



THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST STAPLEGROVE

DIOCESE OF BATH & WELLS

ANNUAL REPORT – 2023/2024

The Rector's Welcome

2023 was, again, a busy and lively year in the life of our church at St John's and I hope that these reports will provide an adequate flavour for the richness and breadth of activity here. Happily, it was the first year since 2019 not to be seriously hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic as life began, at last, to return to something like "normal".

In early January, we bade farewell to Jim Booth in a moving funeral service, attended by many people from near and far, and which paid tribute to his immensely long and extraordinary life, as well as attracting the attention of the local media. Sadly, the year would also see the departure of a number of other church family members and, whilst it's not possible to mention them all, we were all shocked several months later at the sudden death of Sue Derham after a short illness. May they all rest in peace.



On a more positive note, we celebrated King Charles III's Coronation in early May. Having marked the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, once again St John's was at the heart of the community with a picnic on the green attended by many people, games arranged by Duncan and over 100 cream teas enjoyed in the afternoon in the church. In many ways, it was St John's on top form and we were grateful to the organising team for arranging such a successful event.

If that wasn't enough excitement, on 24 June our Curate, Cathryn, was ordained as priest in a memorable service at Taunton Minster attended by many people from our benefice. Cathryn has since been able to celebrate Communion, take weddings and baptisms, give absolutions and pronounce blessings. Cathryn has earned the respect and affection of everyone during her time with us and it was a joy to share in this important occasion. She will remain with us until at least summer 2025.

Our finances have again been challenging. We are enormously grateful to those who contribute financially to the church, as well as to our Fundraising Team and those who support our many events and activities. Equally, we have been fortunate and thankful to receive some legacies. All this has enabled us to keep our heads above water, but rising costs and decreasing numbers mean that the challenge will inevitably remain and we cannot afford to be complacent. My thanks to David Bridges for his safe and wise stewardship of our money.

We were pleased to have the church available as a Warm Space during the colder months, when our regular Saturday coffee mornings provided a natural opportunity for hospitality and friendship. Our building was further enhanced in the autumn with the installation of a fixed screen and projector, which have provided new possibilities for worship and other activities, including Café Church and Film Nights which have both proved extremely popular and been attended by many people from within and beyond our regular membership.

As ever, I have been extremely grateful to everyone who contributes to the life of our church – far too many people to name. At the Annual Meetings this year, Felicity McGill will step down as Churchwarden I share everyone's thankfulness to her for her contribution. Without a successor, Duncan Robertson will continue as lone Churchwarden for the immediate future: again, I know that everyone is deeply grateful to Duncan for everything he gives.

I must also pay tribute to Elizabeth Hall, who is retiring this April from her role in charge of the Choir – a role she has held for decades, let alone years! Elizabeth has invested a phenomenal amount of time and energy over these years and St John's has been considerably blessed because

of her. Happily, she will be remaining with us and with the Choir in 'rank and file' and the Choir will continue to sing regularly with us – which I know is deeply appreciated by everyone.

Finally, a word on Safeguarding. Our new Safeguarding Officer, Sandy Robertson, has worked really hard and made great progress to bring us up to speed as we seek to ensure the wellbeing and safety of everyone, especially our vulnerable adults and children – as well as being our School Governor, by the way, which is no mean commitment! If ever you have any concerns or questions about safeguarding, please do speak to Sandy in the first instance.

God is faithful, and it's my prayer that through the power of the Holy Spirit we will continue to be faithful in our life as a church. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*" God bless you.

The Rev'd Paul Irving

Church of St John the Evangelist, Staplegrove

**Annual PAROCHIAL Church Meeting
Wednesday 24 April 2024**

AGENDA

Vestry Meeting

- 1 Welcome by the Rector, the Rev Paul Irving
- 2 Opening Prayers
- 3 Minutes of last year's meeting – 26 April 2023 – See page 7
 - 3.1 Approval of Minutes
 - 3.2 Matters arising
- 4 Election of Churchwardens

Annual Meeting

- 1 Minutes of last year's meeting – 26 April 2023 – see pages 7 – 10
 - 1.1 Approval of Minutes
 - 1.2 Matters arising
- 2 Reports – see pages 11 – 31
 - 2.1 Matters arising from reports
- 3 Elections
 - 3.1 Election of 3 x PCC Members
- 4 Accounts
 - 4.1 Approval of Accounts (already circulated)
 - 4.2 Appointment of Independent Inspector of Accounts
- 5 Any other business
- 6 Closing Prayer and the Grace

Church of St John the Evangelist, Staplegrove

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024

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Parish Church of St John the Evangelist, Staplegrove

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting

26th April 2023

Chair: The Rev Paul Irving – Rector

Present: The Rev Paul Irving and 27 parishioners

The Rev Cathryn Howse, Patty Beagle, Hazel Hawkins, Brenda Kenny, Sue and Les Derham, Felicity McGill (Minutes), Duncan Robertson, Janet Darby, Iona and Chris Young, Moira and Jim Read, David and Ann Bridges, Marjorie Connell, Heather Williams, Michael and Lesley Clark, Elizabeth Hall, Pam Thorne, Liz Cutler, Paul Carter, Peter Triggs, Stafford Coombes, Grahame Thompson and Shirley Farrington

Apologies: Willian and Suzi Allen, Gillie Greig, Margaret Coles, Alec and Rosemary James, Lynn Triggs, Alison and Martin Cursham, Margaret Senior, Joan Bird, Sandy Robertson, Mike and Jill Hansford, Graham Hobrough, Madeleine Armitage

VESTRY MEETING

1 Prayer:

The Rector welcomed Church members to the meeting. He thanked Iona and Janet for welcoming members and providing coffee. He said that 2022 had been hit by Covid, including his licensing which had been completed after four attempts. During 2022 also we had also welcomed Cathryn Howse as Curate, she had been ordained as Deacon in October and would be ordained as a Priest on 24th June at Taunton Minster when he hoped for a good representation from Church members. The meeting then commenced with a prayer.

2 Minutes of Vestry meeting of 27th April 2022:

David Bridges proposed that the minutes of the last meeting be accepted. Jim Read seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously. The Rector signed the Minutes as a true record. There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

3 Election of Churchwardens

The Rector thanked Alec James and Duncan Robertson, our two Church Wardens for their work during 2022. He particularly thanked Alec James who would not be standing again as Church Warden. The Rector mentioned that Alec had also been thanked during a recent Church service.

The following nominations for the election of Church Wardens had been received:

<i>Posts</i>	<i>Nominees</i>	<i>Proposed</i>	<i>Seconded</i>
Churchwarden	Guy Duncan Robertson	Felicity McGill	Janet Darby
Churchwarden	Felicity McGill	Sandy Robertson	Guy Duncan Robertson

Both nominations were carried unanimously.

ANNUAL MEETING

1 Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting of 27 April 2022

Paul Carter proposed the minutes be accepted. Janet Darby seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously. The Rector signed the Minutes as a true record of the Meeting. There were no matters arising from the Minutes.

2 Reports

The Rector thanked Felicity McGill for putting together the report and to individual contributors. The **Youth Mission Report** from Iona Young had not been received so was excluded from the Annual Report. Iona Young therefore read her report to the meeting:

The Youth Mission Group continues to work actively to engage with our families and young people and we were delighted to welcome Cathryn to the group in the summer. Our pattern of bimonthly Messy Church sessions is now well established and this year we have added extra events at Christmas and Easter. We regularly welcomed about 25 children (aged from 1 – 12) and their parents/carers to these sessions. Each session starts with activities linked to a biblical theme which is followed by worship, and we finish with a social time enjoying drinks and cakes. It has been encouraging to see families return and brilliant to have so many dads coming along. Our growing number of participants is wonderful, but it does mean that at times we need more helpers, so if you would like to be involved, we'd love to hear from you.

With the ending of Covid restrictions, Open the Book has been able to resume in our schools and it is hoped that we will be able to do at least one session each term. For this to be successful we really do need more folk willing to help. The sessions are much appreciated by the children and do help to develop links between our church and our schools, so please give this some thought and let us know if you are interested in being involved.

Iona Young

The following comments were made on the Reports:

Purchase and Installation of Screen and Projector for the Church

A question was raised about the mounting and installation of the fixed screen. There was concern that the structure would be intrusive and would impact on the look of the Church. The view for the congregation sitting in both the north and south aisles would be restricted. Had it been possible to look at installations in other churches and how much would the screen be used.

The Rector said that the installation of the projector and screen had been considered by a Working Group from the PCC. They had visited other church who had this type of installation. The screen would be mounted behind the arch so would not be visible when not in use and the projector would be mounted on the wall. The company who will carry out the installation have worked in 92 Churches within the Diocese so have a wealth of experience. In terms of its use, it will not only be used during some services of Worship but also when the school comes into Church, at funerals, events, and meetings. It will also be far safer in terms of health and safety than the current situation where the screen perched on chairs. The projector has an adjustable lens which will enable those sitting in the north transept to see the screen, but the problem with the south transept is a “work in progress”. A Faculty has been submitted for the work which will go before the DAC shortly. The financing of the project is from restricted legacies.

3 Elections

3.1 Lay Deanery Synod Representatives

The Rector noted that Paul Carter and Gillie Greig had undertaken the role of Lay Deanery Synod representatives for a number years and although their term of office had come to an end, they were willing to stand again for a further term of three years.

<i>Position</i>	<i>Nominee</i>	<i>Proposed</i>	<i>Seconded</i>
Lay Deanery Synod Member	Paul Carter	Guy Duncan Robertson	Felicity McGill
Lay Deanery Synod Member	Gillie Greig	Graham Hobrough	Felicity McGill

3.2 Members of the PCC

The Rector thanked members of the PCC for their support this year. He said that the following members had come to the end of their term of office. Iona Young, Moira Read and David Bridges. Iona will not be standing again, and the Rector thanked her for her hard work both on the PCC but also

as Governor at Staplegrave School. The following nominations had been received for the role of PCC member.

<i>Position</i>	<i>Nominees</i>	<i>Proposed</i>	<i>Seconded</i>
PCC Member	David Bridges	Joan Bird	David Bird
PCC Member	Moira Read	Felicity McGill	Jim Read
PCC Member	Jill Hansford	Moira Read	Heather Williams

All nominations for the roles of Lay Deanery Representative and PCC member were carried unanimously.

4 Accounts

4.1 Treasurers Report

The Treasurer thanked Chris Young, together with his team of helpers, for his work in counting and banking the weekly collections, processing the Gift Aid and VAT reclaims. He also thanked the team of fundraisers, soup lunch organizers, coffee servers, those who do the laundry, flower ladies and all those involved in the production and distribution of the Journal.

Referencing the bible passage ‘on the Road to Emmaus’ where we are encouraged to challenge ourselves to see the reality of what is before us and to take note of what has been told to us in the past, the Treasurer congratulated people for donating more cash than cheques during the past year – so much so that the annual limit of £8,000 had been exceeded.

The Treasurer then took time, using figures from January-March 2023 to explain the reasons why (1) we are reliant on lychgate sales, coffee mornings, events etc to supplement our income and why (2) we say we have a £15k deficit.

Our expenditure on ‘fixed costs’ (Parish Share, Insurance, Cleaning, Gas, Electricity, Benefice Office) for this three-month period was £14,729 whilst our regular and weekly collections during the same period was £8,562. However, Coffee Shop, Soup lunch, Concert, Gift Aid and GASD reclaims together with Parochial Fees supplemented our income by £7,650.

As with all household budgets which were being stretched, the Treasurer pointed out that St John’s is no exception and went on to suggest ways we could increase our income and lower our costs – some of which would be acceptable and some which would be challenging. The most challenging, he suggested, was to possibly look at increasing, after prayerful consideration, our personal church giving.

Using a graphic illustration, the Treasurer explained that, since 2015, our Parish share has increased by 24.5% and our collections have decreased by 12%. This is the £15k shortfall that must be made up in other ways. Fortunately, we manage to do this.... but for how much longer?

The Treasurer thanked the often-anonymous people who generously donated their time and talents, clarifying that our finances would be a lot poorer without them.

The Treasurer concluded with a controversial challenge stating that, since 2015, so many social things in our lives will have increased in price at least 8 times: Golf Club membership, monthly magazine subscriptions, etc but has our financial giving to St John’s increased at least 8 times? In fact, has it increased at all since 2015??

4.2 Receipt of Accounts

The Accounts were received by the meeting. They had already been approved by PCC in March.

4.3. Independent Examiner of Accounts

David Bridges proposed we should use Anthony Yeo of St. Andrews is appointed as the Independent Examiner of the Accounts. This was seconded by Jim Read and carried unanimously.

David Bridges was thanked for his work as Treasurer and Chris Young as Stewardship Secretary.

5 Any Other Business

Duncan Robertson thanked the Rector, Cathryn and their partners for their hard work and support to our Church.

6. Closing Prayers

The Rector led the closing prayer and the Grace.

REPORTS for 2023/2024

1. ELECTORAL ROLL

The number on the Electoral Roll has increased from 90-92 this year, despite the fact that there have sadly been a number of deaths. There are, however, nine new entries for the coming year which is very encouraging.

Gillian Greig - Electoral Roll Officer

2. PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Church members who served on the Council were:

Rector	The Rev Paul Irving (Chair)*
Curate	The Rev Cathryn Howse*
Churchwarden	Mr Duncan Robertson*
Churchwarden	Mrs Felicity McGill*
Hon PCC Secretary	Mrs Jill Hansford*
Hon Treasurer	Mr David Bridges*
Deanery Synod Representatives:	Mrs Gillian Greig, Mr Paul Carter
Elected members: Mrs Gillian Greig ³ , Mr Paul Carter ³ , Mrs Moira Read ³ , Mrs Jill Hansford ³ , Mr David Bridges ³ , Mr Mike Hansford ¹ , Mrs Janet Darby ¹ , Mr Stafford Coombes ¹ , Mrs Felicity McGill ² , Mr Jim Read ² .	

Notes:

¹- term of office ends 2024; ²- term of office ends 2025; ³- term of office ends 2026
Those marked * served on the Standing Committee during 2022/23

Objectives and Activities

The Primary Aims of St. John the Evangelist, Staplegrove, PCC are:

- To be a sign of the Good News of Jesus Christ and his love for the world.
- To nurture the Christian Faith through friendship, caring, sharing, and teaching within the fellowship of the Church.
- To encourage and enable individuals to respond by faith to the message of Jesus and to follow him.

Further, the PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, the Reverend Paul Irving, in promoting, in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the Church and its Churchyard.

Review of the year

The Council met on the following 6 occasions during 2023/24: 3 May 2023, 6 July, 21 September, 23 November, 25 January 2024 and 21 March. Following its approval by the PCC, a signed copy of the minutes was posted on the noticeboard in the Church porch.

The Standing Committee of the Council met on 5 occasions during 2023/2024: 15 June 2023, 7 September, 9 November, 11 January 2024 and 7 March.

The following appointments were made/roles confirmed at the first meeting of the PCC on 3 May 2023, and committees approved by the Council:

• Hon Treasurer	Mr David Bridges
• Hon PCC Secretary	Mrs Jill Hansford
• Deputy Church Warden	Mr Paul Carter
• Relief Churchwarden	Mr Alec James
• Churchwarden’s Group (Buildings, churchyard, grounds)	Mr Duncan Robertson
• Choir	Mrs Elizabeth Hall
• Church Flowers	Mrs Janet Darby

- Eco Group Mrs Cathryn Howse, Mrs Felicity McGill and Mr Duncan Robertson
- Electoral Roll Officer Mrs Gillian Greig
- Evergreen Group Mr Graham Hobrough
- Fairtrade Church Mrs Moira Read and Mr Jim Read
- Fundraising Events Coordinator Mrs Marjorie Connell
- Health & Safety Officer Mr Jim Read
- Hospitality and Community Events Coordinator Vacant
- Journal Editor Mr William Allen
- Journal Advertising Mrs Ann Bridges
- Journal Distribution Mrs Sandy Robertson
- Mens' Society Mr Peter Triggs
- Mothers' Union Mrs Margaret Senior
- Organist Mr David Bridges
- Pastoral Coordinator Mrs Alison Cursham
- Safeguarding Officer: Mrs Sandy Robertson
- Staplegrove School – Foundation Governor Mrs Sandy Robertson
- Staplegrove Strollers Mrs Iona Young and Mr Chris Young
- Stewardship Officer Mr Chris Young
- Taunton Foodbank Mrs Margaret Senior
- Tower Captain Mr Mike Hansford
- Village Hall Representative Mr Stafford Coombes
- Website Rev Paul Irving, Rev Cathryn Howse and Mr David Bridges
- Youth Ministry & Mission Committee Coordinator Mrs Iona Young

The following Sidespeople assisted with Services during 2023/2024:

Joan Bird, Paul Carter, Stafford Coombes, Alison Cursham, Martin Cursham, Janet Darby, Rona Graham, Gillian Greig, Graham Hobrough, Gill Jowett, Richard Jowett, Danny Markland, Jenny Paull, Jim Read, Chris Young, Iona Young. Anton and Nelun Karunartatne and William Allen have all expressed a wish to be Sidespeople and will take on this role during the next year.

Council meetings included reviews of the following standing items:

- Rector's Report
- Church finances
- Church fabric & Churchyard
- Bible Study Groups/Courses
- Café Church
- Charitable Giving
- Church laptop
- Church policies and statements
- Church pub group
- Coronation Event
- Deanery Synod
- Eco Group
- Film Club
- Fundraising Events
- Health & Safety
- Hospitality and Community events

- Journal, Advertising and Distribution
- Mission
- New Service Pattern
- Pastoral
- Safeguarding
- Staplegrove School (including the provision of Bibles to school leavers)
- Stewardship
- Tower
- Vision Action Updates
- Worship
- Youth Ministry & Mission (Messy Church and Summer Holiday Toddler Group)

Thank you to our Church Wardens, Lay Deanery Synod representatives and PCC members, in particular those whose term of office comes to an end at the Annual Meeting.

Jill Hansford – PCC Secretary

3. CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT

Alec James, who had been a Churchwarden since 1995 on 3 different occasions and had served for a total of 14 years, stood down from that role at the APCN in April 2023. He has, of course, 'stood in' whenever called upon since.

He was replaced by Felicity McGill who had been Secretary for the PCC since 2018. Her knowledge and expertise has been invaluable.

The Churchwardens have been particularly supported by the members of the Churchwardens' Group, Paul Carter, Chris Young and David Bridges.

Meetings: There have been 4 minuted Churchwardens' Group meetings this year on 28/8/23, 16/10/23, 8/1/24 and 26/2/24.

Developments April 2023 to March 2024

Outside Church

Tower Clock: erected by Timsbury Clocks on 17 August 2023, £1,400 donation given for regilding, £2,300 for clock.

Leaking roofs: Andrew Hull carried out work on 3.10.23 (£407) and again on 23.2.24 (£310) regarding leaking roofs, flashings and gutter clearing.

Tree: a dead Sycamore tree on the middle north boundary was removed on 30.8.23 (£450) by South West Stump Grinders

Neighbouring hedge – Sandra and John from Old Brookfield, Rectory Close reported our 'Jungle' was destroying their NE hedge. Tim Dunn sorted issue on 19.2.24 for £200. Sandra and John agreed to be responsible for this issue from now on. Stig, their gardener, approved Tim's job and agreed to take on future maintenance.

Hugh Phillips, Old Orchard, Rectory Close requested permission (30.8.24) to remove some Ash saplings that were undermining his garage.

Biffa bin: 9x£47 so far this year (on 9/2, 28/4, 31/5, 5/6, 10/8, 15/9, 31/10, 3/1, 5/1). New, red Biffa Bin arrived 4.1.24. Missed collection on 3.1.24. This is 100% more than 2022 (4 times) and 2021 (5 times).

Tower Doors and Landscaping project: Agreed to proceed with Richard Codd's email (9.10.23) and proceed with Stages 1 and 2 at a cost of £2,235 + VAT. Paid £695.34 on 22.12.23 for initial survey work carried out on 7.11.23.

Cycle rack and compost bin: List B Faculty (ref 2023-091079) for cycle rack. Installed 15.12.23. Compost sign cost £42.

Breeze-block shed: All surplus furniture was removed on 19.12.23. (faculty ref 2023-091076) Bench received a donation of £100. Rest of Furniture went to Men in Sheds charity. 2 wooden ladders also removed. Another 3 bay rack and 8 x 42ltr plastic boxes set up on 19.1.24, cost £312.78. The long wall of the Big Shed now has shelves for storage.

Defibrillator: An offer of a free defibrillator was received and quotes were obtained (£250 to install with outside trunking (email 12.10.23). List B Faculty application was made 20.10.23 (ref 2023-091064) but the offer became 'sold out' before Faculty was received.

Inside Church

5 yearly Electrical Safety check: completed 3 August 2023 by Etech Electrical, £2,436 inc VAT.

Sidespeople celebration: 26 people attended this event on 17 Aug 2023.

Triennial – Richard Carpenter from St James' came 14 September. His Report (email 13.10.23) highlighted another copy of Inventory required, transferring records to Heritage Centre, update web site, sort choir resources in vestry, lack of lightening conductor and developing a Program of Annual Maintenance.

Projector and double dropdown screen installed by Audio Visual Direct from Weston S Mare on 5-8 September 2023 at a cost of £6,750 + VAT.

Toilet Twinning: Raised £243.50 from the Group Christmas card donations. This money sponsored 4 Zambian toilets.

Digital Inventory: The Group Leader of the Church Recording Group 2010-2012 handed over a USB stick on 15.12.23 with a digital copy of the inventory that they made in 2 green folders in 2012. This will enable us to create a digital inventory.

Lapel microphone: One of the lapel microphones was mislaid. Andy Reed from Norton sourced a replacement (£65) and set it up on 27.2.24.

China Mugs: Anonymous donor has given 48 similar mugs that arrived 29.1.25. We now have 100 mugs

Film Night: Film Nights now happen on the 2nd Thursday of each month. 2 film nights have happened. 8.2.24 night attended by 60 people. Next event on 14.3.24 already sold 65 tickets (as on 1.3.24). The last monthly show will be on 11.4.24 and are planned to resume in October 2024.

Policies Updated: GDPR, H&S, Fire, and Disability Risk Assessment policies were updated August 2023

Fire extinguisher certificate:

Events

Coronation Picnic: This was held on the Playground at midday on 7.5.23 with everyone bringing their own picnic. The children enjoyed playing football, a tug of war and a wellie-throwing competition. The event closed with a free cream tea in the Church. The former Parish Council helped to fund the day.

Churchyard Tidy up: Volunteers helped with the churchyard maintenance on 8.5.23 (King Charles' Big Help Out), 30.9.23 and 16.3.24.

Harvest Lunch: St John's hosted All Saints on 1.10.23. About 75 people sat down to a Harvest Lunch. The meal was preceded by the first of the now regular monthly Café Church Services.

Benefice cricket match: The Stephen Kivett cup was won by Curate Cathryn's team by 3 runs on 3.9.23.

Warm Space: The Church was once again advertised as a Warm Space ,during the late autumn and winter months, during the regular Saturday morning Coffee Shop.

Duncan Robertson – Churchwarden

4. FINANCIAL REVIEW

Our closing balances on 31st December

	2023	2022
NatWest Current Account	£ 8,284.36	£17,001.16
CCLA Account – Legacies	£46,982.74	£47,203.52
CCLA Account – Bells	£ 1,727.20	£ 1,178.50
CCLA Account – Tower Door etc	£ 3,379.66	£ 0.00
CCLA Account – Parish Share	<u>£ 2,117.00</u>	<u>£ 0.00</u>
	£62,490.96	£65,383.18

Income of £164,142.55 against Expenditure of £167,034.77 resulted in a *Receipts over Payments* **deficit** of £2,892.22

In 2015 our Parish Share was £37,802. In 2023 our Parish Share was £48,248. In 2024 it will be £55,652.

We continue to rely on income generated through Lychgate sales, coffee mornings, fundraising events, Gift Aid reclaim, hire of the Church, Parochial Fees and one-off donations. We are blessed with clergy and congregation dedicated to ensuring that our beautiful church remains open and accessible to the Staplegrave community. It falls on us all to encourage others to attend Services, coffee mornings and other events to enable our church to remain open and at the centre of our community.

Legacies to the value of **£19,704.87** were received during the year:

Ms Janet Francis Margaret KENNEDY	£17,687.99	<i>Unrestricted</i>
Roger Paul CRABB	£ 1,016.88	<i>Churchyard maintenance</i>
Mary GOTHARD	£ 1,000.00	<i><u>not</u> everyday expenses/maintenance</i>

We donated £1,976.72 to various worthy causes during the year.

David J Bridges
PCC Treasurer

5. STEWARDSHIP

Thanks to all who gave financial support to St John's during the last year, we could not carry on without your generous donations.

Thanks also to all those who supported our Harvest Gift Day weekend, Saturday 30th September – Sunday 1st October 2023, which raised an amazing £3,277, with an additional £773 collected in Gift Aid and Small Donations claims from HMRC.

The Financial Statements in this report explain the pressures St John's faces because the Parish Share we pay to the Diocese is increasing by 15% to £55,652 for 2024. I am well aware of the financial pressures we are all under because of increasing prices, but, if you are able, please consider increasing your contribution to Church funds to help us through these difficult times.

The government's Gift Aid scheme allows the Church to reclaim from HMRC 25p in every pound donated by those who have confirmed that they are UK taxpayers. If you have now become a taxpayer let me know so that the Church can reclaim tax paid on your donations. When you donate by a bank standing order, please feel free to pick up one of the small cards available in the Porch to put in the collection plate for your regular giving to be blessed.

In addition, the 'Gift Aid-Small Donations Scheme', (GASDS), allows the Church to claim a similar tax refund to the Gift Aid claim for cash in collections at services and on-line payments of up to £30 in a single donation. The rules are quite strict and some donations are not eligible, including cheque payments and any single donations over £30.

Preparing the claim for a refund requires a complicated record system to be maintained. My sincere thanks go to all those who count cash and complete this tedious process, but it is all worthwhile, since over 90% of the sum donated in 2023 came into either the Gift Aid return of tax paid or the GASDS top-up grant category allowing us to claim.

Chris Young – Stewardship Secretary – chris.e.young@btinternet.com

6. SAFEGUARDING

Over the past year, the PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). We have reviewed our Safeguarding Policy and put in place a Policy for the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders.

The role of Parish Safeguarding Officer was held temporarily by the Rector until the appointment of myself to this role in August 2023, following a safer recruitment process. We are now registered with 'Thirtyone:eight' for processing any DBS checks. This is the organisation that the Diocese has commissioned to provide this service to all the parishes within the diocese of Bath and Wells. We are also set up with the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard and are working our way through this as a system to show we are compliant with the House of Bishops Safer Church Policy and guidance.

Sandy Robertson – Parish Safeguarding Officer

7. WORSHIP

Having undertaken a benefice Worship Review in autumn 2022, a new service pattern was agreed and trialled in the first half of 2023. For St John's, the major change was now a weekly service at 11am, providing worship at the same time every week which has proved successful as numbers have increased. The fifth Sunday offers a joint benefice Communion, alternating at St John's and All Saints', Norton Fitzwarren.

All Saints' experienced a more fundamental change with their service now taking place at 9.30am every Sunday, as opposed to previously at 10.30am twice a month and once at 3pm. Whilst the new time took some adjustment, the benefit is clear in having a service at the same time every week which has obvious benefits. After the six-month trial period, the new pattern was accepted at both churches on a permanent basis.

Another major new addition at St John's has been the emergence of Café Church on a first Sunday. Café Church is a nationally recognised initiative coming in many different forms, offering worship in a more informal and relaxed style which we hope may appeal to people of all ages and stages and which has been very successful so far. We use the new fixed screen and projector which has the facility to provide audio-visual input to enhance our service. I'm very grateful to our wonderful tea/coffee team for their ongoing service every Sunday, but especially at Café Church which entails serving before and after the service – thank you!

Staplegrave School enjoy coming to worship at St John's for seasonal service such as Christmas, Harvest, Easter and the Leavers Service, where a gift of a Bible is presented to every Year 6 pupil. For the youngest pupils who have grown up through the Covid-19 pandemic, it is often the first experience of visiting a church. Equally, worship takes place regularly at the school where I lead assemblies and our Open the Book Team visit too, always to very popular acclaim!

Our Choir continue to practise diligently and sing faithfully, enhancing our worship and helping to lead the congregation in our sung worship. They are much appreciated – as is our organist, David, who offers his considerable skills tirelessly despite his many commitments. Elizabeth Hall retires this year from her role in charge of the Choir and we will have the chance to show our appreciation to her after her many, many years of outstanding service, as she returns to the ranks.

Our Messy Church has flourished this year, led by the Youth Ministry Group who unfailingly show immense resourcefulness and ingenuity (myself excepted, of course!) in planning and providing the activities. Drawn principally from our two benefice schools, numbers have been really encouraging with a core of regular families and always some new folk at each session. Messy Church (and Café Church) also benefits from Kate's cakes which are always very popular!

We continue to benefit from many volunteers who read and lead prayers of intercession at our services, including a number of new folk who have made their debut recently. Cathryn led an informative training session for readers which was warmly received.

Weddings have been very slow to pick up after Covid-19, not helped also by the national decline in church weddings and the proliferation of new secular venues. It was, therefore, a huge delight for us to see our own Patrick and Tessa married in December at St John's – a wonderful occasion and Cathryn's first wedding as priest. Congratulations all round!

2023 has been an anomaly for baptisms! Having experienced an understandable rise in baptisms following the pandemic when they were either impossible or impeded by severe restrictions, we had a grand total of one baptism service during the whole year. It is to be hoped that this is just a hiatus and indeed I write after a weekend when we had two. Our baptisms now take place within our regular service on a third Sunday – when we have one, of course.

As always, thanks are due to all the many people who help our services to run smoothly. They are too numerous to mention, but without these contributions our worship would not be possible.

The Rev'd Paul Irving

8. BENEFICE VISION GROUP

Recent History

In September 2021, six months after my arrival as incumbent, a Benefice Vision Day was held. The circumstances were exceptional, with the recent Vacancy coinciding almost exactly with the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions, making all church activities very challenging and in many cases ceased altogether.

The Vision Day enabled reflection on the recent Benefice Profile and identified a number of priorities in our mission and ministry which could be developed:

- Better use of buildings
- Developing outreach and community links
- Exploring new forms of worship
- More communication, including online and social media
- More regular charitable giving
- Eco church
- Prayer and unity between churches: stronger together
- Use of the Benefice Office in Norton

The Vision Group, consisting of myself along with representatives from both churches, has met regularly since 2021 and overseen development within these strands which has been positive and successful. We feel that a great deal has been achieved in a relatively short period of time and that there is much to celebrate.

In October 2023 the Group felt that the priorities, which have enabled great progress, should be reviewed this year: *“2024 might be a useful time to revisit and refresh our vision as a benefice and reflect more widely on where we are being led. This may take the form of an Away Day during the summer or autumn.”*

I met in December with Rob Waldron, Taunton Deanery and Parish Development Adviser, to reflect on our progress and discuss possible next steps. He was able to identify some observations:

- Overwhelmingly, he was very impressed with all that has been achieved in the time! The vision priorities were identified and progress implemented through the time. In different ways, there has been a great deal of progress in various aspects of church life which is a credit to many people and should be celebrated in some way.
- He is concerned that the weight of the work falls on relatively few people, and notably on myself. He wonders whether more could be done to cast the net around and identify other individuals or groups who could take on more responsibility (e.g. Messy folk, wider community etc) in order to equip and enable a wider spread of the workload.
- Could the benefice consider arranging some administrative support in order to free up clergy and others into using time more productively?
- He suggested a 'celebration' day to look back at all that has been accomplished, which might in turn encourage enthusiasm and involvement, as well as an opportunity to look forward to the future as things evolve. Rob is happy to be involved in this if we would like.

Next Steps

The Vision Group feels that a celebration of our progress and activities is an excellent idea: to show appreciation to those who work so hard in so many areas of benefice life; to bring the various facets of our work to the attention of everyone, not just those who are directly involved (e.g. Are all people aware of our school work, eco work, house groups...?); to bring people together in shared fellowship and purpose.

A summary of the Vision Progress to be included in this year's Annual Reports for each PCC, with a paragraph about the work achieved in each specific area.

An Interactive Prayer Display will be created to include a summary of the recent years' progress, to be available in both churches from Easter Day, including an invitation for people to respond with their own prayers for how we move on in the future. Cathryn and Paul will arrange this.

A day was proposed for a Benefice Vision Day on Saturday 21 September at St John's Church, Staplegrove. We debated the relative merits of a neutral venue but felt that some folk might find travelling difficult and therefore not attend, and so decided that St John's is probably the best location. Inevitably, the date may not suit everybody, but it seems as good as any.

The aims of the day would be twofold: to reflect upon and celebrate where we have come in the last three years and also discern where God may be leading us on the next stage of our journey. Paul will meet with Rob Waldron again to seek his further advice and discuss the possibility of his involvement in the day, or part of it. The Vision Group will meet again on 22 May to consider the content of the day in more detail, in the light of these discussions.

In the meantime, we ask our PCCs to reflect prayerfully on the matter and in particular any observations or suggestions concerning the 'Next Steps' so that any feedback can be taken into account at our next meeting. We continue to walk in faith and serve our God in the time and place to which he calls us!

The Rev'd Paul Irving

9. TAUNTON DEANERY SYNOD

The first meeting of the Synod year was a Eucharist held in St Andrew's Church and Gillie Greg and I were joined by Revds Paul and Cathryn.

Traditionally the various officers are elected at this meeting and as this was also the first meeting of the new Triennium the following were elected to the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group (DMPG):

Clergy: Revds Elizabeth Shearcroft (**All Ss Halcon**), Andy Wadsworth (**All Ss Trull**) and Revd Dr Nick Griffin (**St George's**).

Ex-officio: Revd Jim Cox (Area Dean) (**SQB**), Revd Preb Julian Laurence (**HT**), Revd Debbie Turley (**St Peter's**) (Assistant Area Deans)

Laity: For as long as I can remember the Lay Dean had been Stephen Grimshaw and there was only one candidate to take on this role and Mr Richard Carpenter (**St James**) was duly elected. Darren Chalmers (**St Andrew's**) continues as Assistant Lay Dean – both are ex-officio members.

Roger Trigg (**The Minster**) and Martin Wakefield (**St James'**) were also elected as members leaving one vacancy for the Laity.

It was also noted that Paul Elliston would be completing his time as Deanery Pioneer in the next few months and he was thanked for his work over the last 5 years.

At the beginning of the service, Archdeacon of Taunton the Venerable Simon Hill commissioned Revd Deborah Turley as Assistant Area Dean for six years.

The Synod meeting took the form of a Eucharist with the Archdeacon presiding and preaching.

The second meeting was held on 31 October at St James Church. The Venerable Simon Hill commissioned Richard Carpenter as Lay Dean for this Triennium and until the first meeting of the next Triennium. Louise Jarmain, a Reader at St Peter's and a school chaplain at St Andrew's filled the vacant Synod Rep post.

The focus of the Meeting was Training across the Diocese and the Diocesan Ministry Training Team Leader, Revd Preb Ronnie Crossman was welcomed to the meeting. She gave an update on training currently available or being prepared and asked that these opportunities are discussed in our PCCs and churches.

A key theme is Shared Local Ministry whereby we can celebrate and develop the gifts that all church members have. A new training "pathway" is to be launched in January 2024 as part of the Diocesan Vision.

The other news was the appointment of Revd Jim Cox as Rector for the South Quantock Benefice with his installation taking place on Sunday 3 December.

The third and last meeting took place in our own church of St John the Evangelist on 13 February 2024 and was well attended. The speaker was Matthew Pinnock – Diocesan Head of Finance who came to address pre-submitted questions relating to proposed changes to the Common Fund and other financial matters in the Diocese.

Emma Gregory, General Synod rep also notified the meeting of a recent initiative called "Save the Parish" which has been set up to address some of these matters. For more information visit www.savetheparish.co.

Gillian Greig & Paul Carter

10. CHOIR and ORGAN

The choir has been able to continue singing for Sunday services this year, ably supported by David Bridges at the organ and piano.

We took part in the Coronation celebrations in May, and sang for the funeral of former chorister Neville Farmer in July. Another memorable occasion was the wedding of Patrick and Tessa Robinson in December.

Age, illness and family commitments have meant fewer members have been able to attend choir practices, so we were pleased to welcome Jill & Mike Hansford and Sue Pawson in time for preparations for the Christmas Carol Service. David's help and advice has been greatly appreciated for these special occasions as well as for Sunday Communion services.

Harvest Festival was celebrated with a special cake to mark 65 years since I joined the choir. For over 40 of these years I have been choosing music and leading the choir at weekly practices and festivals. I have now decided the time has come to hand over the responsibility of being choir director. Our ageing choristers are all keen to carry on leading the worship for

as long as possible, but we now need younger singers and a leader with new ideas and enthusiasm to take the great tradition of choral singing at Staplegrave church into the future.

Elizabeth Hall

11. CHURCH FLOWERS

We have enjoyed another year decorating our lovely church for regular services, festivals and especially for the Kings Coronation. We are so fortunate to have a great band of helpers who always come up trumps on these occasions. As with so many church activities we are looking for new younger folk to come and join the team. No experience necessary and you will be warmly welcomed.

Janet Darby

12. CHURCH MOUSE REPORT

It has been a successful year for the Church mouse community with lots of hay provided for the Crib set which has enabled us to build a cosy nest and keep warm in these challenging times.

The planned pet service is much appreciated although we were disappointed to learn that cats and small terrier dogs are also invited. This does not mean that we accept the title of 'pet', but we are comfortable to be involved in multi species worship and very much hope that this is the start of more general acceptance and affirmation.

This year's crumbs have been a good mix of biscuits and cake which is always pleasing. There really should be more cheese but this could get messy with the underfloor heating.

The Diocesan mouse network has been supportive of our community and a synod type meet-up is planned for the summer with our very own Nibbles invited to speak on the topic of 'Church Cats – a survival guide'.

Squeaker and Whiskers

13. ECO GROUP

The Eco group was formed in June 2023 after the Vision Group had identified an environmental focus as one of its aims.

An eco audit was carried out with material from A Rocha, and from the audit some objectives were identified and agreed by PCC. The objectives were prioritised into categories of short or long term aims, or aspirational. The group will meet regularly to review progress, and there may be other objectives drawn from the audit in time.

So far the group has had successes with installing a cycle rack and installing compost facilities for the churchyard. A fundraiser for Toilet Twinning enabled the Church to fund four toilets overseas, as well as encouraging our congregation to send Christmas greetings on a communal card.

Work is ongoing currently with a Lenten prayer focus for Water Aid, bat boxes and bird boxes to be installed and signage for energy saving. We will also be looking at the cleaning products and paper goods we use as a Church, as well as linking with the school's community project which could involve the churchyard.

Cathryn Howse, Felicity McGill, Duncan Robertson

14. EVERGREEN GROUP

The Evergreen Group has had another successful year. We have lost two stalwart Members in Sue and Les Derham, Michael Hawkins and Pattie but we have welcomed six new Members and we have a total Membership of over 35.

We have carried out a full programme of monthly meetings, including a visit to the Alpaca Centre in Stoke Road, a lovely August Garden Parry hosted by Gill and Richard Jowett, a Christmas Lunch at Oake Manor Golf Club and Carols and tea in St John's.

Financially the Group has a healthy bank balance of over £700 and a working surplus of over £100 on the year. We benefit considerably by the proceeds of the Monthly raffle, supplementing the take from annual subscriptions. We made a donation of £100 to St John's for the use of the Church.

As ever the Group benefits greatly from the generous of donors of prizes for the raffle, admirably run by Connie Brake and Pam Thorne. We are grateful, too, to those Members who help with the refreshments and David Bridges who has helped greatly with the IT and preparing the Church for meetings. And we are grateful for the support of Paul.

I am supported by the committee of Connie, Pam, Ann Bridges and Margaret Coles and immensely by Elizabeth who does so much up front and behind the scenes.

My thanks to All.

Graham Hobrough

15. Your Fairtrade Church



In 2023 your benefice Fairtrade stall and Fairtrade Fortnight Big Brew coffee morning raised £459.11 in profit and donations for the Transform Trade charity, the development and campaigning charity arm of Traidcraft plc. Unfortunately, in January 2023, Traidcraft plc went into administration and stopped trading. This was bad news for us as Traidcraft had been a 'one-stop shop' whereas now we have to deal with several Fairtrade suppliers (e.g.

Oxfam wholesale, Divine) to obtain a range of goods.

Transform Trade, having been independent of Traidcraft, continued in operation and all surpluses from our sales and all donations are still being sent to them.

With many thanks for your support over the last year, and please give us a call (01823 279686 or readjim@hotmail.com) if you need items between stalls, which are normally on the second Sunday of the month, after the 10.30am service.

Moira and Jim Read

16. FUNDRAISING EVENTS

The last 12 months have ended with the exciting introduction of the long awaited Movie Nights. These will not only bring more people into the Church but also promise to be a good fundraiser.

During the year we've had four concerts, all well supported and the Christmas Concert, by the Let's Sing Choir, attracted an audience of over a hundred people and raised £970.

The Lychgate Stall with the Coffee outside was again very popular and over the eleven weeks raised £1700.

David Bird's illustrated talk Walking Britain - - - a Flightless Bird's Perambulations was very entertaining, raising £215, and we hope to enjoy another evening with David in the not too distant future.

On a sunny May morning Adrian and William were kept busy raising £135 from a very well stocked Plant Stall. This year's plant stall will be in two weeks' time and we hope it will be just as successful.

We've had 2 Parish Breakfasts in the last twelve months, the one in the Village Hall was combined with stalls and a raffle in the main hall and raised over £1000 for Church funds.

The one in the Church was combined with a Winter Produce Stall and Jigsaw Swap and raised £333.

Altogether over the year, including the Coffee Shop and Book and Jigsaw Swaps, over £8000 has been raised for Church funds, so thanks must go to the many people who have worked tirelessly to make this possible.

Marjorie Connell

17. HEALTH AND SAFETY 2023 - Please don't turn the page, this always involves you!

2023, our sixth full year of the re-ordered Church!

Unless I've missed something, 2023 has been a quiet year on the health and safety front. This is a good indicator that the maintenance activities, like boiler servicing and path clearing, are doing their job to keep things working and us safe. It is also an indicator that the "wheels" can grind rather slowly when trying to get the short slope from the tarmac path to the paved area flattened as far as possible. This is tied in to the tower door project so 'non-parish groups' get involved which tends to slow things down. Maybe 2024 will be the year it is done.

If you ever have any health and safety concerns, please contact the Church Wardens or myself.

Jim Read - Safety Officer

18. HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Thank you to the sides-people and others who welcome visitors and make them feel at home in our Church, both on a Sunday and at other events during the year. In the absence of a

designated Co-ordinator, hospitality and community events are coordinated by a few Church members. Reports on the various activities are collected below.

Saturday Coffee Shop – Chris and Iona Young

This has been running every Saturday for more than 5 years and has proved to be a welcome hospitality event for the whole community – a chance for a chat to neighbours over tea, coffee, and biscuits.

Through the last two winters it has become a designated ‘warm space’, somewhere to stay comfortable without the need to turn heating on at home; and during the summer, whenever possible, the opportunity is taken to enjoy the outside space of the churchyard.

Keep an eye out for the special events that are regularly added to the Coffee Shop; the book and jigsaw swap, breakfast, and the backdrop to the summer Lychgate Produce Stall. If you haven’t visited the Coffee Shop up to now come along next Saturday morning, 10am to mid-day, you won’t be disappointed!

Thanks go to the helpers who turn out on Saturday to set up and run the event and if you would like to help as well just let us know, we are always looking for additional helpers.

Sunday morning Coffee – Diana Toon

Coffee after the 11am services at St John’s continues to be very popular. It provides a welcome opportunity for those wishing to socialise and enjoy a friendly chat. October 2023 saw the start of Café Church. This service takes place on the first Sunday of each month and is proving very popular.

Thanks to all the volunteers who bring milk, serve tea and coffee, and provide delicious cakes/biscuits for Café Church.

Christmas Carol Service (Mulled wine and mince pies) – Felicity McGill

After our Carol Service in December, we provided mulled wine and mince pies for the congregation. It was lovely to be able to enjoy our decorated church and to share in fellowship after the service. Thank you especially to Janet Darby who coordinated the refreshments and to the volunteers who heated the mulled wine, served the mince pies, and cleared up afterwards.

Community Events – Duncan Robertson

A Coronation Picnic was held on the Recreation Ground at midday on 7 May 2023 with everyone bringing their own picnic. The children enjoyed playing football, a tug of war and a wellie-throwing competition. The event closed with a free cream tea in the Church. Thank you to the former Staplegrave Parish Council who helped to fund the day and to the volunteers who made the day so special.

Volunteers helped with the churchyard maintenance during the year, on 8 May (part of the King Charles' Big Help Out) also on 30 September and 16 March 2024. Thank you for giving up your time to keep our Churchyard looking very special.

The annual Benefice cricket match took place on 3 September on the Recreation Ground when the Stephen Kivett Cup was narrowly won by our Curate Cathryn Howse's team.

St John's hosted the Benefice Harvest Lunch on 1 October 2023 when 75 people sat down to a Ploughman's Lunch, followed by puddings provided by All Saints' and cider and apple juice generously donated by Andrew Ritchie from All Saints'. The meal was preceded by our Harvest Festival which was the first of the now regular monthly Café Church Services. Thank you to the Church members who provided the lunch.

The installation of a drop-drop down screen behind the arch in the Chancel in September enabled the commencement of Film Nights which were held on the second Thursday of the month in January, February, March, and April 2024. Film Nights are hosted by a small group who sell tickets, welcome visitors, provide the refreshments and run the film show. It has been lovely to see so many people attending these events, both familiar faces from our congregation and other members of the community. We hope that Film Night will recommence in the Autumn and run over the winter months.

Neighbourhood Coffee Morning – Jim and Moira Read

Neighbourhood Coffee mornings take place on the third Tuesday of each month in the Church. The timing is designed to complement the Community Coffee morning in the Village Hall on the first Tuesday. Any surplus funds are given to one or more charities, the recipients being chosen by the attendees at the November coffee morning. In 2023 the surplus of £171 was donated to ARC (Taunton Association for the Homeless). Many thanks to everyone who came to these events.

Felicity McGill

19. MENS' SOCIETY

We have continued with our Lunches during 2023/24 which have been held at Oake Manor Golf Club. All the men are very happy going to this venue, and when there we are very well looked after. It's not what you know in life it's who you know.

The numbers attending have not changed a lot so that speaks for itself.

During the past year many of us have endured some type of health problem but that is understandable given the age group. We all try to look after each other.

Besides our lunch meetings we had two extra meetings, one in February 2023 which was in the form of a slideshow on transport at St Johns, and the other a coffee morning at Norton Village Hall in November of the same year.

It has given me great pleasure to organise these activities for our men during the last 3½ years, and grateful thanks to them all for their support.

Long may our group survive and continue to help our community.

It was very sad to hear just recently of the passing of one of the stalwarts of the group.

Stafford was very well-liked and a great friend to us all. He will be sadly missed by everyone.

Peter Triggs

20. PASTORAL

Another year when things seemed a bit more normal after several years of COVID.

Looking at our various services, our Saturday coffee shop as well as organisations such as Evergreens, Men's Society, the Choir, Bell Ringers, Mothers' Union, The Knitting Group, those working with the young through Messy Church and in school through 'Open the Book' as well as the fund-raising group. In all of these there is a strong element of the pastoral work of the church.

Many of our members are now in care or nursing homes and we miss them but hold them in our prayers.

Several of our members have died during the year and we name them here giving thanks for their witness and strong faith, among them:- Jim (Sandy) Sanderson, Neville Farmer, Dot Hughes, Myfanwy Venning, Sue Derham and very recently Stafford Coombes.

We look forward in hope to the next year when we will have the opportunity to support and care for members of our church and beyond.

Alison Cursham

21. STAPLEGROVE MOTHERS' UNION

January

The year started with a shared communion with West Monkton members led by Rev Paul, and was followed by the AGM and refreshments.

At the end of the meeting Moira gave notice that she would be stepping down as our Leader at the AGM 2024.

February

The Annual Wave of Prayer Service took place. A well attended meeting focussed on the links between all the Dioceses across the world and emphasised that though we are far away from each other we are joined together by all that we hold in common as MU members.

March

The meeting was a Lent reflection led by Alan and Ruth Cook from St Andrews Church. Alan reflected on the Lord's Prayer which is shared in various forms around the world.

April

The speaker at the meeting was Anna, the Centre Manager at Open Door in Taunton. This is a charity supporting the homeless in the area, and provides facilities for rough sleepers. Members donated suitable items to assist the work of the charity.

May

This month's speaker was Madeleine Hellier, our Diocesan President, who came to talk to us about, 'Away From It All' – AFIA. This is a MU scheme funded by members and legacies to provide holidays for those who need a break from the stresses and difficulties in their lives.

June

The Annual Garden Outing this year was to Jordans Courtyard near Ilminster, a series of shops on a farm. A very hot day, members enjoyed listening to a talk on floral arrangements



and watching the florist at work. Afterwards they also enjoyed looking at the shops and spending some money!

Everyone enjoyed the day and thanks go to Margaret Allen for organising the trip.

July

The speaker for the July meeting was Anthony, a former Team Leader of the Princes Trust. Based in Bristol he ran projects to support young people, and also ran a 12 week personal development course for young people between 16-24 to give them practical skills, experience and help to secure qualifications.

August

The August meeting was a joint MU Garden Party and Messy Church held in the churchyard. The weather was kind and the cream tea delicious. The event raised £420 for the MU 'Summer of Hope Appeal' set up to provide support for people to overcome inequality and build communities across the world where everyone thrives.

September

Our speaker at this meeting was the Rev Gwen Smith one of our members who stepped in as our advertised speaker was unable to come. She gave an interesting talk about her experiences as a Curate, Priest and Chaplain amongst the farming communities of Kent and latterly North Devon.

October

Two managers from the Women's Refuge came to talk to us about their work. For security reasons they spoke in general about how women contacted them; the needs of the women they sheltered; and also about how they were assisted. Donations of clothing and bedding collected by members were given to them at the end of the meeting.

November

The Annual MU Dinner was held at the Quantocks Restaurant at Bridgwater and Taunton College. Everyone enjoyed an excellent dinner and thanks go to Margaret Allen for organising the event.

December

Members enjoyed our Advent meeting which was a mix of festive readings and carols. The meeting concluded with mulled wine and mince pies.

Throughout the year Staplegrove knitters have continued to provide items for the organisations the Branch supports. This work is greatly appreciated and thanks go to Alison for all she does to continue this valuable work.

Margaret Senior

22. STAPLEGROVE PARISH JOURNAL

Firstly, thanks are due to the Journal team: Joan and occasionally Jim for proof-reading, Sandy for collecting the printed Journals and doling it out to the distributors, David for collecting dues and Ann for doing sterling work as Advertising Manager by chasing up those who haven't paid.

The printing cost of the Journal has fallen slightly to about £1.25 per copy because Character Graphics has now been given a full-page ad. This is against the cover price of 80p and I strongly believe that the cover price should be maintained at about this level and certainly less than £1 so that it's accessible to even the most impecunious parishioner. Thanks to the advertising, the Journal is still in surplus.

If the Journal were given away like the Norton counterpart or presented only in electronic form, I suspect that readers and, more particularly, advertisers would value the Journal less and would be less willing to pay for adverts.

The print run is charged at 280 copies although they start making 300 copies to allow for wastage and they deliver all that reach the quality standard. There are generally just a few copies of the old Journal left when the new arrives. Could Paul and Cathryn please encourage parishioners to take some of the surplus and use them for outreach by giving them to friends or neighbours?

Character Graphics is neither the most expensive nor the cheapest printer but we've always had good service and a good quality product. The few problems have been spotted by a sharp-eyed Becky at CG before the print run starts. I should like to continue with Character Graphics.

I'M HAPPY TO CONTINUE AS EDITOR.

William Allen - Journal Editor

23. STAPLEGROVE SCHOOL

The past year has been one of continued development for the School and reports from the Bath and Wells Multi Academy Trust Advisors are always positive about the progress being shown.

The children continue to attend Church Services for Harvest, Christmas and Easter as well as the annual Leavers Service, where they are presented with Bibles.

Last July, we also gave £5 gift vouchers to the two Worship Champions for the Year 6 class during a special assembly which Rev Paul attended and the plan is to continue to do this each year. The Worship Champions are much valued and contribute to Pupil Voice discussions as well as reviewing and planning some Worship.

Rev Paul goes in regularly to lead Worship for the School, often based around events within the Christian year.

The School held an Ethos Day during the summer term and each class had activities based around a specific value which I was able to attend. Feedback from the day was very positive about how it helped both staff and children cement their understanding of the School's Christian Values.

The School has not yet had their SIAMS Inspection and although overdue, this will not be in the next school year either.

A group of volunteers linked to St Johns have been going in regularly to hear children read. I know that the School highly value this support as it provides much needed additional opportunities for children to practise their reading and see it as a very positive community link with St Johns.

I continue to attend Governors Meetings each half term. Rev Paul and I both attend the Ethos Committee meetings where we are able to monitor the progress being made with how the School is developing as a Church School and living out its Vision and Values.

So another positive year of growing links with the School and Church which has been really good to be a part of and may these links continue to flourish and thrive over the coming year.

Sandy Robertson, Foundation Governor

24. THE STAPLEGROVE STROLLERS

Thanks to all who support our monthly walks, and to those who plan and lead them. There can be as many as 20 people walking and the walks themselves are only a part of the story of the Strollers; the camaraderie between those walking, is just as important, as well as the tea and cakes at the end of afternoon walks, or the lunches after morning walks, that form such a key part. And thanks to the weather which was reasonably kind to us over the last year – although in recent months we did have to avoid most ‘off-road’ routes which were too boggy even for the Strollers.

Our walks are open to all and usually around 4 to 5 miles. Let us know if you would like to join us, information can always be found in the Staplegrove Journal, but be prepared; our walks are sometimes muddy, and we keep walking in all but the very worst of weather.

Our picture shows the Strollers on our Ilminster walk that took in part of the abandoned railway line between Ilminster and Chard last November.

Chris and Iona Young



25. TAUNTON FOODBANK



Thank you all for your continued support for Taunton Foodbank during the last year.

The Foodbank has maintained its service throughout the year thanks to the hard work of Sue Weightman, the project manager, and all the volunteers. 2023 has again been a busy year, but fortunately supplies of goods have been plentiful, and so far, supplies and donations have continued meet demand.

Between April 2023 and February 2024, 8339 people including 3109 children have been helped, 327 of whom were from the Staplegrove area. In this period Staplegrove church and community have donated 170 kilos of provisions. The Foodbank website gives up to date information about the supplies that are needed and those that are there in plenty.

Supplies are collected on Wednesdays from the box in Staplegrove Church. Please keep giving locally as your contributions are much appreciated.

URGENT NEEDS at the moment -

UHT whole and semi-skimmed milk; savoury rice packets; tinned ready-meals: macaroni cheese, spaghetti bolognese, ravioli; longlife fruit juice; small tinned potatoes; instant noodles; tinned vegetables; deodorant, washing up liquid; strong carrier bags.

Again many thanks for all your continuing support. If you want any more information, please see the Foodbank website, or contact me.

Margaret Senior - margaretsenior2@hotmail.com

26. TOWER REPORT

In many respects, this year has been a bit of an extension from last year. Following Covid many towers have struggled with their change ringing, even basic ringing has been an issue. Here at St John's, we have had the same problems as many towers, however, this year we have managed to overcome most of these issues and have made definite progress. We have our ups and downs, as all towers do, but overall, the improvement has been noticeable, so well done all. This is not to say that we can rest on our laurels, oh no, we have the Branch Striking competition in April which we have started to practice for, and of which I have great hopes (again). This year the competition is at Holy Trinity and we have been there to practice a couple of times. Things are looking hopeful. We are going to field two teams this year, which is a first for us.

The bells themselves have started to settle down following the restoration, I know some people will say, 'How can bells settle down.' Well any bell once it has been re-hung takes time to find its own pattern when rung, ours have been no exception. This past year regular maintenance has been carried out and no problems or issues have been found.

Last year saw the clock finally re-positioned on the south side of the tower, and I have to say it does look good. The re-gilding looks lovely and the clock is now 100% accurate all the time. Thanks to a little satellite up in the heavens somewhere.

As is always the case there are things that still need doing. The tower door being the main one. I was hoping that this past year would have seen some progress on this. Sadly, this has not been the case. The path levels need to be adjusted along with the door so both projects seem to have been linked together. As yet there has been very little progress on either, let's hope that 2024 sees some movement in this area. However, thanks to Cathryn we now have a carpeted ringing chamber, ex pew carpets from St Johns via All Saints Norton and then back to St Johns ringing chamber. (Have carpet will travel).

Christmas 2023 was a little busy for the ringers. We managed to ring for all the services over the festive period with 5 services on Sunday 24th. My very grateful thanks to all those who rang at both towers for the various services it was much appreciated.

On a happy note, at the Annual General Meeting of our Bellringers at St James's Church in January we honoured two of our ringers. Firstly Michael Clark, who has been a stalwart within our ringing community at St Johns for many years, made the difficult decision to hang up his sally for the last time in 2023. At the meeting we made Michael a 'Member Emeritus'. This means that, although he is no longer able to ring, he is still a member of the Bath & Wells Association and retains his affiliation to the aims of the Association.

The second happy note was that Alison Pink was made one of two 'Ringers of the Year' 2023. Alison has been a ringer with us for a few years now, and her progress has been excellent. I am sure that in the years to come she will improve quickly along with the rest of the band.

During the year a new Bath & Wells flag was purchased as the old one, despite Heathers sewing, finally flew its last. Watch the tower for the next 'Flag Day'.

As is usual at this time of year, I pay tribute to all of our ringers. I always say that we are blessed with one of the most dedicated and loyal bands of ringers in the Taunton Branch. Not many towers could field nearly two teams of 6 ringers to ring at both Benefice Churches on a Sunday morning so my very grateful thanks to them all for their hard work over the past year, and I look forward to 2024.

Mike Hansford – Tower Captain

27. YOUTH MISSION GROUP

The Youth Mission Group continues to work actively with our families and young people. The pattern of bimonthly Messy Church sessions is well established and we have added additional sessions at Easter and Christmas. We regularly welcome 25 plus children and their families to these sessions and it is good to see the numbers grow with a solid core of regular attendees joining us each time. We have also welcomed some of these families to Sunday Worship. We are very grateful to all who help at these events and if you would like to join the team of helpers you would be very welcome.

A new venture last summer was a toddler group held weekly throughout the school holidays. This was run by Cathryn with help from others and proved very popular and many of these families now join us at other events.

Open the Book continues at school with sessions taking place each term. We currently have opportunities for folk to join the group, you do not need to learn lines, the scripts are quite straight forward and the school really does appreciate us going in to join with their worship. If performing is not your style we also need help with costumes and props so if you would like to help please let us know, we look forward to hearing from you.

Iona Young