

# *From St Mary's ...*

*This month's article comes from Julia Wilson*

## **Links between St Mary's church and Balcombe C of E Primary School**



I'm involved in both the church and the school, as a Foundation Governor at school and as Parish Safeguarding Officer, amongst other things. The links between church and school go back to the time when the school was built, in 1850. The Church of England (in common with some other churches) greatly increased its involvement in education at about that time, to help ensure that all children could improve their life chances by learning at school, and not simply the few whose families could pay.

St Mary's usually puts forward three people to be Foundation Governors to the Diocese for approval. So the governance of the school retains church representation. The church also supports the school in other ways.

Far more importantly, in my view, are the relationships that link the two. The Headteacher and staff are sympathetic to Christian values and promote them by means of the school Vision and its Values. (These have recently been considered at some length, not only by the staff and Governors, but also by a specially formed Ethos committee of the Governing body. Committee members include Foundation Governors, teachers and some interested parents who represent several churches.) These values are taught and practised by staff and pupils alike which, as a Governor, I have observed in class for myself. The Church Wardens are both very keen to strengthen links with the school, and our Rural Dean recently commented that St Mary's was ahead of the game in the way we were planning to reach a new agreement on Growing Partnerships. Many church members have been Governors over the years, their children often went to the school, and there is great affection for it.

Many of you may know of "Open the Book", which is a programme promoted by the Bible Society to teach children bible stories in a fun and very accessible way. A group of us have been performing (or in Covid-19 times, filming) stories for the children to see and learn from; we very much look forward to children joining us once more in the acting from September. The stories are very popular and there is often competition to take part! Some classes have been known to ask that a film be shown more than once!

Each month there is a prayer meeting at St Mary's which includes school parents from several different churches to pray for the school, with requests invited from staff, parents and children; this increases the sense of mutual involvement. In lockdown we have met online but can now meet outside. We love to have new people join us, even if just once!

In the interregnum, two church members (in place of the Rector) take it in turns to lead regular Assembly in school every two or three weeks. We are much looking forward to children coming back to St Mary's, both for special services such as Harvest and at Christmas, and also to learn about it as a place of worship.

The Pathfinders after-school club has recently started again, led by a churchwarden. And Jane Lindsay-Stewart and I are much looking forward to leading Prayer Spaces again both in school and in church.

Happy holidays, one and all!

*~ Julia Wilson*