



ORGAN RECITAL SERIES
2023 / 2024

Organist: Christopher Caplan

Music for a Summer Evening
Sunday 20 August 2023
7.15pm

Music for the Season of Remembrance
Monday 15 November 2023
10.00am

Music for Springtime
Saturday 9 March 2024
10.30am

Midsummer Music
Saturday 22 June 2024
10.00am

Music for a Summer Evening
Sunday 18 August 2024
7.15pm

St Paul's Church
Reading Road, Wokingham RG41 1DA
0118 779 2323 | church.office@stpauls.co.uk
www.stpauls.co.uk



The Walter Climate Change Lectures

A series of 4 lectures by guest speakers, all free of charge for the church and open to all. The series will be held on the following dates:

- 18th September: The Challenge of Climate Change and the Role of the Church
- 23rd September: Engaging with Faith in the Climate Crisis
- 18th October: Midwestern Energy Council and the Role of the Church
- 15th November: Energy Efficiency and Climate Action: A Practical Guide

For more information, please contact: Rev. Canon Peter O'Brien, Rector, St Paul's Church, Reading, RG41 1DA. Email: peter.o'brien@stpauls.co.uk

PARISH REPORTS 2023

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Introductory Note

The Annual Report prepared with the Financial Statements for the Charity Commission contains information on many aspects of parish life, including the PCC sub-committees. Parishioners are encouraged to read it in order to get a fuller picture of the life and work of the Parish in 2023. It is supplemented by the following reports.

And thank you, thank you, thank you for all you bring and offer and share and treasure and bring and... none of this would be possible without you and your heartfelt response to God's love.

The Rector's Review of 2023

Of a smaller oak tree and a bigger Church community

In some ways 2023 will be remembered as the year of **the oak tree** because the large oak which had probably stood for over 200 years had to be reduced because it was so hollowed out and because a large limb fell into the Churchyard without warning one Saturday morning in the summer. It took a lot of effort and conversation and planning to have it reduced by Parish Environmental Services.

The Reading Road had to be closed for more than a day shortly after Christmas 2023 for the work to be done. There was a great deal of public interest and support- and we were very fortunate in that we ended up paying only about £2,000 of the total cost of about £17,000 because of donations, fundraising and grants from the Wokingham Free Church Burial Ground and the Wokingham Society, as well as money raised by St Paul's Junior School through a Messy Hair Day.

The PCC and our committed Church Leaders often work unnoticed- but the oak tree was one of those moments when it was very clear what they did and that they did it well, professionally and with courage.

But there was a huge amount more happening in 2023 than just that one process, time-consuming though it was. St Cecilia's Church of England Primary **School** opened to serve the Matthews Green Estate in Jan 2023 and Louise Cole and I are Governors of the School, which opened as a Junior School to help Wokingham Borough Council deal with the shortage of Junior School provision in the Borough, but which hopes to open for Key Stage 1 in September 2024. Our links with St Paul's Junior School continues to be rich and rewarding. Penny Wallace is Chair of

Governors and I am Vice Chair. Sunny Pau and Jan Norbury are Governors and Pauline Wells is the Clerk to the Governors.

We also do **assemblies** in Holme Grange, Emmbrook Infants, Emmbrook Juniors, Evendons Primary and Windmill Primary and run a weekly Lounge for Year 7s at the Holt who come along to play games and chat and share anything they want to, which is organised in collaboration with Soulscape.

Holy Week was a special highlight because we hosted three people from Westcott House Theological College in Cambridge for the week, which allowed us to do new things like art in Care Homes, a larger Messy Church event on Good Friday and the new idea of Shoecleaning in the marketplace on Maundy Thursday. It felt a very special return to pre-Covid Holy Weeks, a wonderful journey together.

Beyond the oak tree and our work in Schools 2023 was the year when the Autumn Bazaar came back to great acclaim, when a detailed worship consultation led to some changes around music and liturgy and, vitally, a year of **steady but definite growth** at St Paul's. A number of new people started to come to Church and were made welcome, and our **Livestream** continued to be very popular, regularly attracting 25 devices live (which probably means about 35 people) and being shown to residents in two local care homes.

St Paul's is one of a very few Churches in the Archdeaconry which have been growing since Covid and that is something we need to give thanks for and feel justly proud of. That story of growth testifies to the spirit people find when they come to worship and also to the hard work and commitment of so many people, especially the sidespeople and those who serve coffee after Church, and to everyone who noticed someone they didn't know and said hello and welcome.

St Nick's do an excellent job of welcoming people in Emmbrook, and continue to make a huge contribution to the wider life of the parish, being at the centre of all of the parish's committees. The report from the Pro-Wardens on page 11 draws out many of the highlights of 2023, among them the successful Worship Review and several social events which were great fun.

The **Parish Rooms** are now fully recovered from the issues caused by the Pandemic and are very popular. I am especially pleased that we have been able to welcome the Wokingham Muslim Society for their Friday prayers every week.

There is so much for us to be proud of in the parish- and you will read about a lot of it in the pages that follow. In the years to come we need to keep remembering that growth comes from God, and that growth and flourishing do happen.

There is something attractive and deeply relevant in the connection between what we do in Church and what we strive to do in the world, in the way that our worship and rich musical life feed into and inspire our lives of service and engagement. It is clear from our faith and our work that we are relaxed, humble, open and engaged, seeking to share the Good News of Jesus with the world as it actually is rather than

the world as we wish it was. There is everything to suggest that this is not only a true and thoughtful expression of God's love but also something which is attractive to the community as well.

I often use the question "How long would it take people in the community to notice that we are not there any more?" as a way of checking that we are focused enough on the community we are called and sent to serve. The answer I keep coming across and over again is that they would notice a lot more quickly than they would have done a decade ago, which is a great testament to the work we are doing together as well as to the core vision we share of being a blessing and a gift to the community we are part of.

Some time ago we set these statements as our banners as part of the PMC process...

*"Shaped by God in the Eucharist,
we are called to make the richness of his love
known to everyone in the community." (St Paul's)*

*"Exploring through relationships and worship
how God's love is creating and sustaining communities in Emmbrook." (St Nick's)*

They act as both a reminder of who we are and the churches we are called to become, now and in the years to come, under God's protection, inspiration and love.

Fr Richard Lamey, Rector

Parish Life

Churchwardens' Annual Report on the Fabric of St Paul's Church 2022

Under Paragraph 5 (1)-(3) of Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991, the Churchwardens are required to deliver the Annual Fabric Report to the PCC, and on behalf of the PCC to the APCM (with any amendments made by the PCC), including an account of all actions taken or proposed during the previous year for the protection and maintenance of the fabric and all articles appertaining to the church.

Fabric

The PCC appointed a new architect, Peter Preston of Wollaston Rose Architects Ltd. Mr Preston has extensive experience of working with churches in this diocese. He carried out the Quinquennial Inspection on the fabric of the church between May and July and subsequently produced the Quinquennial Report.

The Quinquennial Report runs to 155 pages. A hard copy has been printed and placed in the Church Office with the Logbook.

This is the longest and most detailed report that the church has received in recent years. However this means that on future inspections it will only be necessary to update the report rather than rewrite it from scratch. The architect's regard for the building and the work that we will need to do is clear from the start of the report:

St. Paul's is a beautiful and captivating building and the PCC have clearly worked hard to maintain it over the years. This is demonstrated by the fact that many of the immediate priority defects identified in this report are items of routine maintenance and low in cost. However, storm clouds gather on the horizon, as the age of the building means that a collection of larger and more extensive repair needs will become necessary in the 5-10 year plus window.

He adds:

One example of this is the stonework. Whilst the grey pennant sandstone is generally in a good condition throughout, the same cannot be said of the limestone dressings. Nearly all of the limestone work needs re-pointing and much of it also needs stone conservation or repair to deal with exfoliation of the surface and the decay of weak beds. The sooner all of this is addressed, the less extensive the work will be.

And:

Many of the original cast iron rainwater goods survive. These items are c.160 years old and if properly maintained could continue to give good service indefinitely. Unfortunately, they have not been redecorated and overhauled for some time and this is now necessary if they are not to decay beyond the point of repair.

The architect also highlights the need to replace the roofs to the north and south aisles.

Of the interior of the church, he says:

Internally, the church is beginning to look a little tired. The original decorative scheme is strong and adds greatly to the beauty and spirituality of the space, but the temporary lighting scheme works against it. Areas of plasterwork need repair, areas of the floor needs repair and the pews need re-staining. In the chancel, changes of fashion over the years have led to a dumbing down of the Victorian splendour. The church is without WCs or a servery, and the Parish Rooms are too far away to provide these facilities for services and concerts etc.

He also recommends that the PCC plan for a phased programme to reinvigorate the interior and create something special to pass onto the next generation.

Work has already started on this. As recommended by the architect, and agreed by the PCC, a Measured Survey of the building has been carried out as a preliminary requirement for tenders to be sought and the works to be carried out, and a list has been drawn up of items that need attention. The two major items are the North and South aisle roofs. Some items can be attended to ourselves, while others will need the employment of contractors.

A Feasibility Study for the Re-imagining of St Paul's Church is also to be obtained for the following projects, in order to develop the church building and make it more welcoming and usable by the local community. The following is part of our Statement of Need, which has been submitted in support of a grant from the Diocese to kick start the project:

We need to have a more adaptable building resource to enable us to further our outreach to the local community by making the building itself more welcoming. We want to make St Paul's the go to place for events in our local area.

To this end we are about to embark on a project to make some significant changes to St Paul's church that will improve:

- *Basic facilities such as toilet and food preparation areas*
- *Lighting – greater efficiency and adaptability.*
- *Better accessibility.*

- *Improved storage facilities*
- *Greater sustainability and maintainability.*
- *Greater visibility for services and musical or presentation events*

This will be achieved through the following sub-projects:

- *Re-roof north and south aisle roofs.*
- *Add storage space where possible, particularly in the north aisle.*
- *Improve the lighting.*
- *Move the current children's Chapel to the north aisle.*
- *Add a WC for church users.*
- *Add a sink and food service area.*
- *Improve accessibility, including permanent ramp to north door.*
- *Add space for a nave altar.*

To achieve this, we will need to spend time looking at the existing structure to see how we can make the best use of the space, to design the different facilities to improve usability and accessibility, and to prioritise the work to minimise disruption and provide the best outcome for all concerned.

David Ruddock and Peter Wells, Churchwardens

The Parochial Church Council

The PCC have had 6 meetings since the last APCM in April 2023. At all the meetings the financial position of both the church and the Parish Rooms Trust was monitored. Other highlights are:

In May 2023, the PCC appointed Sunny Pau as a new member. We agreed the 4-month financial reports, the updates to the Log Book and Terrier and the 2023 Safeguarding Policy together with Safeguarding rules and a list of church activities that those rules should apply to. The appointment of officers and Deputy Wardens was confirmed and a list of PCC Committees and their members was circulated. The quotation for the diagonal path and handrail was agreed.

In July 2023, among other things, the PCC discussed Terms of Reference for its Committees and a revised Budget for the year.

In September 2023, we considered in detail the recommendations of the Quinquennial Inspection which will be prioritised and the report on the Oak Tree which recommended that the tree be pruned to a height of less than 4m. A report on

the need for work on the organ was received and it was agreed to commission the work. The PCC also ratified the decision to install new bollards in the car park. Fr Richard advised the PCC of the plans for Christmas services.

In November 2023, the annual payments to our Mission Partners were agreed. We considered the financial report for 9 months and. It was agreed to commission a survey of the church which can be used to seek tenders for the work that needs to be done. Three quotations for the work on the Oak Tree were considered and it was agreed to accept the one from Parish Environmental. A similar survey was agreed for the Cedar Tree.

In January 2024, the PCC considered the Budget for 2024 which indicated that, in order to break even, income must rise by £12,000 this year. The PCC approved the use of Prayers of Love and Faith in main services and agreed that they would support standalone services when these are permitted. The PCC also approved a proposal to introduce the new Revised English Hymnal in 2024, following a short fundraising campaign. It was reported that the churchyard shed was broken into and mowers stolen. Thankfully the repair of the shed and the replacement of the mowers will be covered by our insurance and it is hoped additional CCTV will be installed in the car park area.

In March 2024, the PCC approved the Annual Report and Accounts 2023, the Parish Rooms Trust Report and Accounts 2023 and the Churchwarden's Report in readiness for presentation to the APCM. They also started to consider their response to the Deanery Youth and Children's Plan questions. Concerns about the safety of the Cedar Tree were also discussed following receipt of a report from the arboriculturalist but no decisions were taken.

Lesley Ruddock (PCC Secretary)

Safeguarding

New Parish Safeguarding Officer

In autumn 2023, I was confirmed by the PCC in the role of Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO), joining the Safeguarding Team consisting of Father Richard Lamey, Mother Cara Smart, Parish Secretary Louise Cole and former PSO Chris Barker. Chris is continuing to do the day-to-day work and keeps all the records about training needs and DBS checks of all volunteers and office holders in the parish. She is also training and settling me into my role. For this, Chris' role has changed to Safeguarding Administrator. My role as PSO is (a) to be a point of contact for anyone who has a safeguarding concern, (b) to monitor safeguarding policies as communicated by the diocese and make sure we are in compliance, (c) to keep our records updated with the diocese (especially the Parish Dashboard), and (d) to move forward with our Safeguarding Action Plan, which was approved by the PCC in

January 2024. The Safeguarding Team meets regularly to discuss any matters arising, from concerns to administrative issues. Any member of the team can be approached with any questions, thoughts or concerns about safeguarding.

Training and DBS

- I have now completed all necessary training for the role of PSO as well as a training on Domestic Abuse and a workshop on Spiritual Abuse.
- Thanks to Chris, our volunteers and office holders are almost completely up to date on both their training and their DBS checks, where applicable. This includes the shortening of intervals between DBS checks from every 5 years to every 3 years.
- It is vital that everyone who completes any kind of safeguarding training lets us (=Chris) know. **Appeal:** Please can all our hard-working and conscientious volunteers remember to keep us informed about any training, so that our records are up to date and do you justice!

Parish Safeguarding Action Plan:

- We are on a good way to make sure that our *Parish Dashboard* is up to date. This is an online tool provided by the Diocese, which shows what we are doing to be a safe church. We will continue to update it and fulfil the tasks needed. This includes collecting risk assessments from all Church Groups including young people or adults at risk.
- We are also considering getting access to a Safeguarding Hub, which is an online tool allowing us to keep track of our safer recruiting measures when we recruit staff or volunteers for new roles.

Promoting a Safer Church:

We want to cultivate an atmosphere where everybody feels safe, nurtured and cherished as a person loved by God. To this end, we will:

- promote a good and widely spread understanding of safeguarding, not only as protection from open abuse and neglect or from false accusation, but as the positive creation of a safe and happy environment for parishioners, office holders and paid staff.
- promote an atmosphere where anyone can speak any concern freely. Remember: Voicing a concern is not placing blame!
- advertise the appropriate contacts and encourage anyone to freely share concerns or ask questions about any aspect of safeguarding.

Stefanie Cetin, Parish Safeguarding Officer

St Nicholas' Pro-Wardens' Report

Our numbers at Sunday Mass have fluctuated week by week but despite this our congregation has always been enthusiastic in worship, in fellowship after the service and in welcoming others.

Due to staff illnesses the Wednesday House Mass is now held once a month, but we continue to meet each week for prayer on the other Wednesdays. It is always good to meet for prayer each week and to share fellowship afterwards. Sunday School has settled into a reasonably consistent pattern of meetings, usually on the first and third Sundays of the month, outside of school holidays. The children continue to enjoy responding to the teaching in the sessions through craft-based work, and the congregation enjoy seeing and hearing the results at the end of each service. Thank you to Anne and Paul our two leaders, and the second adults, for all they do to support and teach the children on their journeys.

Our three Fellowship Groups continue to meet for discussion, support and prayer. As always, they play an important part of life at St. Nicholas'.

Members of St Nicholas' generously supported our parish charities and various retiring collections as well as giving of their time helping on parish committees and at parish events.

We collected items of food for the Wokingham Foodbank in Lent and our brilliant auctioneer took charge of our Harvest Auction after the service on 1st October and a goodly amount was raised for the parish charities. We also gave snacks and fruit to Building for the Future, a local charity helping families who have children with various special needs, for their summer events and their Christmas parties.

We enjoyed shared lunches at the Village Hall in June, and in December for our Patronal Festival. It is amazing how everything comes together, and we have a variety of lovely food to share. We had delicious cake after the service on 7th May to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.

St Nicholas' Council meets every three months to pray for and review all aspects of life at St Nicholas'. Members decided to hold a Worship and Music survey to ensure every one of the congregation had their say and could air any concerns. It was very well received and as a result it seemed on the whole people were happy but were able to suggest various ways they thought we could improve things or indeed introduce new things. Some of these we could implement straight away, and we met together twice after services to discuss other suggestions which needed further thought and discussion.

Many of the congregation volunteer for various local charities and community groups.

Our thanks and prayers as always to Fr. Richard, Judi, Cara and Jane for their leadership, care and support in what has not been an easy year for them.

Thank you to all the St. Nicholas' family for your support, enthusiasm, prayers, and all you do. Every one of you plays an important part whether it be to provide the music, being part of the rota, making coffee or welcoming newcomers.

*"For the body does not consist of one member but of many."
(1 Corinthians 12:14)*

Liz Gallagher and Fiona Albinson, Pro Wardens

St Nicholas' Missional Vocation Statement

"Exploring through relationships and worship
how God's love is creating and sustaining communities in Emmbrook"

Woosehill Church Report

This year has seen the church fully back to normal following the Covid Crisis; our numbers have steadily risen to 31 every Sunday morning with 5 watching the live streamed service. During the year we have had all the usual services for each church season, The Crib service on Christmas Eve had 141 attend. The church also hosted two Circuit services the first on New Year's Day and the second on New Year's Eve which were well attended.

We hold a service at Kennet Court on the 3rd Thursday each month which those who attend, about 6 people, appreciate.

We recently re-launched Pastoral Support Groups; Soba gave an outline of how he hoped they would work. Small groups with a coordinator not a Leader but all in each group to support one another were planned. The following week we had an extra café church service where we sat at tables with our group so that everyone could get to know each other and this appeared to work well.

Socially, W o W (Women of Woosehill) has continued to hold a meeting every month, we have played games, walked, eaten meals out, had afternoon tea, decorated pottery and make Christmas wreaths for our front doors. This is a special

group for all Women who worship at Woosehill and a varied year's plan is in place for 2024.

There is Table Tennis on a Friday evening and more are welcome to join.

Lynn Smith (Woosehill church representative on the PCC)

Changes in the Electoral Roll

The total number of names on the Electoral Roll at 31 March 2024 was 231 as against 227 on 26 March 2023. There were 5 additions during the period: Joanna Brown, Jim Clifford, Carole Griffiths, Kay Treadaway and Mary Walker. There was 1 deletion during the period: Angela Smith who has died.

Teri Austen (Electoral Roll Officer)

Stewardship Report

We are grateful to all the St. Paul's and St. Nick's Parishioners who continue to strongly support the Church through regular planned giving and through one off or occasional donations. Planned regular giving allows the Church to budget effectively and manage cash flow so if you are able to and you wish to support the Church with a regular donation a please consider doing this through the Parish Giving scheme.

75% of all our regular donors now give via the Parish Giving Scheme which is run by the diocese who claim Gift Aid on all eligible donations on behalf of the Church. Another important benefit of the scheme is that it allows donors to index link their gift to maintain its value to the Church over time. This is becoming ever more important considering the current level of inflation. I'd therefore like to encourage donors who still give by Standing Order or numbered envelopes to consider switching to scheme. Please contact me or the Treasurer if you have any questions or concerns about the scheme. A link with details on how to join the scheme can be found on the Parish website.

We continue to collect via the plate during services for those wishing to give by numbered envelopes, white gift aid envelopes or cash and also from the wall safe near the font.

Recognising that many people no longer carry cash, we also have a card reader at the back of the Church for use during the services. Donations received using the card reader are treated as anonymous cash donations and as long as they are less than £30,

we can claim 25% tax back on these through the Gift Aid Small Donation Scheme known as GASDS.

We are also able to receive donations by text. This can be done by texting STPAULS5 or STPAULS10 or STPAULS20 to 70450 to donate that amount of money with an option to gift aid the donation.

If you are a UK taxpayer, then we can claim Gift Aid equal to the standard rate of income tax on the value of any gifts given to the Church. Gift Aid provides an extremely valuable contribution to the Church's annual income so if you can Gift Aid your donation, please complete a declaration form available from myself at the email address below. Thank you to those who have previously completed a Gift Aid declaration form but if your circumstances have changed and you are no longer paying UK income tax then please inform me. If you have moved house recently, please could you also complete a new form with your new address. The envelopes placed in the pews can also be used to gift aid occasional or one-off donations.

If anyone has any questions about the Parish Giving Scheme, stewardship or Gift Aid then do please contact me at Church or via email at stewardship@spauls.org.uk

Stuart Fairhead (Stewardship Secretary)

The Churchyard

We are back into a normal year without restrictions of the past years due to COVID19. We enjoy the help of 8 or so from the Probation Service Payback group as well as a few volunteers from the congregation. We have the regular provision of refreshments and we are able to work together in groups again although the threat of COVID, flu and bird flu is still a concern to some of the volunteers.

The major incident of the year was the crashing to the floor of a huge branch from the old Oak, next to the Reading Road, during a working party session in August. This caused us to ask for a full survey of the tree and as a result in December 2023, between Christmas and the New Year, the Oak tree was significantly reduced to remove the danger of it collapsing on to the road and all the road users. Having avoided a disaster we looked at other trees in the churchyard and it became clear that the Cedar tree needed looking at too since the split in the tree has significantly increased and it poses a danger of falling on the church and the gravestones underneath it. The report on its health is not good and a decision will need to be made soon about what work should be done on it to remove the danger.

We have also had the tool shed broken into and four mowers stolen. We are now waiting for the new shed parts to arrive. On their arrival we will be installing them and then applying extra security features. We will need to procure some new mowers to make sure we can keep on top of the grass during the important growing months of April and May.

During this year the churchyard has continued to be looked after and continues to receive very positive comments from the local community.

The volunteers have managed to maintain the chipper and make it functional so we are now able to chip much of the tree waste we generate in the churchyard. The chipped waste has been successfully used to maintain the paths in the churchyard. This means we no longer have bonfires, which are unpopular and release significant carbon into the atmosphere. So we have done a bit to reduce our contribution to climate change.

We have also started to invest in battery powered machines to manage the churchyard although we still do use petrol and diesel in the chipper and mowers since available battery mowers are currently unsuitable for all day use. Material which previously we might have burnt but which is unsuitable for the chipper, is being composted and the leaves, which fall in the autumn, are collected to produce leaf mould. We have been using much of the compost to level out the ground in the churchyard but there is plenty of good quality compost and leaf mould available for anyone who cares to come and collect it for themselves. Please contact churchyard@spauls.org.uk for details if required.

We are pleased to welcome schools into the Churchyard to support their local community as well as a return to St Paul's for the St Paul's Scout group. We have hosted students from Chiltern Way Academy, The Foundry School and St Pauls scouts. The churchyard is clearly an excellent way to reach out to the local community as well as our very long term and successful link with the probation service.

The trees we planted as part of the Tree Succession Project are growing nicely. As is the Medlar tree which has been planted by Wokingham WI near the Parish rooms. It has provided a good show of blossoms and colourful leaves as well as a supply of medlar fruits this year.

We are still looking out for Ash Die Back, or Chalara (*hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), but so far it seems to have missed the churchyard trees. If our Ash trees are affected we will need to remove them. It is this threat that we are addressing with the planting of new trees which will take over when the inevitable happens (over 95% of the Ash trees in the UK, *fraxinus excelsior*, are expected to succumb to the disease eventually).

The tree survey which was carried out in 2017, is now being re-run by the churchyard volunteers, to make sure that our trees are kept in good order, pruned and removed, as necessary. Half of the trees have been surveyed so far and the rest will be done over the next few months.

The drains around the Church and Parish Rooms car park still need repairing. This work was being planned a couple of years ago but the project was halted by the pandemic. I would be pleased to hear recommendations of suitable contractors (churchyard@spauls.org.uk), since this is something which needs to be revisited to keep the drainage system, around the church, in good working order.

There has been a lot of work done over the past couple of years to remove the old spoil heap on the south side of the churchyard. This has provided new grave space and we are indebted to one of our volunteers, Tom Gemmill, who has spent hours managing and maintaining the area, Tom will be reseeded this area over the next couple of months.

If you are pleased with the way the churchyard looks and would like to help to maintain it to its current standard, please come and join us. We really do need more people to mow the grass, manage the compost, maintain and document the graves, tend our trees, look after our wildlife, mend our machines, provide refreshments and more. If this is you, please join us any time from 9.00-16.00 on alternate Saturdays, visit the website (<https://spauls.co.uk/churchyard-working-party/>) or email churchyard@spauls.org.uk for more information.

Andy Clark

Community

Coffee and Chat

Coffee and Chat continues to go from strength to strength. We meet each Friday afternoon and regularly have between 35 and 43 people who come along to meet others and chat, do jigsaws, play games, take part in the weekly quiz and of course enjoy tea/coffee and delicious cakes. Last year, as well as our Christmas party, we held a party to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. We made donations to DEC for the earthquake in Turkey/Syria (£50), Cowshed (£100) and to St Paul's for the Oak Tree works £100. We also held a successful MacMillan Coffee afternoon & members were most generous raising £258.61. Coffee and Chat is a great source of fun and fellowship for all those who come along and strong friendships and support networks have been formed. Thank you to everyone who helps setting up and clearing up, on the registration table, baking cakes, serving refreshments, delivering the very popular quiz and chatting to and welcoming folk.

Susanna Allen and the Coffee and Chat Team.

Walking Group

We now have 18 members. We meet roughly twice a month, different days and different routes, to walk and share fellowship, always ending with coffee. If the weather is bad when we have arranged to meet, we still have coffee!

We have also met for Sunday lunchtime meals, shared lunches including a post-Christmas lunch with a Beetle Drive, formed a quiz team for the parish quiz (we

went from last to second to last this year!) and watched the Coronation of King Charles III together.

This group has proved to be an invaluable source of friendship and support for members, especially those who live alone. We can talk openly about anything and share advice where we are able or just listen. As one of our members said quoting a Beatles song “We get by with a little help from our friends”, which seems a good way to sum up this group.

Liz Gallagher

The Wider View

Deanery Synod Report

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

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

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

The Deanery Plan was also voted through in 2023, with a limited reach and a focus on things like building support groups for people in set roles, like Safeguarding Officers and Treasurers. We are also working on a list of ‘trusted traders’ who

parishes have used and putting on Deanery courses which all parishes can access, e.g. on spotting domestic abuse, and fundraising.

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

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

r Richard Lamey

Sweden Report

The parish link with Sweden continues to be a blessing to us, even if it has seen less activity this year than in earlier, pre-Covid days. Richard and Johannes meet regularly on Zoom to keep up to date with what is happening in the parishes and the country and to support each other- it is always a joy to chat. Richard is also in regular touch with Stefen and Elin who are now in a new parish near Kalmar, which is still in the Diocese of Vaxjo but on the Baltic coast. Bertie has also included a recording of the Vaxjo Church choir, which people enjoyed. It would be good to develop things again in 2024- but we are in a comfortable place and it is always good to pray for each other and to stay in touch, like old friends.

Fr Richard Lamey