



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



*Sujith Selvan Photography*

# **2023-2024**

## **Report of Parish Activities**

For presentation at the  
Annual Parochial Church Meeting  
On Tuesday 30 April 2024

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

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

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

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

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

With every blessing

**Will Hunter Smart**

## 2. Churchwardens’ Report

What a blessing it is to belong to St Nicolas Church! These are our honest thoughts as we consider what a beautiful, vibrant family we belong to here in Newbury, the excellent teaching we receive, the full services each Sunday and the children’s work bursting at the seams. We are so grateful to God for all He is doing among us and for the new people who continue to arrive each week to worship or explore faith with us. We are also incredibly grateful for the strong leadership we have in Will and Joy and the amazing staff team and volunteers who all work so hard to keep this family functioning and doing all they can to be and bring good news to Newbury.

As always, St Nic's has continued to be a very active church with so much going on for people of all different ages and stages of life and faith. We have had plenty of opportunities for fellowship including men's and women's breakfasts, ladies' pudding parties, men's curry nights, afternoon teas for the over 60s, Sunday Lunch at Home, Six in the Sticks, Easter and Christmas craft day / evening and a picnic for the whole church at St Gabriel's School in July. It was also great to be able to celebrate our growing cultural diversity, particularly with our large Hong Kong contingent, by celebrating Chinese New Year with them for the second time as we were treated to delicious Chinese treats over coffee and Chinese tea!

The highlight of the year for both fellowship and teaching was the Church Weekend Away back at the Pioneer Centre in Cleobury Mortimer in October, with over 200 of us attending. As well as the inspiring teaching from Andy Robinson on our relationship with Jesus, it was great to have time to talk to people at greater length, rekindle old friendships and get to know new people. Hats off to Caroline and John Michalski who were brave enough to come along having only attended St Nic's for two weeks prior to the weekend! There was plenty of time for chatting over copious amounts of cake, and lots of fun and laughter while taking part in high ropes activities, going for a walk, participating in a quiz and Celtic dancing or simply cheering on England or South Africa in the rugby! Our heartfelt thanks go out to John & Elaine Canniffe and Colin & Jude Cunningham for their superb work in all the planning and leading of the weekend. All these events have helped to bond us as church family, something which in itself is a great witness to the world outside, *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," John 13:35.*

At St Nic's our mission is to be and bring good news to Newbury, so we endeavour to look out as much as possible and make the most of the opportunities afforded us. The Coronation of King Charles III in May was one such occasion when the church was open for guests and members alike to be able to watch the ceremony in community via livestream. Perhaps the best opportunity to be good news was the amazing holiday club we were able to hold again in July. This was the first time we had been able to run it in its full glory since pre-pandemic days and it was fabulous to see 73 children participating, many from outside the church, and nearly as many volunteers from the church helping to make it happen. Clare Caskie and Beth Mawdesley were amazing organisers and leaders with their fantastic energy and enthusiasm and fabulous creativity. The Light Party on Halloween was also oversubscribed and another brilliant opportunity to share the love and light of Jesus to children on a dark evening. The ever-popular Hidden Treasures and now Tiny Treasures have proved very natural ways of reaching parents and their young children with the love of Jesus as they continue to be fully booked each week, parents really appreciating the love and fellowship they receive as well as the quality activities on offer for their offspring. Meanwhile at the other end of the age spectrum, Newbury Friends Together has continued to be good news for our senior members and their friends, providing not only a chance for some fellowship but also gentle opportunities for responding to God's love.

Having said farewell to Jackie, Madeline Norman gallantly stepped up to run Alpha at St Nic's with her home group in February and March this year, having already run one in Speen in the autumn reaching the Community Café friends with the good news of Jesus. A very practical

way of being good news is helping people who have become overwhelmed with debt. We were delighted to be able to appoint Colin Cunningham as the new CAP debt centre manager in October and to see him quickly launch into this work, meeting families in desperate need, with the help of faithful volunteers accompanying him as befrienders.

Our vision process endeavours to ensure that we align the focus of our ministry through concentrating our efforts on seven key areas. These are covered elsewhere in this document, but it is particularly pleasing to note considerable progress on both the adoption of a development plan for our building and the appointment of Steve Wolak to lead up our effort to encourage and enable everyone in our church family to connect with our corporate prayer life.

We have seen a few staff changes over the last year. Caroline Chichester stepped down as Children's Minister at the end of February 2023 and has so far proved irreplaceable! We are just grateful that she has continued to help with the JAFFA club and assemblies at St Nic's School as well as in a voluntary role with the All Stars. Marcia Wadham was finally ordained at St Lawrence's in Hungerford in March. Ben Norman stepped down as Facilities Manager but thankfully was able to be replaced in his role by the amazing Sam Bryant in May. We had a farewell tea for Jane Sutton as she retired as a Licensed Lay Minister after many years of service in Newbury. Our wonderful Curate, Jackie Fountain, left us in September to start as the incumbent of St Catherine's in Tilehurst in November. Many of us headed to Reading to join in with her licensing service. And most recently we have had to say goodbye to our hugely energetic and enthusiastic Ministry Apprentice, Beth Mawdesley, as she heads off to Coventry for her exciting new role as Holidays' Ministry Co-ordinator for CPAS.

While staff have come and gone, as always we have sadly had to say goodbye to some faithful members of St Nic's who have left us for their permanent home in heaven. This year we remember Dawn Aldridge, Darren Walters, Ann Gore, David Chipfupa, Jenny Patrick, Norma Weaver, Rod Thomason, Betty Parkinson and David Parry. We continue to mourn with those who mourn but rejoice that we will see these precious people again in glory.

We continue to be enormously grateful to Will and Joy 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. The rest of the staff team 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 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, we 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!

Finally, as we write, we are delighted that our long-awaited new signs, on either side of the church building, have been erected at last telling people that St Nic's is alive and active and that they are welcome to join us. Although our numbers are so encouraging each week at our Sunday services, we realise that there are still so many more people out there who need to hear the Gospel and receive the love of Jesus. Our prayer going forward, as we have recently been reminded about in the Sermon on the Mount, is that you would continue to *"let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* Matthew 5:16.

**Tania Wolak & Richard Coward**  
**Churchwardens**

### **3. Deanery Synod**

Deanery Synod sits at the base of the Church of England organisational structure, and its purpose is to provide the means by which all the parish churches in a district can make their collective view known up the hierarchy. This consists of three meetings, called synods, a year to which parishes can send representatives. Perhaps inevitably, the topic which takes the most time is parish share - that is the amount each church has to pay each year - to cover the cost of clergy, diocesan and central costs. This is an unending debate and a significant challenge because as well as the inflationary cost increasing, in many places our congregations are getting smaller. These financial debates are inevitably pointless because the Diocesan share cannot be reduced and so any relief has to be made good by the other parishes who are often in similar challenged circumstances.

The Deanery has created a high-level plan to try and increase numbers, particularly in the smaller rural parishes, even when they have been consolidated into multi parish benefices. So far, attempting to find practical ways forward has been a challenge; smaller numbers reduce available volunteers and for clergy, benefices can create a significant work overload. David Willetts, representative from St Mary's Shaw, has been working with Shaw parish council and the new housing development in the Parish to try and give life to a sense of community by making the church a node. This would provide a pleasant environment, for a range of community events where any residents - thus making the Church one of the key nodes. In practical terms, this could be a 'community cafe'. This concept has been accepted as a way for other rural parishes to develop.

However, against a traditional Deanery approach, progress is painfully slow. As most appreciate, mission is crucially important and following investigations we found that there was a body of people delivering various activities to try and achieve similar results. Therefore, David and I have re-shaped the base plan to concentrate on encouraging, supporting and developing those interested with a view to significantly enhance our mission activity.

This period ended the triennium, and I did not offer to stand again as Secretary but instead intend to move this 'Home Mission Plan' forward. At the moment, officer shortages have significantly slowed any Deanery activity - although this may not be of major significance at the moment as we have Diocesan challenges, such as dealing with the imminent retirement of our Bishop Olivia and other matters which may affect our future organisation.

So, looking forward, His great commission goes ever on. In the words of Isaiah 43:18-19:

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

**Mark Knight**

## **4. Electoral Roll**

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 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 have supported safeguarding arrangements around holiday club and the church weekend away.

We marked Safeguarding Sunday in November by using some video and prayer resources from the safeguarding charity Thirty-one:Eight in both the 10am and 6pm services.

**Rebecca Bird**

**Parish Safeguarding Officer**

## **6. Vision Review**

As a church we continue to follow our Vision Document set out in 2019, seeking to Be Good News and Bring Good News to Newbury. Contained within the document, alongside our vision for our worship, fellowship, and mission, are seven key goals that we believe will enable us to align our church with the vision. The leadership of the church keeps these under review, and it is really encouraging to see the progress we continue to make towards reaching these. In the last couple of years, we have focused on our corporate prayer life (Goal 1), the

welcome and integration of newcomers (Goal 3), conducting a worship review (Goal 4) and agreeing and adopting a plan for our church building to better serve our needs (Goal 5).

Very good progress has been made on the welcome goal, led by Tania Wolak, with the latest change being the refreshing of our 'Get Involved cards'. The worship review is now concluded, and this has resulted in an affirmation of the band led style of worship in both morning and evening services with a small occasional choir used periodically, and larger event choirs leading us at major festivals. Having run a prayer course at the end of 2022, it is good to report that we are now starting a re-focus on this goal with Steve Wolak heading up this area.

The last of our major focus areas is the building plan. It is wonderful to report that we have made really significant progress in this area and following the adoption by the PCC of our extremely thoroughly constructed Statement of Need in the autumn of 2023, and having undertaken a full selection process, we have appointed Camilla Robinson of Clews Architects to undertake a feasibility study. This will focus on how we can adapt our church building to be more welcoming and serve our ministry needs. It is envisaged that we will be in a position to consider the worked-up feasibility proposal as a congregation in the Autumn of 2024.

Lastly, having progressed well with the Newbury CAP debt centre (Goal 6.1) until 2022, we had a pause while there was no Centre Manager. We are now delighted that we have recently selected a new Centre Manager, Colin Cunningham, and that the Centre is now back up and running.

**Richard Coward**

## **WORSHIP (Looking Up)**

### **10am Service**

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

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

We still have work to do of course. We have not properly implemented the results of the worship review that we conducted in 2022. In particular we need to work on the four themes that emerged: *Expectation and Encounter; Freedom, Space and the Spirit; Creativity and Variety; Testimony and Participation (including all ages)*. For the last year and a half we have been blessed to have Beth Mawdesley as our Ministry Apprentice, with a particular focus on

our worship. Beth brought fresh energy, new songs and valuable administrative support to our worship team. With Beth's departure in March 2024 we need to look again at how we resource our worship ministry.

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

***Will Hunter Smart***

## **The Six**

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

After returning to the church hall last winter, despite our initial plan to return to the main church building, we collectively decided that it was not the right time for the move. We felt that this was the best decision for the moment as being in the hall allows for a more intimate feel to the service and is beneficial for the continuing growth of the Six community as a church family.

However, our ultimate goal remains to move back to the church, as we recognise there are many advantages, such as individuals from outside the community wandering past and coming in to see what we are doing.

One of the joys of the slightly more informal style of the evening service is the flexibility to have occasional services where we can diverge from a normal service to some now familiar alternatives. The opportunities to hear one another's testimonies of where God is at work in their lives; spending time walking around Newbury praying for different aspects of the town; as well as evenings focused on sung worship. These opportunities have embellished our regular worship and teaching from a variety of people on Colossians, Daniel, the Old Testament Patriarchs and the 'I Am' sayings from Jesus.

The Six has also been able to host services run by Count Everyone In, CTNA and the Carol Service. As ever, one of the highlights of the year was 'Six in the Sticks' at Pete and Liesl Bradley's 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.

The Six is overseen by a planning team which has evolved over the year. We have been hugely grateful for the support and guidance of Elaine Canniffe and Jackie Fountain. The team now consists of Rhodri Bowen, Joy Mawdesley, Rosemary McDonald, Ben and Hattie Norman, Tim Saunders, Barbara Sporne and Pete Winmill – each representing some aspect of the Six service. The team meets once or twice a term to review the term, to plan ahead, to think creatively and to pray.

*Tim Saunders*

## **Thursday Holy Communion**

At 10.30 on a Thursday morning about 35 people leave the clamour of the market and shops and join together in a simple service of Holy Communion. It is a time of quiet peace and reflection as we worship together. Those who come sense a caring and supportive community around them. We often share news, listen and pray for each other. Some people go on into the hall and the coffee morning afterwards to catch up on news.

Services are usually led by Will or Joy, Janice Macdonald, Geoff Sowden or Pam McKellen and we thank those who read each week. We also are grateful for the support Maria Muir, Sue Elliott and Bob Kennaugh give in welcoming and many other ways!

*Pam McKellen*

## **Benefice Choral Evensong**

This monthly service continues to be a jewel in the crown of worship offered within our benefice and the wider area. Held at 6.00pm on the first Sunday of each month at St Mary's Speen, it has grown in both choir members and attending congregation over the past year; this seems fitting testimony to both its quality and worth as voices soar, the Spirit connects us to God, and we are spiritually refreshed, ready to face another week.

The refreshment continues after the service with tea and cake, together with conversation with new and old friends, which is also good for both body and soul.

Thanks are given because this service depends upon the commitment of our visiting choirmaster/organist, Steve Bowey, the visiting choir drawn from across the area, our rota of preachers, and the cake makers, amongst others. This is a wonderful example of the Body of Christ working in harmony so I hope you will join us and experience it for yourself.

*Janice Macdonald*

## **Children's Ministry (ages 0–5)**

### **Small Stars**

Small Stars meets in the upper hall each Sunday morning in term time, and we welcome between 15 and 30 children aged 0-5 each week. We follow a pattern where we look at Old Testament characters in the Autumn term, then think about the Christmas story, continuing in the New Testament with the life of Jesus in the Spring term, leading up to Easter, and then we have had various themes during the summer term. Each session consists of a time of free

play, then a circle time with singing, snack, story time and a prayer. We then have either a craft or some tuff-tray play related to the story, alongside more free play and the sensory room.

We have a wonderful team of volunteers who look after our little ones, helping them settle in, reading books and playing with them, giving out snacks, helping them make crafts and much more! Here are some words from one of them:

*'Small Stars is a wonderful place to be on a Sunday morning - for all involved!'*

Getting to know this marvellous team has been a great joy. It's so much fun working, serving and learning together, praying with the All Stars team and playing with amazing children.

What a privilege it is to welcome under 5s and their parents and carers to our church family, to learn together about God and discover what the Bible says to us today. Is there anything more wonderful than seeing the faith of very little people start to grow and to hear them sing and pray?

Thank you Lord!

***Sarah South & Sue Edwards***

## **Children's Ministry (ages 5-10)**

### **All Stars**

All Stars has continued to be a well-attended group this year with up to 40 children from year groups 1-6 coming along each week to enjoy a programme of teaching, Bible reading, prayer, craft and games. Years 1-5 meet in the hall, while year 6 enjoy space together in St Nic's House. This split enables us to tailor activities for the different year groups. It has been so lovely to see friendships forming right across the year groups.

During the summer term, All Stars were studying the book of Acts and learning about the early church and Paul's travels. In autumn, we moved to the Old Testament with the stories of Moses and David. A sheep theme began to emerge with sheep-related games, making biscuit sheep and crafting origami sheep bookmarks!

In January 2024 we started using teaching material from a new source: The Biggest Story Curriculum, and we have been looking at aspects of the life of Jesus. We will be continuing this in the summer term.

We have enjoyed themed craft mornings: Christmas led by Vivien Staunton and Mother's Day led by Kate Howarth. Christine and Pete Winmill have joined us to teach singing with Makaton signing and Hannah Maskell has led the children in a variety of songs. It's brilliant to have different visitors who can share their skills and passions.

In October, Beth Mawdesley, Clare Caskie and Alison Davies organised a Light Party which was enjoyed by over fifty children in the hall, many of them from outside the church. It gave them an opportunity to learn that there is an alternative to Halloween and that Jesus is the one true light.

Tania Wolak, Caroline Chichester and Victoria Maxton-Livesey have continued to run the weekly Jaffa Club at St Nicolas School, with numbers attending running between 5 and 12. The children enjoy a time together of games, crafts, Bible study and learning a memory verse. A representative from St Nic's also leads a weekly assembly for the whole school and this role is shared between the clergy, Tania and Caroline.

All Stars is fortunate to be supported by an awesome team of volunteers who continue weekly to give their time and energy in this vital mission of making the love of Jesus real to our children. Their patience, creativity and adaptability are wonderful – thank you everyone. A huge thanks also goes to those young leaders from the Firm who regularly join in the games, crafts and talks – it makes such a difference having you along with us.

Since last Easter, we have been without a Children's Minister, and while advertising this post is ongoing, alternative arrangements have been made for the continued running of the group. Five volunteers – Alison Davies, Becky Bird, Kate Howarth, Mark Glendenning and Tim Comer – took on the additional responsibility of being weekly co-ordinators, having an oversight of the teaching and organisation in the hall. An All Stars administrator, Elaine Canniffe, was appointed on a temporary basis in September, to support the team overall with planning and organising craft resources and the volunteer rota.

At the time of writing, we have readvertised for a Children's Minister and continue to pray for the right candidate.

***Joy Mawdesley & Elaine Canniffe***

## **Youth Ministry**

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

Pathfinders continues to be a vibrant, fun group where it is a joy to be able to spend time in the Bible, talking and learning about Jesus. Over the last year we have seen some changes to our group of volunteer leaders, saying goodbye to Rosie Davis and Judy Ortiz who have served us faithfully and brilliantly for the last few years and welcoming Rob Canniffe and Cheryl Gadsby at the start of 2024. I continue to be so grateful for all the support, time and love the volunteers (Matt Kingston, Adriel Comer, Phil Davis, Rob Canniffe and Cheryl Gadsby) pour into the Pathfinders ministry.

Drop-In has continued on a Thursday afternoon once a month at St Nic's House but we have identified that not everyone is able to make the after school slot so we have welcomed the start of a monthly Friday Night Games night which has been enjoyed by members of Pathfinders and The Firm - I challenge you (at your peril), to take on any member of the youth at a game of jungle speed!

The Pathfinders enjoyed a weekend summer camp in June at the Bradleys' house in Highclere - we are so grateful for Peter and Liesl's amazing hospitality including Peter's expert BBQ skills! The Year 6 group also joined us to get to know the group before their move up to Pathfinders in September. It was a fabulous weekend of fun and relationship-building. The weather was, if anything, too hot (*we shall not complain, despite the amount of sweat lost*)

*putting huge tents up in 30 degrees*) but this did make for a great opportunity to have a water fight!

The summer also had the excitement of welcoming St Nics Holiday Club back. The Pathfinders helped greatly on the young leaders' team. It was wonderful to have so many of them there, and I know they were hugely appreciated by both the adult leaders and the younger children. It was great to see all age ranges of our church family enjoying time together working towards such a brilliant project with the important mission of sharing the good news of Jesus with our community.

In September we saw our group of Year 9s move up to The Firm. Nearly all of them had joined the older year groups (already in The Firm) on the summer Ventures Camp run by CPAS so they felt ready to move on having made new friendships over the summer. The Ventures Camp which Beth Mawdesley and I also went on as volunteer leaders was a wonderful week of fun, fellowship and learning more about Jesus – the young people all said they would love to go again next year!

During the autumn term the Pathfinders went through the book of Mark together reading the good news about Jesus Christ the Son of God, sent on a mission to save us. This was a great start to the new school year with a new group. We also really enjoyed spending more time with one another on the church weekend away in October.

Since January we have been looking at Philippians and discussing how Paul's letter to the church in Philippi gives us vital encouragements and instruction on living as Christians today.

We are now looking forward to tackling some big questions with Bible truths in the summer term and hopefully another camping trip!

***Clare Caskie***

***Youth Minister***

## **The Firm (ages 14–18)**

It has been another exciting year at The Firm. It has been a huge encouragement to see it growing in numbers, reaching between 15-20 young people each week on a Sunday after the 6pm service.

We finished the summer term of 2023 with a series of testimony evenings where members of the church came to talk to the young people about how they came to faith in Jesus and how knowing Him has changed their lives. It was great for the young people to get to know more about other members of the church and ask them questions about their lives as Christians.

The start of summer welcomed back the St Nic's Holiday Club. We were so grateful for the young people who got involved and helped in so many different areas from tech, to kids group leaders to designing art to decorate the church. It was wonderful to serve with them in the shared mission of being good news to our community.

The summer also saw 12 of the young people attend a Ventures Camp organised by CPAS where Beth Mawdesley and I volunteered as leaders. This was 7 nights away and gave everyone a great chance to build friendships with each other and those from other congregations, have lots of fun, study the Bible and learn more about Jesus and how knowing Him transforms our lives.

In the autumn term, we started looking at the book of Exodus on a Sunday. The Firm had said they were keen to know more of the Old Testament and understand how it relates to the New Testament. It was really encouraging to see God's faithfulness to the Israelites. Despite their sin, He always keeps His promises. We saw how the Passover Lamb points us to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who will be the ultimate sacrifice who ultimately rescues God's people.

This term we have been doing the 3-2-1 course by Speak Life. The aim of the 3-2-1 course has been to immerse us in Jesus' vision for life. We have loved the discussions with the young people that this course has prompted.

We have continued with Firm+ on a Tuesday evening, which is our mid-week small group Bible study. Having finished Romans in summer 2023, we have now started the Gospel of John. Normally there are between 5-7 young people at this group, and we enjoy having an in-depth discussion about the passage and how we can apply it to our lives.

We have had some changes to The Firm team over the last year with Ben and Hattie Norman taking a step back after welcoming their daughter Zephaniah. We welcomed Luke Radford in the autumn term and are very grateful for everything he brings to the group. We were all sad to say goodbye to Beth Mawdesley, who has been a large part of all our groups, as she moves on to a new job with CPAS in Coventry. I am so grateful for the continued support of all the leaders: Luke Radford, Paul Mawdesley and Sian Lupton, who bring much wisdom in ministry and care for the young people to everything they do.

We have ended the spring term on a high with four members of The Firm being baptised on Easter Day. It was wonderful to see them make a public declaration of faith and commit their lives to Jesus.

We are looking forward to the summer term, addressing some big questions with Bible truths and hearing more testimonies from our church family.

***Clare Caskie***

***Youth Minister***

## **All Age Celebrations**

This year at St Nic's we have enjoyed a number of All Age Sunday mornings. Palm Sunday saw the middle aisle transformed into the road into Jerusalem with a drama involving several members of the congregation and crowds of people in the pews waving palm branches we had made earlier in the service. At Pentecost Praise, Small Stars taught us a new song and we made and wore Pentecost headbands with flames on! In the summer we had a wonderful service for the end of Holiday Club week with several new songs and then we started the school year in September with Back to School Sunday, where we remembered that God is

with us always, so we can be strong and brave. At Harvest we learned about the work of the Leprosy Mission, and at Christingle we enjoyed filling the church with candlelight and remembering Jesus coming as the light of the world.

I love these times when the church is all together, old and young, learning and worshipping alongside each other.

***Sarah South***

***Children's Minister (0-5)***

## **Bell Ringers**

In March 2023, seventeen members and friends of the St Nic's Tower enjoyed its annual gathering for dinner and thanksgiving at the Craven Arms. In April, the tower was visited by a journalist from a Parisien newspaper, who was writing an article about bell ringing teaching in the UK during the run up to the King's Coronation. On the day of King Charles III Coronation, Saturday 6th May, the St Nic's bells were rung for half an hour before the Abbey service ([click here](#) to see our Coronation ringing photo).

Later in May, four St Nic's ringers made up half of the Newbury Branch band that won the Oxford Diocesan Guild annual eight-bell striking competition, held at Broadwell near Faringdon. In July, St Nic's won the Newbury Branch six-bell striking competition ringing Grandsire Doubles, just piping Bucklebury by one fault (St Nic's were commended for excellent tenor ringing). The same band represented the branch at the ODG competition in October at Shipton-under-Whychwood, finishing a creditable second place out of eight, behind St Mary's Reading. Earlier on the same day, a St Nic's band finished third out of three in the ODG inaugural Raising and Lowering competition at Wigginton St Giles.

Practice nights at St Nics have continued to be well attended with the addition of two new ringers and three returning ringers. In addition, the tower has continued to progress the skills of its youth ringers. During one practice evening in July, Newbury Fire Brigade conducted a mock exercise to remove a casualty down the sixty-six steps from the tower ringing room!

The St Nic's bells were rung for two weddings in September, then in October the tower hosted a visit by 1st Inkpen and Kintbury Cubs, when twenty cubs and five leaders were given a tour of the tower, viewing the bells, and having a go a hand bell ringing and chiming a bell. To end the year, a successful New Year's Eve ringing was had with the Mayor, Nigel Foot and his Mayoress, Sarah Slack, in attendance.

***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***  
***Choir Director***

## **Church Flowers**

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

***Maria Muir & Judith Crockford***

## Prayer

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

There is a lot of prayer at St Nic’s. Some of this is organised centrally, particularly at our monthly Encounter prayer meetings. Much prayer is more informal, taking place in small groups, prayer triplets, DNA groups, etc. This year a new regular Morning Prayer meeting started, initially for Advent 2023, then carrying on into 2024. This meets every Wednesday morning, led by Geoff Sowden and others. I am encouraged that the numbers of people attending Encounter have grown. It’s not revival yet (!), but I sense a new energy and appetite for prayer.

Despite the good things mentioned above, there is much room for growth. Our prayer goal reads:

*Encourage and enable everyone in the church family to connect with our corporate prayer life, at different times and in different ways.*

Although we made encouraging progress on this goal in 2022, with the running of the Prayer Course and a 24/7 week of prayer, we did not manage to make the most of this momentum in 2023. I’m delighted that Steve Wolak has agreed to take on responsibility for this goal, working alongside the clergy. I don’t think we need to make things too complicated! We are starting from a good place. With a little creativity and coordination, I think we can make progress. May God guide us and grow us so that increasingly we are a church that prays on all occasions with all kinds of prayers for all the Lord’s people.

***Will Hunter Smart***

## Stewardship

We started off 2023 with a stewardship budget of £261,696 and finished the year at £269,370. Even though there was an upfront shortfall against the budgeted expenditure at the beginning of the year, there was no specific appeal for increased giving as the plan was to use some of the reserves to fund the church expenses. However, we had amazing support with many new stewardships, increased contribution, and one-off gifts. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, we met our stewardship budget successfully.

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 £258,479 for 2024. The current cost-of-living and economic climate challenges could potentially impact our performance against the stewardship budget forecast for the year. Yet again, we also have a shortfall against the budgeted expenses and therefore a specific appeal was made to the congregation to increase

their giving to meet the financial challenge. Therefore, I would urge for your continued support. If you have any questions related to giving or wish to make any changes, please reach out to: [stewardship@st-nics.org](mailto:stewardship@st-nics.org).

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

***Shalini Philip***

***Stewardship Secretary***

## **FELLOWSHIP (Looking In)**

### **Welcome and Integration**

Since March last year the Welcome Team has tried to establish a rhythm of events to help with planning and making sure that we are covering the different opportunities for newcomers to integrate with church members on a regular basis. So now we know we will have a Newcomers' Welcome Lunch in January, the Chinese New Year celebration in January or February, the Sunday Lunch at Home event in March, a Church picnic in July, and another Welcome Lunch in November.

We have done a revamp of the Get Involved cards, to update and resize them, so they fit better into their stands. Many thanks to Chris Reeves for his hard work on this. These are being well used – at least people are taking them on a regular basis. Hopefully they are taking the next step too and actually getting involved in something!

The Welcome Area in church now looks much more inviting with little coffee tables, often with a vase of fresh flowers on them, providing a more comfortable place for visitors to sit during the week and at coffee time on a Sunday. We also have new noticeboards that better match the carpet and are more fitting for the space.

We now have a regular team of welcomers who are on Mandy's big rota to ensure there is someone available every Sunday morning to stand near the Welcome Desk and be ready to greet newcomers over coffee after the 10am service. This is invaluable as it is so easy for all of us to just focus on people we know and want to catch up with on a Sunday and leave newcomers or others a bit less confident, standing alone. We have got better as a church at looking out for new people. But we still have a long way to go to make sure that we don't leave anyone without a friend to make them feel welcome and at home. This could be the first step to them coming to know Jesus, not just settling at St Nic's!

Thank you to everyone who plays their part in welcome at St Nic's. Please keep up your amazing work. And thank you to the welcome team, Mandy Maskell, Sharon Coward and

Tim Over. If you would like to join us as a core team or join the welcome rota at church, please do get in touch with one of us. We would love to welcome you in!

***Tania Wolak***

## **Women@St.Nics**

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

Our small team held fewer events in 2023 and we miss Thelma Ambler, a valued member of the team, who moved on last year.

We have continued to host termly Breakfasts, Summer Pudding Parties and Craft Events. We aim to encourage community, creativity and Christian faith for women in St Nics, their friends and members of other local churches.

The Breakfasts attract women and their friends to hear the good news within a guest speaker's life story. The porridge was very well received at the January Breakfast, and we now have a good recipe which is also suitable for vegans.

Easter Craft Saturday in 2023 provided a valuable all-age experience and the day proved a great opportunity for people in church to get to know each other. Dads and their children joined in the creativity.

All Stars have enjoyed Viv Staunton's additional craft activities, with some creating 4 works of art during the 1 hour session.

Our Create for Christmas is always popular and is an opportunity to present the good news of the Christmas Story. We are exploring using more eco-friendly and upcycled resources at future events.

Some of us attended the Glendale Women's Day in May at St Mary's Greenham led by the author of 'Sensible Shoes', Sharon Garlough Brown, which was an inspiring and reflective day to remember.

***Joyce Zealey***

## **Men@St.Nics**

Yet another year of fried breakfasts but also a great curry evening, not to mention great fellowship of course – helped by record attendance!

In September, the wonderful church yard at St Mary's Speen played host to a dry and very pleasant curry evening, appreciated by men from both St Mary's and St Nic's.

Returning to our more standard fare of fried breakfasts in the hall, in December Rob Canniffe gave a delightful presentation on his experiences volunteering with the church in Bosnia, and in March Pete Winmill gave a captivating and thought-provoking testimony "it began with an orange".

More breakfasts are of course being planned, along with our Men's Weekend Away in the Cotswolds on 11-13 October 2024.

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

As ever you can join our 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 – those who help organise the events, those who get up exceedingly early on a Saturday morning to chef and do front-of-house-stuff, and those who attend. Too many to mention, but you know who you are!

***Jim Lupton***

## **Pastoral Care**

*Team: Joy Mawdesley, Janet Price, Sharon Coward, Sue Elliott, Rosemary Freeman, Christine Jago.*

This year we have been pleased to welcome Christine Jago to our main team. Her caring approach has already been much appreciated. We have also been grateful for offers of help where needed from Susan O'Neill and Muriel Sowden.

The team has focused on responding to specific needs of individual church family members. This has included practical help with tasks or lifts to services and appointments, offering emotional and prayer support at difficult times and maintaining contact with people when they are not able to attend services, sharing home communion with them if requested.

There is a high level of care shown in St Nic's through its networks and groups, so we particularly reach out to those who do not have these connections. Do let us know if you feel there is someone we are missing or if we can give you any extra support. Equally, do be in touch if you would like to find out more about joining the team.

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

***Janet Price***

## **Small groups**

Our Vision Document as regards small groups states that here 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.'*

Over this past year, a good number of new people have been connected with groups – to the point that we are in need of one or two new groups starting during the next year if we are to continue to seek to reach this goal.

In a church like St Nic's, it isn't easy to feel connected and to build relationships just by coming on a Sunday – and that is where small groups come in. The opportunity to meet with a small group of people (maybe around 12) is a fantastic way of getting to know a few people well, sharing the ups and downs of life and learning together from God's Word. The groups we have do the latter in different ways, whether that be by following the sermon series and using the questions set by the preacher, or finding other study guides and materials of a subject or Bible book of their choice.

We now have 14 small groups that meet across the week, 7 of them in the daytime and 7 during evenings. Some meet weekly, others fortnightly. The groups are by no means the same. Some are groups for women. Foundations, for example, open to women of all ages, is a larger scale 'small' group, meeting on a Tuesday morning in the church hall, with crèche. Another group meets on a Friday morning at 7.30am to apply the Scripture, Observation, Application and Prayer approach to Bible passages.

A more recent model of small group community has been a Sunday afternoon group that enables families to meet together, for the adults to look at God's Word and to share food together. The group that first adopted this model has now opened up a second group for families to meet in this way which is very exciting. So each group across the church offers something different.

There have also been temporary groups that meet for a period of time, such as the post-Alpha group that usually meets in the summer term, as well as those who meet to follow a particular course through, for example, a recent group has started up in the daytime to run the Christianity Explored course.

Our thanks go to the 30 or so members of St Nic's who lead our small groups week by week and in so doing, enable Christian growth and discipleship but also offer care and support to those who come along. Without you there would not be the sense of fellowship and life that there is at St Nic's.

There is still work to be done to more actively publicise our small groups and the opportunity to join them - but please be in touch if you would like to be part of a small group. We would usually try to find out what you are looking for and invite you to join a group that seems as if it will suit you well.

***Joy Mawdesley***

## **Church Weekend Away**

Following on from our first post-Covid weekend away in 2021 at the Pioneer Centre in Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire, we decided to repeat the experience in October 2023.

The aim was to offer the St Nic's church family an opportunity to spend a weekend growing together in friendship and faith. We also hoped to encourage more people to attend, especially families. The theme of the weekend was 'United with Christ,' and our speaker was Andy Robinson who led the teaching sessions. 204 people attended, including 70 children and youth.

Rainy weather didn't deter the Saturday afternoon walkers and those brave enough to experience the Centre's range of outdoor activities, including abseiling and zip wire, while others enjoyed crafting activities, board games and table tennis. In the evening, we were treated to a ceilidh with our brilliant callers, Andy Stafford and Ellen Hunter Smart and a quiz hosted by Colin Cunningham.

Our appreciation and thanks go to everyone who was involved in organising this weekend: Nicky and Steve Clarkson who returned to run the children's teaching programme; Clare Caskie and Beth Mawdesley who organised teaching and activities for the youth; Sarah South and Sue Edwards who set up the creche which was superbly staffed by volunteers and parents; Paul Philip and Andy Cooper and their band of musicians and singers who led us in beautiful worship; the prayer teams, sound and projection teams; Sheila Moore for the accounting and finance; Joy and Will for their oversight and wise advice; Mandy and Libby who were invaluable in sorting out the website and emails.

Finally, thank you to Jude and Colin Cunningham for their enthusiasm, creativity and prayerful insight as they partnered with us to form the organising committee.

### ***Elaine and John Canniffe***

Leaving the best until last, these comments speak more eloquently:

*We had a great time. River and I enjoyed the ceilidh and the outdoor activities while Tim had a chance to relax and play board games. It was wonderful for the kids to have a safe space to be in and have fun together. The talks were great, most especially the optional session which I went to. The food could have been better, but this was very much outshone by the wonderful time we had.*

### ***Adriel Comer***

*Regarding the weekend away...IT WAS AWESOME! What a blessed time away and a brilliant opportunity to meet the church community on a social level. The organisation was excellent, and the venue well-suited for the number of attendees.*

*Andy Robinson, the speaker, was simply inspiring and really focused on what is important in a daily walk with Jesus.*

### ***Caren Hodson***

*Can we never ever leave? Can this be our home?*

### ***Ben Kennedy (age 5)***

## **Party Days**

### **Church Picnic**

It was the time when myself and our children just landed in Newbury... It was a fantastic experience. I remember Joyce picking us up and dropping there; we got to talk and mingle with new people, different foods, kids got along to play with their new friends and overall I would say a good break from the routine, mood and a wonderful get-together.

We enjoyed it very much and wish we have many more in the days to come.

### ***Rajesh Premkumar***

## **Lunar New Year Celebration**

On Sunday 11 February, during the morning service, Venus Fung shared what brought her over to England from her native Hong Kong, and what the Lunar New Year means to her and fellow families from Hong Kong.

Sadly, Venus and her husband had to leave Hong Kong in late 2021 due to political unrest, lack of freedom and democracy. They came to join their friends, the Shek family, in Newbury and have felt welcomed into the St Nicolas Church family. When Venus was young, she studied in Church School and had lots of questions about God. Although the journey over to this country was difficult, she is pleased to have found faith and realised how much God loved her.

The Lunar New Year is celebrated for 3 days, and this year is 'The Year of The Dragon'. It is commonly called Chinese New Year, but this is incorrect as the Lunar New Year is also celebrated in Vietnam, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

After the service, we were all invited to join in the celebrations by sharing refreshments - some wonderfully delicious treats hosted by our dear Hong Kong brothers and sisters. We enjoyed pastries, cakes, biscuits, sweets, prawn crackers, sesame balls, cashew cookies, marshmallow sweets and spring rolls.

Thank you so much to Venus and all our Hong Kong brothers and sisters. You are a true blessing to us. A very happy Lunar New Year to everyone!

***Victoria Maxton-Livesey***

## **MISSION (Looking Out)**

### **Alpha**

In the 2023 summer term we had a post-Alpha group which met weekly with lively discussion of the videos from Alpha that we had not had time to view during the Spring term Alpha course. We were around 8-12 attendees. Then we continued to meet to view the 'Jesus the Gamechanger' series of videos before ending in the summer with a barbecue.

Alpha began again after Christmas 2023 with an attendance of enthusiastic people. We met for 8 Thursday evenings and a morning away at St. Mark's Cold Ash on a Saturday. There are hopes that a small group will emerge from this course also, which will continue the exploration of faith in the summer term looking at the gospel of Mark together.

***Madeline Norman***

## **Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals**

During 2023 we celebrated 4 baptisms and 4 thanksgivings for the birth of a child. It is wonderful to celebrate new life with these families and friends, and to welcome them all into our church family. There were no confirmations from St Nicolas last year, but we are looking forward to Easter Day when several young people and adults will be baptised by full immersion in our church.

With more venues offering weddings nowadays, we have fewer taking place at St Nicolas. Last year we had just two including Sara Hickey and Joe Canniffe from our church family. We also had a marriage blessing for a couple who married under the severe restrictions of the pandemic and wanted their family and friends to witness and celebrate with them in St Nic's.

We also hosted a Coptic wedding. The couple booked the church but brought their own priest. Coptic (Egyptian) weddings are permitted in CofE churches, and we were delighted to be able to host them. Mark Knight and Paul Walter were vergers and very much enjoyed being part of it!

We have held 9 funerals here at St Nicolas Church this year, with 3 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***

## **CAP Debt Centre Newbury**

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) Newbury is a joint project between St Nicolas' and Bridge Church which is supported by several churches in the Newbury area. It was initially launched in June 2019, covering much of West Berkshire, but had to close in April 2023. It re-opened in January 2024 with Colin Cunningham as the new Debt Centre Manager, supported by David Clark, an experienced CAP Debt Coach who recently moved to the Newbury area, attends Newbury Baptist Church, and who has been a wonderful blessing to Colin and the ministry.

Much of the activity since re-opening has been around publicity, with communications being delivered via emails, radio interviews, newspaper articles, banners, posters and flyers, as well as giving presentations in churches and attending numerous meetings with related agencies and volunteer groups working hard to address poverty and the cost-of-living crisis.

Up to the end of March, the service has already welcomed 12 new clients to begin their journey out of debt, coming from Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford. Each case sadly includes varying levels of additional complexity, including mental health (anxiety/depression), unemployment, addiction and other health issues. This is precisely why they need CAP and the love of Jesus in addition to help with their debts.

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 Coach and provide essential practical and emotional support to the client.

We work alongside many key agencies in the area for mutual referrals and signposting of clients for additional support. Regular contact is made with West Berks Foodbank, Home-Start, 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 work alongside the 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. We love to bless our clients and managed to provide 2 legacy clients with Christmas Hampers. We also arranged for a young man to receive a much-needed free bicycle from the Community Furniture Project to save significant money on bus fares. The St Nic's CAP Blessings Fund is still available to be used to fund essential clothing, food hampers and electrical appliances (such as slow cookers to help save electricity).

Our help and involvement is greatly appreciated by our clients, with one saying "Honestly, thank you so much for all your support. Having you really does help me mentally and just to move forward slowly ... thank you massively". Some of our clients are already church-goers, and some are not. We are excited that one client's helper heard the good news of Jesus and gave her life to Him.

We are excited for the future of CAP services in West Berkshire, in the hope that more and more people who are in debt will hear about us and get in touch. We hope to broaden the services being offered, to expand the Life Skills course across the territory and to restart the CAP Money Coaching course to help people of all ages and backgrounds to take control of their personal finances.

***Colin Cunningham***  
***Debt Centre Manager***

## **Charity Coffee Mornings**

The Thursday Charity Coffee Mornings are continuing with a number of regular customers, although some charities still have problems finding enough volunteers and are reluctant to book dates in January and August. Therefore, we now have a summer break in August and after Christmas, start the coffee mornings in mid-January. Vivien Staunton has organised a team of people who are willing to fill in when we have a vacancy or cancellation, which was very useful earlier on in the year.

In 2023, after hosting for many years, Lorna Holmes had to step down owing to ill health and Terina McGuire stepped down at the beginning of 2024 due to other commitments. Thank you for the help you have both given on Thursday mornings. Caroline and John Michalski have now joined the team of Janet Price, Joan Stacey, Fiona Shaw, Sue Elliott and me (helped by Ian). Thank you everyone for the support you give to the charities running the coffee mornings and thanks to Viv and her team for filling in when necessary. Also thank you to Mandy Maskell and Elaine Canniffe who do the admin for the mornings, and to Samantha Bryant for the practical help she gives the team. Mention must be made of Eli Green who sets out the tables before 9.00 am. Thanks Eli, that is much appreciated.

Our regular customers do appreciate these coffee mornings, whether it is having a hot drink and cake, a flutter on the tombola or raffle, or finding a bargain on the bric-a-brac stall, and we also feel we are providing a useful pastoral service for the people of Newbury.

If you know of a charity which would like to run a coffee morning for publicity and to raise some money, there are still spaces for later in 2024. Contact the office for details.

***Lesley Park***

## **Church Garden**

As spring unfolds, it's so lovely to see the purple crocus follow on from the early snowdrops and now there are the bright yellows of the daffodils shining out on the grey wet days, reminding us that the sunshine will be back one day soon! There is bird song and some early bees in search of pollen. What a privilege and a blessing it is to have such a beautiful green space in the centre of our busy market town, open and accessible to everyone.

Last year was a fairly quiet one in the garden. Yume, a group for adults with disabilities, enjoyed growing sunflowers again by the hall entrance and the roses put on a really good show, having enjoyed all the rain. We have started to introduce some low maintenance evergreen shrubs into the railing beds to provide some winter interest. The Newbury in Bloom judges were positive as ever and suggested ways to garden in a more sustainable way, introducing a wider range of pollinator-friendly perennials and encouraging biodiversity.

We are so grateful to the people who help in the garden, past and present. A few of the team who have shown great commitment over the years have now moved on. Thank you so much to Belinda for your gentle and generous leadership, also to Zen, Janet, Thelma and Roger.

This year, with Sam's help, we will explore different ways of tending God's acre so that we can share the load together. We'd love to take part in a wildlife/plant survey and encourage more community involvement. Do be in touch if you'd like to be involved in any way.

***Rosemary McDonald & Vivien Staunton***

## **Eco Group**

St Nic's Eco Group is a small group focussed on encouraging St Nic's to make caring for God's creation a priority, both as individuals within the congregation, and as a whole church community. In November, we attended a vigil in the market place organised by Christian Climate Action, together with members from different churches across Newbury. This was a moving time with reflections on the climate crisis ahead of COP28. We have started meeting regularly again after a pause and are working on a "re-launch" so watch this space to find out more about A Rocha and the Eco Church award scheme and how you and your family can get involved in activities both big and small!

***Suzanne Lees***

## **Hidden Treasures**

At Hidden Treasures we are committed to offering pre-school children and their parents and carers a place to find fun, friendship and faith. We are passionate about offering a welcome which reflects the love of Jesus to all who come. We have oceans of tea and coffee, small mountains of cake, piles of toys and miles of messy play! The gooey swamps, fields of porridge, rice and glue (not necessarily all on the same day!) are the only mess in the hall on a Monday morning as we are carefully led, inspired and organised by Sarah South who encourages us to be the best we can be for God in that place week by week. It is busy, noisy and hugely rewarding!

What an honour it is to share Jesus as we sing and open scripture each week. We are so grateful to the church family for supporting Hidden Treasures where we see God reaching out, touching and transforming lives.

In January 2024 we began a new group called **Tiny Treasures**, for parents and carers of younger babies (from newborn to crawling/cruising age). This is a much smaller group that meets in the upper hall from 1:30pm on a Monday. We have had a steady group of between 5 and 12 parents and their little ones, and there's a lovely supportive atmosphere as they share the ups and downs of parenting tiny ones. We finish with a time of singing, including a simple Christian song each time. Please pray for this new initiative as we seek to follow where God leads.

***Sue Edwards & Sarah South***

## **Holiday Club**

It was great to run Holiday Club again post-pandemic. Clare and I took on the responsibility for leading this in January 2023 as we really wanted to bring back Holiday Club again since it last ran in 2019. We wanted it to be an event not only for our St Nic's children, but also to reach those who do not come to church regularly.

The week's theme was under the tagline of 'Wherever You Go' with our main teaching point being that wherever you go, whatever you do in life, the main thing is that you learn about Jesus and live for him. We incorporated travel-related decoration into this theme, decorating the church with flag bunting, a plane suspended from the ceiling (thanks Ian Norman - [have a look here!](#)), signposts, cardboard cutouts of explorers... the list goes on!

We had 70 children from primary school years 1-6 attend, with more than half of them being non-church kids, so they weren't known to us. We had about 7 schools represented in these numbers as well which was great! All children were divided into a colour group: red, blue, yellow or green. Each day started with a main meeting with songs, teaching, a Bible reading, and memory verse learning, followed by smaller group Bible studies (named BLAST groups) off the back of the talk. These were in school years to enable each child to access the teaching introduced in the morning meeting and to engage with it for themselves.

An array of activities then followed these groups. Viv Staunton and Sandra Reeves headed up the craft team. The children made suitcases and passports that they were then able to take away with them at the end of the week. In the hall we had 'challenge' activities: beanbags were thrown and magnifying glasses were used to navigate round an obstacle course. They also did cooking, headed up by Jinsun Philip, where they made pizzas and decorated biscuits. The fourth activity provided during the week involved flour, spaghetti, marshmallows, and sweets. Emma Davis and Ben Norman provided much entertainment leading this in the church. Whilst the children were participating in these activities, they also gained points, which would be accumulated during the week. One unfortunate leader was to be gunged – this time it was green group who were victorious and Libby Davis duly submitted to the green slime!

Of course, none of this could have been possible without an army of volunteers. We were joined by 70 members of our church family who served so willingly and energetically throughout the week. I'm particularly thankful to the wonderful band who formed 'The Upfront Crew' during the week, giving their time to rehearse beforehand and arrive early to sound check – thank you! We also had some wonderful colour group leaders who kept the kids excited, safe and aware of where they were going when.

The list of volunteers goes on: talk-givers; people on registration to get the children safely in and out; people on sound and projection; activity leaders: Geoff and Muriel Sowden's wonderful refreshments; Eileen Dunn's great photography: sweet cone creators for the take-home bags; BLAST group leaders; church decorators before the week... and there are many more things people did that I've forgotten!

We were particularly grateful for the help of some of our youth who were young leaders during the week and helped us so enthusiastically with the activities, group times and registration.

I also want to thank Becky Bird and Joy Mawdesley for their help with safeguarding and ensuring that we were operating in a safe way.

It was a joy to be involved in the running of the week and seeing the enthusiasm and commitment of so many of church family to make it happen. I look forward to hearing about the next one!

***Beth Mawdesley***

## **Listening Space**

Listening Space has continued to run for the entirety of the last year with pauses during the summer and Christmas holiday periods. The timings have remained the same from 11.30am until 1pm, but now only on Wednesdays in Church. It was originally led by Jackie, who has now moved on to Tilehurst. There is still a small team of volunteers who faithfully fill the slots on the rota.

The team of 1-2 people 'man' the church during the Listening Space times and are 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 Space is available.

It is rare that there are no visitors to the church in the times the team is there. People come into the building for a wide range of reasons. Many come to appreciate our church building (some on coach tours) who will often stop to chat. Others see the sign and spontaneously and bravely come in with specific matters on their heart to talk about and about which to ask for prayer. There aren't as many as previously who plan to come for the prayer, assurance and peace that they find here. 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 as the continuing war in Ukraine and the Middle East. Also, we have had people share about wanting to reconnect and feel closer to God after a time of drifting or those who have questions about faith and God.

We have been able to pray and 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 and that is in an active and 'lived in' space.

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

***Barbara Sporne***

## **Living Advent Calendar**

In December 2023 we were again invited to be part of the town's Living Advent Calendar event. Our evening was Thursday 7 December: the church doors remained closed until the allotted time when they were opened and the people waiting outside welcomed in.

We had assembled a small choir to sing carols. Janet Ruckman kindly gave us the first note on the piano, and Mandy Maskell conducted a little to keep us all together ([click here for the photo](#)). Quite a large crowd gathered as the choir sang from the dais, many people sitting in the pews to listen. In fact, we had to stop singing to allow people to leave.

It was a lovely opportunity for a quiet reflective moment in the busyness of December that people seemed to appreciate.

***Sandra Reeves***

## **Meet Monday**

Friendship, Faith and Fun at Meet Monday.

*Friendship* A person with a learning disability may feel lonely because they are often the odd one out and are left out. At Meet Monday everyone is welcome and valued. The group averages about 10, plus team, which makes it easier to get to know one another beyond "Hello, how are you?" We have welcomed a few newcomers but one or two no longer attend. There is room for more.

*Faith* We have been thrilled to find that most attendees (we call them friends) have a faith that affects the way they live, think and relate to other people. They pray - for themselves, for each other and for the world. Pictures they draw and items they make show an understanding that God loves them. We teach from the Bible so that they can know who Jesus is, choose to put their faith in Him, and grow as his followers. Meet Monday is

important to them and may be their only experience of church. It is a topic of conversation between our monthly meetings.

*Fun* Some of the team arrive feeling exhausted after a tiring day but it's amazing what an hour with friends can do! Fun comes in planned activities, especially drama, Makaton signing, art and craft, but also in spontaneous joy and laughter. We have learned to expect the unexpected! People feel relaxed, comfortable with one another, equal and yet different. Meet Monday and St Nic's are 'Friends with Count Everyone In'.

***Pete & Christine Winmill***

## **Newbury Friends Together**

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

Newbury Friends Together meets in the Church Hall on a Tuesday afternoon with the aim of providing a weekly fellowship opportunity for our senior friends. Around 25 participants engage in a programme of welcome and a catch up which is centred around an activity followed by refreshments.

Our diverse programme this past year has included a number of highlights: Rosemary Collins sharing her experience as a Ten Pound Pom; ballroom dancing with Emma Mayo; we had the pleasure of celebrating Sylvia Barrett's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Ugly Duckling Pottery Painting; Rosemary Freeman came to speak about the great work the Cruse Bereavement Care Counsellors do; a walk through history with Dave Stubbs speaking on his career in the police force; The Dogs Trust on the great work they do in our area and last but not least another visit from Jonathan Edwards sharing some interesting stories on his extensive postcard collection.

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

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

***Liesl Bradley***

## **Our Buildings**

Our collection of buildings gives us and the local community a very flexible and useful arrangement of spaces, and over the last year we have seen an increase in use by both internal and external groups. External bookings benefit both charitable causes and provide an additional income stream.

The upper and lower halls continue to be a great asset and enable us to provide support and worship opportunities to a wide group of people 7 days a week.

Our Church is open Monday to Friday 9.30am – 4.00pm, giving the opportunity to sit and pray, and a surprising number of the public also come in to marvel at the surroundings and history of the building. It is a regular attraction for local tours and schools who often bring their students to visit and enjoy its ambience. We have hosted Cubs, Beavers and Brownies for specially arranged activity evenings with a Christian message, and COINS are a regular booking at Christmas and Easter bringing more school children into our building.

St Nicolas House provides a welcoming and comfortable space for more intimate, smaller gatherings, and Pathfinders and the Firm enjoy the space on Sundays in addition to a number of evening meetings and games nights throughout the month. With the addition of our new kitchen last year, two well-appointed interconnecting rooms on the ground floor decorated just 2 years ago and now the refurbishment of Room 3 on the first floor, we not only have 2 good rooms for hire, we also have an additional room which staff can use for relaxed meetings along with home groups.

We continue to run Open Days, and the Wednesday Prayer group and Listening Space give the opportunity for us to pray for many members of our local community.

As well as our superbly attended services, our Church is also used for a growing number of concerts. Some of these include Newbury Choral Society, The Newbury Spring Festival, Newbury Symphony Orchestra, Cold Ash Brass, Mencap, The Rotary Club, local school concerts, Lumos Candlelit Concerts and monthly organ recitals.

The Halls have also been booked to host regular record fairs, clothes sales and workshops, birthday parties, family gatherings and a number of funeral and christening receptions. We have a good working relationship with our neighbours at Horsey Lightly and they have chosen to host their Christmas party and staff events here too. Our facilities are a blessing and play a significant part in making St Nicolas good news to Newbury.

***Samantha Bryant***  
***Facilities Manager***

## **Outreach Committee**

*Team: Rachel Shepherd, Lesley Park, Vivien Staunton, Sian Lupton, Pam McKellen and Jane Sutton.*

In 2023, through your prayers, care and the financial resources allocated to Outreach, St Nicolas has been able to support 8 Christian organisations working in the local area and 6 working overseas. Thank you.

The Outreach budget of £34,839 was allocated, with the approval of the PCC, as shown in the tables below. (This figure is 10% of the St Nicolas' Church unrestricted income for 2022.)

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

relationships with most of the organisations we support, and many in our congregation work or volunteer with them.

We give heartfelt thanks to all for the generous gifts to the 2023 Harvest and Christmas Appeals. The Harvest Appeal raised £3,980.11 for the work of The Leprosy Mission in Sri Lanka, to enable them to run twenty Community Meals in 2024, providing nutritious food for those affected by leprosy and the impact of marginalisation in Sri Lanka. (One third of the total number of community meals scheduled in a year.) In 2023, they also planted 2,567 coconut trees to help 173 families earn a sustainable income for several generations and cured 310 people of leprosy. At the harvest service, we thanked Rosemary Collins for completing many years as The Leprosy Mission’s representative at St Nicolas. We welcome anyone who would like to take on this role.

£7,630.65 was collected at our Christmas services for West Berks Foodbank. Laura, the Deputy Foodbank Manager, writes: “We have many families across West Berkshire who are currently living in temporary accommodation with only a kettle to "cook" with. Your donation has enabled us to purchase ready-made meals that can be heated just by using boiling water, ensuring these families are able to have nutritious, hot meals whilst in the hotel. We also provide heated blankets to those clients who are unable to afford to heat their homes, especially focusing on the elderly or those with mobility issues. Your fantastic donation will ensure we can continue to help those in need. Many thanks for your support.”

## St Nicolas’ Outreach Giving in 2023:

### Outreach in Local Area:

Organisation	Contact at St Nicolas church	2023
Christian Opportunities in Newbury Schools (COINS)	Sian Lupton	£6,000
Count Everyone In (working nationally)	Pete & Christine Winmill	£5,000
West Berkshire Action for Refugees	Joyce Zealey	£2,500
West Berkshire Homeless	Erica Gassor	£2,050
Street Pastors	John Canniffe	£2,000
Shoemakers Christian bookshop	Jules Gadsby	£2,000
Yeldall Manor (drug and alcohol rehabilitation)	Lesley Park	£1,500
Churches Together in the Newbury Area (CTNA) Christmas lunch	Will Hunter Smart	£500
<b>Total</b>		<b>£21,550</b>

## **Outreach overseas:**

Organisation	Contact at St Nicolas church	2023
Bible Society work in Israel, Gaza and Palestine amidst the conflict	Rachel Shepherd	£4,389
Hope for Africa Church in Lesotho	Vivien Staunton	£3,000
Biojemss (children's charity in Uganda)	Bronwen Davies	£2,000
Miriam Dean Fund, working with the poor in Africa and India	Andy & Sheila Moore	£2,000
Scripture Union, in St Petersburg	Jane Sutton	£1,000
Bible Society of Egypt, through Bible Society of Newbury	Mavis Hughesdon	£500
Novi Most, in Bosnia (one-off gift, linked to an individual visit)	Rob Canniffe	£400
<b>Total</b>		<b>£13,289</b>

## **Overall total for 2023: £34,839**

We would love to hear from you if you are involved with outreach locally or further afield. We want to be more aware of how the congregation is joining in with what God is doing in the area of outreach.

If you would like to know more about the organisations we support, or to receive news for your own prayers or for leading intercessions, please contact one of us. We are also very happy to receive other feedback or suggestions on how the Committee can better support your interest in Outreach.

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

***Rachel Shepherd***  
***Chair***

## **St Nicolas School**

Even more so than last year, we have returned to a much clearer sense of 'normality' in the past year, with no particular Covid concerns anymore, although the effects on our children continue to be felt, particularly with those who missed out on early years provision during the lockdowns.

The school continues to have a very close federated relationship with St John's School, and our governing board works across both schools. St John's School had a SIAMS (Statutory

Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) inspection in December and whilst this was focused on St John's, it was clear that our federation vision: for the good of all – through curiosity, creativity and love, is lived out across both schools. In particular, it was lovely to be able to share in one of our celebration worships with both schools on Zoom, on the day of the inspection.

In December, Mrs Bailey, who had been Head of School since January 2021 left us for another position and she will be greatly missed across our community. The governors were able to successfully replace her, and Mrs Allen started with us in January. She has already brought a considerable amount of enthusiasm and positivity to the role, and we are looking forward to St Nic's School continuing to go from strength to strength.

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 effects of inflation are being strongly felt in the schools, with the federation having to set a deficit budget this year, meaning that the schools will have to cut back spending and look for additional income. We approach this in the same way that we approach everything, with our vision in mind and considering what is for the good of all of our children.

My highlights from the past year are numerous but a particular highlight has to be taking 140 children to Wembley Arena for Young Voices last month. The children were a credit to the school and sang beautifully.

***Keith Harvey***

***Executive Headteacher***

## **Town Team**

*Members: Graeme Coulam, Sue Elliot, Andy Moore, Lesley Park, Vivien Staunton. (Jane Sutton retired from the team during the year).*

*West Berkshire Community Hospital Therapy Garden* It was another busy year with the team of gardeners growing to include folk from outside the St Nic's congregation. A party in June marked 10 years of voluntary effort in developing the garden; in that time the main garden has been transformed and we now also maintain a garden outside a Rainbow Room and the mini-forest. Two or three times during the season the team helps to supervise additional volunteers from local companies doing community outreach.

*Sunday Stalls* We continue to organise occasional “pitches” by CTNA-affiliated organisations to the Sunday congregations. In addition to a self-presentation (about the TOWN team), we heard from COINS, Loose Ends and West Berkshire Homeless. Feedback from St Nic’s members is always positive: “we wouldn’t otherwise know about these groups”.

*Charity Coffee Mornings* This is a valuable outreach into the community with regular clientele who meet up and chat, enjoy the cakes and dip into the bric-a-brac. After a return by charities post-pandemic, their numbers are now reducing. We have been examining possible reasons, trying to address them and making arrangements to ensure that the event goes ahead in the absence of a charity. That requires help from St Nic’s members; we will always be grateful for expressions of interest.

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

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