

Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2019

Funeral Report

The Church of England is privileged as the national church to be often the first port of call for those in the crisis times of life such as death and bereavement. It offers opportunities for pastoral care and support as well as an opening for sharing the gospel.

Saju Muthalaly, Amanda Maskell, Ernie Mann and Graham Davis share the privilege of conducting funeral services when called upon to do so. We enjoy good relationships with local Funeral Directors who contact us when a parishioner has died or when there is a particular request for one of us to take the service which may come from within or outside the parish. The majority of services are taken at Medway Crematorium with some being at the Garden of England Crematorium at Bobbing, near Sittingbourne. Very occasionally we are asked to conduct a burial service which normally takes place at Woodlands Cemetery, Gillingham.

Upon receiving advice of a funeral, arrangements are made to visit the bereaved family, explain the service, and to obtain biographical details of the deceased and their choice of music and other particulars requested. Liaison is maintained between the family and funeral directors up until the funeral takes place. Thereafter, a telephone call or visit is made a couple of months after the funeral to ascertain how the bereaved person is coping and to offer further pastoral support if required. Whilst the majority do not seek further contact, nevertheless the enquiry and offer to do so is always appreciated.

However, we continue to be in regular contact with four people, the funerals of whose spouses were taken by us dating back between 2013 and 2017 who have become friends over this time. In one case, the neighbours either side join the visit, one of whom is a widow whose late husband we took the funeral of two years ago. On two occasions we have been asked to take the funerals of other family members as a result of their previous dealings with us. On one occasion last year, as a result of a link with a lady who lost her mother, Ernie Mann and Graham Davis took a memorial service in the lounge of an elderly couple's house whose 52 year old daughter had died and neither of them were able to travel to her funeral.

Sadly, with the erosion of the Christian faith in our nation, the majority of people choose alternative funeral arrangements with no Christian content. This is reflected in the declining number of funerals taken by St Mark's in recent years.

Allied to the funeral ministry is the *Empty Chair Service* to which all widows, widowers and family members are invited on a Sunday close to Christmas. With God's help, we seek to bring comfort and strengthening to those mourning their loss at a time of heightened celebration around them. Last year saw the number of people attending exceed 20 for the first time. This gives us encouragement to continue this ministry and introduce people to the enveloping love of Jesus in their time of need.