



St Nicolas
NEWBURY
Being Good News. Bringing Good News.



Photo: Chris Reeves

2022-2023
Report of Parish Activities

For Presentation at the
Annual Parochial Church Meeting
On Tuesday 25 April 2023

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 activity. 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, 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.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

With every blessing

Will Hunter Smart

2. Churchwardens’ Report

What a wonderful change to be able to write a report about the year and not have to keep mentioning Covid! As we write in March, spring has sprung and St Nic’s is fully in bloom, not just with the daffodils bringing the churchyard to life, but with brimful church services and plenty of activities serving the congregation and the community. We praise God for His provision for us and for bringing us through a challenging period and into a time of abundance, despite all the doom and gloom around us.

One of the highlights has been getting our welcome and integration process in much better order, which has included Welcome training breakfasts and running our first Sunday Lunch

at Home event for many years. The Alpha Course went very well, with participants appreciating being able to meet in person and some making first time commitments to faith and becoming part of the church community. At Easter we welcomed the Lamps Theatre Company who put on a brilliant production of The Passion. We also gave a big farewell to Nic Cope as our choir master and welcomed Hannah Maskell to fill his shoes, but with a focus on occasional big services rather than more regular contributions.

The summer saw some lighthearted events including the Corn Exchange dominoes tumbling right through the nave of the church building, a Jubilee picnic party, ladies' pudding parties, men's and ladies' breakfasts, as well as the more serious and wonderful appointment of Clare Caskie as the new Youth Minister. Meanwhile the children's work was growing healthily and Hidden Treasures, our group for parents and toddlers, was bursting at the seams!

In the autumn the mood changed abruptly with the death of Her Majesty the Queen. We managed to open and man the church that evening and for the next couple of weekends, so that people could find somewhere to direct their grief and a space to pray. This, and the showing of the funeral in the church building, was much appreciated by those who came and who might otherwise have been grieving alone.

One of the main highlights of the year for many of us was the eight-week prayer course, which was brilliantly led by Peter and Liesl Bradley, using the Pete Greig materials, followed by the beautiful and inspiring 24/7 prayer room in the chancel and lady chapel in November. It was good to see our prayer life, another of our vision goals, highlighted in this way, as well as through the teaching for this term.

The autumn also included a men's weekend away with former Associate Rector, Ed Hobbs, as the speaker. The church was open again for the Hallowe'en weekend so that we could be light in the darkness, and many children from outside the church community were welcomed to the Light Party for the same reason. Another way of Being Good News to Newbury was by starting up a Warm Hub on a Thursday afternoon. A willing group of volunteers was quickly established to run this, and townsfolk have found a warm welcome and community, as well as a place to keep physically warm, in the light of the huge increase in energy prices and cost of living.

Christmas celebrations started early with the Count Everyone In carol service and were followed by many other services, including the crib and carol services, in order to make celebrating the Good News of Jesus' arrival on earth as accessible to as many people as possible. It was wonderful to see the church so full on these occasions, while many others could still follow from home via the livestream.

2023 has begun with a focus on Sex and Sexuality as the General Synod has been meeting to discuss how it addresses same sex relationships. For us at St Nic's it led to an excellent teaching series on this topic at the six service, which has been downloaded and listened to probably more than any other teaching at St Nic's, followed by useful discussions in many homegroups. It has been invaluable to many of us to have clear leadership on such sensitive issues which affect us all.

Any report of the year is not complete without a reminder of those who have left us to move onto glory. We remember Pat Cowton, Gill Lusby Taylor, Noah Hall, Juliet Lake, Mary Livesey, Lillian Butler and Dawn Aldridge. We continue to remember their families as they mourn. We are privileged to have known these precious brothers and sisters and thank God for bringing them into our lives and fellowship.

We are enormously grateful to Will, Joy and Jackie for their clear, biblical teaching throughout the year on so many different subjects, and indeed for the way they have led, guided and pastored us as a church and as individuals on our journeys, whatever we have been going through. We have also been blessed to have Marcia Wadham back with us for much of the year, not through her choice, but she has blessed us with her teaching and service nonetheless. We have just said goodbye to her and James as she was recently ordained at St Lawrence's, Hungerford. The rest of the staff team, too, has also had to work increasingly hard as the church has kept growing and the number of people using our facilities has increased. They have kept smiling despite the challenges of keeping everything shipshape and running smoothly, and we extend our heartfelt gratitude to them.

Of course, the church wouldn't be a church at all if it weren't for the members, many of whom serve faithfully and unseen, week after week to be and bring good news to Newbury. In an attempt to be brief, I will only mention two who literally spend hours, if not days, each week to ensure our finances are in control and that everyone is paid: Sheila Moore and James Lancaster, where would we be without you? The rest of you who volunteer so faithfully in so many different ways know who you are, and the Lord sees and will reward you in heaven if not before! But thank you from the churchwardens, whose load you also lighten considerably. May the Lord bless you!

Tania Wolak and Richard Coward

3. Deanery Synod

Emerging out of the pandemic, each Parish was starting up again, all with subtly different challenges but most notably a lack of volunteers and a lack of cash. However, the lockdown had shown the value of exploiting online capabilities. Nonetheless, it was clear that church leaders were tired and overloaded; particularly in the rural parts of the Deanery, it was difficult to find clergy to cover even normal absence, still less when vacancies or sickness occurred. The challenge of filling clergy vacancies continues and consequently a good few unsettled congregations. All parishes have been involved in the conversations about Living in Love and Faith which has helped inform the national debate. The latest call satisfies no one, which again is unsettling.

However, the sudden increase in fuel prices gave us an opportunity to help our neighbours and the 'warm places' initiative kicked off. In some places these can be seen to have a wider community benefit. Working in tandem with others and the local authorities we are now seeking to extend this concept in the rural areas. It is a very practical way to show faith in action. So, trying to hold this number of significantly diverse Churches together remains a challenge and now even more so as we move forward. This is a situation not unknown

biblically and perhaps given to keep us 'on our knees'. Let us pray for our next-door neighbours.

Mark Knight

4. Electoral Roll

At the time of printing there are 300 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 are either 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 well to any concerns raised.

This year we have responded to some concerns with advice from the Diocese Safeguarding Team. We developed a Procedure for Responding to Safeguarding Concerns and Allegations, which was approved by the PCC in November.

Every parish is expected to have an action plan for safeguarding and the Parish Dashboard system helps us to review our practices. In January the dashboard showed us that we have achieved most of the actions at Level 1 and we now have a new action plan to work towards Level 2. These actions include more training for staff and volunteers, developing some new procedures and implementing the final parts of the national Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance (2022). The PCC approved the new action plan in January.

Rebecca Bird, Parish Safeguarding Officer

6. Vision Review

The St Nicolas Vision document was launched in September 2019 and communicated to the church early in 2020 shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic. In the Autumn of 2021, we undertook the process of reviewing our, somewhat disrupted, progress with a view to considering where, and how we should concentrate our efforts in order to move forward. We agreed as a PCC that our vision document still accurately reflected our vision and our goals but considered that we had made more progress in some areas than others. We

decided to give special attention to four key areas and appoint a person to lead up the progress in each of these. Those appointed were:

- Peter Bradley – Corporate Prayer Life
- Tania Wolak – Welcome and Integration
- Will Hunter Smart – Worship Review
- Jonathan Dean – Church Building Development Plan

Progress has been made, but there remains further work to do in each of these areas. The progress made during the year and the progress required now in each of these areas is summarised here:

Corporate Prayer Life

As a church we placed a great emphasis on our prayer life through the Autumn of 2022 with a sermon series running alongside an 8 week 'Prayer Course' organised and fronted by Peter Bradley based on material from 24/7 prayer. The Prayer Course culminated in the church being open for a week, 24 hours per day, with the chancel and prayer chapel spaces wonderfully transformed into spaces that were imaginatively resourced to facilitate a great place to both talk to God, and importantly listen to Him. Attendance was really encouraging, and there were some wonderful times of coming together for corporate prayer during the week, and also plenty of space for individuals to pray and be open to God's leading.

Moving into 2023 we need to build on our progress to date and work imaginatively to make further progress and ensure that every member of St Nicolas feels that they can be fully involved in our corporate prayer life.

Welcome and Integration

Tania pulled together an active group which have made considerable progress in a number of areas. Two training breakfasts were organised to equip welcomers to give a more effective welcome, and a welcome desk is now manned every week to provide a contact point for people new to the church. This features 'Get Involved Cards' which are aimed at assisting newcomers to participate in the life of the church and helping them to be integrated into the community. The welcome area in church is much improved now, including the notice boards. Additionally, we have welcome flags and welcome postcards printed in different languages.

Meals together as a community have continued to be an important part of welcoming newcomers with two Sunday 'lunch at home' events being a successful addition to the Welcome Lunch, which attracted over 60 newcomers. Another new feature was a Chinese New Year celebration with refreshments after the morning service to help our growing Hong Kong community to feel a part of the church.

Looking forward, we need to establish a rhythm of welcome training events, Sunday lunches at home, Welcome Lunches, etc. to form a regular part of the church calendar and planning. The team hopes to further improve the look and feel of the inside of the church and look at the church events as a whole to help establish a pathway to faith, discipleship and belonging.

Worship Review

Some good progress has been made this year with the PCC taking considerable time to work with the Worship Review team, and consequently we now have a much clearer view about the direction which our sung worship is taking. This resulted in a commitment to a majority of services being band-led with choir-led worship being reserved for special occasions such as the major festivals.

The recruitment of someone to coordinate our sung worship is still pending, but we have been very blessed by the work done by our ministry apprentice, Beth Mawdesley, in organising the teams and also injecting new energy and introducing new songs into our worship. This very much remains under review but the new patterns, and particularly the festival choirs led up by Hannah Maskell, have been most encouraging.

Church Building Development Plan

During the past year considerable work was undertaken under Jonathan's leadership to establish the needs of users of the church, both the regular congregation and outside users. Additionally, there have been a number of visits to churches that have undertaken re-ordering projects in order to understand the approaches others have taken towards reconfiguring their church buildings. This has now placed us in a position where we have drawn up a draft 'statement of need'.

Our next step this year, is to move from a draft statement of need to a finalised document and appoint an architect to propose a number of outline plans that can be assessed to consider how our church building could be modified to more effectively facilitate our ministry.

Richard Coward

WORSHIP (Looking Up)

10am Service

One of our four priority vision goals at St Nic's is our worship goal. The specific goal reads:

Conduct a worship review, focusing on our Sunday services, to clarify direction and identify current and future needs (resources, leadership, staffing) so that we better enable corporate worship where we encounter God and connect with one another.

In the Spring of 2022, following consultation with worship team members, a worship Vision breakfast, and discussion at PCC, we concluded our worship review and produced a document summarising the results. The review included all our Sunday worship, not just the 10am service. However, it contained much that was very relevant to what we do together when we meet on Sunday mornings. In particular, four themes emerged that we want to see more of in all our services: *Expectation and Encounter; Freedom, Space and the Spirit; Creativity and Variety; Testimony and Participation* (including all ages).

Just because we have completed the worship review, does not mean that we have arrived! On the contrary, we now need to focus on implementation. I think we have made good

progress at the 10am service, but there is still some way to go. We are definitely starting from a good place though – we praise God for the *breadth* of our morning congregation (including so many different ages and nationalities), and the *size* of the congregation (including many who have joined in the last year). It's wonderful this year to have returned to 'pre-Covid' numbers at last.

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 at the back of church 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. Since Covid, The Six had been meeting in the church, but in January the decision was made to meet in the church hall during the winter months. During the summer months it had been great to meet in the church and be able to open the doors to welcome in people who were passing by, but the warmth and smaller space of the hall has been helpful during the winter months and has meant that more people have felt able to stay for refreshments after the service. We are looking to move back into the church again when the weather gets warmer.

The Firm (our youth group) started off the year coming into the service for the first 10 to 15 minutes and then heading over to their own groups, but since September it has been wonderful having them in to take part in the whole service.

During the year we have enjoyed having a variety of preachers and service leaders and also a few services where we have had people sharing their testimonies. We have also had services with prayer stations, and two worship services led by Windsong.

The Six has also been able to host services run by Count Everyone In, CTNA and the carol service. Just before Easter we had a service where we read through one of the gospels and shared communion together. That was very powerful.

One of the highlights of the year was Six in the Sticks at the Bradleys' house and garden. It was great to have a mixture of people from the morning and evening congregations with a barbeque, games and a service outside. A good time was had by all.

The Six is headed up by a planning team consisting of Rhodri Bowen, Elaine Canniffe, Rosemary McDonald, Ben and Hattie Norman, Tim Saunders, Pete Winmill, Jackie Fountain and Joy Mawdesley – 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.

Jackie Fountain

Thursday 10.30am Holy Communion

The Thursday Communion continues to be a thriving service. It usually attracts around 30 people of different ages for whom it has become an important part of the week. There is a real sense of community, aided by the Thursday coffee morning which acts as a great opportunity for conversation and connection after the service. We continue to be blessed by George Lancaster playing the piano at the start and end of the service, and during communion and by a number of readers who bring the gospel reading to us.

A big thank you to Pam McKellen and Janice Macdonald who have shared with Will, Jackie and me in the leading of these services over the past year. We are delighted to be welcoming Geoff Sowden to join us in taking this service in the coming months.

Joy Mawdesley

Benefice Choral Evensong

Following a break due to the Coronavirus pandemic, this beautiful and traditional service has become a firm feature of the worship offered in the benefice.

At 6.00pm on the first Sunday of each month, our visiting organist, Steve Bowey, and his choir drawn from several local churches lift the hearts and voices of all who attend. Since this form of worship is a rare feature of parish life in this area, we are attracting a growing number of attendees. Once upon a time, the choir outnumbered the congregation; now, it is about equally split!

Whilst the music feeds the soul, the excellent refreshments and fellowship after the service also play their part: so much so that people are reluctant to leave! Grateful thanks must go to all who ensure the smooth running of this service, be they musicians, hospitality, sides people or service leaders; it is a joy to be part of it.

Perhaps you would like to join us sometime?

Janice Macdonald

The Death of Her Majesty the Queen

On the first Sunday of September we celebrated 'Back to School Sunday', as we got ready to return to the normal routines and patterns of life after the summer. The following week was anything but normal... Within the space of three days the nation was dealing with the news of her Majesty the Queen's illness, her sudden death, and then the accession to the throne of His Majesty King Charles III.

Churches around the country joined in with the ten days of national mourning that followed. St Nic's opened daily for public prayers – both thanksgiving for the life of The Queen and prayer for our new King. Bells were tolled and flags were raised and lowered (according to strict protocol issued by the Government and the Church of England!). On the Sunday immediately following the Queen's death, we held a special service of thanksgiving and prayer at our morning service. Later that week, we held a Benefice service of

commemoration at St Mary's Speen. The period of national mourning ended with the State Funeral, which we screened live in church for any who wanted to attend.

Much later in the autumn, we held a civic service of thanksgiving for the life of the Queen at St Nic's, organised together with West Berkshire Council. District, town and parish councillors were invited from across West Berkshire. As guests arrived they were greeted at the West Door of St Nic's by a thoroughbred race horse – Barber Shop (now retired) had previously been owned by the Queen. Hundreds of people attended the service, with worship led by our choir, and contributions from local school choirs.

The apostle Paul, in his instructions for worship in 1 Timothy 2, says that thanksgiving and prayer for 'kings and all in authority' is one of the things the Church should do 'first of all'. Last autumn we joined together to do exactly that, in a very fitting way at St Nic's, for a very faithful (and faith-filled) Queen.

Will Hunter Smart

Children's Ministry

Small Stars (ages 0–5)

Small Stars meets each Sunday morning in term time, and we welcome between 15 and 25 children aged 0-5 each week. We have a wonderful team of volunteers who look after our little ones, engaging them in play, telling them stories, helping them make crafts and much more! 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. The tricky part is telling the story before all the characters and props have been appropriated by one or other of the children!! They love listening to the stories and asking and answering questions – I am often struck by how 'in tune' with God our little ones are. After this the children have a chance to respond to the story through play or craft, and to continue with their other play activities too.

We have been blessed by the creation of the 'sensory room' on the balcony, which was primarily for Hidden Treasures, but we are able to use this on Sundays too and it's always a popular space. This term we have really enjoyed following the same topics as All Stars and the Sunday sermon series, 'Meals with Jesus', and it has been a great way to encourage families to carry on the conversations at home.

I would love to develop and build up our ministry to families, recognising that children's spiritual growth is not just about an hour on a Sunday morning each week, but that parents and carers are the ones with the most influence on their children's faith, and that we need to support them in this.

Sarah South, Children's Minister (0-5)

Hidden Treasures - *A place to find fun, friendship and faith*

My hairdresser's wife goes to Hidden Treasures, and when I saw him yesterday, he described Hidden Treasures as 'the hottest ticket in town!' We release tickets for 50 family units at 8pm

on a Thursday evening and they are often gone within half an hour. This is down to our central location, our excellent facilities and our wonderful team of volunteers. We are particularly grateful to Sue Edwards who comes up with an array of different sensory activities for every session and to Sarah South who runs our rota and booking system so reliably and produces name badges for everyone which help to break the ice and create a welcoming atmosphere. We are also extremely grateful to the facilities team for the smart new storage cupboards which make setting up and down so much easier. Every week we finish the session by gathering to sing and give a blessing from the Bible, aimed at the parents, grandparents and carers who come. We are grateful for that ongoing opportunity to share the gospel and are praying that it would bear fruit in their lives.

Looking ahead, our priority is building the team. Some key members have moved on in recent months and we need to recruit some new people. We are also asking ourselves whether we should run a second session, as there seems a great need for this provision in our town and we are so well placed to meet it. Please pray for us as we seek God for the future of this exciting ministry. Thank you!

Ellen Hunter Smart

All Stars (ages 5-11)

Although I am no longer the Children's Minister for the 5s-11s it is a pleasure to write this report and reflect on a very blessed, exciting and rewarding year.

All Stars continue to meet on Sunday mornings in term time and we can have anywhere between 20 and 40 children. It has been exciting to see the ministry grow and welcome new families.

The team of volunteers have been fantastic caring for, teaching and loving these children even when they have been very outnumbered!! More fab volunteers have joined the team to help look after the children safely.

Some of the fun we've had involved building houses out of toast, making bubble snakes, spaghetti trees and also learning to read the Bible and see what it says about how much God loves us.

This year the school Year 6s have remained as All Stars and will move on to Pathfinders once they are in year 7. As a group they have been meeting in St Nic's House which has been a blessing for them as they feel 'special' and they can actually hear what each other are saying. It gets VERY noisy in the hall with the increasing number of children.

The challenges going forward are around space on a Sunday morning and inclusion of all children whatever their needs.

The annual Light Party, St Nic's alternative to Halloween, happened again this year. It is a key opportunity to invite children from the wider community to come and enjoy silly games and less silly crafts, but also have the opportunity to hear about Jesus and the fact that he is the one true light.

Jaffa Club still happens on a Tuesday lunchtime at St Nic's Junior school. It is such a privilege to stop and pray with, and for, the children who come in the middle of a busy school day.

Thank you to those who have been so supportive and encouraging of the team over the past year. The children's ministry is in a good place and I wish all the best to my successor and pray that the ministry continues to go from strength to strength as more children hear and learn about the love of God for them. It is such a fun job and God is good!

Caroline Chichester, Children's Minister (5-11)

Youth Ministry

Pathfinders (ages 11-14)

In August 2022 I was appointed the new Youth Minister at St Nic's and excitedly started preparing for the start of a new academic year. I had already been helping with Pathfinders as part of the volunteer team that had been running after Ed left in 2021. The amazing team of Rosie, Adriel, Judy and Matt agreed to continue to help lead Pathfinders and we were also joined by Phil. I have been so thankful to have such a consistent and brilliant group to work with. The decision was made before the summer to keep the year 9's in Pathfinders and move young people up to the Firm at the start of year 10. The year 6 group were also going to stay in All Stars until the start of year 7. This meant that our Pathfinders group stayed the same, and it was a wonderful opportunity to build relationships and work consistently through some great material. In the autumn term we looked at some of the big concepts we learn about in the Bible: God the sovereign creator who is holy and righteous, sin, forgiveness, judgement, Jesus' divinity, and redemption.

During the autumn term we also enjoyed a great weekend camp at the Bradleys'. The young people loved this, and it was a joy to see them all together socialising and doing something fun. In the new year we started an overview of the Old Testament. This was requested by the young people as they said they didn't feel confident on how the Old Testament links with the New Testament. It has been a great term of exploring the Old Testament, learning about how God's promises are always kept, and we can fully trust Him. We have also enjoyed discussing how right from the beginning of the Old Testament we are being pointed to our Saviour that is to come, Jesus.

Pathfinders has become a large group with a few new members joining, we now reach around 16 most weeks which is wonderful.

The Firm (ages 14-18)

Having been appointed as Youth Minister in the summer of 2022, I was really looking forward to getting to know the members of The Firm, as previously I had only been volunteering with the Pathfinder age group. I was delighted to hear Beth Mawdesley would be joining me in working with The Firm in her role as Ministry Apprentice, and she has been a great blessing to me as well as the young people. I was also greatly supported by The Firm team that had been running everything in the absence of a youth minister: thank you Paul, Siân, Ben, Hattie and Simon for continuing to help. The Firm moved to meeting at St Nicolas House again after

some decoration of the downstairs over the summer. We were keen to use this space again and to make it a comfortable place that the young people wanted to spend time in.

During the first half of the autumn term, we looked at a course called SOUL which is a youth adaptation of Christianity Explored based on Mark's gospel. We also enjoyed a great weekend of fun (at home) sleeping over at St Nicolas House: one of the highlights included a glow stick wide game in the church in the dark. During the second half of the autumn term, we based our sessions around the book '10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask' by Rebecca McLaughlin which challenged us to think through tough questions about why we believe in the Bible and the ultimate truth it gives us, and how this leaves Christians living counter-culturally in our world today. In October we were delighted to see one of our Firm members baptised and a couple of other members show interest in attending confirmation classes.

In January The Firm made the decision to join The Six service and have our session afterwards. We felt that was important for our young people to help them become more involved with our church family and experience what church is like. We started to look at the topic of sexuality following the pattern of The Six sermon series, thinking about what the Bible has to say about these issues and how God calls us to live. We have continued with this using a video-based course with small group discussion afterwards.

Another great event we have discovered is 'Nightlife' which is run by St Aldates Church in Oxford once a term for local churches within the Oxford Diocese to bring their youth together. It was a great evening of worship and we heard from Open Doors Youth UK about what 'brave faith' looks like around the world and how that can challenge us in our own lives. We hope to attend the next event in May.

Clare Caskie, Youth Minister

All Age Celebrations

This year we have enjoyed a number of All Age Sunday mornings at St Nic's. We started the school year with Back to School Sunday, where we thought about being salt and light in our schools, colleges, nurseries and workplaces. Other celebrations included Pentecost, Harvest, Christingle and Pancake Praise. Highlights for me have been the children teaching us songs, seeing everyone young and old singing, playing instruments and waving ribbons, as well as quieter times of prayer and reflection. Inter-generational worship recognises that we are all 'fellow pilgrims on a journey of faith' (Preface, Book of Common Worship) and we can all learn from each other. The All-Age band is a great example of this. Our All-Age celebrations aim to engage everyone in the different activities, from crafts, drama, reflective storytelling and participatory prayers. I look forward to more of these times over the next year.

Sarah South, Children's Minister (0-5)

Bell Ringers

2022 was a busy year for the bell ringers of St Nic's. The year started with a successful Quarter Peal of Grandsire Caters. Then on 6th February the bells were rung to celebrate 70 years since the accession of Queen Elizabeth II to the throne. Later in February the band

successfully rang a Quarter Peel of Grandsire Doubles and a Quarter of Grandsire Triples. In March the band rang as part of the vigil taking place in Market Place in support of Ukraine.

At the end of May, the Tower hosted a visit by the Newbury Cub Scouts, during which the Scouts explored the belfry and its bells, and the ringing room where the Scouts and Scout leaders all got to have a go at chiming the bells.

On the Friday and Sunday of the Platinum Jubilee weekend at the start of June, the band rang Plain Bob Doubles, Grandsire Double and Platinum Doubles to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

In September, on the sad announcement of the death of the Queen and as part of Operation London Bridge, the St Nic's bells were rung muffled almost every day for the 11 days of mourning. This was only interrupted by open ringing of the bells to announce the King Charles III Proclamation on Saturday 10th September.

In October, the St Nic's band came third in the Oxford Diocesan Guild Striking Competition at St Mary's Shaw, after winning the branch competition earlier in the year. In November, the bells at St Nic's were rung before the service of thanksgiving for the Queen's life.

The bells were rung on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and finally on New Year's Eve in the presence of the Mayor of Newbury, Gary Norman and the Mayoress Sabrina Chetcuti.

David Bebbington, Tower Captain

Church Choir

Since the summer of 2022, I have taken over as the Interim Choir Director of St Nic's. It has been a long transition with both its challenges and joys, but we are all beginning to settle into a new way of working. After Nic and Sarah Cope's wonderful leadership for so long, these have been big shoes to fill.

We seem to have fallen into a pattern of not one, but two, choirs! We continue with the usual choir of members that meets regularly throughout the year – we have started to refer to this group as our St Nic's Chamber Choir, which denotes a smaller and expert choir, singing in four parts. We are now inviting our church family and others to join what we are calling our Festival Choir.

The Festival Choir will sing at big services such as those at Christmas and Easter. Our Chamber Choir will continue to sing for the occasional Sunday service, at civic services, seasonal services (such as Ash Wednesday) and when requested for funerals and weddings. The Festival Choir was such a wonderful success at the Carol Service, having a 42 people-strong choir and producing a great sound. People particularly complimented the new anthem 'Carol of the Crib'.

We had a wonderful service celebrating the life of the Late Queen in November which went very well, even if some of us were fighting the urge to sing 'God save the Queen'! The Chamber Choir also sang at the Mayor Making service in May, and the Remembrance Service in November; both went extremely well.

Our Chamber Choir has decreased in size over recent years, and we would love to welcome new members and see it grow again. Having the Festival Choir has been a great boost in terms of numbers, the sound and performance.

It has been such a blessing to have Andy Stancliffe become our main accompanist, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his time and commitment. It has made rehearsals a lot easier to lead for me, as well as giving a good support to the choir. I would also like to thank Richard Foster and Andrew Wyndham, who have stepped in to support us at varying times.

I am really looking forward to Easter with contributions from both choirs and two beautiful new anthems being sung by the Festival Choir, and I am very hopeful for the future of our choir-led worship at St Nic's.

Hannah Maskell

Church Flowers

We have continued arranging seasonal artificial flowers in church which have been well-received. The Newbury Spring Festival returned in May, and we arranged a combination of fresh and artificial flowers for the festival. The flower team came together to arrange flowers for Easter, Harvest and Christmas which really added to the celebration of these festivals. If you would like to help, please get in touch as we would love to welcome new flower arrangers to our small team.

Maria Muir & Judith Crockford

Prayer

A Prayer Course and Prayer Room were provided in support of our vision and specifically our goal of encouraging and enabling everyone in the church family to connect with our corporate prayer life, at different times and in different ways.

Members of our congregation were encouraged to participate in the Prayer Course, an eight-week journey aimed at helping our congregation grow as we deepen our prayer life, led (on video) by Pete Greig of 24/7 Prayer. The course was very positively received with the church hall filled every Thursday evening as we together focussed on Pause, Rejoice, Ask and Yield, using The Lord's Prayer as the framework.

As the Prayer Course drew to a close, the sanctuary and lady chapel of our church was transformed into an interactive prayer space for a week, as we joined the current 24/7 global prayer initiative. We invited all the churches in Newbury to participate as we prayed around the clock for 5 days, in time slots of 30 minutes or longer. It provided an opportunity for us as individuals to draw near to God in the sanctuary of our church.

I would like to thank everyone for their contribution towards the Prayer Course and the Prayer Room and especially the leadership of our church for their strong support and encouragement.

Peter Bradley

Stewardship

We started off 2022 with a budget of £281,094, however due to a significant reduction seen early in the year, we re-forecasted the budget in April to £269,668. Even though there was no specific appeal for increased giving, we had amazing support with many new stewardships, increased contribution, and one-off gifts. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, we met our revised stewardship budget successfully. 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 a few new stewardships and increases from existing donors has helped to set a budget forecast of £260,493 for 2023. The cost-of-living crisis and challenging economic climate could potentially impact our performance against the stewardship budget forecast for the year. Therefore, I would urge for your continued support.

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 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

The Welcome and Integration team was established in January 2022 with Mandy Maskell, Sharon Coward, Tim Over, Hattie Norman and myself to support one of the vision goals the PCC saw as a priority. We quickly held our first welcome training breakfast in March where we shared ideas about how to welcome more effectively and help newcomers integrate more into the life of St Nic's. This led to our first 'Sunday Lunch at Home' event in October and a second one at the end of March 2023. We have also set up a welcome table that is manned every Sunday as a focal point for newcomers and helped with the newcomers lunches, the latest one in February 2023 with over 60 guests. We have made "How to get involved cards" to facilitate easier integration, and postcards with "Welcome" in many different languages to help everyone feel welcome, even if communication is difficult. We have bought Welcome flags to encourage people through the doors and improved the welcome area and board inside the church to make it more inviting.

Going forward, we would like to establish a rhythm of these training breakfasts, welcome lunches and Sunday Lunch at Home events so they become regular events in the church calendar. We would like to improve the interior of the church to make it look much more welcoming and alive – the idea of beautiful banners still appeals. More broadly we need to look at the events of the church as a whole and try to create a pathway to faith, discipleship and belonging.

Tania Wolak

Women@St.Nics

The current Women's Ministry team consists of Vivien Staunton, Sandra Reeves, Thelma Ambler, Mandy Winter, Margaret Kennaugh, Joyce Zealey and Joy Mawdesley. Together, we organised a series of social events for women in 2022.

We have had three breakfasts over the past year. In January 2022 Joni McAuliffe from COINS was our speaker. She spoke beautifully in the darkness of January about how to take care of ourselves as we learned of her own story. In September, Jules de Jongh spoke about her work life as a voice over artist, her struggles and her recovery.

In January 2023, Liz Jackson, Archdeacon of Berkshire gave a very dynamic talk describing her work at her previous church in the Midlands, meeting the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers and her work in West Berkshire, a very different environment.

In the late Spring we had a bunting workshop so that we could decorate the church and grounds with patriotic bunting for the Platinum Jubilee.

We had two pudding parties at the home of Joyce Zealey in the summer with the brave ones going for a swim! Our thanks to Joyce for hosting.

A team of 22 women hosted 110 guests at Create for Christmas in November. This popular, unique event offers the opportunity to choose from 15 different crafts, making whatever you like with everything provided. Women from across the churches in Newbury invite friends and neighbours. One lady came from Leicestershire. She has limited social opportunities being a farmer's wife and describes this as the highlight of her social calendar. A Ukrainian woman visiting for the first time said it was "amazing", and a French lady complained no-one told her there were such events in Newbury, in the 10 years she has lived here! It was a great evening. This year it will be on Saturday 25th November – save the date!

I am very grateful for the fantastic team that oversees the Women's Ministry at St Nic's – both the planning team and the wider team who contribute to specific events. Thank you – none of it would happen without you!

Vivien Staunton

Men@St.Nics

Yep – you guessed it – more fried breakfasts this year but also a great weekend away, not to mention great fellowship of course!

Kicking off the year in April, our breakfast provided valuable sustenance for those attending the building projects meeting and got us through to the second breakfast of pastries with the left-over baked beans!

In November we heard from Dr Vaughan Rees, local professional physicist, giving us a whistle stop tour of his recent book “God, Science and Creation, a Beginner’s Guide to the Beginning”. Wrapping up our breakfasts for the year in March, amateur gelotologist Ian Macdonald brought to us the spiritual gift of laughter and literally had us crying (for joy) over our empty plates.

For me though, and hopefully the 35 men attending, the highlight of the year was our weekend retreat to the Cotswolds in October where past St Nic’s Associate Rector, Ed Hobbs, spoke on ‘The Kindness of God’. We are now looking forward to a curry evening in the Autumn and further breakfasts, before the next weekend away in October 2024.

Behind the scenes, DNA/prayer groups remain the bedrock of the ministry, 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!

Jim Lupton

Pastoral Care

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

The team was delighted that Chris Ortiz responded to the call for an increase in its numbers this year, and that Roger Ambler and Mary & Tim Over have kindly agreed to give extra help as needed.

This extra help has assisted us to respond to needs amongst church members for various sorts of support. It might be practical help, including lifts to church or to medical appointments. It might be someone needing emotional and prayer support because of a difficult life experience. It might be visiting church members who are unwell or housebound. We also co-ordinate home communion for those who cannot get to church.

One outcome of our study of the book, ‘The Puzzle of Pastoral Care’ by Alison Moore, was the feeling that we wanted to explore further ourselves, but also offer training for the church family about how we can best care for one another in certain seasons of life. This led to the setting up of a series of talks by specialists during Lent looking at relationships, bereavement, mental health and faith in older people. It might be good to extend this approach into other issues such as addictions or debt problems.

As always it is evident that the bulk of pastoral care at St Nic’s happens because people are aware of the needs of others through the many groups and networks within the church family. The Pastoral Care Team supplements this activity and reaches out to others who

might not have these connections. Please do let us know of any need that we might be able to respond to.

Members of the pastoral team can be contacted in person, through the clergy or by email on pastoralcare@st-nics.org. Extra offers of help are always appreciated, and church members can be assured that all who work in this area of church life are safer recruited.

Janet Price

Small Groups

We continue to see small groups as a vital part of our church life at St Nic's. In a larger church it can be very difficult to get to know people in a meaningful way just by attending on a Sunday. Small groups help with this in creating smaller communities for people to get to know each other and they also contribute significantly to the growth of faith through bible study and prayer together.

We have 13 groups at St Nic's, 6 of which are daytime groups and 7 meet during the evenings across the week. Most groups meet weekly, others fortnightly. The small group for the Year 13s and gap year students run by Ben and Hattie Norman has stopped this year as each of the young people went off to university. A big thank you to Ben and Hattie for leading this group for two years.

There are around 30 people involved in the leadership of our small groups, to whom we owe immense gratitude for their consistent commitment to the life of their group, as each group supports people pastorally, spiritually and practically. Peter and Liesl Bradley have stepped down this year from the leadership of their group, and Paul and Belinda Van Zyl have stepped into their shoes. Our thanks go to Peter and Liesl – at whose home this year we greatly enjoyed a social for small group leaders.

A number of groups have valued following the sermon series through – taking a bit more time to digest the Sunday sermon, with the help of some questions set by the preacher. Over the past year, this has included the book of Galatians, Big Prayers of the Bible and the recent Sex and Sexuality series. Other groups take advantage of DVD Study Guides or courses or make use of bible study books. Most of the groups combine study and prayer with some kind of way of sharing food at some point over each term!

While the number of groups has remained consistent this year, most of the groups have welcomed new people as requests to join groups have come in. I foresee that over the next few months we will need to think about at least one new evening group starting up and there is probably enough interest for a new daytime group – that is a great problem to have! Do let me know if you would like to be part of a small group in the coming year.

Our Vision Document as regards small groups remains highly relevant for our life at St Nic's – 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.'

Joy Mawdesley

The Lent Course

At the time of writing, the Lent Course is halfway through. The seeds of this course were sown among the pastoral care team about 18 months ago, when we all read a book, 'The Puzzle of Pastoral Care' by Alison Moore.

We read it over a number of months as a team and discussed it in our meetings – and one of the things to come out of these discussions was the idea for a Lent course. We wanted to provide an opportunity as a church family to think about some different seasons of our lives, experiences common to all of us, how we can best support and help each other, how the church might need to adapt and change - essentially how we keep on loving one another in those seasons, hence our title, Keep on Loving one another – taken from Hebrews 13.

And so, during March about 60 people have gathered together for four weeks to think about relationships, bereavement, mental health and faith in older people. So far, the evenings have been very helpful and moving and challenging and given much food for thought.

Joy Mawdesley

Party Days

Jubilee Celebration

The Platinum Jubilee celebration was a blast. Children could do crafts, get their faces painted, and mingle with their friends. As children played games and adults talked, there was a celebratory energy in the air that just had you buzzing. You could feel the love of everyone in the church family. Climbing the church tower was a new and exciting way to see Newbury. Creating the paper chain to lower off the tower was creative and memorable. Overall, the Jubilee Celebration was an incredible gathering of our church family as we celebrated the Queen and her remarkable milestone. I will carry these memories with me forever.

Alex Van Dyk

Harvest Lunch

On one of my very first weekends at St Nic's it turned out to be harvest and so what great timing for a lunch gathering. The hall was full with long tables, and I was made to feel so welcome by those around, all of whom in later weeks came to find me and remembered my name. The linking of lunch to the harvest appeal and the auction of produce in Church after the service which was such great fun, all left me with a very favourable impression of our new Church.

Geoff Sowden

Chinese New Year

Over the last couple of years, we have welcomed an increasing number of people from Hong Kong who have come to join with us at St. Nicolas. We are registered as a 'Hong Kong friendly church' and as a Welcome Team we wanted people to feel included, at home here, and able to share something of their culture with us. As the Chinese New Year approached, we talked to members of our church to see if we could celebrate this together as many still

have families living 8,000 miles away in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong community, parents, and children, offered to provide special refreshments and Chinese tea that are traditionally prepared especially for the New Year. We had a special welcome during the church service and had a reading by one of our church family members from Hong Kong. It was a joyous occasion for all to mark the Year of the Rabbit. Thank you to those who made it possible!

Sharon Coward

MISSION (Looking Out)

Alpha

We ran a Daytime Alpha Course last summer term. This was as a part of Foundations on a Tuesday morning. A crèche was available which meant that we could invite parents and carers with young children along to the Alpha Course. We had six or seven new people come along to the course who had not previously been attending Foundations.

Everyone enjoyed the course and found it helpful, whether they were visitors coming along to find out more about faith, or whether they were regular members of Foundations. The course was helpful for encouraging people in their faith and also helping people to know more about sharing their faith with others.

We had two Alpha Away Days towards the end of the course for people to learn about the Holy Spirit and to have an opportunity to be prayed for. A couple of the people who were exploring faith have continued coming along to Foundations to learn more.

This term we have been running an evening Alpha Course and have had around 30 guests altogether. There have been lots of really good conversations and, as always, delicious desserts provided by the homegroups. We have a great team who have provided a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The course included an Away Day and we are looking at running a post Alpha group after Easter for those guests who would like to continue meeting and finding out more.

We are looking forward to hearing testimonies of how God has been at work and using this course.

Joy Mawdesley

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

After a few years of very limited opportunities, we celebrated thirteen baptisms and four thanksgivings for the birth of a child in 2022! Bishop Olivia visited us in November for our confirmation service. Eight people were confirmed, three of whom were also baptised by full immersion. It has been wonderful to celebrate 'new birth' with these families and friends.

Last year we held 3 weddings at St Nic's, including Jackie and Paul Fountain's daughter, Christie, to Daniel Lee, and Shalini and Kurien Philip's daughter, Liz, to Lewis Whatling.

We have held 7 funerals here at St Nicolas Church this year, with 4 interments of ashes in our Remembrance Garden. We have supported all these families through their bereavement.

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

Libby Lake & Mandy Maskell

Our Buildings

Our hall continues to be a great asset, and we regularly see 450 visitors throughout the week from both the internal and external groups that engage and support our community in a variety of different ways. We do have a little space left in the diary for a new group on Wednesdays and occasional free evenings, but otherwise the diary is full. Every Sunday the hall is used for our children's groups in the morning and for The Six service in the evening.

Our church is open 5 days during the week, 10am - 4pm, with the opportunity to sit and pray in our wonderful building, and people do come in. We have run a couple of open church days this year offering various activities for families and prayer if wanted. Together with the Listening Café these have given us the opportunities to pray for many members of our local community.

As well as our services our church is also used for several concerts. We have had 13 concerts since the last APCM, welcoming another 4,500 people into our church. This year we were also able to support the community by screening Queen Elizabeth II's funeral.

St Nic's house is back up and running post Covid with both our Pathfinders and Firm calling it their home. We have begun renovating the spaces which were looking a little shabby and making them more welcoming for a variety of groups. There is still lots of potential for this building.

Our facilities are able to bless the local community in many ways, helping to play a part in making St Nicolas good news to Newbury.

Ben Norman

CAP Debt Centre Newbury

CAP Newbury is a joint project between St Nicolas and Bridge Church Newbury covering the West Berkshire area, which officially launched in June 2019.

To date 55 client families have worked with CAP Newbury representing 71 adults and 51 children. Of these 5 people have gone debt free, 12 clients have been empowered to progress on their own and closed their case with CAP. Of our current clients we have 11 current active clients: 1 client is on a long-term repayment plan, 2 clients are working through the insolvency process and 8 clients are in the process of finding their best route out of debt. We are excited that 2 clients have made a first-time response to the gospel and 17 client families have attended a church event during the time that they have been a client of CAP Newbury.

Local church support and volunteers are the key to the success of a CAP Debt Centre with a continual need for befrienders to visit each client, financial resources to run the centre, fundraising, and valued prayer support. Befrienders are required for each client meeting to

support the Debt Centre Manager and provide essential practical and emotional support to the client.

We work alongside many key agencies in the area for both referrals and signposting of clients for additional support. Regular contact is made with West Berkshire Foodbank, Homestart, Sovereign Housing, local Social Prescribers, Social Workers, Children's centres, and many others all of whom refer their clients to CAP Newbury. We are also pleased to support the new Thatcham and Hungerford CAP Life Skills Courses.

CAP Newbury provides more than just debt advice: sharing the good news of Jesus and offering holistic support to their clients. We love to bless our clients, and so far have distributed 48 Christmas Hampers over the 4 years, provided by small groups from St Nic's, Bridge Church and other Newbury churches, and Easter Eggs Bundles gifted to 21 client families each year with the gospel message. This year St Nic's hosted our first CAP Christmas party with 7 clients attending, along with befrienders and representatives from St Nic's and Bridge Church. Alongside a delicious festive meal there were Christmas crafts to keep the kids (and the adults) amused, and a fun quiz and some carols. The St Nic's CAP Blessings Fund continues to be used to fund essential clothing, food hampers and electrical appliances (including slow cookers to help save electricity).

There have recently been a few changes at the CAP Newbury centre, with a new area manager and some changes in the core team overseeing and supporting the centre. In addition, Lisa John will be stepping down from the role of Centre Manager at the end of April. It is hoped that, in due course, we will be recruiting for the role.

Lisa John

Charity Coffee Mornings

The Thursday Charity Coffee Mornings have now been going for more than a year since the Covid lockdown period and, although they were very slow to start with, recently the number of customers has increased quite markedly. However, charities still are having problems with volunteers to run a coffee morning, and some have cancelled, or the admin team have been unable to fill a session. Rather than cancelling completely and disappointing regulars who meet up for social contact, these mornings are run by the hostess team serving drinks and biscuits.

Both Carolyn Davis and Elizabeth Bennett had to step down from the role of 'hostess' in 2022 and the regular team now consists of Janet Price, Lorna Holmes, Joan Maynard, Fiona Shaw, Sue Elliott and myself (helped by Ian). We have recently been joined by Terina McGuire. Thank you everyone for the support you give to the charities running the coffee mornings and especial thanks for the extra help given when the hostess team has to run the mornings. Also thank you to Mandy Maskell and Chris James who do the admin for the mornings, and to Ben Norman for the practical help he gives the team.

If you know a charity which would like to run a coffee morning for publicity and to raise some money, please tell them there are spaces available later in 2023. Contact the office for details.

Lesley Park

Church Garden

2022 was a challenging year, with the extremes of temperature and lack of summer rainfall reminding us all of the fragility of our beautiful planet and of our responsibility to care for the church garden in a sustainable, sensitive way that is beneficial to wildlife.

The judging for Newbury in Bloom happened on a sizzling July afternoon. Once again, the friendly judges (the head gardener of Highclere Castle amongst them!) offered encouragement for what we are doing as well as useful practical suggestions to increase the amount of pollinator-friendly and drought-tolerant perennials and to continue to develop community involvement. It was lovely to be awarded winner in the Places of Worship category at the ceremony in September.

We are always so grateful for our cheerful and committed helpers, including a Yume group who brightened up many a person's day by planting and tending the beautiful sunflower bed opposite the church hall last summer.

So many people enjoy the garden, whether they are sitting on a bench in the sunshine with a coffee or bite to eat, or relishing the view of the colourful front border through the railings, or just passing through on their way into town. The hope that they will catch a glimpse of God's glory in this peaceful haven makes our efforts feel worthwhile.

We'd so love you to join us in this gardening ministry, where there are a variety of tasks to suit everyone. Watch out for the dates which will be posted up soon!

Belinda Bowery, Vivien Staunton & Rosemary McDonald

Eco Group

The group has continued to meet throughout the year and initiated several small promotions simply to maintain a continued interest in this area. This has included an advent book swap to encourage the exchange of past advent devotionals rather than the purchase of brand new ones by everyone and a walk and bring and share lunch with our sister church St Mary's, Speen. Members of the group have attended as representatives on Town and Church green events, workshops on starting a Repair Cafe and been a voice in local 'green' campaigns. We look forward to the opportunities the coming year brings and cling to the hope that in time, caring for God's creation will become fully embedded in the life of our church.

Samantha Mullender

Listening Café

Listening Café has continued to run for the entirety of the last year with pauses during the summer holiday and Christmas holiday periods. The timings have remained the same as previously, from 11.30am until 1pm, on Wednesdays and Thursdays in Church. It is led by Jackie, our curate, and a small team of volunteers who put their names on a rota.

The team of 1-2 people 'man' the church during the Listening Café times and set up a table and chairs ready to sit and talk to people who come in and ask if they would like prayer. There is a sign on the path outside the church to indicate that Listening Café is happening.

We are able to offer a hot drink and would like to continue to offer this but have decided to rename the slot 'Listening Space', as a more accurate reflection of the type of feel people can expect.

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 on their way out. 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. Then there are others again who now will plan in advance to come for the company, assurance and peace that they appreciate to receive. 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 prayed for and listened to 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 the continuing war in Ukraine. 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 help people experience the love and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ, or signpost to get the help they need. We can show them that our Church is a community of believers ready to share and live out the gospel, that is in an active and 'lived in' space. We have had some attendees later come to our church services and one has recently come to Alpha.

We are praying for more team members to ensure that this service can carry on regularly and smoothly. There has been discussion amongst the team about expanding or changing the time slots to try to overlap with increased footfall in town, perhaps opening concurrently with events such as the artisanal market. 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 Rev Jackie Fountain to find out more.

Kate Ward

Living Advent Calendar

It was great to be involved in the Living Advent Calendar at St Nic's. For those not aware, the Living Advent Calendar is a Newbury-wide event that runs throughout Advent. Every day there is an Advent door at various places across town: windows, cafés, restaurants and shops. It is great for St Nic's to be part of this event to reach the community in ways other than our Christmas services.

The wonderful Daniel Maskell met us outside the doors on a freezing night and, in character, talked us through how the event would run, whilst also adding some comedic ad libs here

and there. When a crowd had formed, the west doors were flung open to reveal 3 paintings done by Ian Norman of different scenes from carols: O Little Town of Bethlehem, Joy to the World and Hark the Herald. One of them had fairy lights in the sky that looked like stars. The choir served as a backdrop to these pieces of artwork and began to sing carols as we entered the church. We stood to listen and then the choir turned to walk up to the dais at the front of church. Mince pies were served alongside a prayer for people to take. It was a great time to reflect on the Christmas story and take a moment to be still. It's great that the church can be such a witness to Newbury and be involved in these events. I will look forward to the Living Advent Calendar at St Nic's next year.

Beth Mawdesley

Meet Monday

It's been a good year with a lot for which to thank God. We are also grateful to our church family for encouragement, prayer and practical help.

Meeting just once a month can seem disjointed but the sheer joy of being together is evident to all. We sing songs of worship and praise and pray and learn about God's amazing love through the spoken word and through drama. Recently we enjoyed colouring, cutting and sticking, to make a beautiful collage depicting God's power in creation. Do take a look when it is on display in the hall.

Here are some of the highlights:

- Growth in numbers, slow but sure
- Growing faith and trust in God
- The confirmation of one man
- Another man attending the Alpha Course
- Participation in the Count Everyone In Christmas Celebration

We have been praying for one another, for paid employment, for those who are moving away, and for one small family where the father has a progressive, terminal illness. It continues to be hard to attract and retain newcomers, mainly because of staff shortages and lack of transport but also where there is no knowledge of Meet Monday. We have a great team and there is capacity to welcome more adults with learning disabilities to join us, generally on the first Monday of each month. This is an opportunity to introduce people to the best friend of all, Jesus!

Pete and Christine Winmill

Meet Monday and St Nic's are friends with 'Count Everyone In'.

Newbury Friends Together

Team: Carrie Gregory, Chris James, Liesl Bradley, Joan Stacey, Carolyn Davis, Cherry Catterall, Kathryn Field

Newbury Friends Together meets weekly in the Church Hall on a Tuesday afternoon, providing a fellowship opportunity for our senior friends.

Weekly attendance varies depending on the programme, with around 25 as an average. The weekly programme consists of a welcome, a catch up and an activity followed by refreshments. Activity highlights for this past year include a history of afternoon tea with spring flowers, legal advice on wills and power of attorney, a walk-through history with postcards, an art history afternoon with our Church Warden (focus on stained glass windows of St Nicolas), a trip to Hillier's Arboretum, Christmas pottery decoration-making at the Ugly Duckling and the very popular Christmas lunch at Chequers Hotel.

We believe this is a valuable opportunity for our seniors to connect on a weekly basis and for new people retiring to Newbury to integrate with the local community. We often see friendships forming and deepening through the Tuesday meetings, but also outside of the meeting during the rest of the week.

It is our aim to make Newbury Friends Together a fun, happy, supportive and caring community.

Liesl Bradley

Outreach Committee

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

This year the Outreach Committee was pleased to welcome Siân Lupton to add to our number.

The Committee acts as a link between members of St Nicolas' and various mission partners the church supports. Each year we recommend to the PCC the allocation of the annual charity budget; the allocation for 2022 compared with 2021 can be seen in the two tables overleaf. In 2022 our budget was £36,701, 10% of St Nicolas' unrestricted income for the year 2021.

St Nicolas' has a number of mission partners to whom regular financial aid and prayer support is given. However, there are five, all with strong local connections with St Nicolas, that are our main mission partners; COINS, Count Everyone In, Hope for Africa Church in Lesotho, Biojemms and Miriam Dean Fund.

In 2022 most of our mission partners were recovering from the two pandemic years and, through these, had found new ways of working which have helped their causes. For example, Count Everyone In (CEI) found by working online they reached more vulnerable people and their families than they did in person. The team started to visit festivals again in the summer and the core team has now expanded to four, as Rosey joined Peter, Christine and Janneke during the year.

COINS returned to providing face to face contact in local schools, as well as continuing online outreach. The Christmas Gift was presented to over 500 children in churches this year. Joni McAuliffe has returned to teaching and Kate Adlam now leads the team. Prayer is needed that the right person may come forward to assist Kate as a joint leader.

In October, for the first time in three years Vivien Staunton, her son David and grandson Jacob were able to visit Edward and Mpho Ndebele at the Hope for Africa Church in Lesotho to plan future developments. The polytunnel, which St Nicolas provided aid for, is now in use on the church centre land in Butha-Buthe. As well as minor additions to the church centre, the important need of provision for pre-school children was noted. This was made the subject of St Nicolas' Christmas appeal and it benefited by £8,241.82 (including gift aid). Thank you for your generosity.

Throughout the pandemic trustees of the Miriam Dean Fund had been able to keep in touch with most of the projects they supported online, but in February this year Andy and Sheila Moore, two of the trustees, were able to visit some of the projects supported in India. This included the Leonard Hospital in Tamil Nadu that members of both St Nicolas' and St Mary's, Speen generously supported with an appeal in 2021. We look forward to a report back on this visit soon.

Siân Ball (née Davies) is visiting Uganda in April for the first time in three years to see the progress that has been made during the pandemic years. She will be accompanied by her husband Quentin and stepdaughter Elizma. Planning is going ahead to develop the Biojemms land so it can be used for the children's bible camps. One of the first necessities is to sink a borehole on the site to provide fresh water for them and for local families. During the pandemic, and currently, the land is providing food and supporting pig and goat projects for vulnerable families in the area.

As well as the Christmas appeal the congregation responded generously to the harvest appeal and £3,296.55, including Gift Aid, was raised for the Ukrainian Bible Society's 'Bread and Bibles' appeal. Thank you again for your generous response.

Other charities supported in 2022 are listed in the tables overleaf. Table 1 gives those supported regularly and Table 2 lists those charities which are supported occasionally or on a one-off basis.

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Table 1

Outreach Giving for 2022 compared with 2021		
	2022 (£)	2021 (£)
Mission Partners in worldwide ministry		
Mark & Ruth (Resettlement grant – 2021)		2,000
Biojemms, Uganda	1,500	3,000
Friends of Hope for Africa Missions, Lesotho	6,000	7,500
Miriam Dean Fund (Trustees: Sheila & Andy Moore)	4,000	2,000
Our Town		
COINS	6,000	8,000
Pete & Christine Winmill - Count Everyone In	6,500	2,500
Shoemakers	2,000	1,500
Bus of Hope	1,000	1,000
YMCA	500	5,000
Street Pastors	2,000	
Rock UK/Bethany Wolak		500
Our World - Outreach Organisations		
Bible Society of Egypt (via Newbury Bible Society)	500	500
SAT-7	1,000	1,000
Scripture Union St Petersburg	1,000	1,000
One - off donations		
(see table 2)	4,701	2,336
Totals (2021 includes £873 carried over from 2020)	£36,701	£37,836

Table 2

Outreach giving for 2022 compared with 2021 - one-off donations and miscellaneous expenses		
	2022 (£)	2021 (£)
Open Doors	1,000	
Yeldall Manor	700	
Leprosy Mission (in recognition of the long-standing work Rosemary Collins has done for the organisation)	500	
Mission Aviation Fellowship	500	
Embrace the Middle East	500	
Trussell Trust - West Berks Food Bank	1,001	
CTNA for Christmas dinners	500	307.55
Mark & Ruth (2021 House-warming flowers)		28.45
Tom Mawdesley (Ministry Apprenticeship)		1,000
Gaza Appeal		500
Yasam Church, Turkey		500
Totals	£4,701	£2,336

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In 2022 we kept back a larger than usual proportion of our budget after our initial allocation in January so we could take into account the needs of our mission partners as they recovered from Covid. We allocated most of this throughout the year and donated the remaining amount to The Trussell Trust (The West Berks Food Bank) to help local people in need.

The committee thanks God for the generosity of the members of St Nicolas and is very conscious of the responsibility it has in allocating 10% of the unrestricted giving to other causes. We try to do this carefully and prayerfully, praying that these donations are helping to spread the Good News around Newbury and into the wider world.

Lesley Park, Secretary

St Nicolas School

This current academic year, it has finally felt as though Covid is in the past, at least in terms of restrictions and illness. However, the effects of Covid will continue to be felt in schools for many years to come. At St Nic's, we have seen increasing numbers of children with higher levels of need both academically and socially. The 'Covid generation' will continue to come

through our school for at least the next 8 years and so we will need to maintain our high standards of therapeutic care for all of our children, whilst keeping high expectations for all.

The past year has seen the school returning to a much more normal pattern of events, including residential visits for Years 5 and 6, sporting events, school trips and in-school events, such as World Book Day. Last year, all of this seemed like a novelty to be able to carry them out again and I know that they are really appreciated by the children.

St Nic's School continues to work very closely with St John's as part of our federation, which is now nearly 18 months old. Our joint governing board have the interests of both schools very closely to heart and they continue to ensure through regular monitoring that the schools are held to account. In particular, the board has a SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) working party, which looks to ensure that the schools are maintaining their church foundations and their close relationships with St John's and St Nicolas Churches.

For me, the highlight of the year was the school visit to the O2 Arena for the Young Voices concert. The school has been doing this for 10 years now and every year it is a special occasion. This year, we took 135 children, who all formed part of a mass choir of 8000 children from across the South-East – a very memorable occasion.

Keith Harvey, Executive Headteacher

Town Team

We continued to work on the 3 strands of our ministry this year: the Thursday charity coffee mornings, being ambassadors for CTNA (Christians Together in the Newbury area), raising the profile of local Christian charities and maintaining and developing the West Berkshire Hospital Therapy Garden.

The coffee mornings were almost fully booked, returning to pre-Covid levels with many of our regulars coming back to enjoy an inexpensive coffee and cake. It is good to have their continuing support as well as that of local charities.

We welcomed the YMCA, Street Pastors and the Foodbank into church to talk about their work in our local community. They are facing the same challenges in needing more funds and more volunteers. Elly Greenwood and Joyce Zealey spoke about their work with refugees in the town, teaching English and encouraging integration and working with the Educafe.

In September, we saw the opening of a second garden site at the hospital, the Rainbow Garden. Many individuals as well as local companies have been involved in this project which creates a private garden for an end of life.

In the same month we received another award, a highly commended in the BBC Radio Berkshire 'Making a difference' awards - a high note on which to end the year.

Vivien Staunton

St Nicolas Warm Hub

The St Nic's Warm Hub was set up at the end of October 2022 as the cost-of-living crisis struck and in response to a call from CTNA for churches to form a web of warm rooms across Newbury. An encouraging number of volunteers came forward that enabled us to start up on Thursday 10th November and continue every Thursday up until the present. The Warm Hub continues directly on from the coffee morning at 12 noon and runs until 4.30pm. Hot drinks, cakes, cuppa soups and the like are provided free of charge together with newspapers, books and games (dominoes mainly!). On many occasions we have been able to provide scones or cakes straight from the oven which has been wonderful. As yet, we have had no formal programme of events but this remains a possibility as we have more regular guests.

Numbers started very small with only a handful of people attending each week, but this has gradually built up to the point where we typically have over 20 guests to add to the regular eight to ten helpers from the church. The Hub is clearly meeting a need to have somewhere to go that is warm during the week, but it is also providing a valuable social space for those who come along who are gradually forming a real community together.

We have been really blessed by the number of volunteers who are able to come along which ensures that we have a welcoming space. Many really helpful conversations take place and there have been opportunities to pray with some of our guests. We are presently starting to discuss how long we keep going into the Spring, or indeed whether opening the hall up in this manner each week provides a place to minister to the needs of our community that might extend to an all-year-round activity.

A big 'thank you' to the Church for supporting this initiative and the resources provided. It has proved a wonderful blessing to people we might never have contacted otherwise.

Richard Coward
