

# **MAIDSTONE URC**

## **ANNUAL REPORTS**

**2015**

## **Minister's Report**

The 2016 Lent bible study group have been considering the film 'The Kings Speech'. I have watched the film in preparation for the series of bible studies and I am looking forward to discussing how the author, who has written a study book 'Finding a Voice', will deal with aspects of the film and how that relates to the themes we find in scripture.

I am struck by King George VI's fear as events unfolded and put him into a position he never expected to be in - king of the country. I could not believe that he was 'set up' to deliver a commonwealth speech to world leaders at Wembley Stadium and that his difficulty was not recognised beforehand. He showed me determination and commitment to conquer the hard and difficult stuff. Jesus Christ faced the condemnation of those he had come to save because they could not cope with the message of change and challenge he came to bring. Jesus came to change and transform the world that was doing its own thing and wasn't following God's ways. God, through Jesus Christ, was about hope and love that would transform and liberate the world he came to save.

The Old Testament is full of tongue-tied leaders and terrified leaders; the New Testament is full of commands to encourage one another. Both Jesus and the apostles had strong messages about the power of words for good and for evil. Both Old and New Testaments are full of the idea of being called to a task.

As Christians witnessing in Maidstone we are called to find a voice and speak the hope of Christ who came to save us. The proposed redevelopment of our building will give us a set of premises which will help us find a Christian Voice 'visible' to those who walk along Week Street, to enable our visible presence to reach out to those who are prepared to follow Jesus Christ. John Ellis reminded us at our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary that we have to 'play the long game'. Our Reformed presence has been in Maidstone for 200+ years and we still have work to do.

It terrifies us to think of the project before us. You may think it will not come in your lifetime, but 'Keep the Faith'. I believe we have a message of hope that needs to be declared and we all need to be prepared to 'play the long game' so that, filled with prayer and the Holy Spirit, God will enable us to achieve not only a voice to speak of Jesus Christ but premises which shine and show Jesus who came to love us.

The words 'Do not be afraid' are spoken to many different characters in scripture. We know the angels appeared in the account of Jesus' birth with the assurance 'Do not be afraid'. Abraham was afraid that he was going to be left childless with nobody to pass on the land and power he had amassed. Abraham put his trust into the Lord's hands and it was eventually rewarded - in God's time not ours: 'And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing' (Genesis 12:2). Abraham didn't see the completion of things: 'After these things the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision

‘fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great’ (Genesis 15:1)

C.S Lewis wrote ‘Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a fire?’ I value those opportunities when we can sit together and look at bible passages and pray together. On a Monday afternoon, twice a month, a group of 4-8 people get together. Why not consider getting together to read and pray and celebrate Jesus Christ: ‘You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light’. (1 Peter 2:9)

My hope as we look forward is that we can continue to work together to spread the message of Jesus Christ. Do not be afraid when things get tough because ‘when the going gets tough, the tough get going’.

Paul writes to the Church in Rome: ‘What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?’

‘And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow - not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below - indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8 31,38,39)

My plea is that we continue to '*be kinder and more gentle to each other*'. When things don't meet our expectation, when things are missed or forgotten - just pause before you speak. 'Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God'.

Blessings

**Andrew Royal**

### **Church Secretary**

Our church year has been filled with the usual mix of joy and sadness. We mourned the passing of Phyllis Bland, Dennis Lewell, Doris Phillips and Joyce Taylor and said goodbye to Peter Taylor when he moved to Bearsden from Bearsted. We were pleased to celebrate the marriage of Catherine and David Johnson and welcome into membership Brian Green and Louise and Craig Howard. At the end of the year we had 95 members.

One of the undoubted highlights of our year was the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our current building and the visit of our good friend and Lay Moderator of General Assembly, John Ellis.

Other reports will record the very successful events we have organised to raise funds for the various charities we support, our own fundraising and the Property Development Fund. I know you will all join with me in recording our thanks to all those members and friends who have worked so hard to make these events so successful.

Thanks also to all those folk who week by week give of their time to undertake the many duties required to keep our church and the activities we sponsor running smoothly.

Our retiring elders this year are Cathy Glazier, Tony Miles and Anne Wates. All three have worked hard throughout their three year term and I am grateful to them all for everything they have done to support the church and for their contributions to the work of the eldership

I must again record my special thanks to Diana Tidball our Assistant Secretary and Jean Cialis our Office Assistant. Without these two dedicated ladies my work would have been that much harder and you would have noticed many more mistakes. Thanks also to Rod Cox and Jenny Robinson our Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer for the sterling work they both do to ensure that our finances are managed efficiently. Also thanks to Graham Wootton our Gift Aid Secretary for ensuring that we get back as much as we are able from the exchequer.

Much of my time this year has again been taken up with matters concerning rights of way and dealing with our neighbours. I have also served on the Property Development Group and in this connection I must mention the work which Graeme Wyles undertakes as Chairman of that group. The church is very fortunate to have Graeme whose experience and contacts are of enormous value and who is extremely dedicated to ensuring that our property development project becomes a reality.

As I approach the end of my term of office I must say how grateful I am to you all for giving me this opportunity to serve our church as your Secretary. It has been a rewarding and busy five years and for me the outstanding highlight has been having the opportunity to introduce Andrew as our Minister and sharing with him the ups and downs of church life during our Wednesday morning meetings together. We are indeed fortunate to have Andrew, Linda and Callum with us here in Maidstone.

Our church has a proud history of service and is now at something of a crossroads. We can go one of two ways. If we are able to go forward with the development of our mission and property we shall have the opportunity to develop our service to the local community and become a real asset to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian Church in Maidstone. If we stay as we are then in a few years' time there may be nothing but our history left. We have much hard work in front of us and there will no doubt be setbacks along the way but with the Spirit's guidance and Andrew to lead us we can surely achieve what is required.

And finally my good wishes go to David and Catherine as they take over the Church Secretary's role. Please give them your support and encouragement.

**John Williams**

## **Treasurer**

This last year has been a steady one. Our expenditure was broadly in line with our Budget. Considerable progress was made on various items of general repair but we are still waiting for suitable quotations for the major works to the roof. There were reductions in some other costs due to specific circumstances such as the lack of an organist and rates rebate on the shop. We are grateful to the Fund Raising Group which raised £2,332 after expenses and paid for various items to improve our premises and to extend our outreach.

Our regular freewill offerings through the envelope and standing order schemes were virtually up to our budget but the other offerings were again significantly down. In order to maintain our overall target members are challenged to increase envelope and standing order giving by 2% on average. We received a generous donation in memory of Joyce Taylor and have been told that Enid Fuggle has remembered us in her will. The value of providing a legacy to the church which has held an important position in one's life can be rewarding to both the donor and the recipient.

We have received several donations of £20 each for insurance policies taken out by members at our neighbours A Plan Insurance, and I would encourage you to pop in and speak to them when you need your next quotation.

Once again we have had increased income from new hall lettings which include a Chinese Church, a video gaming

group and a beginner's class for the Blocco Fogo drummers, together with several private parties for christenings etc. Thanks are due to David Lifford for all the effort he puts into organising and accommodating our guests.

In 2015 our fellowship has continued to support various charities. We have sent significant donations to the Leprosy Mission, Commitment for Life, Mission Aviation Fellowship, Zimbabwe and our monthly pledge to World in Need. Midsummer Music raised the magnificent sum of £2,090 and so, after sending £1,045 to Hi Kent, the remaining sum will go to our Property Development Fund. We also supported various specific appeals including DEC Nepal, Christian Aid mosquito nets, the Maidstone Winter Night Shelter, Barnardo's and our own Southern Synod Moderator's Benevolent Fund.

We were also pleased to be able to respond to the request from General Assembly to increase our M&M contribution by 1% above that suggested in recognition of the importance of Ministry and Mission in our witness.

Once again I would like to thank Jenny Robinson for all her help as Assistant Treasurer. She keeps records of all the received and takes the weekly money for banking. Also to Graham Wootton who looks after the donation envelopes scheme and encourages standing orders. He deals with HMRC to present our Gift Aid claims which have yielded over £11,000 this calendar year.

**Rod Cox**

## **Ministry Groups**

### **Admin & Finance**

2015 brought its challenges to the group and frustration as we waited for quotes from contractors following the issue of the tender document by the surveyor. Regretfully only one quote was received and as this goes to print we are awaiting another possible quote before we decide the way forward. The plaster in the sanctuary has dried out and we are anxious to move forward with the roof work to avoid further deterioration.

As agreed Rod Cowell stood down as our property steward following 5 years of dedicated service to the role. Thank you so much Rod for all you did in that role and your consultancy services during 2015, and 2016 we hope! We were unable to find a volunteer to take on the job, so the group were left with no choice but to deal with property matters as and when they arise, between us. This is not ideal but we try our best.

The Manse property continues to have its issues but the major work has now been completed to our minister's satisfaction. The garage is not usable due to a leaking asbestos roof and the cost of the work is currently prohibitive. Callum Royal has completed some tree surgery in the Manse garden with his colleague, and this is much appreciated.

I am pleased to report that the following work has been completed during 2015:

- Pigeon defence work (spikes) completed, and our thanks must go to David Brown who every Sunday cleared and brushed our frontage whilst the defences were awaited.
- Toilet matters – the children’s toilet in the Dunning Hall was replaced thanks to a major contribution from the fundraising group and the gents urinal repaired, but sadly the work in this respect is an on-going problem.
- An Electrical Fixed Wiring Test was undertaken and the necessary work carried out to make our premises satisfactory.
- The drummers who use our hall kindly arranged some industrial shelving for our main store, which has greatly benefited them and us.
- Our Lettings have continued and our grateful thanks go to David Lifford for his unstinting work as our lettings manager. Country Market unfortunately had to close but Lin Smith has continued a successful Thursday coffee morning in its place.
- Our accounts were approved by the auditor and our budget for 2016 prepared and passed. Many thanks to our Church Treasurer Rod Cox who does much more as

a member of the A&F group alongside his Treasurer duties. Rod is a treasure!

- First Aid Course was held in July 2015 this covers us for the next 3 years. A list of those who attended is on the noticeboard.
- A fire risk assessment has been undertaken and the group will be reviewing any work necessary in the New Year.
- John Williams, our church Secretary, dealt with a deed of release that was required by our neighbour in connection with a passageway from Week Street.

My thanks go to the whole team – Rod Cox, David Johnson and David Lifford. We would welcome a new member or two if anyone wishes to join us.

**Jenny Robinson**

### **Education Committee**

This year as well as supporting Junior Church leaders and helping run sessions with them our main involvement has been organising the two study courses in Lent and then Autumn.

From 23rd February to 23rd March we studied the film " Les Miserables" with the help of a guide written by Hilary

Brand. Our thanks go to all the leaders who volunteered to lead the sessions and our regular attendees. It was certainly more challenging than some of our previous courses.

In the autumn we were asked to run another study course and this time we chose to study the film "Chocolate" with the guide again by Hilary Brand called "Christ & the Chocolatier" (excuse my bad French!!). This ran from 14th September to 12th October and seemed to appeal to some of our ladies because Johnny Depp was in the film! Again, this method of watching the film and discussing a Christian view on interpretation of the issues was very challenging to our attendees.

For our Lent Study this year we will be looking at "The King's Speech" which will run for 5 weeks from 15th February to 14th March. Please see Contact for venue and how to order the study guide or view the film before the course starts.

We were very pleased to hear that Cathy Glazier had been appointed as the Synod's safeguarding officer and congratulate her on her appointment. This does mean, however, that she will have to take a more "hands off" approach to her Maidstone URC roles but already we are looking at our Children and Vulnerable Adults' policies so that we are up to date and compliant with all the latest legal changes. You will hear more about this as the year proceeds.

**Tony Miles**

## **Outreach Ministry Group**

### **Shop Displays**

We celebrated Easter, Harvest and our 150<sup>th</sup> Church Anniversary, and featured Midsummer Music. Charities with displays included Street Pastors, Army Benevolent Fund, Marie Curie Nurses and Christian Aid. In August Amanda Sidwell of MADM, a charity working with the homeless in Maidstone, had a fundraising shop, as did Hi Kent on the run-up to Christmas.

To attract more attention from passers-by, Christmas saw changing images projected onto a screen with questions and answers for the children. It is hoped to develop interactive displays further with the use of large TV screens.

### **Notice Boards**

In the Main Hall we also celebrated the Christian festivals and featured a number of charities including the London Churches Walk and Traidcraft. We try to inform coffee morning customers of our other activities and the church's Walking Group did a display. Our church's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was marked by pictures of our ministers since the three Congregational churches joined together, and fascinating pictures of members from many years back.

For people in Week Street there will be a new enclosed notice board for the wall opposite the shop.

## Visitors' Services

The summer Songs of Praise and December Tea, Cakes and Carols proved useful events to which outsiders could be invited. Other afternoon services are being planned.

## Website

The website continues to be developed so that it represents the activities and events of the church. The Property Development Project is now featured with project documents being added. A church calendar is also available. Please have a look at [www.maidstoneurc.co.uk](http://www.maidstoneurc.co.uk) and let the Outreach Ministry Group know any ideas you have for enhancing it.

Martin Knight has resigned from the group due to other commitments and has been replaced by Kevin Thorne. Thanks are due to them, and Ian McWalter, and particularly to Rod Cowell for the original Christmas display.

**Anne Wates**

## Pastoral Committee

This year our Group has consisted of Catherine Johnson, Pauline Jones, Audrey Fermor, Sue Thorne and we welcomed to our small team Betty Owen in May 2015. Our Group help to support our Minister Andrew in caring for our congregation. We continue giving out the Family news every Sunday, which includes the prayer requests from the book in the Vestry and also the concerns written on the leaves on the prayer tree, by visitors to the Church.

Due to the small number in our Group, we have introduced the new arrangement on the first Sunday of each month that whoever leads the prayers of intercession also gives the family news. Andrew our Minister has been very kind and also includes the Family news within his prayers from time to time. If there is anyone within the Church who would be quite happy to give the Family News and prayers from time to time, please contact anyone on the team, we would be most grateful for the help.

As usual this year we gave out plants at Harvest and hyacinth bulbs at Christmas, to the older members of our Church, mostly those who are unable to attend Church anymore. We give our thanks to the Pastoral Visitors who were able to deliver these and also for the continued support they give by delivering flowers throughout the year to those of our folk who are unwell or going through difficulties.

Catherine will be leaving the Group in March this year, and we will be welcoming a new Elder onto the Group. I'm sure Catherine would like to join me in thanking the members of the Pastoral Committee for their commitment, dedication and support during the past year.

**Pauline Jones**

### **Worship**

We continue to be blessed by our Minister, Andrew's leadership. We give thanks for his ongoing ministry and the way in which he continues to strengthen our church family

both pastorally and spiritually. Much of Andrew's work goes on without us being aware – so, for example, did you know that that he has led Prayers in the Town Hall before the commencement of Borough Council Meetings and, additionally, led the Remembrance time in Fremlin Walk in November.

Our monthly shared services with our Methodist friends continued through the year. Perhaps, however, the time is right to seek additional ways of working together in order to further His Kingdom in our Town.

A number of our people participated in the Good Friday Walk of Witness. We also hosted refreshments at our church

following the Churches Together in Maidstone Advent Service – which this year was held in the open air in Jubilee Square. Luckily, the rain stayed away!

A Songs of Praise was again arranged in August which attracted a good number of people. We also arranged a Tea Cakes and Carols event in December which was enjoyed by many. Andrew, supported by some of our church family, also visited Care Homes where our folk are residing, to sing Christmas Carols. We continue to lead Worship monthly at the Hospice.

This year our Harvest Gifts were given to The Vine Food Bank while the gifts brought to our Christmas Gift Service were donated to The Salvation Army. In both cases, our gifts brought joy and happiness to many people in our community.

A highlight of the year was our Anniversary Lunch celebrating 150 years in our Building. The Luncheon followed a Service led by John Ellis, Moderator of The URC. John and other local dignitaries were our guests at the Lunch along with 73 members of our church family.

**Freda Crispin; Graham Glazier; Helen Kelly;  
Anne & Keith Shave; Carol Wyles**

## **Children and Young people**

### **Junior Church Report**

What a difference a year makes!

After our numbers had decreased in recent years due to Army families moving away, our group of young people doubled in size with the arrival of Kayla, Archie, Abi, Billy and Henry.

We continue to use the Scripture Union material and as the older members reach senior school age we are looking to have discussion based sessions once or twice a month to enable them to talk about and develop their faith from their own experiences and views.

As you will have noticed, the sanctuary was decorated on a few occasions again this past year, around certain festivals. Many thanks to Linda for letting us bring her ideas to life and to those who have to wash paint and glue out of clothes on a Sunday afternoon!

Thanks once again to all the Junior Church leaders and helpers (including crèche).

If you would like to help out, you know where we are!

**Jonathan Brown**

### **Toybox**

2015 was another busy, enjoyable and noisy year. On average we have had 15 babies and young children with us on Thursday mornings and with at least one adult accompanying each child, the Dunning Hall gets pretty crowded! The mums have very much appreciated the new 'jigsaw matting' we were able to buy last year, as the babies now have a much safer place to play and crawl.

As usual we celebrated birthdays with cake, candles and singing, and had (an indoor) Teddy Bears' picnic in the Summer. That was the first time our new bubble machine was used - and how the children enjoyed trying to catch the bubbles! (Thank you, Madge, for your generous gift).

November 12<sup>th</sup> was a day to remember; a church member called in for coffee! We're sure he enjoyed his visit. We'd love to welcome other visitors, too.

Our Christmas party was a great success (with more bubbles) and Father Christmas with his three sacks of presents was guest of honour.

Andrew, John and Paula join us whenever they can and their help is much appreciated by everyone. As ever Georgia and Vanessa (ex Toybox mums) are faithful, hardworking helpers - and we couldn't manage without them.

**Freda Crispin and Anne Shave**

## **Committees:**

### **Press and Publicity**

Over the past year, we have been able to promote and advertise the various activities and functions that have been hosted by the church, in the various publicity channels that are available (KM, Radio Kent, to name a few). Some of the activities advertised, have included:

- Book Sales
- Easter Services
- Charity Fair
- Friday Market

My aim for the year ahead as far as press and publicity is concerned, is:

- To ensure that there is a continued high profile presence of the Maidstone URC in the various publicity channels.

- To continue to compile and publish “features” of the various activities and groups (e.g.: Friday Market, Toy Box, Open Circle, etc.) at regular intervals.

As you are aware, our own website and Facebook page are up and running – this will give us another unique opportunity to explore ways of how this can be of benefit to the publicity of the church (perhaps including other charities and groups?).

I am also keen to hear of any new ideas and am, as usual, open to any suggestions – so, if you do have any ideas, please speak to me at your convenience.

**Ian McWalter**

### **World Church Committee**

The Committee was pleased to welcome Robert Crampton at the beginning of the year but sad that Martin Knight had to leave us to pursue his path back into ministry. If anyone would like to join us please speak to a member of committee. You would be most welcome.

The congregation were again invited to “Count your Blessings” during Lent, resulting in £100.70 being sent to Christian Aid.

In Christian Aid week in May we again put up a display in the shop and we thank Anne and Robin Wates for once more hosting an enjoyable Coffee morning in their garden. This year, in place of a summer lunch, a strawberry tea was held and we are grateful to Frank and Jill Alston for hosting the successful and sociable afternoon. As a result of the Coffee morning, plant sales, Strawberry tea and donations a total of £682 has been sent to further the work of Christian Aid.

Through our Zimbabwe Gift service in June, conducted by Rev Alan Spence, the sum of £688 was raised to support the work of our friend Revd. Imon Ndlovu in Bulawayo. The Committee, and Andrew, had a meeting with the new South East organiser of Christian aid, David Muir, in September and we will be keeping in touch with him. We led the World Church service in October, using material from URC Commitment for Life on the theme of “Committed to God’s Earth”. Commitment for Life envelopes were put out on 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays and raised £1255 during the year. Do read Frank’s monthly articles in Contact telling of the projects supported overseas by Commitment for Life.

We thank everyone for their generosity which raised just over £2000 for our world outreach in 2015.

**Connie Garrett**

## Mission Development Group

During 2015 it was agreed by Elders and Church Meeting that a group should be formed to study the mission and outreach aspects of the changes being developed by the Property Development Project.

The Mission Development Group was formed to look at the impact this new environment will have on the mission and outreach of Maidstone URC.

It was to consider:

- The relationship between Maidstone URC and the users of the building.
- How to take advantage of the more prominent presence on Week Street to develop the profile of the church.
- Any alternatives to a coffee shop that might better support the mission of the church.
- How to engage with customers of the coffee shop, if that is what is developed.
- The development of a Mission Statement that recognises the ongoing relationship with the users of the building and with the needs of the wider community of Maidstone, while fulfilling our commitment to spread the Christian message to the people of Maidstone.
- Consider how the parts of the building which will be principally for the use of Maidstone URC might best be utilised for the mission of MURC.

The group have held three meetings and have been focussing on:

- Developing a Mission/Vision statement.
- The possibility of calling a Church Related Community Worker.
- How to best utilise the improved frontage and our presence on Week Street.

In 2016 we expect to develop these areas for discussion and review at Church Meeting and as input to the Property Development Project.

**Rod Cowell**

### **Property Development**

Our Property Development Appeal has reached a level of £38,000. Our thanks go out to everyone who continues to support our fund raising.

An offer has been received from Birmingham Museum to purchase the Burne Jones “Good Shepherd” stained glass window at a price of £80,000. Church Meeting has confirmed the acceptance of such offer and we are currently progressing the necessary approval from Southern Synod. It is understood that Synod are agreeable to the net sale proceeds, here, coming to our church for the benefit of our Property Development Appeal.

The Church Fund Raising Group have generously donated various sums to the Property Appeal over the year and we

give thanks for their ongoing support. The Property Appeal also benefited from monies generated from the Mid Summer Music concerts. So many people working in support of the Property Fund Appeal and we say a huge Thank You to all involved.

During the year a number of events were organised specifically for the benefit of the Property Development Appeal.

- In February, a Quiz was held in the Main Hall. Our quiz-master was John Clayton – Managing Director of Hi Kent, one of the users of our building;
- In September, All Saints Church generously offered the use of their church premises as well as donating afternoon tea in support of a musical afternoon entitled “Tea for a Tenner”;
- In October, and in memory of nurse, Edith Cavell, two talks were given at our church on the life of Edith and her time in Maidstone – and, indeed, our church. The talks were extremely successful and attracted several local dignitaries. In the region of 200 people attended – many of whom had never before visited our church. A Plaque was presented to our church commemorating the life of Edith Cavell. Arrangements are in hand for this plaque to be set into a prominent position.

Funding Applications have been submitted to The National Lottery – Awards for All Scheme and to The Laing Family Trust. A further Application is in course to the Heritage

Lottery Fund. An Application for funding has been lodged with Southern Synod – albeit that full consideration has been deferred to 2016 pending the introduction of a new Synod Grants and Loans scheme.

Subject to funding, work on the necessary Planning Application will commence in early 2016. As part of this process, we will need to more specifically define the premises we require to support our vision for outreach to our community and Town. Members will have the opportunity to share their views on this important aspect. Additionally, the various users of our building will be engaged to obtain their opinions.

A lot achieved – much yet to do. But, then again, nothing worthwhile happens overnight!

**Rod Cox, Tony Miles, Andrew Royal, John Tidball,  
John Williams, Graeme Wyles**

### **Housegroups:**

#### **Allington House Group**

The Allington House Group met on the second Wednesday of the month throughout 2015 with the exception of August and September when we took a summer break. Our average attendance has been about 10 and we have covered a wide range of subjects. These have included; Quiz's, Bible Study, a Supper, a BBQ and Carols by Candlelight . Our thanks to

everyone who provided hospitality for the meetings and we look forward to another year of fellowship and fun.

**Margaret and Rod Cowell**

**Bearsted**

The group has continued to meet throughout the year and enjoy times of fun and fellowship.

At the beginning of the year we were saddened by the death of Joyce Taylor who has shown remarkable courage and strength in coping so bravely with her problems over the last few years and managing to remain cheerful and attend most of our meetings despite it all. We also said goodbye to Peter, who has also been a stalwart of the group, on his move to Scotland.

We have had talks and discussions and enjoyed our usual alfresco mid-summer meal and have been fortunate that Andrew has been able to join us from time to time.

As we are all now retired we meet at 2.00pm on the first Tuesday of the month and this has proved to be a popular arrangement.

**Paula and John Williams**

## **Open Circle**

We meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 1.30pm at Union Street Methodist Church. The varied programme started with music and magic from the Cole family, with more music and fun from the group 'Anything Goes' in May. Our armchair travels included local scenes and also mountains and lakes in Italy. The most exciting talk involved a visit to the Galapagos Islands.

We try to include input from local charities and this year have heard from Kent Association for the Blind and Hi Kent. The most popular was the speaker from Pets as Therapy, as she brought her dog Alfie. The year concluded with a Christmas medley of stories, carols and Christingles.

Everyone is welcome, gentlemen as well as ladies. We conclude with tea and chat. Details of speakers will be in Contact. Do join us when the topic appeals and bring your friends.

**Anne Wates**

## **Bible Study and Prayer Fellowship**

The group continues to meet on the first and third Monday each month. Studies are led by our Minister but occasionally when Andrew has not been available, members of our congregation have led us. We have been very grateful for their willingness to serve in this way. Passages and topics have been varied, covering both Old and New Testament.

Numbers remain small, around six to eight, so there is plenty of room for more. All are welcome. We now round off each meeting over a cup of tea or coffee for anyone able to stay.

Details of meetings can be found in Contact, the Church Newsletter.

**Madge Neads**

### **Daytime Activities**

#### **Friday Market**

Thank you for your continued support in so many ways. We are grateful to those who have provided or bought our 'bargains' and for those who regularly bake such delicious scones and cakes. As a result of your kindness, a total of £2,740 was donated as follows:-

£2,500 was shared between 25 charities and each received £100; £240 was given to sponsor our child in Afghanistan through World in Need. Seven charities received their cheques at our special Christmas Event in December and the other cheques were posted on. Our customers have also supported Children in Need, Comic Relief, the Marie Curie Tea Party, the Macmillan Coffee Morning, filled five shoe boxes for Romania and continue to knit blankets for British Humanitarian Aid. £150. was raised by sales of books CDs, DVDs, jigsaws, videos and, as usual given to Church Funds as well as 10% of our annual takings.

Friday Market however is certainly not just about raising money or enabling people to buy good quality goods at reasonable prices, it is part of our Church's outreach and it is about the people who come feeling they belong and matter.

2015 has been a very challenging year; it was recorded in last year's report that Joyce and Peter Taylor, who were well loved and valued members of our team, were leaving to live in Scotland near their son. Sadly Joyce died on the day they were to travel to Glasgow. Joyce was a very gentle, loving person and incredibly brave. She was extremely wise and supportive with a great sense of humour. Her cup was always half full and not half empty and they are both greatly missed.

Margaret and I would like to express our grateful appreciation to our Minister, Andrew, the Elders and our Treasurer, Derrick Howe. A special thank you to our young at heart Friday Market ladies and gentlemen who are so conscientious, loyal and supportive. Qualifications are not needed to be part of our team, only a sense of humour and the ability to laugh at our advancing years and ailments. If there is anyone who would like to help, even occasionally, please contact us – you will receive a very warm welcome.

**Margaret Brown and June Mannering – Joint Leaders**

**Weekday Coffee Mornings - Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.**

We commenced serving on the 5th January operating Monday Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, 10.00 – 12.00

until the 23<sup>rd</sup> December.. We had only one cancellation and the usual breaks for bank holidays and the whole of August.

We offer tea, coffee, hot chocolate and cold drinks. Our modest charge includes a free biscuit with their drink. There is the opportunity to purchase the Fair Trade Chocolate Wafer biscuit also a pack of luxury biscuits..

The Loyalty Card is still popular with our visitors giving them the chance to have a free drink on a full card. Takings differ from day to day but the total over the year is £1141.30.

Our relationship with our visitors is one of friendship, where they enjoy the chance to have a good chat over their drinks.

These sessions would not be possible but for the band of willing volunteers. I would like to thank most sincerely, both men and ladies, who loyally turn up regularly, some even working more than once in the month. Their loyalty to this job is very much appreciated in helping to keep the church open every day.

My usual plea is to ask if anyone else could spare three hours a month to help us.

**Audrey Fermor**

### **Saturday Coffee Mornings**

Saturday coffee mornings have taken place throughout 2015 and a hand full of regulars are still coming in for coffee and

cake. The Samaritans, Hi-Kent and Christian Aid have all had mornings to boost their fund raising, as well as book sales. I would like to say a big Thank You to Anne and Robin, Ian, Freda, Anne Shave, Catherine, Pauline, Tracy and Norman for all their help and support over the past year.

**Helen Kelly**

### **Fund Raising Group**

Our activities this year have followed the same pattern as last year: theatre visits, book and plant sales, Smartie box collection, Tea-in-the-Garden and Charities Christmas Fair. The money raised, together with funds carried forward from the previous year, enabled us to fund the purchase of 12 upholstered (and armed) chairs and the new external notice-board, as well as making possible the renovation of the Dunning Hall children's toilet. The Smartie box collection together with £1,500 was given to the Property Development Fund and the Kent Air Ambulance will receive 10% (£233.20) of funds raised this year.

Thank you once again for your support.

**Betty, Carol, Cathy, David, Freda, Ian and Jean**