St. Martin's: A place for everyone, everyday

Life today can seem hectic, with some people so busy there is little time to pause and wonder if they might be missing out on something. For others, each day can seem like the previous one, with little to do and no one to do it with. Or it may be a combination of both extremes. Some days there aren't enough minutes to get everything done or find time to relax; on others, boredom or loneliness can make the days seem empty and endless.

The complexities and demands of today's society affect people of every age and background. As we travel through life, demands on our time and energies change. Our lives may be altered by changes affecting ourselves or someone close to us, leaving us in difficult or unexpected situations we may struggle with. Rapid advances in technology and the rise of social media can also make life seem overwhelming. Changes can happen quickly or over a long period of time.

One member of St. Martin's spent many years as a social worker in Stockport and realised that loneliness is a massive problem in the area. Now retired, Geraldine remains concerned about the physical and mental health and happiness of people around her, and the important part churches and other community organisations can play.



Stained glass picture made by the children in the Crafternoon sessions

She shares her thoughts: "Loneliness can affect anyone at any age; it makes life so hard. Asking for help and reaching out to others can be difficult, it can take away confidence and sometimes people start to withdraw from others, affecting their mental health and ability to function in everyday situations. That is why welcoming community spaces matter. St. Martin's Church is not only a place of worship, it is a place where people come together, meet others and feel they belong.

"You do not have to know anyone or have a reason to walk through the door, you will always find a welcome there. The state of our mental health affects us in different ways, and nobody should feel that they have to face difficult times alone. A conversation over a cup of tea, a familiar face, or simply sitting and listening can be a small but important step to feeling less isolated. In this busy world, loneliness can go unnoticed; a warm welcome and seeing other people can mean more than we realise."

Most people need companionship and pleasure in their lives – something to look forward to, share or achieve. The communities of Marple and surrounding towns and villages have many organisations and groups offering a huge variety of experiences, with opportunities for new friendships, skills and activities.

From arts and crafts and dance classes to coffee mornings, board games, historical and music societies, walking and lunch clubs, dementia and toddler mornings…the list goes on.

Churches are often places where these opportunities are available and St. Martin's is one of them. For its congregation, bringing people together is a critical part of its role in the community.

Some social occasions follow the Sunday service. In the church hall there is a chance to chat over a cuppa, slot in a few jigsaw pieces, browse the varied book selection, peruse craft table items or visit the monthly Fairtrade & Eco stall. Several times a year, special celebrations include popular bring and share buffets, providing a lively Sunday lunchtime.

But there is far more happening at St. Martin's than church services and their adjacent gatherings.

For craft-loving youngsters, **Crafternoon** sessions are held five or six times a year, usually on Sundays, 2-4pm. Free to attend, they have a theme based on the church year and alternate between St. Martin's of Low Marple and St. Paul's of Compstall. Activities are aimed at children up to the age of eleven, although anyone interested in crafting is welcome. Crafts include painting, colouring, making lanterns and bookmarks, beadcraft, creating a communal stained-glass picture for display and an always-popular food-based craft. At Crafternoon story time, children listen to and learn about a Bible story linked to the day's theme.

Licensed Lay Minister Debbie, a Crafternoon leader, had: "been interested in starting something like Messy Church because I felt called to work with children and young people and I love crafting. St Martin's didn't have the resources to run what people expect from Messy Church, so we decided to run something similar, and Crafternoons was born. I feel blessed to share my love of God with others."

Everyone is welcome at Crafternoon sessions. The next, on Sunday 29 November, 2-4pm in St. Martin's church hall, will be Advent themed. For further information, email Debbie at juniorchurch@stmartins-lowmarple.co.uk.

St. Martin's is a Grade II listed building designed by John Dando Sedding. It features on the "National Heritage List for England" and enjoys legal protection. Its interior is a treasury of work from the English Arts and Crafts Movement. In 2012, **St. Martin's Low Marple Heritage Trust (HT)** was founded "to preserve and make known the artistic heritage" of the church.

While responsibility for the upkeep of the building and its contents rests with the vicar, churchwardens and Parochial Church Council, the HT helps through fundraising, publicity and the administration involved in maintenance and restoration. It has organised many small conservation projects and three significant ones: restoration of a painting in the Lady Chapel (2016), a stained-glass window (2024) and a prominent sculpture (2025). The Trust is currently working on two conservation projects, involving stained glass and a decorative plaster panel.

Supported by church members and the local community, the HT runs a varied programme throughout the year, including lectures, excursions and workshops. It has also organised several Community Art projects involving individuals and institutions from the Marple area.

Details of the Trust's programme and how to become a Friend of St. Martin's HT can be found at www.stmartinsheritagetrust.org.uk.

On Wednesday mornings during term time, from 10am-12pm, the church hall welcomes those who enjoy **Coffee, Cake and Boardgames**.

There is also tea, conversation, cards and jigsaws to enjoy during a relaxed and friendly few hours. The group started about four years ago and games sampled include Rummikub, Skyjo, Yahtzee, Cribbage and Qwirkle, although everyone is open to new game challenges suggested by newcomers.

Kath helped establish the group and recalls that at the set-up meeting: "my eyes were drawn to the variety of boardgames on the vicarage shelves, so we went for Coffee, Cake and Boardgames. It's rewarding to welcome people in and enjoy time together. Everyone appreciates the friendly atmosphere with plenty of banter amongst the players - or with those who prefer to watch from the sidelines. People can just turn up and give it a go. We're ready from 10am but it's fine to just drop in and see how it goes."



Coffee, Cake and Boardgames is popular

Dancing is renowned for its health benefits and enjoyed by people of all ages. The **Folk Dance Group** started in 2010 when people dancing the Gay Gordons at a Burns Night celebration had so much fun they wanted more. Sixteen years later, they are still dancing the Gay Gordons and many other dances when they meet in the church hall on Thursdays, 2-4pm, from September to April.



Some of the members of the Folk Dance group with Mike in the centre

The group's popularity spread by word of mouth and dancers now come from churches and communities as far as Romiley and New Mills. No experience is necessary and age is no barrier, with some lively octogenarians in the group. Group leader Mike says: "I enjoy taking the classes as the group are so friendly and leave with happy, smiling faces. I introduce each dance, a mix of traditional English, American, Scottish, and Playford, and we walk through the moves before trying with music. It's a fun session and an easy way to keep active. Newcomers are always welcome." Ring Mike for more details on 07396 969759.

A **Mothers' Union Fellowship** group meets every 3rd Wednesday of the month, 2-4pm. Everyone is welcome to drop in and see what goes on, including all women and even men.

St. Martin's has long opened its church hall to the local community. Weekly hirers include Yoga, Tai Chi, a Karate club, Mellor Art Society and Tiny Talk sign language sessions. Occasional uses range from drama rehearsals to wedding receptions, birthday parties and watercolour painting classes.

St. Martin's is not just a place for Sunday services. It is at the heart of the community – a place to meet others and find companionship, learn new skills and enjoy activities that bring people together. The church and its hall are there for the whole community and everyone is welcome through its doors.

More information

- **Sunday Choral services:**

10.30am: Parish Mass (sung Common Worship)

6.30pm: Sung Evensong (1st Sunday of the month)

For more information about St. Martin's visit the website: www.stmartins-lowmarple.co.uk

- **For Baptism, Christenings, Confirmations, Funerals, Weddings or to book the parish hall, please call 0161 511 0060 or email: vicar@stmartins-lowmarple.co.uk**
- **For all other enquiries please call Alan Ashurst on 0161 456 9693 or email: churchwarden@stmartins-lowmarple.co.uk or by post to 15 Brabyns Brow, Marple Bridge, SK6 5DT**