

PARISH LIFE

We have much to be grateful for:

Church Life

- An advert for an incumbent for the proposed plurality of Wootton, Whippingham and East Cowes came out in December, but no one applied. To achieve this required a great deal of work from the East Medina plurality representatives, so we have come a long way.
- Steve and Sue Beynon completed the course for Lay Worship Leaders and have taken on the leadership of the Brunch service, and other services and activities involving children's ministry.
- David Bennison has completed the course for Lay Preachers and started exercising his ministry.
- Rev Len Fox and Rev Sandie Osborne continue to help us by leading services of Holy Communion at both churches.
- Café Communion continues to be popular and I am grateful to the team of Rev Len Fox, Mary Peters, Hilary Baldwin, Pauline Kirby, Kitty Reeves and Margaret Errington for everything they do. Special thanks go to Margaret Frost who contacts and arranges lifts for everybody who wants to come. The donations from this service were given to the hardship fund for Wootton Primary school.
- The weekly discussion group has moved from the coffee lounge to make way for Stay & Play and now meets in the home of a group member.
- Our Anna Chaplain, Hilary Baldwin, is expanding her ministry across the parish.
- The Schools Ministry Team of Harry Kirby, Steve and Sue Beynon has made strong relationships with Wootton Primary School, taking assemblies every month. The school came to St Mark's three times to celebrate Easter, Harvest and have a Christingle service
- The Big Mac talk given by David McCulloch after the morning service every 3rd Sunday is popular and instructive.
- Warwick Hammerton oversees our website and is our go-to tech guru.
- Margaret King is everywhere – as sacristan, vergers and pastoral care leader.
- Mike Broadsmith has looked after all the legal paperwork required for both churches – a big job, especially with the saga of the brick-lined grave!

Outreach

- Mark's Brothers (bacon butty group) continues to grow under Harry Kirby's leadership.
- Stay & Play has replaced Little Lions, with longer opening times under the leadership of Helen Smallwood, Steve Beynon and Sue Beynon. The numbers attending are growing but the group moved into the coffee lounge for the winter months.
- Elephant Club is popular with elderly people from the church and the community. I am very grateful to the team of Cecily Matthews, Kitty Reeves, Hilary Baldwin and David Bennison who lead this group. Elephant Club also moved into the coffee lounge for the winter months.
- David Bennison, Helen Hopper and Hilary Baldwin lead monthly informal services at Solent Grange.

- David Bennison and Warwick Hammerton compile The Bridge magazine and this is delivered by a large team to every house in the parish. David Chambers finds the advertisers who cover the costs of the print run.

During the year, I shed many of the jobs that had fallen to the churchwarden during Covid. I am so grateful to the people who have taken on these roles:

- Pauline Kirby who is now the 'housekeeper'
- David McCulloch who now does all the service rotas
- Helen Hopper who is producing the regular prayer letter that goes out to the prayer team
- Helen Davison who has taken on the monthly newsletter that goes out to all the congregation on email.
- We owe a lot to David McCulloch who, together with David Bennison, has led many of our services this year. The choir is growing in numbers and their leadership with singing is much appreciated.
- Karen Osborne, our Lettings Officer, quietly organises the increasing number of lettings of church premises which involves the practicalities of invoicing, the hosting of some meetings and the unlocking/locking of premises, where she is aided by Mike and Judi Thomas.
- At St Edmund's, the indefatigable Doreen Gazey, ably assisted by Lynn Peppitt, continues to raise funds to help keep this very old and much loved church in good condition. Doreen has helped many people who are trying to trace their ancestors. Lynn and her musical friends have held concerts.
- The Open Weekend was held in September. However, it is thought that this year's Open Weekend will probably be the last.
- David Bennison chairs the St Edmund's Building Fund and we are grateful to him, the committee and the Friends of St Edmund's for all they do.
- No matter how hard we try, we cannot stop the ageing process and it is with regret that Ann Jolliffe has decided not to continue with the jumble sales and the Big Breakfast which were held for the last time this year. Thank you to Ann for all you have done over many years for this parish.
- Thanks must go to Harry Kirby for his role as chair of the PCC and to all the PCC members, but one person who must not be forgotten is Mary Peters! Mary agreed to be the second churchwarden when it was necessary to have two in order to apply for a priest. We have tried hard not to ask her to do anything more than she was already doing (which was a lot!) but Mary quietly gave us more, and I am so very grateful to her.

HOWEVER...

Our financial position is not what it was. Two of our largest donors have moved away from the parish and that, together with the enormous increase in fuel bills, have left us in debt at the end of 2023. This is something that has to be rectified before the debt gets out of control. We have bought a card reader but are having difficulties making it work in both churches. The hope is that the funds brought in by the card reader when it is working will help our financial position.

More groups, as well as the Diocese, are hiring our premises, and together with our existing hirers should help increase income.