

PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES
Annual Report
FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2018

APPENDIX 1

REPORT FROM ST HELEN'S CHURCH

1 Church Council

1.1 District Church Council

Craig Peterson

The DCC met six times during 2018, to consider the normal business of the church. Routine business included financial and fabric reports, especially regular reports on repairs to the North Aisle. Another topic that appeared regularly on the agenda for DCC meetings this year were the Strategic Planning reports. The reports have guided the planned renovations for areas within the church including the Baptistery, Vestry, Chancel and other spaces for the church community.

Additional items of interest during the year included:

- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- A report from St Helen's church Flower Arrangers
- The new Electronic Collecting Box
- An audit report on the use and disposal of plastics at St Helen's
- Approval of working agreements with Mrs Gwen Bevington and Revd Jennifer Brown
- Authorization of Mr Rob Baugh as a Sacramental Assistant

All DCC business and decisions are recorded in the minutes of the meetings. Minutes, once approved, are available via the Parish office.

1.2 Team Rector's Report

The Revd Dr Charles Miller

I have rehearsed in brief in my report to the parish some of the factors which have made 2018 a hard year, I shan't repeat those here, but rather express my thanks to the Wardens and Pro-Wardens, and to the other leaders of lay teams, who have so ably 'stood in the breach' to make life, worship and witness at St Helen's so rich and, for me at least, spiritually sustaining.

Worship

Our services continue to adapt in small ways. Jane Baun's departure in July forced a re-think of the first Sunday evening service. In the end I proposed, and the DCC accepted, working within Jane's established 'model' of Vespers but with an ecumenical and catechetical slant. I translated the evening Office of the ecumenical community of Bose in northern Italy; we adapted its format a bit; and our DoM was co-opted to write some simple chants for the service (slightly changeable as we move through festivals and seasons of the Church Year), a task he happily set to. The result has gained security and momentum through the autumn of 2018, and that has continued strongly in 2019. The catechetical theme 'In the Beginning' has given us opportunity for a different kind of exploration of the Bible—sensitive to the witness of 'tradition' but aimed at intelligent application to the current worshipper. The result has been a congregation between 25-30 each month; resource sheets to take away for prayer and study; and an informal 'choir' which leads the congregation in the musical dimension of the worship. A small team has grown to help with set-up and take-down, and a variety of congregants read both scriptural and 'traditional' readings (the latter might easily be from a contemporary writer).

From my point of view, the service, and especially the address themes, have re-awakened and challenged my interest: there are so many episodes and themes in the Book of Genesis about which

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I have thought little and on which I have never preached! So I am on a big but gratifying ‘learning curve’! Thanks to all who have made the early months of Vespers such a success.

The other evening service about which decision needed to be made was on the fifth Sunday. Again, I discussed this with the DCC but without any emerging sense of how we should handle it. I was clear that I felt unable to take on something *sui generis* which needed lots of preparation time, but that, whatever we did, needed to be a distinctive addition to what we currently offer, aware that the evening services tend to have *niche* congregations. A complicating feature about the fifth Sunday is that there are only four in a year, and one commonly occurs in Christmastide, and so is cancelled, leaving three such Sundays a year. To do something genuinely distinctive on only three separated Sundays a year is something of a challenge. Anyway, we continue to put off the day of reckoning. (The first such Sunday in 2019 is Mothering Sunday—not a good day to initiate something new.) So, ideas continue to be welcome from all quarters, but bear in mind the intrinsic limitations!

A real success through 2018 has been the strengthening of the third Sunday Choral Evensong. Our DoM has invigorated the choir participation with new, challenging repertoire (often supported by an organist while he directs), co-option of new singers, and noteworthy attention to musical detail. The result has been fantastic. (An example was the Evensong in October at which Gwen Bevington was licensed.) A complementary bonus has been the sensitive and able officiating of Michael Hosking. He presents the chants beautifully, his demeanour is ideal for the service, and his prayers are always, well, *prayerful*. What more can one ask for? The congregation has typically been pretty strong, and it has been gratifying to see congregants who find the morning service(s) hard for this or that reason. But we can do better! So, I urge you all to etch Evensong into your diaries, and bring along friends! (The service lasts almost exactly 50 minutes).

Related to the ministry of music has been the important, long-awaited step of hiring an assistant organist. This had been discussed before my predecessor left, and was raised now and then since but without resulting initiative. However, the music review we conducted three years ago made clear the importance for the choir of a Director in front of them *directing*. I resolved, with the DCC’s agreement, to reinvigorate the idea of an assistant organist, and we wrote it into the expectations of the post when we hired our (new) Director of Music, Peter Foster. Peter was thrilled with the idea and began advertising in the autumn of 2018. The results we now know, but you can read more in his report in this document. Let me say, though, that I think this is a most important step for St Helen’s as it continues to build on a choral tradition stretching back to the Oxford Movement revival of the mid-19th century when our robed choir (of men and boys) first began.

Ministry

We are blessed with a rich group of clergy and lay ministers who share with me, as Incumbent, in the celebration of the sacraments, pastoral offices, preaching, teaching and pastoral care. In the late autumn *TEAMword* I referred to a document ‘Set God’s People Free’ which sees the church as a whole becoming better equipped in the ministry and mission of Christ to the world. However that may happen, this is sure: trained ‘professionals’ are key in building up the Body of Christ in all aspects of its life and worship. We live in an age which seems often to pooh-pooh the ‘expert’ and the ‘professional’. But from my point of view, the People of God, to be edified and equipped, need the best support, guidance and discernment available. Our team, both formally and informally understood, has a huge amount of that, and I am thankful for this rich web of experience, expertise and wisdom at the heart of the ministry of the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames.

One rich addition to this ‘web’ of formal ministry in the parish is Gwen Bevington, licensed by the Warden of Readers as a Licensed Lay Ministry (LLM or ‘Reader’) in October under the authority of Bp Colin. Gwen introduced herself in the last *TEAMword* and is now gaining momentum at St Helen’s. 2019 will see her ministry grow and extend throughout the parish in discussion with Team

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Vicar Paul Smith. It has been many, many years since St Helen’s enjoyed a Reader’s ministry—can anyone remember when? Anyway, I’m delighted to have Gwen as part of the Team.

Thanks are readily due to stalwart Mary Williamson, our Associate, who enters her final nine months with us in 2019—yes, three years will have soon passed! You can read her report on ministry elsewhere in this report.

Thanks are also due—and I know she shares these sentiments—to the honorary assistant clergy who make it possible for the official ‘Team’ clergy to sustain and develop the worship and ministry of our parish: Prof. John Barton, David Bevington, Bp. Henry Scriven, Prof Keith Ward, Christopher and Pauline Seaman, and Roger Williams (8 am only). Their offering of time, wisdom, insight and support makes serving in Abingdon such an enriching, gratifying experience.

The Pastoral Care Team

Elsewhere in this document you can read a report on the team’s ministry in conjunction with the clergy—keeping in touch with the house-bound, the sick, the frail and those who become invisible on Sunday mornings when we commonly see one another. While Mary Williamson continues as the clergy liaison with the group, for a couple of years Liz Norman has managed the flow of information, updates, etc., for group members in between occasional face-to-face gatherings. That has been very useful. Toward the end of 2018 Liz informed me that while she wishes to carry on with the pastoral involvement, she will lay down the ‘admin’ side. So I express my sincere thanks to Liz for that aspect of her share in the work and look forward to her continuing pastoral support presence.

The following table from our service register lists the number of participants at some of our major services.

| | |
|--|------|
| Wednesday Holy Communion | 1068 |
| Sunday Eucharist | 5519 |
| Communion at care homes & Home Communion | 209 |
| Easter Eve | 34 |
| Easter Day 8.00 | 25 |
| Easter Day 10.30 | 208 |
| Holy Matrimony | 8 |
| Baptisms | 10 |
| Healing and Wholeness | 106 |
| Choral Evensong | 332 |
| Funerals | 6 |
| Morning and Evening Prayers | 886 |
| Christingle | 784 |
| Midnight Mass | 101 |
| Christmas Day 8.00 | 29 |
| Christmas Day 10.30 | 105 |

Review and ‘Flourishing’

My 2018 Ministerial Development Review (MDR) was conducted by our Area Bishop Colin Fletcher. It was a very good experience; Bp Colin was supportive in all respects, and continues to demonstrate a remarkable ‘in-tune-ness’ with my wider family situation. This year too all the clergy received a document from the Oxford Diocese entitled ‘Flourishing in Ministry’. Simply, it’s an inventory of things clergy should be attentive to so as to practice a sustainable and spiritually healthy ministry. I completed the document promptly, and noted with satisfaction how many aspects of its recommendations are already ‘in place’ and part of my routine. However, there are

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always growth points, and I am attending to those as best I can. Thank you for your support and solicitude in all this.

Thanks

Thanks are due, readily, from me to our wardens and pro-wardens who have been a solid and insightful council of advice through the year in question. This year warden Norman Gee stands down after six years of service, so I wish to express my special appreciation to him for his sterling service in that role.

Our Administrator, Jenny Balshaw, continues to support ministry with amazing calm and efficiency; without her it is hard to imagine keeping it all going. I know that volunteers too, in their respective duties, find Jenny a huge support.

Also, on a practical level, it is right to acknowledge the work of Phil Atkinson, our church Caretaker, for his reliability, flexibility and good cheer over the course of the year. Thanks to him (working and liaising with others) so much goes so smoothly.

Finally

I remain convinced that we have a sound 'fellowship of faith' at St Helen's. We are working rather well with the healthy inheritance others have passed on to us. We welcome and say 'farewell' with suitable attention and respect. On good Sundays one can see a spectrum of ages in our main congregation of which many congregations would be envious (our Junior Church and Quest leaders do a fantastic job!); the national and racial mix reflects the realities of Abingdon. Our 8 am congregation really is a congregation of mutually supportive people and not simply an aggregation of 'ships passing in the night'. The evening round of services complements with pastorally-attuned variety our rather *set* forms of morning Eucharistic worship. And much of the round of feast and fast, coupled with civic occasions, are marked by our superb band of bell-ringers who use our fine ten 'new' bells to such harmonious effect. All of this makes for something rooted, upbeat and joyful. Thank you for being part of it!

1.3 Warden's report

Norman Gee & Linda Hobbs (Churchwardens)

Chris Jefferis & Geoff Meen (Pro-wardens)

Worship and Leadership

Our pattern of regular worship has continued throughout 2018, with the variety of morning and evening services valued by those who take part. It has been good to see growing congregations at the Evensong and Vespers services.

The Junior Church and Quest groups continue to flourish, and their reports at the end of the morning service on a Sunday are valued by the congregation.

Mission, outreach and spiritual growth

The Faith Forum on the first Sunday of the month is very well attended, with participants from across the parish. Numbers continue to grow, and there is good participation in the lively discussions after the each presentation. Happily, volunteers have come forward so that breakfast can still be served before these gatherings.

The Wednesday morning Eucharist service has been well-supported over the last year. The hospitality after this service is enjoyed by all with many birthdays marked with coffee and cake. The Tuesday afternoon book study group "Desiring Life" and our house groups have both continued to meet.

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We must express our continued gratitude to our Associate priest, the Rev Mary Williamson, for her continued hard work in all aspects of St. Helen's life. We are fortunate to have had the support and active involvement of David and Gwen Bevington; David continues to assist with and lead in services as required, both at St. Helen's and within the parish. On the 18th November at choral evensong, Gwen renewed her licence as a Licensed Lay Minister, a position she held prior to moving to Abingdon. We are also fortunate to have time allocated to St Helen's by final-year student Dominik Chmielewski.

Short Eucharist services are held each month in several of the care homes in Abingdon, as well as at the Health and Wellbeing Centre in Audlett Drive. These services are valued by all who participate. In December, a carol and Nativity story led by Mary Williamson was narrated and enacted by several of our congregation who regularly assist Mary; the efforts of all concerned were enthusiastically enjoyed.

Home Communion continues to be taken to the sick and housebound – members of the clergy and of the congregation ensure that this important mission continues. We thank all who give their time and dedication to this important aspect of our church mission.

The monthly publication, the Window, continues to reach a wide readership. Producing this material month by month requires dedication, and thanks are due to the team who work hard to do so.

It is encouraging to see a steady flow of new members coming into the church. Families wishing to have their children baptised are encouraged to attend Morning Praise, and this service has grown in popularity, with a significant number of young families.

Caring for one another

Hospitality is an important enabler for the work and witness at St Helens. We make a point of inviting the congregation to stay for refreshments after services, as the provision of coffee and tea after the Sung Eucharist on a Sunday morning offers an important opportunity for fellowship, giving all the opportunity to exchange news and feel part of the "family of St. Helens". The occasional birthday celebrations help with this too. Many newcomers make their first friendships with other parishioners chatting in the South Aisle or at one of the newcomers lunches or men's breakfasts held every few months.

Refreshments are also provided after the mid-week Eucharist and monthly after the 8:00 am Holy Communion and Morning Praise services.

Quite a lot of work is needed to prepare and to clear up afterwards. We owe thanks to everyone involved, and more volunteers are always welcome. The fellowship on all these occasions does much to bind together the St Helen's community.

The Pastoral Care group have continued to meet on a regular basis, offering assistance to those in our congregation in need of support. The work of the group is supported by church members able to offer their time to this important initiative. Our thanks are expressed to Liz Norman for her work in coordinating the work of the group.

Special Events and Visitors

The highlights of the year of course include the main festivals at Easter and Christmas. The largest service of the year was on Remembrance Sunday (100th anniversary of the end of the first World War), with well over 800 people present. Our registers show that about 2170 youngsters attended carol school carols services in the run up to Christmas, and 875 people attended services on

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Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. It was good to see many families attending together, with children of all ages.

We keep the church open from Easter to the end of September each year. This requires a big commitment of time by our stewards, led by Elizabeth Simpson. Their work enables many thousands of visitors to come into St. Helen's over the year as individuals, families or groups. Visitors are often to be found absorbing the atmosphere of quiet, or sitting quietly in prayer and perhaps contemplating the centuries of prayer and worship in the church.

We would like to acknowledge the valuable behind-the-scenes work of our staff - Kinga Kucz who cleans the Parish Centre week by week, and caretaker Phil Atkinson, who looks after the church building and is always flexible in preparing it for worship and big events.

Administration

The parish office is at the heart of much that happens at St. Helen's. Our Parish Administrator, Jenny Balshaw, has been quietly reorganising many aspects of the office, and your wardens wish to thank her for the smooth running of the office, to acknowledge Brenda Johnstone who has given a lot of time as honorary office assistant, and to thank Susan Scott and Rosemary Smith who have manned the office during administrator absences.

A significant part of the Administrator's work is to manage the steady flow of enquiries to use our premises. A typical week sees 15-20 different events in the Parish Centre. Many are our own events - church business meetings (e.g. DCC, PCC), parts of our worship or Christian formation (e.g. Wednesday Eucharist, Desiring Life) or outreach and ministry (Clergy Consultation, Marriage and Baptism Preparation), but several other groups use the hall as well. Good judgement is needed in approving requests, but making the hall and church available like this provides much-needed income as well as supporting the local community.

Significant IT support has been needed behind the scenes over the last year, notably to handle backup problems and issues created by windows updates. Happily, we are once again able to run reliable off-site (encrypted) backups of our files. In the autumn, we signed a new printer/copier contract at a lower price, and users are coming to terms with the new printer. The installation of fully-wired Ethernet to the lounge has helped to improve the very unreliable computer networking there, although the new multi-user license for our finance package is not yet running entirely smoothly. Quite a lot of work has been needed to comply with the new data protection regulations (GDPR), and the local implications are still being worked through.

1.4 St Helen's Church Fabric Report

Stephen Thomas

The main project for 2018 has been the replacement of components of the church underfloor heating system. There had been the problem before with the water leak, which meant that for some time mains water was being pumped into the heating system by the pressurisation unit. This led to a build-up of iron oxide sediment in the pipework and lime-scale in the boiler heat exchangers. The two boilers were given a full service in February but it was not possible to bring the heating back to full power, as the blockages in pipework limited the water flow rates. There was also evidence of a slow water leak in one of the burner units, as the lime-scale had caused overheating in the heat exchanger pipe, resulting in a pinhole defect. There were other problems with the boilers, so the overall repair bill would have been substantial. The cost of new boilers was not significantly higher, so it was decided to replace both boilers, instead of attempting repairs.

The sediment in the heating pipes had been restricting the hot water flow under large sections of the church floor. The sediment had accumulated particularly in the heating manifolds which are

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intended to distribute the hot water evenly over the 20 underfloor heating zones. The heating contractor had in the past tried flushing out the manifolds with a pressure washing system, but this was only partly successful as sediment became lodged within the adjustment valves inside the manifolds. The recommendation this time was to replace the manifolds completely. The new manifolds are now working far more effectively than before. However, there are still some floor areas where the water flow rate is slightly lower than others. This is probably due to localised air locks in the heating pipework. The boilers can be operated in a de-aeration mode, which helps remove air bubbles from the heating circuit - the bubbles tend to move around and eventually accumulate at the highest points within the boilers where there are automatic air vents. The air locks should therefore clear over a period of time. If this doesn't happen, the contractor will be able to repeat the pressure flushing process during the next maintenance visit, ensuring that all the air is forced out.

Preparations are underway for the decoration of the North Aisle, including repairs to fallen or loose areas of ceiling plaster. The intention is to remove the redundant heating duct which dates back to the 1960s when it was common to use asbestos for construction and insulation. A sample of the duct lining has been removed and tested for asbestos. The result is that no asbestos has been detected, but there is still a risk of asbestos in the internal pipework of the duct. This will need to be checked as work on the duct removal progresses, once the pipework becomes accessible.

There has been other fabric work, relating to the Church Centre:

- The external doors of the Church Office have been replaced with new double-glazed units. The original doors had sections of rotten wood and were beyond economic repair.
- The north boundary wall for the Church Centre had developed a significant lean and was at risk of collapse, probably because of tree roots affecting the foundations. The wall has been replaced by a wooden fence. The tree stumps have been removed and the roots ground down to a low level to discourage regrowth. Complete removal of the roots was not possible because of the proximity to the Church Centre building and the footpath.

1.5 Music Report

Peter Foster

Over the past year the choir has welcomed two new adult members, as well as re-welcoming one returnee. We have also admitted two new junior choristers to the choir, who received their surplices in January. We said goodbye to Sheila Hills, a long-standing and faithful choir member, who has had to move away due to health.

The choir continues to play a central part in leading our worship at the Sunday Eucharist, and at Choral Evensong once a month. The choir continues to adapt well to the demands of its (still fairly) new Director of Music, and has faced a number of new and unfamiliar works in German, in Russian, in six unaccompanied parts, and in intimidatingly complex rhythmic styles with cheerful equanimity.

One new musical venture in the last few months has been the revised Vespers liturgy on the first Sunday evening of each month, which includes specially composed chants inspired by the Bosé community of north Italy. A small group of singers has been formed to support this service, which is starting to establish itself as a new and distinctive element to our worship.

Outside St Helen's, members of the choir have again been participants in events run by the local branch of the RSCM. Several of our junior choristers attended the Easter Course for Young Choristers, where they had the chance to sing in Exeter and Lincoln College Chapels, alongside choristers from several other local churches. Many of the choir took part in the Diocesan Choral

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Festival in Banbury in October, under the direction of Kerry Beaumont, Director of Music at Coventry Cathedral. The younger choir members regularly follow the RSCM's training scheme Voice for Life, and some of them are currently preparing to take the Bronze exam, the first level at which this is examined externally.

Within the parish, singers from the three churches have taken opportunities to collaborate. The services on Ash Wednesday at St Michael's and on Ascension Day at St Nicolas featured the massed choirs (or at least moderately massed), and the service of Nine Lessons and Carols in St Nicolas's church also included singers from across the parish.

St Helen's has also taken the decision to increase the capacity of our Music staff by appointing an Assistant Organist. As I write this, Andrew Shouler (who has already accompanied a number of services over the past year or so) is about to take up this position on a permanent basis, and we very much look forward to welcoming him.

I would like to thank choir members for their commitment, reliability and enthusiasm for leading the musical elements of our worship, and for their continued hard work and willingness to rise to new challenges. I would also like to thank David Wickens (a former Director of Music at St Helen's), who continues to use his considerable knowledge and expertise in the area of organs and organ building to assist with the maintenance of our fine instrument.

The choir continues to be open to new members, both adults and children/young people. If you are interested in joining (or if you have a child who is interested in joining), then information about the routines and expectations is available on the church website or from the office, but having an informal conversation with me would be a good place to start.

1.6 Charitable Giving Group

Chris Brown

In addition to ad hoc collections and personal giving, St Helen's has supported five designated charities in 2018. These comprise three overseas charities: the Barnabas Fund (£1000 pa), the International Refugee Trust (£1,000 pa) and the Dorothy Springer Trust in Sierra Leone (£1,000 pa); and two local ones: the Be Free Young Carers (£1,000 pa) and The Abingdon Bridge (£1,000 pa). The role of the Charitable Giving Group is to oversee, publicise and engage with this planned giving.

The Barnabas Fund is a UK based charity supporting persecuted Christians. It funds projects supporting persecuted Christians in 34 countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe as well as encouraging prayer, raising awareness and contesting injustice. Susan Scott is the congregational representative.

The International Refugee Trust has been supporting work with refugees since 1989. It works with partners in Syria, South Sudan, Uganda and Jordan improving health care and helping people to become self-supporting. Tom Hardy does voluntary work with the Trust and is the congregational representative.

The Dorothy Springer Trust is providing employment skills for the disabled in Sierra Leone. Peter Penfold is the patron of the UK charity and visits Sierra Leone regularly. The charity is run in Freetown by Dr Abdulai (Abs) Dumbuya, who visited St Helen's in 2015.

The Abingdon Bridge provides support and counselling for vulnerable young people in its recently opened new offices on Bridge Street. Our congregational contact is Fiona Tonks. Our commitment to support TAB finished at the end of 2018. The CGG has recommended supporting Trinity Learning instead of TAB for 2019 to 2021.

Trinity Learning has been helping school communities in Abingdon to improve their quality of life since 2009. In that time, they have worked with 22 primary schools, three secondaries and the local

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Special School, offering a combination of practical help for busy staff and educational interventions to help student confidence and emotional literacy. These projects are tailored to the needs of each school community after discussion with their staff and can range from project-managing Quiet Gardens to staff INSET sessions on stress management and supported work experience placements for pupils with special educational needs. Six members of St Helens church are involved with the charity. Linda Cole would be the congregational contact. The CGG has recommended support for 2019 to 2021.

Be Free YC (previously South and Vale Careers Centre) is a long established local charity providing help and support for carers. There is currently no provision for young (<25 years) carers. BFYC is working with approximately 200 young carers in the Abingdon area giving them individual counselling and helping with socialisation, friendships, skill development and looking to the future. Lesley Legge is the charity's Chairman and is the congregational contact. St Helen's commitment to support BFYC finished at the end of 2018. The CGG has recommended continued support for 2019 to 2021.

The CGG wishes to express its thanks to Ben Tonks who has served for a number of years and is moving on, due to other commitments.

Further information about our charitable giving, including details of the designated charities, is available on the notice board in the church and appears on the website, in the newsletter and in The Window from time to time.

Thank you to all members of St. Helen's for supporting the work of our charitable giving group. Do not hesitate to talk to us if you have questions or suggestions.

Peter Penfold, Chris Brown (Chairman), Tom Hardy, Lesley Legge, Mary Anderson

1.7 Treasurer's team report

Susan Read

This report focuses on the people and the mechanics of producing the financial reports of the church rather than the financial results of 2018.

I'd like to thank the great many people involved to some extent or other in the financial side of St Helens. The sidespeople count and record the collections after every service. Jeff Dale usually helps with the counting and also cares for the coffee income, keeps abreast of all the stewardship income and most importantly compiles the gift aid returns.

On Mondays the banking group, Ann Murdoch, John Thompson and I, happily count the church collections and other income and take it to the bank. I am pleased to report that a lot of other people have come and helped over the course of the year and that the group of people I can call on to help now numbers over ten!

Ann Murdoch, our Assistant Treasurer, does St Helens' bookkeeping and comes in twice a week to make sure all our suppliers are paid in a timely fashion and our bank statements are properly accounted for and reconciled.

Jenny Balshaw, our Administrator, invoices wedding couples and all those who use the Church and Church Centre. She does an excellent job, which helps St Helen's to pay its way.

We are also assisted by some of the other church workers who keep good records of the income and expenditure of their bits of the church money, including Susan Scott (hospitality), Liz Norman (flowers), Anne Smithson (archiving), Colin Casemore and the Faulkners (Friends of St Helen). All these people do an excellent job and deserve our thanks. Apologies to anyone I have inadvertently omitted.

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is flexible. During the past year we have used the Roots ecumenical material which follows the lectionary as a basis for most of our sessions. The key Bible story is told in many different, often active, ways and other activities include games, music, dance, art and craft.

This year has been a year of change as quite a few children left over the summer. Some children moved up to Quest and three families left Abingdon. We were particularly sad to say goodbye to Erin and Branna McElhatton as Erin was a Junior Church leader, and we thank her for all her help. We started the autumn with a fairly small group, but have been pleased to welcome some new families during the autumn.

The leadership team now comprises Rachel Brignall, Melanie Brown, Catherine Kimber and Sue Pemberton. We also have a small band of helpers, although leaders also fill this role. We thank all our helpers, also parents who come with their children and help out.

Sue Pemberton on behalf of the Junior Church team.

2.4 Quest

Elizabeth Irving

Sunday provision during the service for older children and young people.

As ever, I remain hugely grateful to my fellow Quest leaders, Norman Dawson, Margaret Horton and Martin Kimber for all that they do to lead and inspire our young people during the short time that we have together on Sundays. We are still subscribing to the *Roots* materials, which provides 2 magazine copies and online logins to access worksheets and ideas. Notwithstanding, many leaders often choose to invent their own materials, to take a slightly different tack, or focus on a different reading from the main theme of these notes, which lends variety and interest to the weekly provision.

In Lent last year, we followed the USPG booklet focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals. This made an interesting break from following the lectionary, and provided some thought-provoking discussion.

Quest members continue to be both from the choir and the congregation and both regular and non-regular church-goers, but we have a small core who are present most weeks. Quest members wrote and presented the prayers for Harvest festival this year, and did readings at the Epiphany Carol service. Throughout Advent, Quest members read the prayer as each candle was lit. It is often the young people themselves who feed back to the congregation at the end of the Sunday service on what we have been doing that morning.

In all of this, we are supported by our loyal helpers, Chris Bayliss, Sue Cox, Barbara King and Chris Charles, as we have to have two adults present at every session involving children and young people for safeguarding reasons. Catherine Scriven has also joined us to help out when we have needed an extra person for which we are very grateful.

2.5 St Helen's Baby & Toddler Group

Rachel Shearer

The Baby and Toddler Group runs two sessions on a Monday morning with an average of 40 families attending every week. We have had to operate a waiting list for places for most of this year. This is a pity but it does give us financial independence and allow us to support children's work at St Helen's as appropriate.

In June's lovely weather we held our third Picnic in the Park when the whole toddler group decamped to Albert Park for a morning of games, songs and picnics. Our thanks to Christ's Hospital for permission to use Albert Park and St Michael's for opening up their toilets for us.

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We have continued our collaboration with the Abingdon Court Care Home in Marcham Road, which specialises in dementia care. On one Thursday in the month we hold a toddler session in the care home and the children are able to interact with the residents to everyone's benefit. We have a range of activities to encourage this and of course, we do lots of singing.

We have also been lucky to have sixth-form helpers from the School of St Helen and St Katharine who need little encouragement to play with the children, especially on the craft and the play-dough tables.

Sadly this will be my last report, for after 15 years co-ordinating the Baby and Toddler Group I am leaving Abingdon for Scotland. We have a very keen set of parents, some of whom have offered to help with the practical aspects of the group, but we are looking for more helpers to join either of our sessions on a Monday morning, and, importantly, someone willing to co-ordinate the effort. With a large enough team of helpers we are able to cover when folk are away, so that duties do not become too onerous.

My grateful thanks to our current team of helpers; Cathy Meen, John Thompson, Pam Martin, Elizabeth Simpson, Sue Phipps and Roger Nettlefold.

I would encourage anyone with some time on a Monday morning to think about joining us even if only as an occasional helper. Please talk to any of our existing helpers for details. It is very rewarding, you can see some of the things we get up to at www.facebook.com/StHelensToddlers.

2.6 The Window

Alexandra Green

The Window, in its fifth year as a publication for the whole parish, continues to be published ten times a year, with double issues for December/January and July/August. The editorial team consists of Alexandra Green, Silvia Joinson, Carol Worthington (St Helen's), Louise Heffernan (St Michael's), and Andrew Coker (St Nicolas). David Pope monitors the mailbox, and John Thompson and Barbara Nettlefold with the team of distributors make the monthly distribution run smoothly.

Sadly Sheila Hills, after many years on the editorial group and a very generous host for our meetings, moved to Somerset to be near her family; we miss her contributions. We were also sorry to say goodbye to Ian Miles who provided puzzles once a quarter.

One of the most important aspects of the production of *The Window* is the type-setting, and this has been ably and cheerfully carried out by Rachel Shearer for a number of years. We will be very sorry to see Rachel relinquish this role on her relocation to Scotland and hope that those who have expressed an interest in taking over from Rachel will find it a worthwhile and manageable task.

We are grateful to NP Design in Wallingford for their high quality print production and their willingness to accommodate the occasional missed deadline. We look forward to working with them during 2019.

The Window is currently delivered to over 200 houses in the parish and sent by post to the diocese, local press and others. Readers also collect copies from each of the three churches. It would be good if there was an increase in subscriptions and circulation, especially in the areas of new housing. There are usually spare copies each month, so please consider taking one (or more) for friends and neighbours.

The team are grateful for the contributors who provide such interesting and informative articles. Please let the team know if you would like to contribute a piece.

Alexandra Green, for *The Window* editorial group

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3 The Wider Church

3.1 Church-in-Abingdon

Liz Norman

As the name suggests, this committee is composed of representatives from all the main churches (14 in all) in Abingdon. St Helen's has two representatives on this committee, namely, Barbara King and Liz Norman. The committee was first convened in 1988 and meets quarterly.

Recent CIA activities include :

- participation in the Week of Christian Unity ending with a united service
- Maundy Thursday shoe shining in the Market Square
- Good Friday walk of witness through the precinct to St Nicolas' Church
- Women's World Day of Prayer
- annual Bereavement service
- annual inter church quiz

as well as other events throughout the year.

Forthcoming events include a series of Lent Lectures by Will Donaldson entitled "The Beatitudes and Countercultural Lifestyle", and, on April 6th, The Abingdon Passion Play.

The CIA supports Christian Aid, Christian Listeners, Church Twinning, Archway, 35 Ock Street, Prayer Space in schools, Christian Focus, Abingdon Bridge, Abingdon Street Pastors and others.

In St Helen's weekly newsletter, we can only highlight one or two of the activities, so, those who are interested in the work of the CIA should consult their monthly newsletter which can be found on the CIA website, www.church-in-abingdon.org.uk.

3.2 Church-in-Abingdon Twinning Group

Elizabeth Simpson & Anne Dodd (St H representatives on the CiA Twinning Committee)

The aim of the Church in Abingdon Twinning Group, which is affiliated to the Abingdon and District Town Twinning Society, is to foster relations between the churches in our twin towns and to develop a greater ecumenical understanding. Many warm friendships have been formed through these inter-church exchange visits. Abingdon and District Town Twinning Society (ADTTS) was formed by the Town Council after the second world war to encourage twinning between towns of comparable size in Europe with the intention of creating greater understanding between the peoples of different countries and formerly was sponsored by the local authority. Abingdon is twinned with Argentan, in Normandy, France; Colmar in Alsace, France; Schongau in Bavaria, Germany; Sint Niklaas, in Belgium; and Lucca in Italy.

The CiA Twinning Group Committee meets four times a year, rotating its venue to host the meeting at each of the churches in the two parishes in Abingdon. There are presently representatives on the committee from St Nicolas', St Michael's St Helen's, St Edmunds, Abingdon Baptist Church, Trinity Methodist, All Saints Methodist, Christchurch, Peachcroft Community Church and Society of Friends.

Members of our congregations are encouraged to take part in the twinning opportunities. This might include visiting our twin towns, hosting visitors when they come to Abingdon, taking part in the programme planned, helping to welcome our visitors and supporting our communal meals.

In 2018 two exchange visits were arranged. A group of eleven German Christians, of three denominations from Schongau, Bavaria, came to Abingdon through the very hot weekend of 5th to 9th July. We were particularly pleased that both the Catholic Priest, Pfarrer Norbert Maxer and the Lutheran Minister, Pfarrerin Julia Steller, were members of the visit. This visit covered not only the normal trips around Abingdon, Oxford and the local countryside, but also emphasised ecumenism in Abingdon, including the purpose, history, organisation and work of the Church in Abingdon

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(CiA). The visitors were hosted by local families from several of our churches, with others offering an evening meal or a Sunday lunch, thus giving the visitors the opportunity to meet many members of our congregations.

One of the highlights was the very welcome cooling Salter's boat trip to Oxford before facing the streets of Oxford. The unusual heat did enable us to enjoy a marvellous outdoor barbecue on the Saturday evening at Trinity Church.

The visit concluded on Monday morning with a talk and discussion in St Helen's Church on the subject of the Abingdon Parish Team, particularly requested by the Schongau clergy, and given by the Revd Dr Charles Miller.

The second visit took place at the end of August when a group of nine members of the St Joseph's Church, Colmar, in the Alsace region of France, came to Abingdon with their parish priest Fr Francois Martz. Their visit began with lunch in the garden of St Ethelwold's House, chosen for its spiritual and inter-faith heritage. Most of the visitors had not been to Abingdon before. They were taken to many of the churches in the town and learnt of the several denominations in the UK and of how, thirty years ago, the churches in Abingdon formed an inter-church committee to develop ways of working together for the good of the whole community.

Through a sunny weekend the visitors were taken to Oxford by bus and returned by Salter's steamer to Abingdon. The main meal together was held at the Peachcroft Community Church. Talks were given by speakers who work with the elderly, sick visiting and music therapy. These topics were chosen because St Joseph's is connected with the hospital chaplaincy, and with homes for the elderly and for adults with special needs and therefore were of particular interest to the visitors.

A specially planned church service was held at St Edmunds on the last evening celebrating the fellowship nurtured by the Twinning groups of both towns, with candles being lit for private prayer. This was followed by refreshments and fellowship in the church room, serenaded with music from All Saints' String Quartet.

Several new hosts and dinner hosts were involved on this visit which helped to make the visit such a success.

Church Twinning received a late invitation to visit Argentan in September to take part in their Heritage weekend, but in view of the two visits hosted by Abingdon there were not enough takers to make the visit viable. Argentan has therefore invited us to visit in September 2019.

The Twinning Committee was very grateful to the Church in Abingdon for its donation of £120 in 2018. This goes a long way to help pay for hospitality expenses, particularly for joint meals and subsidising visitors' outings.

These exchanges could not happen without funding and each committee member is asked to consider ways in which they can raise funds within their own church. Expenses are kept down by the generosity of supporters, host families and shared meals.

We encourage our congregations to see Church Twinning as an activity in which everyone is invited to take part and we welcome anyone who would like to be involved.

3.3 Traidcraft

Ruth Afako and Ann Murdoch

The Traidcraft stall was well supported throughout the year but in December the decision was taken to close it down. This was because of a combination of circumstances which made it hard to keep a regular supply of goods.

- Traidcraft experienced financial difficulties and some popular products were not readily available.
- After many years as an account holder and supplier for several Abingdon churches, Jan Lawrence decided to give up this role.
- None of the team of volunteers was in a position to take on more responsibility.

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Arrangements were made to ensure that the church continues its ethical policy of buying Fair Trade tea and coffee.

3.4 Foodbank

Linda Hobbs

St Helen's continues to support the Abingdon Food bank located at Christ Church in Northcourt Road. The food bank has been increasingly used, with numbers rising year on year.

Regular donations of tinned and packet food are then given to anyone referred for assistance.

Abingdon food bank is not part of the Trussel Trust, the national organisation running many of the food banks throughout the country. This means there is more flexibility as to how many times people can use the service. However, any user must be referred prior to their being given food.

Regrettably, due to this increased need for the service, a second food bank has been opened in South Abingdon. This additional outlet opens one day a week, increasing availability of assistance to three days each week. The additional food bank is supplied by the main food bank, so increasing the amount of food required.

Recently, several of the congregation have begun to regularly donate financially to the food bank, as a separate aspect to their Christian giving

During Harvest Festival, St Helen's generously donated the large quantity of collected tinned food to the food bank. A display of posters helped raise the awareness of the congregation, as to the needs of and reasons why, some families in our community experience difficulty.

As usual, over the Christmas period, the congregation of St. Helen's were very generous, contributing large quantities of festive goods, which were then made into Christmas parcels for families and individuals referred by care providers.

It is regrettable that there is a need for food banks, but whilst that need continues, I feel sure that St Helen's congregation will continue to support those in our community in need.

4 Church groups & organisations

4.1 Handbell ringers

Susan Read

In 2018, three people joined the handbell group and two left the group. Our team was slightly larger, fifteen strong, consisting of eleven adults and five school-aged ringers.

Meetings and performances in 2018:

We held ten weekly practices starting on 7th October. This year we again met in St Helen's Church Centre each Sunday evening.

We did ten performances (below), and were asked if we would come to Nicholson House more often because the residents enjoyed it so much.

| | |
|------------|---|
| Sat 24 Nov | Christmas Market, St Helen's Church |
| Thu 29 Nov | PHAB meeting in Christ Church Hall |
| Sat 1 Dec | Extravaganza, St Nicolas Church |
| Sat 1 Dec | Concert for residents of Nicholson House |
| Wed 6 Dec | Entertainment in Fleur de Lys House |
| Sat 8 Dec | Before charity concert at Oxford Cathedral |
| Sun 16 Dec | During & after Carol Service, St Edmunds Church, Abingdon |
| Sun 16 Dec | After Carol Service in St Nicolas Church, Abingdon |
| Mon 17 Dec | Monday Club, John Mason School |
| Fri 22 Dec | Before carol service in St Helen's Church |

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I'd like to thank all the handbell ringers again this year for their helpfulness and for the fun we have had.

4.2 Tower Bell Ringers

Brian Read

Abingdon has a large and active band, ringing the ten bells at St Helen's and the six bells at St Nicolas' every Sunday morning plus other services by arrangement. Attendance is good and we achieve a high standard. There were again fewer weddings to ring for this year. On occasion we are asked to toll the tenor bell as the mourners arrive before a funeral.

The national *Ringing Remembers* celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Armistice was observed on Remembrance Sunday with a lunchtime bells party at St Nicolas' and later an excellent half-muffled quarter peal of Grandsire Caters at St Helen's. You may have heard St Nicolas' bells ring out during the bun throwing.

The regular practice night is Tuesday, alternating at the two churches, while the early Friday evening practice sessions, mainly for learners and younger members. We organised six outings during school holidays for youngsters. (A recent visit to Thame was featured on Channel 5 news.) Two of our band were in the winning Diocesan team for the National Youth Contest last July in London. We are happy to teach girls and boys (from age 10) who may be interested in learning to handle a bell and join in.

We continue to concentrate on teaching younger recruits. Philip now rings with us on Sundays. Two older ones, Sophie and Josh, who qualified at level 5 of the *Learning To Ring* course, enjoyed a weekend of intensive tuition from the experts in Birmingham.

We continue to host each Friday afternoon a visit of a group of boys with two masters from Abingdon School for learning-to-ring teaching sessions. This after school activity is thriving, with significant progress to report. The boys were pleased to ring for their school carol service at St Helen's.

The ringers are always happy to welcome members of the congregation or visitors up the tower or to entertain special requests for the bells to be rung.

www.abingdonbells.org.uk

4.3 Friends of St Helen's

Colin Casemore

We have been able to continue our support for fabric and maintenance costs this year. We transfer £10,000 annually. Funds are generated from our investments of subscriptions and other funds. The stall has contributed to this with over £2000 this year, with other fund raising events including the Coffee Morning/Book Swap, Summer Lunch, and a Talk by Sarah Wearn on Abingdon School in the First World War. We are currently in need of someone to take over the Stall, a significant revenue earner and visitor attraction, and also for others to form a committee to generate and manage a forward programme of events.

4.4 Ministry of Welcome & Hospitality

Susan Scott and Marian Ward, Co-ordinators, Ministry of Welcome.

Our efforts to make new members of the congregation, visitors and users of the church feel welcomed have continued during the year.

Hospitality in the shape of refreshments and music continues to be a strong feature of the life of St Helen's, notably teas and music on the third Sunday before Choral Evensong. The regular

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Newcomers lunches have continued to be happy occasions when clergy and members of the regular congregation have been able to meet new folk over a meal and a glass of wine.

Breakfast refreshments continue to be served at the end of the first 8am HC service of the month when it returns to St Helen's, thanks to Sandra Granger, and before the start of Faith Forum on the second Sunday of the month thanks to Pam Martin and Jane Morgan. Refreshments are served at the end of the service of Morning Praise on the first Sunday of the month thanks to Maria Gibson, and of course every Sunday morning after the Parish Eucharist. Hospitality has been offered at this year's Wedding Workshop, and other occasions such as St Helen's Got Talent evening, as the need has arisen.

Donations received on these occasions have enabled our Ministry of Welcome to be self-financing and to invest in catering equipment as needed, and meant we could offer complimentary refreshments to those attending Baptism Preparation and Marriage Preparation, and to visitors.

A group of committed helpers and cooks support this ministry and it has been heartening to receive more help this year, although more help is always welcome.

4.5 Mothers' Union

Barbara Earl

Abingdon Mothers' Union has had a very successful year. Two new members joined us, we raised over £1200 for various Mothers' Union charities. Through the year we had some interesting speakers. In March we hosted one of the diocesan spring meetings and July saw us at Dorchester Abbey to celebrate 130 years since the start of Mothers' Union by Mary Sumner. We made Christmas cards for prisoners at Bullingdon prison, took Christmas presents to Old Station House, supplied tea, coffee etc. to the Balsam project Didcot and toiletries to the JR Hospital. In November we held a Service for Activism against gender based violence and we also had a quiet evening led by Paul Smith. A really busy year!

St Helen's Flower Arrangers

Liz Norman

St Helen's has a very long tradition of having flower arrangements to enhance our worship. A very big thank you to the present members of the group, for their support, time and planning that go into the arrangements especially at the church festivals. Thanks, also, must go to the people who support the group with refreshment and tidying up.

Sadly, the numbers of arrangers have dropped to 13 of which 5 support festivals only. Many thanks to Sue Austin, Doreen Webb and Dorothy Colloff, all of whom have retired from the group this year, for all their hard work over a large number of years.

As a group we meet 3 or 4 times a year for coffee and to plan the rota and festivals. Last year at:

- **Easter:** we widened the spectrum of colour with a few different placements.
- **Harvest:** we had fewer placements but bolder arrangements.
- **Christmas:** we used poinsettias to give a rich warm colour within the Church.

At Easter and Christmas, we asked for donations for the flowers as an act of remembrance to of loved ones, and our appeal met with a very generous response – many thanks!

Lilian Colman has been kindly taking photographs of recent arrangements at festivals so that we can build up a photo archive of arrangements over the years. If anyone has any photographs Lilian would love to receive them. Also, at the Information Desk, there is a pink folder containing photos of the more recent arrangements.

At this present time, we have three placements. These placements are replaced every two weeks and refreshed during that period.

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- **The Porch**, which is the first point of contact that people have on entering St Helen's, where we have changed the placement of flowers to welcome worshippers as they enter. Since the main doors open inwards, the view of one of the window arrangements can be restricted, so we have added arrangements either side of the glass doors. This has been warmly received.
- **The Lady Chapel Pedestal**. (The Lady Chapel is, of course, in use daily for morning and evening prayer and as a Sacred Space for prayer and quiet reflection.)
- **Altar**. The Flower Pedestal providing enhancement for Sunday worship.
- **Font**. Arrangements from Easter until Pentecost, All Saints day and other festivals.

When it is possible we blend or contrast the ecclesiastical colours.

4.6 Readers & Intercessors

Susan Gee

We are fortunate in having around 35 members of our congregation who read regularly and 15 people who lead intercessions. The rota for readers and intercessors is organised on a quarterly basis, and usually most would lead the prayers and/or read once a quarter, though in the case of readers, they may read more often, especially to cover extra evening services. It's good to have more young people reading and being involved in leading prayers for special services, and I'm encouraging them to do this on a regular basis.

At the end of January, Chris Charles led a short workshop for readers and intercessors, with advice on improving delivery and better use of the microphone. Those who attended found it very helpful, and I hope this may be repeated to benefit those who were unable to be there.

A big thank-you to you all, for your willingness and dedication, and for all you do to enrich our worship week by week.

4.7 St Helen's Guild

Holy Dusters

Val Casemore

The Holy Dusters 'team' has remained the same this past year with Richard Kirby, Heather Jefferis, Barbara Nettlefold, Bertha Nyahoda, Sue Phipps, Gill Titcombe, Tony & Lesley Legge and Colin & Val Casemore continuing to clean the church each week. Pam Martin is our ever willing 'locum'.

Sacrists

Alexandra Green

The team of sacrists, Alexandra Green, Judith Hosking and Gill Titcombe, continue to support the clergy and congregation by setting up and clearing away the vessels, vestments and liturgical books for the 8am and 1030 Eucharists on Sundays and on other occasion such as the services in Holy Week.

During the past year, Bertha Nyahoda decided to withdraw from the team and Ann Moss has had to temporarily withdraw due to ill-health. We are grateful to both of them for their contribution to this ministry. This means that the team has only three members, which makes it difficult to cover the rota, especially during periods of illness or holiday. We would be grateful to hear from anyone who is interested in finding out more about what is involved in being a sacrist and who is able to commit ideally to one Sunday a month.

The team has had several discussions and provided feedback on the plans for re-ordering and welcome the progress that has been made so far. Alexandra Green represents the sacrists on the re-ordering team leaders project team.

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We are grateful to Susan Gee for her work in looking after the altar cloths and frontals and hangings, to Norman Dawson and his helpers for providing bread each week, and to Phil Atkinson with his help particularly with candles.

4.8 Sacramental Assistants

Sue & Mike Austin

Many thanks to those who do sacramental assistant duties. Also thanks to those who distribute bread if there is only one priest there. Also thanks to those who visit those people who are ill at home or live in a retirement home and give them Holy Communion and also those who assist at the Wednesday Holy Communion service. It is an uplifting job to assist. After many years we have decided to take a break and we are looking for someone to take over preparing and distributing the rota.

4.9 Servers

Michael Hosking

The serving team has continued to offer its services regularly at the 10.30am service at St Helens and at other services when required.

We have lost a number of people from the team during the year. Clare Horden and Nigel Rhymer are no longer regular members of the congregation. Nigel and his family have moved north. Clare has been away on a gap year, and will be going to university shortly. We wish them both well for the future. Sue and Mike Austin and Jamie Griffin are no longer serving regularly, due to health issues. We thank them all for their many years of past service.

Dominik Chmielewski, our placement student from Culham, has also helped out with serving from time to time. Thanks are due to all members of the team for all their hard work.

We have also welcomed a number of new faces. Rob Bough, Gwen Bevington, Hazel Glennie and Sue Phipps have all joined the team during the year. We thank them for their hard work, and hope that they enjoy their time as part of the team.

There is always space for additional servers to join the rota. Please speak to Charles or to Michael Hosking if you would be interested in finding out more about this particular form of ministry.

4.10 Sidesmen

Dr Martin Kimber

St Helen's is blessed with dedicated volunteers who help out running the Sunday services. In fact, there is notable overlap between the sidespeople and various other roles that keep things going both visibly and behind the scenes. It is a great pleasure to work with such friendly, enthusiastic and helpful people who make a real difference to both practical and social aspects of worship in our church.

Elements of what we do gently evolve. Congregants and visitors will notice a trolley has appeared from which we now ask them to select a hymnbook and to return it at the end of the service. The trolley is quite heavy when laden with all the books, so unfortunately it is not possible to provide an at-seat service in the aisles. Card payments are not yet accepted, but do ask us to point out the fire exits if you are unsure.

As coordinator I (Martin) maintain and email out a "booklet" of guidance and useful information for anybody helping out: this includes fire safety rules, contact details and all the rotas. There would always be space for more helpers - please let me know if you would be able to join in (even if only occasionally). Especially please look out for any sign-up sheets for example for Holy Week or in Advent. Some of our services attract more than 700 people and can only run with sufficient sidespeople present.

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4.11 Stewarding [Open Churches Scheme]

Elizabeth Simpson

Through the summer months in 2018, from Easter to the Patronal Festival in mid-September, we have endeavoured to keep the church open for two hours in the middle of every day and to make welcome visitors, pilgrims and those who are looking for a quiet place for prayer. Regretfully, there have been a few occasions when the stewards for the day have not been able to be present and have been unable to find a substitute.

I would like to record very grateful thanks to the sixteen regular stewards, each of whom for many years have faithfully opened the church and received visitors. We have a small bank of six occasional stewards, who will fill in when asked and if they are free. However this is not enough to ensure that we can honour our commitment to the Open Churches Scheme and we know two of our regular stewards have said they will be unable to continue in 2019.

The weekly notice of public worship is displayed on the Tower notice board. At the foot of this notice is the statement that the church is open to visitors every day from 11am to 1pm. If anyone reading this report feels he/she could help with stewarding, even if only occasionally, your gift of time would be greatly appreciated.

Being a welcoming steward in the church brings rewards both to visitors and stewards. It is an opportunity to work with and get to know other members of the congregation. A glance at the Visitors' Book will show that people have come here from all over the world and value the opportunity to look round our church. They are impressed by the building and frequently remark on the warm welcome they have received.

As well as visitors from all over the British Isles, we have received those from Australia, Hong Kong, India, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy (painted ceiling/ wonderful windows!), Vienna, Austria (We are on holiday and found this nice church with such nice people). Poland (an unexpected find) and from 6th Abingdon Scouts (our annual visit. Many thank yous for being open).

On Heritage Day we counted 116 visitors. Although we were open all day this total was considerably down on previous years, mainly because the town council did not organise Heritage Day on as big a scale as in previous years.

We ended the season on 22nd September, by which date we had welcomed 3059 visitors, a not insignificant number. We look forward to 2019 with a renewed invitation to members of the congregation who may be considering taking part in this valuable outreach work. Please have a word with Dorothy Donald or Elizabeth Simpson.

4.12 Archives

Anne Smithson

Archives stored in the Tower/Exchequer Room are now completed and listed in the new Inventory.

The only work outstanding is to have a team of helpers, remove old photos of 19th century Vicars and others from their frames and store them in archival wrappings as advised by Berkshire Record office administrator.

Both Christ's Hospital and Abingdon Borough have already used this new storage method. If anyone is willing to help with de-framing and disposal of glass, along with old plywood type backings, please let the Administrator know. We can then make contact and start planning and measuring for the materials we will need to purchase.

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4.12 10th Abingdon (St Helen's) Scout Group

Tom Kyffin

The last year has been another good year for the Scout Group. The Beaver colony and Cub pack are almost full (12 Beavers and 21 Cubs) and we have a small team of dedicated leaders. We have had an excellent year of Scouting with our young people participating in a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities including camping, crafts, cooking, sports and learning new life skills. The highlight of the last year was our Group camp at Dry Sandford in July where the Beavers and Cubs took part in a wide range of fun activities.

Our team of leaders is small and we are always looking for adults who are prepared to help on a regular or occasional basis. In addition, we are still looking to start up a Scout troop to allow the Cubs to stay at St Helens until they reach 14. If any members of the Church know of anyone who can help with Beavers, Cubs or Scouts than please contact Tom Kyffin, the Group Scout Leader (tom_kyffin@hotmail.com), who will be happy to provide more information.

It is good to offer the children a taster of new skills to enjoy. If you have a hobby or work skill such as first aid, music, astronomy etc. that you think our young people would enjoy, and which would fit into 1 or 2 evening session, then we would love to hear from you.

Finally, the leaders, helpers, committee and children would like to say 'thank you' to the Church and the congregation for their continued support and for the use the Church Centre.

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APPENDIX 2

REPORT FROM ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS' CHURCH

Personnel, 1 January – 31 December 2018

Clergy

The Revd Dr Charles Miller (Team Rector)

The Revd Paul Smith (Team Vicar)

Churchwarden

Mr Peter Squire (first elected April 2017)

One vacancy

Deanery Synod Representatives * (also on PCC and DCC)

Sue Scott (from 2017)

Alexandra Scott (from summer 2017)

PCC Members *

Hilary Clare (to 2019)

John Clare (to 2021)

Jenni Collins (to 2020)

DCC Officers

Vice-Chairman John Clare (PCC to 2021)

Treasurer Mike Collins (DCC to 2019)

Secretary Hilary Clare (PCC to 2019)

DCC Members*

Dorothy Bell (to 2021)

Keith Bowman (to 2020)

Adrienne Compton-James (to 2020)

Frank Debney (to 2019)

Eileen Duckett (to 2021)

Krissi Hartley-Morris (to 2018)

Jean Hercus (to 2021)

Louise Heffernan (to 2020)

Ming Ng (to 2019)

Helen Owen (to 2018)

Margery Radford (to 2018)

* The date of the election of all officers and committee members is that of the AGM.

Note that following the decision at the ADCM 2018 no DCC member is eligible for re-election until one year after the end of their term.

The Standing Committee is composed of the Vicar (or Rector), Churchwarden, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary (vacancy for 2nd Churchwarden).

The Fabric Committee is composed of the Vicar, Churchwarden, Keith Bowman and Frank Debney (from ADCM 2017)

The DCC met six times, and the Standing Committee informally, during the year.

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Other officers

Stewardship Officer Julie Woodley
Electoral Roll Officer Keith Bowman
Pew Leaflet David Duce
Parking liaison Peter Squire, Jenni Collins
Registers Hilary Clare
Church Safeguarding Officer Carol Bowman
Church-in-Abingdon representative Jane Cadogan

Team Vicar's Report

Although I was doing a limited amount of work during the first part of the year, it was a joy to return to full-time ministry on Ascension Day 2018 at the Corporate Communion for the parish held at St Nicolas'. I am indebted to all my clergy colleagues, especially the Team Rector, Charles Miller, our Associate Priest, Mary Williamson, Pauline and Christopher Seaman, and John Barton for covering services. We were also fortunate to have the ministry of Fr Nicholas Cheeseman, DDO for Berkshire, as he preached for us on the first three days of Holy Week. We are blessed in having a good team of people. A lot of extra work fell on the shoulders of our Warden, Peter Squire, who already carries a heavy burden as the only Warden for our congregation at present, and so I owe him a debt of gratitude.

Attendance

In the Churchwarden's report it is noted that attendance on Sundays is slightly down. This remains a cause for concern and the Away Morning which would have taken place at the time of writing this report was to help us both to 'give thanks' as a congregation, and to look forward. The DCC will be looking carefully at what this time together achieved and how we can effectively move forward. I do want to highlight two things in terms of attendance, however.

Firstly, it is heartening to report that the two Masses which are celebrated in the week (Tuesday evenings and Thursday lunchtimes) are well-attended for a small Sunday congregation. (Sometimes getting an average of 15 people during the week). I am delighted that people are supporting these 'celebrations' and that they are meeting a need. I am most grateful to Pauline and Christopher Seaman who provide cover for me in my absence on Thursdays; and to Philip Tovey who was able to provide cover on Tuesday evenings. However, at present there is no one to call on for Tuesday evenings, when I am involved in the teaching programmes of the parish (Baptism preparation), or on leave. This is something which needs thinking through for the future.

Secondly, we need to be thankful for attendance at Christmas and Easter. It was good to see that numbers were slightly up on 2017, especially at Midnight and on Christmas morning. I am grateful to Carol Bowman and her team for leading children's worship and activities at these two festivals of the year, which are doing well numerically and meeting a need for families.

Mission and Ministry

Last summer there was a well-received PCC Away Day at St Mary's Convent, Wantage, the house of the Community of St Mary the Virgin. This was the first of its kind in many years and was well attended. There was much energy and excitement as to what the PCC could be doing in the future and much common ground was covered by the three congregations. Such matters of Pastoral Care, for example, were highlighted as to be vitally shared by congregations under the guidance and supervision of their respective clergy. As we move into a new year the work of the Communications Group, a new group for Christian Teaching and Spiritual Growth, (set up following the Away Day) should become an important part of our parish life.

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Following on from the comments relating to attendance figures I want to say thank you to all DCC members for their work over the past year. Special thanks must go to those who are leaving us, and a warm welcome to those who may join us. It is important to know that this is not simply about joining a committee or attending more meetings. The flourishing of the DCC depends on all its members having a keen interest to see the ongoing mission and ministry of the congregation take place. There is business to be done, yes; but there is also the need for considering how the DCC can both help the existing community grow and deepen in faith and love, and find ways of growing our congregation.

The DCC has begun to look at ways of making the South-West End of the church more welcoming with a particular 'mission emphasis', with teaching materials, and also a physical place for prayer.

Discussions began towards the end of last year and I am most grateful to those who as a working party have begun thinking through the issues. All this has to come to 'a whole', and it is my strong hope that by the beginning of our new DCC year, the working group would have agreed a coherent plan for approval. This has to be one of our priorities.

There is a view – indeed it is shared by Bishop Michael Beasley of Hertford, formerly Director of Mission in the diocese, resident in Abingdon and a visitor to our church - that if a congregation can increase its numbers by 10% each year it is doing well. We could do even better if in addition to that we were able to draw back into our common life those whom we do not see as often as we once did. (Hebrews 10.23-25a)

I think there is every reason to believe that this is possible. Over the last few years, there are those who have testified to St Michael's being a warm, welcoming and hospitable community. That's why they have joined us and stayed. There is therefore every reason to root the coming year in thankfulness as we offer the Eucharist week by week to the glory of God, working together in love and unity to attract others to the Risen Christ.

I am grateful to you all for your generosity and commitment to our common life. Please pray for me as I do for you.

Your friend and pastor,

Father Paul Smith, Team Vicar, 22 February 2019

Churchwarden's Report for 2018

Worship and Services:

Peter Squire

During 2018, our regular pattern of services continued with the Mass at 09.30 on Sundays, a Said Mass at 19.30 on most Tuesdays (combined with lay-led meditations at the Stations of the Cross during Lent), and a Said Mass at 12.30 on Thursdays. We were most grateful for honorary clergy and clergy team for their cover from throughout the parish during the year, not least during Fr Paul's absence when he was awaiting further surgery.

We also hosted, and increased, Labyrinth Walk activities, including Silent Reflections and Advent Labyrinth Walks (see Sue Sheppy's report below).

In addition, certain Holy Days (e.g. Epiphany, Dedication Festival, Corpus Christi and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary) were marked by a weekday mass.

Regrettably the average attendance on Sundays has fallen to 42 (44 in 2017). However, the average attendance at the Tuesday and Thursday services was similar to that recorded in 2017. There were also 6 baptisms, 2 weddings and 8 funerals during the year.

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We held a Holocaust Memorial Day Concert “Vespers by Candlelight” on 27 January in aid of The Abingdon Passion Play 2019, and, on the same day, commenced a fortnightly Study Course on the Beatitudes, given by The Revd Professor John Barton, The Revd Dr Paul Sheppy, The Revd Dr Phillip Tovey, and The Revd Canon Dr Emma Percy, which was well supported by all three churches in the parish.

Easter: In Holy Week, which attracted 197 communicants (a significant decrease on 2017), Mass was celebrated on the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Throughout the week, addresses were delivered by Fr Nicholas Cheeseman, DDO for Berkshire Archdeaconry.

We observed the Triduum in the usual way, beginning on Maundy Thursday we observed the Mass of the Lord’s Supper with the Washing of Feet, the Stripping of the Altar and Watch of the Passion. Compline was then said at midnight. On Good Friday morning Carol Bowman led a short interactive children’s service attended by 29 adults and 18 children and followed by a variety of craft activities whilst refreshments were served. Thanks to two of our young church members, Carys Hopkins and Sarah Clark who helped with both the service and crafts. This was followed by the Liturgy of the Passion in the afternoon.

The Lighting of the New Fire and Easter Vigil was celebrated on Holy Saturday and this was followed on Easter Day by The Sung Mass of the Resurrection.

Christmas: Our Christmas celebrations commenced with our popular Crib service, led by Carol Bowman again with the help of Carys Hopkins and Sarah Clark and accompanied by Keith Bowman on the piano, and attended by 54 adults and 21 children.

The Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve saw a full Church with an attendance of 221. Many thanks to Glynne Butt, the choir and the 3-piece ensemble for the outstanding music on the evening. This was followed by Midnight Mass with 32 communicants and Christmas Morning Mass with 40 communicants (both slightly up on 2017).

Outreach: St Nicolas’ Primary School held a service at St Michael’s at the end of the Spring Term with 500 + and a donkey in attendance and a service to celebrate St Nicolas’ Day in December with 510 in attendance.

Abingdon School held three services in St Michael’s during 2018: A leaver’s service in June at which 200 were in attendance; and Lower and Upper School Carol Services in December with 490 in attendance.

On 8 September we welcomed visitors participating in the Abingdon Heritage Weekend and Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride.

During the year, concerts were given at the Church by Abingdon Concert Band, Huw Rhys James and Wantage Academy Band, and the Church was hired in October by New Life Church (Oxford) for a South of England gathering. Our church room continues to be well used by local organisations. Fund raising: We continued to fund-raise, during the year, for our two nominated charities -The Abingdon Bridge, a charity for young people based in the town, and Tariro, a youth charity in Zimbabwe. In addition, we supported: 1. CMS with a cash donation; 2. The Porch Day Centre in Oxford by donating our Harvest gifts; and 3. Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust by sponsoring Louise Heffernan and Nicola Ng for the Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride. Our Autumn Fair was also a great success raising significant funds for the church, and for the Home Farm Trust. Fabric: During the year, in addition to regular maintenance, we undertook restoration of Station of the Cross 14 and work arising from the 2016 Quinquennial Inspection (see Keith Bowman’s report below). I am very much indebted to Keith for overseeing these, and other, fabric projects, and for

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accepting responsibility for St Michael's online faculty applications. Many thanks: To all who contributed in any way to our common life, particularly to those who serve at the altar, our Sacristan, our organists, the dedicated band of choir members, members of the DCC, cleaners and flower arrangers; and finally, to Fr Paul for his leadership, support, kindness and love over the year. Let us continue to pray for the Lord's blessing on him.

Fabric

Keith Bowman

In January the DCC accepted a quotation for the repair of Station 14, which had been damaged early in 2017. Following the granting of approval by the diocese, the work was undertaken at the end of August and the repaired Station was rededicated at the Patronal Festival.

In February we received, with very little notice, the news that the gas main serving the church was to be renewed. Because excavation in the churchyard requires diocesan authorisation and the phasing of the work with neighbouring households was linked with that at the church we did have to disconnect the supply for a couple of days.

Authorisation was sought from the Archdeacon for the first phase of repairs identified in the 2016 Quinquennial Report. Work started in November and was completed just before Christmas. Whilst the scaffolding was in place over the roof of the south aisle, the opportunity was taken to paint the roof gutters on the south side. During replacement of some of the roof tiles it was found that the supporting timbers were deteriorating so these were replaced as necessary.

Our neighbours at 28 Park Road sought permission to undertake some building work adjacent to the boundary of the churchyard. This work started in September and is still in progress.

In addition to the major projects above there was also the usual round of minor repairs, routine servicing and preliminary planning of works for execution in 2019.

Labyrinth-inspired activities in 2018

Sue Sheppy

World Labyrinth day

St Michael's was open from 12 noon – 2.30 pm on Saturday 5 May for people to walk and pray the Labyrinth. In particular a good number of participants came at 1 pm to join in the worldwide 'Walk as One at 1'. This was followed by prayers led by Sue Sheppy and a light lunch. Altogether, 12 people attended at some point in the day. Carol Bowman and Sue Sheppy were ably supported by members of the congregation who acted as stewards for the hours the church was open.

Thy Kingdom Come

This was initially an invitation from the English Archbishops that grew into an international and ecumenical call to prayer between Ascension and Pentecost for God's kingdom to come. In Abingdon, St Michael's joined other churches to provide various prayer experiences. The events began with the united service on Ascension Day at St Nicolas Church. St Michael's was open on Tuesday 15 May from 10 am until 3 pm for quiet reflection, and a labyrinth activity was made available. 12 people attended at some point during the day. Carol Bowman and Sue Sheppy were ably supported by members of the congregation who acted as stewards for the hours the church was open.

Silent Reflections

2018 marks the 7th year of our monthly Silent Reflections. These are held on the last Tuesday evening of the month at 7.30 - 9 pm. Each time a simple theme is introduced before people move into the church for shared silence and personal reflection. This year these themes were introduced by Fr Paul, Helen Owen, Sue Scott or Sue Sheppy. Eileen Duckett is our catering manager, and often assists in reading scripture or poems during the introductory sessions. Material is produced to

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aid these meditations, and we gather together again at the end for closing prayers and refreshments. Over the year, 22 individuals have joined us in this space at one time or another from churches in and around Abingdon, or from no regular church community. For many people a labyrinth walk is an important part of the evening. For the first time we had to cancel a session as the weather at the end of February was so extremely cold.

Circle Dancing

These weekly sessions are led mostly by Mary Williams and occasionally by Elizabeth Mitchell, and we use the labyrinth to circle up. We dance to secular and sacred music and it was seen from the beginning as a place to encourage those into our beautiful sacred space here at St Michael's, who do not attend our church, or indeed are not part of any faith community. In this way it was seen as part of our mission.

Moving into Stillness

In addition to our weekly circle dancing, our circle dancing to Taizé music with silent interludes has become a regular monthly event. This is led by Elizabeth Mitchell, an experienced teacher in this way of meditating through movement and stillness. As with our regular circle dancing, the labyrinth is used to maintain the circle formation. Between the two sessions, Eileen Duckett and Sue Sheppy have provided light refreshments for the dancers, which have been much appreciated. There was no meeting in January as a few of us met to discuss how the taster sessions had been received, and how to publicise the event more widely. The session scheduled for 1 March had to be cancelled because of the extreme weather conditions, but throughout the year this event has grown in popularity and attendance is now regularly in double figures.

Advent Labyrinth Walks

The church was open on Tuesday 4, 11 and 18 December between 11 am and noon, and 7 pm and 8 pm. There was an opportunity to walk the labyrinth or simply to enjoy the sacred space. Material for reflection was available on a different Advent theme each week: Coming in Faith, Coming in Hope, Coming in Love. A short prayer was said at the beginning and end of the session, led each time by a different member of our congregation. Overall 44 visits were made.

Groups and individuals

We were contacted by a number of people throughout the year who were interested in walking the labyrinth. All visits are welcomed. Contact is usually made either from information on our church website, or from the Word-Wide Labyrinth Locator managed for us by Carol Bowman.

Electoral Roll

Keith Bowman

In March 2018 the roll underwent a simple revision to consolidate the amendments which had been made since the previous year's revision.

At the conclusion of the 2018 revision the roll contained 91 names, one more than at the same time the previous year. During the year there had been two names removed and five new names were added. There was one change of address notified but there were no changes of name.

Traidcraft

Glenys Enticott

Last year St Michael's church and congregation bought £1,532 worth of goods from Traidcraft. Unfortunately, during the year Traidcraft made a huge loss (due mainly to the fall of the pound against the dollar). It is now developing a new but much smaller business which sadly will no longer be able to buy from many of their long-standing craft suppliers.

However, St Michael's is still able to buy from Traidcraft tea, coffee, sugar, toilet rolls etc. for use in church. Please buy F.T. goods in shops wherever possible.

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If new business picks up we hope to be able to open the stall in church again. Meanwhile, for more information you can go to www.traidcraft.org.uk

Many thanks to all those who have supported us over the years.

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APPENDIX 3
REPORT FROM ST NICOLAS' CHURCH

Reports to the 2019 Annual Meeting of St Nicolas Church

Team Vicar's Report

Although I was doing a limited amount of work during the first part of the year between surgery, it was a joy to return to full-time ministry on Ascension Day at the Corporate Communion which is now held at St Nic's on an annual basis. We enjoyed the preaching of the Revd Paul Cowan, the Bishop of Oxford's Chaplain, followed by the fellowship among a good number of people in the parish.

I want to express my thanks to all my clergy colleagues who throughout the year support the ministry of the parish: with myself and the Team Rector, Charles Miller. We owe a debt of gratitude to our Associate Priest, Mary Williamson, for the times she provides service cover and for the assistance she provides in our two Care Homes when we make regular visits once a month for the Service of Extended Communion. Thanks go also to our Honorary Clergy, John Barton, David Bevington, Roger Williams, Keith Ward, and Emma Percy (our Bowles Lecturer). They provide a richness and variety which not every parish is privileged to receive. So, many thanks to you all.

Worship

I want to pay tribute to all members of our congregation who make contributions to our worship on a weekly basis, in whatever way, both those who participate 'up-front', and those whose hard work is largely hidden. I am grateful to you all.

We have continued with our well established service pattern but I think it is important in this report to highlight two acts of worship in particular.

Firstly, Mattins which is celebrated on the First Sunday of each month. I made some small changes in September to bring the service in line with the order of the Book of Common Prayer. This involved putting the Psalm in the correct position, but introducing another Canticle. I have received various feedback, for which many thanks, and I am aware that we are behind in making changes from the draft format. However, I do intend to see that this happens so that we can have a completed format and order.

Secondly, following the departure of Jane Baun during the summer we had to look at ways at working with the Third Sunday Service. I am delighted that a group meets with me regularly to plan our series and the themes we explore and I want to thank all those who form part of that group both leading and preparing Orders of Service. We have now covered a wide-range of themes over the years, but I hope that should people feel there is teaching they would like to hear you will speak you would let me know.

Mission and Ministry

Last summer there was a well-received PCC Away Day at St Mary's Convent, Wantage, the house of the Community of St Mary the Virgin. This was the first of its kind in many years and was well-attended.

There was much energy and excitement as to what the PCC could be doing in the future and much common ground was covered by the three congregations. Such matters of Pastoral Care, for example, were highlighted as to be vitally shared by congregations under the guidance and

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supervision of their respective clergy. We have discussed the area of Pastoral Visiting on the DCC and I want us to move forward with this, as I am with St Michael's, so that people can be formally trained to assist in this pivotal ministry in the life of their congregation. Our Parish Development Advisor, the Revd Charles Chadwick, has written a course for the training of potential Pastoral Visitors, which is something I will be studying to see how it might serve both of my churches. As we move into a new year, the work of the Parish Communications Group, and a new group for Christian Teaching and Spiritual Growth (set up following the Away Day) should become an important part of our parish life.

I want to say thank you to all DCC members for their work over the past year. Special thanks must go to those who are leaving us, and a warm welcome to those who may join us. It is important to know that this is not simply about joining a Committee, or attending more meetings. The flourishing of the DCC depends on all its members having a keen interest to see the ongoing mission and ministry of the congregation take place. There is business to be done, yes; but there is also the need for considering how the DCC can both help the existing community grow and deepen in faith and love, and find ways of growing our congregation, under my leadership.

Numerical growth is a matter that the DCC has raised during the year, and is something that we all share. There is a view – indeed it is shared by Bishop Michael Beasley of Hertford, formerly Director of Mission in the diocese, resident in Abingdon and a visitor to our church - that if a congregation can increase its numbers by 10% each year it is doing well. We have shown signs of this already which is a cause for celebration and we need to first pray, and then work together, on keeping up this trend. We gather together every week to worship to the glory of God, (Hebrews 10.23-25a). We are called to work together in love and unity, that as we go out into the world, we might attract others to the Risen Christ.

A Final Thank You

I should like to conclude by offering my thanks to Paul Rast-Lindsell and Andrew Coker for exercising their work as Wardens throughout the past year. There has been a lot to do and much has been achieved. You can read elsewhere in this Annual Report about the Fabric works. I do want to draw attention to the most significant, which is the installation of the new heating system which was achieved in record time and ready for Christmas. Thank you to Andrew for that.

I am grateful to you all for your generosity and commitment to our common life. Please pray for me as I do for you.

Your friend and pastor,

Fr Paul Smith, Team Vicar, 25 February 2019

Other Reports

Statistics 2018

Baptisms: 4
Funerals: 2
Memorial Services: 0
Weddings: 1

7.2 Church Wardens' Report

Paul Rast-Lindsell

This has been my third year serving as a St Nicolas' Churchwarden; the second alongside fellow Warden Andrew Coker whom I would like to thank for all his hard work during 2018.

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Services:

Our Sunday Service pattern has continued much the same as last year. An 8.00am Parish Holy Communion is held every odd month, with St Helen's church hosting the even months.

Our main morning service is at 11.15am offering a range of worship types - Morning Prayer (Matins) on the first Sunday, Holy Communion on the second and fourth Sundays, and a less-formal service on the third Sunday during which the sermon is replaced by a study and discussion on topics from the bible followed by an opportunity for fellowship with a coffee afterwards. This service has become quite popular over the year with more people taking on the role of leading it. If there is a fifth Sunday in the month, the service is a 'lighter', more modern, Family Communion.

As is the Church's custom, we of course hold various specific services according to the time of year such as Easter, Harvest Thanksgiving, our Patronal Festival in early December and the Christmas services which include a Crib service for children; a Carol service and two Communion services. These major feast days are always well-attended.

Other Services include lunch time prayers for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Ascension Day when St Nicolas' hosts the parish Communion.

The Wednesday evening Nourishment in Christ (N.I.C.) service stopped during 2018. It was decided that it had 'run its course' and we are considering what might replace it during 2019.

Activities:

During the year, St Nicolas has remained open for a few hours on most weekdays – enabling visitors and locals to enjoy a time of quiet reflection, or a chat and refreshment if preferred. The church still attracts many visitors, mainly during the Summer months and we receive a considerable number of people from both the UK and abroad; many of whom express their delight in finding the building accessible. Our Verger, Jim, is the mainstay of this outreach and he is supported by several members of our congregation.

St Nicolas has also continued to be used as a venue Sunday afternoon concerts. In addition, the very popular weekly 'market' of home-grown fruit, flowers and crafts is continuing to run on Friday mornings.

Members of the congregations from St Nicolas and St Helen's, together with others, make up a house-group which meets up on a fortnightly basis to read and discuss various chapters or books in the bible.

There are other varied and irregular activities throughout the year when St Nicolas plays host to a variety of events, for example, Art exhibitions, various talks and film screenings. We once more offered our space to 'Cards for Good Causes', who were tremendously pleased to be able to use St Nicolas again during November and December.

A highlight this year was an exhibition to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. Genuine recruitment and other posters from the war years were put on display in the church by the Abingdon Museum. St Nicolas added to this by having a cascade of knitted and crocheted poppies hanging from the ceiling.

The year always closes with our participation in the annual Abingdon Extravaganza. However, 2018 saw a departure from our usual stall set-up. This time we concentrated on the children by

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providing 'pocket-money' gifts for them to buy and offering cartoons and popcorn. The adults were not left out with mulled cider being available.

Inventory:

As per the Archdeacon's request (a regular occurrence, not a special event), Andrew undertook to review the church's inventory, finding everything as it should be.

Meetings

The Church Council (DCC) held several meetings during the year to consider the normal business of the church, special projects and events. A main topic of discussion was the improvement of the heating system, the work for which was completed during December. The proposed changes to the toilet block were put back until this renovation had been done. The financial position of St Nicolas remained of concern, although the year did find us better off than the budget set. The accounts continue to be monitored.

The Standing Committee (The Vicar, Churchwardens and the Treasurer) met on a few occasions to review various elements of church business, consider the budget and set DCC agendas.

The Vicar, Churchwardens and Treasurer all attended Parochial Church Council (PCC) meetings to represent St Nicolas views on wider Parish matters.

This year members of the PCC attended an 'away-day' in Wantage to have a more informal discussion about the Parish and what was of importance. This proved to be very beneficial as the group was freely able to 'bounce around' ideas and 'think outside the box'. The list of thoughts included items such as worship, outreach, communications and social activities.

Fabric

Andrew Coker

2018 was a year of achievements for St Nicolas' fabric.

The most visible and important was the work carried out on the stonework to the Norman arch west door. It was in a poor state and crumbling, however it is now much more complete and is weathering in well. Some repairs were also made to south porch.

The reordered west end of church continued to be well used and much appreciated. The new chairs have been well used at major Services. We thank Abingdon Town Council and the Vale District Council for their grant support for the purchase. There is now a good balance of pews and moveable chairs which can be other used informally or in rows for services and they blend well together.

Work on the Blacknall aisle is currently not being dealt with. During 2019 a full plan will be drawn up and presented to the DCC. In consultation with the town council, now owners of the memorial glass taken out of the church in 1880, it has been agreed in principle that the glass can be restored to the windows. A full proposal will be drawn up in 2019 for both in time for the 400 anniversary of the death of John Blacknall and his family in 1625.

The heating system was in a perilous state. 3 of the gas fired radiators no longer worked and other 4 were emitting CO. They have all been removed and a water fed system installed occupying the same positions as the old heaters and therefore making very little visible impact. Among the various improvements is the removal of the fireguards which were very ugly. The flues which vented the heated and their grills have also been removed from outside and the work was so good it was commented on very favourably by the DAC officer dealing with the faculty.

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Land registry of the church and grounds has finally been granted enabling the church to apply for various grants. Now we need to start fundraising. When the kitchen block is finally sorted a post box will be incorporated to enable St Nicolas to have its own post code, which will greatly hasten the process of applying for things such as the internet, which will be installed in 2019.

The town council took a very long time to mend their clock on the west front, but all is now well. St Nicolas took the criticisms from many town's people for not fixing it sooner. Surprising that in this digital age an old fashioned clock is still valued so highly.

Repairs were carried out to various items such as the processional cross and woodworm protection of the high altar and finally the two under table boxes in the nave had shelves fitted.

Donations

Jenny Smith

The DCC allocated money from the 2018 budget for the St Nicolas donation to CiA for CiA sponsored projects and for the cost of the "It's Your Move" books for pupils at St Nicolas School.

CiA supports Abingdon Bridge, 35 Ock Street, Abingdon Street Pastors, Back to 35, and work in schools as well as making a small donation to the Abingdon Passion Play.

In addition:

- Our Harvest Collection in 2018 was £75 and went to Christian Aid. Gifts of produce (where suitable) were given to the foodbank.
- Our Christmas 2018 Collection was £350 and went to the Children's Society.
- On Sundays 7th and 14th October special collections were made for World Homeless Week and we raised £112.10 that we shared between OWNS (Oxford Winter Night Shelter) and Homeless Oxfordshire.
- Foodbank support has continued.

We were also able to host fundraising events for three other charities during the year, taking advantage of our position on the Market Place:

- Cards for Good Causes. They make a donation to the church, but also raise funds for their own causes.
- Friends of Stowford House in July.
- Kennington Memory Club in September.

We host a Traidcraft stall once a month (the surplus is given as a donation back to Traidcraft).

We would like to hear from any other member of the congregation who may wish to help with donations and charities. Further input is always helpful with regard to suggesting speakers, poster displays in church, details of other local or overseas charities or suggestions for special collections during the year.

Choir and Music

Eluned Hallas

Music is an important part of our worship and we are still seeking a permanent Organist / Director of Music. However, we have been greatly blessed by the support of many musicians (local and not so local) who have played for us over the year, and we thank them all.

We also thank the many singers who have augmented our choir for special services throughout the year - particularly Easter, Ascension Day, St Nicolas' Day and Christmas. It has been especially good to have the generous support of the Directors of Music and choirs at our sister churches - St Helen's & St Michael's.

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We would be delighted to see new members join us - either regularly or for special services.

Ministry of Welcome: Stewards and other Duties

Paul Rast-Lindsell

At our services, there are several roles undertaken by members of the congregation. These comprise of Sacristan, Steward, Reader, Intercessor and Chalice Assistant.

In the past year, we have both added and lost to the number of volunteers who do these jobs but there are still over 20 people able to carry out these duties and we are very grateful for the time and effort they put into doing so.

On a weekly basis, it is occasionally difficult to find enough people to fill all the roles; we mainly need Intercessors and Chalice Assistants. Also, it would be beneficial to have an additional Sacristan - this job currently rests with only two. If you feel that you can help, please talk to Fr. Paul, the Churchwardens or Eluned Hallas.

Flowers

Emma Coker

Many thanks to our dedicated team of flower arrangers at St Nicolas who make sure the church is looking festive at Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festival. For the rest of the year we hope our efforts add to the warm welcome to everyone who comes into the building. Flower arranging can feel like another form of ministry as it encourages conversations with visitors and parishioners while being a therapeutic activity for those who participate. Church flower arrangements also enable those who wish to make a donation in memory of loved ones to contribute towards something that is enjoyed by the church community. We are always looking to expand our team and no experience is necessary as we all learn from each other.

Churchyard garden

Andrew Coker

Abingdon Town Council has kindly agreed to take on responsibility for our closed church yard and are making a contribution of £500 a year for its maintenance. Redundant church yards are the responsibility of the local authority since the 1974 reorganisation of local government. The town did a thorough search of their archives and decided that it was for them to pay. The church yard will continue to be looked after by parishioners but now with financial support for bigger projects.

Bell ringing

Hugh Bishop

Ringling for Sunday service and special occasions has been well supported through the year. The highlight of the year was ringling for the centenary of the Armistice. The bells were rung for the Bun Throwing on the Saturday. On the Sunday, the actual anniversary, the bells were rung half-muffled for morning service, at 10.40 the tenor was tolled 128 times, once for each of the fallen from Abingdon and finally the bells were rung open at 12.30 as part of the national celebration, 'Ringers Remember'.

The bells are generally in good order but a new set of ropes will be needed soon.

Extravaganza

Julia Bishop

There were several new items this year, notably the sale of mulled cider and the provision of children's carton film and popcorn after 4.00pm. These were both very popular with those who came into the church, but we felt that we needed to improve the publicity, to attract more people. We have several ideas as to how to do this. As usual the cakes and cookies were extremely popular

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and profitable, especially as Harriet Coker and friend sold them in the Market Place and Bath Street. We are going to try the idea of “Pocket-Money presents” again next year. The siting of the stage in the Market Place caused us some problems as it obscured views of the church, so we are going to discuss alternative siting nearer the National Westminster Bank with the Town Council. The total receipts came to £960, which is a record for this event. Many thanks are due to the committee who helped with all the arrangements: Hildegard Hyde, Andrew and Emma Coker and Eluned Hallas.

St Nicolas DCC

Eluned Hallas, Secretary

Membership:

Church Wardens

Andrew Coker
Paul Rast-Lindsell

Representatives on the Abingdon Deanery Synod

Andrew Birks Elected 2017 to serve until 2020
Eluned Hallas Elected 2017 to serve until 2020

Representatives on the Abingdon Parochial Church Council

Hugh Bishop Re-Elected 2017 to serve until 2020

Members of St. Nicolas' Church Council

Julia Bishop Elected 2016 to serve until 2019
Jenny Fishpool Elected 2016 to serve until 2019
Hilda Mafabi Elected 2016 to serve until 2019
Emma Coker Elected 2017 to serve until 2020
David Howard Re-Elected 2017 to serve until 2020
Hildegard Hyde Elected 2017 to serve until 2020
Dee Dee Lowe Elected 2018 to serve until 2021

Church in Abingdon Representatives: Julia Bishop

Appointments made by DCC:

Treasurer: Andrew Birks
Secretary: Eluned Hallas
Safeguarding: Eluned Hallas
Health & Safety: Paul Rast-Lindsell

The DCC & Standing Committee met regularly throughout the year to discuss the maintenance and enhancement of the church fabric (reported elsewhere); church services and other events; inter-parish, inter-CiA and community co-operation; and finance (see separate report). Specific areas of concern during the last year have been issues around maintenance and enhancements to our historic building; congregation wellbeing and growth; and finances.

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Proceedings of the Church-in-Abingdon

Julia Bishop

1. Staff changes

Paul Goodliff left Abingdon Baptist Church and Jane Baun left St Helen's. Keith Dunnett became the incumbent of Christ Church. The Salvation Army is still being staffed, from Friday to Monday only, by retired clergy Ken and Wendy Clark.

2. Task groups and associated projects

The CiA continues to support community projects which concentrate on specific areas of co-operation:

- 35 Ock Street,
- The Abingdon Bridge,
- Abingdon Street Pastors,
- Christian Aid,
- Women's World Day of Prayer (to be renamed "World Day of Prayer"),
- Christian Forum (which will appear in Abingdon Round and About from March 2019),
- The Church Twinning Group,
- The Passion Play,
- Desire (which works in the three secondary schools and the Abingdon and Witney college),
- Experience Easter, (run by Trinity Learning),
- Various Alpha courses,
- Prayer spaces in schools,
- CiA News and Christian Focus magazine.

3. Finance

Finance The agreed policy on the General Fund is to limit the retained balance to a maximum of one year's expenditure, but maintain an amount that covers all agreed salaries and associated costs for the year ahead. The balance at 31 Dec 2018 was £5739. The expenditure for Community Projects is normally funded by church donations indicating that only a small balance in hand is necessary. It was agreed to keep the commitment unchanged at £6400, as detailed below, for the three years 2018-2020, although some projects had increased their funding requests. The only new project is Thrive.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| • The Abingdon Bridge | £2000 a year for their work with disadvantaged young people |
| • DESIRE youth network | £1000 a year to help run schools weeks and larger events |
| • Abingdon Street Pastors | £1000 a year to fund their ongoing help for people out at night |
| • Experience Easter | £750 a year to help school children and their teachers explore the Easter story |
| • 35 Ock Street | £500 a year to support their work as a meeting place for church and the community |

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APPENDIX 4

REPORT ON ST NICOLAS CofE SCHOOL

Eluned Hallas, Foundation Governor

St Nicolas is a successful primary school - larger than average with a full pupil roll of some 400 pupils aged from 4+ to 11+, and over 50 staff. At its OFSTED inspection in January 2018 the school received an overall rating of GOOD.

The Governing Body represents all stakeholders in the school - staff, parents, and the Diocese, with co-opted members adding specific skills to the team. There are two Foundation Governors appointed by the Diocese, with the Team Vicar at St Nicolas' Church, Father Paul Smith, a co-opted Governor. The Governing Body includes members from a range of Anglican traditions and those of no formal faith, thus making it broadly representative of the school – both pupils and staff – and the community in which it sits. In discussions and decision making, all viewpoints are expressed and debated in a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance, while maintaining the school's Anglican foundation.

During 2018 the Governing Body worked, in consultation with all stakeholders to articulate the school's vision, aims and values as:

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" John 10:10b

Being part of the St Nicolas family is about ***enjoying*** coming to school as we learn through great ***experiences***, inside and outside of the classroom. We have high ***expectations*** of each other. We value our staff who help every child ***engage*** with every opportunity on offer. At St Nicolas, we are ***learning excellence*** as we prepare for the next stage of life and live out our Christian values.

This is achieved through:

1. Providing an holistic education with a wide range of academic and extra-curricular opportunities that are accessible for every child;
2. Ensuring that the quality of teaching challenges and inspires every child so that each child can be the best they can be and develop their potential;
3. Promoting behaviour and relationships throughout the school based on our Christian Values which are embedded throughout our teaching and learning;
4. Helping every child enjoy their time at school and supporting each child so that they can grow in independence and confidence, able to make good choices for themselves;
5. Building a sense of school family through proactive engagement and strong communication so that we can work in partnership with parents and carers to strengthen our teaching and support of every child;
6. Growing our links with the wider Abingdon community and beyond to provide a greater and more diverse range of opportunities inside and out of the classroom with other schools and businesses.

St Nicolas School has active links with both Abingdon Parishes, and with other members of the Church-in-Abingdon. Whole school assemblies are an important part of the school life, and

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opportunities for class reflection are sought. There are whole school church services for St Nicolas Day, at Easter and at the end of the school year. Children in year 6, and staff leaving at the end of the summer term, receive a candle at this last service – as a symbol of taking the light of St Nicolas into the next phase of their lives. A copy of the Scripture Union Moving On book is also presented to each child on leaving Year 6. All children new in school at the end of the summer term receive a Bible, funded through the St Nicolas School Trust. The ‘Value of the Month’ programme, underpinned by Biblical teaching is now firmly embedded, showing the teaching and working out of Christian Faith. With the help of the Desire Group, and supported by volunteers from local churches, Prayer Space weeks are now a regular part of the school calendar.

St Nicolas’ has always aimed to provide a broad ‘topic based’ education beyond the core subjects of Reading, Writing & Mathematics, and this wider base is again being encouraged under the new OFSTED inspection framework. An extensive wider curriculum includes regular whole year group drama and music performances, choir and orchestra concerts, excellent sport provision including successes in inter-school competitions, and residential trips in Year 4 and Year 6. In the past year the range of school clubs (held after school and at lunch break) has been widely expanded offering pupils additional opportunities to take part in a range of activities that suit their interests and provide ways to experience success. The results in the end of school Standard Assessment Tests (Yr 6 SATs), remain strong, and behaviour in school and on external visits is good.

The Governing Body continues to work closely with the staff team for the benefit of all stakeholders. The OFSTED report commented that Governors have a secure understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses, and carry out their statutory duties well, supporting and challenging the school effectively and working with the school management to set the strategic direction of the school and playing a full part in monitoring effectiveness.

Looking to the future, the school has established a link with an overseas school, and is seeking to strengthen awareness of and links with the wider local community. A specific new school focus is consideration of the ‘mental health and well-being’ of both pupils and staff, and Governors are keen to support and promote this.

We give thanks for the skill and dedication of the teachers, teaching assistants, office, site support and specialist staff, and for all the volunteers (including governors) who give their time and skills in support of the children in our care. Please continue to hold the school community in your prayers.