

## Your Rector's Letter

*Dear friends,*

### Should we do numbers?

How important are statistics for the church? Should we take them into account or not at all as our focus has a spiritual character? Is our spiritual 'thermometer' not more important than the numeric one?

I am convinced that there is a link between numbers and the spiritual life of a church. Figures of church attendance very often reflect the spiritual growth or decline of a church. In previous years I have shared these figures openly so that we have an objective instrument to measure (numeric) growth or decrease at St Mary's. This year the figures are very much in line with previous years. On an average Sunday morning we welcome 88 people at the services at 8am and 10.30am.

### Ordinary Sunday services

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
8am	10	11	11	12	14	12	10
10.30am under 16	7	7	7	6	6	5	6
10.30 am adults	77	79	79	76	76	72	72
Evensong	17	16	16	17	17	14	16
7 past 7	10	11	11	11	12	11	12
Taizé	18	12	25	34	28	18	27

As I explained in one of my previous Tidings letters, the status quo feels like growth as every year we say farewell to about half a dozen members of the congregation due to ill health, being less mobile or because of death. In some way about the same number of newcomers join St Mary's every year; as a result our numbers have not dropped in the last decade.

### Sunday 10.30am per category

For the first time I have compared the three different Sunday services at 10.30am: All Together, Matins and family Eucharist. I did not include the big services Harvest, Christmas and Mothering Sunday. For Matins however I have included the Civic service and the Bereavement services. It is not a surprise that All Together attracts more children and families. It is our most popular Sunday service.

2017	All Together	Matins	Family Eucharist
under 16	9	4	5
adults	69	70	70
TOTAL	78	74	75

I was saddened that in 2017 there have been two Sundays without children attending: 29 October (Half term) and 10 December (snow!). I was disappointed not just because of the work and time that the Sunday club leaders put into their preparation, but also because a church without children is spiritually and socially unhealthy. It is said that at least 10% of the congregation should be under 16. We achieve this on first Sundays with All Together but it would be good to see an increase on the other Sundays as well.

### 10 years overview of 10.30am Sunday service

The current register goes back 10 years. An opportunity to look back over the years. Here are the figures for 10.30am from 2008 until now.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
10.30am under 16	1	1	3	7	7	7	6	6	5	6
10.30 am adults	59	57	66	77	79	79	76	76	72	72

### Holy Ground, Prayer and Bible Groups

A new figure in 2017 is for Holy Ground. We welcomed on average 9 people, which makes it our least attended service. It is a very inspiring and prayerful service. In 2018 we will give it another go from May until October and see what happens. Why not give it a try?

Also very encouraging are the several study and prayer groups: Bible studies on Tuesday afternoons and Thursday evenings, Lectio Divina on Wednesday evenings and Fellowship Group on Monday evenings. 2017 also saw refreshing quiet days led by Janet and John and a successful Churches Together Alpha course with 8 participants.

### Christmas 2017

I read somewhere that in recent years, church attendance at Christmas was growing. However, this was not our experience at St Mary's in recent years. But Christmas 2017 seems to confirm this optimistic news as numbers were clearly up in comparison with the year before (except Christmas Day service). Our church is rightly encouraged by these figures.

St Nicholas visit 180 (+15)

Christingle 321 (+ 100)

Carol Service 140 (+8))

Crib service 283 (+70)

Midnight 170 (+34)

Christmas day service 65 (-31)

That's a total of 1,159 (+196) of which 302 were younger than 16.

### December 2017

A rough count tells us that during December about 2200 people walked through the church door to attend one or more Advent and Christmas services or events. I included in this grand total these approximate figures for:

Sunday services during Advent: 240; December market: 500 and because of the weather St Mary's hosted CTW Carols on the Quay at which 301 people were present.

### Not without you

Growth in our church is only possible thanks to several volunteers who help running and organising services and functions. But we need more helpers as there is so much going on. If you like to join our magnificent team please talk to me, the churchwardens or anyone else involved and let us know what you would like to do. Can you give your time and skills? Thank you!

*Erwin*