



Wantage
Methodist Church
With Children

Annual Church Report

2024

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From the Manse....

Two little words don't seem to do justice to all that this report sets out and celebrates, but nonetheless, 'thank you' is what we want to say.

Thank you to all those who have given so freely and so generously of their time and of their energy.

Thank you to those who have given financially and practically in so many different ways.

Thank you to those whose work goes on behind-the-scenes and out of the public gaze as well as to those whose contributions are far more visible and up front.

Without all of this, we couldn't as a Church do all that we do. Our worship, our witness, our service and our ministry would not be as it is.

Each and every Sunday, a copy of the church notices is deliberately placed on our communion table. Why is this done you might wonder. Well, quite simply it is a symbolic gesture in which we offer all that we do and all that we are to God and ask for his blessing.

As together we reflect upon this past year and look to the future and all that lies ahead we do so with those two little words on our lips as we say 'thank you' to so many.

We also of course say 'thank you' to God for all that he has done for us as we continue to place our hope and trust in him. He has blessed us in this past year, blesses us now and will do so in all that is yet to be.

Love and God Bless

Keith

Church Leadership Team / Church Stewards

Helen Carter

There are so many people to thank this year, as there is every year. Firstly, many thanks to Keith for his leadership and encouragement throughout the year. Our thanks are due to June Grunwald, who stood down as a Church Steward last May, but you will see from the number of times her name is mentioned in other reports just how much she does for the church. I would like to thank my fellow Church Stewards. We work very much as a team. Sue Haithwaite and I were delighted to welcome David Worth into the Church Steward team and would love to hear from anyone else who feels they are being called to serve the church in this way.

As ever our Sunday steward team of Jan Abrahall, Alison Brown, Andrew Barber, Rachel & Morgan, and Diana Gawlas have been such a support on a Sunday morning, and we thank them for being so willing and cheerful in their duties. We have also had occasion to take up the offers from past Church Stewards (Ann Barber, Alison and Clive Phillips) to act as Church Stewards on some Sundays and are extremely thankful to them for that.

I did say there are a lot of people to thank this year! Of course we thank Gordon Skidmore and Zack Smith for ensuring those who wish to participate in worship via Zoom are able to do so. Those of us in church have the opportunity to see all the information for the service as projected on to the wall at the front of the church thanks to Heather Wells, June Grunwald and John Carter. After the service many of us decamp through to the hall for refreshments and fellowship, and so our thanks are due to all those who serve us and to Alison Phillipa for making sure those on the list know when they are on duty.

There has been and will continue to be a number of Local Arrangements each quarter. It has been really heartening to know that we can find people or groups of people to lead worship on those particular Sundays.

There are many who work unseen. Things happen and we may not notice, but the property is well looked after thanks to Rob Charles and Doug Hatto, plus Gordon Skidmore who oversees all the lettings, which in turn bring in welcome income. Gordon works hard to make sure the balance of lettings between church, charitable organisations and others is appropriate. June Grunwald ensures that supplies of all the consumables (coffee, tea, toilet rolls, liquid soap, etc.) are readily available for our usage. They all deserve huge thanks. This past year has provided many challenges that many will not be aware of – except on the odd occasion when the church heating hasn't functioned!

The purpose of the Church Leadership Team is very much to make sure that every aspect of church life is secure. In last year's report June explained the make-up of the team and how this particular body of people came about. During the year Clive Phillips stepped down as treasurer and Heather Wells has taken over. They are still working together on some aspects of finance for Wantage & Childrey church. A huge thank you is due to Clive for his diligence in everything financial for many years for this church.

The team has continued to meet throughout the year at varying intervals to discuss all aspects of church life. There is a separate report on Holy Habits Light. That was an initiative suggested by Keith and the church has benefitted in many ways from this. Other aspects of worship have been discussed at every meeting. With a decrease in the number of Local Preachers available, and the decrease in the availability of supernumerary presbyters, plan making has necessitated an increase in the number of Local Arrangements where it is up to the church stewards to ensure the Sunday services continue to happen. Thankfully individuals and groups have been willing to lead worship on those occasions and the variety of worship has been much appreciated.

All our special services for harvest and Christmas were well received, and many thanks are due to Jan Abrahall for the church decorations on those weekends. A decision was made to ensure that very nearly all the decorations are made from readily available materials for gardens and hedgerows, and they have been beautiful.

There have been some very special events during the past year.

We had a morning when, as a church, we looked at the future beyond 2025. There will be at least one more of these gatherings to look to the future for when the Circuit staffing is reduced.

Our annual Christmas Tree Festival raised just over £540 for Blood Cancer UK. Thanks are due to June Grunwald for organising this great occasion.

The ecumenical musical event entitled "What about Joseph?" was a great success. That was much enjoyed by performers and audience alike, and the event raised funds for Helen & Douglas House to the sum of £1,100. Many thanks to Julie Steventon and Gill Skidmore for using their musical talents in enabling this to happen.

Other ecumenical gatherings have been the week of prayer for Christian Unity (via Zoom) and World Day of Prayer service held at Grove Methodist Church.

Our church building was open on the morning of Holocaust Memorial Day (27th January) when a good number of people visited the church and stayed for a varying amount of time. Bruce Thompson and June Grunwald worked together to supplement this one-off event by adding an event where we had a most moving evening with Bruce introducing us to Agnes Kaposi, an inspirational 91-year-old holocaust survivor. The other guest that evening was Rabbi Tanya Sakhnovich who led us in appropriate Jewish prayers. A special evening indeed.

One initiative not mentioned so far is Stepping out with Noah. Usually twice during the month, Keith has led these walks which have attracted a varying number of people, and those who have taken part have appreciated the time together. Those walks have always included a stopping point with some reflection and prayer. Please don't worry about those words 'stepping out' as the pace is set so that everyone feels comfortable.

Other aspects of church life will be covered in individual reports and so I won't mention those, other than to say that it is heartening to know that there are many within the church who participate in, and volunteer for, all other activities on offer. Even more thanks are due to all those who facilitate all these activities.

Shortly there will be a 'Who's Who' board where you can see who to contact about different church activities/duties, but until then, if YOU are interested in being more involved with any aspect of church life please talk to any of the stewards or to Keith.

HOLY HABITS (Light)

Helen Carter

As we work through the 10 Holy Habits it feels appropriate to see where we are up to. With each Holy Habit we have considered there has been a monthly service over three months, a book (or two) plus a film. Thanks to Jane Kent some of us have met to discuss the books, and thanks to Keith and Gordon Skidmore some of us have gathered to watch the film.

Habits need to be formed and developed, and so it is hoped that the consideration of each Holy Habit will lead to some action on the part of the church.

We started with the Holy Habit of Prayer and from that has come a monthly lunchtime prayer time in the vestry at church, and also a 'home group' which is open to those living in Richmond Village. The book for this Holy Habit was 'Chasing Francis' by Ian Cron, with 'Bruce Almighty' being the film.

We moved on to the Holy Habit of Gladness and Generosity. There have not been any specific initiatives that have come out of this, but it has really made us think about how we can use that habit for the good of the church and the community. The book and film were 'Humboldt's Gift' and 'Elf' respectively.

Our third Holy Habit was Eating Together. The books we read associated with this were 'Chocolat' by Joanne Harris and 'Appetite' by Ed Balls, with the film being 'Babette's Feast'. To experience this we were hosted by Kids@church for a breakfast on the morning of our carol service in December. Additionally we shared two lunches of soup, bread, and cheese. Much generosity has been shown by those offering to supply food and helping to set up the hall. Also the generous donations from those participating have enabled us to make significant donations from the lunches to the local Food Bank. There will be another lunch in May on Christian Aid Sunday. The money raised at that will be donated to Christian Aid.

As this report goes to press we will be part the way through looking at the Holy Habit of Worship. The books for this are 'The Essex Serpent' by Sarah Perry and the children's book 'a Friend for Little Bear.' The film is one that will appeal to most of us, namely 'Sister Act' with Whoopi Goldberg! All are welcome to come along so look out for the date being advertised. As yet, we do not know what initiatives might arise from this but I am sure there will be something exciting.

CHILDREY METHODIST CHAPEL

Gordon Skidmore

Childrey is open for Worship on the 2nd and 4th Sundays in the month.

On the morning of Good Friday 2023 a reflective service was held at the Chapel, conducted by Keith. Attendees came from Childrey, Grove and Wantage Methodists and also our friends from St Mary's, Childrey.

On Easter Sunday evening 2023, an Emmaus service was held at Childrey with Grove and Wantage Methodists again attending. It was also nice to see the Legge family from Calne at the service. A Chapel tea was also partaken of. The Legge family were stalwarts of Childrey chapel for many, many years.

Pat and Brian Winsley, regular attendees at Childrey Methodist Chapel celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary on the 14th September. At our service on the 10th September we commemorated this special event (albeit 4 days early!). After the service an Anniversary cake, baked by Fran Esplin, was shared between the congregation. Flowers and a congratulatory card were also presented to Pat and Brian.

On Sunday 24th September 2023, Childrey Methodists joined with the congregation at St Mary's, Childrey for a joint Harvest Festival service led by St Mary's new Rector, the Rev Ness Brunner-Ellis with our Minister, Keith, preaching the sermon. Afterwards refreshments were served in the church.

On Sunday the 8th October the roles were reversed when we held our Chapel Anniversary service and Keith led the worship with Ness preaching the sermon! The Childrey music group and the Village choir provided their usual uplifting contribution. Afterwards a Chapel tea was enjoyed by around 40 people.

Over Christmas we joined in with the village as we sang carols round the tree as part of the Childrey Christmas Festival Weekend, along with members of the Wantage Silver Band and Childrey Choir. We shared a Carol service at St Mary's led by Ness and with Keith preaching

Members of Childrey Chapel attended the funeral of James 'Jim' Lloyd Hughes on the 22nd November at Wantage Methodist Church. Jim and

Sonia were frequent attendees at Childrey services and it was always a pleasure to see them.

We were sorry to have to share the news that Fred Gee died during the last week in January 2024. We give thanks for his life and assure his family and the people of Childrey of our prayers. His funeral was at St Mary's Church, Childrey on Monday 19th February and he is buried in St Mary's church yard where Joy is buried.

We are grateful to Fran Esplin, Collin Craig, and Kevin and Angela Goodman for all they are doing to maintain the witness of Childrey Chapel in the village.

Pastoral

Ann Barber

As in most annual reports on the pastoral life within our church, this year's is made up of events that have generated joy and celebration, together with those about which we feel deep sadness. Overarching all of them is our thankfulness for the certainty of God's love and care for each of us. We feel safe and reassured by his promises, and all of the blessings we receive. With thanksgiving we recall the lives of those who have died in the last year.

In April we offered our love and support to Keith and Liz on learning that Keith's mother had died at her Care Home in Nottingham.

In June Gordon Scott died in Elmbrook Care Home to which he had recently moved with his wife, Marina. Gordon had worshipped with us very faithfully for many decades until, at age 90, he was no longer able to do so. He is remembered affectionately for his warm and friendly manner – always smiling and cheerful.

Brian Soffe died in the JR Hospital in December, having been admitted there following a fall, and his funeral took place at Garford Crematorium. Poor health had prevented both Brian and Jane from worshipping with us for a while, although they were on our Prayer List throughout this time. We continue to remember Jane, Emma and all of Brian's family at this period of particular difficulty and sadness.

Also in December, Brenda Edwards died at Abingdon Community Hospital. Brenda was one of the residents at Fleur de Lis who began worshipping with us as soon as she moved into her new accommodation. She

celebrated her 90th birthday a year ago, and her cheerful presence with us on Sunday mornings will be missed.

Dilys Seymour, one of our oldest members at almost 101, died on New Year's Eve. She had moved from Wantage in 2022 to live in a Care Home near to her daughter Alison in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. Dilys was a loyal member of Wednesday Fellowship over very many years. A Thanksgiving Service in our Church took place on in February.

On 11th December a Thanksgiving Service was held for John Morton, who died a month earlier. It was a privilege for everyone who attended to learn about John's life. The efforts of Gill, Derek and Felicity, ensured that he was given such a breadth of fulfilling experiences despite his disabilities. These, and his day to day care, were made possible for John through the dedication of his family, support organisations and many volunteers.

When last year's cold winter weather, which seemed almost interminable, eventually gave way to Spring sunshine and longer days, it was uplifting to welcome back those whose health problems had temporarily kept them from being part of our congregation on Sunday mornings. We gave thanks for God's healing mercies, and reassurance of his care for each one of us.

Very many weeks after the accident which injured Joan Clipsham's leg and immobilised her, the longed for recovery enabling her to return to church was a cause for celebration. Adrian Richens recovered well enough to return to some part-time working at Elmbrook Court, and was able to celebrate his 60th birthday amongst friends at the Community Café. After two spells of ill health which meant that Jane Robinson could only share in worship via Zoom, it was a joy when she too was well enough to return to worshipping in church once more.

Infant Baptisms are always a cause for celebration, and in July we were pleased to welcome Daisy Jane Carter into our church family by Infant Baptism.

When Sharon first became part of our church family in 2010, the youngest of her four children, Prince, was in Secondary School. We provided some financial help to enable him to become a weekly boarder, instead of having extremely long daily walks between home and school. Prince is now 30 years old and last year he came to live and work in Swindon, doing the same work as a Carer that Sharon did. We were pleased to welcome him to one of our morning Services, followed by lunch in the hall, and Prince was able to meet the people about whom he has heard so much from his Mum!

The church Flower Rota worked smoothly until Covid, but it has not proved possible to re-establish it reliably. It is therefore recognised that sometimes we are not able to provide fresh flowers for our Morning Services.

We are aware of all the responsibilities Keith bears as our Minister, and as the Superintendent of our Circuit, particularly at this time when important decisions have to be made for its future structure and operation. We are therefore very appreciative of the pastoral care he offers to everyone in our church family. We thank him for his support that is so reassuring during times of difficulty, and uplifting in the sharing of our joys at happier times.

Communion Stewards

Rita Lawrence

We have had 15 Communion services since our last general church meeting and once a quarter we now invite the congregation to come forward to receive the elements. We continue to take other services seated.

The minister distributes gluten free bread to the congregation, instead of the gluten free wafers we have been using, and the stewards help with the distribution of alcohol-free wine.

Our services have included the Maundy Thursday evening Tenebrae service, Easter service at the Millenium Stones at Ardington, on Christmas Eve a Cloth for the Cradle service, a Remembrance service, a Covenant service, and an Accreditation service for Libby Hawkness-Smith – each special and a little bit different.

At the time of writing we are looking forward to Easter and the services connected to that.

Mary Trotter continues to look after our Communion table cloths beautifully and for that we say a big thank you.

Thank you, also, to my fellow Communion stewards for their help and support and to everyone else who helps with Communion tasks.

Church Life

Kids@Church report 2024

Jane Kent, David & Cath Worth, Keith

It continues to be a pleasure and privilege to facilitate Kids@Church. This last year we enjoyed, amongst other things, baking cookies and hosting breakfast for the 10.30 congregation while exploring a range of Bible stories in a fun, interactive way. We start in the church itself usually with a story, prayer and often a song and then move through to the hall for games or a craft activity. We always finish with a simple breakfast together and since doing this we have all noticed how the friendships are growing amongst both the children and the adults and the mutual support offered and received is a joy to see. We continue to be incredibly grateful to Zack, Jordan and Liz who faithfully help us in the kitchen every month and June who is always willing to help us in church.

Junior Church

Cath Worth

We currently have no Junior Church aged children attending Sunday services. For any visiting children colouring sheets and toys are always available as well as a crèche room if parents wish to take young children out.

Community Drop In Café

June Grunwald

The Community Café, which is open in the hall on Mondays from 9 am to 12 noon, continues to prove popular. The café welcomes a core group of regulars and from time to time new people drop in. Some are visitors to the town and others drop in on an irregular basis. There is no charge for coffee, but any donations go to a charity. In the past year these have included our own church, who provide a free home for the café, The Cornerstone café and Christian book shop, Grove Day Centre and Christian Aid

Numbers of visitors vary with fewer people on very cold or very wet days. The average number is around 35 people. Once again it has been well worth opening on Bank Holiday Mondays as over 20 people dropped in.

We are very grateful to all our volunteers on the rota who make the café such a welcoming place. It has been helpful, in the past year, to have church members who have been willing to help out on the odd occasion. For further information about the café, please contact either Eileen Rennie or June Grunwald.

Tuesday prayer and study group

Eileen Rennie

The group has had another very successful year. Numbers have remained constant at eighteen with an average attendance weekly of fourteen. We are now in our twenty third year of meeting. Obviously members within the group have changed from the early years as people have moved away, people have moved here and some sadly have died. We now have a steady six people who regularly take turns in leading the group discussion and occasionally others will offer. This has greatly enhanced the growth in our faith journey together.

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, a hymn, bible reading and discussion. In prayer time we use the Methodist Prayer Handbook "Hidden Treasures" 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 updates in bringing our concerns to be noted for inclusion in the prayer session at the end of our meeting.

This past year we have much enjoyed a number of studies. In April 2023 on completion of our Lent Study we had our annual visit to the Stations of the Cross at the Convent in Holy Week before starting our study of Holy Habits Prayer which took us to the end of May. In June and the first two weeks in July we studied Bible Month Isaiah and this included a Day for Quiet Reflection at The Convent led by Libby Bolton, reflecting further on Isaiah. In July we started our Study of Holy Habits, Gladness and Generosity and Keith led the second session for us on his visit. We once more extend our thanks to Keith for his regular quarterly visits to the group. These visits are always looked forward to and we really appreciate how he gives so willingly of his time from his very busy schedule. On starting back in September we returned to our study of Holy Habits Gladness and Generosity, completing this mid October when Keith led the final session. Next we started our Study of Holy Habits Eating Together which then led us into our Advent Study "They Sang" written by Amy Scott Robinson which was based on the four songs in the Christmas Story, Zechariah's song The Benedictus, Mary's song The Magnificat, The song of the Angels, Gloria in Excelsis and Simeon's song Nunc Dimittus. On return in January after our

Christmas break we studied session five of the Advent study which was Our Song and we had a lovely afternoon when each person contributed something summing up what Advent/Christmas meant to them. A special reward for all our contributions was a cup of tea/coffee and some Mincemeat Slice! We would thoroughly recommend this wonderful study to others. For the remainder of January we studied the final two sessions of Holy Habits Eating Together and Keith came to talk to us. In February we started our Cover to Cover Lent Study, "Who is The Christ?" written by Anne Calver who is a Baptist Minister, author and speaker. The six sessions look at Jesus as The Builder, The Humble King, The Holy King, The Harvester, The Risen King and The Commissioner. This takes us to Holy Week when we once again visited St Mary's Convent to be accompanied round the Stations of the Cross in reflection, prayer and song. Further contributions from the group this past year have been decorating a tree for the Christmas Tree Festival in December 2023 and leading a Local Arrangement on Palm Sunday 2024.

We now look forward to a further successful year for 2024 to 2025.

Bible Study at Elmbrook Care Home

June Grunwald

The Bible Study continues to meet on the second Monday of the month at 2.30pm. Different residents attend from week to week, some with impairments (visual, mobility, speech and cognitive) and from a wide variety of church backgrounds. Because of this we use a simple format of hymns, prayer, bible reading and questions lasting about 30-45 mins. The number of people who attend varies from month to month for a variety of reasons but a core group from the care home and from our church attend on a fairly regular basis. In October Keith, our Minister, led a session which included Holy Communion and also gave communion to residents in their rooms and in the garden which was much appreciated. In November we held more of a Remembrance service which was so well attended we used the larger cinema room in Elmbrook. It has been good to have members of our church join us and the residents have enjoyed interacting with members of our church. If you would like to be involved in any session, please contact me.

Seasonal Bible Study

Gordon Skidmore

In Advent and Lent we have been pleased that Alison Phillips has led Bible Study appropriate for the season. This year we have used "A journey through Advent" (Rob Frost) and "At Home in Lent – An exploration of Lent through 46 objects" (Gordon Giles).

Knit & Chat

Carolyn Roche

Knit & Chat is thriving with the regular attendance of twelve or more people at our twice monthly meetings. These take place in the church hall at 2pm on the first and third Mondays of each month although this can change to the 2nd and 4th Mondays in January. We all enjoy a tea break during the session with 'posh' biscuits or the occasional piece of cake left from the morning's café.

Along with working on individual projects many of us worked hard at producing just over 1700 angels. As usual these were blessed in church before being taken out to bless the people of Wantage. Thank you to all those who helped in any way with this annual project. We have already begun on the next host of angels as well as knitting warm hats for the homeless and for refugees. If you have any ideas of projects that we could undertake then please get in touch.

Some attendees are more interested in the 'Chat' part of our name. We regularly have two people who come to enjoy the conversation and fellowship. So, once again, we look forward to another year of knitting, crocheting, sewing and chatting. Please come and join us.

Music in Church

Gill Skidmore

Many thanks to Carolyn Roche and David Worth for sharing in providing the music for worship.

You may have become aware that there was a problem with a note not sounding reliably on the piano. Permission was granted by Church Council for us to call in the Kawai technicians. The piano has now been fully serviced and the problem solved, so should be good until its next regular service is due.

Music Makers has been meeting monthly, giving an opportunity to explore new hymns and worship songs. It was good to be introduced to one of those songs in worship recently. Thanks to Linda Tillotson for arranging this.

Finance

Heather Wells

It is with a few nerves that I prepare this report. Clive handed the accounts to me over the summer and autumn with me officially taking over from 1st September. It has taken a while and a lot of support from Clive to get all the accounts fully under my belt.

There have been no unexpected expenses, the largest outgoing expenses have been:

- £1,330.80 for the chapel boiler controller repair
- £304.25 for the piano to be serviced

The amounts that we have raised/given to charity include:

Community Café (Sep>Nov)	£505.55	Cornerstone
Community Café (Dec>Feb)	£503.69	Grove Day Centre
Misc Donation	£10.00	Down to Earth
Wantage & Grove FoodBank	£97.20 plus (£143.60 minus expenses)	Holy Habit of Eating Together x 2 Misc Donation £10
	£10.15	Toilet Twinning
Christmas Tree Festival	£669.83	Blood Cancer UK
Christmas collections	£161.80	CRISIS UK
Memorial Service for Dilys Seymour	£35.00	BHF
TOTAL	£1,993.22	

Summary of accounts:

Collections	21811.75	Utilities	5720.15
Lettings	2605.00	Insurance	2475.47
Other Income	1231.07	Copyright	296.80
Community Café	1009.49	Repairs	1911.22
Collections	253.22	Cleaning	4688.16
Coffee	460.90	Junior Church	32.82
Charitable Fund Raising	746.55	Other	1544.78
		Donations - Methodist	2225.00
	28117.98	Donations - Other	303.21
		Photocopier	1101.49
		Ben Gifts to individuals	60.00
		Payments to Charities	866.63
			21225.73

Property

Gordon Skidmore & Rob Charles

Chapel Heating

We experienced a total failure of the chapel boiler controller this winter (at just the wrong time!) which involved rigging a temporary fix while a replacement controller could be sourced and programmed. This has been completed but with some rather irritating intermittent snags which we are trying to sort.

Hall Heaters

Some continuing issues we experienced with the new heaters were eventually sorted.

Routine work

The Health and Safety Assessment has been completed.

The servicing of both boilers 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.

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

Repairs to woodwork (windows and doors) have progressed through the year to limit weather damage. The wet winter is causing some issues with swelling of woodwork so some external doors are proving “sticky”.

Other Work

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

Thanks are due 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.

Users

Gordon Skidmore

External users continue to be happy using the premises and we have been pleased to welcome the use of the premises by a few new users.

The bookings mailbox is: wntgmethodistbookings@gmail.com

Copyright

Kelvin Rose

During the last twelve months we sang, as best we could, 237 hymns chosen by our preachers. I have reported the ones that were in copyright, roughly half of them. Nearly all 237 hymns are in Singing the Faith but three are in Singing the Faith Plus.

The following four hymns were sung most frequently, actually four times each:

- O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder;
- Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
- Let us build a house where love can dwell;
- Before I take the body of my Lord.

Finally, my thanks to Gordon for unfailingly providing me with the Order of Service where the hymns are set out each week.

Technology

The church premises have an internet connection with WiFi available through all the premises. We are grateful to Rodney Tillotson for his oversight of the technology, and our service contract with British Telecoms.

“Zoom” transmissions are being used for morning worship each week, along with funeral and thanksgiving services and also some user events. This allows people to share where otherwise they would have been unable to attend. It also makes us an attractive place for public events and allows work to be done on our premises, particularly by the Community Chaplain.

There is a cost to us not just for the BT contract but also for various IP rights contracts.

Thanks are due to Zak Smith and John Carter for their support with Zoom for morning worship.

Wantage Methodist Website <https://wantagemethodist.org.uk>

The site administrators are Rev Keith Underhill, June Grunwald and Gordon Skidmore and the editorial management of the site is managed by the Church Stewards with the minister. We are grateful to Jordan and Zak Smith for maintaining our presence on **Facebook**.

Notices

Whilst there is a limited print run each week, these are available on the Wantage Methodist Church web site. This web version is always the most up to date version as updates are made and errors and omissions in the printed copy are corrected and a new edition posted.

Thank you to all who contribute and particularly to those who help publish the notices when Gill and I are away. So that all the people who may be preparing the notices can have access to your articles, please use the following postbox:

wntgmethodistnotices@gmail.com

Sector Newsletter (CGW News)

In 2023 we published 10 editions under the title CGW News. All editions are available on both Wantage Methodist Church and the Wantage & Abingdon Circuit web sites. Printed copies are available for those who would prefer them. We try to include items from a wider world and deliver something which is more than a diary of events. Any comments or offers of content are gratefully received. Please let us know of any ideas to improve what we publish.

Just as important, please read it as otherwise you will miss important and relevant information.

The sector newsletter mailbox is:

wantage.sector.newsletter@gmail.com

Email

To allow people to take holidays and still maintain support for the weekly notices, monthly newsletter, annual report and bookings, there are email addresses for these issues which are separate from personal email accounts and which can be accessed by deputies who are given the necessary password for access.

Please use these addresses rather than personal email accounts for these purposes.

Messages are not guaranteed to be dealt with in a timely fashion if not sent to the dedicated email addresses.

Bookings : wntgmethodistbookings@gmail.com

Notices (weekly): wntgmethodistnotices@gmail.com

Newsletter (monthly) : wantage.sector.newsletter@gmail.com

Annual Report : wmcannualreport@gmail.com

Circuit Matters

Circuit Leadership Team

The work of the Circuit Leadership Team is carried out by the Circuit Staff – Rev Keith Underhill (Superintendent), Rev Ian Griffiths, Rev Bruce Thompson, Deacon Selina Nisbett and the Circuit Stewards – Anne Matthews, Geoffrey Maunder, Carolyn Roche, Mary Hancock (Property) and Gordon Skidmore (Treasurer). Both Geoffrey and Carolyn retire this year and we owe a major debt of thanks to them for their work for the circuit over the past years. As a result we need to look for new people to become Circuit Stewards. It is an interesting and rewarding role. If you wish to find out more then please speak to one of us.

The Circuit has had a very busy year with stationing. In April 2023, we held a farewell service for Rev Jocelyn Bennett who then had her Sabbatical prior to moving in August. In October 2022 we were matched with Rev Bruce Thompson, the ex-Chair of the Lincolnshire District. He and his wife Karen have now moved into the Didcot manse. This required decorating and updating. The Circuit Stewards would like to thank all those who came to help, especially with the work in the garden. It was good to worship with Bruce, Karen and their family at the Welcome Service held at Didcot on 2nd September 2023. Bruce is working particularly with the Didcot, Milton and Wallingford churches.

Rev Ian Griffiths will be leaving the Circuit at the end of the connexional year in August 2024. We wish him and Tabitha well in his new appointment and thank him for the work he has done in Abingdon. Rev Georgina Bondzi-Simpson will be stationed to our Circuit, subject to Conference, in September 2024. A significant amount of work will be needed to the manse she will live in.

Rev Bruce Thompson's 2-year appointment to the Circuit ends in August 2025. Deacon Selina Nesbitt's appointment also ends in August 2025.

This May they will enter the stationing/re-invitation process.

Keith will be sitting down (retiring) in August 2025 and the Circuit will then be served by two presbyters.

As well as meetings dealing with the usual business of the Circuit, the CLT has been holding meetings concentrating on the future sustainability of the Circuit. We are aware that in 2025, when Keith retires, we will be a two presbyter circuit. The Methodist Connexion is already having great difficulty in finding presbyters to fill all the appointments and as noted last year the Circuit is currently supporting churches with the assessment but this is not sustainable in the long term. Matt Forsyth, the District Mission Enabler, has

been part of our conversations and joined us at our special Circuit meetings last year. The Circuit Plus 1 meeting in March looked at the questions 'How could worship be organised?' and 'What should our presbyters be doing?'. The Circuit Plus 2 meeting in October then looked at the questions 'What steps should your own chapel take towards considering merger or closure, in order to assist in the creation of few chapels/ worship centres?' and 'What suggestions do you have for providing meaningful and viable alternatives for your particular chapel when there are Local Arrangements on the Preaching Plan?'. A Circuit Plus 3 meeting is planned for 18th May to focus on what Presbyters should be doing.

The CLT are also meeting with the Oxford Circuit who are currently having to deal with a reduction in presbyterial staff. Discussions will look at how we can work together to the benefit of both circuits.

Libby Hawkness-Smith continues as the lead chaplain. Her chaplaincy work takes place at Great Western Park and at Wantage and Grove with the assistance of her canine chaplains. Libby's recognition service as a Local Preacher was on 18th February at 3.00 at Wantage. We thank her for all the work that she does and congratulate her on completing her local preacher studies.

Wendy Moorin continues her work as an Anna chaplain and her dog Tilly as a canine chaplain. We are very grateful for all the work that they do.

Wantage and Grove Church Partnership

Ann Barber

The AGM and joint Service took place at St John's, Grove in June. Updates by two clergy members of the Partnership gave encouraging reports on church involvement with education in both Grove and Wantage. Neil Townsend, leader of Wantage Community Church, reported on plans for the Kingsgrove housing development. At present their worship takes place in the Primary School, [Wantage Primary Academy], but eventually WCC will run the Community Centre which is due to be built, and so, after worshipping in many different locations in the town, will finally have its own building.

John Durant, the Vicar of Grove, spoke of the Anglican involvement with educational establishments on Grove's Wellington Gate development. The new School, known as St John's Academy, is a Church of England Foundation School. Eventually it will provide Primary and Secondary education, but its first intake of Primary School age pupils occurred last September. It is hoped that there will be a worship centre within this new

establishment, and there will be a chaplaincy provision based within the school.

It was proposed, and subsequently passed unanimously, that the annual levy of £250 per member church should be re-instated immediately. Historically, the date of the Partnership's financial year has always been from 1st September to 31st August, followed by the AGM in September. To realign the two since the AGM now takes place in May or June, the financial year also runs from 1st May to 30th April.

The first in-person meeting of the Action Group since 2020 took place in September, and was better attended than the many Zoom meetings which had continued, despite the end of lockdown restrictions.

There were lots of Carol Singing events within the local communities of Wantage and Grove. Some were accompanied by Wantage Silver Band. At each event flyers with details of the special Christmas Services for all of the Partnership's Churches were distributed to the audiences – along with sweets and chocolates.

The production of "What about Joseph" in our church on 16th December was a highlight of the Partnership's year. Gill Skidmore directed the singers and several of our church family took part – some as soloists and others as members of the Chorus. The words and music were composed by Julie Steventon of Vale Elim Church, and it was an inspiring ecumenical event. Congratulations were offered to everyone involved in the event, which saw our church filled to capacity with an audience made up of people from all of the Wantage and Grove denominations. As well as the enjoyment it provided, the production also raised over £1,100 for Helen and Douglas House.

As in previous years, the 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was celebrated with a short reflection each evening transmitted via Zoom. The session on Sunday 21st January took place in person at the Parish Church, led by the Vicar, Rev Katherine Price.

The Vicar for the Vale Benefice, which includes Grove, Denchworth and Hanney, Rev John Durant, retired at the end of 2023. John's support for the Partnership's projects has been appreciated, and we offered him our best wishes for a happy and fulfilling retirement. John Steventon, from Vale Elim Church, indicated at the AGM that he wishes to stand down as the Partnership's Chair. John's successor, to be chosen by the Church Leaders, has not yet been decided. There is still a vacancy for a Secretary. We will be sorry to lose Fr Benji Tyler who was ordained as Curate for

Wantage Parish Church and Holy Trinity, Charlton in 2021. This was a demanding role, especially during the period of inter regnum before Katherine Price was appointed as the Vicar of Wantage. Fr Benji is a popular member of the Partnership, and we wish him well as he takes up his appointment as Vicar at the Parish Church of St Andrew in Chippenham after Easter.

Arrangements are being made for ecumenical events during Holy Week. Included in the plans are an outdoor Service in the Market Place at 10 am on Palm Sunday, and a Walk of Witness from the Kingsgrove estate to the Parish Church on Good Friday, during which there will be prayer stops at the churches, including our own, along this route. At 11 am that day, the usual outdoor Service will take place on the Green opposite Grove Methodist Church. A performance of the Passion Play, by a cast of professional actors, in Wantage Baptist Church, has been booked for the evening of Maundy Thursday. It is a source of disappointment that it has been arranged to coincide with our Service of Holy Communion, a long established tradition that is shared between Grove Methodist Church family and our own.

**Wantage Methodist Church Annual Church Meeting
Sunday April 28th 2024 During Morning Worship (starting 10:30 am)**

AGENDA

Apologies

Greetings and Remembrances

Minutes of ACM 2023

Annual Report 2024

Appointments

Church Stewards

Sue Haithwaite, Helen Carter, David Worth nominated for reappointment

Representatives to Church Council

Rita Lawrence and Mike Skinner have completed their two terms of 3 years and stand down. Gill Skidmore and Heather Wells have completed their first term of 3 years and are ex officio members of Church Council. Peter Bainbridge and Jane Kent have completed their first term of 3 years and can be nominated for re-appointment. There are therefore at least 4 vacancies as Elected Representatives

Any Other Business

Nominations for Church Steward and Church Council Representatives must be received by Rev Keith Underhill or Gill Skidmore **by April 21st**. Nominations need the approval of the person nominated who must be a member of the Methodist Church.

Wantage Annual Church Meeting

Sunday 7th May 2023 at 10.30 am

Incorporated into worship at Wantage Methodist Church and on Zoom

Present: 53 attendees in person and 15 on Zoom

Within the context of relevant readings, hymns and prayers, the following is a record of the business of the meeting.

Introduction: The Methodist Church requires an annual church meeting to be held, at which business includes the election of Church Council members and Church Stewards and reflection on the life of the church. Worship and “business” are connected so it is appropriate to integrate the meeting into worship. The annual report has already been circulated, reflecting the activities of the last twelve months. This year the meeting will look at the past, the present and the future – the Alpha and the Omega.

The Past: The annual report is a snapshot of the past year. It reflects the Church that we try to be – inclusive, welcoming, tolerant. Slides shown before the service represented aspects of the Church’s life.

- The Annual Report was accepted as a true record of the life of the Church over the past year.
- Members who had passed away during the year (June Crouch, Roy Schofield, Marian Jones) were remembered in prayer and thanks for the contributions they have all made to the life of the Church.
- June Grunwald was thanked as she steps down at the end of her term as a Church Steward, latterly as the Senior Church Steward.
- Diana Gawlas (end of term) and John Leake are stepping down as representatives to Church Council and were thanked.
- Sadly Wednesday Fellowship is no longer able to continue, but the great contribution made by Diane Barton and Mary Trotter was gratefully acknowledged.
- Similarly the work of Jane Kent as YMOSES ceases to meet after many years.
- Following the “God in love unites us” discussions, the Church is now fully licensed to conduct same sex marriages, with Rev Keith Underhill and June Grunwald authorised as registrars for all weddings.
- The minutes of the 2022 Annual Church Meeting were accepted as a true record.

It has been a strange year, with the aftermath of COVID, the Ukrainian situation, high inflation rates to mention but a few factors, but we give thanks for the steadfastness of God's love and the work of our Church.

The Present: Childrey members were welcomed and thanks offered for the life of Childrey Methodist Church, which has now become a class of Wantage Methodist Church. When Methodist membership drops below twelve, a church becomes a class of a bigger church. Worship continues in Childrey on the second and fourth Sundays of the month, with ten to sixteen people attending, but the governance, finance and property have become the responsibility of Wantage Church Council. Childrey has two representatives on the Council. Clive Phillips, Collin Craig and Gordon Skidmore were particularly thanked for assisting in the smooth transition.

- Helen Carter and Sue Haithwaite were re-elected as Church Stewards. There is an urgent need for at least one more. Authority was given to the Church Leadership Team to appoint if a nomination is made.
- The Sunday Stewards were thanked for their help.
- There are two vacancies on Church Council. Authority was given to the Church Leadership Team to appoint if nominations are made.
- Rob Charles, Doug Hatto (the "unsung hero") and Gordon Skidmore were thanked for their property work.

Holy habits (lite): This is a way of looking at ten habits which were part of the ancient church. For the three months to the end of May, the topic has been prayer, with one service a month concentrating of this subject, a novel to read and discuss and a film to watch. A similar pattern will be followed in June, July and August on the theme of gladness and generosity.

Finance:

- As a church, giving has been generous, showing a 12.25% rise over the previous year, but there is still a deficit of about £6,000. Lettings are down on their pre-COVID levels, while costs, especially fuel costs, have risen.
- Clive Phillips has done a magnificent job as Church Treasurer, but he will be stepping down this year, by October at the latest.
- A replacement is urgently needed. Options include splitting the tasks and outsourcing, which would cost in the region of £2,000 and local input would still be needed, e.g. collection counting and banking.

- All members are invited to explore what is required with no obligation if they decide the position is not for them.

The Future: Wantage Methodist Church is not a church in isolation. It is part of the Wantage and Abingdon Circuit, which is part of the Northampton District, which in turn is part of the Methodist Connexion. What happens to the Circuit as a whole has implications for the local churches.

- The Circuit currently has three presbyters, Keith Underhill, Ian Griffiths and Jocelyn Bennett, who will be replaced by Rev Bruce Thompson in September. It also has a Deacon, who has a quite different role from a presbyter, a community chaplain and an Anna chaplain.
- The number of presbyters will be reduced to two by September 2025, because the finances do not allow for more, but also because reduced Methodist Church membership in the Circuit means that the Connexion will not allow more than two.
- A meeting at All Saints Church on 4th March, open to all, began to explore the implications – how to fill the plan, especially as the number of active Local Preachers is dropping?; what should presbyters be doing? – there are opportunities for creative working and to be radical.
- A number of ideas were put forward. It is stressed that nothing has been decided but working together we will find a way forward. The Circuit cannot tell individual churches what to do, but the Circuit Leadership Team will liaise with the churches as it seeks to find the best solution.
- Most importantly, we must not lose sight of mission and service to the community or we have failed. Examples of valued service in Wantage are the community café and the connections with Elmbrook Care Home.

An invitation is extended to all to attend a meeting on Saturday 29th July, from 9.30 to 12 noon to look to the future:

- Who do we want to be?
- What are our priorities?
- What are our hopes and dreams?
- What are our worries?
- The Church will work together with trust and respect. The future will be sustainable if everyone takes ownership.

- If they so wish, anyone is welcome to communicate with Keith Underhill or the Church Leadership Team members prior to the meeting.

Final thanks were expressed to all the people who contribute to worship in any way, including the musicians and the media team. Keith Underhill reiterated that all Methodist churches are not like Wantage, and he is very grateful to be minister of such an active church.

Helen Carter concluded the business of the meeting with grateful thanks to Keith for all he does.

The service and Annual Church Meeting finished with a blessing at 11.30 am.

Church Council membership, 2023/24

Minister	Rev Keith Underhill
Church Stewards	Sue Haithwaite Helen Carter David Worth
Church Treasurer	Heather Wells
Church Council Secretary	Gill Skidmore
Pastoral Committee Secretary	Ann Barber
Safeguarding Officer	Ken Smith
Property & Finance Committee	
	Property Steward Booking Secretary
	Robert Charles Gordon Skidmore
Junior Church Co-ordinator	Catherine Worth
Former Church Steward	June Grunwald
Communion Steward	Rita Lawrence
Circuit Steward	As agreed by the Circuit Stewards
Street Pastors representative	Zack Smith

Elected Representatives

Rita Lawrence	Due to retire in 2024 (2 nd term)
Mike Skinner	Due to retire in 2024 (2 nd term)
Peter Bainbridge	Due to retire in 2024 (1 st term)
Jane Kent	Due to retire in 2024 (1 st term)
Gill Skidmore	Due to retire in 2024 (1 st term)
Heather Wells	Due to retire in 2024 (1 st term)
Alison Brown	Due to retire in 2025 (2 nd term)
Kelvin Rose	Due to retire in 2025 (2 nd term)
Margaret Fordham	Due to retire in 2025 (1 st term)
Eileen Rennie	Due to retire in 2025 (1 st term)
Carolyn Roche	Due to retire in 2025 (1 st term)
Alison Phillips	Due to retire in 2026 (1 st term)

Childrey Representatives

Kevin Goodman
Fran Esplin
Collin Craig (*Reserve*)

Church Appointments 2023/24

Church Stewards	<i>Appointed by the GCM</i>
Church Council Secretary	Gill Skidmore
Church Treasurer	Heather Wells
Property Steward	Rob Charles
Bookings Secretary	Gordon Skidmore
Pastoral Committee Secretary	Ann Barber
Pastoral Visitors	Nicky Atkinson, Ann Barber, Diane Barton, Alison Brown, Helen Carter, Faith Culshaw, June Grunwald, Sue Haithwaite, Julie Horton, Jane Kent, Rita Lawrence, Alison Phillips, Eileen Rennie, Carolyn Roche, Kelvin Rose, Judith & Mike Skinner, Mary Trotter, Mary Whittaker, Catherine Worth
Communion Stewards	Rita Lawrence (Lead Steward), Jan Abrahall, Andrew Barber, Zack Smith and Graham Wells, plus Mary Trotter for communion cloths
Property & Finance Committee	
Chair	Gordon Skidmore (acting)
Secretary	<i>Rotating</i>
Independent Examiner of Accounts	<i>Tba</i>
Church Life	
Chair	Rev Keith Underhill
Secretary	<i>Rotating</i>
Music Coordinator	Gill Skidmore
Baptismal Roll Secretary	Catherine Worth
Junior Church Coordinator	Catherine Worth
Junior Church Workers	
Creche Helpers	Jo Aldworth, 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	Kelvin Rose
Church Gardener	Jan Abrahall
Authorised Persons (Marriages)	Keith Underhill, June Grunwald
Representatives to Circuit Meeting	
<i>The Church Treasurer and one Church Steward are ex-officio representatives. The church is entitled to four elected representatives (one for every 25 members):</i>	
Ann Barber, Alison Phillips, Eileen Rennie, Kevin Goodman	
Representative to Wantage and Grove Church Partnership	Alison Phillips and Gordon Skidmore <i>(Ann Barber is Treasurer)</i>
Weekly Notices	Gordon Skidmore
Monthly Sector Newsletter	<i>(appointed by Stewards of the sector churches)</i> Gill and Gordon Skidmore

The Church Leadership Team

Minister

Church Stewards

Church Treasurer

Pastoral Secretary

Representatives to Wantage and Grove Church Partnership

Circuit Stewards who are members at Wantage

Two representatives of Church Life – to be appointed at 2024 General Church Meeting

Resourcing the work of Wantage Methodist Church

We are always looking for people prepared to take up some of the tasks involved in the work of Wantage Methodist Church (with Childrey)

We need **Church Stewards**. What is involved in being a Church Steward? Please talk to any member of the Church Leadership Team.