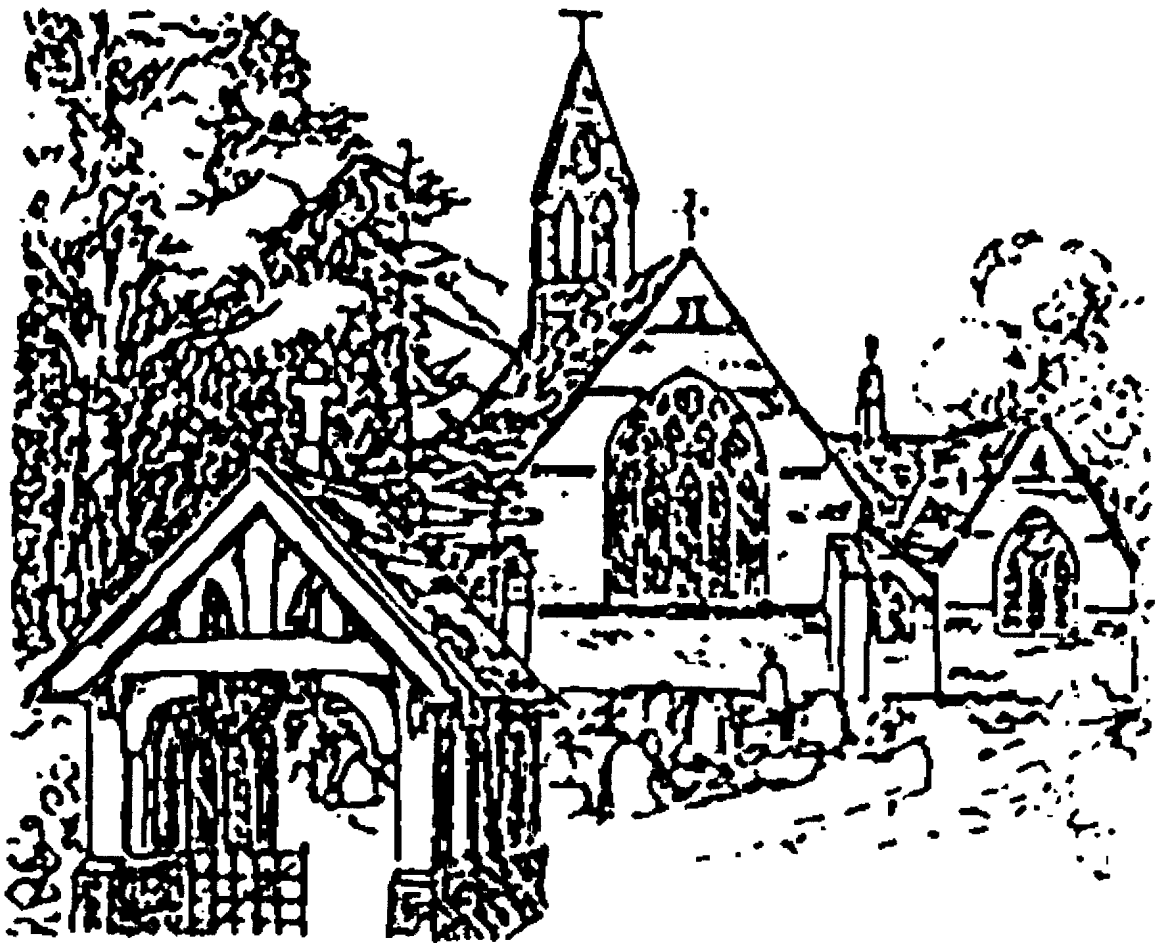


St John the Baptist Parish Church  
Crowthorne

# Annual Report 2023 - 2024





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## **CROWTHORNE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL**

Notice is hereby given of the ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS to be held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 in the Church Hall at 7.00 p.m.

### **AGENDA**

1. Opening Prayers
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of the Vestry Meeting of Parishioners 2023
4. Election of Churchwardens

Notice is hereby given of the ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING of the CROWTHORNE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL to be held immediately following the meeting of Parishioners on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 in the Church Hall

### **AGENDA**

1. Minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Parish
2. Matters Arising from the Minutes
3. Approval of the Annual Report and Accounts
4. Report on changes of numbers on electoral roll.
5. Presentation of Parish Reports
6. Elections
  - (a) Parochial Church Council
7. Appointments
  - a. Hon Secretary
  - b. Hon Treasurer
  - c. Hon Independent Examiner
8. Notices
9. Closing prayers

## **AGENDA of FIRST PCC MEETING**

(to follow APCM on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 )

1. Apologies:
2. Committee Membership
3. Safeguarding
  - DBS, Basic and Foundation courses required of PCC members
  - St. John's Safeguarding Policy- To approve
  - Responding to Safeguarding Situations flow chart – To approve
  - Safeguarding Action Plan- To approve
  - Church Activities- To approve
  - DBS Officer- To approve
  - Safer Recruitment Officer- To approve
  - Safeguarding Dashboard and Hub users- To approve
4. Health and Safety
  - Approve Health and Safety Officer
5. GDPR
  - Teams, storage/security
7. Welcome Teams

## CROWTHORNE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

The Revd Laura Wheatley Downs (Chair)  
Leigh Welham (Churchwarden)  
James Laverick (Churchwarden)  
Mary Harwood (Hon Secretary)  
Tracy Perrett (Hon Treasurer)

### Meeting of Parishioners held in church after 10.00am service on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023

**Opening prayers** The vicar opened the meeting with prayer. Laura asked us to be quiet and still and think of what God has done for us. Some of the congregation shared what God had done for them.

#### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Sheila Stickland, Carol Cain, Caroline and Richard Ireson, David Rance and Jenny McKeever

#### **Minutes**

Approval of the minutes of the meeting held on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022 were proposed by Anne Pelham and seconded by Grant Robertson. There was one abstention.

The Revd Laura Wheatley Downs (Vicar) signed the Minutes as a true record.

#### **Election of Churchwardens and Deputy Churchwarden**

**Leigh Welham** was proposed by Penny Rickards and seconded by Sheila Stickland

All were in favour, there were no abstentions.

There was a round of applause for Leigh.

**James Laverick** was proposed by Leigh Welham and seconded by Jenny McKeever

All were in favour, there were no abstentions

There was a round of applause for James

**David Rance** has agreed to continue as Deputy Churchwarden. Our grateful thanks go to him. David was proposed by Diana Gray and seconded by Doreen Norfield

All were in favour there were no abstentions

A round of applause was given to David.

Laura expressed her thanks to the Churchwardens for all they do, for the willing help they give her and the enormous work done behind the scenes.

Laura advised that Leigh will come to the end of her service next year and asked that we all think about a replacement for her.

Ken Perrett gave a vote of thanks to Laura on behalf of us all. She was indeed an answer to our prayers. God sent her to us. There was a round of applause for Laura. Laura thanked all of us for the welcome she received. She said it was an absolute joy being with us.

## *Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held in church on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023*

### **1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Acceptance of the minutes on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022 was proposed by Margaret Barnes and seconded by Hazel Berry and agreed by all. There was one abstention.

They were signed by the Revd Laura Wheatley Downs, Vicar as a true record.

### **2. Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **3. Approval of Annual Report and Accounts**

The Financial Statements for 2022 were presented by Tracy Perrett, Treasurer and her report is as follows:

I took over as Church Treasurer at the beginning of this year. A quick summary of how this year's accounts were prepared. Our previous Treasurer, Beccy, who did such an amazing job for 17 years, entered all the data for 2022 and then passed the files to me for preparation of the Statutory Accounts which you have before you. Once completed these were passed to our Auditor Laura Myers who was happy to sign them off before they went to PCC for approval at the end of March.

The breakdown of the unrestricted income of £104,287 is illustrated in the chart detailed on page 14 of the accounts. As you will see, the majority of unrestricted income, 68%, is received through planned giving. Just over £31,000 was donated through the Parish Giving Scheme; £35,000 by Standing Order; and the remainder by the weekly envelope scheme. Planned giving was down for the third year in a row which is of concern as it is difficult for the church to plan without confidence in the income it will receive. It is hoped that this year more members of our congregation can be encouraged to sign up to the Parish Giving Scheme which administer the donations on our behalf including claiming gift aid.

The remainder of unrestricted income which came in was one-off donations and Gift Aid on eligible donations.

The majority of the restricted income received in 2022 was in aid of the Ukraine appeal which was launched by the church in March 2022.

The majority of resources expended in 2022 come under the heading of Charitable activities. These are detailed under table 8 in the accounts (on page 17) and illustrated in the chart.

The total resources expended in the general fund was £126,194. Of this 62% was our Parish Share. This is the money that each parish is asked to contribute to support the provision of mission and ministry of the Church in the Diocese of Oxford and beyond.

Church running costs include, amongst other things, the cost of gas, electric and other utilities, insurance premiums, waste collection and the AVS annual maintenance contract. The major works costs were for the curtains and the church laptop. And the Missions Giving fund of £11,411 was distributed equally between our seven missions: Church Army, Church Mission Society, Leprosy Mission, Embrace the Middle East, Corrymeela, Bible Society, and HopeZone. In addition to these missions, details of the other charities we supported are detailed in the report.

As the Statement of Financial Activities shows on page 10, the net result was that the General Fund for 2022 ended with a deficit of £7,040. The reserve on the general fund now stands at £57,659.

Regarding the loss on our investments in 2022 of just over £44,000. Details of the origins of the trust are included on page 8 of the accounts. Investments in the UK generally fell by approx. 20% in 2022. Unfortunately, the church's investments dropped by more than 25%. These investments are something which the PCC will review during the coming year.

Just a few words about 2023. The budget prepared by Beccy in November and approved by the PCC in January predicts a loss of almost £20,000 in the General Fund. This is based on an assumed drop in donations as well as a large increase in the cost of gas and electricity. We can turn this around with a concerted effort on all of our parts.

The final chart illustrates the amount which donors gave during 2022 either by Standing Order or by the Parish Giving Scheme. There were a total of 84 donors at St Johns who gave in this way which is great. It has been calculated that the cost of running our church each week costs approx. £24 per person. As you can see, over half of our regular donors gave less than £10 a week. Of course, everyone's situation is different but if 100 people at St John's were able to increase their giving by just £3.88 a week then we would break even at the end of 2023 instead of making a large loss.

Tracy invited any questions on the accounts.

*Maggie Wade asked if we could reinstate the May Fair as this was always a good form of fund raising.*

Laura replied that for this year it was felt there was no energy to do it. It takes a lot of effort and time to organise. We are celebrating our Church being 150 years old and the Coronation of King Charles III. We may consider reinstating the May Fair in the future, we need a group of people who are up to it.

*Nigel Cavell asked about the Parish Share.*

Laura replied that this year we are paying a similar amount to what we paid last year. However the allocation of the Parish Share is being restructured and next year we are likely to be paying significantly higher.

*Richard Seaton* asked how much gift aid could be claimed on a £10 donation. The answer being £2.50. Richard then asked the question if planned giving was 68% of total unrestricted income why was the Gift Aid only 14% of the total unrestricted income. The answer was that not all donors pay income tax and therefore did not qualify for gift aid on their donations.

Leigh Welham thanked Tracy for her report which made the accounts very clear to us all. She has been very conscientious and spent a lot of time on them.

Laura reiterated this and added her thanks.

There was a round of applause for Tracy.

Laura said on 25<sup>th</sup> June we will begin our Stewardship Campaign. We need to know where God is leading us. The PCC will begin a time of discernment in May. We need to be able to plan ahead with our finances. We don't do so for the sake of it but in service of God.

There being no more questions on the accounts and Tracy recommended the accounts to the PCC.

Proposed: Veronica Burgess

Seconded: Lia Davies

All were in favour – there were no abstentions



#### **4. Report on Electoral roll**

The report was given by Tracy Perrett, Electoral Roll Officer.

At last year's APCM it was reported that the Church Electoral Roll figure stood at 179.

Since then, 7 new names have been added and 12 names removed. Accordingly, the Church Electoral Roll figure now stands at 174.

In accordance with the Church Representation Rules the amended Electoral Roll was displayed for 14 days to allow anyone to appeal against the inclusion or removal of any name. No such appeals have been received.

Laura thanked Tracy and advised that we need to find a replacement Electoral Roll Officer for Tracy.

#### **5. Presentation of Parish Reports**

Laura asked that we take the Parish Reports as read and asked if there were any questions arising from these.

*Maggie Wade asked about craft church.* This has been held in the Lady Chapel. It is lovely to see the children. The sound system on Sunday in church means that in the choir they cannot hear and it is distracting. Can the craft church be moved somewhere else.

Laura said she recognises that the Lady Chapel is a special place in our church and a good place for listening to the rhythm.

We need to have volunteers for young people to be in the hall - we need more than two adults. We had lots of children in church over Easter. We need people to invest in our church's young people before we lose them. We need to love and serve them in order to flourish. Help need not be every week but we need people to come alongside and sit with them.

*Doreen Norfield* was concerned about the mess left in the Lady Chapel on Easter Sunday. It needed a lot of cleaning afterwards.

*Maggie Wade* said we should encourage the children to sing.

*Bob Wade* said the younger people and parents in the congregation should be encouraged to step up and help.

Laura agreed with this but said at "Come and See" on Sunday afternoons we are attracting new families. We had 27 attending the last one and these families have joined us in the last three months. They are leading services themselves and becoming committed. However, she said the older people in the congregation are still able to contribute and offer their time, wisdom and skills too.

*Lia Davies* said there is immense pressure on young parents raising children to come to church and give of their time. People's lives have changed so much. We must make them feel welcome and be open hearted.

*Nigel Cavell* said we should be proud and happy to have 27 children in church.

*Hazel Berry* asked if we could make the area at the back a bit bigger. *Laura* said she had this in hand.

*Laura* said she will be putting an article in the Church Newsletter and we want to talk about young people and how we worship together. We had 8 children in church this morning and two new families.

On Wednesday this week she was having a Zoom meeting at her house on how to engage with young people and anyone was welcome to join this.

*Grant Robertson* asked about the Choir Screen – when it was down in the service we could not see the choir. Could the choir move to the seating near the piano? We appreciate our choir and today we had a large choir. When the screen is down it is difficult to hear and see them.

*Jim Wearing* said if the choir are to sing we need better lighting in the choir area

*Josh Cavell* said the children need to have the words printed in larger print for them to sing.

*Steve Pope* said if new members do not wish to join the choir, we are in need of servers and acolytes.

*Laura* thanked everyone who had contributed to the reports and who had given of their time.

## **6. Elections**

### **PCC**

*Laura* thanked all those who served on the PCC and *Jenny McKeever* who was retiring after two terms of three years on the PCC. A presentation had been made to *Jenny McKeever* at the end of the morning service.

*Steve Pope* was retiring after three years on the PCC and a presentation was made to *Steve* in recognition of his service.

There was a round of applause for *Jenny McKeever* and *Steve Pope*

We have eleven vacancies on the PCC. Three of those retiring had agreed to stand again for a further 3 years.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Second</i>
<b>Anna Pearce</b>	Anne Mohan	Diana Gray
<b>Ken Perrett</b>	James Laverick	Anne Pelham
<b>Julie Roberts</b>	Jill Pope	Margaret Barnes

All were in favour of the above three candidates. There were no abstentions

**Brian Berry** was proposed by John Lindsay and seconded by Chris Watson

All were in favour. There were no abstentions

There was a round of applause for each of the above nominations

### **Election of Deanery Synod**

There are four vacancies for Deanery Synod for three years

Name	Proposer	Seconded
<b>Carol Frost</b>	Sheila Stickland	Penny Rickards
<b>Anna Pearce</b>	Anne Mohan	Ken Perrett
<b>Leigh Welham</b>	June Todd	Jasmin Bushnell
<b>Lia Davies</b>	Jill Pope	Susan Robertson

All were in favour of the above four candidates. There were no abstentions  
There was a round of applause for each of the above nominations

### **7. Appointments**

Mary Harwood had agreed to stay as Secretary for one more year.

*Honorary Secretary*, **Mary Harwood** was proposed by Anne Pelham and seconded by Gillian Gyenes All agreed and was so appointed.

There was a round of applause for Mary

*Hon. Treasurer*, **Tracy Perrett** was proposed by Hazel Berry, seconded by Lia Davies All agreed and was so appointed.

There was a round of applause for Tracy

*Honorary Independent Examiner*. **Laura Myers** had agreed to continue as our Honorary Independent Examiner

Proposed: Tracy Perrett      Seconded: Julie Sharpe and was so appointed

Our grateful thanks to Laura Myers are recorded. There was a round of applause for Laura.

### **8. Notices**

(i) There will be a government alert today at 3 p.m. There is no need for any action. Anyone with a second mobile phone for security or safety issues should turn off the second phone and this will not ring.

Laura thanked everyone involved in the church

The meeting closed at 1.00 p.m. with prayer

## **Vicar's Report**

*"What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can dwell in its shade." Mark 4:30-32*

The last year has brought with it many changes, joys and challenges as we have journeyed together to seek where God has been, and where God is leading us as St. John's.

The PCC has been diligent, open and prayerful in helping to lead us through these transitions alongside our LLMs and Churchwardens.

Perhaps the biggest of these transitions is the germination and the continuation of our Church vision. You'll have an opportunity to look at this in more detail later in this report, but in the meantime, I'd like to reflect on the past year, looking at the vision and values we identified as those we'd like to live by.

### **Vision and values**

*Inspired by our faith in Jesus, we strive to be a joyful, nurturing, inclusive, and creative community where all can flourish in their relationships with God, themselves, others and creation.*

I frequently give thanks for you as a Church and the ways in which you give selflessly of your time, energies and gifts to serve one another and the community of Crowthorne. I have been blown away by your openness to try new things which might be beyond your comfort zone so that others might come to also know the God that many of us have had the privilege of walking alongside for some time.

The 150<sup>th</sup> celebrations (HMVC, The Church on Waterloo Road, giving of bookmarks, assemblies, re-dedication service, BBQ and other events) epitomised our values of being joyful, nurturing, inclusive and creative. They rooted us deeply as we looked forward to the next 150 years.

But we have also seen these values outworked over Easter and Christmas when we saw an amazing number of people engaging with our services from 9 lessons and Carols fabulously led by Katherine Bond Smith and our Christmas Community Choir, to our Crib Service heroically taken on by Carol and Hazel, and our Midnight Service led by Gillian and Julia. People are hungry to know God, to be part of community, and as a congregation here at St. John's we have welcomed them.

I give thanks for the joy found in the hubbub of the coffee time after Church, in the board games afternoons and in Mothers' Union. In the generous hospitality offered by our social and events committees, in the delight of the children and young people at the end of a service, and in the smiles on your faces as they come in.

Joy in the confirmation of 5 of our young people in February, and the baptisms of those from within our midst.

I have seen joy in the celebrations of other baptisms and weddings, those who support these life events, and those who attend.

I see the joy and the desire to be inclusive and creative in trying new songs and new ways of engaging with liturgy and teaching in our Sung Eucharists, All Together Services, Contemplative Communion, Evening Services and Café Eucharists, (and in the laughing and 'what was she thinking!' moments in which you have graciously accompanied me in). Giving thanks to the choir, organists, AVS, church office and ministry teams who have all helped make these a reality.

The same can be said in the growth and establishment of 'Come and See' attended primarily by families new to St. John's in the last year and capably and wonderfully led by Sam and Kate, and where members of the MU wonderfully feed us. This new congregation and expression of Church has spilled out to wider services and events, including an Easter craft experience, a pet service, and a make-your-own Christingle

service. Many of those who attended these come from our local schools who also regularly visit us for services and who we visit for assemblies and lessons.

I see the deep and far-reaching nurturing of folk and their inclusion in the life of St. John's through our pastoral visiting team led by Gillian, and in the ministry of our LLMs who visit and give communion to those who are still very much part of our Church family but can't make it on a Sunday morning.

I have witnessed careful, considerate and kind accompanying of those whose loved ones have died this year, not just by the LLMs who have led and taken services, but by those of you who have continued to support each other in grief and heartache.

Spiritual nurturing has taken place in our advent course, which Julia led fantastically well, and in our adult Bible Study group which runs every other week, as well as in our Sunday Club for children and young people, which now runs every week thanks to our dedicated team of helpers and those that lead them. Our Podcast and Soundcloud set up and maintained by the AVS team has meant that those who cannot make it to Church can still listen online and be nurtured that way.

Beyond our walls, a faithful team of gardeners carefully tend our churchyard, making it a place where wildlife can flourish. Beyond our hedges, many of you give your time to projects in the village which care for others through Good Neighbours, Community Minibus, COATS, CTC, Hopezone, Edgbarrow school and the Deanery. I am sure that many more expressions of your love and care have gone un-noted here and yet I know are vital to those who live here in Crowthorne and beyond.

As a Church, we have sought to ensure that we, others and creation can flourish through the giving of our finances, often at times sacrificially, generously and in joy. We have seen giving increase over the last year, not just to St. John's but also to our Missions partners which Hazel oversees. From Embrace the Middle East to Alexander Devine, the Red Cross, the Children's Society and Hope Zone, St. John's continues to be a place where Missions are at the heart of what we do.

I think you'll agree that there has been much to be thankful for over the past year. There are so many people I would like to thank, too many to list here, but I hope you know who you are. However, in this report, I'd like to mention the LLMS and Wardens, who have been a source of great support, and especially Leigh Welham, who has faithfully served us over the last few years as Church Warden and, at this APCM, has stepped down from this role having served St. John's, before, during and after a vacancy alongside James Laverick.

With that comes the opportunity to look forward, holding in gratitude the things where we have seen God at work in and through us, in our worship, our caring for others and the planet, in our generous hospitality, and in our partnering with others.

These things which we hold in gratitude are often small beginnings and seeds of something else. This year as I go on maternity leave, St. John's has a real opportunity to ensure that these seeds which have been sown over this year are planted deeply. This is something that only you can do. In continuing to be joyful, nurturing, inclusive and creative, together, we can ensure that we are being who God has called us to be for this season.

Remember that God is the only one who can make things grow, so spend time in prayer, asking God to bless the things which will grow his Kingdom and give shade and nourishment to those who need it. If that is the only thing done, be assured that life will come from it. I encourage you to continue to care for each other, but also to look outwards to the community of Crowthorne to notice where new shoots are emerging and where new seeds might need to be sown. Ask God to send people out into the harvest and see if that might also be you.

Although I may not be present at St. John's for the next little while, I will continue to hold you all in prayer and close to my heart. You really are a very special community, with so much to offer the community of Crowthorne and the world around us. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus who promised you His Spirit so that you may be filled to overflowing. May your hearts be opened to recognise Him as you walk the road ahead, in the breaking of bread, the reading of scripture, in your meeting together and in your being called into

the world. May you love it and the people within, beyond what you thought possible and may you rejoice at the wonders He will show you along the way.

Grace and peace,  
Your sister in Christ,

*Revd Laura Wheatley Downs*

## **Churchwardens' Report**

The Churchwarden year begins at the Archdeacon's Visitation Service in June. This is a legal requirement, and you need to attend and be sworn in before you can take office. The one in 2023 was at St. Michael's in Tilehurst on 7<sup>th</sup> June.

At St. John's we have agreed that a Churchwarden normally serves in the post for a period of four years, but they still need to be voted in by the congregation at the APCM, like the Visitation this has to be done annually. This term can be extended by another year with the agreement of the PCC and congregation. It is a very enjoyable role, and you get to meet a lot of people and find yourself doing things you never imagined you would. If you get the chance, we would urge you to consider taking on this role in the future. You would not be on your own as there are a lot of experienced people within the church willing to lend a hand and offer advice.

Leigh had served her four year term which was due to finish at the APCM in 2023 but Leigh agreed to serve one additional year as warden. Leigh will step down from the position at the 2024 APCM.

In Oct 2023 we announced that Laura has been with us for a year and with this we also announced that she was pregnant with her second child. The news was greatly received but also brought with it the thoughts of what happens when she is on Maternity leave. Without a vicar at the helm the churchwarden has to ensure the church keeps running, chairing the Standing Committee meetings and the PCC meetings. We have been working closely with Laura the LLMs and many others in the church to plan activities for when Laura is on Maternity leave. This includes the worship rota which is quickly getting filled up to ensure we have cover for all services through to when Laura returns in 2025.

Tracy has done an excellent job as Treasurer which we are extremely grateful for. Mary Harwood has continued to support with her secretarial skills who we could not have done without and is due to step down at the 2024 APCM.

We are managing to cover the costs involved in the running of the church, although we do have a deficit budget. Many of the congregation have made the transition to the **Parish Giving Scheme** from the various other ways of giving and as a result of the stewardship campaign some have increased their giving. There are leaflets in the church about this way of giving and we are always happy to chat to you. By joining this scheme you would be giving the church financial stability you would also be easing the burden on the Treasurer and Finance Team from the many admin tasks involved and having to deal with HMRC. There is also information on the church website.

We continue to work to be an Eco-Church, recycling as much as possible, using Fair Trade products, where possible using environmentally friendly cleaning products and reducing our use of single use plastic by refilling containers when empty. The Fabric Team also ensure that the church heating is at a level to protect the building but is only heated when necessary, which is even more important in these times of high energy costs. This past winter we have had signs placed on the doors and have been trying to keep these closed as much as possible to retain the heat in the church and the hall.

Our quinquennial inspection took place in 2023 by a certified surveyors who undertook the work. This produced a detailed report on the state of the church building which has been shared with the Fabric team who has been planning and working on remediation activities to continuously maintain the building and make it accessible for everyone.

We could not carry out our roles without the co-operation and hard work of a lot of people in the church. The chairs of the various committees and teams have kept the church safe, warm and beautiful, inside and out and have kept us fed and watered at various events. We realise how lucky we are with all the support we receive and would like to thank everyone concerned.

Finally, we continue to be thankful to the entire congregation for all of their time, talents, and financial support in ensuring that the life of our church continues to go from strength to strength, and that the fabric of our beautiful building is maintained.

*James Laverick*

*Leigh Welham*

## ***Advent Fair/Late Night Shopping***

Each year on Advent Sunday we hold a mini-Advent Fair, and last year for the first time had a stall at Late-Night Shopping to raise funds for the church. We had unused items from the Fair, so we ran a tombola.

December 2023 the calendar threw us a conundrum, the shopping event was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December and Advent Sunday was on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The decision was taken to still have a stall to show a presence at the event but instead of fundraising we had a craft stall in the Heart of the Baptist Church. It was a very cold night, so we were very thankful to be indoors.

The Advent Fair was postponed to the following Sunday as it was felt that it would be asking too much of the volunteers to undertake two events in one weekend.

Unfortunately COVID raised its ugly head, and I was unable to attend the Advent Fair but most of the organisation had been done so a big thank you to those that took over and ran the event and raised over £400 in much needed funds for the church.

Advent 2024 will once again be in the correct order with the Fair on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December and Late-Night Shopping on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Nearer the time we will be looking for volunteers and ideas for more stalls.

*Leigh Welham*

## ***Befrienders/Baptismal Support***

We have had a further 4 Baptisms at St. John's Church since my last report. These services continue to have a more personal theme in that it has been tailored to the individual baptism candidate. Laura has moved the time and date to suit the needs of the Baptism party and the parents and families have expressed their appreciation of this.

Laura and I continue to meet the candidate and parents at their own home. Laura talks through the meaning of the baptism and collects together their hymn/song choices for the service.

On behalf of Mothers' Union I present the candidate with a booklet "Your Babies Baptism", which offers a complete guide for families preparing for their babies' baptism. Following this for the next 5 years an anniversary card is given to the candidate acknowledging their Baptism.

*June Todd*

## Book Club

We have met three times since the last APCM. In May, September and in January.

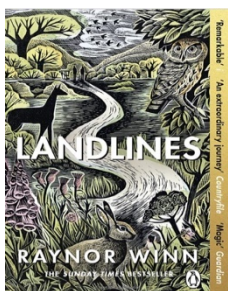
At each meeting, we discuss a selected book over a glass of wine and some nibbles.

We have enjoyed some lively discussions about the chosen books.

At the end of May we got together to discuss “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The first American novel to become an international best-seller, Stowe’s novel charts the progress of slaves who attempt to escape to freedom and in particular, Tom, who despite all his hardships maintains a strong Christian belief. We thought that the book was both very moving and still challenging for us today.

In September we discussed “Landlines” by Raynor Winn



The book is about a backpacking journey of 1000 miles from Cape Wrath in Scotland to Cornwall. Raynor recalls the people they meet and the land they travel through.

We had a very lively discussion ranging from sanitation to miracles! The book was rated from 6 out of 10 to 8 out of 10. I think we all felt it was worth reading. There will be a copy in the Church Library.

In January this year we discussed “Transforming Love” by Amy Boucher Pye

On the cover of the book it says “how friendship with Jesus changes us”.

The book takes the gospel stories about the three siblings; Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and delves into them. Mary, Martha and Lazarus are not part of Jesus’s 12 disciples they are his friends.

In each chapter there are snapshots of Amy’s life, thoughts about an aspect of one of the three stories. This is followed by an exercise of personalizing and adapting of Psalm 23. At the end of each chapter there are some questions to think about.

It is a very readable book, but it is more suited for individual reflection or a small study group than a book suited for book club. We would recommend the book as a very thought provoking read.

If you would like to read any of these books they are in the library.

*Anne Pelham*

## Choir

The choir has continued to lead our weekly worship; they have remained a loyal and dedicated group of singers. It goes without saying that we are more than ready to welcome those of you who would like to lift your voices with us!

Our current choir members are:

Sopranos: Anna Pearce, Celia Mc Dowell, Julie Cavell, Julie Roberts, Suzan Laverick.

Altos: Sue O’Hare, Maggie Wade. Tenors: Josh Cavell, Jim Wearing.

Basses: Peter Hattersley, Bob Wade.

We were delighted by the number of ‘extras’ who joined us for the Service of Nine Lessons including FIVE lively trebles (Note: there are robes to fit you waiting in the vestry . . . !). We all appreciated how wonderful it was to have Katherine as our *temporary* choir director.

This event made us realise that finding a **permanent director is an imperative**. We need to be more ‘aggressive’ in our search, since it is likely to take a great deal of time to find a suitable candidate requiring an interview and approval by all those involved.

Enormous thanks must also go to our lovely organist, Richard Seaton, who has been a tower of strength for us all – choosing the weekly hymns (and changing them regularly!) and encouraging us with his



wonderful organ skills. We do 'allow' him two Sundays a month off, and welcome Jennifer White or Janet Rogers on these occasions.

It is often quoted that: 'to sing is to pray twice,' which we do, as we sing so many lovely hymns (even the unfamiliar ones!). We are very blessed indeed.

Finally, renewed thanks to all in the choir who have kept going so well under such challenging circumstances.

*Choir*

## **Church Cleaners**

Thank you very much to all the volunteers who give up their time to keep our church clean on a regular basis. We are blessed this year that we have been able to add three additional people who have volunteered to come on the rota.

If you feel that you could help by contributing your "time and talents" to keeping the church clean regularly, please talk to Laura or Jenny McKeever to add your name to the list. The cleaning can be done any time during the week allocated. The church is divided into five cleaning areas so that each cleaning session should only take 1 to 1½ hours. The nave and hall are often cleaned by a couple either with a spouse or with a friend. We are particularly short of couples so do talk to your friends and see if you can persuade one of them to join you in making church cleaning your New Year's Resolution. Generally cleaners take on to clean four times a year, so it is not such an arduous chore. This is not something that needs to be left only to the ladies as we all know that you gentlemen as just as handy with a vacuum cleaner, brush and duster as the ladies in your families.

The annual 'Spring Clean' will be on Saturday, 23rd March, and we look forward to a good turnout of helpers so that the church and halls sparkle for Easter.

*Jenny McKeever*  
771379

## **Church Flowers**

The Church Flower arrangers provide flowers for the Sunday services throughout the year, except for Lent and Advent. The whole church is decorated for the festivals of Easter, Harvest and Christmas, with special arrangements for the Patronal Festival, Confirmation and Remembrance Sunday.

We are currently a team of 12 happy flower arrangers. We work well together and support each other when necessary. For example it can be quite a daunting task to do a special arrangement for a wedding! We are very fortunate to have so many talented flower arrangers in our church family. If new members of the congregation would like to join us you would be most welcome. Most of us are self taught and there are plenty of us to help if you have no experience but would like to give flower arranging a try?

This year our wonderful treasurer Doreen Norfield has stepped down after more than 40 years of keeping our finances in order. Doreen has been amazing keeping the books balanced and helping me to run the team. We all wish to thank Doreen for all her time and talent in keeping us going. This is a continual task as each fortnight the flower arrangers need to be paid for their flowers!! We are very fortunate that Shirley Smith has very kindly taken over from Doreen as treasurer.

This year, after the break due to Covid, we are back to providing flower arrangements for weddings and funerals.

The Mothers' Union continue to donate money for the Lady Chapel flowers and the flowers are arranged by Mothers Union members. I would like to thank Mothers' Union and all the church Flowers Arrangers, for their time and talents, in producing such beautiful arrangements for us all to enjoy and enhance our worship.

If you would like to remember a loved one on their anniversary, birthday or other special date by having flowers arranged either at the Remembrance Table or Altar we are happy to do that for you.

We have found that the increase in the price of flowers this year has been causing us a problem and some discussion has taken place about reducing the amount of flowers we have in church. A few more donations would be very welcome in an attempt to avoid this situation. I would very much like to thank those people who have made a donation this year particularly the flower arrangers, who I know often give generously with extra flowers.

Any questions please contact [carol.cain@crowthorneworshipchurch.org.uk](mailto:carol.cain@crowthorneworshipchurch.org.uk)

*Carol Cain*

## **Church Office**

We have continued with the faithful team of Anne Pelham, Carol Frost and myself, as much of the work continues to be done from home. We can access all the Church files and systems from home and can even unlock the Church door remotely.

We have been very fortunate to be given a new photocopier during the year and this makes the work in the office much easier.

We are in the office on a Wednesday morning. We check the post, print and post notices for upcoming events, print copies of the worship rota for the Sunday worship, update the spreadsheet copy of the Burial Register and program the doors each week. Laura keeps us busy with Orders of Service and Publicity.

The Office Team has continued to share the preparation of the Weekly News which goes out by email on a Thursday evening. Some paper copies are made available at Church and some are still being delivered by the Covid Support Team.

During the week, one of the team is responsible for checking and responding to emails sent to the Office. This person also sends copies of the weekly news to each of the care homes.

The Church diary is maintained electronically by Anne Pelham. This is particularly important for bookings and for setting the door locks and heating. The diary is accessible to anyone with a Church email address.

*Ken Perrett*

## **Churches Together in Crowthorne**

The Churches Together in Crowthorne group consists of seven churches who work with each other for the benefit of the residents of Crowthorne. The seven churches are St John the Baptist, Crowthorne Baptist Church, Crowthorne Methodist Church, Holy Ghost RC Church, St. Sebastian's Church, St James in Finchampstead and the Vineyard Church.

Janet Rogers from St Sebastian's is the Chair, Leigh Welham of St John's is the Secretary Imogen Forsaith of Vineyard is the Treasurer and Barry Bailey also of Vineyard is vice-chair.

St Johns have two lay representatives at the moment, Anna Pearce and Leigh Welham and Reverend Laura Wheatley Downs is the clergy representative.

Funding for the CTC comes from the **coffee shops** which are held weekly at the Methodist church on a Tuesday morning and Baptist church on a Thursday morning. The funds raised cover the costs of the CTC – Insurance, Summer Activity costs and associated costs of the Christmas Lights and Late-Night

Shopping in December. The CTC also gives funds towards other events or initiatives which benefit the local community such as HopeZone.

There are usually four meetings per year in January, May, September (AGM) and November and then we hold other events either for fundraising or for joint worship. We also hold planning meetings for events such as Late-Night Shopping and Summer Activities which are open meetings for anyone to come along to. These proved to be very beneficial this year and much appreciated for the volunteers of Summer Activities who felt more included in the event.

April 2023 – **Good Friday** service was held at St John's Church followed by a Walk of Witness through Crowthorne to the Baptist Church for hot x buns and fellowship. This year the service will be at Crowthorne Methodist Church followed by the Walk of Witness to St. John's.

The first four Fridays of the school summer holidays in July and August 2023 – **Summer Activities** were organised by CTC for the young people from Crowthorne and beyond. This year, following our planning meetings, we decided to purchase bright yellow CTC branded T-shirts which proved to be a big hit with volunteers and the community. The volunteers felt part of a team and members of the community could easily identify that it was members of the church putting on the event. Many people were not aware that it was the churches running this, now they know. We do not charge for participation just ask for a donation of whatever you can afford if you can. A welcome day out for many in the continuing times of financial hardship.

The CTC have continued with financial responsibility for the **Christmas Lights** in the Village and also helping Crowthorne Parish Council with the running of the Late-Night Shopping Event. Last year we said that we were making it our mission to put more CHRIST into the event and this year had two slots for carol singing outside the Baptist Church with a message from our Angels, Revd Laura and Revd Sharon. We also had more presence in the running of the event and continue to work with Crowthorne Parish Council in the planning for next year.

Two weeks later on a Saturday morning we also sang carols in the High Street where our 'Angels', this time knitted and crocheted ones, were again in evidence much to the delight of many members of the public. Something we could not do without all our knitters and crocheters in our congregations. Thank you also to the members of the churches who joined the choir.

On December 22<sup>nd</sup> we went carol singing in the Prince and the Crow. A group of singers, accompanied by our Busking Band, entertained the patrons of the two establishments and went down such a storm we have already been booked for Christmas 2024 and are looking to extend our list of venues.

1<sup>st</sup> March 2024 – World Day of Prayer will be held at the Methodist Church and later in the month a coffee morning with a Bring and Buy sale to raise funds for Corrymela again at the Baptist Church.

CTC events and activities are open to all, and we look forward to welcoming you.

*CTC Reps  
Leigh Welham  
Anna Pearce*

## **Churchyard**

The churchyard is maintained throughout the year by a small group of volunteers. There is a regular work force every Wednesday, most Friday mornings and other people work at times that suit them. A big thank you to all the helpers: Anna Pearce, Anne Mohan, Jill Pope, Linda Armstrong, Mary Harwood, Mike Frost and Richard Forbes. A special thank you also to Philip Foster who has stepped down to take up some family duties. We miss both his mowing skills and his engaging conversation over coffee.

The obvious tasks are mowing the grass and strimming around the headstones during the Spring and Summer then raking the leaves when they fall in the Autumn. It is a big task to keep the flower beds under the rose trees stocked and tidy. Sometimes the small jobs make a big difference too. We regularly remove dead flowers, pick up fallen twigs and the bins are emptied each week – we separate the organic material to go onto our compost heap and have recently started to put aside any discarded plastic flowerpots for one of the team to take to Squires or the Bracknell tip for recycling. The block path has recently been

weeded and the edges trimmed. The team appreciate kind comments from people who remark on our well cared for churchyard.

Incidental tasks are to cut back small seedlings that have taken root – oak, holly and sycamore are the worst offenders. Did you know that most of the trees in the West of the churchyard are self-seeded, some are many decades old. The surrounding hedge has had continual attention during the last couple of years to remove unwanted creeper and bracken and generally keep it at a manageable height. Low hanging branches and dead wood has been cut from some of the trees.

If you would like to help in the churchyard in any way then please speak to me or anyone in the team – or just come along on a Wednesday morning.

*Anne Mohan*  
*Churchyard Team*

## **Communications**

The Communications group continues to meet monthly on-line using Teams.

We aim to keep the congregation and our community informed about the Church. We do this through:

- The Church website
- Social Media
- Information posted on our noticeboards
- Weekly News
- Crowthorne Eye

At each meeting we review the effectiveness of our communications and plan the communications for the coming weeks. Laura provides us with lots of stunning graphics and we are very grateful that she has agreed to continue to do that during her maternity leave.

The growth of people donating through the card reader and on-line by means of the website or QR codes has been significant and beneficial to the causes we have been able to support during the week.

We deal with a lot of technology. This is the group that oversees the use of:

- Administration of Microsoft Office, Teams and Onedrive
- Mailchimp for the Weekly News
- WordPress for the website
- The card payment device
- Just Giving and GiveALittle Charity Giving pages
- Ticket Tailor for selling tickets.
- CANVA for image design
- The photocopier
- The AVS

*Ken Perrett*

## **Deanery Synod & Deanery Green Team**

We have four lay reps on the Deanery Synod Committee, reps are appointed for a 3-year term, the number of reps is dependent on the number of people on the electoral roll. Anna Pearce and Leigh Welham are

members of the Deanery Standing Committee and Leigh Welham is also the Deanery Secretary. There are four meetings per year held in churches throughout Sonning Deanery.

At the March meeting we had a presentation for Revd Jon Salmon from (Trinity, Earley) and Siew Yin (Hong Kong Trinity) who told us about the new Hong Kong congregation that was being set up at St Mary's Winnersh as they had outgrown the space at Trinity Church in Earley. Sadly, we were informed at the end of 2023 that Siew Yin had passed away.

June is the AGM, and this was held here at St. John's.

In September we met at All Saints, Wokingham, and heard about their refurbished building and how they now use the open space for the community as well as for services.

At the November meeting there was a very interesting talk from Kathryn Aboud, from the Oxford Diocese, about children, young people, and families and how we might encourage them into faith.

The final meeting of the year, in March, will be at St. Michaels and All Angels in Sandhurst and we are welcoming Bishop Olivia.

When there is a speaker at a meeting, we are happy to welcome visitors to come and participate and understand if they don't want to stay for the business.

Throughout the year we have finalised how Parish Share will work with support from the Deanery and have also given out a number of Green Fund grants to churches to support their work in reducing their carbon footprint.

Alongside Deanery Synod there is also a Deanery Green Team Group. St John's have a team that meet with other teams in the Deanery who discuss and share ideas on how to improve the environment in and around their churches. This includes ideas on reducing the carbon footprint of the buildings, enhancing the biodiversity of the churchyards and ideas on events with the community.

*Deanery Green Team  
Anne Pelham  
Anna Pearce  
Jenny Herbert  
Tracy Perrett  
Leigh Welham*

*Deanery Synod Representatives  
Lia Davies  
Carol Frost  
Anna Pearce  
Leigh Welham*

## **Deanery Report from Area Dean**

As well as excellent presentations around Youth and Children's Work and the building project at All Saints "Space for All", a major focus for Synod this year has been the adjustments to Parish Share which were voted through with a large majority. We decided in the end to reduce people's Share payments immediately while staggering those facing an increase by making up the gap with Deanery Funds. Our Deanery Green Fund has been very popular and we have made grants for things like lightbulbs, a new door for a parish hall and sensors which turn lights off when people have left the room. The application process is very simple and we match the funding offered by the PCC to a total per grant of £1,000. Parishes may only make one application per calendar year but there is nothing to stop parishes applying year after year.

The total Share we paid in 2023 was £1,017, 105, which is 93.6% of the total we are asked for by the Diocese. We were £69,797 short, a deficit made up of only two parishes. Thank you to all of the parishes, and all of the Finance Teams and Treasurers, for their excellent efforts to support mission and ministry across the Deanery and beyond. (We were £84,000 short in 2022 so this is a considerable and welcome improvement).

The congregation of Hong Kongers who worship in Cantonese at St Mary's, Winnersh are in good heart and steadily growing in number, to the extent that they now need to rent further space at The Forest School when they meet. It was good to have a presentation on this initiative at Synod in April 2023 at Owlsmoor.

The Deanery Plan was also voted through in 2023, with a limited reach and a focus on things like building support groups for people in set roles, like Safeguarding Officers and Treasurers. We are also working on a list of 'trusted traders' who parishes have used and putting on Deanery courses which all parishes can access, e.g. on spotting domestic abuse, and fundraising.

Deanery Chapter continues to be well attended and a real source of support and ideas. Part of the reason that we are keeping a narrower focus in our Deanery Plan is the significant number of parishes in vacancy at the moment. We are holding the line at the moment, through committed lay leadership, hard-working clergy in the parishes in question and willing support from the Deanery. I am really thankful for everyone's commitment and help in the four parishes of All Saints, Finchampstead, Ruscombe, Twyford and Hurst and Winnersh and Bearwood. At the start of 2024 we are still trying to work out what level of ministry is affordable for Winnersh and Bearwood, and how to split Hurst and Ruscombe with Twyford into two separate parishes.

Rickey Simpson-Gray was installed as Vicar of St Sebastian's, Wokingham Without in 2023 and Laura Wheatley Downs was licensed as Assistant Area Dean, alongside Jane Kraft who continues in role. I was also relicensed as Area Dean in November 2023- those five years have gone very quickly indeed, since I was first licensed in 2018.

*Rev'd Canon Richard Lamey*

*Rector of St Paul's, Wokingham and Area Dean of Sonning*

## **Events**

2023 was our Sesquicentennial 150<sup>th</sup> Celebration and was particularly special in the life of our church. Steve Pope made a request for a small Steering Committee to ensure we marked the occasion and his willing band of volunteers met at his house several times:

Anna Pearce, Diana Gray, James Laverick, Brian Berry, Jim Wearing & Chair Steve Pope.

We wanted to involve schools and James was able to produce a beautiful bookmark. We printed 2,000 copies. It consisted of a glossy, high-quality image of St John the Baptist taken from our famous stained glass window and on the reverse side we wrote the Lord's Prayer to help spread the word of God.

Every school child in Crowthorne received a bookmark. Edgbarrow, Crowthorne C of E, Wildmoor Heath, Our Lady's Prep, Oaklands Infants and Juniors and twelve framed copies were also presented to those organisations who had made bunting for the church, including the care homes in the area.

The first event was The Hart Male Voice Choir on 13<sup>th</sup> May, arranged by Steve and we were delighted as we filled the Church and the advertising worked! We raised a surprising amount of money for our Church. We were all very buoyed up with this success and hastily planned our next event.

Brian Berry, who had studied Drama was very keen to put on a Docu-Drama and soon joined our intrepid group. This turned out to be a total triumph again, playing to a packed house over two nights. It contained music, images on our large screen, poetry and a lot of lines being delivered off by heart! It focused on the History of Crowthorne, the Crimean War and a delightful playlet about village life at that time with our truly

wonderful Thespians from the congregation. Special thanks to Jonathon Turner, Jenny McKeever, Margaret Barnes and Julia Norton for their outstanding contribution to the evening. Steve narrated and Brian remained calm throughout even when one of his originally chosen actors threw a wobbly! The costumes, lighting and music really added to the atmosphere and it is somewhere on tape I hope.

Back to school and while DG was delivering the bookmarks (she works in schools so made sense). She was keen to get banners to celebrate this momentous event. The evidence is on the North wall. Huge thanks to Crowthorne C of E for their sterling work in this regard and which clearly explains that we are 150 years old. In addition, our own Sunday Club provided the brightest most vibrant painting and we will treasure it. Many thanks to all involved, to Mike Frost for hanging them and to my dear friend Diane Pye for sewing them and ensuring they were identical. Did we have a Faculty? It seems we did!

AP had a beautiful bench which also needed a Faculty – she is the expert so we relied on her for wisdom in our meetings. The wooden bench is now in our churchyard and another reminder of our special year.

Finally, to mark the end of our 150<sup>th</sup> celebration the Bishop of Reading came to our Patronal Festival and rededicated the church, blessed the altar and the banners with sprigs of rosemary dipped in holy water. It was a wonderful service and our new Reverend Laura helped us celebrate our new beginning.

2024 and beyond. In 2022 we decided that Carolyn Ireson should come out of retirement and run her legendary plant stall. After DG had begged and cajoled her my dear partner Colin said he would do it if Carolyn showed him the ropes, so we set off to the Carnival and it seems we have started a new tradition. In July 2024 we have secured a similar pitch and we have volunteers to man the stall but please do donate anything you have grown in your garden that would be ready for sale in July.

In July this year it is our Infamous Flower Festival. While the events committee is disbanding DG and anyone who was on the original May Fair Committee will be joining the support group (if able) to help Leigh and her team before and during the event. Any other volunteers would be welcome and frankly needed to ensure this event – a mainstay of biannual Carnival Week – continues and showcases our Church.

*Diana Gray*

## ***Fabric Committee***

A year of maintenance and minimal expenditure. The small team of Mike Frost, Anne Mohan and Laszlo Gyenes has carried out a number of small projects to maintain the effective function of the Church and Hall. Some of the relatively straightforward first hits of the Quinquennial report have also been tackled.

### **Health and Safety**

No specific H&S activities addressed and communion being held at lower level now so no requirement for use of altar stairways. Main Hall entrance requires small ramp over the weather step. This is a project for imminent attention.

Fire Extinguisher annual service carried out and 2 units replaced due to being out of specification.

### **Heating System**

Main church heating had annual service and continues to be effective

Hall Heating continues to be tweaked. This year we have fitted thermostatic control of convector radiator fans. This has proved more efficient. The thermostat was relocated in the Hall and measures the temperature more effectively. We had dropping system pressure which was found to be leaking radiator fitting in the small study/play room adjacent to the foyer. This was replaced and the floor dried out. We have now found the radiator fan of the unit by the disabled toilet to be faulty and has been sent away for repair. This will be re-fitted in 2023-24 period. Hopefully this will prove beneficial to the effectiveness of the heating

## **Electrical**

Following last year's power outage from overloaded socket in Kitchen, the ring main in this area has been extended from one to 5 sockets.

A kindly donated fridge has been installed in the kitchen and now occupies one of the new sockets.

The 5 year Electrical check was carried out by Thomas Williams of TW Electrics Ltd. Essentially all was good with the need to replace some RCB switches and remove some sockets which had unnecessary RCB's fitted.

TWE have quoted for replacement of existing non efficient hall lighting to be carried out in 2023-24 year. Cost of this work will be borne from Kind donation and equivalent donation from the Deanery Green fund.

## **Plumbing**

No plumbing remedial works carried out. Gents toilet will be subject of some renovation during this coming summer.

## **Quinquennial**

This always presents as a major concern for the next 5 years. The items identified as needing work often materialise as major cost implications to us. This report by John Radice was no exception. The 2 main projects of concern were the tiling in the church which is under carpet, and the Access issues for wheelchairs. The carpets were removed from the Choir stalls and the floor cleaned. No further work is needed here! The brown carpet throughout the church covers a multitude of sins. Previous quotes were obtained to do a thorough renovation which amounted to about £60K. This is not an option at this time so we will assess the extent of the condition of the tiles under the carpet and consider minor repair/renovation to redress the concerns of the architect over the rubber backed carpet removal.

The disabled access issues are a concern and consideration has been given to the way we carry out service activities to negate the need for major costly church alterations

A number of smaller jobs identified have been carried out. Working through the A category items.

Roof leak identified above foyer entrance hall has been resolved and dried out. Consideration for decoration of foyer once lighting has been replaced. Simple but timely job of a painting work party!

## **Internal Repair and Maintenance**

The sole speaker for the PA system in the choir stalls right hand wall has been placed on a swivel mount so the choir can hear the service.

Bench installed at the front of the main entrance from donation to commemorate the 150 year anniversary of the church.

Gate post at main church entrance from Waterloo Road has been stabilised with cement but will need replacement during 2023-24 season.

New paper towel dispensers have been installed into the three toilets

Prayer board removed from Lady Chapel and relocated in Main church outside Lady Chapel in plain view. Small shelf added for pens and paper.

## **Blocked downpipe**

Consideration was given to this in the quinquennial report. It was agreed with the architect that we needed to carry out further exploratory work to assess the next step. Initial digging has discovered the drain going in a totally different direction to that expected. During more mild weather of spring we will dig further then seek advice of expert again.

*Mike Frost (Chair)  
Anne Mohan  
Laszlo Gyenes*



## ***Junior Confirmation***

On Sunday 4th February 2024 at 4pm, 5 of our young people were confirmed by Bishop Olivia (Bishop of Reading) at a wonderful service in Wellington College Chapel, a beautiful setting. Supported by their families, with Carol and Julia, and some of the congregation from St John's also attending to support them. The following Sunday they were welcomed in Church at the end of the 10am service when they were presented with their certificates, bibles, candles and book marks. During refreshments after the service a wonderful cake made by Gwen Stevens to mark the occasion was enjoyed by all.

Many thanks to:

- Maggie Wade for inscribing the certificates and bibles
- Gwen Stevens for making the cake
- Judith Thomas for supplying and inscribing the bookmarks (on behalf of Mothers' Union)

Lord, we ask you to bless those confirmed and their families.

May the Holy Spirit guide them on their journey,

And may they be strengthened by your love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

*Carol Frost & Julia Norton*

## ***Library***

We have a library which is located in the entrance hall, both behind and beside the white board. It is full of books on a wide variety of subjects. There are books on prayer, Bible study, church architecture, the Saints, pastoral care to ecology, and novels. Then, there are books for specific for Advent and Lent or for specific age groups.

Not many people have used this valuable resource this year. I would urge everyone to browse the library, to see if there are any books that may be of interest. Books are being added to the library stock, including the books we read for Book Club. It is simple to borrow a book; just record the details in the log book which is on the top of the main book case and then on returning it just complete details against the same entry. There are no time limits on how long you can take a book out for.

Many thanks to all those who have donated books to the library.

*Anne Pelham*

## ***Minus 5's***

This is an informal group meeting on Wednesday mornings in term time, from 9.30 for parents/ carers with children under 5. Many of the children are younger, often coming before they go to pre-school groups. The adults appreciate having time to chat with a coffee and the children to play and engage in various activities from time to time. We hold a short and simple service in Church before finishing at about 11.00am.

*Gillian Gyenes*

## **Missions Committee**

The Mission's Committee is responsible for co-ordinating our support for the seven Christian missions to which St John's contributes on a regular basis. These missions and their representatives are, Church Mission Society (CMS) – Claire Taylor; The Leprosy Mission - Wendy Allerton; The Corrymeela Community – Diana Gray; Church Army - Gini Cope; Embrace the Middle East - Ken Perrett; Hopezone – Jenny Mckeever; Bible Society – Veronica Burgess.

In 2023, St. John's donated a total of £10,821, representing 12½ % of the planned giving by church members and shared between our seven Missions. Donations were made by bank transfer to avoid the handling of cheques.

Historically in addition to those seven Missions we support a local hospice, Alexander Devine Hospice for Children situated in Maidenhead and Carol Frost keeps us informed about their work. On Christ the King Sunday 2023, Anita Weare came to speak to us on behalf of the Hospice and the collection on that day amounted to £674.24.

The Children' Society is also under the banner of the Missions Committee. We keep the congregation informed about the Society through Sunday morning speakers and articles in the Weekly News. We support the Society financially through the annual Christingle Service and occasional fund-raising events. In December 2023 the Come and See, Christingle Service raised £142.91. On 21 January 2024 the Rev Canon Terrie Robinson, the Oxford Diocese Ambassador for the Children's Society came to speak. There was a bucket collection on that day, which raised £500 for the Society.

In March 2023 Carin Hunter from Crowthorne Hopezone came to speak. She appealed for more volunteers so that Hopezone can be open of more afternoons each week.

Also, in March there was the Annual Lent Lunch, and the chosen charity was the Ukrainian Red Cross working in Ukraine and surrounding areas to provide essential aid, food, shelter, healthcare and to help local partners. The lunch was provided, prepared, and served by members of the Missions committee and raised £1,000.

In May the Rev Dr Alex Wimberley leader of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland, gave a video presentation, rather than incurring the expense of traveling to speak to us.

In June, Ruth Sayers our Church Mission Society partner should have visited but was unable to come due to a bereavement. We are expecting her to visit in 2024.

In October Miriam Kennedy, manager of the Church Army Marylebone Project showed a video and gave a very moving talk about the project.

In December our Christmas Giving Tree raised £1040 for Yemen, the forgotten war and this was sent to Yemen through the Red Cross, and the Red Crescent

The members of the committee contribute articles to the Weekly News to coincide with the visits of the mission's preachers and giving more information about the mission. Further information about the missions we support can be found on the Parish Website.

The committee has continued as always to keep in contact with the missions they represent, and I would like to thank them for what they have achieved in the past year to support their own and the other projects mentioned in this report and also those in our congregation who so generously support these missions and projects.

***Hazel Berry***

## ***Mothers' Union***

The branch of the Mothers' Union here at St John's has had another busy year with two meetings a month, events and projects. We are delighted to have enrolled six new ladies which brings our total number of members to sixty eight. We had a variety of speakers during the course of the year including a talk from Steve Pope on the history of the church, a police officer, an expert on curiosities in the Cotswolds and from two charities, Mercy Ships and The Cowshed. A trip was arranged to St Paul's, Wokingham and two members went to York for the Annual Meeting. We invited members from the other churches in Crowthorne to join us for an ecumenical meeting arranged by the local World Day of Prayer Committee. All our meetings are open to everyone.

We enjoyed a double celebration as firstly in May we were involved in the Hart Male Voice Choir concert for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inauguration of St John's, serving the refreshments and organising the raffle. Then in July it was the turn of the branch to mark the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding on the same day, time and place all those years ago.

The MU ran the cake stall at the Advent Fair, gave bookmarks to the confirmation candidates, provided the refreshments for the monthly Come and See All Age services, organised the Link to Hope shoebox appeal and the knitted angels for Late Night Shopping, ran the refreshments in the hall for funerals and memorial services and arranged the flowers in the Lady Chapel.

We supported the wider Mothers' Union making Christmas cards to send to Bullingdon Prison, collecting items and filling toiletry bags for parents and carers with children in the John Radcliffe Hospital and supporting families with baby products for the Oxford based charity Baby Basics. Our main fund-raising activity has been The Away From It All holiday scheme. The Christmas cake made by Gwen Stevens raised £142 to which we added another £60 from a Bring and Buy and greetings cards made by Jasmin Bushnell and her team. We also supported the Mothers' Union General Fund.

We are looking forward to another busy year ahead supporting our members, the Mothers' Union in the diocese and other parts of the world where the organisation of four million members needs our help and prayers.

***Penny Rickards***  
***Branch Leader, Crowthorne***

## ***Pastoral Group***

This is a committee who between them try to care for as many people as possible in our congregation. This includes visiting, phone calls, emails and text messages and any other ways of keeping in touch. Cards are sent on various occasions to let the recipient know that they are in our thoughts and prayers. We have a Welcome Table at the 10.00 a.m Sunday Eucharist for newcomers to be welcomed into the congregation. The MU also have pastoral lists so that their committee can keep in touch with their members too. Home Communion is taken to individuals who are housebound and to local care homes. If you have any concerns or would like to talk to someone please have a word with one of the following:

Revd Laura; Hazel Berry; Carol Cain; Julie Cavell; Ann Cottrell; Carol Frost; Gillian Gyenes; Julia Norton; Penny Rickards and June Todd

***Gillian Gyenes***

## ***Prayer Groups***

### ***Mothers Union Prayer Group***

The Mothers' Union holds a Prayer and Coffee Morning on the fourth Thursday of the month at 10.00 am in the hall. In our prayers we remember those mentioned on the prayer board and anyone with a special request, the seasons and future meetings.

The Mothers' Union has a Wave of Prayer that extends around the globe and we explore the lives and situations of members often living in very different situations to our own. We take part in the World Day of Prayer in March and again in our ecumenical meeting in October.

The Mothers' Union actively supports the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence and we include the material provided in our prayers in November. All our meetings begin with prayer. Everyone is welcome to our meetings.

***Penny Rickards***

### ***Prayers for Healing and the Sick***

The life of the parish is supported by prayer. There is a rota of intercessors for our weekly 10.00am service and a prayer board now moved into the main body of the Church for everyone to use. A group meets regularly every Friday at 5.30pm in the Choir Vestry to pray for healing for those mentioned on the prayer board and for anyone else known personally to us, as well as for the needs of the parish. MU also holds a monthly prayer group.

***Gillian Gyenes***

### ***Praying for Streets***

Each month Mary Harwood produces a list of specific streets and roads in the parish. Those streets and roads are put in the prayer section of the Weekly News. They are also mentioned during the intercessory prayer in our Sunday Services. In this way we can pray for every street or road in our Parish. It takes over a year to cover all the streets and roads. This list of is also sent out to the other churches in Crowthorne so that they can also pray for the same streets.

***Mary Harwood and  
Anne Pelham***

## **St John's Sunday Club**

**Connect, Create, and Celebrate.**

Sunday Club @ St John's continues to provide an opportunity for primary school age children and their



families to meet in the church hall and gives them a chance to celebrate their shared faith together. The sessions start at 10:00 am and continue until the children and leaders/helpers join the main congregation towards the end of the service in the church; in time for those who have been Confirmed to receive Holy Communion and for the children and those not yet confirmed to receive a blessing. After this has been completed a Sunday Club member shares with the congregation what they have been doing. Sunday Club is now available every Sunday during term time (note: not the last Sunday of school holidays or during school holidays, returning the Sunday after term time resumes). Please note that Sunday Club does not take place when there are special services, i.e. 'All Together' services. At each session we

explore a bible story through games, crafts, and songs. We are always looking for more helpers, this could be you! If you are able to consider this and would like to have a chat to find out what this would involve, please contact Carol Frost or Julia Norton for more information.

Carol Frost [carol.frost@crowthorneparishchurch.org.uk](mailto:carol.frost@crowthorneparishchurch.org.uk)

Julia Norton [julia.norton@crowthorneparishchurch.org.uk](mailto:julia.norton@crowthorneparishchurch.org.uk)

*Carol Frost*

*Julia Norton*

## **Safeguarding**

Over the last few years or so, Oxford Diocese, in line with the National Church, has taken a new look at many aspects of Safeguarding, as the Church has very much needed to update its practice here. Most importantly, we should all now be more aware of each other's safety within our Church community, irrespective of age or our role within the Church. It is no longer solely the responsibility of one or two named individuals or even of a committee.

To this end and at the request of the Diocese, we have compiled a very comprehensive audit, listing all those whose role requires/invites them to attend or complete online, the relevant Safeguarding course, provided by the Diocese. I should like to thank the very encouraging number of people who have taken part in these courses and who have had their DBS checks renewed, thanks to Anne Mohan. It was also heartening to realise, in carrying out this exercise, what a great number of people volunteer in so many different ways, contributing overall to the smooth running of our Church.

'Promoting a Safer Church Action Plan' which acted as a checklist for all aspects of Safeguarding has been reviewed, and, with many thanks to Veronica Burgess, the 'Safer Recruitment' section is now also up to date.

Training courses have been held online including one on Domestic Abuse, which was a particular concern during lockdown. We have had regular communications from the Diocese regarding Safeguarding and all the LLMs have attended the Advanced Leadership Course as well as the Domestic Abuse course. PCC members have completed the Basic and Foundation online Courses and Pastoral Group members the Domestic Abuse course as well.

Should you want further guidance over any matter, please do contact the Vicar or myself, if that would be helpful. We have a model Safeguarding Policy which is approved annually by the PCC and there is a contact list of Who's Who (regarding Safeguarding) on the Church website.

*Gillian Gyenes*

## **Servers**

Thanks go to the stalwart team of Crucifers which includes Barry Brewster, Ken Perrett, Shaun Rance and Chris Watson.

The Re Dedication service, carried out by the Bishop of Oxford in June 2023, was enhanced by the inclusion of Acolytes namely Page and Lia and I thank them for their participation.

Recruits to the valuable and necessary role of Crucifer and Server in our church would be more than welcome.

*Steve Pope*

## **Social Committee**

The Social Committee was pleased to welcome Brian Berry to our number when he became a PCC member in April 2023. The committee members are now: Brian Berry, Nigel Cavell, Lia Davies, Richard Ireson, Jenny Mckeever, Jill Pope, Sue Sumner, Jim Wearing and Leigh Welham.

The committee served wine and cakes after church on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May to toast our new Kiing Charles III. Then on 13<sup>th</sup> May we provided refreshments during the interval when the Hart Male Voice came to start our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration with a well-attended concert.

As last year the 2023 'Big Brekkie' on 21<sup>st</sup> May had a sparse take-up.

After the service on 18<sup>th</sup> June when the church and stained glass were re-dedicated by the Bishop of Oxford we had help to serve a glass of bubbly and a slice of one of Gwen Stevens' delicious cakes, before moving on to a celebration BBQ in the Vicarage garden. We were pleased to welcome 75 partakers who enjoyed a hot sunny afternoon.

Again, following the "Church on Waterloo Road" docu-drama staged as part of our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> June the committee served tea and coffee.

A Harvest Supper was held on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September when 53 diners partook of baked potatoes with a choice of fillings followed by apple themed desserts. Those attending were very appreciative of their meal and a good time was had by all.

Crowthorne Choral Society held a Christmas concert in the church at the beginning of December and the committee served refreshments at a more leisurely pace than the Crowthorne Orchestra's annual Christmas concert a week later. The committee was very grateful for the extra help serving refreshments during the hectic interval at this event. Thank you to Lia and Freddy Watson for selling the raffle tickets. We also served mince pies and mulled wine after our Nine Lessons and Carols Service later in the month.

The committee is also providing the refreshments for the board games afternoons inaugurated in February by Anne Pelham. This is great fun and an enjoyable way to spend a Saturday afternoon.

My grateful thanks go to the hard-working members of the Social Committee who put a lot of effort into our social evenings and into assisting with refreshments. We are also very grateful for the extra help given by members of the congregation as and when needed. Your help will be called upon again this summer when the bi-annual Crowthorne Flower Festival takes place.

*Jenny McKeever*

## **Stewardship**

This year, we had a stewardship campaign which ran in June and July 2023 over three weeks, which included a teaching series on Joy, Generosity and Gratitude as part of our thinking about stewardship of our money, passions and gifts.

We also had a series of prayer evenings focusing on the same themes.

The direct result of the stewardship campaign resulted in a fantastic outcome as seen in our annual accounts earlier in this report.

This year, the stewardship committee will be looking for ways to fundraise specifically for the role of a Director of Music, looking toward the congregation of St. John's and diocesan grants to do so.

Another focus of the committee will be to think about the place and encouragement of legacies within the giving of congregation members.

Finally, the stewardship committee have been re-evaluating where our investments are currently being held, and if these should be moved in order to provide better returns and ethical

The Stewardship committee continue to encourage individuals to:

- Consider signing up to:
  - o the Parish Giving Scheme at <https://www.parishgiving.org.uk/donors/find-your-parish/crowthorne-st-john-reading/>
  - o or Standing Order Scheme (Talk to Tracy Perrett who can give you a form)
  - o and Gift Aid scheme (Talk to Tracy who can give you a form)
- Re-evaluate their giving to the Church- Are you giving too much or too little? Do you give to the plate, but think you could give regularly via the Parish giving scheme so that we can claim gift aid and plan ahead?
- If you'd like to change how you give, please contact your bank for standing orders, or contact the Parish Giving Scheme on 0333 022 1260.
- Join the Stewardship group, or feed in new ways of fundraising.
- Give thanks for all that has been and will be.

This year we also saw Steve Pope step down from this committee. Huge thanks to him and to Tracy, James, Julia and Phil who continue to serve us in this way.

*Revd Laura Wheatley Downs*

## **Welcome Team**

Our Welcome Teams continue to bless our Church community and those who are visiting us.

We have moved back to the pre covid method for communion where we have two lines down the centre isle, returning via the side isles.

Members of the Welcome Team are: David Rance, Doreen Norfield, Sheila Stickland, Ann Cottrell, Barry Brewster, Sue Sumner, Mary Clark, James Laverick, Carol Cain, Jill Pope, Julie Sharpe, Keith Wilkinson, Nigel Cavell, Liz Martyn, Ken Perrett, Anne Pelham, Leigh Welham, Jenny McKeever, Katey Williamson, Philip Foster, Raj Ariaraj, Simon Harding, Grant Robertson, Susan Robertson, Tom Lewis, Brian Turner, Kathy Beard, Daphne Bass, June Todd, Chris Watson.

Our thanks to all for their continued service to the parish.

We aim to operate each of our four Welcome Teams with seven people. If any parishioner is interested in joining the Welcome Team, please email David Rance at:

david.rance@crowthorneparishchurch.org.uk

*David Rance*

## **Website**

We update the site every week with news of upcoming services and events. The Weekly News often has links to the website to provide more details on a new item.

*Ken Perrett – website editor*