

 **St Nicolas**
NEWBURY
Being Good News. Bringing Good News.



2020-2021
Report of Parish Activities

For Presentation at the
Annual Parochial Church Meeting
On Tuesday 25 May 2021

**PARISH OF ST NICOLAS NEWBURY
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1. Rector's Introduction to the Annual Reports

What a year it's been - for all of us! Covid-19 has impacted every person and every organisation, turning our lives upside down. It's locked us down and kept us apart, but it's also forced us to adapt and think creatively about how to continue to function as church - how to worship together, how to care for one another and how to reach out into our community and our world. These three things are the three areas of our St Nicolas Church vision and this booklet is arranged in that order: Looking Up (Our Worship); Looking In (Our Fellowship); Looking Out (Our Mission).

We produce this booklet every year in preparation for the APCM. This year it is a thinner booklet than normal, for the obvious reason that Covid has forced many of our ministries to shut down. However, we give thanks to God for the ministries that have been able to function and how they have been able to adapt. And we are hugely grateful to every person who, in the midst of all the personal struggles and pain of the last year, has been able to contribute, in however small a way to the ministry and mission of our church. Thank you.

At the time of writing, we still do not know when life (and church life) will return to 'normal'. However, we can be sure that whenever we are back to normal, we will find that we were not the same as we were. Covid has changed us all. But, much more significantly, God has been changing us. No situation, however painful or difficult, is beyond his redemptive purposes. He has been at work in all of this, alongside all our work. Over the coming months, may he give us eyes to see how he has been changing us and where he is calling us.

...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

With every blessing
Will Hunter Smart

2. Wardens' Report for 2020

We are writing this on 29 March 2021, the day we can finally start to meet our friends and family again outside. What a year we have experienced since our last report for the APCM booklet at the beginning of March last year! But we have not only come through it; in many ways we have thrived through it. It has been wonderful to see so many gifts coming to the fore, so many church members getting involved in ways they might never have otherwise considered, so much creativity. In many ways we have been greatly blessed through this pandemic and we praise God for His goodness and faithfulness to us despite the difficulties we have all faced at times.

And life has indeed been tough at times. Some of us have lost loved ones, some have been very lonely, some have lost jobs, some have suffered with Covid (current churchwardens included!) and some have struggled to juggle work and caring for and educating their children (not least our Rector!) We are so grateful that at St Nics we also have a very able Associate Rector in Joy, as I think the support that Will and Joy were able to give each other in working out how to navigate their way and the church through this strange time was invaluable. I think our church leaders and staff have been wise in how they have handled things, not trying to run before they could walk in terms of how the services and other activities were

conducted. We have also had the opportunity to get to know our leaders and some members of the congregation better, as they have shared honestly and openly about what life has been like for them during this time, through the services and videos of Life in Lockdown.

With the onset of the first lockdown at the end of March we were clear that, although our buildings had to close, the church remained open. We had to find new ways of being church. Services were pre-recorded from the clergy's homes or even memorably from Will's allotment shed! Many new volunteers, including children and young people, got involved by making video recordings of themselves reading the Bible, leading the prayers or talking about life in lockdown. The children and young people did a great job of being presenters in their children's work and many of the adults tuned in to see what they were up to as it was so professional and fun. The worship team became incredibly creative and resourceful recording and mixing worship songs for us, complete with beautiful photography. Many hours were dedicated to making these special recordings which really helped with our worship. Special thanks must go to Andy Laidler, Andy Cooper and Nic Cope for their labours of love in this.

In July, just as we opened up the church building to a congregation again, we were delighted to welcome Jackie Fountain as our new curate. Although this was a hard time to join the church, with social distancing and other covid restrictions making a usual induction and getting to know the congregation very tricky, she and her husband Paul have thrown themselves fully into the life of the church. As well as preaching many times already and being there pastorally for people, Jackie has frequently led the weekly Encounter prayer meeting, led the Christmas blessing group and is now leading the Alpha course. Paul has also blessed us greatly, not only with his incredible positivity, but practically too as he has led and trained the team responsible for livestreaming.

Meeting again safely onsite involved a huge amount of preparation of both the church building and instructing the stewarding teams to run safe services and many thanks go to Mandy Maskell and Belinda Bowrey for making this possible. We were grateful that many people stepped forward to help with the stewarding. These in-person services happened alongside the pre-recorded services so the clergy and staff members were frequently working doubly hard to ensure everything happened smoothly.

Summer at St Nics would not be complete now without our annual Holiday Club, which in 2020 ran for a week online at the end of July under the title, "Search and Rescue". Caroline Chichester and her team did a wonderful job getting everything ready. Beth Mawdesley and Josh Philip fronted the videos, craft packs were prepared in advance for families to collect and 87 children from the church and local community booked on and engaged with this, at least 17 more than would have been able to participate in the building itself.

All Saints Day at the beginning of November saw our first on site All Age service and it was great to see the church looking relatively full and lively again. But by the following Sunday we were in lockdown two, just as Paul Fountain, Steve Wolak and the team had got the livestreaming up and running. This meant that, although the church was closed to the congregation, the clergy and worship team could still lead us live from the church building and need not spend hours trying to do everything twice. The beauty of this was that we could all worship together at the same time and sing our hearts out at home. Over the last few months we have seen many people step forward to help with the livestreaming, and it has been wonderful to see a veritable army of volunteers be trained up and serve in this way.

Christmas, although a contrast to our usual full church celebrations, was not cancelled! The women's ministry team worked incredibly hard to bless as many as wanted with an Advent candle kit, so we could count down the days in style. There were even enough kits for us to bless some of our friends from outside the church too. Bethany Wolak and Freya Williams designed Christmas cards which we were able to give to every member of the parish and church respectively and remind them of Jesus' light in our darkness and that the church was still here for them. Wonderfully, using a booking system, we were able to have some of our key services in person as well as online, and so we celebrated Jesus' arrival into this world with joy and hope in our hearts, despite the increasing bad news about the new strain of Covid wreaking havoc with hospital numbers and deaths again.

The end of the year saw the departure of Belinda Bowrey from her role as Facilities Manager at St Nics. She had served us faithfully for fifteen years, ensuring we were warm for our services, that the church buildings and grounds were properly cared for and that everything functioned and was serviced properly. For many people she was the face of St Nics when she helped them as they hired the church or hall for one function or another. Our appreciation of Belinda was shown by just how quickly and generously so many of you gave on the news of her departure and it was lovely to be able to bless Belinda with such a wonderful gift.

By the New Year we were in lockdown three and back to online only services again. Our Rector was taken out of action for a few weeks with the sad and sudden death of Ellen's mother, but Joy and Jackie handled the services and other activities beautifully. And now in March, with longer and brighter days, the incredible vaccine roll-out helping to make us safe, an Easter garden reminding us of our new life in Jesus, we are delighted to be back in church for our services and the sense of joy and hope is almost tangible.

Throughout the year much work has been done pastorally as well. Printed copies of the service and church news have been delivered to those with no internet access, many phone calls have been made to the lonely and assistance given to those in need. Sadly, though, we have also lost several members of our congregation over the past year, including Iris Bishop, Robert Willis, Joan Cox, Deirdre Hammond, Mary Hassell, Anne Burton, Michael Perkin, Pauline How and Bernard Eggleton. It has been particularly sad, with the Covid restrictions, not to be able to celebrate the lives of these wonderful Christian brothers and sisters together as a church and to be able to mourn with their families. But our hearts go out to their loved ones and we are so grateful to have known them at St Nics.

Zoom church breakfasts have been a tremendous blessing over the last few months. Rather than an elegant ladies' breakfast or a men's fry up in the hall, we have settled for whatever we have at home and joined in together hearing wonderful testimonies from church members and even a retired missionary from India. As well as the inspiring and challenging talks, it has also been fun to "see" many members of church in their home environment and to have breakout rooms chatting to some of them.

We are so grateful to our clergy, our staff team and everyone who has volunteered in any way this year to enable life to happen as smoothly as it has. Much adapting has needed to happen, many of you have stepped out of your comfort zones or learnt new skills to meet a need. Hours have been spent on top of full-time jobs putting worship videos together, for example. There have been many humble servants. This has been a year when we have really

needed to be “an orchestra, not an audience” and in many ways we have grown as a church because of this. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts and ask the Lord to bless you as you graciously continue to serve Him and the church in this way.

Tania Wolak & Rick Coward

3. Deanery Synod

St Nics now has its full complement of Lay Deanery Synod Representatives who support and encourage the work of Newbury Deanery, of which St Nics is the largest congregation. Having published the Mission Plan, we started the period in the expectation of action on four areas: Schools, Lay Training, Financial Sustainability, and emphatically Environment. A merged Standing and Pastoral Committee would open the way for focussed working parties in each area. Then, the pandemic struck! Parishes and Benefices quickly rose to the challenge and in a variety of ways, used technology and other sources to support their congregations as best they could. Interpreting the rules was challenge enough, but our usual slender financial situation started to cause grave concern. No parish was unaffected, and many had to dig deep into reserves to such an extent that next year’s parish share is in serious doubt.

The Deanery Treasurer, fortunately well-respected by the Diocese Finance people, along with the Lay Chair were able to convince the Diocese of the challenge we face. However, for the first time in several years the Deanery was unable to meet the whole share. Nonetheless, we have been able to welcome Revd David McLeod as he starts his term as Area Dean and have welcomed newly appointed Associate Arch Deacon, Revd Liz Jackson. At the moment, we have a Benefice and a Parish which are in special measures and are being managed carefully and compassionately and it is probable more will follow this route.

We’ve also managed to keep Deanery Synod representatives informed of regulation and Diocesan news of online services etc, centrally produced, together with issuing regular written sermons. Deanery Synods are still held via online conference calls and very well attended. Going forward, we can see that the Mission Plan will need adjusting to take account of what we’ve learned. We can also see the exciting challenge ahead as we look to restore congregations and better exploit technology to meet the demands of the different ways we find people will want to worship as our new definition of normal starts to emerge. So, yet again, those timeless words in Isaiah 43: 18-19, play true.

‘Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.’

Mark Knight

4. Electoral Roll

There are 286 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. Elections for the Parochial Church Council, 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. It is my role as Parish Safeguarding Officer to support and work with the staff team and others to make sure we follow that guidance and to respond to any concerns raised.

The last year has been very different and few of the usual face-to-face groups with vulnerable people have run as usual. At the start of the pandemic, the children's and youth teams wanted to work out how to meet virtually using Zoom. It was important to do this in a way which kept the children and young people safe online, and maintained appropriate boundaries with the adults.

As planned, all PCC members undertook the basic safeguarding training which was available online through the Diocese.

As more normal church activity is planned to re-start, I will be working with the staff team to review the DBS status and training for all volunteers working with vulnerable groups, and it is likely that some new volunteers will need to be recruited. The PCC will consider a Safeguarding Action Plan for the coming year, and the learning materials provided by the Diocese on some significant safeguarding cases within the wider Church of England.

Rebecca Bird, Parish Safeguarding Officer

WORSHIP (Looking Up)

Services

2020 began with our three Sunday services as normal: 8am, 10am and 6pm, plus our regular Benefice Evensong at St Mary's. Following our recently launched vision, we started the year looking at the last of the three areas of our vision, 'Looking out: Our Mission'. At the 10am service we had a very encouraging series, 'Frontline Sundays', using material from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, encouraging us in our everyday mission out on our front lines, at work, school, home and in our communities. At the 6pm we also preached on a series on mission, finishing with an invitation evening.

Then, in March, everything changed...

It's amazing to look back over more than a year and to see how we were forced to adapt our Sunday worship so completely and so quickly. It's also hugely encouraging to see how we have been able to adjust and adapt, both as restrictions have changed and as we developed new skills for online worship. On the very first Sunday of lockdown, Joy preached from Hebrews 10:19-25: "let us consider how we may spur one another on" and "let us not give up meeting together". In everything we've done since then, we have tried to ensure that we

have kept gathering together (in spirit, even if not in person), and that we have kept encouraging each other to keep going in our faith during these testing times.

Immediately following the March lockdown and the closure of churches, we began a pattern of a recorded audio sermon, plus a brief video welcome message and an online service sheet. As our confidence with video recording and editing grew, we celebrated Easter 2020 with our first full video service. We had so many positive comments about what a difference the service made to Easter under lockdown. Following this, we soon began videoing our sermons each week, recorded from a variety of different locations, including gardens, kitchen tables and allotment sheds!

As the clergy began to learn skills they'd never been taught at theological college(!), so the musicians also quickly learned how to record and mix songs from homes. We had memorable and moving recordings from worship bands and the choir. As confidence and experience grew, so did the quality of these home-grown worship videos. We also began to include recorded readings and prayers from members of the congregation. In those early, confusing days, it was so encouraging to see the faces of different members of the congregation. We also made every effort to include contributions from all ages, including the children. Alongside this, many of the adults watched the children's videos produced by StNicsKids and Pathfinders every Sunday.

Over the Summer we continued with the plan to preach on the second area of our vision, 'Looking in: Our Fellowship'. It was counter-intuitive to do this at a time when we were not able to meet physically. However, we felt there was great benefit in thinking through what the fellowship of the church really meant when so many of the occasions we normally experience fellowship were no longer possible. True Christian fellowship means much more than coffee at the back of a church building after a service! In many ways it was helpful to have coffee, the building and the normal service all taken away to experience a deeper meaning of fellowship.

July saw more change... Church buildings were permitted to re-open for public worship. We made the decision to open as soon as possible, beginning with just a morning service and then shortly afterwards adding an evening service. We raised up a team of wonderful stewards who had a difficult balance to strike between welcoming the congregation warmly and seating them safely. We had to learn how to lead and take part in socially distanced worship. It was so strange and often alienating to begin with. However, it was wonderful for some of us to be back in the building at last. Undoubtedly one of the hardest things has been not being able to sing, although we have been incredibly grateful to the musicians and singers who have led us so well from the front.

During the Autumn we continued, once again, with our plan to preach on the remaining area of our vision, 'Looking up: Our worship'. We had a short series, 'Worship in 3D', thinking about worship as a discipline, a delight and a destination. This concluded with a celebration of Holy Communion, the first time on a Sunday in 9 months.

And then we hit the November lockdown... Fortunately this coincided with our plans to begin livestreaming our services. While it was painful for us all to experience another lockdown, it gave the new livestream team a chance to practice without a congregation in place – and it gave us a new urgency to livestream successfully, as everyone was depending on it. Those early livestream services were both terrifying and exhilarating for everyone

involved in running them. It has been incredible to watch the Livestream team (working closely with the PA and Projection teams) grow in competence and in number. Their work has been invaluable, and was a hugely encouraging improvement to the format of our online services just when we needed a boost. They also enabled us to successfully livestream all of our outreach Christmas services, which was especially important following the surge in Covid numbers and the new restrictions over Christmas. Our wonderful Christmas by Candlelight service has been watched nearly 1½ thousand times – the most watched of all our services since we began.

The New Year brought a new lockdown and livestreaming continued without an onsite congregation. Since March we have been back in the building, with a now familiar mix of onsite and online congregations. Of course, we are longing for the time when all restrictions are finally lifted and we are all able to be in one physical place. Both socially distanced and online worship leave a lot to be desired! However, we anticipate that our Sunday livestream will continue even when all restrictions have gone. It is a wonderful way of connecting with those who are not able, or not ready to come into a church building yet. It has great potential for outreach and mission.

One final, vital way that Sunday worship has continued alongside all of the above has been the weekly postal packs which have been produced for those without access to the internet. Each pack has contained a service sheet and printed sermon, plus often a newsletter and a prayer card. Every week, since 22 March 2020 around 30-40 packs have gone out from the church office, many of them hand delivered. They have been a spiritual lifeline for many older members of our congregation, and we have received regular phone calls telling us the difference this old-fashioned technology (paper and ink!) has made to lockdown.

I deliberately haven't mentioned any names in this summary of the last year under Covid. There are simply too many to mention. Again and again, different members of our church family have offered their time, their equipment and their skills (or been willing to learn completely new skills). We are so grateful to everyone. And, above all, we are grateful to God, for his provision and his guidance, as he has led us through this last year. He alone is worthy of our worship.

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith... let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together.” Hebrews 10:19-25

Will Hunter Smart

Children's Ministry

STNICKIDS (ages 0–10)

The past year has been challenging and has sadly meant that the Sparklers, Comets and All Stars have not been able to meet safely onsite for a session at all. This includes the newly launched Hidden Treasures group too. However, the year has given us new opportunities, tools and skills to reach out and teach the children about Jesus.

A combination of pre-recorded videos, activity packs with resources and Zoom has meant that I and the team have remained connected with the children, the children have been

connected with each other and the fantastic and faithful All Star leader and helper team have remained connected too.

The leaders have taken part in the videos and Zoom by giving little talks, leading a craft activity and leading prayer. Some of the older Pathfinders and Firm have helped too.

The children have also taken turns leading games, craft, memory verses and prayer on video and during the Zoom sessions. They have enjoyed seeing each other on screen – possibly more than seeing their leaders!! It has been fantastic to see how gifted the children are – much of this would not have been obvious if we had continued on site.

The videos, packs and Zoom sessions have tried to cater for 0-10s rather than just 5-10s throughout the various lockdowns and restrictions and especially since November in the absence of a children's minister for the younger age group. This has not been wholly successful due to the wide age range but has kept families in the loop. There is currently a separate Zoom group for the older All Stars as well as the Sunday Breakfast Club for all the 0-10s.

By and large the content has linked with the teaching in church so families can talk together about the same Bible passage and what it means for them.

Holiday Club managed to take place online using pre-recorded videos. Thanks To Beth Mawdesley and Josh Philip for doing such a great job hosting the videos. We set up the St Nics Search and Rescue Mission. We had over 80 children sign up and collect resource packs to enable them to engage with the videos and do activities linked to the theme. Thank you to the team who put together the resource packs whilst remaining socially distanced – not an easy task. Obviously, the Club was not the same online, with very little contact possible with new families and very little opportunity for the wider church family to be involved.

There has been much to plan, tweak and change completely over the past year. Going forward we hope to be back onsite safely by the Summer with the children playing a much more active role in leading different parts of the All Star sessions.

Finally, I would like to thank the parents for all their support and encouragement over the last year – they have filmed/directed videos, provided craft materials, fed back as to what was and wasn't working and all the while home-schooling and doing their own jobs. And, of course, thank you for your amazing kids. It has been fun, despite the restrictions, teaching and nurturing their faith.

Caroline Chichester

Youth Ministry (ages 11-14)

TGI

Sadly, the government restrictions over the past year have meant that the style and structure of TGI had no similar model which could run for the young people. Without the craft and energetic games that formed a large aspect to the Friday evenings, the sessions would have become something very unappealing to the majority of those who previously attended. We produced four short video clips over the year to keep some level of connection with the children and families.

Pathfinders

We have kept Pathfinders running nearly every week of the year. The small and dedicated team provided a space for the 10-13's to grow in their knowledge and love of God. We have met online for most of the year and provided opportunities for the young people to express what they are experiencing and receive prayer from one another and from leaders. Meeting online has had its challenges, with a few of the young people finding it hard to connect in this way. Whenever the government guidance has allowed onsite sessions, we ran onsite. Deciding to do this has been good for the group.

We have started using the New City Catechism, that contain 52 questions and answers to help understand the core doctrines of the Christian faith. The new material has been fruitful both in the sessions and at home, with some parents regularly taking time to disciple their children using the questions and answers. We have around 12 Pathfinders online each week, with cards dropped to those who find it hard to connect online.

Youth Ministry (ages 14–18)

The Firm

The Firm sessions have not dropped in regularity despite all that the past year has held. As with Pathfinders, the small and dedicated team provide a space for the young people to grow in their knowledge and love of God. We have met mostly online, but whenever the government guidance has allowed onsite sessions, we have met onsite which has been good for the group. The 14-18's have been meeting in two separate groups, numbering around 15 in total.

Meeting online has been hard for all the youth, but the older Firm group have felt this most acutely. Some alterations in the structure and content of their sessions have helped ease this. Several of the youth have been involved in church services at different points in the year, these include serving in the band, Bible reading, prayers and audio/visuals.

Edward Carthy

St Nicolas Church Choir

This last year the choir has only managed to meet in person just prior to Christmas, with a few Fridays possible in the run up to the *Christmas by Candlelight* carol service. Other than that, we have been reliant on technology, with regular choir practice videos to use at home, and Friday night get-togethers on Zoom to maintain the social aspect, together with lovely choir newsletters produced by Lesley Kerry. Adapting to the new challenges thrown up by the pandemic, several of us have been able to record ourselves singing various anthems and songs, and Nic and Sarah have learnt how to put these together into videos for use in services! However, we are all looking forward to the time when we can resume singing in church and practising together, and we hope and pray that that time may not be too much longer.

When we do restart, we welcome anyone who sings and has a love of choral singing to join us - please do contact me, or just turn up on a Friday evening during term time, if this is you!

Nic Cope

Church Flowers

Due to the restrictions over the past year, we have not arranged fresh flowers in church. Instead, we have created some seasonal artificial flower arrangements to add colour and hopefully lift people's spirits when they have been able to come into the church building, or when watching services online. With this in mind, it was also agreed to keep flowers in church over Lent.

Maria Muir & Judith Crockford

Prayer

The apostle Paul encourages the church at Ephesus to pray "on all occasions" and "with all kinds of prayers and requests" and to "always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." That's a lot of 'all's! Clearly a healthy church is one that keeps praying.

Of course, as with every area of church life, Covid has had a significant impact on our prayer life at St Nics. On the one hand it has cut down the particular opportunities we have had for us to pray together. For much of the year we haven't been able to gather physically together; it has been difficult to run some of the more creative onsite prayer events and activities that we have sometimes had; and it has been impossible to offer prayer ministry after our services. On the other hand, Covid has been a huge spur to pray. If we don't pray together (and for one another) in a season like this one, we never will! Early on, following the first lockdown, we decided to run our Encounter prayer meeting weekly, over Zoom. Initially, we thought we would do this only for the summer term. However, it's not yet felt right to return to monthly - so we're still going weekly. Initially attendance at these Zoom prayer meetings was high. Of course, over the months, attendance has dropped, especially from those who have spent all their working days in online meetings. Nevertheless, we have a committed core who have kept going. Thank you! We've also tried to have particular times of focused prayer: during Holy Week 2020 we produced a 'Journeying with Jesus' prayer guide, and we did the same for Thy Kingdom Come. We also ran onsite 'Night prayer' evenings for Lent 2021. For those who have been isolating or without access to the internet, Mandy Maskell has sent out weekly resources, including the most beautiful prayer cards, alongside the printed services. The wall in Mandy's office is decorated with each of these cards - they make a wonderful display and a reminder of one way in which we have had to adapt to pray during these challenging months.

Prayer is one of our seven goals in our vision. We have committed ourselves to 'Encourage and enable everyone in the church family to connect with our corporate prayer life, at different times and in different ways'. In some ways, the last year of Covid has helped us to think differently and to adapt in our corporate prayer life. However, at the same time it has been hard to make obvious progress with this goal. There is still much work to do. May God guide us and grow us so that increasingly we are a church that prays on *all* occasions with *all* kinds of prayers for *all* the Lord's people.

Will Hunter Smart

Stewardship

I'm sure you would agree, 2020 was an extraordinary year due to Covid, which impacted all walks of our life including the life of the church. Due to lockdown during most of the year,

there were challenges with the financial aspects of the church. A presentation of end of year financial position by our Treasurer during the church services in Oct/Nov 2020, had a significant positive impact on the total income for 2020 and helped us to close the year strongly. Our budget for 2020 was £278,883. A stewardship deficit of ~£10K at end of Q3 reduced to less than £3K by end of Q4, thereby closing the year at £275,922. We also received substantial one-off donations amounting to £24K in Q4. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, we met our stewardship budget successfully.

The end of year appeal also brought forth a number of new stewardships and increased contributions resulting in a healthy budget forecast for 2021. However, as we are still dealing with Covid and the uncertainty surrounding it, this could impact our performance against the stewardship budget forecast for the year. Therefore, I would urge your continued support.

Even though the church buildings were closed for the majority of the year, the church did really well to meet online and continued to develop our ministry areas, specifically youth and children's ministry, building a strong foundation of Christian faith for our younger generation.

If you have any questions related to giving or wish to make any changes, please reach out to: 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 Sunday services stewardship, hospitality & worship teams, children & 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 a blessing to Newbury.

Shalini Philip, Stewardship Secretary

FELLOWSHIP (Looking In)

Men@St Nics

Last year, we said that our ministry revolved around fried breakfasts! This has remained the case even during this very strange year. We have continued to meet although breakfast has been of our own making and, of course, virtual. Muesli all round then!

With heartfelt thanks to our speakers, we held three breakfasts: Richard Littledale on bereavement; Paul Fountain on mission; and Joanna Lazarus' uncle, Reverend Mathansingh Leo Edward speaking live from India on his experience of following Christ.

Away from the breakfasts, the bedrock of the ministry remains our DNA groups, where 3-5 men meet regularly to encourage (and challenge) each other in their walk with Christ. As ever you can join our mailing list or WhatsApp group via the church office or please talk to me – especially if you want to know more about DNA groups!

My thanks go to all those involved in the ministry – too many to mention but you know who you are!

Mathansingh sends his best wishes to all the brothers and sisters of St Nicolas.

Jim Lupton

Pastoral Care

Team: Joy Mawdesley, Sharon Coward, Sue Elliott, Rosemary Freeman & Janet Price.

The Pastoral Care Team has had a year of challenge. We know that members of St Nics have been dealing with problems brought about by the pandemic and the measures to contain it as well as other issues and events. We would have liked to be doing what we always do – meeting up with people at home or wherever they are, offering help with transport etc - but of course we have come up against Covid restrictions. Our contacts have therefore had to be through activities such as telephone conversations, getting emergency provisions or, when allowed, meeting people outdoors – and we have kept in touch with a good number of people in these ways. We trust in the goodness of God at this time and look forward to soon being able to be more closely involved with His people.

As always to make us aware of anywhere we can help please do contact us through the church office or the pastoral care line.

Janet Price

Small Groups

One of the goals in Our Vision for 2019-2021 states that we wish to: ‘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.’ Just six months into this goal being formulated, the country went into lockdown and small groups were not able to meet in the usual way. I don’t think that anyone dreamed it would still be the case over a year on.

Being part of a small group has been a really important lifeline for many over the past year. We continue to have 14 active small groups, most of which soon adapted to new ways of meeting up, using WhatsApp and Zoom to continue. Those that couldn’t cope with the technology have stayed in touch in other ways. Many of the groups have continued to meet in their weekly or fortnightly patterns and the groups have been an essential way of keeping connections with each other, offering support and care and enabling ongoing growth as Christians. A small number of people continue to meet in prayer triplets or DNA groups.

Over the past year there have been some changes in the groups – Val and Pete Hanson stepped down from leading their group last April and Tim Comer has led the group since. Val and Pete left Newbury in the Summer after many years of service to St Nics in many different ways, and we are grateful to them for their contribution to the life of the small group ministry. Anthony Rendall and his family left Newbury in August, again, we are thankful for his involvement in this way.

Two new groups have started over the past year. Joyce Zealey began a group via Zoom last Spring and Hattie and Ben Norman are involved in running a group for the Year 13 students, and any on gap years, to study the Bible together and to help them to think about what it means to be a Christian at university.

It must be said that the past year has been a very challenging time for our small groups. Many have found it too hard to try to engage with each other via Zoom, others have found it one thing too many after a working day spent on Zoom or a day of home schooling. For the small group leaders it has been a tough job trying to keep people connected and to lead bible studies online week by week. Zoom is a great way of seeing each other and being able to

maintain relationships, but it is not as good as meeting in person, nor is it an easy way for new people to join groups.

There are 26 different people in the life of St Nics who are involved in leading small groups. They have kept on leading their groups in new ways, while at the same time having to adjust to what lockdown has meant for their own lives and that of their families. We are so thankful to them and to God for all that they have done to support so many people in day-to-day life, in growing in faith and in prayer.

As with other areas of church life, the short-term challenge is, as restrictions ease, to know how to progress towards meeting in person again. One group has already been able to do this by meeting outside and in a group of six. We wait to see the full impact of the last year on our small groups and, although it may be that we have not been able to progress our vision goal in this area as we had planned, nevertheless we remain confident that God, who began this good work in us, will carry it on to completion.

Do let me know if you would like to be part of a small group in the coming year.

Joy Mawdesley

Women@St Nics

Team: Joy Mawdesley, Ellen Hunter Smart, Viv Staunton, Joyce Zealey, Mandy Winter, Sue Armstrong-Follows (to Oct 2020), Gemma Gaskin (to Dec 2020), Kate Howarth, Thelma Ambler.

We had just held our “Pop Up Choir” event, enjoyed by 50 women, when lockdown struck. This was an inspiring afternoon with Rachel Staunton, a professional choir conductor and Artistic Director of The London Youth Choir. A dynamic singing session, with a mixed repertoire which was both fun and challenging, ended in a ‘mini’ concert to invited guests. It was a great start to our year’s programme.

As our new world was revealed we looked to new ways of doing things. Sadly, we said goodbye to Sue Armstrong-Follows who had been involved in the Women’s Ministry for so many years and we thank her so much for all she has done and for all her creative skills that she has shared with us.

We resumed the Women’s Breakfast on Zoom in October with Jackie Fountain as our speaker, enabling people to ‘meet’ her and hear her story. It was wonderful to hear what a broad base of skills and experience she brings to St Nics. Into 2021, the breakfasts developed into whole church events. Kate and Phil Howarth told their fascinating story in February and Sam Mullender, hers, in March.

As restrictions continued, we chose to reshape ourselves to embrace all of the church family again. Our popular ‘Create for Christmas’ event morphed into a church wide activity with 300 Advent Candle making packs and a video showing how to make them up. St Marys, Speen joined in taking 50, and adapting the idea by making up some of the candles before distributing them, so that older church members could enjoy them too.

We put together 3 Easter crafts in packs with an ‘on-line’ evening and demonstration for Foundations. Having moved from weekly Tuesday morning Bible Study meetings to smaller

evening Zoom sessions many of the women hadn't seen each other for a long time so it was really great to get everyone together.

We finished our year with the Easter Herb Garden which St Mary's and CAP (Christians Against Poverty) joined in. People took gardens for neighbours, for house groups and as an evangelistic tool to friends. It was a fantastic team effort pulling all the elements together.

Reshaping ourselves has been rewarding, bringing people together, finding new and interesting ways to keep us connected. And there are more new initiatives to come ...

Joy Mawdesley & Vivien Staunton

MISSION (Looking Out)

Alpha

This Spring we have been running an Alpha Course at St Nics. For the first time, due to Covid circumstances, this has been an online Alpha. In spite of being on Zoom, there have been some great conversations and discussions. One of the advantages of being online is that geography was not a limit. We were joined by one couple from Scotland. During the course we have seen one person coming to faith, and others from all different places on their faith journey have been encouraged and challenged and have grown in their faith.

The course was originally planned to last for 6 weeks, but almost all the participants were keen to carry on for a bit longer, so we are currently doing 4 extra weeks. It has been good to see God at work, and we are looking forward to the next time we run Alpha.

Jackie Fountain

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

During this unusual year we managed to celebrate three baptisms and three thanksgivings for the gift of a child at St Nics. It has been wonderful to welcome these children into the family of the church although most of them had to be private events due to the covid-19 restrictions on gatherings.

We also celebrated 2 weddings this year, including Beth Hutchins & George Winterbourne. Beth was a member of the Firm at St Nics. Both couples had at least one date postponed but they had beautiful, if somewhat smaller, celebrations eventually.

It may be a surprise to know that we have only had 4 funeral services at St Nicolas Church this year. Most of the many funerals arranged have been for West Berkshire Crematorium over the coming months, in light of the pandemic. As in past years, we have supported all these families through their bereavement. We are expecting to hold several Thanksgiving Services in the coming year once the government guidelines are lifted.

Many, many thanks to all those who helped to make these services go well, despite very different and difficult circumstances.

Libby Lake & Mandy Maskell

Bookings

The church and hall have been almost empty over the past 12 months due to the current pandemic. We are very grateful to The YUME Project, who have been able to hire our large hall on Wednesdays and Fridays since October 2020, due to the Government enabling them

to continue their extremely vital support work within the community. Although it will take several months before we are able to run at full capacity again across both of our buildings, we do hope that the hall will be serving more of the church ministries and local community very soon.

Mandy Maskell

CAP Debt Centre Newbury

The Newbury CAP Debt Centre has been running for nearly two years now, but these have been no ordinary two years! Shortly after Lisa John was appointed as the CAP Debt Centre Manager for Newbury, CAP Head Office announced a 6-month halt to new clients due to a backlog of work at the Head Office. However, as a new Debt Centre we were allowed to see a limited number of new clients. This slowdown of clients thankfully came to an end at the beginning of 2020 and so we could gear up for more clients ... or so we thought. Then came Covid with all its restrictions which has been a challenge for the work of CAP debt support as it has meant the work has to be done over the phone. Normally, many hours are spent at the client's home discussing their situation and literally hunting down the paperwork.

Lisa has managed to keep a cool head with determination and passion to help those in need throughout this period in the face of these immense challenges.

A few key facts for those who like numbers:

Total family units supported to date: 22 (10 year 1, 12 year 2)

Total number of people supported to date: 34 adults and 28 children

Families who have progressed to the budget setting phase: 6

Clients responding positively to the gospel: 1

It is much harder to make progress and build relationships with our clients, but we have been able to get some clients through to a debt solution and really make big steps to debt freedom. Not forgetting that we have prayed with each and every one of our clients at least once, and most of them multiple times. We have also talked about God, faith, Jesus, Christianity, the Trinity(!), amongst other things to a number of clients. It is such a privilege.

Our links to referrers has increased and we are very blessed to have such an active and supportive environment around us in the local area. We have regular contact with West Berkshire Foodbank, West Berkshire Community Baby Bank, Sovereign Housing, local Social Prescribers, Social Workers, Children's centres and many others all of whom refer their clients to us. There are also a number of initiatives starting in the town including a community café and community larder which will benefit our clients but will also provide us with a connection to others who need our support. We are liaising with these organisations in how best we can work with them to support those who need our help.

Client bookings are down nationally, and we have appointment availability some months, but we continue to work hard to publicise to local media, through church social media and through referrers and contacts.

Please pray for our clients and future clients, for connection, for Jesus to be part of their lives and for Jesus to be front and centre of our centre.

Steve Wolak

Churchyard Garden

We only took a short break at the beginning of the season from the garden, enabling us to keep on top of it throughout. With no deadlines for 'Newbury in Bloom' and 'Britain in Bloom' we were able to take time to think about how we might do things differently going forward. We will be planting more bee-friendly perennials and fewer annuals and grassing over some smaller beds and developing others. As so many things had changed, the team appreciated just being together.

Other people took the opportunity to use the garden differently. Two men serenaded us with their guitars on Wednesday mornings, enjoying being outside in the beautiful weather we had in April and May. A young girl from the bank, working less hours, offered to help and we taught her about gardening. She appreciated the outdoor space with us in her break times. A bible study group enjoyed meeting up outside as their usual venue, Caffè Nero, was closed and many people just stopped for a chat.

We look forward to another season, introducing some new planting, involving more community members alongside building the garden team. Why not join us?

Vivien Staunton, Belinda Bowrey & Rosemary McDonald

Ecogroup

After a break at the start of the Covid-19 outbreak, the ecogroup resumed monthly meetings online. Although not as proactive as we'd have liked to be, we have run Autumn and Spring photo campaigns to encourage church members to open their eyes to the beauty of God's creation and capture that on camera to share with the church family. It has been lovely to see some of these photos adorning the church notice board too. We are currently exploring the possibility of 'Wild Walks': local walks captured on paper both as a resource for individuals to follow and possibly something to do as a church family, again with the aim of facilitating connection with God through the awesome nature of His creation.

We have established an online presence through the church Facebook group, posting ecofacts and, throughout lent, weekly challenges to improve our own sustainability through small lifestyle changes. This has linked in to the Creation Care resource, which we encouraged members of the church family to undertake to get an idea of their own household sustainability, plus hopefully find inspiration on how to improve it!! Nearly 20 households took part, with around 10 achieving bronze awards: a big congratulations to the Comers, Knight, Silver Birch, 60WS, Meldrum, South, Hawkey, Lancaster, Houghton and McDonald households for that achievement! Sign up is at creationcare.org.uk/members/

As the country moves back out of lockdown, we are starting to plan more participatory and in person activities that we can do as a church, as well as explore ways to build greater connection with community environmental activities. We have just reached out to St Mary's, Speen, in the hope of expanding the group to include representatives from there and are excited about working across the two churches. As we move through the spring and towards the summer, we are very much looking forward to the opportunities this year might bring.

Samantha Mullender

Hidden Treasures

Hidden Treasures met just four times before lockdown meant we had to close. The four meetings we had were extremely well received – the atmosphere was fantastic. People loved being in the church building, really appreciated the variety of activities available and the warm welcome they received.

We didn't try to create an online version but put the whole thing on ice. We are really looking forward to rebuilding the team and reopening as soon as restrictions allow, and inviting little ones and their parents and carers back into St Nics to find fun, friendship and faith.

Ellen Hunter Smart

Meet Monday

Meet Monday had held just six meetings when the first lockdown was imposed. We did our best to maintain contact with Meet Monday Friends but it was difficult because, understandably, care staff and family members were protective. We delivered greetings cards and activity sheets but it is hard to find suitable material for adults with learning disabilities because some cannot read and some dislike colouring, but they are not children.

Last summer, when it became apparent that restrictions would continue, the team decided to resume Meet Monday but to run it on Zoom. There is joy and laughter as we attempt singing, prayer, drama and Bible teaching within the limitations of Zoom. We generally number 4-6 people (plus team) including one new lady; four more hope to re-join when we can meet in person. We are praying for growth but the priority has been to support Meet Monday Friends through these difficult times.

We thank God for the brilliant, gifted and enthusiastic team that shows dedication and perseverance, meeting each month via Zoom to plan and pray for the forthcoming meeting. We long to welcome people, face to face before too long, and give everyone the opportunity to know Jesus as their Saviour and Friend, and to take their place in the Church.

Meet Monday and St Nics are 'Friends with Count Everyone In'.

Christine Winmill

Outreach Committee

(See Tables 1 & 2 on pages 21 & 22)

Team: Rachel Shepherd (chair), Lesley Park (secretary), Pam McKellen, Vivien Staunton and Jane Sutton.

In March 2020, we had an inspiring evening of personal testimonies from a St Nics team who had recently been to Uganda to help lead the Biojemms children's camp in Kampala, and from Andy & Sheila Moore who had recently visited Miriam Dean Fund projects in Africa. (Over 40 members of the congregation met in the hall to share the evening – it was a joyous occasion!)

Since then, the Committee have been meeting online to pray and keep in touch with our Mission Partners. All our partners have experienced significant challenges this year, through changing economics, restrictions on meeting, ministry and travel and, in some cases, the challenge of responding to increased demands from the local community for basic supplies of aid and food. They have experienced the stormy times of covid in their respective contexts.

What can we be especially thankful for?

- The privilege of sharing the wonderful generosity of St Nicolas Church with our Mission Partners. The Church Outreach budget in 2020 was £35,573. We allocated this to the organisations listed in the tables below, and we are very grateful for the faithful prayers of the congregation for all these partners and organisations.
- The congregation's generous donations at Harvest – we were able to share £8,877.41 between Miriam Dean Fund, Biojemss and Lesotho. The community development project in Nairobi supported by Miriam Dean Fund purchased an incubator for chickens. This has been a great blessing to the community. Biojemss are developing a piggery on their recently purchased land and planting crops to help support local vulnerable families. And the church in Lesotho planted crops to help church members and local families during the covid pandemic.
- The new relationship we developed as a Church with Home Start West Berkshire over Christmas. In addition to Christmas donations, which raised over £2,000, we look forward to exploring other ways to get involved with Home Start in the months ahead, as they reach out to local families in difficult times.
- The opportunity to welcome Mark & Ruth back among us, having returned from their service overseas. They would greatly value our prayers for their future.
- Helping two younger members of the church to step out into Christian outreach:
 - * Bethany Wolak has been volunteering with Rock UK, a Christian charity that provides adventure holidays for school children, though unfortunately they had to close temporarily due to the pandemic.
 - * Tom Mawdesley started as a ministry apprentice at St Ebbe's Church in Oxford.
- God's faithfulness in multiplying all that we offer to Him.

The following tables show our donations in 2020 compared with 2019. Table 1 (page 21) shows the regular donations to our Mission Partners and Table 2 (page 22) shows 'one-off' donations over the year. With the agreement of the Finance Committee, £873 was carried over from 2020 to the 2021 budget as we felt we would be more able to assess specific needs in 2021. For example, we have recently given an emergency donation to Hope for Africa Church, Lesotho, to help Pastor Edward respond to those in great distress in the area. The Outreach budget for 2021 is £37,836.

Continues on page 22

Table 1

Outreach Giving for 2020 compared with 2019		
	2020	2019
Mission Partners in Worldwide Ministry		
Mark and Ruth (£1000 per quarter)	4,000	4,000
Biojemmss (Uganda) – Siân’s Role	3,000	2,000
Friends of Hope for Africa Missions, Lesotho		5,000
Miriam Dean Fund (Trustees: Sheila & Andy Moore)	2,000	1,000
Our Town		
COINS	10,000	10,000
Shoemakers	1,500	1,000
Bus of Hope	1,000	1,000
YMCA	5,000	4,000
Newbury Street Pastors	1,000	1,000
Count Everyone In (Pete & Christine Winmill)	2,500	2,000
Rock UK/Bethany Wolak	750	
Our World - Outreach Organisations		
Bible Society, Egypt (via Newbury Bible Society)	1,000	1,000
SAT 7	1,000	1,000
Scripture Union St Petersburg	500	500
One-off Donations and Miscellaneous Expenses		
See table 2	2,323	4,643
Total	35,573	38,143

Table 2

Outreach Giving for 2020 compared with 2019 - one-off donations and miscellaneous expenses		
	2020	2019
Mark and Ruth (resettlement gift in UK)	200	
Tom Mawdesley	500	
SAT7 (Beirut Appeal)	250	
Embrace Christmas Appeal (Syrian refugees)	500	
Lindy Hope (resettlement donation)		500
YMCA Newbury		1000
Calendars for Mission Partners		21
Christian Aid (Hurricane Idai appeal)		500
Rock UK – Bethany Wolak		500
Miriam Dean Fund		400
Mark (towards legal expenses)		400
Embrace the Middle East (Gaza Appeal)		400
Church Pastoral Aid Society		400
Biojemmss (Siân Davies)		400
CTNA for Christmas Dinners		100
Bethany Wolak (Christmas present)		22
Amount Remaining	873	0
Total	2,323	4,643

Continued from page 20

Please continue to pray for our Mission Partners and the organisations we support, especially in these challenging times. Termly prayer letters with the latest from all our Mission Partners are available on the Church website under the ‘Get involved’ menu, or from the Church Office. February’s prayer letter is available [here](#).

If you have suggestions of how as a Church we can be praying for and supporting outreach work more, or if you’d like to find out about serving on the Committee, we’d be pleased to hear from you. And we love to hear when anyone in the congregation is getting involved in mission locally or overseas, so we can see how best we can support!

On behalf of our Mission Partners and all the organisations we support – a sincere thank you.

Lesley Park, Secretary

St Nicolas School

When I look back on last year's report, it seems to be a world away from the situation we now find ourselves in. Over the last year, the world has changed immeasurably and at St Nicolas School, we have remained open throughout, providing work both in school and remotely to children throughout the pandemic. Across the year, there have been many pockets of hope – our Year 6 children returning to school on 1st June, all the children returning in September, some school trips and sports activities that were able to take place and our sharing assemblies, but there is no doubt that this has been a difficult year for us all.

Despite all of this, our children and staff have remained resilient and if anything the school has become stronger over the past year. We have tried to make sure our school community is kept informed of any changes and have done our best to provide high quality remote learning, whilst keeping the provision strong for those children of key workers and more vulnerable children who have been in school.

Above all, I believe that the school has provided a high level of pastoral support to the community, through foodbank collections which have been very much appreciated; our collective worship which has been posted online each week and which has enabled us to bring our school community together; our teachers making phone calls and emails to individual parents and children to check on their wellbeing and our support staff providing emotional support to children in school.

Overall, the school remains a strong place and our motto, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself," has never felt as appropriate as it has done this year.

Keith Harvey, Executive Head

Town Team

Our usual activities were curtailed in 2020 so we focussed on the West Berkshire Community Hospital Therapy Garden where we were enthusiastically welcomed back after the first lockdown. We knew we couldn't leave the garden for long, especially after April and May when the sun shone every day, and everything was springing into life. We returned to celebrate the good news that we, as part of a bigger team volunteering in hospitals across West Berkshire, had been awarded the Queen's Award for Volunteering.

The garden is a vital space for patients and their visitors and hospital staff. It is a place to relax and recharge, especially this year. And we all enjoyed being back together as a team, bringing something unique and positive to the staff at this difficult time.

We ended our gardening season on a high note too, winning the title West Berkshire Community Group of the Year. A worthwhile season all round.

Vivien Staunton & Andy Moore, Co-leaders