



*Photo: Caroline Michalski*

# **2024-2025**

## **Report of Parish Activities**

For Presentation at the  
Annual Parochial Church Meeting  
On Tuesday 6 May 2025

**PARISH OF ST NICOLAS NEWBURY**  
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## 1. Rector's Introduction

This Report of Parish Activities is the result of a huge amount of work. Not just the writing and collating of all the reports (although thank you to all of you who have contributed), but, more significantly, the many, many activities that make up the life of our church. This Report is ordered under the three areas of our St Nicolas Church Vision: Looking Up (Our Worship); Looking In (Our Fellowship); Looking Out (Our Mission). In each of these vital directions for St Nic's, individuals and teams have worked hard – and the following pages are a testimony to that work.

Of course, a booklet like this can never be exhaustive, so, whether your name appears in the headlines somewhere, or whether your work at St Nicolas is largely unseen and un-named, thank you for all that you have done.

As you read through this booklet – this record of work – please take time to give thanks for all that is good here at St Nicolas. There is so much to give thanks for in our life together. And please pray that as we continue to do our work, so God would do His work in and through us. So that His purposes would be fulfilled in us as we seek to be good news and to bring good news here in Newbury.

*“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose” Philippians 2:12-13*

With every blessing

**Will Hunter Smart**

## 2. Churchwardens' Report

It has been such a joy to belong to St Nicolas Church this last year. So much has happened and we have enjoyed consistently meeting together with our brothers and sisters in Christ to listen to fabulous teaching and praise with skilfully led singing and music each week. It takes a lot of people a great amount of effort and time, not to mention their God-given gifts to keep our Sunday worship so vibrant, and we are very grateful.

We have been so blessed once again by tremendous, sound teaching, morning and evening on Sundays led by Will, Joy, Simon and others. We have looked at Old and New Testament books and focused on Jesus over the year. We have met for special celebrations together

such as 'Six in the Stix' our evening service in the garden of Phil and Kate Howarth this year, craft days, a Light Party at the end of October, not to mention the usual celebrations of Easter and Christmas. This year Christmas was particularly noteworthy with the church full to bursting for our formal carol service lead by our festival choir and a new event of 'Casual Carols' in the church hall which was also very popular with families and guests.

But St Nic's is so much more than a Sunday congregation: we are a community seeking to bring good news and be good news to one another and to those living around us. Our fellowship has spilt out over the week, with our work together in other ministries such as our regular Men's and Women's breakfasts and many of us met for fellowship or service in various different groups. Hidden Treasures, our group for toddlers and their carers, meets on a Monday morning during term time to give the children a fun play space and interesting activities, and the mums and carers time to chat. It always ends with a singing and story time to introduce Jesus. Meanwhile the town team are busy maintaining and developing the West Berkshire Hospital Garden and blessing the patients with a beautiful space and friendship. Tiny Treasures for mums and dads of not-yet-mobile babies meets Monday afternoon for cake and sharing of advice, lessons learnt, and the wisdom of some of our experienced ladies from the congregation. Meet Monday happens once a month for adults with learning disabilities in the evening and is a thriving and joyous community introducing some to Jesus and making accessible teaching and worship.

Tuesday sees Foundations, a thriving bible study group for ladies, in the morning and Newbury Friends Together in the afternoon, for the slightly older members of the congregation and friends. Wednesday brings the Listening Space to the church, a quiet place for anyone to speak of their lives and their troubles and receive prayer and love. On Thursdays we have the charity coffee morning open to many charities in the town, and if there is no charity wanting the space that morning, then it is hosted admirably by the ever-smiling team who welcome the charities and show them how it works the rest of the year. Meanwhile Holy Communion is celebrated in the church that morning.

Of course, I have left out our wonderful Homegroups and other small groups and our prayer meetings every Wednesday morning and once a month in our Encounter group on a Tuesday evening. Not to mention the wonderful work in our vibrant communities of those under 18 years old.

Then there is the Holiday Bible Club in the summer holidays when 72 kids, over half not from St Nic's had an amazingly wonderful time learning that Jesus is the champion. Such fun was had by everyone, including the more than 70 adult volunteers it took to run the week. Thank you so much. Thanks also to the imagination, energy and leadership of Clare Caskie and her team. It was truly wonderful.

Are you feeling breathless and weary already reading all this? Well, we have left some groups out and there are many more volunteers working hard to keep all this and more afloat. Thank you everyone, your gifts and your time are precious and greatly appreciated, even if we haven't mentioned you or your ministry here. Together we make this branch of the family of Christ, which we call St Nic's, such a wonderful people to belong to and so full of God's grace and love.

Of course, we could not be such a large family and not suffer loss of some members who have died. This year these include Mark Tippet, Charlie McAllan, Bill Stedman, Pat Herriman and Eric Griffith. We miss them and we mourn with those who loved them. We are so thankful for all they contributed to our family.

All this activity is supported and managed by our wonderful team of staff, which is now, for the first time in a few years, complete, as we have been joined by Simon Eves our new curate while Tania Wolak stepped into the role of Children's Minister for children in years 1-6 as she stepped down from being churchwarden last year. Thank you, Tania for your hard work over those previous years and your enthusiasm and skill leading this part of the children's work. Simon has arrived and got stuck into the work very quickly, already skilled at handling God's word and starting new initiatives such as the Monday evening football group and the 'Fellowship on Tap' men's informal meetings down the pub. It was Simon who also instigated a change from our usual Spring Alpha course to the much shorter 3-2-1 course which delivered a fabulous introduction to Jesus in just 4 evening meetings and was greatly received.

So, as we come to the end of our thoughts on the year at St. Nic's, we note how wonderful it has been to run this race with all of the members of St. Nic's and how important everyone's contribution has been to make this year so good and so full of God's joy. We have so enjoyed living this year with all of you, and we look forward to another wonderful year together in service to our King Jesus.

***Madeline Norman and Richard Coward***

### **3. Deanery Synod**

Deanery Synod acts as an intermediary between the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of each parish and the Diocesan Synod. It provides a platform for discussing and addressing issues of ministry and mission within the deanery. The meetings, called 'synods' are held three times a year, to which parishes send their representatives.

Early in the year we learnt that Area Dean, Revd David McLeod, would be leaving the Deanery to take up ministry in Brittany, France. Our new Area Dean, Rev John Toogood from Chieveley Parish, was appointed and licensed in June. Our Lay Chair, Bruce Laurie, also left to be nearer family, after many years of dedicated service to the Deanery.

Over this last year, two of our deanery meetings have focussed on outreach to children and young people. So many churches struggle to engage and nurture children and young people – yet they are the church of tomorrow. Our Diocese has applied for extra funding to help train and equip lay people to think creatively about how to reach children and young people in new ways. It has made me so thankful when I consider the amazing staff and the facilities we have here at St Nic's; perhaps we need to share some of our gifts and blessings with other churches local to us and to encourage them.

***Chris Philip***



## 4. Electoral Roll

At the time of writing there are 260 people on our Electoral Roll. The Roll is a list of those who are qualified to attend and vote at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM). Elections for the Parochial Church Council (PCC), the parish's representatives on the Team Council and the Deanery Synod take place at this meeting. Anyone is entitled to be on the Roll if they are baptised, are 16 years of age or more and either are a member of the Church of England, resident in the parish or, not being resident in the parish, have attended public worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment. It is important that all those eligible are included on the Electoral Roll so that they can play a full part in the life of the Church. The PCC, Team Council and Deanery Synod need to be fully representative of the whole church membership. Only when a person is on the Electoral Roll can they stand for election, nominate someone else for election and vote. Enrolled members may also raise any question of parochial or general church interest at the APCM.

***Mandy Maskell, Electoral Roll Officer***

## 5. Safeguarding

The Diocese provides clear guidance about how we should safeguard vulnerable groups and have provided useful advice throughout the year. It is my role as Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) to support and work with the staff team and others to ensure we follow that guidance to respond well to any concerns raised.

We have responded to some concerns this year with the advice from the Diocese Safeguarding Team. We have supported safeguarding arrangements around holiday club and other groups led by members of the church. We marked Safeguarding Sunday in November by raising the issue (especially in light of The Makin Report) and also with the PSO being interviewed and talking about their role at both morning and evening services.

***Paul Mawdesley, Parish Safeguarding Officer***

## 6. Building Project

2024 was a year where we made a huge leap forward in moving into reality our vision for making our church building more warm, welcoming and facilitating our worship for many years into the future. In February the PCC agreed to appoint, from an excellent short list of three, Clews Architects (with their principal Camilla Finlay), together with mechanical and engineering designers and quantity surveyors, to undertake a feasibility study for our building project.

The initial drafts examined whether we could satisfy all the objectives of our Statement of Needs (SoN) without recourse to extending the building. It became clear that, although the option of building onto the existing structure would be one that had to be carefully justified, the only way in which we could fully meet our objectives of providing all the facilities envisaged in our SoN while maintaining both the seating capacity of the church and its interior architectural integrity, was to consider an extension parallel to the exterior wall of the north aisle.

Three options were drawn up by Clews and presented to the PCC. After considerable discussion the PCC achieved a consensus around a hybrid preferred option.

The preferred option featured the installation of underfloor heating and the reconfiguring of the floor necessary to facilitating this. The heat source selected was an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) together with a proposal of photovoltaic cells on the roof of the church to ensure that we came as close to net zero carbon as we can. In addition to the heating improvement, an internal glass porch at the west door and glass doors on the north and south entrances were proposed to open up the church to be more welcoming and at the same time reduce draughts and heat loss.

The selection of this method of heating meant that both a plant room and ASHP units would both be required, and it made sense to propose the location of these on the North side of the church. Additionally, the plant room requirement was amalgamated with that of toilets, flower-arranging room and storage into a proposed extension connected to the existing building through a glass corridor accessed from the north porch.

Internally, a flexible layout was proposed that entailed the removal of the pews and replacement with movable seats. The new arrangements also included a servery at the Northwest corner of the building. At the East end, the lowering of the chancel floor, and the extending of the dais to provide better facilities for band-led worship, allowed for improved accessibility to the whole area through a lift adjacent to the south aisle wall. The dais level is proposed to continue giving access to the prayer chapel where glass screens will provide an intimate space that has both privacy and the facility to heat this independently.

Overall, the PCC were convinced that this was a plan which met our requirements as laid out in the SoN and as such we communicated our desire to move forward with a project along these lines to the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) who will be responsible for giving all the necessary permissions for us to undertake the work on our Grade 1 listed building. On 3<sup>rd</sup> December, we had a very lengthy, but encouraging, meeting with members of the DAC together with representatives from The Victorian Society, The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and subsequently with Historic England. The views of all these parties will be considered by the DAC before coming to a final decision.

At the year-end we were waiting for official feedback but we now know that the DAC is generally positively disposed towards our plans and although there is a range of views from the other bodies we do not see any of their concerns as insurmountable. There remains substantial work to be undertaken in order to obtain the final green light on our plans and this is expected to extend to the late Autumn of 2025.

The plans as they stand have been presented to the church together with an indication that this is a project that will cost between £3 million and £5.5 million. In parallel with the work being undertaken, to finalise what is feasible in terms of the building, a funding feasibility study will be made during 2025. We have arrived at a very exciting stage where we pray that our vision and our faith will come together to find what God would have us do for our generation and those to come at St Nicolas Church!

***Richard Coward, Churchwarden and Chair of Building Project Committee***

# WORSHIP (Looking Up)

## 10am service

Our 10am service is the largest of our services at St Nic's and it is the most diverse. We have new-born-babies, much-older-saints and everyone-in-between! The great joy of this diversity is that the service is a genuine expression of our church family – this is something that many newcomers and visitors comment on. The great challenge, as in any family, is how to hold together the different preferences of different members of the family.

We praise God for signs of growth over the last year. I think we have increased in the breadth of our congregation (including a growing number of different nationalities and backgrounds). We have also grown in size – when I stand up to lead or preach on a Sunday morning it is a great joy to look out at such a full church! We now regularly have over 200 adults and over 70 children at the service. We are also better at welcome (a key task in such a large service) and this is thanks to the work done by the team overseeing our welcome vision goal.

We still have work to do of course. We have not properly implemented the results of the worship review that we conducted in 2022. In particular, we need to work on the four themes that emerged: Expectation and Encounter; Freedom, Space and the Spirit; Creativity and Variety; Testimony and Participation (including all ages). Having said that, it is very encouraging to see growing evidence of all four of these themes occurring naturally in the life of the service.

We are, as in every area of church life, dependant on and thankful for the many people who serve in different ways. Each Sunday morning, before the congregation arrive, those who are serving that Sunday gather to pray. It's a diverse team, with many different skills and responsibilities: worship leaders and musicians, 'livestreamers', PA and projection operators, stewards, clergy and others. It's a fantastic representation of the church family, even before the rest of the church family have arrived! We are so grateful to the many people who serve in these ways, displaying such commitment to our church and to the importance of Sunday worship.

***Will Hunter Smart***

## The Six

The Six is our Sunday evening service meeting at 6.00pm. It has been a real privilege to spend time with a variety of different people of different backgrounds and from different churches as we have regularly met to worship God. One joy is the fact that we have seen an increase over the year in the regular numbers at The Six service, with peaks when the service is a bit different such as our testimony evenings and bible read-throughs.

A particular highlight of the last year was the casual carol service, designed to be an evangelistic opportunity, whilst slightly more relaxed than a normal carol service. Our initial intention was to be around tables in a café style but with rumours of large numbers we decided against this, in the end there were so many people we barely fit in the church hall!



One of the joys of the slightly more informal style of the evening service is the flexibility to have occasional services where we can diverge from a normal service to some now familiar alternatives. The opportunities to hear one another's testimonies of where God is at work in their lives, spending time praying with the help of prayer stations and walking around Newbury praying for different aspects of the town as well as evenings focused on sung worship. Taking 'Six in the Stix' to a new location brought a great evening of joy and worship. The Six has also been able to host services run by Count Everyone In, CTNA and the carol service.

It has been great to see the community building within the evening service with it regularly being a challenge to lock up the hall at the end as so many people are enjoying sharing life over a cup of tea, as well as the blessing of seeing new people step up as they develop their skills in serving one another within the church family. The variety that we can have as different people lead in various ways is a great aspect of the Six service.

The one-off different occasions and variety of involvement are all aspects which embellish our regular worship and teaching on the Psalms, Ephesians, and sitting at Jesus' feet through the parables of Luke alongside a Pause for Proverbs and looking at Obadiah in 'a book in a night'.

The Six is overseen by a planning team which has evolved over the year. The team consists of Joy Mawdesley, Rosemary McDonald, Tim Saunders, Barbara Sporne and Pete Winmill – each representing some aspect of the Six service. The team meets once or twice a term to review the term, to plan ahead, to think creatively and to pray.

***Tim Saunders***

## **Thursday Holy Communion**

Our 10.30 Communion service on a Thursday morning is a wonderful moment of quiet and reflection in the middle of the busyness of the week. A congregation of about 30 gather together and has become a community of its own, getting to know one another, recognising familiar faces week by week. The service is valued by those who attend, giving people the chance to stop and be reminded of all that God has done for us. The link with the coffee morning in the hall provides a way of fellowship continuing after the service.

Services are shared among the clergy – Will, Joy, Janice Macdonald, Pam McKellen and Geoff Sowden and we look forward to Simon taking services later in the year. We are also supported by those who read the gospel reading each week and by Maria Muir, Sue Elliott and Bob Kennaugh who prepare for the service and welcome those who come – thank you all very much!

***Joy Mawdesley***

## **Benefice Choral Evensong**

Choral music has a centuries long tradition in the Church of England and has established itself as a firm fixture in our benefice. Held on the first Sunday of most months in St Mary's, Speen at 6.00pm, we are transported into another realm as our souls, and the voices of the visiting choir, soar heavenward.

This traditional service relies on the commitment of our visiting choirmaster/organist and his scratch choir; their professionalism, enjoyment and enthusiasm are wonderful to see. It also relies on the backroom team at St Mary's who meet and greet, provide a range of tasty refreshments, open and close the church and look after the heating. I believe I am not alone in saying the attending clergy view their place on the rota of preachers as a pleasure not a chore.

The congregation has increased since our last APCM, so it now comes close to equalling the number in the choir! If you haven't yet attended, do come along and give it a try; you will be warmly welcomed.

***Revd Janice Macdonald, St Mary's, Speen***

## **Children's Ministry (ages 0–5)**

### **Small Stars**

Small Stars meets in the upper hall each Sunday morning in term time and we welcome between 15 and 30 children aged 0-5 each week. We start with free play, then we come and sit in a circle for singing, snack and story time. The children love singing and playing their instruments and join in enthusiastically! While we have snack, the story of the day is told, usually using props in a 'godly play' style, or else with some acting. After a prayer, the children can make a craft related to the story or theme of the day, or there is usually a related play activity, as well as the free choice and the sensory room... plenty to choose from!

In the summer term we looked at some of the Psalms and what they teach us about facing our fears with God's help. We then went through the Lord's Prayer, thinking about what the different parts mean and encouraging the children that we can talk with God anytime, anywhere.

In the autumn term we learned about several characters from the Old Testament, and what their stories teach us about God. We had fun blowing trumpets and knocking down the walls of Jericho with Joshua and his army, and pretending to be lions for the story of Daniel. This term we began a new format for story time as we have a big group of children who are in reception class, so we started splitting into two groups for story and snack time so that we could better tailor it to the needs of the children.

In the spring term we have been focusing on the life of Jesus, and in particular some of his miracles. We got into a boat in a storm, divided up bread between the 'crowd', and pretended to haul in heavy nets full of fish! We love finding out about the amazing things that Jesus did, and knowing that he is still able to do miracles today.

Thank you to the wonderful team of volunteers who look after our little ones, engaging them in play, telling them stories, helping them make crafts and much more!

Recently some of the parents, carers and grandparents at St Nic's have begun a course run by 'Parenting for Faith', which has led to some great discussions and sharing about how we can walk with our children on their journey of faith. Children's spiritual growth is not just about an hour on a Sunday morning each week; parents and carers are the ones with the most influence on their children's faith, and the church needs to support them in this.

***Sarah South***

## All Stars (ages 5-10)

It has been an absolute joy and privilege to join the All Stars team, firstly as a volunteer from March 2024 and then as a paid Children's Minister from June 2024. I joined a wonderful team of volunteers, who all serve so willingly and happily, realising the honour we have to share Jesus with these precious children. It has also been a complete blessing to have Elaine Canniffe continue in her role as Children's Administrator as she is brilliant at keeping me and the volunteers organised!

All Stars is a thriving group of primary-aged children, from school years 1-6, and most weeks we have 30-40 children in the hall during the morning service. Children are registered in their age groups and then participate in a game, or quiet colouring if they prefer, before joining together for a time of singing and teaching as we explore the topic for the week. Back at our registration tables we take time looking at God's word in smaller groups, before finishing with a craft or challenge activity related to the theme.

Last spring and summer we spent time immersing ourselves in the gospel stories, using the wonderful teaching resource, "The Biggest Story" curriculum, which had been purchased shortly before my arrival. This resource comes complete with some excellent short videos, which tell the Bible stories in a very accessible and aesthetic way, providing a great springboard to delve deeper in our smaller group time.

In the autumn and first half of the spring term 2025 we immersed ourselves in the book of Genesis, finishing up with the story of Joseph, to coincide with the main church teaching on this character. Do look at our display board in the church hall to get a glimpse of some of the lessons we have been learning! Since the February half term we have returned to the gospels to find out what Jesus did and taught in the run up to Easter.

One of the highlights of each term has been a Praise Party, where we have enjoyed extended times of singing, dancing and generally making a joyful noise to the Lord! Andy Cooper has led us in the worship with his one man band and it has been so encouraging to see the children really engage with this, learn some new songs, including ones written for adults, and be willing to pray out loud too. Andy has even been kind enough to let the children have a go on the microphone and instruments at the end of the session and I definitely think we have a few budding worship leaders in our group. Watch this space!

During the October half term, on 31st, we held our annual Light Party. About 50 children attended, a third of whom were from outside the church community, and had a great time playing games, doing crafts, eating hot dogs and listening to a very exciting talk given by Simon, which included much hilarity as pumpkins were dropped from a ladder so that they smashed on the floor (representing the evil things that Jesus conquered!) Again, we're grateful to the wonderful team of volunteers who joined in to make that happen – including some brave souls who don't normally involve themselves in the children's work!

During our Christmas party, as well as the usual fun and games and singing as well, Viv Staunton volunteered to help us make some exciting crafts using clay. While we're on the topic of celebrations, many of the volunteers enjoyed a social evening together in January where we gathered around a hot meal and glass of wine in St Nic's House while getting to know more about each other beyond the realms of our work with children! The following

Friday evening we held a social for the years 4, 5 and 6s at St Nic's House, where they enjoyed pizza and chat and watched, "Joseph, King of Dreams".

As well as immersing myself in All Stars at St Nic's Church, I have continued to be involved with St Nicolas School. The clergy, Caroline Chichester and I all take regular turns at taking assemblies on a Wednesday morning, which is a huge privilege as we get to talk about Jesus to 250 children at a time. In addition to that, Caroline, Victoria Maxton-Livesey and I run a weekly lunchtime club, JAFFA (Jesus, A Friend For All), which gives us a great chance to build up proper relationships with a smaller group of children, currently 10-14 in regular attendance, and Be and Bring Good News there.

As you can probably tell, I am loving my role as Children's Minister and am so grateful to God for calling me to this role and to the wonderful team who help make it happen so smoothly. Elaine and Joy had done a brilliant job of keeping everything running in the absence of a Children's Minister so it was in a good place when I began. The incredible team of volunteers always arrive with smiles on their faces ready to help set up tables and lug carpets around before settling to prayer and then the work of sharing Jesus with the children. I am personally grateful to each and every one of them for welcoming me so warmly to the role and working together with me to make the subtle changes that we have needed to put in place. Looking ahead, we pray for wisdom and guidance as we welcome new children almost weekly and as we try to engage those who come regularly so that they can become strong disciples of Jesus and live their lives wholeheartedly for Him.

***Tania Wolak***

## **Youth Ministry**

### **Pathfinders (ages 11-14)**

It has been a joy to spend another year with the Pathfinders group. I have been so grateful for a wonderful team of Phil Davis, Cheryl Gadsby, Matt Kingston, Rob Canniffe and Adriel Comer. They have all been a wonderful support to me and week on week provide the Pathfinders group with brilliant leadership.

The Pathfinders enjoyed a weekend summer camp in June at The Bradleys' in Highclere - we are so grateful for Peter and Liesl's amazing hospitality! The year six group also joined us to get to know the group before their move up to Pathfinders in September.

Another great Holiday Bible Club gave the Pathfinders a wonderful opportunity to serve as young leaders. Their help across the week was so valuable and especially beneficial for the younger children at Holiday Bible Club, to whom they were fabulous role models, showing what serving and being part of church family is all about.

In September our group increased in numbers with the new year 7s joining us, we now regularly have around twenty young people at Pathfinders. This is brilliant and brings a great atmosphere of fun and friendship to our sessions. As a team we continue to be so thankful for the wonderful blessing and opportunity of having so many young people part of our church family – even if we may be running out of chairs!

Our Friday night games socials continue with us meeting once a month on the first Friday. This is a great chance for the young people to spend time with their friends and get to know

new people. As leaders, we also really value this time to build relationships with the young people, hearing about what they are interested in and what is going on in their lives.

In September we started a new series in our Sunday sessions on the characteristics of God based around a book called 'None like Him' by Jen Wilkin. In January we joined with the 10am congregation and All Stars in starting a series on Joseph. It was great to have the opportunity to all be looking at the same Bible passages and we hope it made for interesting conversations at home during the week.

***Clare Caskie***

## **The Firm (ages 14–18)**

It has been another great year at The Firm. We have continued to meet after The Six service on a Sunday evening. It has been great seeing the youth get involved in various services, serving in different ways such as projection, sound, refreshments and worship bands. Most recently we have been following The Six sermon series for our discussions at The Firm, looking at what we have just heard and discussing how it applies to our lives.

We have also continued Firm+, our midweek Bible study group where last year we spent the year going through John; since September we have studied Ephesians and now have started the slightly daunting task of Revelation.

I'm so grateful for a wonderful team of volunteers for The Firm and Firm+; Luke Radford, Paul Mawdesley, Sian Lupton, Mildred Obeto, Rosie Davis and Kristina Martin. They are such a blessing to the young people and offer great wisdom and leadership as well as always being a great support to me.

Last summer we saw many of The Firm go to the summer ventures camp, Quantock. This is a week-long camp in Somerset and always provides a wonderful time of fun, friendship and learning more about what it is to follow Jesus. Many of the young people are now already signed up for the 2025 camp this coming summer.

The summer also saw many of The Firm helping at the Holiday Bible Club where they served using all their different gifts: singing, projection, sound, leading the children's groups. It was so lovely to serve alongside them - they were such valued members of the team and obviously extremely popular with all the younger children!

The All Stars team traditionally run a Light Party over the Halloween evening and last year we decided it would be wonderful to open the church during this time to welcome any passing people with hot chocolate and live music. The youth got together a band (Hannah Gadsby, Toby Davis, Hannah Phillip, Eli Green and Luke Petrovic) and provided a wonderful set of music, and it was so appreciated by our church family and others in our community.

During the summer half term, it is becoming a tradition at Firm to have testimony evenings where we invite members of the congregation to come and share their testimony with the young people. These are always really appreciated - the young people love the chance to hear from different people and get to know them a bit better, hearing how God has worked in their lives. We are already looking forward to this year's testimonies... could it be you?!

***Clare Caskie***



## **Gap Year Group**

This group has grown naturally out of Firm+ for those who have graduated out of that group but who are still around and eager to study the Bible together. We don't always stay completely on topic but overall it's been a fun group, and we've had a good time- especially as we've dived into the book of Revelation. It's been nice to see the group grow slightly as people have been welcomed into the group.

*Simon Eves*

## **All Age Celebrations**

On Palm Sunday the whole congregation joined in with sound effects from donkey hooves to cheering or booing as Jesus came into Jerusalem. At Pentecost Praise we celebrated the church's birthday with cupcakes and candles! Back to School Sunday was also a chance to celebrate the Holiday Bible Club and introduce the new songs to the rest of the congregation. It was great to have the dais covered in rucksacks and bookbags as we prayed for the challenge of going back to school and work. At Harvest we thought about the story of The Good Samaritan and how we can love our neighbour, writing and drawing our prayers on paper people.

New this year was a Persecuted Church All Age service, where taking communion in silence and with the lights off helped us imagine what it's like in countries where meeting together as Christians is very dangerous. The children were given prayer passports and a world map to take away so that they could be reminded to pray for people in these countries.

Christingle took a new form as Joy used a cabbage and a lightbulb to illustrate her talk! The all-age choir led us in worship and prayers were led by members of All Stars. On Christmas Eve at the Crib Service the church was full of nativity characters as we heard the Christmas story once more, with lots of audience participation! Rob Canniffe made a very entertaining angel, and Simon used his poetic gifts for his message!

Following our teaching series on Joseph we had a colourful time in February thinking about how Jesus brings colour into our lives. Writing scratch art bookmarks was a powerful moment of asking Jesus to bring light and colour into the lives of those we know.

*Sarah South and Tania Wolak*

## **Bell Ringers**

2024 was a busy year for St Nic's tower ringers, with outings, dinners, hosting visitors, competitions and teaching. The St Nic's ringers started the year appearing in the Newbury Weekly News, with a report on the visit of the Mayor and Mayoress's (Nigel Foot and Sarah Slack) to the tower to herald in the New Year and say prayers for the year ahead. In February the tower embarked upon their first outing for several years when a dozen St Nic's ringers made a pilgrimage to ring at five church towers in Surrey (St Mary's, Ewell, St Martin of Tours, Epsom; Christ Church, Epsom Common; SS Mary & Nicholas, Leatherhead; and St Mary, Stoke D'Abernon).

In April, sixteen ringers attended the annual 'thank you' dinner at The Craven Arms to thank the ringers for their service ringing and their role in calling people to church. In early June, a St Nic's band achieved a creditable second place in the Newbury Branch 6-Bell striking competition held at St Mary's, Speen. Later in June the tower hosted the 2nd Newbury Cub pack, when nineteen cubs and five leaders were given a tour of the church tower. Supplied with ear defenders they watched the bells in action, had a go at chiming a bell and learnt the role church bells play in church life. In July, six St Nic's ringers were invited to ring the bells for a service at St Mary the Virgin Church, Oxford. In mid-July, the bells of St Nic's were rung for the only wedding of the year.

The year also saw another six new people, including four youths, beginning to learn to ring. This brings the total number of new people having learnt and continuing to ring at St Nic's since 2022 to eight, an unprecedented number in the ringing world! The St Nic's tower ringers are as numerous as at any time in the recent past.

Practice nights at St Nic's were exceptionally well-attended in 2024, with often more than fifteen ringers on the Monday evening sessions. All ten bells were frequently rung for the half hour before the Sunday morning service, and one hour of ringing has taken place approximately once a month before the Sunday evening service.

***David Bebbington, Tower Captain***

## **Choir-led Worship**

Across the Easter weekend last year, we were led by Hannah Maskell and the fantastic Festival Choir, made up of members of the regular St Nic's Choir along with those who simply joined in for Easter. They made a wonderful sound, and many consider that the Good Friday service is one of our best services across the year.

Also at Easter, Hannah stepped down as Choir Director, having served our regular church choir for two years. We have been so grateful to Hannah for stepping into Nic Cope's (rather big) shoes and keeping our choral singing going – and doing so with such passion and determination. Alongside this, she created the Festival Choir which has helped our worship at Christmas and Easter, forming a choir of about 50 people from the church family who have greatly enjoyed singing together, offering moving and joyful pieces.

With the regular St Nic's Choir getting smaller and no Choir Director to direct them, it became clear that worship led by a choir would not be able to continue within our usual Sunday services. This was a source of sadness to those for whom singing in the choir on a Sunday has been part of their way of worship for many, many years. Our Benefice Choral Evensong at St Mary's once a month is providing an alternative way of singing together, where the choir led by Steve Bowey makes a beautiful sound in a quiet, reflective service. It was this choir that was able to sing at the Mayor Making service last May, when Andy Moore (and one of their own!) was made Mayor for the year.

Wonderfully, Hannah has been able to make a comeback (!) to lead the Festival Choir at both Christmas 2024 and Easter 2025. This has continued to attract good numbers from within the St Nic's congregation – the commitment of only a small number of weeks' rehearsal time seems to work for people, enabling them to feel that they can join in. A number of children

have also been part of this choir. Hannah has had a variety of accompanists including Nic Cope, Will McCrea and James Ellicott, to whom we are very grateful.

We very much hope that the Festival Choir will continue for our major festivals – and that Hannah may be able to lead them. The Choir responds to her leadership and the combination of her desire to create worship and that she loves what she does, makes the Choir a joyful place to be. Do look out for opportunities later in the year to be part of the Festival Choir, if you haven't been already. You have missed out!

***Joy Mawdesley***

## **Church Flowers**

We have continued arranging seasonal artificial flowers in church which have been well-received. The flower team came together to arrange extra flowers for Easter, Harvest and Christmas which really added to the celebration of these festivals. We also arranged artificial flowers for the Newbury Spring Festival in May, which they helped to fund. We have no flowers in church during Lent, although we place a dried foliage arrangement in the porch during this time.

***Maria Muir & Judith Crockford***

## **Prayer**

I have been re-reading the Philip Yancey classic book, 'Prayer - Does it make any difference?' The book explores the complexities of prayer, addressing doubts and frustrations. He emphasises prayer as a relationship with God, not a tool for manipulation, and examines unanswered prayers, aiming to deepen understanding and revitalise the reader's prayer life. Would recommend it as an easy read with lots of great testimonies. In chapter 8 he says about his frustration with God's lack of intervention, "my perspective has changed as I understand prayer as partnership, a subtle interplay of human and divine that accomplishes God's work on earth." God has chosen to work on earth through his church.

A quick review of our prayer activities at St Nicolas Church over the past year.

Regular Prayer:

- Corporate Intercession - at each service.
- Prayer Ministry - now offered at every 10am and 6pm service.
- Encounter - 2nd Tuesday of each month in the church hall, a time for praying together for the church's ministries.
- Morning Prayer - at 9am each Wednesday at the church for half an hour.
- Listening Space - from 11:30am to 1pm on Wednesday at the church.
- Home Groups - meeting in people's homes and supporting one another in prayer.

## Event Prayer:

- Thy Kingdom Come - annual initiative set up by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, 9 days of prayer for the world.
- Summer Prayer Walk - The Six step out of the building and walk around the town to pray for the people of Newbury.
- Persecuted Church Sunday - The Six focus on prayer for the persecuted church. Linked to Open Doors.

I am also encouraged to hear of many other prayer groups that meet regularly, including prayer triplets, DNA groups, etc. If you are interested in being in one, then please speak with me or Joy who will help you set one up. We are also running a prayer email (prayer chain) as part of our prayer ministry to be advertised on our website in future.

We have many prayer activities at St Nicolas Church, but we could always do more. If you have any ideas on prayer, please talk to me or Joy.

***Stephen Wolak***

## Morning Prayer

We meet each Wednesday at 9am in church. The original vision for this came from the first goal in the vision document, 'to enable and encourage the Church family to connect with our corporate prayer life'. As a regular prayer time did not take place in the Church building, to pray in Church was a key part of the vision and so a group started to meet in the prayer chapel about 15 months ago on a Wednesday at 9am.

We meet for half an hour of praying through the readings of the day, leading onto the issues on our hearts and minds. It has been a joy and privilege of being together in prayer for our Church and our world in the Church building, following in the steps of our forebears in faith. Apart from a very small number of Wednesdays we have met consistently each week, joined by Coins and other groups occasionally when they are using the Church building. So, if 9am is a helpful time we would love you to join us whenever you are able and if you set aside this time to pray at home and so join us in that way, do let the office know and we can encourage each other.

***Geoff Sowden***

## Stewardship

We started off 2024 with a stewardship budget of £258,479, revised mid-year to £266,361 and finished the year at £278,425. To meet about half of the cash shortfall in 2024 budget and protect our free cash reserves, a giving appeal was made to the congregation to increase their giving to fund the ministry activities, outreach giving and running of the church. However, we had amazing support with many new stewardships, increased contribution, and one-off gifts. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, we met our stewardship budget successfully, which helped to reduce the overall deficit and achieve break-even position.

During the year we were pleased to welcome several new families who have also joined our Stewardship schemes. Some members have left, for various reasons, and we are most

grateful to them for their contribution to St Nicolas Church whilst we shared the pleasure of their fellowship.

Retaining current giving along with few new stewardships and increases from existing donors has helped to set a budget forecast of £270,581 for 2025. The ongoing impact of cost-of-living and economic climate challenges could potentially impact our performance against the stewardship budget forecast for the year. Yet again, we also have a shortfall against the budgeted expenses and therefore a specific appeal was made to the congregation to increase their giving to meet the financial challenge. Therefore, I would urge for your continued support.

If you have any questions related to giving or wish to make any changes, including legacy, please reach out to: [stewardship@st-nics.org](mailto:stewardship@st-nics.org).

Whilst we are most grateful for all the financial support we have received during the year; the church cannot function effectively without the enormous amount of voluntary help we receive - our PCC members, our stewards, hospitality and worship teams, children and youth teams, those working in different ministry areas, the various committees that serve different areas of service, and so many more. Thank you for all you do to keep the church running smoothly and help achieve our vision in being Good News and bringing Good News to Newbury.

**Shalini Philip, Stewardship Secretary**

## **FELLOWSHIP (Looking In)**

### **Welcome and Integration**

During the past year the welcome team together with the church staff have continued to establish a plan and rhythm of events to help newcomers feel welcome and to help them integrate with the wider church family.

We held a welcome lunch during the year in January 2024 and a second welcome lunch was carried over from November into January 2025 which was well attended. Our aim is to have two welcome lunches each year if there are sufficient numbers.

Chinese New Year was celebrated in February with beautifully prepared refreshments in the hall after the 10am service. A big 'thank you' goes out to all those who participated!

Sunday lunch at home was also a successful event in March where hosts and guests enjoyed Sunday lunch together meeting new people. Sadly, the church picnic in July was cancelled due to torrential rain. We hope for sunshine this coming July!

Our regular team of welcomers do a great job welcoming people as they come into church. We also try to ensure that the welcome desk is manned after the 10am service to talk to new people over coffee. Thank you to everyone who has played their part in welcome at St. Nic's. If you meet a new person in any of the services, please make them welcome and guide them to the welcome desk where they can find more information about what is going on in the church and fill in a Welcome Card. They will then receive the church email and be followed up with an invite to the next welcome lunch. The Welcome Cards are also available in the pews and in the hall foyer in the evenings.



Currently welcome projects are put together by Sharon Coward, Mandy Maskell, Tim Over and Tania Wolak, and are run by many other members of our church family. Thank you to all those who have helped this year. If you would like to help join the welcoming team, please get in touch with the church office.

***Sharon Coward***

## **Women at St.Nics**

*Team: Vivien Staunton, Margaret Kennaugh, Sandra Reeves, Mandy Winter, Joyce Zealey and Joy Mawdesley.*

Our small team continues to arrange a number of events throughout the year for the women at St Nic's. Our aim is to provide an opportunity for women to come together in lovely surroundings (wherever that may be) to meet each other, to share struggles unique to us as women and to grow in our Christian faith. We also hope that we put on events that women can invite their friends to.

Our 'staple' event is the breakfast which we usually hold three times a year and this year has been no exception. All three of our speakers have been from within the church family. In April 2024, Rosemary Freeman was our speaker. In September, it was wonderful to welcome Suzie Eves, new to Newbury and St Nic's as the wife of our curate. Anita Jacob came to speak in January 2025. It is clear from these three speakers alone that we are fortunate to have, within the life of St Nic's, women who have their own stories to tell, who have had inspiring faith journeys and women whose lives are far from ordinary once walking with, and used by, God.

During the summer term we held two pudding parties at the home of Joyce Zealey, enjoying her beautiful gardens, amazing puddings and, for some braver souls, even the swimming pool!

Something different this year was the plan to hold two Quiet Days in July and August, giving the chance to set aside a day to be quiet and reflect and draw near to God. These events were small but greatly appreciated by those who came.

As a Women's Ministry team we put our energies into supporting the Easter Craft Saturday and a Christmas Open Day in December. The latter meant that we did not hold our separate Create for Christmas event – this is always so popular, but we felt it right to take a breather in 2024 and re-think for 2025.

If you have any thoughts about events that you would like to see us have here for the women at St Nic's, do let us know – and we would love you to join our team if this area of ministry is something you have a passion for. Do be in touch.

***Joy Mawdesley***

## **Men@St.Nics**

Yep – you guessed it – more fried breakfasts this year but also a great weekend away and great fellowship of course!

Our first breakfast of the church year heard from John Roe, the Railway Mission's Chaplain for London and the Southwest, who described how they provide welfare, wellbeing and spiritual support to all railway workers.

In November, Simon Eves shared his inspiring testimony: 'Reflections on Fatherhood: My Story of Faith' to a record turn out of 60; that's a lot of sausages!

At the time of writing, our last breakfast of the church year is about to take place. Colin Cunningham and CAP Befrienders are sharing how Christians Against Poverty are lifting the burden of debt in Newbury.

For us though, and hopefully the 30 men attending, the highlight of the year was our weekend retreat to the Cotswolds in October when Rev Rupert Shelley spoke on 'Convictions to live by': looking at four fundamental Christian convictions.

Behind the scenes, DNA/prayer groups remain the bedrock of the ministry, where 3-5 men meet regularly to encourage and support each other in their faith journey.

Our thanks go to all those involved in the ministry – those who help organise the events, those who get up exceedingly early on a Saturday morning to chef and do front-of-house-stuff, and those who attend. Too many to mention, and GDPR probably precludes me from listing them in any case!

***Jim Lupton and Tim Saunders***

## **Pastoral Care**

*Team: Joy Mawdesley, Sharon Coward, Sue Elliott, Christine Jago and Janet Price*

The members of this team respond to specific needs of individual church members. Responses have included practical help with tasks and transport, maintaining contact with people when they are not able to attend services (including sharing home communion with them if requested) and offering emotional and prayer support at difficult times.

Particular mention should be made here of the work of Rosemary Freeman who has decided that the time has come for her to step down from her role on the main team. Her wisdom and knowledge have been much valued, particularly her understanding of bereavement.

We are however very grateful that Rosemary is joining a few other individuals as part of our wider team of helpers. We have greatly appreciated the support given by these people in befriending roles and in providing transport to appointments.

There are two areas in which we are looking for help. We would be extremely grateful to hear from anyone who feels they can offer the sort of occasional help mentioned above as members of our wider team. We would also hope to hear from, or about, anyone who is needing a bit of extra support.

Members of the pastoral team can be contacted in person, through the clergy or by email on [pastoralcare@st-nics.org](mailto:pastoralcare@st-nics.org). Anyone who contacts us can be assured that all interactions are treated with the utmost confidentiality within the team and that all team members have been safer recruited.

***Janet Price***

## Small groups

It is wonderful to see how busy St Nic's is on a Sunday, with new faces all the time. But it does mean that it can be difficult to make meaningful connections with other people who we can walk with in our Christian lives, it is difficult to get to know people in a snatched conversation after the service, and to find them again the next week! That is where small groups come in.

Small groups are a significant part of the life of St Nic's – they are probably the main place where we get to know other Christians and where we can share the ups and downs of our lives and be supported well by a few people. All of our small groups focus on looking at the Bible together, prayer and support, friendship and fun – and often, food!

After the APCM last year, Geoff and Muriel Sowden came forward to take up leadership of a small group and so we have been able to establish a new group as we had hoped. Their group has now been meeting since the autumn. This brings the total of small groups to 15, supporting over 150 people across the week.

The groups vary significantly – 7 of them meet in the daytime, Foundations is a much larger group for women which gathers on a Tuesday morning and has smaller groups within it. Some meet weekly, others fortnightly, a number break on the week of Encounter to encourage as many as possible to attend the prayer meeting. Some meet very early (!) while two of our newest small groups are family groups that meet on a Sunday afternoon.

For our main Sunday morning sermon series, the preacher produces questions that small groups can use to explore the topic in more detail – this is popular with a number of groups, while others use other resources – Bible study guides or DVDs to promote discussion.

From time to time, other small groups which are temporary come together – in 2024 there was a small 'Christianity Explored' course run in the daytime, and in the evening an 8-week 'Mark Uncover' course which was well attended.

Over the past year there has been a steady flow of requests to join small groups and so most groups have grown in some way. Please do not hesitate to be in touch at any point if you would like to be part of a small group.

Finally, our thanks go to the 30+ leaders of our groups – who are so committed week by week to helping their group to grow in faith and to care for one another. You are absolutely at the heart of what God is doing at St Nic's and without you we would not be able to fulfil our vision of being a church where we 'encourage and enable everyone in the church family to commit to a mid-week small group as part of their growth as a disciple of Christ.' Thank you all so much.

*Joy Mawdesley*

## Fellowship on Tap

Sitting in a pub on a Monday night might not sound like ministry but it has been a real pleasure to get together and see conversations steadily move from small talk into more significant sharing between the men who come along. Amongst the pub talk there have been a few particularly memorable conversations about fatherhood and prayer (amongst other things). We generally reflect on something that was raised by the sermons the day before

and it's been great to see people of a whole variety of ages share and listening and talking about trying to follow Christ in the everyday stuff of life.

***Simon Eves***

## **Party Days**

### **Lunar New Year**

Lunar New Year is celebrated in some Asian countries. It symbolizes the start of a new year on the lunar calendar and the coming of Spring. It is a time for family reunions, wishing for prosperity and happiness.

Hoping the refreshments we made bring New Year's blessings to St Nic's brothers and sisters.

***Eric Leung***

### **Ride and Stride**

This nationwide annual event is organised by the National Churches Trust in conjunction with local Historic Churches Trusts to raise money to provide grants to support and maintain the fabric and heritage of churches in financial need. It is a sponsored event where participants can walk or cycle on a local route, taking in pit stops for refreshments along the way at different churches. Money raised is split between the participating church and the local trust. We raised just over £6,000, half of which has gone into the Building Project and half to Berkshire Historic Churches. Here is a personal perspective on the event.

As we approached St Nic's at lunchtime to start our challenge, there was a buzz of people and bunting. Some had already finished, including a gang of small people on wheels with their families, who had been adventuring to St Mary's Speen and back. We had chosen the gold stride route, to Boxford and back via St Mary's, Stockcross and Shaw: around 11 miles.

It was a beautiful day for a walk, and I felt blessed to be out in creation with two boys and the dog for company. We had not been inside Stockcross church before. We were welcomed and given a tour and homemade biscuits. At Boxford we had a rest in the lychgate and a flask of tea. Our legs were a little weary when we got to Shaw, but we pushed on and reached St Nic's again. We were rewarded with the largest possible chocolate medals and a great sense of achievement for the walk and some funds raised.

***Rebecca Bird***

### **St Nic's Football**

In September we started having a kickabout on Monday nights with men from church along with a range of friends and others who had been invited along. Pretty soon we realised that we needed to start playing weekly due to the number of people coming along getting up to nearly 20 a couple of times. We play at St Nic's school, and it's been good to grow our relationship over there. Most of all though it's been great both for building friendships throughout the generations (our players have ranged from 14 to 65!) but also creating an easy place for people to make a connection with church and we've had some people come to church on Sundays and over Christmas off the back of coming along to football.

The quality of the football is ... questionable at times but people generally leave with smiles all round.

*Simon Eves*

## **MISSION (Looking Out)**

### **321 Course**

We ran the 321 course for the first time after Christmas. In many ways it's an alternative to Alpha – designed to be easy for people to come and investigate Christianity and ask questions about Jesus. We ended up having around 50 people come along to at least one session and needed 6 separate discussion groups which were all led by a brilliant team of volunteers. The course was short – only running for 4 sessions but I think that meant more people were willing to give it a try.

The videos were visually striking and thought-provoking. They're produced by Speak Life and presented by Glenn Scrivener whose teaching is really engaging. Throughout the course it was clear there were plenty of people who really wanted to find out more and we've had about half a dozen people who had very little prior church connection come along to church since the course and make significant steps in their faith - do please keep praying for them.

Although the joy of seeing people really engaging with the Gospel was definitely the highlight, Sue Edwards' desserts were fantastic and deserve a special mention!

*Simon Eves*

## **Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals**

On Easter Day 2024 six young people and adults from St Nic's were baptised by full immersion and two renewed their baptism vows. We also celebrated another 6 baptisms through the year. It is wonderful to celebrate new life with these families and friends, and to welcome them all into our church family.

Last year we had just one wedding at St Nicolas. With venues offering weddings as well as receptions these days, wedding bookings in church have dropped.

We have held 8 funerals here at St Nicolas Church this year, with no interments of ashes in our Remembrance Garden. We have supported all these families through their bereavement.

Many thanks to our vergers, organists, flower-arrangers, bell ringers and technical operators who wonderfully support us making these occasions so special.

*Libby Lake & Mandy Maskell*

## **CAP Debt Centre Newbury**

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) Newbury is a joint ministry between St Nicolas' and Bridge Church which is supported by several churches in the Newbury area. It re-opened in January 2024 with Colin Cunningham as the new Debt Centre Manager, supported by David Clark, an experienced CAP Debt Coach (DC) who had recently moved to the Newbury area (he attends Newbury Baptist Church and has been a wonderful blessing to Colin and the ministry).



In the 15 months since re-opening, the Debt Centre has welcomed and supported 58 cases (comprising individuals, couples and families), predominantly from Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford. Headline numbers:

- 12 cases now completely debt-free through insolvency and support - £216,000
- 6 cases repaying their debts through repayment plans - £86,000
- 23 cases still live and being worked through

In several cases we have been instrumental in getting clients support with claiming benefits, receiving Foodbank parcels, and in getting them rehomed away from dangerous locations or unsafe properties. As part of our pastoral approach, we have been able to bless clients with gifts and financial support from the CAP Blessings Fund, which was generously donated by church members, to provide emergency and immediate help to clients in their times of need. We also gave Christmas cards, church service invitations, a small gift and a supermarket voucher to many families to support them over the Christmas period.

Most of our clients sadly come with varying levels of additional complexity, including mental health (anxiety/depression), unemployment, addiction and other health issues. This is precisely why they need CAP and the love of Jesus in addition to help with their debts. Prayer is always offered during our meetings and is accepted by many people who are on their own journey with meeting Christ. We have seen several clients renew their faith and attend church services. Our help and involvement are hugely appreciated by our clients, with two notable comments from recent cases: "I've never known such kindness" and "I felt the presence of Jesus during the meeting".

The Newbury CAP ministry only exists with the support of Befrienders, members of churches who attend the client meetings to provide support to both the DC and the clients, and who also provide a level of pastoral and emotional support to the clients. A Befriender is needed for each client case, and thankfully we have a pool of circa 22 people from across 8 churches, as well as from Foodbank, Social Services and Social Prescribers.

We are excited for the future of CAP services in West Berkshire, in the hope that more and more people who are in debt will hear about us and get in touch. We have also just restarted CAP Money Coaching courses in Newbury, to help people of all ages and backgrounds to take control of their personal finances, to create their own budget and to learn how to live to their budget, with the aim of reducing getting into debt in the first place.

***Colin Cunningham, CAP Newbury Debt Centre Manager***

## **Charity Coffee Mornings**

This will be the first time for many years that this report has not been written by Lesley Park! Lesley retired last December after more years than she could remember of being responsible for the smooth running of the Thursday coffee mornings. Thank you, Lesley, for all your hard work maintaining a regular presence of different organisations raising funds for their cause and for caring for the team of St Nic's members who hosted these events.

In the last couple of years, however, we have had to have discussions about how to fill the increasing number of gaps when there has been no booking by an outside organisation. At a recent meeting of the current St Nic's team of hosts (Janet Price, Joan Stacey, Fiona Shaw,

Caroline and John Michalski, and Sue Elliott, plus Viv Staunton who represents us on the Town Team committee), we were keen to ensure the regular continuity of these coffee mornings. They are an important meeting-place for local people and a great opportunity for charities to raise funds, even though the actual number of charities applying has decreased considerably. At the meeting we decided to run those spare coffee mornings ourselves and to raise funds for St Nic's connections such as the Holiday Bible Club, Hidden Treasures etc.

This worked very successfully in January and February this year; we raised significant funds, and the sessions were much appreciated by the regular customers returning after the Christmas break. They enjoyed getting back to meeting up with their friends again, finding bargains among the bric-a-brac, winning prizes on the tombola and eating tasty homemade cakes, all at very reasonable prices. If you haven't been to one of these mornings before do give it a try; it's a very welcoming venue.

We are very grateful to the people who help us make these events happen every Thursday: Mandy M, Elaine C and Samantha B, as well as Eli and Francesca who have shared the heavy physical work of setting out the tables before 9.00am, and to David Pascall who frequently volunteers as a helper.

A big thank you, too, to you members of St Nic's who so generously bake cakes for us, provide tombola prizes and look out bric-a-brac items.

We do need another host (or two) to join the team and fill the gap left by Lesley. Speak to anyone on the team if you think you would like to get involved; they'll tell you what an enjoyable way it is to serve our community.

We would also like to offer the opportunity to raise funds to a wider range of charities; so if you have a charity in mind please let us know.

***Sue Elliott on behalf of The Host Team***

## **Church Garden**

The Church gardens are enjoyed by all those that pass through, and compliments and comments of enjoyment reach us on a weekly basis.

Our gardening team is slowly expanding and some order is taking place, with improvements being made to both the Church gardens and Remembrance Garden. We are even managing to clear the pathways and edging to give a neater impression and more definition to the borders.

Last year the gardens were awarded 1st Prize from Newbury in Bloom, in the Places of Worship Category, this came with a £100 prize which went towards new pots outside the hall and we also received an engraved gardening fork which was a lovely surprise. The judges loved the wide range of pollinating plants, most of which have been home grown, and the idea of bringing together community to help tackle the vast number of borders.

We are so grateful to the people who help in the garden, past and present. Our current team has offered great commitment with Viv, Rosemary, Jill, Gary, Themis, Connie, Noah and Tony... though we need more in 2025!!

We took part in a greatly successful and fun wildlife/plant survey one Sunday in June, both adults and children alike enjoyed getting involved.

***Samantha Bryant, Facilities Manager***

## **2024 Easter and Christmas Open Days**

It was wonderful to have the church so full of excited and enthusiastic visitors for both the Easter and Christmas Open Days. Both events encouraged our creativity with a whole range of Easter or Christmas crafts spread around the church, engaged our excitement with treasure hunts and quizzes, enthralled us with beautiful live music and singing, tested our stair-climbing stamina with the very popular Tower Tours, and provided some much-needed refreshments and snacks between activities.

Most importantly, the Open Days were an opportunity to provide a warm and friendly welcome to everyone who visited St Nic's, and to share the Good News of the Easter and Christmas messages through crafts, stories and hospitality. I particularly enjoyed making an Easter bracelet at the first Open Day, and Christmas crackers at the second, as well as watching our excited younger visitors gather in the nativity stable to hear a Bible story told by a Shepherd (with toy sheep) or one of the Three Kings. Many thanks to everyone who worked so hard behind the scenes to make these days so exciting, friendly and fun for everyone.

***Caroline Michalski***

## **ECO Group**

We are still a small group and still here. We helped facilitate the Count on Nature event in June, which was well-received and got people engaging with and enjoying our beautiful outdoor space as well as participating in crafts in the church. It has been a challenging year, and in November we hosted a meeting with other local Eco activists to see if we can support wider community initiatives which resulted in some promising suggestions which might be useful as the season changes.

Similarly, although the diocese has had much else to consider, eco matters are again coming to the fore. Here, it's pleasing to see that eco is implicit in all we do - for instance the Building Project has taken on board heed of very professional expertise in the proposed design of our heating and energy needs. This is a real challenge in a listed building of our size! So, we'll be looking to increase in size and scope in the coming months, perhaps with our Master's guidance, meeting the diocese challenge to work towards net zero carbon emissions by 2035.

***Mark Knight, Suzanne Lees, Rosemary McDonald, Elaine Canniffe***

## **Hidden Treasures and Tiny Treasures**

Hidden Treasures is our Monday morning group for children under 5 with their parents and carers. It's a place to find fun, friendship and faith.

At 9:50am the doors open and we welcome around 50 adults and 60-something children into the church hall. Downstairs are the all-important refreshments for the grown-ups, along with messy play and craft activities on tuff trays (thanks Sue!), water play, dressing up, ride-on toys and much more!

Upstairs there's a climbing frame, ball pool, baby toys, and the very popular sensory room with bubble tube, fibre optic lights and so on. Our amazing team chat to the parents and carers and play with the little ones, sharing God's love with the families that come each week. We have a prayer box on the table where people sometimes leave prayer requests for the team, and we are privileged to get to know these families and share in their joys and sorrows.

At 11am we all gather at the front of the hall downstairs for together time. Ably led by Anna on the piano and Adrian and Liz on guitar, we sing nursery rhymes and 'Jesus songs', as well as Happy Birthday to any children that have birthdays that week (and sometimes adults too!) Parents regularly report that their child has been singing songs at home that they've learned at Hidden Treasures, such as He's got the Whole World in his Hands... "You have taught children and babies to sing praises to you" (Psalm 8 v.2a, ICB). One of the team also gives a short thought or blessing from the Bible. We have also been able to give out Bible verse cards, make crafts related to the Bible story, and gift Bible storybooks to families. Thank you to the wonderful team who make this great ministry happen!

Tiny Treasures, for parents and carers of younger babies (from newborn to crawling/cruising age), meets at 1:30pm on a Monday and is now over a year old, as are some of its oldest babies who started aged 6-12 weeks! We have a steady group of between about 8 and 16 parents and their little ones each week, and there's a lovely atmosphere as they chat, enjoy refreshments (hot cups of tea are so appreciated!) and share the ups and downs of parenting. We finish with a time of singing, including a simple Christian song each time. This has been another great opportunity to build relationships with families and it's been wonderful seeing people grow in confidence, connect with other parents and ask for prayer in difficult times too. I'm really grateful to Margaret and Sandra for enabling this group to blossom!

***Sarah South***

## **Holiday Bible Club**

"Just wanted to pass on my huge thank you to the entire team who put on the holiday club this week. C... has honestly enjoyed this week more than any other club she's done all summer. She was really anxious the night before and the first morning but has been really excited to go in each day after that which is testament to the support of everyone around her. Thank you again!"

"I wanted to say thank you for the wonderful summer club. C... and K... had a wonderful time there. We are very thankful to all the volunteers who supported the club."

Two notes of appreciation from parents of children who don't come to St Nic's Church. What has been even more encouraging is the positive comments from children themselves. As Caroline, Victoria and I went back to JAFFA club at St Nic's School in September, we were delighted that four of our members, only one of whom attended St Nic's Church beforehand, were excited to tell us the memory verse they had learnt at Holiday Bible Club and very enthusiastic about all they had enjoyed. Highlights for them included the crafts, songs, games and activities as well as watching one of their leaders get covered in slime! And the fruit – well, another one of the girls who attended Holiday Bible Club is now a regular member of All Stars as well as of the lunchtime club at school. God is at work in these children's lives and that's the long-term goal – to see these children become true friends of Jesus.

In all, 73 children (40 boys and 33 girls) attended Holiday Bible Club this year, which was a full house. Of these, 58% were from outside St Nic's. It was fantastic to be able to bring the good news of Jesus to these children. It was also great to see so many members of the congregation involved. What a wonderful way to build up the church family! It was also encouraging to see so many Pathfinders and The Firm involved as young leaders, giving them an important introduction to serving and leading others – something they did superbly.

Organising Holiday Bible Club was definitely a shared effort this year, but particular thanks have to go to Clare, who really did take on the lion's share and worked wonders with a spreadsheet! Without her keeping an eye on what needed to be done when and by whom, there is no doubt it would not have run nearly so smoothly. Thank you, Clare! And thank you, once again, to everyone who got involved and helped us to be and bring such good news to the children of Newbury in August.

***Tania Wolak***

## **Listening Space**

Listening Space has continued to run for the entirety of the last year with a few pauses for holidays etc. The timings have remained the same from 11.30am until 1pm, on Wednesdays in the church building. There is a dedicated team of volunteers who faithfully fill the slots on the rota.

A team of 1-2 people 'man' the church during the Listening Space times and are always ready to sit and talk to people who come in and offer prayer where appropriate. There is a sign on the path outside the church to indicate that Listening Space is available.

It is rare that there are no visitors to the church in the times the team are there. People come into the building for a wide range of reasons. Many come to appreciate our church building (some on coach tours) who will often stop to chat. Others see the sign and spontaneously and bravely come in with specific matters on their heart to talk about and about which to ask for prayer.

Not only is it a privilege and humbling to pray with people, and have their confidence, particularly those who are vulnerable, but also to see that people are pulled towards Church in times of angst and need. It is a reminder of the significance and purpose that the beautiful building of St Nic's has in our community.

We have listened to and prayed for people who are worried about the security of their homes or have lost their jobs. Those who are experiencing loss after marital breakdown or bereavement as well as people who have received a serious diagnosis or who are struggling with physical or mental illness and pain. Events in the world draw people to pray in church such as the continuing war in Ukraine and the Middle East. Also, we have had people share about wanting to reconnect and feel closer to God after a time of drifting or those who have questions about faith and God.

We have been able to pray and have seen people experience the love and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have shown visitors that this church is a community of believers ready to share and live out the Gospel and that our faith is active and practical.



We always pray for more team members, to ensure that this service carries on regularly and smoothly. If you would like to be part of this prayer ministry or know anyone who would be well-suited to it who we could ask, please contact Barbara Sporne to find out more.

***Barbara Sporne***

## **Living Advent Calendar**

In December 2024 we again took part in the town's Living Advent Calendar event, door no. 14 and why not, as our Rector likes to describe them... the best doors in town! They look even more impressive since having a facelift this year!

We used the west doors for a change this time and lit the pathways with lanterns. It was a great success with a good number of expectant people waiting outside to be welcomed in.

The Church was, of course, festively decorated, and the lantern theme continued from the west doors through to the dais and round to the side chapel. We offered hot chocolate, mince pies and the youth band were wonderful, as they played and sang festive music for our visitors.

***Samantha Bryant, Facilities Manager***

## **Meet Monday**

A welcome surprise! Numbers aren't everything but it's encouraging when attendance figures grow. Last year we reported that average attendance had grown to 10 but, since then, new people have joined us almost every month, reaching a peak of 21 after the Count Everyone In Christmas celebration and now an average of 16. However, 16 is only a drop in the ocean compared to the number of adults with learning disabilities in the area.

We pray for each person to come to know Jesus and grow in faith. The meetings are relaxed but organised, following a similar structure each month and focusing on just one learning point. Bible teaching is interactive, about Bible characters, incidents, parables etc, often through unrehearsed drama with opportunities to join in. We worship God with singing, Makaton signing and colourful flags; we share news, pray for one another, and enjoy art or craft activities. At refreshments time team members chat with our Friends; their joys and challenges may be different from ours and hard to appreciate, but we can listen and pray.

Support staff are welcome, and we minister to them with tea, a friendly word and an hour without the usual pressures.

Thank you to our wonderful team. There have been a few changes this year but everyone loves being involved and, even if we feel tired when we arrive, the joy and laughter, as well as deeply moving moments, invigorate us as we leave. Have you thought about joining us?

***Pete and Christine Winmill***

## **Newbury Friends Together**

*Team: Liesl & Peter Bradley, Cherry Catterall, Kathryn Field, Joy Mawdesley, Jasu Shah, Joan Stacey,*

Newbury Friends Together (NFT) is an important part of our outreach ministry and meets in the Church Hall on a Tuesday afternoon with the aim of providing a weekly fellowship opportunity for our senior friends. Around 25 participants engage in a programme of a welcome, a catch up and is centred around an activity followed by refreshments. Highlights of the diverse programme this past year include craft work and cooking demonstrations, Christmas carols with a message, an osteopathy talk, a presentation on robotic knee replacement, a visit and presentation by the Mayor of Newbury, Cllr Andy Moore OBE, postcard memories by Rev Jonathan Edwards and a fun-filled Christmas Lunch at The Dolphin. We had the privilege of celebrating five 90th birthdays this past year!

It is our aim to make NFT a fun, happy, supportive, caring community and it is rewarding to see friendships forming and deepening not only through the Tuesday meetings, but also outside of the meeting, during the rest of the week.

We believe that NFT plays an important role in providing valuable support to our senior community and I would like to sincerely thank our leadership team and the clergy for their commitment and the support they afford.

***Liesl Bradley***

## **Our Buildings**

Our buildings continue to give us an arrangement of useful spaces, that in addition to our regular Church activities give pleasure to many external hirers too.

The past year has seen an increase in bookings and revenue to over £39,000, along with very positive feedback from those who have hired, comments ranging from the wonderful acoustics of the Church, beautiful architecture, general quality of halls and meeting rooms to the general provision of facilities and the cleanliness of the spaces.

We have continued to run Open Days, and on a Wednesday the Morning Prayer and Listening Space give the opportunity for us to pray for many members of our local community in our Church.

Over the past year we have hosted highly successful children's groups with Hidden Treasures and Tiny Treasures, Cubs, Beavers, Guides, Brownies and this year a new weekly session for Rainbows. In addition, there are specially arranged activity evenings with a Christian message and COINS are a regular booking at Christmas and Easter bringing more school children into our building.

St Nicolas House provides a welcoming and comfortable space for more intimate smaller gatherings and Pathfinders and the Firm enjoy the space on Sundays in addition to a number of evening meetings and games nights throughout the month. Headway Charity regularly likes to meet here along with home groups and Manna's mid-week gathering.

As well as our superbly attended services, our Church is also used for a growing number of concerts. These include Newbury Choral Society, The Newbury Spring Festival, Newbury

Symphony Orchestra, Cold Ash Brass, Mencap, The Rotary Club, local school concerts, The Welsh Choir, Sing Louder, Berkshire Chamber Music, Lumos Candlelit Concerts and monthly organ recitals. This year, we even had a one-off prestigious concert held here with Russell Watson. The Church bells are ever popular with David Bebbington bringing regular groups of ringers in from other Churches around the country, due to the significance and quality of the St Nic's bells.

The Halls have been booked to host regular CA meetings, events for the Mayor of Newbury, Polling Station Day, Thames Valley Air Ambulance fairs, Nomads Drama Group, Yume, U3A, Berkshire Agricultural Society and Berkshire Archaeological Society, vintage record fairs, clothes sales and workshops, birthday parties, family gatherings and a number of funeral and christening receptions.

Our facilities are a blessing and play a significant part in making St Nicolas good news to Newbury.

***Samantha Bryant, Facilities Manager***

## **Outreach Committee**

*Team: Rachel Shepherd, Lesley Park, Vivien Staunton, Sian Lupton, Pam McKellen*

*In 2024 the team said farewell to Jane Sutton and have welcomed John Michalski to join us.*

In 2024, through your prayers, care and the financial resources allocated to Outreach, St Nicolas has been able to support 6 Christian organisations working in the local area and 7 Christian organisations working overseas, many of these with local connections. It is a privilege to have established long-standing relationships with most of the organisations we support, and many in our congregation work or volunteer with them.

The Outreach budget of £36,123 was allocated with the approval of the PCC as shown in the tables below. (This figure is 10% of the St Nicolas' Church unrestricted income for 2023).

Over and above the Outreach budget, our Harvest Appeal raised £3,013.93 for the West Berks Foodbank as well as many donations of food, and the collections at the Christmas services for Kindergarten equipment and water tanks at Jeel al Amal, a children's home and school in Bethany, totalled £14,111.12 - an amazing response. We give heartfelt thanks to all for the generous gifts to these appeals.

The Outreach Committee seeks to share news and prayer requests from the organisations we support with the congregation, to prayerfully allocate the Outreach budget that is set aside by St Nicolas church at the start of the year, and to support those looking for opportunities to get involved in mission.

We would love to hear from you if you would like to get involved with outreach locally or further afield, or if you would like to know more about the organisations we support for your own prayers or for leading intercessions. We are also very happy to receive feedback or suggestions on how the Committee can better support your interest in Outreach.

Finally, if you would like to find out about serving on the Outreach Committee, please talk to one of us. We are a small, enthusiastic team and looking for others to join us.

***Rachel Shepherd and Lesley Park for the Outreach Committee***

## St Nicolas' Outreach Giving in 2024:

### Outreach in local area

Organisation	Contact at St Nicolas Church	2024
Christian Opportunities in Newbury Schools (COINS)	Siân Lupton	£6,000
Count Everyone In (working nationally)	Peter & Christine Winmill	£5,000
Good News for Everyone - Newbury branch	Colin Cunningham	£200
Yeldall Manor (drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Reading)	Lesley Park	£1,500
Churches Together in the Newbury Area (CTNA) Christmas lunch	Will Hunter Smart	£300
<b>Total</b>		<b>£13,000</b>

### Outreach overseas:

Organisation	Contact at St Nicolas Church	2024
Friends of Hope for Africa Mission church in Lesotho	Vivien Staunton	£4,000
Biojemss (a children's charity in Uganda)	Bronwen Davies	£4,000
Miriam Dean Fund (working with the poor in Africa and India)	Andy & Sheila Moore	£2,000
Leprosy Mission – Aandaban Hospital crisis in Nepal	Lesley Park	£3,000
Medic Assist International - Chinchpada Christian Hospital, India	Rachel Shepherd	£4,000
McCabe Educational Trust - Jeel al-Amal School & Boys Home, Bethany	Pam McKellen	£4,000
Open Doors (supporting persecuted Christians)	Tania Wolak	£2,123
<b>Total</b>		<b>£23,123</b>

## **St Nicolas' Outreach Giving in 2024 *continued*:**

Overall total for 2024:	£36,123.00
Harvest Appeal:	£3,013.93
Christmas Appeal:	£14,111.12

## **St Nicolas C.E. Junior School**

This has been a positive year for St Nicolas School, with a good Ofsted report in October as well as our new head of school (Mrs Allen) becoming embedded within her role over the course of the year.

In September, we started a nurture group in school, providing support for those children, who find school the most difficult, in line with our vision: "For the good of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). This has proved to be a very successful provision so far, supporting the needs of children within school and allowing for high quality teaching to take place for all.

Ofsted visited in early October and we were very pleased with the outcome. I could quote the whole report, but some of the highlights are as follows:

- Pupils are proud of their diverse school
- There is a happy feel to this school
- The school has high ambition for all pupils
- There are high expectations set for behaviour
- Pupils benefit from many meaningful opportunities which nurture and build on their talents and interests.
- The school embraces its increasingly diverse school community. Pupils learn about a wide range of faiths and cultures. They are accepting of difference and show empathy and understanding towards others.

Mrs Allen, our new head of school, has supported us in developing further, putting a real emphasis on the curriculum across the school, meaning that our children's learning is at the forefront of everything we do.

With our governors and with diocesan support, we are focusing on developing spirituality across the school over the coming months, looking at ways that we can nurture this, within our children. Our partnership with St Nicolas Church is key to this and we really appreciate the weekly assemblies that our clergy run, as well as the services at St Nicolas Church, which are always special for children, families and staff.

***Keith Harvey, Executive Headteacher***

## **TOWN TEAM**

*Members: Graeme Coulam, Sue Elliot, Andy Moore, Vivien Staunton. Lesley Park retired from the team and as lead host for the coffee mornings just before Christmas.*

### **TOWN Team future**

In the early part of 2024, the Team prepared a paper for the PCC on its future. This observed that, after more than 10 years of existence, membership of the team was reducing, it had been unable to recruit and the energy of those remaining was waning. It was felt that some aspects of the activity would probably continue without oversight, but that others would not (see below). At the PCC in September, the expectation was that a review of the Vision Statement (to take place in 2025) would be informed by the paper. With members busy on other matters, the TOWN Team has not met since then.

### **West Berkshire Community Hospital Therapy Garden**

The gardening team has been administered by the hospital trust's volunteering group over recent years, and now only around a third of its members are from St Nic's. The team and the garden thrive with new developments each season. Coffee mornings and the annual plant sale in the churchyard help with funds to supplement what the hospital and its Friends' Group can provide.

### **Sunday Stalls**

We organised a single "pitch" by Newbury Street Pastors to Sunday congregations in April. This activity would need to be sponsored by another group if the TOWN team did not continue.

### **Thursday Charity Coffee Mornings**

This is a valuable outreach into the community with regular clientele who meet up and chat, enjoy the cakes and dip into the bric-a-brac. There continue to be fewer charities booking sessions than the weeks available, and the hosting team, with other support, has done its best to ensure that the event happens each week outside of the August and Christmas/New Year breaks.

***Vivien Staunton & Andy Moore, Co-leaders***

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**Best in Category – Place of Worship  
Newbury in Bloom**



**Restored West Door**



**2<sup>nd</sup> Newbury Cubs' visit the Bell Tower**



**Ringin in the New Year (2024)**





**Holiday Bible Club**



**The Stable**



**A Cabbage for a Christingle!**

