspiration.

Back to Church Sunday was combined with Harvest Festival and was a great success.

The Service for the Bereaved on 1<sup>st</sup> November is always well attended.

We had a good Christmas with a full church on most occasions, including the joint Carols by Candlelight held at Aston Parish.

Last but not least, Transforming Church has got underway creating enormous interest among members and between the three churches. New ideas for including people and watching and planning for church growth and participation are all in hand for the coming year and beyond. I shall be retiring from the position of Committee Secretary after the 2010 AGM and wish you all the very best and God's blessing.

### **St James Advice Centre – Mr David Fletcher**

This has been an eventful and challenging year for the Advice Centre. At the end of September 2009, our Director Ziaul Islam resigned, having worked with the Advice Centre ever since it began in 1977. He was given a good send-off, with many friends and colleagues attending a farewell party. He is now providing immigration advice for a highly-regarded firm of solicitors in the city centre.

We have welcomed Mr Musawar Khan, an experienced solicitor, as our new Senior Advisor. Inevitably there has been a time of adjustment, compounded by staff ill-health and a very time-consuming preparation for an audit last December on behalf of the Legal Services Commission. This was essential for maintaining our Quality Mark, and with all members of staff working flat out we managed to pass the audit with flying colours. Praise God!

2010 has begun with a high degree of uncertainty about whether Birmingham City Council will continue their present level of funding for advice organisations such as ours; we are also finding it very difficult to obtain extra funding from grant-making agencies, as the impact of the recession bites. Unless we find some extra money, we will have to reduce staff hours or even close the Advice Centre down, which would be a tragic loss for the local community. However, I am encouraged by the thought that the Centre has faced and weathered similar crises before now. Your continuing prayers for all of us are much appreciated.

### **Junior Church – Juliet Fletcher**

Our Junior Church is made up of a group of about 8 young people ranging in age from approximately 8-17. Though their attendance fluctuates they are committed to learning and

growing in their faith. One of the members decided to declare his faith publicly and was baptised at Aston Parish Church during the year which was a great joy to all of us. Some of the work they have completed on Sunday mornings is displayed on the Junior Church noticeboard. *Please take time to look at this work as your interest will be a real encouragement to them.*

Scripture Union material, 'the grid' (11-14 year olds) and 'X-treme' (8-11 year olds) has again provided us with a range of activities that enable us to explore bible-based themes that are relevant to our young people.

We meet together as Junior Church on two Sundays of the month. On the remaining weeks we provide a resource table at the back of the church where worksheets on a theme related to the talk that day are available for the young people to complete.

The young people have participated in a number of All Age Services by reading from the bible, and leading prayers.

I want to thank the committed group of helpers that make Junior Church possible. Maureen and Lynette along with myself provide the teaching and Sherrin, Marlene and Joanna are able helpers.

Finally, we are always keen to involve more people in this important ministry. If you have a heart for young people and would be available to attend a Junior Church session about once every 6-8 weeks as a helper we would love to hear from you. You would not need to teach. You would need to have a CRB check.

### **St. James' Treasurer report – Jackie Burton**

I feel as though I have gradually 'fallen in' to the role of Treasurer at St. James during the past year. But most of the accounting has gone smoothly, and God has blessed us abundantly.

Pledge members, and those who give on the collection plate have brought in some £15,000 and other donations around £2,000. Thank you all very much indeed! Of course, a building so extensively used as St. James has a lot of overheads, the cost of running the building for the year is over £20,000 – thankfully rental income helps towards this.

I would like to say thank you to all the 'team' who count the money and make sure it gets to the bank every week.

### **Report on Men's Club – Cephas France**

The Men's Club is held at St. James in the Meeting Room alternate Tuesdays 11.00am to 2.00 pm and alternate Thursdays 7.30 pm to 10.00 pm.

We aim to start with prayer or a Bible reading. The main Club time is usually devoted to playing dominoes. Although we do have a dart board, and any other suggestions would be welcome.

There are about ten regular members who come along. It is open to all gentlemen. My wish would be for more men to join us.

## **Report on Social / Trips – Maureen France**

On 1<sup>st</sup> August we went to Great Yarmouth, it was well supported, and a good time was had by all. The weather was good, and people are asking when and where the next seaside trip will be.

We held a Caribbean Evening on Saturday October 3<sup>rd</sup>. This was a huge success, our compere for the evening was Gary Parkes, the entertainers were on form, which included a puppet show, guests from other churches, and a comic play with myself and Sue Martin. Clive Cole had everyone using percussion instruments as he led us on his drums, and later on we all enjoyed a meal together.

On July 26<sup>th</sup> we joined our link parish at Colwall for the St. James Day Patronal festival. It was good to be with them again, and share lunch, they also held a raffle, and we ended the day with a lovely service of evensong. Plans were made straight away for a return visit to St. James Aston in the New Year.

## REPORTS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

### Churchwardens Report to St. Matt's Church Committee – Bill Perry

This has been another eventful year for a number of reasons. I had intended to use my second year as churchwarden to follow up on some urgent needs.

Firstly, it was necessary for a leasing agreement to be put in place so that we could finally stop arguments with the Diocese about who is responsible for what. In July last year we met with the Diocesan Secretary, their Legal representative and a Director from the managing agents, to discuss the draft agreement. Unfortunately the agreement was somewhat one-sided and so they agreed to go away and prepare another 'draft for discussion.' After a number of calls to the Diocese it seems we will have to wait a little longer.

Secondly, we needed to address the problem of overhanging 'runaway' trees and foliage in the churchyard and Birmingham City Council have done this. Additionally, you will have noticed that a lot of work has been carried out in the churchyard to clear away and open up the area and along with CCTV cameras, additional lighting and repairs to the current lighting carried out by Ali and his team, this has helped to make the area safer. A new Intruder Alarm system has been installed (again by Ali) and this has been working well. We had intruders about six weeks ago and although a door was damaged, the alarm did its job and nothing was stolen. Thirdly, there is the matter of the car park in front of church. Thoughtless parking by individuals has often rendered it difficult, if not impossible, for emergency vehicles to gain access if there was an emergency and it was also impossible to bring old and infirm members close to the church to drop off and pick up. This was completed shortly after the last annual meeting.

You cannot have helped but notice the difference to the Foyer area. The whole area is now well lit. After re-wiring, re-plastering and re-decorating it now looks somewhat more welcoming. We just need to add some finishing touches to make it into a truly welcoming entrance to the church.

There has been a decrease in our lettings this year at St. Matthew's and this has made a significant difference to our income. Shiloh Apostolic Church decided to leave us after 27 years and the Eritrean church left after two difficult years with us. However, Without Walls Fellowship Church have joined us and this makes up for some of the lost income. WWFC though are much closer to us and our relationship is much better than previous churches who have used our premises. Because of the loss of income, we had to terminate the cleaner's employment and also the caretaker. This meant that cleaning has to be done by the congregation on a rota system and WWFC have joined in this enthusiastically. Separate to all of this, we have made application for a grant to update the Church Hall facilities and to refurbish the foyer area, but which unfortunately was not successful. Nigel (to whom we are extremely grateful) has been looking at this again and may be submitting a revised application in the near future.

The Neighbourhood Office which started meeting in church last July was suspended in December due to council cutbacks, and so we have lost a good source of income. A busy twelve months..

## **St Matthew's Church Accounts Summary 2009 – Geoff Miller**

It has been an interesting year for accounts with so many imponderables with anticipated turmoil of the national and international money market. Preparing a budget at the beginning of the year with so many possibilities, such as: rising costs, reduced congregational income potentially leading to reduced giving.

However none of that takes account of our God being a great big God who holds us in his hands.

The year again started with faith in preparing a negative budget, because we could not see how we could pay the expected expenditure. A few months into 2009 the Eritrean Church decided to relocate, resulting in a loss of revenue, but this was almost immediately countered by B'ham City Council neighbourhood office wanting to use our premises. Sadly due to their changing finances and slow uptake of their service they stopped their use after only a couple of months, but may return. Then we were approached by Church Without Walls who wanted to hold not only their Sunday worship [starting in September] but also to run other community based activities.

So yet again at the end of 2009 we can report that our total expenditure was approximately the same as our income. With past claims on tax refund money we have been able to increase the building fund, which has enabled money to be set aside for future planned improvements to the buildings, including more imminent redecoration works to the entrance foyer and toilets.

Whilst a little late in the year we have also kept to our pledge to give 10% of our income [£1200] away to worthy causes, split equally between the B'ham Diocese Malawi Fund and Livingstone House [a B'ham based charity].

However, in 2010 we again anticipate a negative budget. Sadly Shiloh United Church have relocated after being at St Matthews for over 20 years. This has meant hard decisions over removing funding for church cleaning and caretaker facilities. But then again we have faith for tomorrow because we know that "our God is good"...

## **Children's Church for St. Matthew's report – Hillary Miller**

Children between the ages of 5 and 11 years meet during 2 Sunday services of the month. The other 2 Sunday's include Big Breakfast and all age worship.

Attendance has been erratic and never more than 4. Children do attend for a week or two and then seem to disappear. Some of our disappearances appeared again on Mothering Sunday and it is important that in the future the leader (emphasis on one only) takes details in order to follow up. As the room we use is easily accessible to the congregation, parents and guardians a single leader does not present as a breach of the child protection policy.

The area set aside for pre school children is now frequently used as this age group is on the increase. Hope for Sunday school! We need as a church to continually give welcome to these little ones with a flexible approach to help engage them. Thank you to those who have joined the corner to help address this. All Age Worship does not appear to grab their attention and there is a dilemma as to what resources are made available on these Sunday's.

Scripture Union teaching materials are used. However since the end of January we have been studying Welcome to the Lord's Table with and the 3 involved have been amazingly

consistent. Letters to parents outlining dates for these sessions and a printed reminder for the children to take home has I believe helped this.

*As I write this I start to think of ideas which I will risk sharing with you.*

- Attractive welcoming leaflets for children and parents of the little ones. Explains how we usually work and our all inclusive policy
- Fun ‘well done for attending cards’ supported with stickers/ texts.
- More regular feedback to the wider congregation on what we have been doing while they have received teaching.

Please continue to pray for new leadership, fresh ideas and above all the children to share in discipleship with.

### **Big Breakfast – Revd. Jenny Arnold**

Over the past year, Big Breakfast has moved venue from the school to the church. The majority of people who come are now regular church goers and so we felt there was no advantage to meeting in the “neutral” territory of the school. Although the format has stayed the same, and of course there are still bacon butties, the content of the monthly programmes have changed to reflect the largely Christian nature of those attending. Last year, month by month, we looked at the fruits of the spirit.

While Big Breakfast is still appreciated as an alternative style of worship, I am concerned that we are not reaching the unchurched parents and children of Nechells, and I would love this year to be able to start something again in the school, perhaps mid-week after school, aimed specifically at parents and children who do not yet know Jesus. Do speak to me if you feel you would like to be part of a team setting up something like this.