

The Parochial Church Council St Margaret's Church, Betley



For presentation at the
Annual Vestry & Parochial Church Council Meeting
Sunday 14th April 2024 at 12noon

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms”.

1 Peter 4: 10

Review of the Year 2023/24 by Jennifer Walton, Vice Chair of PCC

Looking back on last year's 'Review of the Year', I note that there have been fewer major changes in both our national lives and indeed our Parochial Church and Village lives during 23/24. Most joyful, and exciting perhaps, we celebrated the first coronation in over 70 years, as King Charles III and Queen Camilla were crowned in Westminster Abbey. For some it was the second such event in our lifetime, but a far from everyday one.

As anticipated, over the past twelve months, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and Ministry Team have worked together, to provide a rich pattern of worship, exploring different styles of worship and liturgy, as well exploring our Christian faith in small groups for informal study and worship. We are well blessed with leaders, both authorised and lay; some only serve St Margaret's, and some also officiate at our sister church All Saints' Madeley, most importantly the Vicar, but we can all mix and match! As well as Vicar Tim, there are 2 Associate Ministers, a Children, Youth and Families Minister, 3 Licensed Readers and 2 Readers with Permission to Officiate (ie 'of a certain age') not to mention 2 Lay Leaders. From time to time Claire Watson, training for ordination, also joined us. This combination not only leads to a rich variety of styles but also new insights into the old familiar message.

There is no doubt we still need to be Covid aware. Covid restrictions have been reviewed at regular intervals and the congregation use personal judgement and common sense where needed to protect themselves and others. Administration of Holy Communion continues with the giving of bread and wine together and we have not returned to 'sharing the chalice' as yet.

Sadly, despite this wealth of worship style, there are far fewer worshippers, than in 2017. As I write, I look forward to the Palm Sunday walk to church led by Coco the donkey. I expect Coco is being brushed up and readied for his star performance, courtesy of local farmer, Frank Speed! Among the highlights of the Year, there was the Carol Service which attracted a good crowd and the Crib Service in the Speeds' Barn hosted over 400 adults and children as well as lambs, calves and the donkey. Numbers at ordinary Sunday services are creeping up slowly and the Choir is also approaching pre-covid numbers, and despite the loss of long-standing members, we have some new faces and returning old friends, both in the Chancel and the Nave. It is clear that people's habits and needs have changed; new activities and family traditions evolved. The statistics suggest an uplift in attendances at Sunday services, but it may be some people come more often as opposed to us seeing new faces!

The PCC has responsibility for maintaining the fabric of St Margaret's Church. Maintaining an old listed building such as ours is a constant challenge and an expensive one. This year for example there will be guttering to repair on the south aisle as we have a leak.

PCC also has oversight of the management of the Reading Room, which has its own committee, approved by the PCC.

The PCC has met on 6 occasions in the year to March 2024 for full formal meetings, with an average attendance of 57%. All meetings have a structured Agenda and have focused on the PCC's responsibilities for Mission and Ministry activities, together with finance, buildings, fabric, resources, Health and Safety, and Safeguarding. We have appointed new coordinators for Health and Safety and Safeguarding.

Priorities during the past year:

- First and foremost, to provide safe and regular options and a place for people of all ages to worship, and to learn more about the Christian faith, whether they are exploring faith for the first time or are experienced members of the congregation seeking to learn and grow.
- To keep in touch with individuals and the community via email, electronic and hard copy pew sheets, the Parish Magazine which is now hard copy again, Facebook and the Website. A big thank you to Audrey Darlington who continues to produce a weekly Pew Sheet full of information, events, and diary dates, and to all of our 'Communications Team' in this type of sharing and information ministry.
- To oversee worship and spiritual developments through the Ministry Team.
- To review and organise special services, including Easter, Harvest and Christmas.
- To update Health & Safety and Protection of Young and Vulnerable People policies.
- To observe General Data Protection Regulations compliance in all our communications.
- The PCC has also overseen and encouraged the activities of various sub-groups and activities (see separate reports).

Mission now and looking forward

- Ruth Fish as Children's, Youth and Families Minister for Madeley and Betley has worked hard and creatively to provide a wide variety of options for fun and spiritual learning, in School and Church. A recent report following the Church of England's Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodists Schools (SIAMS), found that Betley School offered excellent provision for spiritual development and lives up to its reputation as a Church School.
- Vicar Tim and Ruth Fish liaise closely with Betley Primary School. The children come into Church for a weekly service and St Margaret's also hosted their Nativity Play and Christmas Service to a large crowd of parents and friends. The children also had their Christmas Tree Decorating Ceremony – entering Church in their class 'bubbles'. Their craft work was excellent, and it looked beautiful.
- Ruth is in Church every Sunday and 'Earlybirds' meet in the Vestry on the 3rd Sunday of the month and in the Children's Corner at other services.
- The Youth Group meets every Monday evening in the Reading Room. Interestingly most of the members are from Madeley, and although numbers are few those who go are very keen.
- PCC and Ministry Team is still considering a course.
- PCC have supported and promoted Sanctus (a local charity), Christian Aid, The Church of England Children's Society and Tearfund for Mission Sundays. Donations received at the Crib Service were in support of the Macari Foundation (a local charity supporting homeless people).

- Collection of food for distribution by the local Foodbank continues – see individual reports.
- The Reading Room continues to provide a safe place for Betley residents and others to meet. In 1997 this project was just a vision. In 2017, the Operating Arrangements document describes the Reading Room’s function as providing, a ‘living presence of the church in the Community in a practical way.’ It provides facilities relevant to people’s needs and a neutral link between those who share directly in the life of the church and those who don’t. The Committee and the large team of volunteers represent the variety of people who meet there, and the PCC is very appreciative of all their hard work and commitment. Among the volunteers on a Saturday morning you may find a young person, learning about ‘community service’ as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
- Refreshments are provided after Sunday Church Services (mornings), and this provides a chance to chat, share personal news and relax.

Ministry

- Harvest Festival and Christingle Services were held in Church.
- In 2023 there were: 3 Marriages, 4 Baptisms (involving 3 families) and 10 Funerals/ 1 Graveside Burial, 2 Funeral-Only Services/6 internment of ashes.
- As mentioned above the pattern of Sunday services is very varied.
- Our well-established Fellowship Groups continue to meet in the Reading Room.
- The Choir are to be thanked for all their efforts especially as many have faced challenges on a personal level.
- Further details on many of the items contained in this Report are to be found in individual activity reports which follow.

Priorities for 2024/25

- To develop new ways of advancing our Mission ‘to celebrate Christ’s love, grow in Christ’s love, share Christ’s love and welcome and encourage others’.
- To further develop the Children’s, Youth and Families Ministry.
- As a Dementia Friendly Church, we will further develop our ministry to those who live with dementia and to their carer.
- To actively work towards ensuring that our church is as accessible to all as possible through guidance of the diocesan ‘Enabling All Network’.
- Closely monitor and manage finances at a time when income is still reduced to ensure we are able to remain a positive position. We are grateful to our treasurer Graham Holton for his diligence and firm guidance.

Electoral Roll 2023/24 *by Jenni and Graham Nixon*

Before the APCM and in accordance with the Church Representation Rules, the church Electoral Roll has been revised. There are 74 members on the Electoral Roll.

Financial Review 2023 by Graham Holton, Treasurer

The accompanying Financial Statements illustrate the movement in each of the PCC Funds in respect of the year ended 31st December 2023. The opening and closing balances of each Fund are shown on the Statement of Assets and Liabilities. **End of year funds totalled £100,216** compared with £102,860 the previous year. The following additional notes are of particular relevance (*figures in £ only*):

Total Income

- **Planned Giving** at £25,088 was **£1,654 down** on the previous year. Following the end of Covid 19 restrictions and the reopening of St Margaret's and all other churches for worship there has been a move of some parishioners to other churches and this has reduced planned giving. The Cost-of-Living Crisis has also impacted on planned giving.
- **General Collections** at £4,244 were **£1,089 up** on 2022. This is a reflection of the church being open for worship the whole of 2023.
- **Collections at Baptisms, Funerals and Weddings** at £960 were **£43 up** on the previous year, again a reflection of the church reopening for weddings, baptisms and funerals.
- **Gift Aid Tax Recovered** for General Fund at £7,382 was **£76 down** on the 2022 figure, a reflection of the reduction in planned giving.
- **Net income from fees** (weddings, funerals etc) at £11,136 **down £204** on 2022 figure, certainly not a material change and no concern needs be raised.
- **Legacies** – A Legacy of £2,500 was received during 2023 and was allocated to the Special Projects Fund. We give our sincere thanks for this generous legacy.

General Fund

Expenses were again controlled as well as possible during 2023. There have been major cost pressures resulting from the Cost-of-Living Crisis and general price rises following Covid 19 reopening.

- **Church Running Expenses** at £3,061 were **£914 down** on the previous year.
- Utility Bills (oil and electricity) at £3,741 were **£1,063 up** on 2022, this increase is smaller than expected, luckily milder weather has saved on heating oil, the use of the Reading Room for church meetings has also saved costs.
- **Church Maintenance Costs** at £3,445 were **£2,121 up** on 2022. With a building the age of St Margaret's maintenance costs will vary quite dramatically from year to year. In 2023 we required roof repairs costing £1,140, heating system repairs totalling £560 and electrical repairs £286 all unavoidable.
- **Upkeep of Services** at £668 was **£251 up** on 2022. This however was a good result as the increase was due to bell ringing at weddings. A delight for all.
- **Sundry Expenditure Costs** at £1444 were **£436 up** on 2022; this was the result of the ciborium requiring repair.
- **Parish Share payments** of £31,069 (2022 £33,894) were made during the year. The Parish Share was paid fully to date at the end of 2023 and obligations for 2024 amount to £27,658, a useful reduction.

- The General Fund showed a **revenue deficit £8,405 for 2023** so an end of year transfer to Special Projects Fund in accordance with the PCC's Reserves Policy has not been possible.

Churchyard Maintenance Fund

- Total costs of upkeep and maintenance of the churchyard amounted to £4,408. All costs relate to grass cutting, hedge repair and water. Grants of £2,320 were received by the fund (2022 £2,563). A transfer of £2,000 from Magazine Fund enabled the fund to carry forward a balance of £10,570 at the year end.

Church Fabric Fund

- The fund had a 2023 end of year balance of £3,113 (2022 - £5,873).

Flower Fund

- The fund had a 2023 end of year balance of £332, no change over the year.

Magazine Fund

- The Magazine Fund generated a surplus of income over production costs enabling a transfer of £2,000 to be made to the Churchyard Maintenance Fund (2022 £1,948) in accordance with PCC Reserves Policy. The end of year balance of £2,294 reflects receipt of advertising income and subscriptions for 2023. The Fund is budgeted to make a surplus in 2024.

Special Projects Fund (Designated)

- The Fund benefitted from a generous legacy of £2,500 in 2023 which increased this capital fund. At the 2023 year end the balance of this fund was £64,149 (2022 £61,649). This fund will be used to fund the CYFM position.

Special Projects Fund (Restricted)

- This fund had a Nil balance at the end of the year (2022 £Nil).

Reading Room Fund

- The Reading Room has benefited from the relaxation of Covid restrictions and has been back to normal opening. In addition, use has increased due to the cost of heating making it preferable for meetings to be held in the Reading Room rather than the church. This has resulted in a surplus of £1,776 (2022 surplus £2,428), the fund carried forward a balance of £16,645. (2022 £14,871).

Reserves Policy

Throughout the year the PCC has been fully aware of its financial obligations and regular reports have been received from its Treasurer. It is PCC policy to invest its reserve funds with the CBF Church of England Deposit Fund or other UK financial institution approved by PCC. In accordance with prudent account guidelines its Reserves Policy is regularly reviewed by PCC. The end of year financial position was in line with the current Reserves Policy, a copy of which can be obtained email request from graham.holton@btinternet.com.

Ongoing Financial Position

It is pleasing that despite the Cost-of-Living Crisis and increased costs of goods following Covid that the General Fund generated a smaller than budgeted deficit in 2023.

A formal budget for General Fund has been prepared for 2024 which will be considered by PCC and monitored throughout the year. 2024 will be another challenging year where continuing efforts need to be made to optimise income whilst continuing a tight control over costs. The Treasurer will continue to monitor all income and expenditure trends on a monthly and cumulative basis with reports given at PCC meetings. The PCC expects to meet its financial obligations in 2024 and beyond although the financial challenges being faced continue to be well acknowledged.

Warden's Fabric, Goods & Ornaments Report *by Jennifer Walton*

Routine Inspection of the Headstones

This was carried out in both graveyards in Summer 2023. A further inspection will be carried out in 2024 and any unstable stones will be laid down. We are still trying to make contact with the family of an unstable stone which was identified in 2022 and laid down; this has latterly included contact with the Betley Local History Society.



Grass Cutting and General Garden Maintenance

This continues to be carried out by a contractor for both burial grounds. We are also very grateful to Derrick Eglin for voluntarily keeping the main footpath tidy again this year.

Church Footpath

The surface is very worn, particularly close to the main door and towards the tower door. The Church Architect did provide a specification to resurface and repair the path in 2022, however, this was very costly and the PCC decided not to proceed at that time. This matter has been raised again and the current PCC is looking at different options and exploring other ways of managing this. In the meantime, all the loose gravel has been swept up and removed.

Burials

As reported last year, the area to the south-east of the central path is now closed for further burials, however there is still space in the 'Garden of Rest' for the internment of ashes on that side of the graveyard.

Main Entrance

Serious problems have become evident to the south/west corner of the roof and guttering by the main door, leading to ingress of water during heavy rain fall. We are seeking a specification and quote.

Planting

The Wildlife Garden is now complete due to the combined efforts of both the School and the Church Eco Groups.

Illumination of East and War Memorial Windows from outside

This work was finally completed and recognition is given to Jeff Gibson for many hours of work together with Peter Ainsworth. The East Window looked amazing for our special Passiontide Service last month.

Boiler Room Ceiling

This is always damp – the project to ‘seal’ the brick work is now on hold partly due to. A divergence of opinion as to the best solution.

General

Both a thorough Health and Safety and a Safeguarding Procedural Review was carried out in early 2024 following the appointment of two new coordinators, namely Gill Mellor as Health & Safety Co-ordinator, and Jean Ainsworth as Safeguarding Officer.

Goods and Ornaments

One silver pattern has been misplaced but to the best of our knowledge all other items and goods remain the same.

The Ciborium was repaired as discussed last year using a grant from the Bonfire Committee.

The Quinquennial inspection is due later this year and no doubt many issues and expensive problems will be high lighted.

Deanery Synod *by Linda Hough*

Representatives from churches across the Newcastle Deanery meet three times a year. Everyone is welcome to attend these open meetings which are another opportunity to share fellowship, hear news from other parishes and to pray for our wider church family.

Our current elected synod members are Linda and Rick Hough, and Ann Deavall. Below is a summary of this year’s meetings; you can request a copy of the full Minutes if required from Linda or Ann.



22nd May 2023

St Michaels and All Angels Church, Cross Heath

“Church Heating & Net Zero Carbon by 2030”

by John Polhill

After a short act of worship, we heard from our guest speaker John Polhill, a former Chair of the Church of England’s Energy Advisers Network, and retired Sustainability Adviser for the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) in October 2021. The key points raised by John were as follows:

- Churches energy use generally falls into 3 categories in order of energy usage - large churches open on a regular basis, medium churches open at least 4 days a week, followed by the rest.
- Net zero is about reducing the use of carbon-based energy.
- Carbon offset is through the planting of trees etc.

- Does the Net Zero commitment include the congregation?
- The changes a church needs to make is mainly related to the size, i.e. small churches = small changes.
- Churches can make simple changes to reduce heating costs such as draft proofing and setting the church heating to times closer to the church services.
- The Diocese has 3 heating advisors, but these are advisors to the Chancellor and not to advise the Parishes on the most suitable heating system.
- Churches are left to sort out their own heating problems.

Questions raised following his talk involved the use and fitting of solar panels, heat pumps and the way in which vicarages impact on net zero carbon targets. Overall, these are all complex issues which are different for each church and can involve extra costs to set up, require navigation through strict DAC processes, and unfortunately with very little support.

16th October 2023

St Mary's Church, Knutton

"Setting up a Family and Youth Ministry in Madeley & Betley, Staffordshire"

by Dr Ruth Fish



Yes, our very own Ruth gave a talk about her role in All Saints and St Margaret's !! After providing some background information to her role and sharing some of the activities she has initiated during her time in post, Ruth highlighted the following points:

- Children and families are tending to drift away from church.
- Children need to be not just God-smart but God-connected with their own relationship to God.
- Although Madeley has seen an increase in the number of children attending church, it only represents a small proportion of the number of children living in Madeley village.
- Unless action is taken the number of 10-15 years attending church will be Zero in 10 years.
- People and especially children want to know the Gospel, if we as Church do not do it who will?
- Churches should get actively involved in community activity and events.

Ruth also spoke of her time spent in our local schools:

- Prayer spaces in School. This is an initiative to provide a place in schools where creative ways to pray can be developed to allow the children and adults to explore Prayer.
- Wild Church, (also referred to as Muddy Church and Outdoor Church) where activities take place in the grounds of the church including the use of Prayer stations set up in the grounds.
- Prayer is essential for all the activities.
- Activity in Secondary Schools is a work in progress and for this to be successful, meaningful relationships have to be formed. The church is not there just to 'do assemblies'.



17th January 2024: Online (due to the weather)

Alcohol and Drug Abuse: Introducing 'KEYS Community Detox' (national charity)

By Reverend Malcolm Mycock

We were introduced to a church-based programme for those wishing to detox from alcohol and or drug addiction. Malcolm himself is a recovering alcoholic and his own experience after rehab was the lack of support in the community leading to numerous relapses. He attended Alcoholic Anonymous meetings where acknowledgement of a 'higher power' underpins their 12-step programme, but he wanted a programme that acknowledged God and he discovered KEYS, a national charity. This is based on three 'keys' namely community, spiritual and medical. His own experience is that those people with addictions he has come into contact with are 'hungry' for the Gospel. So much so, there are now two groups running in Stoke on Trent at the moment (Park Church, Shelton and St John's, Abbey Hulton). The groups are run by volunteers from the church after receiving training from the national charity.

An Update of Prayers of Love and Faith

During our Deanery Synod meetings, we also heard from Chris Gill, Lay Vice Chair of Newcastle Deanery Synod and also a member of General Synod regarding a change in Canon Law regarding this seven-year long project for which he asked everyone to pray for all those involved in making decisions and for the impact on the church as a whole.



"The Prayers of Love and Faith are resources to pray with and for a same-sex couple who are committed to one another in faithfulness and love. They are intended to enable those who wish to give thanks for and joyfully mark that commitment before God and their community of faith." Bishop Helen-Ann Hartley.

"We know not everyone in the Church of England agrees on these important questions which go to the heart of who we are – about people's lives, their love and our shared faith. This is reflected in the House of Bishops, where there remain different views on the best ways to proceed." Bishop Martyn Snow.

"These Prayers are offered as pastoral provision. It is our prayer that they can be used with grace and understanding. Sharing them will be a blessing to the whole Church."

The House of Bishops agreed by 24 votes to 11, with three abstentions, in favour of a motion to make the *Prayers of Love and Faith* resources available with effect from December 17.

The Church's understanding of marriage – or Holy Matrimony – remains as a lifelong, faithful and exclusive covenant between one man and one woman. Yet some may wish to recognise the commitment same-sex couples make to each other and publicly pray for God's blessing on them. (Church of England)

Report of Activities: Celebrating Christ's Love

The Bellringers *by Robert Bailey*

We have 9 ringers who are all members of the North Staffs Association of Change Ringers. Whilst this seems a reasonable number for 6 bells, we sometimes struggle for ringers due to holidays and illness. Anyone interested in learning to ring will be made most welcome and introduced to a challenging but enjoyable pastime.

We are very grateful for the contribution Josie Martin has made to our ringing since moving to Madeley.

It has been a sad and difficult year; in May we lost our good friend Denzil. Denzil was my vice-captain and was always very supportive with the ringing and maintenance of the bells. I recall not long ago having to remove the second bell clapper because the bearing was too tight, the bearing was eased and replacing it involved Denzil crawling under the bell because the clapper bends at the bearing, and replacing it was difficult but with Sue's assistance, we succeeded. The normal maintenance of the bells is being carried out by the ringers.

I have been absent from ringing many times this year due to an operation on my arm and the death of my wife Helen, thankfully the ringers have carried on admirably without me.

We have had a number of visiting ringers including the North Staffs Association and the Open University Society of ringers.

I wish to thank all our ringers for their enthusiasm and commitment throughout the year.

Church Music *by Kevin Hamer*

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Colossians 3.16

Alison Hendricken

Last summer after 6 years as our organist, Alison Hendricken decided to stand down from the role and move on to new pastures. We were very sad to see her go but thank her sincerely for her music and her commitment to St. Margaret's and the choir in that time – a time which included the testing period of Covid in which she provided accompaniment in different innovative ways for both Church and on-line.

Music in worship

Despite extensive advertising and publicity no-one has come forward to pick up the role of organist at St. Margaret's but with careful planning ahead it has been possible to provide organ or piano support for our music in worship. Grateful thanks go to Stewart Smith from Whitchurch and Geoffrey Walker from Newcastle who are currently able to cover 75% of Sunday mornings between them. Gratitude also to Lyndon Hills from Wybunbury and locally Fenella Head and Alison Hendricken for helping over the last 12 months; especial thanks to Geraldine Luckhurst for her commitment to the Carol Service and the rehearsals it necessitated.

By dint of innovative arrangements for rehearsal, our church choir has been able to continue leading our worship every Sunday morning, giving a vocal lead to our hymn singing and contributing special music and anthems to suit the occasion.



The Choir - since November the choir has increased slightly to 15 adults 'on the books' and we thank them for their willingness to sing every Sunday and come to Friday practices not only to prepare music but also to enjoy fellowship.

There is plenty of room for new members – especially ladies to sing the melody line, and we encourage people to come and give singing with us a try ... no initial commitment necessary!

The organ and piano

Our organ is kept in excellent playing condition thanks to the maintenance contract we have with Jim Molyneux. Our Roland electric piano continues to work well but may need some attention in the coming year.



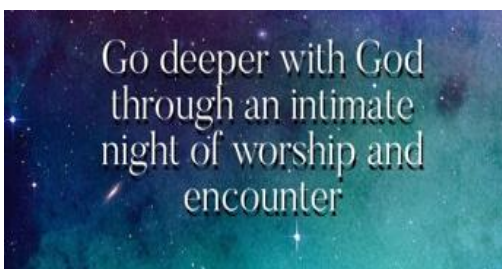
Special Services

Yet again (albeit with a smaller choir of a 12 singers) we were able to celebrate Christmas with an exciting Carol Service telling the nativity story with traditional congregational carols and special Choir carols, accompanied by Geraldine Luckhurst.

This Passiontide a special service of music and reflection - *The Way of the Cross* - is planned.

Although church weddings have reduced in number considerably in recent years, the choir sang in one in 2023 and has the prospect of at least two in 2024.

Living Streams by Reverend Dot Woods



“Fruit trees will grow all along this river and produce fresh fruit every month. The leaves will never dry out, because they will always have water from the stream that flows from the temple, and they will be used for healing people”.
Ezekiel 47:12 (CEV)

We meet on the first Sunday of the month at All Saints Madeley.

The team presently consists of Nick and Ann Deavall, Ed Jervis, Kath and Dave Whitefoot and myself. Evie Watson has been accompanying Ed as he leads us in worship over the past few months, and we are delighted she has wanted to do this.

We are currently leading our monthly meetings, using as a framework, the 'Five Marks of Mission' which encourages us to seek Jesus, and share the gospel in various ways. In July's meeting we will conclude this present bible-based series with an Agape Meal, before we break for August.

We have been slowly increasing in numbers, and currently have about 27 adults and 7 children attending regularly. We meet at 6pm and commence at 6.30; ending loosely at 7.30 but any who would like to are encouraged to stay on a while longer as we continue in contemporary worship and prayer.



Dementia Friendly Church & Enabling All *by Linda Hough*

The diocese has Dementia Friendly Churches Local Networks which meet on Zoom every four months to share ideas and practice and I continue to attend these wherever possible. The

Diocesan Dementia Friendly Church Enabler, Sarah Thorpe, is a great source of support and information, and encourages all churches to work towards being a **'Dementia-Friendly Church'** and this 'look' different for each church depending on its layout and the range of symptoms a person with dementia may have, and of course support for their carer/s.

Listening to where we're at...



Professor Peter Kevern, Professor of Values and Social Care at Staffordshire University has been involved with the dementia-friendly church initiative from the very beginning. In 2020, his research findings confirmed that our dementia-friendly church work on raising awareness about dementia can have a real, community-level change on how welcoming and hospitable our churches are, improving the experience of people living with dementia if they turn up at that church. The next stage is a collaborative research project to see what now works in a dementia-friendly church network and the impact it is having on people affected by dementia in those churches and communities across the diocese. This involves a greater provision of training for members of the church and the diocese are planning to run online 'bite-sized training sessions' which anyone can attend, and I will provide details of these once available.

I have suggested to PCC an improved way of displaying/sharing information at the back of church and we are to have a new 'display area' ... watch this space for details!!

Dementia predicted to overtake the incidence of cancer. In 2021, it was estimated that there were over 13,600 older people in Staffordshire living with Dementia and that its prevalence is set to

increase by a further 3,500 by 2030. By 2025, it's estimated that over one million people in the UK will have a diagnosis of dementia – and almost all of us will know someone living with the condition. It is for these reasons that dementia awareness remains high on the church's agenda.

In response to the pledges agreed upon last year:

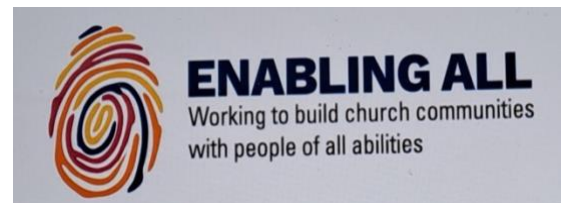
- I introduced the Diocesan Dementia-Friendly Schools Network to Ruth Fish to share with Betley Primary School
- I arranged a dementia-focused Sunday Service in May 2023
- I purchased two copies of the Diocesan recommended books 'God's Not Forgotten Me: Experiencing Faith in Dementia' for use in church as a reference book as well as the Reading Room.

Moving forward, I have worked with and agreed with Sarah, Diocesan Dementia Friendly Enabler:

- To develop a resource file to include sources of credible information and training/workshops in how to support those affected by dementia.
- To use our pew sheet to add a quote or a fact from the above resource file and books each month (as pledged last year but not achieved) as a way of raising awareness of this illness
- To encourage members of the church to write a prayer or use a piece of Scripture or a poem that can be displayed in church each month to raise awareness and show support to anyone visiting the church affected by dementia. Or a piece of artwork. Or even a floral display? We can be as creative as we want!!

If anyone has any other suggestions or would like to join me in this supportive ministry, please do get in touch.

As included in my report last year, there are of course several serious illnesses, long term conditions and disabilities which impact on a person's day to day functioning. St Margaret's is committed to the safety and the comfort of those attending and visiting our church.



1 in 6 people (at least!) live with some kind of physical or mental impairment. Some are hidden. Many are not spoken about.

Jesus spent lots of his time and energy showing us that no-one is excluded from knowing and experiencing the love of God.

As always, if anyone would like to help with this, please let me know.

The Reading Room *by Audrey Darlington*



The Reading Room continues to be an important part of village life for many people and the number of people attending in January/February this year increased by 56% over the similar period last year. Our finances have now recovered to pre-Covid levels in spite of much increased costs. Taster Talks are always well supported and often attract people who don't come in at other times, as do our Bank Holiday walks, with associated refreshments. The Book Exchange and Foodbank Collection continue.

We have again played host to a volunteer doing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Volunteering Module.



Some significant birthdays have been celebrated this year but sadly we have lost Jean Mabey who, from the very beginning of the restored Reading Room, played a big part in the interior colour schemes and was a committee member until two years ago. She is greatly missed.



On 6th May 2023 we live-streamed the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla and at the appropriate point in the service we proposed a toast to our new King with a glass of Prosecco. The live-streaming was particularly appreciated by those who would otherwise have been



streamed the Coronation of King Charles III the appropriate point in the service we King with a glass of Prosecco. The live-streaming was particularly appreciated by those who would otherwise have been watching it alone at home.

In July we took part in the Betley Show Scarecrow Competition to portray something Victorian. Our subject was Florence Nightingale who, as a friend of the Tollet family of Betley Hall, was a visitor to Betley and sailed on the pool behind Betley Hall Gardens.



When the hairdresser's shop behind the Reading Room came on the market in the Summer, we looked into the possibility of purchasing it but when everything had been considered we decided against it.

In January/February this year we acted as a village collection point for Dr. Patel's Retirement contributions from his patients.

If you would like to become a Reading Room Volunteer, we would love to hear from you - please speak to Kevin or Audrey.

As someone said: 'Words cannot really reflect the fun, often comfort, and the way people are so often helped by just being with others in the Reading Room.'



Report of Activities: Growing Christ's Love

Children, Youth and Families Ministry *by Ruth Fish*

Earlybirds

Earlybirds continues to meet on the 3rd Sunday of each month in the vestry at the back of church. I prepare and lead the sessions but have a small team of helpers who take it in turns to come and help out. Attendance is variable, ranging from 0-4. However, it is a lovely group and we always have lots of fun when we meet. We continue to use the Energize materials from Urban Saints. A challenge to growing this group is that it only meets monthly which makes it difficult to gather any momentum. However, running the group more frequently would require more manpower which is a challenge.

Family Worship

The morning services for the first Sundays of each month have been 'Family Worship' during the last year. I have regularly been involved in planning and leading these services alongside several others. The services have intentionally been planned to be informal, intergenerational and interactive. However, the challenge of providing this style of service when the number of families present is few or none, has been recognised. After discussion at ministry team and PCC, these services will be changing to 'Morning Praise'. We will continue to explore other options for family-friendly worship, outside of the 9.30 Sunday morning service.

Wild Church

Between April and October 2023, we experimented with a monthly 'Wild Church' in St Margaret's churchyard. This drew on resources from Forest Church and Muddy Church and various books on outdoor worship. It also made use of a large bell tent which had recently been purchased by All Saints, Madeley. We experimented with different kinds of activities each month. There was lots of space to be creative and reflective. I'm very grateful to the small team who faithfully came a long each month, come rain or shine, to help out. Numbers were variable but never huge. Some of the advantages were that it gave space for people who prefer to be on the go and active all the time to be able to worship really freely. Likewise, there was space to spend unlimited time just reflecting quietly on a single poem or a psalm. It was a great learning experience and there are lots of ideas to take forward as we consider plans for future family-friendly worship provision.

Churchyard

As well as using the churchyard for Wild Church, we also used it for an outdoor prayer spaces activity with the school last summer. It has been good to be able to make use of the Wild Area in the far end of the 'new' churchyard. Wild Church have placed mini bug hotels and bird feeders in the area and the school Eco Group is currently designing posters for the area. I recognise that we are blessed with really special outside space and have been looking at ways to facilitate people from the community and beyond being blessed by spending time here. I am currently in the process of developing 2 trail leaflets for the churchyard. One is an historical trail which will point out various points of interest. The other will be a reflection trail, encouraging people to wonder as they wander and to stop, pause, be still and reflect.

Youth Group

The Youth Group has now been meeting for a year back in the Reading Room. We started with 12 young people, dipped slightly but are back up to 12 again, although it is worth noting that the majority live in Madeley or attend due to links with All Saints or Sir John Offley school. What is really exciting is that over half the group are 'unchurched'. I am very grateful to those who have helped out during the year and to Kevin and Audrey who facilitate our use of the Reading Room. We play a lot of silly games, eat a lot of snacks and have lots of fun. We also explore faith along the way and are currently working through some of Youth Alpha resources, in a very low-key, relaxed way. In August, a very small group of us went as day visitors to Limitless, the annual youth festival of the Elim churches, which happens at the Staffordshire showground. This was a really good day out, with some great teaching, inspiring seminars and uplifting worship.

Schools

This is a really exciting and fruitful area of work. We have continued to build on the good relationship that we have with the school during this year. I am now regularly in school 2-3 times a week with various extra activities at different points in the year. We are now in a pattern of providing a series of lessons for each class on the school's Christian values, at the start of the school year. We also get invited in at other points to do occasional lessons linked to the RE curriculum. I continue to help out at the weekly lunchtime Eco club. This group looks after the school's garden as well as raising awareness in school of various environmental issues. It's a lovely way to spend time with the children and staff. They were very proud when they harvested some of their own vegetables to sell back in the summer. The school come into church once a fortnight for Collective Worship which is always a joyful time. It is lovely to see children really enjoying being in church and engaging with the teaching and worship. The school also use the church for seasonal services which this year included Harvest, the Christmas Tree service and Nativity services. Some children have also come along to the Sunday Harvest, Remembrance, Christingle and Mothering Sunday services where they have contributed with songs and poems.

In January, the school underwent a SIAMS inspection which seeks to assess whether church schools are fulfilling their Christian vision and values. The school's report was excellent and commented on the good relationship between the church and school: *'There is an excellent and mutually beneficial partnership with the clergy, church community, and the parish youth and families' worker. This enables significant and impactful support for worship and many other elements of the life of the community.'*

Betley Tots

This toddler group, which previously met in the Village Hall, now meets weekly in the school hall. Although church has no oversight or responsibility for the group I continue to attend as an extra pair of helping hands, a helper with Facebook admin and a link person for the church. This is a really lovely group which it's a joy to be part of.

Final Thoughts

There are many things for which I am grateful this year. I am particularly grateful for all those who have helped out with the various groups and activities mentioned above. Those things would not happen

without that help. I am also very grateful for the wonderful relationship I have with the school. I am so pleased that all the effort the staff put in to ensuring that the school lives out its vision and values was recognised in its SIAMS inspection. It has also been great to see so many children and families keen to be involved in various seasonal services throughout the year.

As I look forward to the next year, I'm hoping that we can explore more ways of building on the good relationships we have with families in the community to offer spaces for worship that are welcoming, engaging and accessible, particularly to those who would not usually access normal Sunday services. It is wonderful to know what it is to be loved by God, and my hope and prayer is that more people in this community would get to know that for themselves.

Fellowship Groups *by all group co-ordinators*

“Let us not give up meeting together, but let us encourage one another!” (Hebrews 10:25)

Our Fellowship Groups continue to regularly meet in the heart of the village, in the Reading Room, and are a great way for us all to deepen our understanding and faith, to develop friendships, to share with and learn from each other... and test out some tasty treats in the process!

It is such a blessing to have this opportunity to come together in God's name beyond the usual Sunday Services, with overall numbers across the three groups remaining between 25 -30. The groups are self-organising but under the general oversight of St Margaret's Ministry Team and in particular Reverend Dorothy Woods.

Just Desserts ! (1st & 3rd Wednesdays at 19.30) *Co-ordinators – Ann & Nick Deavall 01270 877821*

Throughout Autumn we followed a digital course entitled “Life Explored” which asks “what's the best gift God could give you?” It was challenging, thought provoking and prompted some great discussions! The group are currently digging into 1 Corinthians, exploring the various themes St Paul wrote about to the young, vibrant church in Corinth, many issues which are still very relevant to today's world. We are continuing to support Sanctus, St. Mark's Shelton, a local Christian charity whose work and commitment to refugees and asylum seekers.

Puddings ! (Every other Tuesday at 19.30) *Co-ordinator – Linda Hough 01630 642924*

After completing our bible study ‘It is well’ by Sarah Koontz (which centred around six well known hymns, the history behind them, their authors and the influences and inspiration to worship God in this way, through music), we have embarked on ‘Understanding the bible’ based on John Stott's book of the same name. Our journey began with the purpose of the bible, its geographical and historical context, its Old and New Testament story with some cultural insights along the way, before delving into the message of the bible, as well as exploring its authority and our interpretation of it, and now the final chapter, the use of the bible, is in sight. This has been an interesting but sometimes challenging way in which to learn more about our faith through our relationship with the bible and our understanding of it.

Searching Issues ! (1st & 3rd Tuesdays 10.00 – 12.00) *Co-ordinator – Sadie Blankley 01270 829128*
There are nine members in this group. At the start of the year, we continued our journey

through The Acts of the Apostles. When this was complete, we had a series of sessions hearing about group members' favourite hymns – each person choosing one and explaining why it was important to them. Over the following months we looked at some passages from Isaiah; discussed the (sometimes surprising) roles of women in the Bible; and explored Christian responses to contemporary issues such as homelessness and human trafficking. In the second half of the year, we studied 'Spiritual Gifts' with one of the Lifebuilder Guides, and in Advent went back to Isaiah.

Joint Events

All three groups came together on the evening of Tuesday 5th September 2023, in the Reading Room, for our Annual Summer Fellowship Party. As our get-together was later than usual in the year, it was felt to be more appropriate to meet in the Reading Room rather than Lakeside, Betley Hall Gardens. We certainly missed the beautiful setting overlooking the lake and the kind hospitality of Lesley and Martin Wooliscroft but after a short uplifting service, we enjoyed scrumptious refreshments brought by each member... and there was much conversation and laughter.

Publicity

The existence and activities of the three Groups continue to be kept in the 'public eye' through references on the weekly pew sheet, St Margaret's website and through word of mouth recommendations.

New Members Welcome

If anyone is interested in joining one of our groups, you will be made to feel most welcome whilst sharing in fellowship, exploring your faith, and learning more about our loving God.

Report of Activities: Sharing Christ's Love

Eco Church Group *by Reverend Tim Watson*



After receiving the A Rocha UK Bronze award in 22/23, the Eco Group has had a quieter 23/24 but continues to be involved in the annual cycle of creation-related services at St. Margaret's. The group really needs a co-ordinator to push things forward. If anyone feels called to help with this important ministry, please get in touch.

Charitable Giving by Graham Holton

St. Margaret's PCC | Summary of Charitable Giving | Financial Year Ended 31 December 2023

It was the policy of the PCC to focus its charitable giving for 2023 on 4 pre-determined Christian or other charitable causes in the UK and abroad, in addition to meeting its commitments to the Lichfield Diocese.

(Amounts rounded to the nearest £)

	2022	2023
Voluntary Income	£	£
Planned Giving	26,742	25,088
Tax Recovered	7,458	7,382
Other Collections and Giving	<u>5,388</u>	<u>8,347</u>
TOTAL	<u>39,588</u>	<u>40,817</u>
Payments Made		
Lichfield Diocese Mutual Support Fund (Element of Parish Share above allocated costs of ministry)	5,649	5,649
Grants – Relief/Development		
Christian Aid		420
TearFund	495	510
Grants – Home		
Sanctus St Mark's	437	
Children's Society	727	563
Grants – Secular		
FoodBank Newcastle under Lyme		300
Macari Foundation	438	664
TOTAL	<u>7,746</u>	<u>8,106</u>
Giving % of Voluntary Income	(19.6%)	(19.9%)
% excluding additional Parish Share	(5.3%)	(6.0%)

Foodbank 2023 by Kevin Hamer

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat” (Matthew 25.35)



Support in the Betley community for the Newcastle Foodbank has continued throughout the last 12 months, facilitated by St. Margaret's.

**Year ending December 2023
the community gave 876 kgs of food.**

This is much appreciated but sadly over 25% less than the previous year, despite tremendous donations at Harvest time and Advent. However, St. Margaret's also gave a cash donation of £250 from the Harvest Festival.

Newcastle Foodbank has recently written to St. Margaret's as follows:

“We really appreciate the ongoing contributions you make - churches are vital partners to us and to the network of Trussell Trust food banks across the UK.

Sadly, food banks are at breaking point and Newcastle Staffs Foodbank has to be here for people in our community who have no other options this winter. The soaring cost of living is driving record numbers of people on the lowest incomes to our food bank – and the amount of help needed is outstripping the donations we're receiving”.

Collection boxes for non-perishable food are available in the porch of the Reading Room and just inside the Church, with contributions being moved to safety every few days prior to periodic trips to the Foodbank warehouse on Parkhouse Industrial Estate.

A frequent update on contributions, with encouragement, is placed in the pew sheet and on Facebook. Also a monthly update is published in the Parish magazine.

Grateful thanks to Di and Ken Eaton who have assisted Kevin Hamer over the year with deliveries to the Foodbank Warehouse.

The Newcastle-Staffs Foodbank exists to help local people in crisis. Local professional people such as doctors, health visitors, social workers, Citizens Advice Bureau staff, welfare officers, the police and probation officers, identify people in need and issue them with vouchers to enable them to obtain emergency food for them and their family for up to 3 days.

People continue to struggle with wage levels or benefit payments which do not cover the essentials of living. The cost of living crisis has hit many people, in particular the rising cost of food and of heating and cooking.

At six distribution centres around the Borough, volunteers meet clients over a cup of tea and 'signpost' them to agencies who can help resolve any longer-term problems they may have.

For more information visit www.newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk

Betley Parish Magazine 2023 *by Ken & Sadie Blankley*

The aim of the magazine is to share news from St. Margaret's church, and from the Methodist chapel as well as general village information. The magazine is an important means of outreach. From the February 2023 the cover price increased to 70p with an annual subscription for 11 issues of £7.00. At the same time the annual cost of advertising in the magazine rose from £35.00 per quarter page to £40.00. At the end of 2023 there was a small turnover of advertisers. Proceeds after deducting printing and postage costs contributed to the maintenance of St. Margaret's churchyards.

Eleven editions were printed at Keele SU Printshop during 2023. These included separate editions in July and August and a combined December/January issue. The print run was 400 copies each month.

The magazine has consistently been between 40 and 44 pages long and we are very grateful to all the contributors who report on both regular and occasional village activities. There has also been an increase in unsolicited articles as people view the magazine as a useful communication channel for Betley and Wrinehill. The printed magazine with its longer shelf-life complements Facebook posts which are more immediate but are then rapidly replaced by new posts.

Many thanks to Sue Cheetham and the distribution team who make sure copies are distributed before 1st of every month. Thanks also to Pam Clarke for reviewing each month's final draft, to Graham Holton for financial advice, and to Lawrence Dyson for website support as needed.

St Margaret's Website *by Lawrence Dyson*

Following the significant changes made to the website last year, this year the website has had relatively few amendments. The theme, plug-ins and WordPress version have been updated where required to ensure the site is secure.

In terms of ongoing work, I add new information to the site when I see particularly newsworthy information in the "Sunday morning take-home supplement". In addition to this, but perhaps not as frequently as I should, I also remove this content when it's past its sell by date. Recent changes have been made to the safeguarding page, for example, following Jean Ainsworth taking on this role from Jennifer. Suggestions for new content or requests for removal of existing content are always gratefully received.

At some point in the future, I still intend to give the site a proper overhaul and move it to a more modern user-friendly template that will hopefully look better and be easier to manage.

St Margaret's Facebook *by Ann Deavall*

As Christians seeking to be witnesses and grow disciples, we must be wherever people congregate ... this includes the world of social media which gives us a great opportunity to reach out to people we cannot connect with in person.

St Margaret's Facebook page is 8 years old; its main aim is to be a platform for sharing information about the services and special events we offer and to increase awareness of how we show Christ's love in the Betley community through missional activities. Regular posts include the weekly Pew Sheet (produced by Audrey Darlington) and Sunday Service schedules.

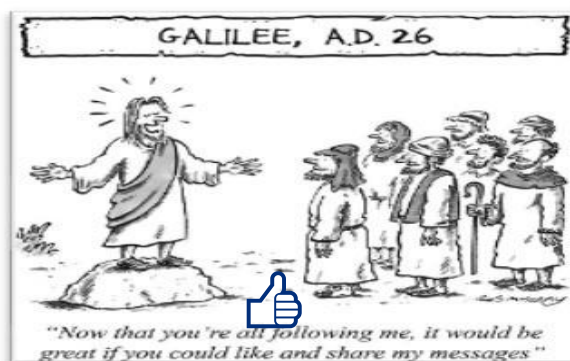


Our online community is a diverse and cherished group, coming from far and wide. The number of followers of our page continues to grow and it is encouraging that there is an increased interest in what we're sharing with people. There is always an increase in activity on our page leading up to Easter and Christmas, when people seek out seasonal events that mark these special times in the Christian calendar. Our online presence is a vital platform for reaching people who may not be regular attendees in the church building but still want to connect with their faith community.

Our team prays the Facebook page continues to be a vital information hub and a safe place of outreach to share God's love with our online congregation. If you do follow us on Facebook please help us spread the good news by clicking, liking and commenting on our posts as we continue to share what God is doing in the Parish of Betley.

You can find us at

<https://www.facebook.com/stmargaretsbetley>



Structure, Governance & Management of St Margaret's Church

The Parochial Church council (PCC) is a corporate body established by the Church of England.

The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure and is a charity exempt from registration with the Charity Commission.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules.

At St Margaret's, the membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent (our vicar), churchwardens, a readers' representative and members elected to the Deanery Synod and the PCC by those members of the congregation who are on the Electoral Roll.

All church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

All PCC members are elected to stand for one year.

Deanery Synod representatives are elected for a period of three years and are members of the PCC on election.

There are three formally constituted groups responsible to the PCC:

- **The Standing Committee**, which is empowered to take specifically delegated or urgent decisions on behalf of the PCC.
- **The Ministry Team**, who share responsibility with the incumbent for the spiritual development and mission of the Parish.
- **The Reading Room Committee**, through a deed (the 'Trust Deed') made between Lichfield Diocesan Trust ('the Trust') and St Margaret's PCC, the Trust 'stands possessed of the Reading Room property' on behalf of the PCC which is the Administrative Trustee. In its capacity as Administrative Trustee, the PCC has appointed a Reading Room Committee to manage the Reading Room in accordance with its aims as defined in the Trust Deed.

Administrative Information

St Margaret's Church is situated in Church Lane, Betley, Crewe, CW3 9AX and is part of the Diocese of Lichfield within the Church of England.

The Parish is held in plurality with All Saints' Church (Madeley), with one Vicar, the Reverend Tim Watson.

Correspondence should be addressed to the PCC Secretary, St Margaret's Church, Church Lane, Betley, Crewe, CW3 9AX.

Parochial Church Council (PCC) Members

Members who have served at any time from 21st May 2023 (the date of the last Annual Parochial Church Meeting) until the date this report was approved are listed below:

Ex Officio Members:

Reverend Tim Watson (Parish Vicar & Chairman)

Jennifer Walton (Church Warden, Reader & Vice Chair)

Deanery Synod Representatives:

Ann Deavall, Linda Hough (also PCC Secretary) and Rick Hough

Elected Members:

Jean Ainsworth, Pamela Clarke, Nick Deavall, Margaret Floyd, Bernard Swift (Church Clerk), Dena Swift and Annie Williams

Duty Wardens:

Jenny Clarke, Di Eaton, Margaret Floyd, Gill Gibson, Gill Mellor and Bernard Swift