

Snapshots Issue 2 update (December 2015)

Depth at *Fun-Key* and diversity across St Mary's



Gillian Lunn writes...

Since April 2014, *Fun-Key Church* has continued on the last Sunday of every month. It is still enjoyed and supported by a group of people, ranging from just a few weeks old through to their '70s. We have seen some new faces of all ages (particularly older) become more regular, and inevitably others have dropped off. Also a few of our regulars occasionally attend other services at St Mary's Church, such as a family at the new bi-monthly Café Church service and also play in the band at the all-age Eucharist service on the third Sunday at St Mary's.

Usually we follow the lectionary. Themes have included: vine and branches; how clean are you; called to worship; the baptism of Jesus; wonderfully and awesomely made; and our journey through the church year.

Across this year: two lambs visited us for a baptism; the bell-ringers led us in prayer, with us ringing little bells sending our prayers to God; the town crier called us to worship; we toasted marshmallows on Moses' burning bush; we made soap monsters in the microwave; we pressed apples during our vine and branches service; and we made mini palm branches. The congregation have made milkshakes, decorated cakes, quietly arranged flowers, contemplated while making shapes out of clay, blessed animals, and enjoyed each other's company, all while worshipping God and drawing closer to him. We have baptised two Fun-Keys: a young boy and a four month old baby girl, the daughter of one of our helpers.

Fun-Key Church continues to be hugely blessed by the volunteers and the Mothers' Union who continue to serve refreshments. Our helpers appreciate being able to come on the day, not having to do prep, but participating fully. The small core team choose activities which are low prep, or they source and prepare for the activity before the service. A happy by-product is the way our regular volunteers have come to know each other so much better. That is despite often having worshipped together for years at the morning services at St Mary's. Our male volunteers received a commendation in last year's Church Life/Church Times photo competition: "men around the font"!

It feels as if *Fun-Key Church* has matured a little bit, not in a stuffy way but more that as planners we have become more experienced. We're learning from what has worked in the past, and are gaining a feel for when we could expand on something. As we do not hold a Christmas *Fun-Key* we never get the opportunity to explore that theme. This year we wanted to look at Advent, but our Sunday was not technically Advent so we "approached Advent". This helped us look properly at preparing for Christmas.

We've improved developing and extending ideas and activities during the *Fun-Key* service, by explaining why we are doing activities. Sometimes we provide ways of allowing people to explore things in more depth at church or at home between *Fun-Key* meetings. A good example was making Advent candles - rather than just asking people to light them daily, we provided Bible verses to go with every day. People have been sharing these on their personal Facebook pages and on our *Fun-Key* page.

We are still hugely encouraged by John Chambers, our “permission-giving rector”, and this has meant that *Fun-Key Church* has been increasingly lay-led and driven. He attends fewer planning meetings, indicating his confidence in the *Fun-Key* team, safe in the knowledge that if we require advice or support he would give that. He adds: “What *Fun-Key* has done is open people's minds to different types of worship. *Fun-Key Church* was the mould breaker, and now there is an openness to many kinds of worship by this very traditional market town church.”

So what has emerged?

St Mary's Church has become more deliberate and diverse in what it provides, for both the church and the community at large. Much thought has been given to the style, provision and timing of services and a pattern and package has developed. It's not set in stone but is more a continuing work in progress. Along with the weekly Book of Common Prayer 8am Eucharist, and the 10am Sung Eucharist, a variety of services and their congregations have developed, providing different forms of worship to suit different ages and types of people.

Two of our *Fun-Key* planners, Claire Murray and Julia Robertson, both completed the Fresh Expressions *msm* course last year, leading to the development of *Free to Be* (see below). Gillian Lunn was licensed as a reader in October 2015 and is continuing to gain experience in preaching at St Mary's (and occasionally other churches), co-organises the new monthly Café Church services and she also takes the occasional funeral.

Monthly at 6.30pm there is Choral Evensong, *Illuminate* which is contemporary all-age worship, and Café Church, a relaxed and informal service with a variety of inspirational speakers, home-baking and closing with Compline. Bi-monthly, *Free to Be* meets as an after-hours contemplative candle-lit service with prayer stations and space to be. The worship committee has been brave enough to consult the congregation on the timing and content of all the services at St Mary's and will report back to the PCC their findings and recommendations.