

Christ Church Cheltenham Activities Reports for 2024-25

PCC sub committee reports

Children & Youth

The Children & Youth sub committee met once and exists to oversee the work with children and young people at Christ Church. While the interaction with our younger people at Christ Church continues to be good away from Sunday provision, we are very aware that needs to be a focus for the next year at Christ Church, for which we will need leaders.

The Friday term time Lego Club, Monday weekly baby & toddler group, and the twice monthly Youth Connect continue to provide valuable space for local families. Most of the families that we engage with at these times are rarely part of the worshipping community at Christ Church. Although we have had families come to be baptised from these groups, we are aware that we need to provide additional opportunities and space for conversations about faith to become part of the everyday activities for the church. Our relationships with the local schools are good, with both state primary schools in our Parish receiving regular visits from Christ Church for assemblies and class lessons, as well as us hosting services for Christmas & Easter. We also host Cheltenham Ladies College for some evening services and their Confirmation service, and various other schools for their annual Christmas carol services.

The monthly All Together Service continues to thrive, and we hope and pray that as we work out how we might offer an even better space for children and young people on Sunday mornings, those families who join us monthly may be encouraged to take a more regular part of our Sunday worship.

Simon Heron

Worship

The worship committee met once during 2024-2025.

It has been instrumental in the introduction of the fourth Sunday Community Praise service, which with its blend of traditional and contemporary in a more informal format has been well received. Choral Evensong is now monthly (except August) and is seeing some encouraging growth. The 8am BCP Holy Communion has become smaller as various members have moved away or have died. Although there are few congregants for the earlier service, it continues to be appreciated by those who do attend and we continue to see this as being a worthwhile and valuable part of the service provision on a Sunday morning.

Our Sunday and midweek pattern is now embedded, and the worship committee is keen to see how this regular format will work out in the coming twelve months.

Simon Heron

Christ Church Choir

It was a great pleasure last July to travel over to Hereford Cathedral and sing Choral Evensong during the Cathedral Choir's absence. Christ Church Choir was augmented by

members of the choir from Pershore Abbey, adding to the excellent sound. Christ Church Choir then sang Evensong at Gloucester Cathedral on the last Saturday in August. We were made very welcome by the Cathedral Clergy and much enjoyed singing in our home Cathedral. Once again, it was good to see members of our own congregation supporting us.

New choir members have been welcomed including Pauline Fisher, who is a trumpeter and plays with the organ and in the group. Pauline played the Last Post at our annual Service of Remembrance for which we are most grateful.

Cheltenham Ladies College boarders joined us for the annual Advent Carol Service on Advent Sunday. Both Christ Church and CLC choirs shared the singing of the Advent Carols to great effect.

Christmas and Easter continued to be musically rich seasons in the church's year, with the choir singing in Carols by Candlelight and the Christmas services. The choir rehearsed through the winter months music for Lent and Easter. On Palm Sunday evening a Devotional for Passiontide, with the title Last Words of Love, was held. It was a meditation with anthems and hymns. Choral Evensong joyfully rounded off the Easter weekend with rousing psalms, canticles, anthems and hymns.

Choral Evensong continues to be a regular service held at 5:00pm on the second Sunday of the month. Support by the choir and congregation for this service has been good during the year. Many thanks again to Sarah O'Meara and helpers for providing tea and cake afterwards.

Many thanks must also be given to all the musicians who sing in the Group and the Choir for their loyal service during the year. Without their commitment, Christ Church could not benefit from the wonderful music sung and played throughout the seasons as part of our services.

Tim Ingold, Director of Music

Deanery Synod

Meetings of the Deanery Synod were held in November 2024 and March 2025. Presentations were given on the work of Christian Aid and on stewardship and giving. The recent work of Christian Aid in Ukraine, Gaza, Malawi and Sudan was highlighted as only part of the services now given to 29 countries, reaching out to 4 million people. Useful information was presented and discussed regarding stewardship from the visibility of giving devices in churches to giving through wills and legacies.

Appointments

It was reported at the November meeting that, following appointments at St. Philip and St. James and at St. Barnabas, Cheltenham now has a full complement of clergy. Subsequently The Rev. Andrew Blyth has been appointed to 'Mission and Ministry' at Oxford which involves large strategic projects in 800 churches. He will be on sabbatical in May and June, returning in July before taking up his new post. This leaves vacancies for a new Area Dean and a new incumbent at Trinity.

Parish Share

A new Parish Share model is to be introduced in 2026, relating to the full cost of ministry: stipend, housing, pensions etc. There is a commitment to greater transparency by the diocese. The diocese forecasts a deficit of £2.5 million. The new Parish Shares are likely to be linked to the present Parish Share amounts and will be set for three years.

Deanery Strategic Mission Plan

Project Turn Key is offering help to churches in procuring maintenance services, saving money and time. Options for the future use of St. Peter's Church and its site on Tewkesbury Road, Cheltenham, are being considered. Discussion continues on possible new mission schemes.

Safeguarding

In view of the findings of the Makin Report, some changes will be made in safeguarding procedures at Parish level. Thanks were recorded for the work done by all Parish Safeguarding Officers.

Hilary Martin

Fabric Team

The Fabric Team has been busy throughout the past year to keep our building in good repair. Here are some of the jobs that have been undertaken.

The team has assisted with the new roof to the Harwood Hall and with the Solar Panel project.

We have been informed about the need to check the hanging cross for its construction and support. After inspection we believe the support to be sufficient but it remains important to have the cross examined closely.

Much work had been done to finally make the Nave attic safe for maintenance work

We have continued changing our light bulbs to LED in the attic and elsewhere.

The male loos were fixed once a suitable spare part for the waste pipework was found.

The loo for people with disabilities has had the closure removed as some were having difficulty getting in. A weaker closure may be put back in. Closures have recently been found to have failed and will need replacing as will the taps in the main loos.

Work has started lime mortar pointing the worst parts of the back wall next to Abbeyholme and cement pointing to the paving in the courtyard.

A new shed has replaced the old playgroup shed in the courtyard.

The heating has been finally fixed in the Music room. The church heating has been much improved and engineers are due to be back at time of writing.

Enquiries have been made to make the velux windows in the Bayshill / Lansdown rooms operate. We have found worn and broken parts and no supplier as yet; we may have to buy a new system.

A loss of water pressure was found to be a faulty pressure reducing valve. This has been removed and the water restored. In looking for the problem the route of the pipe work has been found and the plans will be updated.

A large leak was found in the back of an old lead drain pipe, a larger hole was cut in the front to give access and then both were repaired.

Some work has been done to stop rain water leaks in the main Church at the vestry and both tower rooms where we could gain access. We will support the standing committee and any volunteers in the major works needed to reach inaccessible areas of the roof. Delay and changing weather patterns has made this an urgent task now.

After flooding in the car park the drains were emptied of sludge.

The organ blower needed a new switch unit installed by professionals. Work was done by us to improve ventilation in the blower house and ensure it was rodent free.

The prayer space is now carpeted and available for prayer.

A small change to the mowing was made and a wild orchid was then spotted. It is believed there are now two there.

Penny continues to do wonders in the first part of the garden. Recently some work has been done further in. This remains a depressing job due to the shadow cast by the enormous yew trees. These two trees need a tree work application to have them removed. Epicormic growth is regularly removed from the lime trees.

The Guinness Trust has been contacted regarding work affecting our property. They have started work on overhanging sycamore trees. They are also to remove ivy on the back wall of the church. They are happy for us to erect a better temporary fence to the blower house compound.

Parish centre gutter maintenance and solar panel cleaning is now part of a regular programme.

The lightning conductor was replaced after an attempted theft. A second attempt was successful and the steeplejacks then boxed in a replacement.

Decluttering continues!

Brian Jenner

Pastoral Care Team

The pastoral care team aims to provide friendly, compassionate, spiritual and emotional support to individuals and families with whom we are connected. We aim to keep contact and make home visits to the housebound, hospital and care home residents who can no longer regularly attend Sunday services as well as offer support for those in our congregation who are experiencing acute needs such as bereavement, mental health issues or acute illnesses.

We are currently in transition as Tina, Anne, Pat Hopkins and Janet Marshall are all laying down some or all of their ministry in the Pastoral Care Team. Tina Benney and Anne Chapman have led the pastoral care team since Tim Mayfield left and before! They have all done so much for Christ Church members over the years that I feel they are a hard act to follow. Thank you for all you have done. I hope that the Pastoral Care Team can continue and flourish going forward.

We meet every other month as a team on the last Thursday of the month. At this meeting we update on our own status and ensure we have the training, support and capacity we need to continue in our roles. If we have a concern about any of the people we are supporting it is

only discussed in private supervision meetings arranged with the incumbent. This is due to the confidentiality needs of the people we visit.

We are a dwindling band of volunteers with an ever-growing caseload. Part of the reason for this is the need for our volunteers to be willing to undergo training (including Safeguarding) and DBS and suitability checks.

Christ Church is a very caring and friendly congregation and a lot of care and support is given to or received by members outside of our supervision which is all right and good. However, as chair of the Pastoral Care Team and Parish Safeguarding Officer, I am acutely aware of the dangers that vulnerable people face accepting help from someone they have only met at church and equally the danger a well-meaning person can put themselves in by a confused or ill person they were trying to help. This is the reason I feel training and supervision are vital for Pastoral Carers to maintain safe working practices.

So, we are eagerly looking for volunteers who have a calling to give in this ministry whether they have experience of counselling or caring roles, professionally or personally. Enquirers who would like to explore the possibility of joining our team should email or speak to Mandy or Simon pastoral@christchurcheltenham.com

Please pray for every aspect of this ministry.

Mandy Whitefield
Pastoral Care Team Leader

Christ Church Baby and Toddler Group

We meet on Mondays (except Bank Holidays) from 1pm to 3pm in the Harwood Hall for parents, carers and pre-school children.

The group continues to thrive. Some members are very regular while others we see from time to time. There is plenty for the children to do, including a baby area, small world play, playdough, craft, painting or cooking, and the ever popular climbing frame. The highlight of the afternoon, when we all do something together, is at song time led by Simon and Gill. Everyone joins in with enthusiasm. Many of the parents have become very efficient at tidying up. We end at 3pm by singing and dancing the Hokey Cokey.

I am very grateful to the team of helpers and for the prayers for the group on Monday mornings. If anyone would like to go on the rota to help, we would love to include you.

Sarah O'Meara

Christ Church Pre-School

At Christ Church Pre-School we have had another busy year. This year we have been full to capacity and have supported many children and families. We had our Ofsted Inspection in February and we are pleased to report that we got a Good rating. The inspector highlighted lots of strengths and as always there were a few recommendations.

We have had new staff join us and one member of the team is currently doing her Level 3 apprenticeship and we are fully in support of this.

The children have been having lots of fun learning new things and experiencing a wide

range of activities. We are planning another trip in the summer which we are very much looking forward to.

We have 15 children going off to school in September and we are busy enrolling new children to join us. We have an open afternoon in May to welcome new families. We look forward to another busy year!

Vicki West, Play Leader

Open the Book

Two teams of three continue to take 'Open the Book' assemblies, fortnightly at Christ Church Primary and, now, only monthly at Gloucester Road Primary.

It's an enormous privilege to have the opportunity to share Bible stories at the whole-school assemblies in this way and the children are always attentive and very eager to join in. At Christ Church, the staff are very amenable to us including large groups from different classes and happy for them to join us early to rehearse. Year 6, in particular, have been keen to join in before they leave.

We use the 'Open the Book' resources, published by the Bible Society and use a mixture of the new and old resources and this seems to work well.

In addition, as well as school assemblies at Christ Church, Simon and I have continued to lead class assemblies at Gloucester Road, as part of their RE syllabus. I visit the Reception class 3 times each year – on my recent visit to talk about 'Why Christians celebrate Easter', I was amazed by how much these 4 and 5 year olds had learnt about Easter, praise God. In the autumn, we also had visits to church from two Gloucester Road classes.

Next term, Open the Book teams will lead sessions with Year 6 from both schools, and give them each a copy of the excellent transition booklet, 'It's your Move', published by Scripture Union and designed to give practical tips, from a Christian perspective, on starting at secondary school. Again, it's a real privilege to have the opportunity to share our belief that God will be with them as they embark on a new adventure.

Praise God for all these opportunities to share our faith with children from both these schools and if you feel you could join one of the Open the Book teams, please let me know – just an hour on Wednesday mornings!

Maureen Jones

Lego Club

Lego Club exists to open our church doors and serve the community by providing a free, welcoming space for families. It's a weekly opportunity for parents, grandparents, and carers to come after school with the children in their care, relax together, connect with others, and build friendships. Alongside quality refreshments, children enjoy creative play with Lego, Duplo, and a range of related activities.

Launched on 5th November 2022, Lego Club runs every Friday during term time in the baptistry area. It remains a lively and popular space, with around 20 families attending each week. Children from several local primary schools join us regularly.

We've also created a *Kids Connect Lego Club* Facebook page, where we celebrate the children's Lego and Duplo creations, including stop-motion videos. New additions like Lego Art and Lego Technic have been well received.

In addition to the after-school club, Christ Church Pre-School enjoys its own Lego session every other Friday at 2:30pm. Vicki, who leads the preschool, also serves as one of our regular volunteers. Lego resources are also used by the Christ Church Youth Connect group and during special events like *The Big Feast*.

More than just play, Lego Club has become a place where friendships grow over coffee and Sarah's much appreciated cakes - often with delicious contributions from other families too. We've been privileged to have meaningful faith conversations with parents and children, exploring the Bible, baptism, and the life of the church. Children frequently ask to explore the building, showing genuine curiosity about the space. One of our Lego Club families brought their son to be baptised last Spring.

I'm incredibly thankful for our brilliant volunteer team. Sarah O'Meara and Wandee take the lead on refreshments, Maureen offers every child a warm welcome (often recognised from *Open the Book* assemblies), and this year we've been joined by Victoria from Sportily and Wendy. All regular volunteers are safely recruited and DBS checked.

A special thank-you to the team for keeping things running so well during the autumn term while Simon and I were on sabbatical—they went the extra mile.

In February, we were delighted to welcome a group of overseas visitors from our partner diocese in Sweden. They thoroughly enjoyed seeing Lego Club in action.

There's always space for more helpers - if you'd like to be part of this welcoming team, please get in touch. We can promise great company, good coffee, and excellent cake!

Gill Heron

Youth Connect

Throughout 2024 the Youth Group met every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month and we have continued to provide a range of activities including table tennis, arts and crafts, table top games and making and eating tasty snacks! We added an indoor badminton set to the range of sports activities we offer, which has proved quite popular. We have had a trip to Hollywood Bowl and a Christmas Film Night watching 'The Muppet Christmas Carol' with popcorn and ice-cream. We celebrated Bonfire Night with a fire pit and sparklers. We made jacket potatoes and S'mores, and toasted marshmallows over the fire pit.

We have also had many interesting discussions with our young people about the issues that matter to them in our world today.

Since the start of this year, our Year 11 members have begun to prioritise studying for their GCSE which start soon, and we wish them all the best and every success as they head into this challenging time of their school career. As a result of this, we have seen a drop off in the numbers of young people who regularly attend. This was to be expected and, as a team, we are looking at ways to engage and encourage children from years 7, 8 and 9 to come along. 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 2025, when they move into year 7. We continue to actively share information

about our group with families and young people who attend Christ Church for other activities, for example at Lego Club as Youth Group can provide a social activity for them to move on to when they are too old to attend Lego Club anymore.

However, because of the low numbers regularly attending at the moment, we have taken the decision to meet during term time only for now, until our numbers build up again.

Of course, we must remember the small but dedicated band of supporters without whom the group would not happen and we are very grateful for their commitment and the time and effort they put in.

Shelagh Gartley

9th Cheltenham Brownies and Rainbows

Both Rainbows and Brownies continue to be at full capacity, with all girls staying in Guiding as they move to the next section when they are old enough.

We have covered lots of the Girlguiding programme over the last year, with girls earning many badges. Rainbows and the younger Brownies enjoyed a visit to Slimbridge in the summer term last year. The older Brownies had an Amazing Animals themed sleepover in the hall at the end of term.

Most recently we did a badge where the girls learnt about various jobs they could do when they were older. We had a number of visitors coming in (see below) and enjoyed a visit to the fire station and to a football game, where the girls were mascots to Cheltenham Town Women's Football team. The Robinesses made it to the 4th Round of the Women's FA Cup, playing Wolves at home.

Our visitors included Juliette Williams who was one of only a handful of female fighter pilots. She was part of the first Tornado GR4 crew, and also an RAF's Hawk solo display pilot, as well as being the first woman ever to join the famous RAF Hawk display team. She was one of the few women pilots to fly combat missions over Iraq and Afghanistan.

Bishop Rachel came and spoke to the girls. She made history with a number of firsts: When she became the first female diocesan bishop in the Church of England and when she became the first female bishop in the House of Lords. She is also Bishop to His Majesty's Prisons.

We enjoyed a visit to the Cheltenham Fire Station with Suzanne Quincey, who is the current "World's Toughest Female Firefighter Alive" and the current "Ultimate Female Firefighter" having won 19 medals, 12 of them gold, for the UK in these international competitions. Suzanne was a 2012 Olympic torchbearer and a Woman of Achievement at the 2013 Woman of the year lunch.

Unfortunately the local Green Councilor was unwell the week she was due to come and visit us.

We are always looking for additional helpers!

Sian Green

9th Cheltenham (Christ Church) Guides

We now have 12 Guides on roll, with more to join after Easter, and they continue to be a friendly and very enthusiastic group. The new-ish Guide programme is firmly established now. One Guide has recently received the silver award for completing 4 'themes' and a few more should achieve that next term.

Last summer the Guides were given the opportunity to join Zoe, our student Guider, on a weekend camp with her 'home' Guiding group from Oxford. This year Sian and Elizabeth Green have kindly volunteered to take 6 of our Guides on an overnight camp, Bubbs Hill Bash, at Cowley in June. The Guides enjoyed covering activities for an RNLI badge in the autumn and we've enjoyed two evenings make 'sugar craft' models for Christmas and Easter.

Sadly, we've said farewell to one of our leaders this term and I'm very grateful to Charlotte for co-leading the unit with me now. Next term we hope to cover the 'traditions of Guiding' badge, which will include cooking in a brick oven, as Guides did during the war. We also hope to have an evening's archery at our county HQ in Cowley. Please pray for the Guides and for energy for the leaders!

Maureen Jones, Guide Leader

Craft Club

Craft Club meets 10.00 - 12.00 on those Wednesdays when there isn't a Friendship Club lunch. An earlier start was introduced to enable members to attend the exercise class at 11.30. A charge of £1 per person goes toward materials and an outing.

Craft Club provides a friendly place for conversation, a hot drink and snacks. Members bring their own activity or use the club materials such as a range of arts, knitting, crosswords and sudoku. Beautiful table flower arrangements were made to take home at Christmas and Easter.

We continue to work with National Star College 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 with us as a volunteer. Pat was invited to the College reverse Job Fair where she was interviewed by students about the volunteering roles at Christ Church.

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

We are very grateful to Mike Vonk and Tina Bull for their loyal support in making it work. Mike does much of the transporting of members to ensure they get here. Another big thank you to those generous Christ Church people who donate craft resources.

Pat Hopkins

Plan B

The Plan B bereavement club has continued to meet monthly (on the 3rd Thursday) at Webb's Garden Centre, from 10.00am to 11.30am. Our members are church and non-church goers and we enjoy having a good chat with coffee and cake.

The club is open to anyone who has lost someone, no matter how long ago. We do share our experiences when there's a need but we also enjoy each other's company.

If you feel you would like to come along, please contact Martin Osborne either at church or on 079 79 797 967. You will be made very welcome.

Martin Osborne

Cheltenham Food Bank

In the last twelve months, Christ Church members have given donations weighing 244.55kgs (539 lbs)!! This is amazing, and the Food Bank wishes me to thank all those generous people who have donated.

The work of the Food Bank is vital and helps people in real need.

I'd like to thank Bill Hews and Chris Eddershaw for their faithful service in delivering the goods to the Food Bank.

Martin Osborne