



Wantage
Methodist Church

Annual Church Report

2021

The **Methodist** Church 
Official Tea Colours



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From the Manse....

As I write my introduction to this Annual Report some words of my colleague Rev'd Jocelyn Bennett come to mind;

*“One hundred days and counting,
Our normal swept away.
We questioned and we wondered,
We worried and we prayed.
Though everything was different,
Our life turned upside down,
And God was waiting with us
Until we met again “*

Additional verses to this hymn were added to mark the milestones of two hundred, then three hundred days. The last verse goes on to say:

*“Through all of twenty twenty
And into twenty one,
The world has changed completely
From what we've ever known.
The cycles of the seasons,
The glimpse of hope we feel,
For God is hugging tightly
And we shall all be healed “*

Like all good hymns it reminds us of what we have experienced, whilst at the same time reminding us of the hope that is still to come.

I'd like to take this opportunity of thanking all those who have worked so hard to keep our church up and running, enabling the mission and witness of this our 176th year to continue, even as our building has sadly been closed for much of these past twelve months.

As over the coming weeks we begin to re-open for Sunday worship and other activities (subject to Government and Connexional guidance etc.) may we find the time to acknowledge our stories and our losses as well as how in the midst of this pandemic, we have been aware of God's presence.

Together we face the challenge of how to start over again as we look to return to life with fewer restrictions. Reflecting on all that we have been through and recognising that the landscape has changed around us, what will we need to keep and what will we be brave enough to discard? What should our priorities be in this new world that awaits us?

I am certain that together we will rise to the challenges that lie ahead and as we do, experience God's guiding hand leading us onwards.

With love and God Bless,

Keith

A very different year has been a challenging experience for us all. Whether it has been coping with isolation, or trying to keep up with what we can or cannot do, the year has tested us all and, I suspect, distressed us. As a result there is a big hole in this report where we are unable to say anything about work that has had to be suspended.

By the time this is published it will be one year since the public health emergency started. There are many people who we need to thank for their commitment during the year. There are of course all the people involved with the medical and social work in the community including the unsung heroes behind the scenes doing the service work to allow the front line staff to work safely. As we look at the health and care sectors we see a small scale version of our community as a whole. Doctors, nurses and carers are the visible part of the team, who could not do what they do without the cleaners, porters, clerical staff, drivers, technicians and so many more who make sure the place is safe to operate and that people can be communicated with and treated. In the general community there are similarly front line workers who are visible, and support staff, without whom the place would not work. It is a reminder that everyone contributes to the community and without anyone there is a poorer place. This is just as true in the church and while a few are visible, all the church membership works to maintain that network of care and support and we must thank everyone who has done their best to keep contact with, and care for, others through the year.

In one sense the stewards' team has had less to do this year and yet we have worked hard to maintain communications and respond in a timely and responsible way to the ever changing situation. Throughout the year we have been aware that not everyone has the facility to be able to keep in contact over email and the internet. We have worked hard with our pastoral visitor team to communicate with and care for all.

We are particularly grateful for the work Keith and the other members of the Circuit staff have put in to provide imaginative and inspiring worship materials. His use of "YouTube" and "Zoom" has encouraged us during the year. Ensuring that material has been available to print and distribute has given us the opportunity to keep the whole church involved.

Many of us have come to terms with "Zoom" for worship, meeting and social contact. This has been stranger for some than others and we recognize that not everyone has been able to share. Good things have come out of the "Zoom" experience. People have got to know others across the circuit. We now have another tool to try to help people join in worship or conversations even though they are not able to physically attend at the chapel. Full internet access is now available in the church building and we have started to explore how we can best share what is happening in the building with people unable to be there.

In the brief period that we could have some services in chapel, it was a rather strange experience with limited access, no singing and no real social contact before or after. However they were a start and it is expected that we shall start again after the "May" key date.

Much of the effort and ideas to celebrate Wantage 175 came to naught. We did welcome monthly special preachers with whom we had made arrangements to come as part of the celebrations. We were pleased to share their presence with the circuit. Thanks are due to all who did the work to prepare for the year even if it was blown away by the Storm "Covid".

We are especially grateful to Keith this year for all he has done to find new ways of doing things. His dedication to caring for all and sharing the Gospel is an inspiration to us all. His year has had its issues over and above the business of looking after Wantage, Grove and Childrey. In the autumn he should have been walking the Camino (path of pilgrimage across northern Spain) but that did not happen. This is now deferred until he can have access to Spain again. Liz has retired and they are entertaining themselves cultivating an allotment.

The stewards' team has been blessed with Alison Phillip's service and dedication for the last few years and she now comes to the end of her term. We owe her a major vote of thanks for the quiet caring and leadership she always offers to us all. As those who have been contributing to the tasks of the "church rota" know too well, behind that smile is someone who is expert at unobtrusively twisting your arm! Thank you, Alison, for all you do in the life of the church.

As we start up again we are going to be seeking new ways of doing things. New Stewards are needed and we also have to find a Treasurer. The "church rota" will undoubtedly be different and we will have to see what we will have the resources to do.

Pastoral

Ann Barber

Realising that it's twenty years since writing my first report for the Church Annual Meeting, having just taken over as Pastoral Secretary from Jenny Whymark in 2001, I couldn't resist looking back at some of our previous records, and reflecting on the changes during that time. Here are a few of the many:

- We had 21 Pastoral Visitors, of which one third are still 'in post', and our current total is 22
- Our membership was 141 and is now exactly 100
- Our oldest member, resident in a Care Home, was 104 – Graham will be 99 in September, but lives at home and worships with us regularly either in church or on Zoom
- A new, credit card style membership card was trialled but didn't survive. Complaints included its likeness to a store loyalty card, and the absence of the fish symbol

During the past year, sadly four members of our church family have died.

On Good Friday, Doug White, who had been in Wantage Nursing Home for almost two years, passed away just a short while before his 80th birthday. His funeral took place a warm, sunny day in May, at his graveside in East Challow cemetery. Keith held a short but uplifting and reassuring service despite lockdown restrictions, and

eight others, representing our wider church family, were able to attend and to offer greatly appreciated support to Marjorie and Colin.

On 23rd April, Pam Rose died in Wantage Nursing Home where she had been a resident for a year and a half. Kelvin had previously looked after her devotedly at home until specialised nursing care was needed. Pam is remembered with deep affection as an active, longstanding and loyal member of our church, holding many different roles including as a church Steward. We give thanks for Pam's service to our church, and the friendships she shared, the memories of which are cherished. Whilst a Thanksgiving Service in church to celebrate Pam's life wasn't allowed, technology made it possible for the funeral to be live-streamed from the Crematorium, enabling many of our church family to share in it.

In May, Sheila Penney, also a resident at Wantage Nursing Home, died there too. Whilst well enough to worship with us, Sheila was an enthusiastic member, and enjoyed several of the weekday groups as well.

The fourth loss, in December, was Ian Campbell. Although he had not attended Church for many years, Ian's membership was longstanding, and he will be remembered for his service to the local Wantage community.

During the year there were several happy occasions which would ordinarily have been celebrated after a morning service, and enjoyed by the whole church family. Lockdown restrictions altered our usual social activities drastically, but didn't cancel them completely. Between them, Geoffrey Stokell, Gill and Gordon Skidmore and Liz Underhill had a range of milestone events to celebrate - a 90th birthday, Golden Wedding Anniversary, 60th birthday and retirement. Adhering to all of the rules relating to social contact, each of these special events was acknowledged and celebrated in safe and happy ways, and the warmth of good wishes and love from the whole church family was conveyed to them, even if in creatively unusual ways.

In November we said goodbye to Sharon Hayford as she prepared to return to her family in Accra, from whom she had been separated for nearly twelve years. Sharon's contribution to every aspect of our church life was enthusiastic, wholehearted, dedicated and characterised by the depth of her Christian faith, which she radiated perpetually. A Zoom Farewell was our only option, but it was a wonderful means by which messages of affection and gratitude for all that Sharon did for our church could be expressed. A generous cheque, some small gifts with special significance, [including a WMC apron earned by her inimitable attachment to washing up after church lunches], and a memory book of photos and messages were presented to her. Everyone will miss Sharon, but we can maintain contact by Whatsapp, and it's good to know that she is settling back well into the Ghanaian way of family and church life.

I am woefully conscious of our need for a new Church Directory, as promised for 2020. This time last year all the preparations were in place for gathering everyone's contact details, and more crucially, mandatory permission for their publication from every individual listed in the directory. GDPR legislation does not allow us to assume continued permission from earlier editions, neither is verbal agreement adequate. Lockdown completed sabotaged the plan for obtaining this, and prohibited visiting

every household to acquire it. I am hopeful that we can make progress in the coming months. In the meantime, please get in touch with me if you need a specific address or phone number so that I can facilitate this process for you.

We greatly appreciate Keith's dedication in offering pastoral care to all of our church family, and the guidance and support to everyone to whom the privilege of being a Pastoral Visitor is entrusted. His immediate response to every pastoral need is a blessing which we all value deeply

As in every aspect of our church life, 2020 to 2021 has been unique in its differences, challenges and opportunities. Our pastoral care of each other has been expressed in varied and unusual ways, but never lacking or neglected. What follows in 2021 to 2022 is beyond our knowing, but we are certain of the promise we can all trust with great thankfulness – as it appears on this year's membership cards: "The best of all is, God is with us". That is a promise to which we cling, not just in the coming year, but forever.

Communion Stewards

Eileen Rennie

Sadly during the period April 2020 to March 2021, due to Covid 19 restrictions, we have not been able to serve Holy Communion. When restrictions finally allow us to serve Holy Communion it is planned that we will continue to serve this in the seats once every quarter. The Benevolent Fund Collections have also suffered during this period.

As was reported last year, Andrew, Graham and Rita have indicated they are willing to serve for another year. John Leake indicated at that time his wish to stand down when we have found a replacement and Eileen Rennie indicated she would retire by March 2021. However both John and Eileen are happy to continue meantime until things gradually return to some form of new normal, thus giving us time to recruit new volunteers. Very sadly Peter Preston will now have to retire for health reasons. We owe a huge thank you to Peter for the many, many years he has served faithfully in this capacity. I am sure the Annual Meeting will wish to record these thanks. Mary Trotter very ably performs the duty of keeping the Communion cloths in pristine condition. She too has agreed to continue in this service for a further year. Our thanks go once again to Mary.

Thank you to my entire fellow Communion Stewards and other helpers for their support in ensuring that all the Communion duties are fulfilled efficiently.

As always we appreciate any feedback you can give to assist us perform this duty to your satisfaction.

Worship Consultation

Carolyn Roche

Due to the Pandemic Worship Consultation has not met since February 2020. We do hope to meet on-line on March 24th.

Music in Church

Gill Skidmore

Due to the Pandemic "Firebrand" had to be cancelled. It has been a quiet year!!

Kids@church & Junior Church

Cath Worth

Due to the pandemic there has been no Junior Church or Kids@Church since March 2020. We have kept in touch with families by emailing resources and delivering items such as Advent calendars and Christmas cards. Our most recent Kids@Church@Home activity focuses on Jesus in the wilderness and involves a Lent Journey. It will shortly be followed by Holy Week crosses and Easter eggs.

We look forward to being able to meet again at church in the not too distant future.

YMOSES

Jane Kent

I have continued to keep in touch with our young people who are part of YMOSES and I was delighted we could meet together in the hall in a distanced way a couple of times towards the end of the year. We now have a "whatsapp" group and I am in contact with each person at the normal time we would meet. I can't wait to meet up with them as a group when we are allowed to do so! Please continue to hold all our young people in your thoughts and prayers.

Movers and Shakers for Mission and Service

On Sabbatical!!

Action For Children

Carole Robbins

Action for Children started in 1869 as National Childrens' Homes. There have been many ways of raising funds over the years. One of the most memorable was the "sunny smiles" books which resulted in the Festival of Queens. Each church chose a queen to take the funds raised to the festival. The home collecting boxes which have changed their design many times were another way of collecting money. But I feel that they have outlived their purpose now that we all tend to use cards and there is a reduced amount of small change in circulation. After 22 years I will be ceasing to empty boxes after September 2021 and would suggest that any donations you wish to make be made through the church or sent directly to Action for Children or at the occasional event held by the church.

Hopefully the church will continue to support Action for Children through the Christmas collections.

The few boxes that were emptied last October raised £167.15.

Community Drop In Café

Eileen Rennie

Sadly since last year's Annual Report we have not been able to meet due to Covid 19 restrictions. None the less we are still a vibrant group just waiting for the time when we can all meet again to enjoy each other's company. We have tried to keep in contact either by email or phone with as many people as possible who have attended. It has also been wonderful on a number of occasions to have actually seen some people as we have walked for exercise and so we have been able to socially distance for a chat.

When we are eventually able to open again we hope that numbers attending each week will continue as before, ranging between 35/45, and even topping 50 as we did on a few occasions. We have regulars who come most weeks, some staying for the entire morning, and most weeks we welcome new people. There is the option to just sit and chat or to do jigsaw puzzles, or play board games or colouring. We also have a table of books you can browse and choose something to take home to read.

We have a list of enthusiastic volunteers who sign up regularly for duties. We have two in the kitchen serving tea/coffee and two in the hall welcoming people as they arrive. The rotas are on the notice board outside the "Parlour" so please feel free to sign up to volunteer.

There is no charge for tea/coffee, cake etc., but there is a donations basket. Since we opened in April 2019 we have supported the charity Fund for Human Need and until having to close for Covid 19 restrictions we sent them around £1600. At the Movers and Shakers Meeting in February 2020 it was agreed that we would support four causes in our second year. These are :

Clean Slate - a low cost, long term listening and support service for all victims of abuse and mental illness.

Hope UK - equipping young people in your community to make drug-free choices.

Through the Roof - transforming lives through Jesus with disabled people.

Our Church Hall Refurbishment Fund.

Obviously to date we have not been able to support any of them thus far but once we are able to open again these charities will in turn be supported.

We look forward to another successful year when new friendships and support will be established.

Why not come along and join us. We look forward to welcoming you. For further information please see either Eileen Rennie or June Grunwald

Tuesday House Group

Eileen Rennie

Our lively and friendly group meets on Tuesday afternoons during term time at 50, Warmans Close from 1:30 pm to 3:15 pm. Sadly, since the Covid 19 Lockdown in March 2020, we have been unable to meet.

However, each week on Tuesday at 3:00 pm those in the group join in prayer in their own homes using the details I email to them each week on a Monday. Prayer has always been an important part of our meeting so it is good to continue with this. Prayers are appreciated by so many people and requested by and for many people too.

Sadly in December we had to say goodbye to Sharon as she returned to her home in Ghana. Her cheerful presence, words of wisdom and moving prayers will be truly missed. We keep in touch so it is good to be able to share news.

We currently have 16 people in the group and the average attendance each week is 12. The group is now in its twentieth year of meeting. Everyone in the group appreciates the fellowship, sharing and caring they find for and from each other which has grown over the years. We are always happy to welcome anyone to this Study Group whether on an occasional or permanent basis.

Each meeting includes prayer, bible reading and discussion. In prayer time we use the Methodist Prayer Handbook "The Earth is the Lord's" and the District Prayer Diary together with our prayers of concern and thanksgiving for people and situations in our own Churches, our families, friends and beyond. Our meeting on the first Tuesday of each month includes the Monthly Prayer List from the Newsletter. We start each meeting spending a little time for prayer requests in bringing our concerns to be noted for inclusion in the prayer session at the end of our meeting.

We are, of course, very much looking forward to the time when things eventually return to a new normal and we will, once again, be able to meet together. We will also be so pleased to have our regular quarterly visit from Keith when he never fails to inspire us. This will give us the welcome opportunity to study God's word and continue to grow together in our faith. We assure anyone wishing to join us at anytime of a very warm welcome.

Tea@3

This new activity has been meeting at 3pm on Tuesdays.



Knit & Chat last met face-to-face on Monday 16th March 2020. We moved the meeting to the hall so that we had more room to spread out, and when we can eventually meet again we will continue to use the hall. This meeting was an opportunity to sort out the green blanket squares, made for the Dickensian evening Christmas tree. Several people took the squares away and put them together to make blankets. Unfortunately they still await distribution but hopefully this will be sorted soon.

Throughout 2020 we all continued knitting angels and were pleased to have around 1800 to be distributed. The angels were well received by the local care homes, the Ray Collins Trust for their Christmas Hampers and by people finding them in and around Wantage. As with so many things over the past 12 months, things had to be done differently and the angels were blessed as part of a Zoom service.

Thank goodness for Zoom. It has enabled those who are willing and able to use this to keep meeting on the first and third Mondays of each month and we are very grateful to Helen and Gordon for making this possible. We also say thank you to June for setting up a Facebook group, another way to keep in touch, and for regularly putting photos and news about the group on the Church website. Phone calls, cards and Newsletter updates have been a way to keep those without use of the internet part of the group.

Angel knitting began as soon as Christmas had passed. Some of us are currently making flowers to decorate parts of the outside of the Church at Easter. Alongside our own projects there is always plenty to keep us busy. Thank you to everyone who has knitted, crocheted and chatted over the past year – we look forward to getting together as soon as we are able to do so.

Wednesday Fellowship

Due to the pandemic Worship Consultation has not met since March 2020.

Church Lunches

Due to the pandemic, there have been no Church Lunches.

Thank you

I have to start by thanking church members and friends for their continuous, generous, financial support of the church (average about £3,400/month) since the beginning of the first lockdown in March of last year. As a result of that support and with some economies, the church ended the last Connexional year (at 31/8/2020) in a good financial position, despite a loss of income from summer lettings, with total unrestricted funds approximately equal to those at the beginning of the year at about £43,000. Further, during the first six months of this Connexional year (to 28/02/2021), that continuing support, together with a generous legacy of £10,000 left to the church by our dear friend Pam Rose, has placed the church in what I expect to be a good financial position by the end of this year at Aug 31st 2021, although it is too soon to put a figure on that.

Connexional year 2019/2020

In March 2020 the church was required to close its buildings because of the Coronavirus pandemic. The main effects of this on the church's finances from March were: *General Church Fund*, loss of all lettings income during the summer, loss of cash collections and the related gift aid income; *Benevolence Fund*, loss of all income from communion collections and Sunday refreshments. In addition the church received almost no income to distribute to *charities* from events such as church lunches and other fund-raising activities.

To minimise expenditure, the church halted all non-essential spending, mainly cleaning, repairs and non-essential maintenance; and the cost of utilities decreased. Fortunately the overall decrease in expenditure was approximately equal to the loss of lettings income. Also during this time church members continued to give regularly and generously by sending cheques to the treasurer and through bank standing orders and transfers.

- Table 1 is an overview of fund movements during the year (*The purpose of each fund is summarised in the "Church Funds and their Purpose*). It shows that the church was in a good position at the end of the year (31/8/2020) in that the general operating fund was slightly higher (£26,888) than at the beginning of the year (£25,251), and the church reserves were also slightly increased from £41,950 to £43,697. It also shows that the Benevolence Fund decreased significantly from £1,929 to £1,067 during the year. Usually the fund ends the year at a similar level to the beginning because "communion collections" and after-church refreshments collections top-up the fund. But that was much diminished.

Table 1 Overview of Fund Movements 2019/2020 (£)

Funds	Start 1/9/2019	Income	Expense	Transfers	End 31/8/2020
Operating Funds					
General Church*	26,495	58,088	55,867	332	29,049
Special Projects*	0	2,490	2,208	0	282
Photocopier*	(1,244)	758	3,201	1,244	(2,443)
Sub-totals	25,251				26,888
Other Funds					
Benevolence Fund	1,929	2,058	2,919	0	1,067
TMCP Trust 17820*	16,699	110	0	0	16,809
Minor Funds					
Wednesday Fellowship	649	495	300	0	844
Lunch Club	0	2,261	1,257	(1,004)	0
Community Cafe		1,358	1,358		0
Other (held in abeyance)**	572			(572)	0
Charity Fund					
Charitable	0	6,164	6,164	0	0
Total All Funds	45,099	73,782	73,274	0	45,608

(1) Items marked with an asterisk * comprise the reserves at year end (£43,697) and beginning of year (£41,950)

(2) Item marked with double asterisk** was held over from the discontinued FNG fund in error and should have been transferred to the General Fund in 2018/2019

Table 2 provides a breakdown of income and some of the items of expenditure during 2019/2020 and compares that year with the previous year (pre-pandemic). The figures are included so that church members have a clear view of where the church income comes from and how it is spent. Points to note are the large reduction in lettings income, and the reduction of expenditure on items such as utilities, maintenance and cleaning. *(The unusually large expenditure on Junior Church in 2018/2019 was explained in the report to the 2020 Annual Church Meeting and was due to supporting young people to attend 3Generate largely by funds from FNG and the Circuit).* Some may question whether it is sensible for the church to rely on lettings income to balance the books in normal times.

Table 2 General Church Fund Income and Expenditure (£)

	2019/20	2018/19		2019/20	2018/19
INCOME			EXPENDITURE		
Collections			Assessment	37,289	34,545
Envelopes	11,621	14,713	Utilities	3,721	5,209
Standing Orders	21,590	21,275	Insurance	2,002	1,882
Cash	6,725	3,501	Photocopier (net)	2,443	1,596
Transfer out	(390)	(390)	Copyright licences	190	576
Collections sub-total	39,546	39,099	Website maintenance	297	297
			Maintenance & repairs	2,294	7,892
Other Items			Cleaning	3,946	5,061
Gift Aid Recovery	9,509	9,204	Junior Church	79	1,376
Lettings	7,414	12,142	Donations (Methodist)	1,975	2,175
Interest	203	201	Miscellaneous	4,012	3,689
Other Income	1,415	1,754			
Other Items sub-total	18,541	23,301			
Total	58,087	62,399	Total	58,248	64,298

Another point to note is:

- Also, not shown, charitable donations from fund-raising through charity envelopes, Friday lunches, Wednesday Fellowship and Community Café, were reduced from £11,800 to £8,900.

Current Connexional year 2020/2021

During this year (from Sept 1st 2020) church income will come almost entirely from the continuing regular giving by church members plus gift aid recovered from HMRC. There will be little or no income from lettings, which in recent normal years has amounted to about £12,000/year. Fortunately we are starting the year with a reserve fund of approximately £43,700, which is about £10,700 more than the recommended minimum reserve that we should hold, based on past experience.

Regular Giving has remained remarkably constant at about £3,400/month and if giving continues at that level the church will receive £40,800. However, this only just covers our Circuit Assessment, our largest single item of expenditure, which will total about £39,500 this year. This leaves very little for all the church's other expenditure.

Fortunately the situation is not quite as bad as it may sound. As mentioned earlier, in December the church received a very generous legacy of £10,000 from Pam Rose, and in January the church received a rebate from HMRC of approximately £10,000

from our annual Gift Aid claim. The legacy from Pam Rose has to be deposited in the church's account with TMCP as required by CPD and forms part of our reserves.

Table 3 shows that during the first six months of this church year (1/9/2020 to 28/2/2021) actual church income (excluding the Pam Rose legacy) at £30,224 slightly exceeded expenditure at £29,771.

Table 3. Income & Expenditure: Sept 1st 2020 to Feb 28th 2021

Income (£)		Expenditure (£)	
Regular Giving	20,259	Utilities	1,275
Gift Aid Reclaim	9,812	Insurance	2,026
"Riders & Striders"	153	Maintenance	1,547
Total	30,224	Cleaning	130
		Junior Church	54
		Photocopier	1,365
		Assessment	19,678
		Miscellaneous	1,471
		Methodist Causes	2,225
		Total	29,771

Some explanation of Table 3 is necessary about "Methodist Causes". Each year the church, like other Methodist churches, makes donations to a number of central Methodist Church funds. These donations are considered a duty and are authorised by Church Council. The CC Meeting on February 4th agreed that, in view of the church's reasonable financial status, the normal donations should be made this year and payments were made to Methodist Church Fund £1000, Property Fund £600, Leaders of Worship & Preachers Trust £125, Ministers' Housing Fund £125, Fund for the support of Presbyters and Deacons £125, Fund for Human Need £250; a total of £2,225. The CC Meeting also agreed payments from the Benevolence Fund to a number of local charities. In the first six months the Benevolence Fund received a donation of £200 from Wednesday Fellowship and another £200 from Gift Aid reclaim, bringing it to £1,467. A donation of £70 was made to "Little People" in November and CC considered it appropriate to make five donations of £70 each in February to: Wantage Independent Advice Centre, Wantage Counselling Service, October Club, Wantage & Grove Street Pastors, and Be Free Young Carers. Since then the Benevolence Fund has received a small number of useful gifts from church members who recognised that the Fund would not otherwise receive any money. Apart from the donations listed in this paragraph, it is very unlikely that the church will be able to make any other significant donations to charities this year.

So, what can we expect during the second half of this year? The income in the first six months is probably £10,000 more than we can expect in the second half of the year because it contains our annual one-off gift aid reclaim. However, “normal” expenditure during the first half of each year tends to be higher than in the second half. For example, insurance at £2,026 and “Methodist Causes” at £2,225 are one-off payments. At the moment the only unusual payment that I expect is for the repair of the west external boundary wall of the church premises. Part of this has begun to tilt dangerously toward the nursery next door. The church Property Steward, Rob Charles, has been assiduous in addressing this problem and to obtain an acceptable solution at an economic price. At present we have only an estimate but it seems likely that we face a bill in the region of £2,000 to £4,000. It is certain that the church will need to draw on its reserves to cover its costs during the second half year. My best guess at present is that we will end the year as we started with a reserve fund of about £43,000. This would be a good position from which to enter the next Connexional year.

A New Bank Account

For the last forty years the church has shared a special sort of current account at HSBC bank with other Circuit churches and the Circuit management, known as the Circuit Giro. This was set up by our then Circuit Treasurer John Guthrie with the advice of our local bank manager Miss Pam Seymour (later Mrs Pam Rose). At the time and for many years it provided advantages of enabling the churches to obtain a higher rate of interest and easier movement of funds between the churches and with the Circuit. In recent years these advantages have diminished and some disadvantages have become more important. Consequently the Circuit Leadership Team and the Circuit church treasurers have agreed that the Circuit churches will set up their own, individual, bank accounts and stop using the Circuit Giro. I am now in the process of setting up a new bank account for Wantage Methodist Church with HSBC. It will be necessary later this year for all Standing Orders and Bank Transfers from church members to be moved to the new account, and I will write individually to the members who will be affected when I have the new bank account details. I apologise for this inconvenience.

Church funds and their purposes

Funds	Purpose & Comments
Operating Funds	<i>Used for running the church and maintenance</i>
General Church	Week-to-week running of church. See Table 2 for details.
Special Projects	One-off projects exceeding £1000 in price
Photocopier	Previously named "Capital Projects". Renamed to reflect actual use.
Other Funds	<i>Used as described below</i>
Benevolence Fund	Restricted fund. Used for relief of hardship among local families or distributed to local charities.
TMCP Trust 17820	Contains bequests. Used mainly as a reserve for future needs.
Minor Funds	<i>Under the control of church groups</i>
Wednesday Fellowship	Used for speaker expenses, charitable donations, and related.
Lunch Club	"Expense" is money donated to charities. End balance is for General Church use
Community Cafe	Met on Monday mornings to provide fellowship and outreach. Not originally intended to raise funds but attendees insist on "giving" and this is now passed to charities
Other	Money left over from Friday Night Group when it ended, ring-fenced for youth work. In 2018/2019 this was used to support YMOSES young people to attend 3Generate. Last year Church treasurer omitted to transfer the money to General Fund by mistake and corrected this year.
Charity Fund	<i>Raised from collections</i>
Charitable	Raised by the church for charities through envelopes and special events

Property

Gordon Skidmore & Rob Charles

With the building closed for most of the year, and costs being managed to limit cash flow, work towards the refurbishment of the Hall building and replacement of the hall chairs has not progressed.

Responding to the needs of the pandemic and what will be required as we go forward, sanitiser stations were purchased and used on those occasions we were able to use the building.

The building has been checked at least once a week and water is run through the pipes, toilets are flushed and the heating is exercised.

Internet

An Internet connection and extension WiFi hubs in the Chapel and the Hall have been installed to give a complete WiFi facility on the premises. Amongst other things this allows the broadcast of events in the building and reception of remote contributions. Thanks to Rodney Tillotson for his hard work, particularly for his patience in the futile negotiations with Virgin Media.

Bad News

The rear boundary wall at the “Beacon” end has “moved” and is out of true. It will need replacing with either a new masonry wall or a substantial fence as a matter of some urgency. Unfortunately there have been delays in progressing this work because of the unpreparedness of building firms to even quote for this work.

Routine work

The Health and Safety Assessment has been completed.

The boiler servicing has been completed.

One of the invisible jobs is the maintenance of the water softener for the dishwasher and we must thank Rodney Tillotson for his continued commitment to this task.

Portable appliance testing of electrical appliances has been completed.

The fire alarm and fire extinguisher servicing is up to date.

Other Work

We are grateful to Doug Hatto for his practical help again this year.

We are grateful for all the support we get from members and friends in the upkeep of the property. Without their help the place would be a very different asset.

Copyright

John Leake

Copyright reporting has continued throughout the year. Our last normal service (pre Covid) was on March 15th 2020.

For the year 1st March 2020 to 28th February 2021 the most frequent hymns were:-

‘Through Advent we journey’ played 5 times (a new hymn by Rev’d Jocelyn Bennett)

SF 706 Longing for light played 4 times

SF 728 O God, you search me and you know me played 4 times

And the following hymns all played 3 times:-

SF 20 Be still for the presence of the Lord

SF 353 Jesus is Lord

SF 455 All my hope on God is founded

SF 503 Love divine all loves excelling

SF 662 Have you heard God’s voice

So a wider variety of hymns has been used this year.

My thanks to Keith for providing us with the order of service each week and for managing the Zoom meetings with aplomb.

Users

Gordon Skidmore

As with everything else, our user activity has been suspended by the Covid pandemic situation.

During the year since March 2020 we have been effectively closed to external users. The only exceptions to this have been working with the food bank to provide storage and sorting facilities for the Christmas effort and one occasion with MIND, again at Christmas to allow an opportunity for association.

We are expecting to allow occasional use through the summer with more regular use in September, all things being well. Babes & Toddlers are possibly starting up in May and three one off sessions have been agreed. We are going to be a Polling station at the local elections at the beginning of May, and will host two restricted sessions for Wantage Music Festival on Saturdays in June.

We are grateful to H J Knapp & Son for looking after authorised access to the premises.

The bookings mailbox is: wntgmethodistbookings@gmail.com

Circuit Matters

Carolyn Roche

It has been a very busy year for the Circuit as it has sought to support and serve our nine churches through this very challenging year. The CLT are very aware of the concerns and difficulties that the churches are facing at this time, some more than others, and how they are looking for ways forward in a post-pandemic future. The CLT are very grateful for all the hard work being done in individual churches to keep their congregations still feeling part of a community.

The Circuit staff have worked incredibly hard to enable us to continue with worship. Keith has provided Sunday Zoom services for those able and willing to join in and Ian and Selina have provided weekly reflective services that people can use at home. There are also resources available on the Circuit YouTube.

The Zoom services see about 108 devices joining each Sunday which equates to around 150 people taking part. It has given participants a great opportunity to meet more people from around the Circuit.

Keith and Ian successfully completed the re-invitation process. We are very pleased that Keith will be with the Circuit for a further 4 years, until 2025 and Ian will be with us for a further 3 years, until 2024.

Unfortunately Keith was unable to take his Sabbatical as planned but, hopefully this will occur later in 2021 and in 2022.

It is good that Rev Jocelyn Bennett is now able to be on a phased return to work and is gradually doing more in the churches at Didcot, Wallingford and Milton. She has also written hymns that we have used and contributed to or helped plan Lent and Advent services.

Our thanks are due to the Circuit Treasurer, Geoffrey Maunder and to the Circuit Property Steward, Mary Hancock for overseeing the Circuit finances and making sure that the churches have their necessary inspections and that the Circuit staff have safe homes in which to live and work.

The Circuit Leadership team currently consists of the Circuit Staff, the Treasurer, the Property Steward and four Circuit Stewards. Alan Smith stepped down from being Senior Circuit Steward in August 2020 and we thank him for all his hard work while in this role. He will finish as a Circuit Steward in August 2021 so we have opportunities for more people to join the team as a Circuit Steward. We are also looking for a Treasurer. Maybe this is you! Please pray for our Circuit and that we have people willing to take up this important work.

The chaplaincy work at Great Western Park continues with one lead chaplain, Libby Hawkness-Smith. She has had to work mainly on line. In December she managed to create an interactive Advent calendar that was available on the Circuit web-site using contributions from the groups she works with. Sarah Ifil stepped down as a lead chaplain in May and as yet we have not been able to appoint a replacement. We pray that we will be able to do this later this year.

Unfortunately the June celebration of 200 years of Methodism in the Vale, which was to be held on White Horse Hill with the West Oxfordshire Circuit, had to be cancelled.

Other things, such as the Circuit initiative on mental health have just had to be postponed.

We now look forward to exploring more about the Methodist Way of Life and how it can help us develop as churches and as a Circuit. Keith has already written and preached about this and on April 14th, Michael Wadsworth, a Learning and Development Officer in the Eastern Region, will be giving a presentation. Due to current restrictions, this will still have to be a Zoom meeting

Once again, I end the report by thanking Keith for all his dedicated work for the Circuit. In a very challenging year he has continued to encourage and inspire us.

Wantage and Grove Church Partnership

Ann Barber

When the Partnership's annual Service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity took place last January, doubts had already arisen over other events which the member churches celebrate collectively. The first casualty was the ecumenical open-air witness in the centre of Wantage on 5th April. The first lockdown was in place and the usually joyous celebration of Palm Sunday was silenced and unseen. Similarly, the other outdoor Service, usually held in Grove on Good Friday morning, couldn't happen either.

Meetings of the Partnership's Action Group, which bring together the leaders of all the member churches and two lay reps from each, have been maintained via Zoom. This included the AGM at which Alec Gill, having completed the agreed 3 year term as Chairperson stepped down. His successor, John Steventon of Vale Elim Church, was welcomed into the role. Fortunately, the recent absence of a Secretary has been overcome, as Peter Rumsey has volunteered for this responsibility, and is keeping everyone well updated.

In October the Action Group was delighted to learn that Grove Free Evangelical, [GFEC], had accepted the invitation to join the Partnership. GFEC's leader, Adrian Kerr, and Roger Middlebrook as the lay representative, were welcomed to their first Action Group Meeting.

It was clear by the autumn that there was no possibility of producing and distributing the 2020 Partnership Christmas card. The cancellation of the Scouts Post had already been announced. An alternative means of communicating the message of Christmas was agreed. This took the form of a WGCP Christmas Video, with each Church contributing a reading from scripture and a song or hymn, each about five minutes in length. Streaming of the video went live on 13th December, and received favourable responses from many sources. It was an interesting compilation, which clearly illustrated the varying styles of worship in our member churches, but all combined to convey the Nativity story in its traditional form.

The next challenge was to produce an alternative means by which to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Again, this was a successful innovation. Over a period of 8 evenings, each member church produced a 20 minute reflection/meditation to

illustrate its chosen style of praying. Since this was made available via Zoom, it enabled everyone who joined to see each other on screen. It was judged to be a worthwhile venture, and was appreciated by significant numbers of people from all of the churches.

At the time of writing this report, there is no chance of this year's Palm Sunday or Easter events being held in their usual form. Whilst there's a sense of disappointment over that, perhaps it's also good for us to go on discovering and creating new means of our being the church in Wantage and Grove. The Partnership already has tentative plans for ways in which the message of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection can easily be shared locally via a Stations of the Cross Prayer Walk, with stations set up at appropriate locations in Wantage and Grove. Whatever changes may be generated by the Coronavirus in our environment and daily lives, we know that the God whom we all seek to serve as Christians within our community, will never change, and for that we are thankful.

Church Council 2019/2021

Minister	Rev Keith Underhill
Church Stewards	June Grunwald Sue Haithwaite Alison Phillips (retiring 2021) Gordon Skidmore
Church Treasurer	Clive Phillips (seeking successor)
Church Council Secretary	Alison Brown
Pastoral Committee Secretary	Ann Barber
ACM Elected Representatives	<i>Elected for 3 years.</i>
	<i>Eligible to be re-elected for second term. Max of 6 years (max 15 representatives)</i>

Helen Carter	Due to retire in 2022 (2 nd term)
Rodney Tillotson	Due to retire in 2022 (2 nd term)
Alison Brown	Due to retire in 2022 (1 st term)
Julie Horton	Due to retire in 2022 (1 st term)
Kelvin Rose	Due to retire in 2022 (1 st term)

Eligible for re-election if willing to stand

Diana Gawlas	Due to retire in 2020 (1st term)
Margaret Fordham	Due to retire in 2021 (2nd term)
Rita Lawrence	Due to retire in 2021 (1st term)
Mike Skinner	Due to retire in 2021 (1st term)

Church Council appointed members

Former Church Steward	Heather Wells
Junior Church Co-ordinator	Catherine Worth
Communion Steward	Eileen Rennie
Safeguarding Officer	Ken Smith
Property Steward	Robert Charles
Booking Secretary	Gordon Skidmore
Property & Finance Committee Chair	
Church Life Chair / representative	
Street Pastors	Zak Smith
Circuit Steward	As agreed by the Circuit Stewards

Church Appointments 2021/22

Church Stewards (Appointed by the GCM)

Church Council Secretary Alison Brown

Church Treasurer Clive Phillips (seeking successor)

Pastoral Committee Secretary Ann Barber

Pastoral Visitors

Nicky Atkinson, Ann Barber, Diane Barton, Alison Brown, Helen Carter, Faith Culshaw, June Grunwald, Julie Horton, Rita Lawrence, Alison Phillips, Eileen Rennie, Carolyn Roche, Kelvin Rose, Judith & Mike Skinner, Mary Trotter, Mary Whittaker

Communion Stewards

Eileen Rennie, Andrew Barber, Rita Lawrence, John Leake, and Graham Wells, plus Mary Trotter for communion cloths.

Property & Finance Committee:

Chair Gordon Skidmore (acting)

Secretary Rotating

Property Steward Robert Charles

Bookings Secretary Gordon Skidmore

Chapel Gardener Jan Abrahall

Other Committee Members

Ann Barber, Diana Gawlas, Doug Hatto

Independent Examiner of Accounts Geoffrey Stokell

Movers and Shakers: (Mission and Service)

Chair Rev Keith Underhill

Secretary Rotating

Worship Consultation:

Chair Rev Keith Underhill

Convenor Carolyn Roche

Music Coordinator Gill Skidmore

Baptismal Roll Secretary Catherine Worth

Junior Church Coordinator Catherine Worth

Junior Church Workers Heather Wells, Alison Phillips, Catherine Worth

Creche Helpers Jo Aldworth, Jane Kent, Eileen Rennie, Linda Tillotson

YMOSES	Jane Kent
kids@church	Jane Kent, Catherine Worth, David Worth
Safeguarding Officer	Ken Smith
Health and Safety Officer & Responsible Person (Fire Safety)	Ken Smith
Copyright Coordinator	<i>John Leake</i>
Authorised Person (Marriages)	Keith Underhill
Representatives to Circuit Meeting	
	The Church Treasurer (Clive Phillips) and one Church Steward (Gordon Skidmore) are ex-officio representatives. The church is entitled to five elected representatives (one for every 25 members).
	Ann Barber, June Grunwald, Alison Phillips, Eileen Rennie
Representative to Wantage and Grove Church Partnership	
	Alison Phillips and Gordon Skidmore (Ann Barber is Treasurer)
Weekly Notices	Gordon Skidmore
Monthly Sector Newsletter	<i>(appointed by Stewards of the section churches)</i> Gill and Gordon Skidmore

WANTAGE METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL CHURCH MEETING, SUNDAY 15 APRIL 2019, held during the 10.30 MORNING SERVICE

Present

Keith Underhill, Minister, led the service of worship and the business for the General Church Meeting.

70 people were in the congregation for the morning service.

Apologies were received from Helen Carter and John Carter.

Opening Devotions

The service opened with a welcome and introduction to the ACM which was to be incorporated as part of the Sunday morning worship.

“Everything we do as a church comes from our worship: reaffirm, proclaim and declare what we believe to be true”

Worship

Keith offered **Worship** to the congregation and asked if they would receive the report to which the congregation replied yes.

Learning and Caring

Keith offered the reports for **Learning and Caring** to the congregation and asked if they would receive the reports to which the congregation replied yes.

The Pastoral Visitors were thanked for their dedication in caring for those connected to the church.

The Methodist Church Youth President will be visiting Wantage June 25th.

Wantage Methodist Church continues to reach out to the wider community with Friday and Sunday lunches.

Service

Keith offered the reports for **Service** to the congregation and asked if they would receive the reports to which the congregation replied yes.

Service as part of calling:

Action for Children, Street Pastors, Holocaust, All We Can, Toilet Twinning and much more

A drop in café starts in the church hall tomorrow on 29th April 2019.

Stewards

Heather Wells is stepping down.

June Grunwald, Alison Phillips, Gordon Skidmore are reappointed and Sue Haithwaite will join the team

The elected representatives to Church Council are:

Alison Brown, Helen Carter, Margaret Fordham, Diana Gawlas, Julie Horton, Rita Lawrence, Kelvin Rose, Mike Skinner, Rodney Tillotson

Keith invited the congregation to think whether God is calling them to anything new?

Evangelism

Mark Sandals will be visiting new housing developments in the Grove area and is inviting others to join this Grove initiative.

It is hoped to have a Christian presence in local housing developments as they are being built and when the houses are just occupied.

Offering

Is an opportunity to respond to God's word heard during the service and when we offer something back to God and our lives for his use.

Finance and Property

Keith offered the reports for **Finance and Property** to the congregation and asked if they would receive the reports to which the congregation replied yes.

This Church is fortunate with good stewardship and response from the people of the church.

Thanksgiving

Keith asked the congregation to offer thanks for each other as together we are the body of Christ, the Church.

Keith asked the congregation to reflect on the last year and give thanks for those who have died: Dot Fern, Lois Knighton, Joyce Sharp, Robin Trotter, John Fordham.

Keith opened the service to the congregation for questions or comments.

Diana said she was grateful to Margaret and Francis McAlpin for helping with technology at Wednesday Fellowship.

The service closed with a blessing

There was no Annual Church Meeting in 2020 due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.