

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



2021-2022
Report of Parish Activities

For Presentation at the
Annual Parochial Church Meeting
On Wednesday 4 May 2022

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

This Report of Parish Activities is the result of a huge amount of activity. Not just the writing and collating of all the reports (although thank you to all of you who have contributed), but, more significantly, the many, many activities that make up the life of our church. This Report is ordered under the three areas of our St Nicolas Church Vision: Looking Up (Our Worship); Looking In (Our Fellowship); Looking Out (Our Mission). In each of these areas much has been done – especially this year in the restarting and rebuilding of church life through the different phases of the pandemic.

One of the prayers that I regularly pray for St Nic’s Church is Paul’s prayer in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1. Paul prays for the Thessalonian church, that God would bring to fruition ‘every desire for goodness’ and ‘every deed prompted by faith’, so that Jesus might be glorified in the church and the church glorified in Jesus. St Nic’s is not a perfect church, but it is full of many good desires and many good deeds, which are described in the reports below. As you read through them, please pray with me (and with the apostle Paul)...

“that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him.”

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

With every blessing
Will Hunter Smart

2. Wardens’ Report

As we write in March 2022, we are entering a new season. All covid restrictions have finally been lifted, the church looks very full every Sunday, our Vision goals from September 2019 are being actioned, the Alpha course is in full flow and the Living in Love and Faith course has been launched. Just as we have entered the season of Spring, so the church is experiencing its own spring as many things that have been dormant are budding and coming to life. We look forward with eager anticipation to all the Lord will do in us and through us, and for the new life he will bring in the year ahead. But for now, we must reflect on all that he has accomplished through us at St Nic’s over what has been another year of changing restrictions due to a covid pandemic that, for the time being, refuses to go away.

In March last year we were emerging from lockdown number three and St Nic’s opened its doors once again to a live congregation, albeit masked and socially distanced and with only one service on a Sunday morning. But it was a start! And, of course, the livestreaming continued so that those unable or not yet ready to come in person could join us from home.

We continue to be incredibly grateful to the wonderful team of volunteers who arrive very early on a Sunday morning to ensure all things tech happen seamlessly, enabling the rest of us to engage with our Sunday services, either from home or in the building, able to hear, see and experience everything very clearly.

Although we began with a period to Recover, Rejoice and Re-envision, we also decided not to Rush getting back to normal. This meant that some things stayed online, such as occasional church meetings, and not all activities were restarted straight away. Wonderfully we were able to continue to meet in person for church services as well as online throughout the rest of 2021 and through the rampaging omicron variant in the early stages of this year too.

Highlights of last Spring included a wonderful display of photographs taken by many members of the congregation and collated by the Eco Group, reminding us of the beauty of God's creation and giving us reasons to be thankful, whatever life was throwing at us. Easter saw us celebrating the risen Lord with three in-person services, as well as the livestream, each one culminating in a wonderful recording of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, performed by many members of the church family and expertly put together by our resident choir master, Nic Cope. Thank you Nic!

Like many churches we were made aware that there were many people likely to arrive from Hong Kong and we tried our best to ensure that we were ready to welcome them. We are delighted that several families and individuals from Hong Kong have decided to make Newbury and St Nic's their home in recent months. With our congregation becoming increasingly international, it was powerful and moving to watch a recording of our brothers and sisters from overseas praying The Lord's Prayer in their own languages at Pentecost.

In June we were delighted to announce the appointments of Ben Norman as our new Facilities Manager and Sarah South as our new 0-5s Children's Minister. Both established themselves quickly in their roles and are already making very positive differences to church life and helping us to be Good News to the community. Another way we could be Good News was through the Listening Café which Jackie Fountain, with the help of a newly formed team, began in the church building twice a week to enable those who wanted to come and talk to someone (about the difficulties they had faced over the pandemic or anything else) to be able to share and have someone there to pray with them. During our Sunday services it was wonderful to see the All Stars children having fun together again, albeit in the churchyard at first. Hidden Treasures, Foundations and Newbury Friends Together all restarted in a more limited way, but much to the relief of the people they served.

In July we began to gather in person again for our Encounter prayer meetings. It felt incredibly moving and beautiful to be physically together at the front of the church building praying for St Nic's and our community. And in our church services we were finally allowed to sing again! It's amazing how much we appreciated the simple things we had been without for so long. One of our vision goals was to review our worship at St Nic's and so a consultation with different groups and the PCC got underway. July ended with an event called "Made in God's Image," celebrating everything creative that members of our congregation and some of their friends had been able to achieve during the various lockdowns.

The Autumn began with a sad farewell to our Youth Minister, Edward Carthy, who was leaving us for pastures new at St Albans Vineyard Church. It was also a time for a big relaunch of youth work now that everything could happen physically again. We are incredibly indebted

to the amazing teams of volunteers who stepped up to lead Pathfinders and The Firm at this time when much sensitivity and healing was needed after the huge damage that covid had inflicted on so many young people in particular. And how they rose to the challenge! The new leaders came not only with fresh energy and enthusiasm, but with a fresh way of doing things too, including lots of fun playing ping pong and eating pizza at The Firm. The young people responded brilliantly, some bringing their friends along too. But the volunteers are hardworking people with limited time capacity and so a review of what and who we might need next to enable our youth to be well served in the longer term began. The brilliant feedback from parents and young people alike helped us form a job description and advert which is still live as we write. We look forward with eager anticipation to the Lord's provision for us.

Meanwhile all the children's groups also began again in September during the morning service, enabling them to receive age-appropriate teaching from the All Stars and Small Stars leaders and allowing the parents finally to be able to listen to a sermon in peace! Thank you again to Caroline and Sarah who led these groups so beautifully, and to all the wonderful volunteers who give their time so that they can function well. At St Nic's School the clergy, Caroline and Tania were finally allowed to give in-person assemblies again and our lunchtime JAFFA club relaunched with over 40 children attending!

The big event in the Autumn was the Church Weekend Away at The Pioneer Centre, Kidderminster. One hundred and forty members of St Nic's ages 0-80+ gathered for a wonderful time of fellowship, worship, teaching and fun. It was fantastic just to be able to talk to one another, eat meals, sing, laugh or even cry face to face and unmasked. The Holy Spirit was very present with us. Our worship felt free and beautiful, we could receive prayer and the teaching from our visiting speaker, John McGinley, on Mission Shaped Living was incredibly inspiring. I think everyone left having had a great time but also newly equipped to live intentionally for Jesus every day.

Back home Caroline and the children's team hosted a Light Party as an alternative to Halloween. This was a great way to Be Good News and light in the darkness on what can be a difficult time of year for many families. October also saw St Nic's members putting together rucksacks full of goodies for newly arrived Afghan refugee children and celebrating harvest with donations of food for the Foodbank and money for farmers in Burkina Faso. Sadly, just as we were beginning to enjoy new freedoms and life becoming more normal again, the covid numbers started to increase and some restrictions returned. Thankfully we could keep meeting physically, albeit masked again, and Christmas was not cancelled! In fact we held more Christmas services than usual as the most popular ones, as well as being livestreamed, were held twice each. It was especially lovely to have a full choir and orchestra again at the carol service and to welcome back John McGinley to speak.

2022 has started with a real drive to action the Vision. The Vision Breakfast on 12 February, which brought over 80 members of the St Nic's church family together to catch up on where we had got to, had, as its focus, the worship review. It was great to be feeding into this as church family. We are about to have another breakfast to help us improve our welcome at St Nic's, and there are plans afoot to revitalise our prayer life and the church building itself.

As we write we are living in the shadow of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and working out how we as a church can "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). As well as many

prayers in our church services and at our Encounter prayer meetings, we worked together with CTNA and hosted daily lunchtime prayer for Ukraine in St Nic's. We also hope to support John Philip, as he works with The Rotary Club to get much needed medicines and equipment to Ukrainian doctors, as well as those willing to host Ukrainian refugees in the Newbury Deanery.

At the end of another year in church life we also remember the lives of those who have been faithful members of St Nic's and have now left us for glory. These include Dorothy Revill, Doreen Griffith (Blod), Jim Johnston, Eunice Collins, Alan Collins and most recently Heather Bosley. We are privileged to have known them and continue to remember their families who mourn their loss.

We are so grateful to Will for leading us wisely and clearly over another year. Of course, he has been very ably assisted by Joy and Jackie. Together they are a fantastic clergy team who inspire us with their teaching, drive us in our Vision, guide and comfort us through difficult seasons, be it covid or wars or more personal situations, lead us in prayer and so much more behind the scenes. We are also hugely indebted to our excellent staff team, without whom these churchwardens probably would not have accepted to be in office! And there are some incredible volunteers who give so much to make church life happen smoothly behind the scenes. I think of our Finance Team - James Lancaster and Sheila Moore in particular spend hours every week ensuring our books are in order, everything is budgeted for and people are paid. There are worship leaders, bellringers, flower arrangers, choir members, refreshment servers, tea towel washers, brass polishers, homegroup leaders, welcomers, pastoral visitors, children's team, youth team, Hidden Treasures team, Newbury Friends Together team, outreach committee, church and hospital garden teams ... too many of you to name. But each of you has played an invaluable part to enable life to happen as smoothly as it has over another year at St Nic's. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts and may the Lord continue to bless you as you graciously serve Him and the church in this way!

Tania Wolak and Richard Coward

3. Deanery Synod

Deanery Synods have continued via Zoom, including the tri-annual elections. Our Chris Philip has agreed to serve on the standing Committee – a welcome addition.

Much time is spent discussing Parish Share (the amount each parish pays to the Diocese each year) because the Deanery has a responsibility for ensuring that it shares this financial obligation to the Diocese on a fair basis. This year, the poor state of some parish finances were made much worse as a consequence of the pandemic. However, next year's burden will be lower for Newbury Deanery as the Diocese has been able to contain its costs, and because of temporary reduction in clergy costs. This latter includes the very generous provision of Revd Raymond Obin at St Mary's Shaw. We shared the great joy of the congregation at St Mary's when the Area Dean's team concluded the legalities and formalities so Raymond could be appointed. They have also been supporting efforts to ensure the continued sustainability of Walbury Beacon Benefice.

Deanery Synod is contributing to the Living in Love and Faith conversation. Synod members have also had opportunities to feedback, on the initial effects of the pandemic and then on returning to normality. The Deanery Mission Action Plan is still relevant but will need to be

adjusted in the light of what has been learned in the pandemic, particularly in the use of technology.

By God's grace, Oxford Diocese' Parish finances are holding up quite well, but we know that in the Church of England overall that is far from the case.

The effects of the pandemic prompted Synod to keep in touch with representatives between meetings, including 'written sermons' for those in rural areas where communications are lacking.

General Synod reports give indication that not only finance and sustainability of our present structures will create disquiet, so will issues such as safeguarding and human sexuality, all alongside the need to care for our creation far more.

Parish feedback reveals a tired people now, subtle but significant changes to parish demographics but thankful that we are coming through this trial. Nonetheless whilst the past storm abates and we start moving again, we can see heavy storm clouds gathering.

There have been several occasions when St Nic's has quietly offered and given support to the Deanery which is appreciated.

Mark Knight

4. Electoral Roll

There are 294 church members on the Church Electoral Roll. Since May 2021 we have removed 15 people, some of whom have moved away and 7 of these people have been members of our congregation that have sadly passed away in the last 12 months. A further 12 people have joined the roll over the past 12 months prior to it closing on 10 April.

Since January, I have been in touch with several members, not yet on the roll, and have had a pleasing response. I shall continue to encourage new members to join the roll, whilst gently reminding existing members to sign up.

Mandy Maskell, Electoral Roll Officer

5. Safeguarding

The Diocese provides clear guidance about how we should safeguard vulnerable groups. It is my role as Parish Safeguarding Officer to support and work with the staff team and others to make sure we follow that guidance and to respond to any concerns raised.

The autumn of 2021 saw a peak of safer recruitment activity, especially in the volunteer teams working with children and young people. This was due to a combination of the re-starting of activities on site, the welcome increase in numbers of children and young people in our groups and the departure of Ed Carthy as Youth Minister and the subsequent need to put new youth teams in place.

We marked Safeguarding Sunday in November, with short interviews at both the main services to explain my role.

We have started to use the Parish Dashboard system. This is a tool provided by the Diocese that helps us to assess our safeguarding processes against expectations and creates an action plan for us to follow. The action plan was approved by the PCC in January and includes some work on policies and procedures, including implementing the Church of England's updated Safer Recruitment & People Management guidance, which became effective in January 2022.

Rebecca Bird, Parish Safeguarding Officer

6. Vision – From Review to Action

The St Nicolas Vision document was launched in September 2019 after a carefully considered process by the PCC and was communicated in some detail to the church in early 2020. Its starting point is the desire of the church to both be and bring Good News to our town. To achieve this, we recognised there were three dimensions involved; Looking Up in worship, Looking In in fellowship and Looking Out in mission. Within each dimension we articulated our expectations of the church we believed God wanted us to be. These aspirations led us to a call for action involving seven distinct goals. There was always an intention to review our progress towards these goals during 2021, but the necessary diversion of our efforts and resources brought about by the Covid19 pandemic served to divert our attention away from progressing the goals in the way originally envisaged. However, in the Autumn of 2021 it was felt that it would still be worthwhile reviewing our progress on the goals, and more generally our progress towards becoming the sort of church we believed we should be, and that this should inform, concentrate and reinvigorate our efforts to move forward.

The PCC review commenced in September 2021 and took the form of a survey. We assessed our progress across the board in an effort to highlight both what remained important to us and where our key priorities should be. The PCC considered this over three meetings in order to formulate a way forward. We firstly noted some key themes, namely:

- We are a bit shy about the Good News we have and fail to look outward sufficiently
- We play it a bit safe, especially when it comes to being led by the Holy Spirit
- We are open to more challenge
- The route into our church and on through to being an active disciple could be much better

The PCC went on to look at our seven goals. All the goals were still considered to be important to us and that there was no need to amend our overall vision and strategy. It was considered that we had made good progress with two of the goals, namely:

- The encouraging and enabling everyone in the church family to commit to a mid-week small group
- The development of three key outreach ministries, the CAP Debt Centre, Meet Mondays and Hidden Treasures, although the pandemic had impacted on their progress

Additionally, we discussed the goal of establishing a new congregation in the Benefice. While this was still very much on our agenda, it was considered that it should not be addressed immediately and that we should prayerfully consider the right time to move forward while ensuring that we did not lose sight of it. This left four goals that the PCC considered required our immediate and concentrated effort.

- Our corporate prayer life
- Our welcome and integration process
- Conducting a worship review
- Agreeing and adopting a development plan for our church building

We decided early in 2022 to reinvigorate our action on each of these key areas by re-forming teams under four team leaders:

- Pete Bradley – Corporate Prayer life

- Tania Wolak – Welcome and Integration
- Will Hunter Smart – Worship review
- Jonathan Dean – Church Building development plan

A steering and support team has also been formed, comprising Rick Coward (Chair), Will Hunter Smart, Joy Mawdesley and the team leaders, to ensure that each area progresses and also to keep the PCC appraised of the progress. Each group has now drawn together their teams and has a plan of the work they intend to undertake.

Our corporate prayer life

Pete’s team realised that to achieve the goal, namely, “Encourage and enable everyone in the church family to connect with our corporate prayer life, at different times and in different ways” there was already a huge amount of prayer taking place amongst our congregation. There are many gatherings for example in weekly prayer groups, small groups and DNA groups, that often go unnoticed. We need to recognise, give thanks and understand the power of this existing prayer foundation.

The teams approach will be to operate within God’s grace and focus on the following key areas:

- Encouraging
- Enabling
- Connecting
- Finding imaginatively the ‘Different times and in Different Ways’

Our welcome and integration process

Tania’s team has met, agreed a plan and has already been taking action to improve our welcome process including a ‘Welcomer’s Training Breakfast’ held on 26th March. The plan extends this process to integrating those who wish to join the church into the life of St Nicolas.

Conducting a worship review

This small team of clergy and wardens, led by Will, has now been meeting since Autumn 2021 and has taken views from worship leaders, PCC, the choir and the wider congregation. The response has been broad and extensive and is presently being reviewed in order to adopt a coherent way forward, ensuring that our worship enables us to ‘encounter God and connect with each other’. A paper will be presented to the PCC to ensure there is a consensus on our direction of travel.

Agreeing and adopting a development plan for our church building

This Group has been re-formed with Jonathan Dean as Chair and has a clear strategy to build upon the important work already undertaken. The PCC has approved funding to complete stage 1a - to agree a ‘Statement of Needs’ with the PCC by June 2022. The work will take into consideration the needs of the congregation and many other users of our church to create a vision / needs-led brief from which to develop options for our church building.

Subject to the approval of the PCC, the team will progress to stage 1b in the Summer, when an appropriate architect will be selected to provide options of schemes that address these needs. There is a strong focus on ensuring that whatever is taken forward supports our ministry and vision more effectively. We aim to agree a plan by March 2023.

Rick Coward

WORSHIP (Looking Up)

10am Service

At the beginning of the pandemic – on that first Sunday of lockdown we preached on the following verses:

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

I don't think I'll ever read that passage again without remembering what it meant to 'not give up meeting together' during 2020, 2021 and 2022!

There's no question that this last year has been a little easier than the previous one. We haven't had such extreme changes; instead, it's been a process of gradually adjusting our Covid guidance to respond to the different phases of the pandemic. I've lost count of how many times we've revised our 'Covid guidance for Sunday Services' document. I'm very grateful to Joy and the Churchwardens for their partnership in producing the guidance, as well as to our stewards team for implementing it!

Aside from the practical details of Covid guidance, we have got on with the *spiritual* task of gathering together, to draw near to God and to spur one another on in our faith. Increasing numbers of people have been able to do this onsite. Others have remained online. However, we have met though, we have worshipped together.

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

As part of our Vision review in the autumn we identified worship as one of our four priority goals where we want to make rapid progress in 2022. As part of this we have been conducting a worship review, consulting with different teams, and the congregation (at a recent Vision Breakfast). The review will be completed in the Spring of 2022. Our goal is this:

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

This review includes all of our Sunday worship, not just the 10am service. However, we look forward to the implementation of the review and the impact it will have on our morning service. May God continue to provide for and guide us, as he has done through all the disruption of the last two years. And may we continue to be faithful in gathering together to encounter him and connect with one another. Let us not give up meeting together!

Will Hunter Smart

The Six

It has been exciting to see how The Six evening service has grown and changed over the past year. The Six is headed up by a planning team consisting of Rhodri Bowen, Elaine Canniffe, Jonny Hilliard, Rosemary McDonald, Ben and Hattie Norman, Tim Saunders, Pete Winmill, Jackie Fountain and Joy Mawdesley – each representing some aspect of the service. The team meets once or twice a term to review the term, to plan ahead, to think creatively and to pray.

In particular, members of the team planned and organised an Advent Communion service and also a New Year service where people shared testimonies of what God had been teaching them, or answers to prayer.

This time last year, due to all the restrictions of Covid, the morning and evening services were very similar with the same sermon at both. During the year, The Six has been able to take on its own identity once more with more informal worship, more contemporary songs, a more contemplative style of worship and an informal communion service once a month. Since January, The Six has had its own sermon series again.

Recently it has been exciting to see more people from the congregation being involved in the services with various people leading and preaching and giving testimonies. In February we had “New Voices Sunday”, where people who were not used to preaching could begin to learn by giving short talks on a passage. They did a great job.

We remain in the church building for the time being and look forward to warmer weather when we can worship with the West Doors open again. Since September, The Firm, our Youth Group, has been meeting in the hall but joining The Six for the first part of the service before heading over to their own teaching. We are hoping that they will be able to be more involved in contributing to the services as we move ahead.

The numbers are growing as people are feeling more comfortable to come back to church, with new faces too, and we are beginning to serve refreshments again which is helpful for building community.

Jackie Fountain

Thursday 10.30am Holy Communion

Following the lifting of restrictions, the Thursday Communion very quickly returned. It is a wonderful service, in the middle of the week, and has become an important part of the week for those who attend. The congregation has grown over the past year, with attendance usually being between 25 and 30 and those who come gain a real sense of community. We have also been particularly blessed to have George Lancaster playing the piano at the start and end of the service and during communion. It has been lovely to have music in the service, and to have readers for the gospel reading once again. With the return of the Thursday Charity Coffee Morning, many now stay on for refreshments and further conversation, making it a morning full of buzz around the church and hall.

A big thank you to Pam McKellen, Janice Macdonald and Raymond Obin who have all shared with Will, Jackie and me in the leading of these services over the past year.

Joy Mawdesley

Children's Ministry (ages 0–5)

Small Stars

Small Stars (formerly Sparklers and Comets) restarted in September 2021 after a long closure due to Covid-19. Small Stars runs each Sunday morning in term time, led by the 0-5s Children's Minister and resourced by a team of volunteers, and is for children aged 0 to 5 (school reception year). Whilst pre-Covid we had two groups, Sparklers for 0-3s and Comets for 3-5s, it was not possible to continue separate groups due to many previous faithful volunteers either stepping down or moving away. We have worked hard to build the team back up again and are very grateful to those that have come on board, though there is always room for more! Our numbers have grown since September - it has been great to welcome lots of new families to Small Stars and the children have settled in very well.

Currently the teaching programme is still under development, but we spent Autumn looking at some key Old Testament characters leading up to the Christmas story, and Spring looking at Jesus' life and miracles and the Easter story. Each session involves free play including a messy or sensory activity, craft, Bible story time, songs and a snack. It is a challenge to cater for this very wide age group, but the children have responded really well to Bible stories told in a 'godly play' style, with props to bring the story alive. We have had some great conversations and I am continually amazed by the spiritual awareness of even our youngest members. Thank you to all the parents for your support and to the amazing team of volunteers who make this possible!

Hidden Treasures

We restarted our parent and toddler group in Summer 2021 on a small scale in the church hall, running on a Monday morning, with its mission of fun, friendship and faith. We were limited on the numbers we were able to have, but this had the benefit of creating a real sense of community and friendship amongst those who came. As restrictions eased, we have been able to open up to more people. We have been in the church hall and have used both upstairs and downstairs, including the exciting, newly-created sensory room area on the upstairs balcony, with bubble tube and fibre optic lights.

Hidden Treasures has now become so popular that we have moved to an online booking system to avoid having to turn people away on the door – the queues were almost stretching down to the high street! Each session involves a huge range of play activities, including messy play, construction, small world play, dressing up and of course the sensory room. Tea and coffee are available throughout, along with delicious cakes and biscuits! We finish with a 'together time' of singing and a blessing from the Bible. Recently our fantastic team have taken it in turns to share a verse from the Bible that is special to them, and we have had some great conversations about faith with some of the mums and carers there.

Thank you to the wonderful team of volunteers who come and get stuck in, and often messy! If you would be interested in coming along to find out what we get up to, or joining the team, please contact Ellen Hunter Smart or Sarah South.

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

Children's Ministry (ages 5-10)

The main highlight of the year has been the All Stars' return to meeting onsite. Thank you to the team for being so game to make it happen and making it a big success. We began tentatively a year ago in the churchyard and discovered that it was a great place to have an All Star session with many people pausing in the street outside to see what was going on. Since September we have been back in the church hall welcoming many familiar faces and have also welcomed several new families, which has been wonderful.

Due to some people being cautious about returning in the light of the pandemic, we are looking for some more volunteers to serve in this area and bless the children and their families. This will involve a lot of time going through the safer-recruiting process but safeguarding the children is a top priority.

The older All Stars have had their first social evening with games, pizza and a movie to give them an opportunity to just hang out together and to familiarise themselves with all that St Nic's House has to offer - ready for when they become Pathfinders.

Another highlight was the Light Party in the Autumn which was a great opportunity to reconnect with the wider community and invite other children to join us for an evening of games, food and fun focussing on Jesus being the one true light.

I've also been really excited to be part of the setting up of the All Age worship band – still to be given an official name. A huge thank you to the Hollards, Paul Philip and Rhodri Bowen for making this a reality with passion and energy. It has been so good to see a great range of age and talent come together to lead us in worship and to see younger members of the church family being mentored and valued by older members.

The lunchtime club at St Nic's Junior School (now federated with St John's) is meeting back on site and we are beginning to build relationships with the children there and rekindle friendships with the hard-working staff after our enforced absence due to the pandemic. The first week back on site we had over 30 children. We now just have one year group at a time with between 5 and 10 children attending. Thank you to Tania Wolak and Victoria Maxton-Livesey for their enthusiasm in this.

I have so appreciated having a fellow Children's Minister (Sarah South) to work alongside as I was beginning to feel a little lonely! We have worked on building a sense of team across the Small and All Stars, ministering to the children together.

Thank you to all the parents and carers of the children who have been supportive and patient with the team as we have worked out a way for the children to meet whilst keeping safe from Covid. It is so good to be free of restrictions now. We're here thanks to the grace of Him who is able to do unimaginably more than we could ever think or believe.

Caroline Chichester, Children's Minister (5-10)

Youth Ministry

Pathfinders (ages 11-14)

When Ed Carthy, our Youth Minister, left in September 2021 the Pathfinders had been getting re-established following all that Covid meant for them. They had continued to meet regularly throughout, whether that be over Zoom or in person whenever restrictions allowed. It has been wonderful that since September there has been no interruption to being able to meet in person.

Supporting Ed had been Ian Norman and Matt Kingston and they were joined in September by Rosie Davis and Clare Caskie, so a fantastic Pathfinder team came together in the absence of a Youth Minister. In the Autumn term and into the new year the young people studied the Sermon on the Mount.

At Christmas, Ian Norman retired after 26 years working with children and young people at St Nic's. What amazing service over so many years – thank you, Ian for all you have done!

The Pathfinder team has now been joined by Adriel Comer and most recently, Judy Ortiz, so it remains in a healthy position. On a Sunday morning anything up to 15 young people gather in St Nic's House for fun and food and fellowship and for much of this term they have been looking at the life of Joseph together.

Joy Mawdesley

The Firm (ages 14–18)

Due to Covid restrictions, the Spring term continued with Ed & Charlotte Carthy and myself leading The Firm via Zoom sessions; an earlier session for Years 8, 9, & 10 and later for Years 11, 12 & 13. Ed was creative with the games, we had interesting discussions and an opportunity to pray for each other. The 'Living in Love and faith' session, around LGBT and gender identity issues in life and the church was particularly challenging.

In the Summer term we were able to meet in person. Initially we just played games and got used to being together again, then we had a couple of Bible studies and topical discussions. Ed shared he was leaving for a new post in July. In August we had The Firm 'Graduation Party' celebrating those who were leaving for adult life! Mocktails up the bell tower and then an amazing meal created by Hattie and assisted by Helen, Ben and Tim was enjoyed by 16 young people. We had a 'meet the gang' at Bills for the new Year 9's joining The Firm, then back to St Nic's House for ice cream. On 5 September we said 'farewell' to Ed and Charlotte at both services with a picnic lunch and games in Northcroft Park.

Ellen Hunter Smart, Paul Mawdesley and Simon Green kindly stepped forward to join me, ensuring The Firm continued to serve our young people. We decided to run a Youth Alpha course and have been delighted with the attendance.

Siân Lupton

Bellringers

In line with the gradual relaxation of Covid restrictions, we were able to call people to service by 6 of the 10 bells from May 2021 onwards, ringing all 10 again by the end of the year. Bellringing practice resumed on Monday evenings from 7:30pm in August. It was impressive to see almost all existing ringers return to ringing and we were able to welcome visiting ringers back to the Tower.

On Saturday 6 November, a band of six rang for its only wedding of the year. On 23 March a bell tolled for five minutes in remembrance of those having died from Covid, and on 10 April, it was tolled ninety-nine times to observe the sad passing of the Duke of Edinburgh.

In October the St Nic's ringing room was cleaned, with many interesting artifacts and historical records being discovered. The St Nics' hand bells, dating from the 1880's were retrieved from their long hibernation. I am investigating their possible restoration and the formation of a hand bell band.

The four rings during the Christmas period (Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Eve) were well attended, with a highlight being all ten bells ringing on New Year's Eve in the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress of Newbury, Billy and Sharon Drummond.

We have three ringers who have successfully completed the Association of Ringing Teachers course and are ready to teach anyone wanting to learn. Anyone who is interested should contact me.

David Bebbington, Tower Captain

Big Band

We started the Big Band to provide an opportunity for anyone who plays an instrument to be able to use their gift in a service without the necessity of being at an advanced grade. The underlying ethos, as with the choir, is of inclusivity and to give opportunities to develop confidence and gain experience in a friendly environment whilst contributing to our collective Sunday morning worship.

Pre-pandemic we usually had about three Big Bands per term, but clearly this last couple of years this has not been possible. As restrictions continue to ease, and we get used to living with Covid, I hope this initiative may be resurrected to encourage our musicians (young and old!) to be involved.

Thank you to all those who have played with me for a Sunday service over the years, whether as part of a Big Band or indeed, any other group! Thank you.

Nic Cope

Church Choir

Pre-pandemic, in recent years the choir has led worship on about two Sunday mornings per month.

During the pandemic the choir had weekly video rehearsals, met on-line via zoom, and used WhatsApp to keep in contact with each other. The choir contributed to services with videos of hymns, songs and anthems for the live-stream services. The choir wasn't able to sing in person other than for the odd service, and even when initially possible, that was subject to the limit of six singers. However, there were a couple of highlights when it was possible to have a fuller choir in church, namely the Carol Services in 2020 & 2021, all be it with members of the choir socially distanced! Since January this year the choir has been scheduled to sing twice at the 10am service, plus Good Friday and Easter Day.

I'm glad to say that in-person choir practices resumed last Autumn, and we've recently been meeting in the Hall which is more convenient than church for social distancing (and warmer!). The practices give us time for fellowship and to rehearse music for up-coming services.

As for many groups in the community, the pandemic has had an effect on numbers. Membership of the junior choir is now much reduced though I hope this can be reversed as things return more to normal. The adult choir numbers have stayed resilient and there are still more than 30 singers that regularly attend and another ten or so that swell the choir for special occasions. Thanks to Lesley Kerry and Rachel Bowey for running the weekly choir newsletter to help maintain the bonds of friendship and support over the last couple of years, and to the choir itself for staying so committed and caring.

Notwithstanding the pandemic, choirs always have fluctuating numbers. Attracting new singers is always vital to off-set losses as people grow older and leave for pastures new, whether going to university or moving house etc. Singing, and especially singing communally within a social group, is really beneficial to those taking part. We welcome all singers to join us, whether experienced or not, and of any age (youngsters usually join when 8+ years old). We aim to provide a safe and welcoming environment to develop musical and vocal skills. When we sing, we hope that everyone, whether members of the choir or congregation, can engage and benefit from the joy of singing praises to our Lord!

Finally, this year is especially poignant for me as I stand down Easter 2022. I'd particularly like to thank all our regular choristers, and the many people who swell our ranks for special occasions such as Remembrance, Easter and Christmas, both singers and instrumentalists. At the time of writing, the Worship Review is ongoing; I pray that it reaches a successful outcome, and hope that the role of the choir is valued, and that interim / longer term planning & leadership are put in place, so that the choir continues to grow from strength to strength to underpin the ongoing worshipping life of St Nicolas.

With thanks for all your support of Sarah, myself, and the choir over the years,

Nic Cope

Church Flowers

We have continued arranging seasonal artificial flowers in church which have been well-received. We were also able to do this for the Newbury Spring Festival which took place successfully in September! Christmas was the first festival since the pandemic that we joined together as a team to arrange flowers. Given the continued difficulties of this present time, we have kept some flowers in church over Lent to help welcome and lift people's spirits when they come into the church as visitors or for regular services.

Maria Muir & Judith Crockford

Lamps Collective: Bread and Starlight

The pre-Christmas rush and stress was starting to build up... presents, food, drink to buy; cards to write; entertaining to plan. Then suddenly the offer of "a grown-up pause for breath before Christmas."

In the front of the church a woman stood kneading bread and reminiscing... Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. We can read the bare facts about her in Luke's Gospel - a descendant of Aaron, wife of Zechariah, both God-fearing, elderly, but "barren".

Then, as she kneaded her bread and was silent and spoke and sang of the past nine months, she became a real person. She had remained in seclusion for five months, a lonely and puzzling time with a suddenly mute husband, frustratingly always around but never speaking. The public shame of not bearing children had miraculously gone! Then another miracle as her cousin Mary, also pregnant after a message of an angel, came to visit, wonderful company as they discussed what had happened to each of them. She could reassure Mary in the face of gossip.

Elizabeth reflected on the months she shared with Mary; of Mary's outpouring of the things God had done, and then Zechariah's sudden ability to speak and praise God after the naming of their baby, John.

And so, amidst all our own busyness, an evening of quiet, a grown-up pause for breath for each of us, there to relax our bodies and minds as she kneaded her bread.

We enjoyed and appreciated it so much, we look forward to it coming again and would encourage others too.

Frances & David Hawkey

Living in Love & Faith

At the time of writing, we are halfway through running the Living in Love and Faith Course. This has been offered across the Benefice on a Tuesday evening at St Nic's and a Tuesday afternoon at St Mary's.

The Living in Love and Faith resources, of which the course is a part, were published by the Church of England in November 2020 in order to help the church to engage with issues of gender, sexuality, marriage and relationships. Each course session lasts 90 minutes and consists of Bible study, reflection on the issues, discussions in small groups and the sharing of experiences through video stories.

Following the course there is the opportunity to feed back to the national church by the end of April 2022. All the feedback received will be gathered, listened to and reflected on, and it will shape the way forward for the Church of England in these matters.

The aim of the course is not to tell people what to think, but to enable listening and learning from each other in these areas. There have been about 55 people taking part at St Nic's and it has been good to have the opportunity to talk about these things, such a part of our culture today, but not something the church readily speaks of. Issues of gender, sexuality, marriage and relationships are sensitive but important issues for us to be engaging with and the course has enabled us to do that. The room has been alive with conversation and a willingness to listen and learn together.

The course finishes on 5 April and as we go into the Summer term, we will be thinking about how we might need to carry on some of this discussion as we seek to be followers of Jesus in love, faith and holiness in our world today.

Joy Mawdesley

Prayer

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

As with every area of church life, Covid had a significant impact on our prayer life at St Nic's. On the one hand it cut down the particular opportunities we had for us to pray together. On the other hand, Covid became a huge spur to pray. If we don't pray together (and for one another) in seasons like we've been through over the last two years, we never will!

There is a lot of prayer at St Nic's. Some of this is organised centrally, particularly at our monthly Encounter prayer meetings (which moved back and forth from online to onsite over the last year). Much prayer is more informal, taking place in small groups, prayer triplets, DNA groups, etc. Nevertheless, there is much room for growth. As part of our vision review in the autumn, we identified prayer as one of our four priority goals, where we want to make

rapid progress in 2022. Our goal reads as follows:

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

I'm delighted that Peter Bradley has taken on responsibility for this goal. He will be writing this report in 2023. May God guide us and grow us so that increasingly we are a church that prays on *all* occasions with *all* kinds of prayers for *all* the Lord's people.

Will Hunter Smart

Stewardship

In 2021 we were still under Covid restrictions which impacted all aspects of our life including the life of the church. We kicked off the year keeping in mind the uncertainty around Covid and the potential impact on stewardship performance. However, I am pleased to report that due to the regular giving continuing as forecast, we could finish the year in a healthy financial position. Our budget for 2021 was £282,568. We ended with a surplus of £6K, thereby closing the year at £288,667. We also received generous one-off donations amounting to £12K. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, we surpassed our stewardship budget successfully.

Retaining current giving along with a few new stewardships and increases from existing donors, has helped to set a healthy budget forecast for 2022. However, as we are seeing economic impacts due to Covid and other global events, it could potentially impact our performance against the stewardship budget forecast for the year. Therefore, I would urge for your continued support.

If you have any questions relating to giving or wish to make any changes, please reach out to: stewardship@st-nics.org.

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

Shalini Philip, Stewardship Secretary

FELLOWSHIP (Looking In)

Men@St.Nics

For a ministry that typically involves fried breakfasts, the last year saw some diversification!

In March, we held a joint virtual breakfast with the women and Joanna Lazarus' uncle Reverend Mathansingh Leo Edward speaking live from India on his experience of following Christ.

The wonderful churchyard at St Mary's then played host to a very pleasant (and almost dry) curry evening in early September, with great food courtesy of Shalini and Jinsun.

Lastly, we returned to our old haunt the hall in December, for our traditional fry up with our own Rick Coward delivering a seasonal and entertaining masterclass on Renaissance Art and Christianity.

Away from the breakfasts, the bedrock of the ministry remains our DNA groups, where 3-5 men meet regularly to encourage (and challenge) each other in their walk with Christ. We now look forward to our breakfast on 30 April and our weekend away on 7-9 October.

As ever, you can join our mailing list or WhatsApp group via the church office or please talk to me – especially if you want to know more about DNA groups!

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

Jim Lupton

Pastoral Care

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

With the rollout of the national vaccination programme, the team has been pleased this year to gradually return to pre-Covid patterns of supporting members of the St Nic's family. This has included practical help with lifts, shopping, etc, visiting church members who are unwell or housebound and giving emotional support for people struggling with their situations.

Team members have participated in a course on suicide first aid and also studied together an excellent book written by Andy Moore's sister-in-law Alison Moore 'The Puzzle of Pastoral Care.' We hope to take forward what we have learned from this book in the coming year.

It is evident that the bulk of pastoral care at St Nic's happens because people are aware of the needs of others through the many groups and networks within the church family. The Pastoral Care Team supplements this activity and reaches out to others who might not have these connections.

Members of the pastoral team can be contacted in person, through the clergy or by email on pastoralcare@st-nics.org. We would also love to hear from anyone who would like to give a little help now and then.

Janet Price

Small Groups

Over the past year we have picked up our Vision Document again and our goal as regards small groups remains as important as ever. We have said that we wish to... 'Encourage and enable everyone in the church family to commit to a mid-week small group as part of their growth as a disciple of Christ.'

Our sermon series on the Holy Habits in the Autumn of 2021 also reinforced the importance of the habits of regular study of God's word, of prayer and fellowship – all of which, of course, small groups support us in.

The impact of Covid-19 has continued to impact the life of our small groups – some groups have only begun to meet in person again in 2022. For those who were unable to engage via Zoom, the chance to return to their group has been opened up once more. Small groups continue to be an important part of Christian discipleship for those involved. The leaders and the groups have done an amazing job keeping in touch and welcoming new members.

We currently have 14 active small groups, six of which are daytime groups scattered across the week and eight of which meet on weekday nights, Tuesday to Thursday. Some meet

weekly, others fortnightly, and all incorporate bible study with prayer and sharing life together.

There have been some changes to the small groups this year. Joyce Zealey's Zoom group has now stopped - a brand-new group that had come together in lockdown and was so helpful for that period of time. Jim and Siân Lupton are stepping down this month after faithfully leading their group for many years. What began as a group for 20s and 30s (and led to at least 2 weddings!) has aged over time! Rachel Shepherd is also stepping down from leading her group, with the group continuing to run and welcoming new people. Many thanks to Joyce, to Jim & Sian and to Rachel for all that they have done to support those in their groups over the years.

Excitingly some new groups have formed in the last year. Ben & Hattie Norman have re-named their group for Year 13s and gap year students - now known as Eleven, as it meets on the 11th of each month whichever day it falls. The group led by Chris & Rosie Davis has now become two groups – the impact of Covid meant that it had become too large for everyone to meet together and so a new group has formed led by Libby Lake and Pete & Christine Winmill. Tim & Mary Over and Nigel & Margaret Croxford now lead a Tuesday morning group which is full already. Paul & Jinsun Philip are hosting a group for a number of families which is meeting about once a month over food on a Sunday.

There are now around 30 people involved in the leadership of our small groups - we are so thankful to them and to God for all that they have done to support so many people in their day to day lives and to grow in faith.

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

Joy Mawdesley

Weekend Away

As we drove to the venue for the parish weekend away, after what seemed like a lifetime of covid-enforced physical separation from St. Nic's church, Jude and I had a real sense of uncertainty about how we would feel. This completely melted away as we pulled into the car park, seeing friendly familiar faces and smiles everywhere. It quickly became like a long-overdue family reunion, with so many friends to catch up with as well as new people to get to know.

The accommodation was warm and adequate, with a fabulous personal welcome in our room and a very well-organized schedule of worship, events, meals and social time. There were copious opportunities to talk and chat over refreshments, cakes and biscuits – one of the true blessings of a weekend which regular church time doesn't offer. We thoroughly enjoyed our Saturday afternoon activities of golf and craft, and the evening quiz (no winning speech necessary).

The highlight for us was the guest speaker and the accompanying worship sessions. John McGinley was a very friendly, funny, encouraging, enthusiastic down-to earth guy with a passion for bringing people to faith. He taught us an amazingly simple yet challenging approach to communicating our faith to others, based on scripture and prayer, which we were instantly able to apply and then share the outcome. It was the planting of a seed which we pray will flourish and become part of our everyday lives as committed Christians. Overall, it was a great and blessed weekend.

Colin Cunningham

Women@St.Nics

Team: Vivien Staunton, Joyce Zealey, Mandy Winter, Thelma Ambler, Joy Mawdesley, Sandra Reeves (joined in June), Kate Howarth (left September 21).

In the last year, the Women's Ministry team has consciously worked to reshape itself, keeping sight of our goal, to find different ways of enabling people to keep connected.

Our breakfasts continued as an all church zoom event in May with John & Chris Philip outlining their journey to St Nic's. Penelope Swithinbank was finally able to speak to us in person in October (having been booked for June 2020 originally), with a livestream option. We welcomed several new people and it was so good to be together again. Penelope gave a very positive, moving and inspiring talk expressing hope in all circumstances. Joni McAuliffe from Christian Outreach in Newbury Schools (COINS) joined us in January, telling us of her journey over the past few years – it was very encouraging for dark January!

Joyce Zealey hosted two well-attended and very enjoyable Pudding Parties in June. And many ladies took up the option of a swim.

July saw a new initiative "Made in His Image" bringing people together in a different context (see separate entry).

September saw the creation of a strong team trialling crafts for the November 'Create for Christmas', our biggest event of the year. Following a series of mini workshops, the final crafts were selected and the event was held on the usual Saturday evening with a new second option on Monday morning. As ever the women who attended were grateful to have space to do something for themselves as well as appreciating the broad range of crafts to choose from and good company. We even took it 'further afield' with The Firm, Pathfinders and All Stars having their own version of Create for Christmas.

We welcome suggestions for new ideas and look forward to more women joining us in the coming year.

Vivien Staunton

MISSION (Looking Out)

Alpha

It has been good to be able to run Alpha in person this year after last year's online course. We have a wonderful Alpha team, and we are very grateful for all who have been leading groups, welcoming, organising catering, organising tech and praying. We are also thankful to all the small groups who have provided delicious desserts for all the sessions.

The course has been running for 8 weeks now and we have 14 guests coming along. Many of them are exploring Christianity for the first time, and others are learning more and thinking more deeply about it. There has been a great atmosphere at the course, with many questions and much laughter.

People in the group are keen to continue so we will be running a couple of extra sessions after Easter and are planning on running a post-Alpha group in the Summer term.

Starting in May, Foundations will be running a Daytime Alpha Course with a crèche.

Jackie Fountain

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

In 2021 we celebrated 8 baptisms and 1 thanksgiving for the gift of a child at St Nic's. After all the lockdowns, it has been wonderful to be able to welcome them all into the family of the church and give thanks with their friends and relations.

Three weddings were also held at St Nic's, including Siân Davies & Quentin Ball – Siân was a member of St Nic's for many years and remains in touch as CEO of Biojemms, one of our mission partners. All were great celebrations after a difficult time of lockdowns and restrictions.

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

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

Libby Lake & Mandy Maskell

Bookings

St Nic's Hall is a well-used facility by both internal and external groups, in the week we see around 350 people come through the doors. We are running close to full capacity with 3 different groups using the Hall most days. Most of these activities are for the Larger Hall with the Upper Hall mostly being used for Children's work and meetings.

St Nicolas Coffee Morning is a great opportunity to engage with the community. Since Covid, the mornings have suffered with less people attending than before, however the mornings are slowly growing in popularity due to the dedication of Lesley Park, Chris James, and the Hostess Team.

St Nic's House is beginning to be used again. Since Covid, it has predominantly been used as offices for staff and the occasional small meetings, but Pathfinders are now back to using the downstairs for their Sunday morning group.

St Nicolas Church is open during the week between 9am and 4pm. People often wander in off the High Street for private prayer or to marvel at the architecture. There are still lots of opportunities for the church to be utilised during the week.

The church, being the largest concert venue in Newbury, is welcoming back our regular concert bookings with six concerts this Spring and nearly all our regular concerts and external services in December.

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

Ben Norman

CAP Debt Centre Newbury

A quick reminder that the Newbury CAP Debt Centre was set up in 2019 and started with the CAP training course for our Debt Centre Manager, Lisa John, in June 2019.

Since the Centre was set up, we have helped 44 families, with a total of over 100 people. Despite the ongoing challenges of covid, we have taken on 17 new families in the last 12 months.

Of all our families we have seen:

- 3 become debt free
- 3 currently on debt management plans (DMP)
- 1 deceased while on DMP
- 1 dropped out of DMP
- 7 empowered to go forward independently

All the rest are either not ready or able to work with us for one reason or another but all were supported and blessed by the Newbury CAP Debt Centre.

In the last year we have set up a dedicated CAP Blessings Fund through the very generous giving of a few individuals from St Nicolas Church. This fund is available to any of our CAP clients who find themselves in difficulty and need some support and has already helped a number of families with food, clothing and other needs.

Each Christmas the Newbury CAP Debt Centre delivers hampers to all our clients. Last Christmas 18 hampers were delivered involving small groups from six local churches. Each Easter the Debt Centre sends out Easter Eggs and gospel messages to all clients.

The mission of CAP goes beyond practical help. CAP believe that it is through practical help and love that CAP clients can discover Jesus for themselves. Four of our non-church clients attended a church Christmas event (not Christmas service), all our clients are prayed for, invited to church, and regularly told how much God loves them. Our clients are at different stages in their faith journeys and are being encouraged by practical support, prayer and some attending church services.

The Newbury CAP Debt Centre currently has 10 active clients, and the centre is fully booked until end of April 2022.

Please pray for our clients and future clients, for connection, for Jesus to be part of their lives and for Jesus to be the focus of our Centre.

Steve Wolak, Trustee

Charity Coffee Mornings

The Thursday Charity Coffee Mornings resumed in October after the Covid lockdown period. They started up with Covid precautions and were run by the hostess team serving drinks and biscuits for the first few weeks. There were only a few customers at first, mainly just the St Nicolas' Thursday communion congregation. In mid-November, church charities started running the coffee mornings again with cakes, bric-a-brac and tombolas, and gradually other regular customers started to return. In 2022 other charities are now running the mornings and the number of customers is increasing. It is also gratifying that the team has been thanked recently by customers saying how much they appreciate the resumption of the coffee mornings.

The regular team of volunteer 'hosts' now consists of Janet Price, Lorna Holmes, Carolyn Davis, Joan Maynard, Fiona Shaw, Elizabeth Bennett, Sue Elliott and myself (helped by Ian). Thank you to them for the support they give to the charities running the coffee mornings and especial thanks for the extra help given when the coffee mornings resumed in the autumn. Also thank you to Mandy Maskell and Chris James who do the admin for the mornings, and to Ben Norman for all the practical help he gives the team.

If you know of a charity which would like to run a coffee morning for publicity and to raise some money, there are still spaces available later in 2022. Please contact the office for details.

Lesley Park

Churchyard Garden

2021 was a quiet season, maintaining the beds, making some small adjustments while keeping a keen eye on initiatives from the Royal Horticultural Society.

We joined in with the eco groups weekend building a very large bug hotel on the north side of the church. And in January we participated in the RSPB's bird count.

This season will be different with St Nics at the heart of the Spring Festival in May followed by the Jubilee celebrations in June and the return of Newbury in Bloom in July. The RHS have altered their judging criteria this year, placing more emphasis on sustainable gardening and supporting biodiversity. We are being encouraged to select appropriate plants for year-round impact and to use ecological gardening methods. We have already started work prioritising perennials and pollinator-friendly plants. Pollinating insects need access to a continuous and reliable food supply. Recent research has shown that the most beneficial urban gardens are those packed with plants. We are up for the challenge and are looking for anyone with any level of gardening experience to join us. In this vein, we are inviting The Yume Project's clients to cultivate the bed running along the walled path. All help is welcome. Do see our poster of gardening dates.

Vivien Staunton, Belinda Bowrey & Rosemary McDonald

Eco Group

The main event for the Eco Group this year was the 'Green' Church Open Day in September. This was an event with talks on a range of topics from wildflower roofs to the theology of creation care; local stands and businesses with eco-themes; and children's activities.

The Eco Group recently gained PCC approval to aim towards the A Rocha Eco Church bronze award, and we will start working towards this in earnest after Easter. Have a look at their website here ecochurch.arocha.org.uk. This survey looks at 5 key areas of church life (worship and teaching, management of church buildings, management of church land, community and global engagement, and lifestyle). We hope to work with groups within the church, and the congregation as a whole, to offer suggestions and encouragements of the changes we can make to better care for God's creation.

Suzanne Lees

Listening Café

Listening Café has been running for the past 7 months at lunchtime, from 11.30am until 1pm, on Wednesdays and Thursdays in Church. It started after a period of lockdown where there seemed to be a need for somewhere to go to pray and talk or just be quiet in the church. A small team, led by our curate, Jackie, volunteered to be available at the back of church to welcome anyone who walked through the door and to listen and pray as required. I have been surprised how many people visit the church during the daytime and there is usually a steady flow.

We have had people who have accepted the offer of someone to pray with them, perhaps they have felt anxious about the impact of Covid and the lockdowns or have recently been

troubled by the events in Ukraine. Some have wanted to share their own stories of tough times and coping with illness or bereavement, others want to just take time out in the day to come and be quiet before God. We have been able to signpost some people to get the help they need and have also been able to share the good news of Jesus and invite people to church services and events.

Coffee and tea are available for those who want to stay a while. We have booklets and cards available with helpful Bible verses, and also historical information about the church, for the many people who come on coach tours and spend a few hours visiting Newbury. If you would like to be part of this prayer ministry, please contact Rev Jackie Fountain to find out more.

Sharon Coward

Living Advent Calendar

I had the pleasure of taking part in the Living Advent Calendar in 2021 at St Nics. As part of the choir last year, we were already preparing for the Christmas services with Nic Cope, when we were informed that we were also taking part in the Living Advent Calendar. "What is a Living Advent Calendar?", I hear you say. Hosts around the town prepare a window, tableau, display or experience for the people of Newbury to enjoy on set days over advent. The first one I went to was a snowy scene set up in the window of a friend's house which was decorated by her and her family. It was unveiled on a set day for all to see with mince pies and mulled wine available.

On the Sunday of Advent when St Nicolas Church was unveiling their window, brown paper had been put over the door to hide the surprise underneath. On the evening itself, the talented artist, Daniel Maskell, unveiled his work on the doors of the church and in his role as host, led people in through the decorated doors, explaining the Christmas message. The artwork was in the style of our own stained-glass windows, with a star radiating out in the night sky.

The choir sang our selection of favourite carols for the visitors, underneath the beautiful Christmas tree. People took photos of the choir as the tree lights glinted on the baubles, ably decorated by St Nicolas church team. The choir then processed for more carols around the piano as visitors enjoyed maybe their first visit to this 500-year-old church. I hope that we host it again next year.

Elly Greenwood

Made in God's Image

Summer 2021, and with the lifting of some Covid restrictions the Women's Ministry Team were prompted to organise an event that allowed the church to have some much-needed fun and to celebrate the creativity of the church family whilst they had been under lockdown restrictions.

All sorts of crafts from across all age groups were showcased in the church hall from jam-making, painting and sewing to name a few, to more substantial items like Paul Udry's full-size bird table and garden furniture set, and Jim Lupton's ironmongery equipment.

A prayer tent was erected at the front of the church and although the weather was awful many were intrigued to see what was going on in the church and came to investigate.

Other activities were also happening within the church enabling people to see the views over Newbury by taking tower tours, which kept Joy very fit, even managing to include an unscheduled extra tour due to the number of people wanting to take part. Other activities were laid on for children including a treasure hunt with a sweet reward.

Feedback was that it had been good to reconnect with others again and have much needed face to face conversations.

Mandy Winter & Sandra Reeves, Women's Ministry Team

Meet Monday

At Meet Monday we worship God, pray and learn about the Christian faith in simple but profound ways. Our friends with learning disabilities appreciate joining in with drama and other activities that build greater understanding of God's love and purposes for us. Laughter and fun are important, as are the delicious refreshments.

Family members tell us how much the twelve months of Zoom sessions were appreciated, as well as activity packs and occasional goodies that were hand-delivered each month. We recommenced on-site meetings in October and it was so good to be together, despite face masks and social distancing. A man who had been unable to join on Zoom was delighted to be back and we were equally pleased to see him.

A highlight was the Count Everyone In Christmas celebration, livestreamed from St Nic's. Several Meet Monday friends attended, and one lady was thrilled to do a Bible reading.

Numbers continue to be disappointingly low and, even though we gained one person during Covid, we also lost one who moved out of the area. It is hard to retain people, not because they don't want to come but for reasons such as poor memory (despite reminders), staff shortages and lack of transport. We have the capacity to grow and would appreciate help in reaching adults with learning disabilities who might like to join us, generally on the first Monday of each month.

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

Pete and Christine Winmill

Newbury Friends Together

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

Newbury Friends Together meets weekly on a Tuesday afternoon for older people needing fun and friendship. Our members attend as and when they are able – most are not church people, but some are seekers after faith. The committee team has increased to six this year and so we are able to arrange a nicely varied programme covering music, games, cookery, health and craft.

So far this year we have had a talk on the Wetlands presented by a member of their team, a demonstration of Autumn Flowers by a member of the Church, a Steady Steps workout with a local health coach and a cookery demonstration on Welsh Cakes to celebrate St David's Day offered by members of the NFT team. We are looking forward to a talk on South Africa from a member of the NFT team and a Musical Afternoon with a local musician.

As our members grow in number and in confidence they are encouraged to open up and share with each other. Friendships are deepening and people are happy to participate more and more, making Newbury Friends Together a very happy and caring community.

Our member numbers have increased significantly since the pandemic, highlighting the need for Newbury Friends Together. We anticipate that over the next year with the increase in retirement properties in Newbury the member numbers will increase again.

Chris James

Outreach Committee

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

The Outreach Committee acts as a link between members of St Nicolas' and various mission partners the church supports. Each year we recommend to the PCC the allocation of the annual charity budget; the allocation for 2021 compared with 2020 can be seen in the two tables below. In 2021 our budget was £37,836, approximately 10% of St Nicolas' unrestricted income for the year 2020 plus £873 carried over from 2020.

St Nicolas' has a number of mission partners to whom we give regular financial and prayer support. The last two years have been very much dominated by the pandemic. This has meant partners having to find different ways of working and many have suffered financially due to a decrease in donations and an inability to raise funds and awareness of their causes. However, some made good use of online facilities, especially COINS, who managed to keep in touch with schools and run their Easter and Christmas programmes for the benefit of pupils. We recognised this by giving them an extra donation. Count Everyone In also prepared resources for using online and Pete and Christine Winmill reached more vulnerable people online than they did previously in person.

We regularly produce prayer letters to update members of the church on the work of our mission partners. In 2020 Mark and Ruth returned to the UK and have now settled in Northamptonshire. Mark is working for a South African company and Ruth is studying a Christian counselling course. They still keep contact with the church in Turkey and hope to return to work abroad when conditions are more favourable.

Our partnership continues with Edward and Mpho Ndebele and the Hope for Africa Church in Lesotho. Due to Covid, Edward has been restricted in when he can visit the church in Lesotho, however the church has continued to grow. Regular food parcels have been provided for vulnerable families through financial aid from Friends of Hope for Africa Mission, which we have supported. The church centre in Butha-Buthe is now in regular use and the land around it has been cultivated.

Projects supported by the Miriam Dean Fund have been badly affected by the pandemic and in May we initiated a Covid Appeal to support the Leonard Hospital in Tamil Nadu. Due to the generosity of members of both St Nicolas' and St Mary's Speen a donation of £9,844 was raised, which, with matched funding and gift aid, came to a total gift of £19,243.

Siân (Davies) Ball of Biojemms was married in St Nicolas Church in a beautiful ceremony. She has been restricted to working remotely from the UK for the last two years, but she hopes to return to Uganda in June. Quentin, her husband, who originally comes from South Africa, has been attending courses in preparation for accompanying Siân to Uganda. The staff of Biojemms in Uganda have been helping vulnerable families in the area around Rukungiri with emergency food supplies and they are cultivating their 7 acres of land for the benefit of local families.

As well as the Covid appeal the congregation responded generously to the harvest and Christmas appeals. The Tearfund 'Share the Load' climate change appeal for harvest raised £5,354 for projects in Burkina Faso, and the Christmas appeal for Loose Ends in Newbury raised £4,208 plus gift aid and some matched funding. Thank you everyone for these fantastic responses.

Table 1

Outreach Giving for 2021 compared with 2020		
	2021 (£)	2020 (£)
Mission Partners in worldwide ministry		
Mark & Ruth (2021 Resettlement grant; 2020 £1000 per quarter)	2,000	4,000
Biojemmss, Uganda (Siân's Role)	3,000	3,000
Friends of Hope for Africa Missions, Lesotho	7,500	
Miriam Dean Fund (Trustees - Sheila & Andy Moore)	2,000	2,000
Our Town		
COINS	8,000	10,000
Shoemakers	1,500	1,500
Bus of Hope	1,000	1,000
YMCA	5,000	5,000
Street Pastors		1,000
Count Everyone In (Pete & Christine Winmill)	2,500	2,500
Rock UK/Bethany Wolak	500	750
Our World - outreach organisations		
Bible Society of Egypt (via Newbury Bible Society)	500	1,000
SAT-7	1,000	1,000
Scripture Union St Petersburg	1,000	500
One-off donations and miscellaneous expenses		
(see table 2)	2,336	2,323
Totals (2021 includes £873 carried over from 2020)	£37,836	£35,573

Each year we keep back a proportion of our budget to allow for one-off needs which might come up during the year, for example, disaster appeals or grants to individuals undertaking Christian outreach, and these tend to differ from year to year (see Table 2 below). In 2020 and 2021 we supported Bethany Wolak who intended to spend 2 years with Rock UK, a Christian youth organisation. This was closed during lockdown but she managed to return in May for a further few months before she started at university. We also gave some support to Tom Mawdesley who opted for a second year of ministry apprenticeship in the Oxford area.

Other organisations we supported in 2020 and 2021 with the outreach allocation, prayer and other activities are listed in the tables below.

The committee is conscious of the responsibility it has in allocating 10% of St Nicolas' unrestricted giving to other causes and we try to do this carefully and prayerfully. We pray that with these donations we are helping to spread the Good News around Newbury and into the wider world.

Lesley Park, Secretary

Table 2

Outreach giving for 2021 compared with 2020 - one-off donations and miscellaneous expenses		
	2021 (£)	2020 (£)
Mark & Ruth (2021 House-warming flowers; 2020 resettlement gift)	28.45	200
Tom Mawdesley (Ministry Apprenticeship)	1,000	500
SAT-7 (Beirut Appeal)		250
Embrace Christmas Appeal (Syrian refugees)		500
CTNA for Christmas dinners	307.55	
Gaza Appeal	500	
Yasam Church, Turkey	500	
Amount remaining		873
Totals	£2,336	£2,323

St Nicolas C. E. Junior School

The last year has been a very different one for St Nic's School, with two items dominating for us – federation with St John the Evangelist School and Covid.

Our federation with St John's School is possibly the most significant change that has happened to the school for many years. Federation provides an opportunity for both schools to work even more closely together and to align our approaches and vision.

On 20 October, the two schools officially federated with the governing boards of both schools being dissolved and a new federation governing board coming into existence. On that day, children across both schools held a 'federation day' which focused on our new vision for the two schools: For the good of all – through curiosity, creativity and love. The children created pieces of artwork that are on display in both schools and which reflect these important values.

Even at this early stage, our two schools are already developing really close bonds and we have begun to align the curriculum across the two schools, meaning that we can really focus on developing learning across the two schools.

Of course, Covid has dominated across the whole year, as it has done in all aspects of life. During the past year, we have experienced lockdowns and a variety of changing restrictions with the children accepting any changes with positivity and resilience. The past 6 months have been particularly challenging with increased Covid cases in school with both staff and children, as the Omicron variant took hold.

Despite all the difficulties the school continues to be a fantastic place to learn and work and all of the staff and children have really demonstrated our new vision, working at all times for the good of all.

Keith Harvey, Executive Headteacher

Town Team

We have had another successful season maintaining and developing the West Berkshire Community Hospital Therapy Garden. We are pleased that the team of volunteers has increased as we have now taken on responsibility for the newly planted 'Tiny Forest' of 460 saplings on the site. We also hope to complete the Rainbow Garden this season creating a private outdoor space adjacent to one of the palliative care suites.

The team has also helped support staff with patient visiting and since December a weekly visit from a PAT dog.

We aim to be self-funding and held a very successful Plant Sale in June. It was good to meet up with returning customers and to hear we are gaining a reputation for the quality of our plants.

We were able to resume our role promoting organisations affiliated to CTNA (Christians Together in the Newbury Area) through our "Sunday Stalls." Loose Ends gave an inspiring presentation of the work they do caring for the homeless in Newbury and their expansion plans. Joyce Zealey and Elly Greenwood spoke about their roles working with people from Syria and Afghanistan now living in the Newbury Area.

The Thursday coffee mornings resumed in October. This is a valuable outreach into the town and a great opportunity for local charities to raise funds. It has been good to see local charities enthusiastically returning and filling up this year's calendar.

Andy Moore & Vivien Staunton