

## Chaplaincy in Overstone



**Vision:** To be a friend and help to build the new community in Overstone; sharing God’s love and light, with a hope that we can build a tangible expression of faith.

I have been reflecting on how I often start the story of Overstone when asked in conversation; and to my dismay I have noticed that I often start by explaining that we don’t have the promised Community Centre! I have considered why this could be and have surmised that our vision and hopes for Small Groups and the ‘tangible expression of faith’ written in our vision has not been realised the way we imagined; buildings play an essential role in bringing people together but the promised building has not materialised. What Overstone continues to teach us however, is that building community and sharing faith is not dependant on bricks and mortar, but more on prayer, discernment, courage and a willingness to keep listening to God, listening to the community and ourselves, and respond to what we hear. I need to redress how I start the story!

My December report noted that we would continue our practice of unconditional gift giving. There is now a culture of gift giving in Overstone, as many of the residents brought and gave away gifts to children and families during our Carols on the Green:



- C&S brought gifts and sweets for the children and they made up 50 bags, along with additional gifts in case there wasn't enough. There wasn't!

Rev Katrina donated books about the Nativity for different age groups which were given with the gift bags.



- B baked delicious cupcakes for residents to help themselves and enjoy.



- A group of mums got together and they baked 100 ginger bread men for the children to decorate with icing. We brought all the icing pens.



I approached David Wilson Homes for their support and they agreed to donate £100, which was used to purchase drinks and luxury minced pies, which meant that everyone could have a drink and a pie.



The Christmas Story was told and our first Popup Community Choir led everyone in carol singing; the event was quite incredible. I am so pleased that I now play a supporting role in our Carols on the Green. G, who is a wonderful community organiser takes the leading role and he is seen by everyone as a wonderful person who loves his community. It has been very moving to see how this has evolved.

In February we distributed 1000 cards to homes, sharing a message of God's love. On Valentines Day we made up 100 bags of chocolates and sweets, erected the gazebo and invited families to come out for sweets and a chat. The cards were printed by the CofE and the sweets and treats were purchased by us. Our ecumenical partnership continues to grow and serve the community. Churches Together in England have requested a 'Pilgrimage' to Overstone, to see the work we are doing and to learn from our partnership. This visit is due to take place in the summer.

Cards posted to 1000 homes.



In March and April, we had Easter events in two different areas in the community. On one estate we had an Easter Egg Hunt with just under 30 families; whilst on the larger estate we had over 60 families. All the children received gifts of chocolates at the end of the hunts, with some receiving gift bags with stories of Jesus' resurrection and a cross craft to scratch and hang by window.

We were also able to bless care home staff and some residents with the remaining chocolate. All of this was made possible with help of a donation from a local business, sourced by a member of our resident planning team.

Our Steering Group met in February; we were visited by the Parish Chair, Stephen Williams. Stephen explained that the intentions of West Northants Council, is to propose another 3200+ properties in Overstone, and change a planning boundary. This

would have a significant impact on infrastructure, with a loss of amenities for the community.

I had previously filed an objection, Stephen advised that the church filing an objection would carry more weight if we were willing to do so. We were willing and Phil graciously agreed that we could hand this over to him to share with our Chair, who also agreed, and the objection was written and sent in by Phil (thank you Phil).

In March 'B' (an incredible community champion) along with her husband, created objection sheets for residents to use which would help them articulate an objection. She didn't know how to engage the community with this, so I suggested that we have a community event, where residents could meet under the gazebo, read through the paragraphs they had constructed, and complete their objections. The event was planned and advertised on Facebook; it was a great success as the community came out in full force!

There is a culture of community and togetherness in Overstone which I have not experienced in any other estate where I have lived before. There is a real desire of wanting to be together; wanting to build relationships; and a desire to create a place to live where they can be a community of belonging.

Together with the Church of England, we have been privileged to play an active role in nurturing and strengthening the spirit of community—helping to foster connection, belonging, and a shared sense of purpose among those who live in Overstone.

The Reflection & Prayer space continues to thrive, with students from all current year groups attending (7, 8 and 9). The space is bursting with engaging interactive activities, which help the student destress,

reflect, question and respond. The Deputy Head Katy-Jane Wilkins said in a recent governor's meeting, "The student love the space, we all love the space." I asked Matthew Edwards (Headteacher) to pen some of his thoughts, this is what he wrote:

"Melvina has created an inclusive space for students at Northampton School, sourcing materials herself to create a warm, inviting and respectful space. The sessions cater for all races, nationalities, religions or beliefs to openly discuss, debate and enjoy each other's company. This space enables students to share, question and explore their thoughts and feelings in a safe and controlled environment and allows them opportunities for quiet reflection and contemplation. Melvina has been proactive in advertising the sessions to students to grow the number of students that access the space.

We have greatly valued Melvina's input this year, as have the students, and would welcome a continuation of this in some form in the future."

In some form refers to the changing population of the school, as around 200 new students will join the school in September, so the current space which is an entire classroom will need to be rethought and most likely repositioned to a smaller space. This space has been a joy and a blessing to the school.



In my role as governor, I am speaking with the **Care Home** regarding engaging with the school. The

school are hoping to be more connected with the community and in my recent talks with the Home's Activities Coordinator, she confirmed that they are very open to engaging with the students. Our monthly services and regular visits to the Care Home continue to play an important part in supporting and encouraging the faith of the residents. Bringing the Home and the school together will be of great benefit to both; research shows that connecting young people with seniors can help to boost confidence, increase communication, and improve memory. The young people can benefit emotionally, socially and educationally.

We now have 5 leaders in the **Walking Group**, with a total of 37 members in the group. We have never had all 37 attend a walk together, some walkers attend sporadically or seasonally, with a core group who attend regularly. It is a staple in the community and as new people move in, the group is often recommended as a place where people can find friendship and connection.

I am currently delivering the 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort of pioneering training with Matt Finch: BNPNP - Beginning a New Place for New People. My role as a member of the **NPNP Embedding Team** has given me the opportunity to grow and develop in areas which have strengthened and enhanced my chaplaincy work.

Since the year begun, I have **led services** in 3 churches: Harpole, Kingsley Park, St Andrews and then again in Harpole at the end of May. From the responses to this service, it was very clear that there is a desire to get involved in New Housing, and of course I have offered to help!

I was scheduled to present the **Interactive Resource** at our April Synod. Following discussion, it has been agreed that the presentation will be deferred and will be presented at a later time.

The **Parish Council** are still in discussions regarding their desire for me to facilitate a group which brings the community together. They have been occupied with the Local Plans so this has been pushed down the agenda. Stephen (Chair) advised that it will be included in their next Parish meeting.

We have decided to pause our exploration of a **Dine and Divine** type group. This is just a pause and we will continue to listen and discern when and if it is the right thing to do.

#### **The coming months:**

- A visit from Churches Together in England to explore our ecumenical partnership and the journey of Overstone.
- Weekly activities over the summer holidays, with special attention to faith activities for children and families.
- Growing a team which supports the Prayer Reflection space at Northampton School. Contact has already been made with David Speirs, and Moulton CofE have expressed an interest in partnering with us. I am moving steadily with this and I am taking advice from Kate, as this is another CofE.
- By my next report we should have a final decision from the Parish Council on whether we will be facilitating a space for the community to meet.

## Reflections for the Execs

Your leadership insight is important as we navigate this season in Overstone. I began the report by reflecting on the limitations we face, particularly the absence of the promised community centre and the lack of a physical space to welcome people. I would value your strategic and personal perspective as we look ahead. How can the district support communities like Overstone in sustaining vision, identity, and hope when key resources have not materialised? What are your hopes for Overstone and for the emerging housing ministry developing around the district?

Thank you for your faith in and prayers for the work in Overstone; and thanks be to God for all who continue to pour their time, energy, and love into this remarkable ministry.

God bless you!

*Mel Brown*

*Overstone Pioneer Community Chaplain.*