

Report for 2015

BURY UNITARIAN CHURCH: ANNUAL REPORT: 2015.

As Beryl remarked, at our first service of 2016, our congregation is an exceedingly generous one; not only do we give freely of our time, energy and knowledge, we contribute to a variety of deserving causes, as well as to church-funds. During 2015, we sponsored one of our organists, Chris Price, when he undertook to raise funds for muscular dystrophy by scuba-diving; after an illustrated evening talk, we raised more than £500 to send to Nepal, as well as sponsoring Val Chamberlain's trek there; at Christmas, we collected over £500 again, to send to our churches in Germany and Hungary, who were supplying humanitarian aid to refugees; we continued to support Traidcraft and, indeed, have sold goods to the value of at least £25,000, over the years since 2003, to help people in developing countries; and we set up our own Prostate Cancer Support Group, based at the church---which involved an enormous amount of administration in an unfamiliar area, plus fund-raising to sustain the venture.

The Charity Committee undertook the PCSG work, assisted by Yvonne Trace, the Development Officer for Prostate Cancer UK. The group, which was launched in March, originally attracted 30 interested people; the occasion was attended by the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress, and Annette German, a specialist nurse, was the guest speaker. Since then, this committee has organised a Quiz Evening, a delicious Strawberry Cream Tea, and an equally tasty Wine and Pudding Evening, at which George Scaife spoke about the sponsored bicycle-ride he had offered to do for the cause; 12-year-old James Wright carried out his own ride, and £1,600, in total, was handed over to Howard Maden, the Chairman of the newly-independent group, at the Harvest Festival; the group continues to meet, monthly, on church-premises, and we wish them success in the future. The Charity Committee has supported ten charities, over the years, and raised £13,500, along the way; next year will be quieter, with a Quiz organised, but nothing further.

As 2015 progressed, we stepped up our efforts in the photographic and publicity fields; our new television and DVD player enabled us to look at pictures of our recent events, and the photographs have all been labelled and filed, in order to preserve a detailed record of church-life over the past 5 years. Our website contains a wide range of constantly-changing photographs, and Roger is planning to include video-clips, too. The Harvest Festival and Carols by Candlelight services have been filmed in their entirety---work on which we hope to build. Our Facebook page is thriving, and we regularly attract more than 100 visitors to posts; please support us! This year, we set up a publicity-budget and have made an effort to advertise every church-event in the local press, to very good effect. We are becoming known in the Bury community, as our continued involvement with Bury Light Night shows; we have now participated for the third time, when more hotpot than ever was consumed! Before the Prostate Cancer Support Group launch, Beryl broadcast on Radio Manchester---another new, if stressful, venture, which involved us both in getting up far too early but brought additional publicity.

At regular intervals, we have had 11 special services conducted by Beryl; whilst some of these were traditional (for the Harvest, Mothering Sunday, Father's Day, and the Summer Service), others were innovative; St. Valentine's

Day brought us a consideration of the meaning of Love; the "Time to Remember" service, in September, celebrating the lives of those we had loved and lost, was a wonderfully moving occasion, and the flowers collected and dispersed looked beautiful. We remembered again on Remembrance Sunday, when we paid tribute to the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the felt poppies, in memory of those from our congregations who had perished during the First and Second World Wars, were on display, once again, and Laurence Killian's rendition of The Last Post and Reveille heightened the emotion of the occasion. Remembrance Day itself dwelled on all those involved in the Wars, in various capacities, and the reading of the account of the very first Armistice, in 1919, brought tears to the eyes. On Remembrance Sunday, Beryl presented to the congregation her Book of Remembrance---the result of two years of often harrowing research and effort, and a unique record of which she, and we, can be justifiably proud; the Bury Times printed an article and photograph about our Book, and there is an article due to appear soon in the Inquirer---further publicity!

Our Christmas services were of high standard: Christmas Day attracted a good attendance and an appropriate exchange of greetings; the Adult Nativity Service was incredible---and not just on account of George's knees---with amazing acting! Our Carols by Candlelight was attended by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Greater Manchester, Mrs. Karen Phillips, who greatly enjoyed her visit to us; this was a superb service, in every way, and atmospheric in the extreme; wonderful music was provided by the Square Chapel Brass Ensemble, led by Laurence Killian.

The "Heart to Heart" Seminar Group conducted a service, in May, based on its conclusions; it was very clear that quality of worship enhances quality of life, and it was interesting to share the group's thinking. On the first Sunday of December, Val Chamberlain, Betty Kenyon and Lois Williams devised a service on the theme of "Winter"---not necessarily a gloomy, sad season, but an opportunity to prepare for regeneration and rebirth. To those who contribute to these services, we extend our thanks; not only is the content excellent, but the preparation and delivery are proficient, and we are fortunate to be able to call upon such talent and willingness.

In May, one service was conducted by Rev. Jim Corrigall, and another by Dawn Buckle, who had recently been elected a GA Honorary Member---the first woman to be so chosen! Earlier in the year, Roger and I attended Jim's Induction as Minister of Padiham, Rawtenstall and the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry; in May, four of us were present at Rev. Cody Coyne's Induction at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester; Beryl, Susan, Betty and Neville attended the GA AGM's, in Birmingham, and reported back. A group from Bury attended Ainsworth Chapel's 300th Anniversary Service, in April, brilliantly conducted by Rev. John Allerton; the Mayor, Michelle Wiseman, was present; the service was filmed, and the buffet tea was very well-received. NELUM organised an event at Walmsley Chapel, Egerton, in August, when we were invited to admire the new Community Garden, attend the meeting, and partake of another excellent tea. In the same month, Val escorted a group to The Elizabeth Gaskell House, in Manchester; this is now fully-refurbished, and well worth a visit. Seven Women's League members represented Bury at Bank Street, Bolton's 95th Birthday Celebrations in September, when yet more tea followed a pleasant service; this was a good opportunity to renew acquaintance with friends from our other churches. Another instance

presented itself when we exchanged services, as is traditional, with Bury's United Reformed Church, in July; when we visited them, we took with us a picture of the old New Road Chapel painted by Barbara Spencer, a member of our Book Club; this was much appreciated and positioned immediately. On the following Sunday, we welcomed friends from URC to a Kinship Service---worship specially devised to be inclusive and welcoming.

It cannot be denied that we enjoy our food---almost as much as we like getting together to chat! This year, we have had three congregational lunches, the first of which was in June, after the Midsummer Service and the taking of the most recent congregational photograph; we invited Sharon Briggs and Shirley Rabbett to be our special guests, in appreciation of their tremendous support during their stints as Mayor and Mayoress, and Deputies. A Harvest Lunch was served, as was a Christmas Lunch, and thanks are due to Susan Mitchell and Pam Gilbert, respectively, who organised these occasions, as well as to all those who helped. Nowadays, we are finding that we need to simplify the formula, but not by sacrificing the quality and enjoyment of the occasion. A trip to The Fusiliers' Museum, just before Christmas, to see a display of Downton Abbey costumes, and followed by a delicious afternoon tea, completed our outings for the year.

The Social and Fund Raising Committee have had a successful year, with several very enjoyable events; The Nostalgia Swing Band proved tuneful and humorous; the Book Auction, and the Bury Art Society's Exhibition, whilst not attracting huge numbers, were pleasant; The Square Street Singers and Tutti Flutti Concert showed a high standard of musicianship; and The Lancashire Fusiliers' Concert, in November, with its special, floodlit drumming as the highlight, was spectacular in the extreme. The Committee-members are to be commended for achieving such a good blend of the two elements which form the group's name!

Our regular groups continue to thrive---all making a valuable contribution to church-life. The Book Club has read through its quota, with good discussions along the way; probably the most popular book in 2015 was "The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry"---one that is well worth re-reading. The Men's Fellowship has tapped into great expertise amongst its members: Roy Wilkinson spoke about his experiences with the 98 Squadron, in 1945; Roger Mills gave an illustrated talk about The Welsh Highland Railway; and other subjects included Knots, Bicycle-rides, and the workings of the church-organ. The Women's League hosted the Manchester District Lunch and Service, in February,

and held a Coffee Evening in aid of Unitarian College, Manchester, in October; this year's speakers included Anne Mills, on the subject of her holiday in Norway, and Rachel Hayes, on her experiences and successful career in The Royal Navy; other talks dealt with Patchwork, Organ-transplants, and the work of the Radcliffe branch of Christians Against Poverty. The Luncheon Club calls on the services of three excellent and experienced chefs, and, this year, organised a Christmas Party, too; it may interest you to learn that Pass the Parcel is still a very popular game. Our church-members do a splendid job baking for Saturday Coffee, although we could do to attract a slightly wider audience, at times.

A few more members of our Junior Church would be welcome, also; however, it is good to see our young people participating in services---and not just because we can have stories on those occasions! June Clarke does excellent work with the Junior Church; she gives freely of her time and works hard to overcome the problems of teaching small groups which cover such a wide age-range. The Choir, too, give of their time to practise music for special services; four-part harmony is almost beyond reach, nowadays, which makes it difficult to find music---but a random choice, made from an internet site which offers free sheet-music, provided us with a most beautiful carol, at Christmas. Our three regular organists have continued to make wonderful music for us, but, sadly, the health of Chris Thompson has given cause for concern, and we were saddened by his untimely death on January 31st, this year.

Sadly, in March, we lost our oldest member---Alice Whewell, who had reached the ripe old age of 101! Alice was held in great affection by everyone; she remained strong in spirit, to the end, and we paid tribute to her, both at her funeral, and a few weeks later, when we added Bailey's, biscuits and chocolates to our Sunday coffee. Lilian and Jack Sharples died within a month of each other, and their funerals were conducted in January and February; we lost others who had been connected with the church: Dorothy Luxton, Les Keating, Rene Sutherland, and Jean Bacon (néé Spencer), and several members lost people close to them. We mourn them all and offer condolences to all who have been bereaved.

To everyone who works to make this church successful, I offer my personal thanks; no contribution is unappreciated, and our worship and social-life would be the poorer without everyone's efforts, whether these involve serving on committees, organising events, reading lessons, arranging the flowers---or the hundreds of seemingly-mundane tasks which are rarely noticed---until there is no-one to do them! Special appreciation and thanks go to Derek and Freda Worthington, Jean Jackson, and Marc Peters, for all the many and varied tasks they have undertaken over long years; all have found it necessary to resign, recently, and the job of reallocating all the duties they have undertaken has proved difficult indeed; their contributions leave a huge hole in the fabric of church-life and are, already, much missed.

I have departed from my usual tradition of thanking Beryl and John at the beginning of my report; normally, I take the view that they are vitally important to this church and, thus, entitled to an early mention. This time, I am saving the best to the last! To John, in all his capacities, as preacher, pianist, choirmaster, and Lord High Everything Else (in the best possible sense), we express gratitude for his continuing commitment, his ongoing help and support, and his encouraging presence. We have had to adjust to a new, slimline Beryl, and, at times, we have been obliged to manage without her, when she has been ill; as her Ministry at Bury draws to a close, we acknowledge the stability and continuity she has provided, over the last five and a half years, in addition to her hard work, enthusiasm and guidance; her presence has been an inspiration, and she will be much missed.

In 2016, we resume our search for a new minister---no easy task, especially for the members of the Ministerial Appointments Group, who have worked hard and reported very regularly to the congregation---sadly, so far, without a successful outcome! The winds of change are blowing, and we face the challenge of adapting; we are all growing older, and there are fewer of us, and

this inevitably means that we cannot continue as we have been accustomed to doing previously. Nowhere is this more obvious than in our organisation of the Bazaar, which, for many years, has been financially and socially successful; however, its future is under discussion, and opting for change---here, and in the church as a whole--- will need a common-sense approach and a great deal of courage. If we work together for the good of a church that means so very much to us all, we can succeed; if we use the manpower, willingness and determination that remain to us, we can regroup and emerge---possibly in slightly different form---but still vibrant and vigorous!

Anne Mills: March, 2016:

Chairman of the Congregation and Church Secretary.