

Christ Church Cheltenham Activities Reports for 2023-24

Fabric Committee

The last year or so has been challenging with Martin Chapman, Shirley Collins and Dr. Kim Fleet leaving us. Now depleted of many skills we have done many smaller tasks. A big thank you to those who joined us for the Christmas preparations to name just one. We need to identify tasks to be passed on to the architect, to David Hill our janitor, back to PCC or find suitable contractors. The solar panels come under the Carbon Zero team who will also be addressing the leaky roofs onto which the panels will go. More help is needed, namely younger hands and office skills.

Brian Jenner, Current Chair of Fabric

Deanery Synod Report 2023-24

Synod has, as usual, met three times in the past year. The key issues included:

- The appointment of a new Area Dean. Andrew Blyth, vicar of Trinity, has taken over from Rev Gary Grady, and has appointed 5 new assistants to help with specific topics.
- General Synod remains deeply (and apparently fairly evenly) divided on its response to 'Living in Love and Faith' regarding same- to sex relationships. Progress is glacial. General Synod sounds to be an unhappy and rather fractious body...
- Parish Share. Some facts and figures for our diocese
 - Currently running on a deficit of £1.4M per year
 - Parish Share income in 2022 was £6.477M
 - Cost of Ministry is £76K per full-time post

This is why Parish Share for 2024 has gone up by 7%; and from 2025 we shall have a new scheme based on a cost of £80K per full-time post. This will run for 5 years and will be reviewed every 5 years thereafter.

- Much Deanery Synod effort continues to be spent on the Deanery Strategic Plan (which the diocese requires us to produce). Andrew Blyth describes this as like gardening: feeding, weeding, moving, planting, what we need to take forward and what should be prioritised. Each Parish has now been asked to submit its key short, medium and long term mission priorities. If you have views I am sure Simon would welcome them!

Ian Kirkwood

Pastoral Team

As always, members of the Pastoral Team have continued in our efforts to help and support members of the Christ Church family and those in our community.

The Team is unfortunately now smaller than usual, as one member has left the church in the past year, and we have yet to replace other recent losses. We would benefit from a few younger members, and also more men. Recruitment has been difficult.

Our bi-monthly meetings for discussion have been led by Simon, and Mandy Whitefield has supervised the necessary Safeguarding Courses. We enjoyed a social gathering in the garden of Ed and Julia Bishop last Summer. Thank you to all of them,

We always welcome requests from the Church Family where there is a need, and will do our best to be supportive. We are grateful for support given in particular instances by other Church members at our request. We also recognise the spontaneous loving care given by church folk to each other, which is such an important part of the Christ Church family life. Please do let us know if you are aware of anyone who might appreciate some support, or just a chance to talk to someone. If you are new to Christchurch and would welcome introductions to other folk, please do ask.

The members of the Pastoral Team are Tina Benney, Julia Bishop, Anne Chapman, Pat Hopkins, Janet Marshall, Jennie Norman, Angela Smith, Peter Stanley, Janet Vonk, and Mandy Whitefield.

Tina Benney and Anne Chapman

Christ Church Pre-School Annual Report

Pre-School has had another fun, busy year! We have been busy doing lots of fun activities with the children, helping them learn and develop following the EYFS and our curriculum.

Our numbers have been increasing and our numbers for September look good. We have 18 children going on to school in September, we will miss them but wish them well at their new schools.

In December, we took the children and their parents to Perrygrove Railway in Coleford. We got to take a ride on the train and meet Father Christmas! The families had a lovely day and the weather was good to us!

The government has introduced new funding for families of 2 year olds and we are encouraging our families to apply for this funding and we have made provision to have spaces for 2 year olds in September to accommodate the rise in need.

We look forward to another busy year!

Vicki West and Lisa Davis, Play Leaders

Open the Book

Once again, our 2 small teams have had the privilege of retelling Bible stories in whole-school assemblies in both Christ Church Primary (CCPS) and Gloucester Road Primary Schools (GRPS). I have been leading the assemblies fortnightly at CCPS, with invaluable help from Maria Poldervaart and Brian Jenner, but, sadly, Nikki Seville, with 2 friends from Elim church, now only leads monthly assemblies at GRPS. This is because the staff feel that there is now

longer enough time in the curriculum for more frequent assemblies. We continue to involve the children in every assembly and we're never short of volunteers!

During the past year Rev Simon and I have also had the opportunity to lead class assemblies regularly at GRPS. I find it quite a challenge explaining why Easter and Christmas are important to me as a Christian to the Reception class of 4 and 5 year olds, but what an opportunity and a privilege to share God's love with them.

Last summer, as a church, we once again gave a copy of Scripture Union's booklet 'It's your Move' to all the Yr 6 leavers at both schools. The booklet includes lots of practical tips for starting at secondary school, and also testimonies from children and teachers about how God will be with them as they transition to a new school. Both schools were happy for the 'Open the book' team to lead a class session to give out the books and have a look at what they contain, and, once again, we could share our belief that the Lord will be with them and care for them.

The 'Open the Book' material, now overseen by the Bible Society, has been revised and updated recently and both teams are now registered under the new scheme. Please pray that an 'open door' of opportunity will continue for us to share Bible stories regularly with all these children. For children attending GRPS, a local community school, this may be the only opportunity they have to hear them. For children at CCPS, these assemblies reinforce the teaching they are blessed to receive at a Church school. It's such an important link with Christ Church as well – I've been greeted a number of times in a local supermarket by children who recognise me and most weeks at Lego Club, I'm lobbied by children who want to take part in the next assembly!

Both teams are very small – if you would like to help in any way – either by joining the team, supporting us in prayer, or helping to sew new costumes or make new props, we would love to hear from you.

Maureen Jones

Lego Club

The aim of the Lego club is to open our church doors and serve our community by providing a regular, free, safe, welcoming space, open to all, for families to get together. For parents, grandparents, carers to come after school once a week with the children in their care, connect with us and others and grow friendships. To provide good quality refreshments and engaging play opportunities for children using Lego and other associated toys.

Lego Club launched on 5th November 2022 and happens in the baptistry area of the church. The club runs every Friday in term time, it continues to be a popular club with an average of 20 families each week. It is busy! It attracts children from a variety of different primary schools in the local area. Alongside the club there is a Kids Connect Lego Club Facebook Page to share the children's Lego and Duplo creations and the stop motion videos they have created. We also introduced Lego Art which has proved to be very popular and some Lego Technic.

In addition to the regular after school session, Christ Church Pre School children have their very own Lego Club session every other Friday starting at 2.30pm. Vicki, who leads the pre school, is also one of our regular volunteers.

We have seen friendships developing between the parents over coffee and Sarah's particularly good cakes. We've also been privileged to have faith conversations with both parents and children asking about the bible, baptism and about the church. Children often ask to look around the church.

I am very grateful for the time given by the Lego Club Team to enable the club to happen. We have the best refreshments organised by Sarah O'M and Wandee. Maureen does a fabulous job welcoming the children each week and is often in conversation about Open the Book assemblies with children who also meet her at their primary school. We sometimes have overseas students who come to help with Sarah. All of our regular volunteers are safe recruited and DBS checked.

There is always room for more helpers, so please get in touch if that might be you. We can offer very good coffee and cake!

Gill Heron

Youth Connect

In the beginning . . .

The spark of an idea for Christ Church to provide a safe social space for young people in school years 7-11 first came about in late 2022, and we held our first planning meeting in February 2023. We decided, at this time, to meet twice a month on a Sunday evening in the Harwood Hall and we came up with a number of ideas for activities that we thought we could provide, which we hoped would entertain and engage any young people who chose to come along (more of this later). We also thought about how we might encourage new people to come along, give us a try and find out what we are about.

Over the spring and summer of 2023, we amassed a band of merry men and women who were willing and able to support the group on a regular basis. It is important to say how much the enthusiasm and effort that our supporters give to making the group a success is appreciated and valued. It is true to say that the group would never have come into being without them and certainly wouldn't be the success it is now.

During the summer of 2023, we reached out to other churches and their youth workers for guidance and support. This help has been invaluable in getting our group off the ground. It is fantastic to know that other churches are encouraging us, and praying for Christ Church Youth Group to be a success.

The much awaited grand opening . . .

We 'opened for business' on Sunday 1st October and our enthusiastic band of supporters outnumbered the young people by about 3:1! We had fun, played table tennis and table football and ate pizza. A great start to a new venture.

The first 6 months . . .

Since the first meeting in October 2023, we have continued to meet on the 1st and 3rd Sunday of each month. We have familiar activities out each week, such as table tennis, table football and Lego, and we aim to offer an extra activity for everyone to get involved with, if they choose.

On Bonfire Night we had a fire pit and sparklers in the garden. We made jacket potatoes and S'mores, and toasted marshmallows over the fire pit. We enjoyed lots of sticky parkin whilst watching fireworks from neighbouring gardens.

In early December we had a film night when we scoffed delicious hotdogs and popcorn whilst watching 'Elf'. On 17th December the Harwood Hall was already booked for the Carols by Candlelight service, so Youth Group decamped to Hollywood Bowl where we enjoyed an evening bowling and – you guessed it – eating!!

2024 (so far) . . .

We started the New Year by thinking about our hopes and dreams for the coming 12 months, and we created an A1 sized poster covered in our ideas. We will look back on these later in the year. Our members (young and older) came up with some fabulous ideas for things they would like to see happen in 2024!

We followed that 2 weeks later with an evening of mixology, making mocktails for all to taste and share. Some, like the Pina Colada mocktail, went down very well with our young people. Others (with more healthy ingredients) not so!!



In February we embarked on a microwave mug-cake baking evening with some fantastic looking, and very tasty, results. There seemed to be an awful lot of chocolate used in the cakes that evening!



As you can tell, food features large on the list of things our young people enjoy.

The last time we met, on 17th March, we painted pebbles and wooden eggs for Easter. We clearly have some budding Picassos in our small group!



The future . . .

Although still quite a small group we now have 9 children on our books and the number who come each week is gradually growing. The relatively small numbers have given us the chance to get to know our young people very well, and this helps us to provide activities we think they will enjoy. We have encouraged the young people to take an active role in the group by asking them what they would like to do during the sessions going forwards. They have added some great ideas to the 'Suggestions Box' which is on the table every week. So, get ready for a bit of dodgeball, some hide and seek, a game of rounders in the park and, possibly, a sponsored walk.

As part of our forward planning, in the summer we are looking to invite the current year 6 children at Christ Church and Gloucester Road Schools to come to a taster evening. This will offer them the opportunity to see the group and meet the young people currently attending, which will help them decide whether they would like to be part of the group from September 2024, when they move into year 7.

We are actively sharing information about our group with families and young people who attend Christ Church for other activities and we have had 2 members who have joined through word of mouth.

All in all, this has been a wonderful and positive start to a new venture for Christ Church. Thanks go to all those who have played a part in getting the group off the ground and given their time, energy and prayers to making it a success.

Shelagh Gartley

9th Cheltenham (Christ Church) Guides

For a small unit (11 Guides now), we've had a busy year. Last July we invited past members and local leaders to celebrate the 90th birthday of Christ Church Guides. It was a great evening and we were delighted to welcome our County Commissioner, Sue Cooper, one of our former Guides, to join us to give Skye Swinton her Gold award, the highest award that Guides can now achieve. Sian Green, our Rainbow and Brownie leader, and also a former Christ Church Guide, had been at work behind the scenes and arranged for me to be awarded my 40-year service award as well, as I've now been leading the Unit since 1983!

Also in July, we held a Brownie and Guide sleepover at church and then a Parade service the next day. During the summer holidays, Skye represented Gloucestershire Guides at an international camp in the Netherlands, which she loved. She is now a young leader with

Rainbows. We have 2 new leaders for the Unit which is great news as I will need to retire at some point. However, Zoe, who has been a leader with us whilst at University, will be leaving us in June – I'm very grateful for her commitment and support during the last 3 years.

This February, we celebrated World Thinking Day by climbing up to the clock room so that we could make our Guide Promise at a local landmark – 5 Guides made their Promise for the first time. We're getting on well with the new Guide programme now, in addition to other Guiding initiatives, including earning the 'Swish' badge, which involved finding out about recycling and upcycling clothes and then having a 'fashion show' in church to highlight our 'creations' which was very well attended by parents and friends.

The current Guides are a young, enthusiastic and delightful group and it's a joy to lead them each week.

Maureen Jones, Guide Leader

Craft Club

Craft Club meets 10.30 – 12.00 on those Wednesdays when there isn't a Friendship Club lunch. There are 21 members, male and female, most of whom attend regularly. A striking feature of the Club is how supportive they are of each other, providing lifts, hospital visits, conversation, helping with crafts and IT skills.

We continue to work with National Star in providing work experience. Students attend with a Job Coach and help us with refreshments. It is rewarding to see them grow in confidence. Our first student graduated from the College and is still volunteering with us.

In June, we had our annual outing to the Star Bistro, where we enjoyed coffee and cake.

We were very saddened by the sudden illness and death of Janet Osborne. Janet was a founding member who was always kind, generous and supportive. She had a wonderful collection of card making resources and guided us in making beautiful cards.

We are very grateful to Mike Vonk, another founding member. Mike is reliable and supportive; always willing to make sure members can get to the group. We look to Mike as our art expert!

Pat Hopkins

Plan B

Plan B bereavement group meets on the third Thursday of each month in the conservatory at Webb's Garden Centre, Evesham Road, between 10.00 and 11.30am.

We have nine members, some from Christ Church and some not, and we enjoy a good chat with coffee and cake. And we obviously sometimes share our experiences of loss (either recently or longer ago) which people find helpful.

On 15th June we had a garden party at Martin's house on a VERY HOT day !! On February 25th this year we had our customary belated Christmas meal at The House in the Tree. No sign of party hats but lots of laughter.

If you are thinking of giving it a try, (it's very informal), please contact Martin Osborne on 07979 797967.

Choir Report - 2023-2024

By the beginning of 2023 everyone was recovering from the upheaval of the pandemic and life was returning a little more to normal. Now that we know that things are not going to be cancelled at a minute's notice, the choir has flourished with that greater sense of stability. We have now settled into a familiar monthly routine of services which has kept us all busy.

Christ Church choir combined with All Saint's choir sang the services at Worcester Cathedral on the first weekend in September. It was a lovely trip giving us all the opportunity to socialise and enjoy singing together. We were delighted to have James MacDowell Scott (All Saint's Director of Music) playing for us, keeping everyone on track. It was good to see members of the congregation who came to support us.

Later in September All Saint's choir joined us again to sing in the annual Heritage concert. This year we sang music which is not usually heard these days as part of a service, such as the Nicene Creed and the Te Deum.

As the Worship Group leads the morning service on the second Sunday in the month, Choral Evensong at 5:00pm has become a regular fixture for most of the year. As expected attendance of the congregation has been varied. However, the only real crash in numbers occurred when evensong clashed with the Wimbledon Final. Tea and cakes are enjoyed after the service. Many thanks to Sarah O'Meara for organising this treat.

Christmas and Easter have again been musical highlights. We welcomed Simon Williams to play for Carols by Candlelight last Christmas. He is organist at Cheltenham Ladies College and also works for the Royal College of Organists. On Palm Sunday evening this year we held the service of 'Music and Readings for Passiontide', with suitably penitential music. Choral Evensong joyfully rounded off the Easter weekend with rousing canticles, anthems and hymns.

Looking ahead, the choir is planning to sing Choral Evensong in Hereford Cathedral on Saturday July 20th. The service is at 5:30pm and members of the congregation are most welcome to attend.

And finally, I would like to express my thanks to Tony White who looks after the music library, choir robes and does anything that needs doing.

Tim Ingold