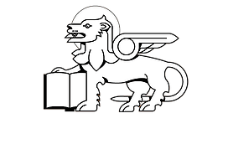
**News from St Marks** 

As I write we are in the midst of an NHS crisis and national lockdown due to the pandemic. Taking the difficult decision to close St Mark’s for public worship for a period of time to protect the vulnerable and the NHS too, meant I had to rethink how I continued to try and reach people. It is not easy because the core of the congregation are not facebookers or are reachable except by phone or post. However, there are also some members who are happy to connect online. Therefore, I decided to try out making a short video consisting of prayer, bible reading and the art reflection I do for the newsletter. I launched it via Facebook and the website early January and the responses have been really positive, as well as getting more views than the page has received before. I am also getting better at editing the website. I still send out postal or email communications to my less techie people but the videos seem to be reaching others! And we have now launched our newsletter which has been emailed out and attached to the FB page.

While I cope with becoming an internet sensation (only kidding) I have other positive news - the building work is not only completed but within the original budget thanks to the builder who gave us such a favourable quotation. I now intend to use some of the budget to develop the external ‘garden’ area to make it more eco-friendly and community focused. I have been in contact with Southend Council who are looking for public areas that would lend themselves to re-wilding and bee pollinators. I am also so happy that St Mark’s was able to offer the space for the twice-monthly Hygiene Bank run by All Rise Collective. My other exciting news is that I applied to be an assistant chaplain to University of Essex, Southend Campus, and was appointed! Obviously, with lockdown I have not yet been able to go and introduce myself, but once I can, I hope to offer my services, and St Mark’s as a dedicated sacred space for the use of any student ministry, once they are allowed to return.

Blessings, Mother Cherry