

High Street Methodist Church
Witney

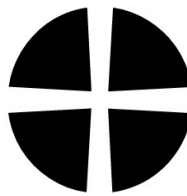
ANNUAL REPORT
Year Ended 31st August 2021



MISSION STATEMENT FOR HIGH STREET METHODIST CHURCH

Jesus Christ who brings us to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit is the foundation of our life together.

High Street Methodist Church aims to be a church, which is bringing Christ to our community and our community to Christ. We want to be dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ, devoted to each other, determined to serve our local community and to support our fellow Christians.



Dear Church,

We continue to find our 'new normal' as we exit a global pandemic, but as we do, we also recognise that new and difficult challenges are emerging for both the local and worldwide communities.

As we move further away from the existence of lockdown restrictions, the more we are starting to discover the impact the last few years has had on our community, and High St Methodist Church has not been immune. Some church members have found it difficult to return to church for several reasons and attendance is slightly down from what it was pre pandemic. Though acknowledging the reality of the decrease in numbers I also caution against believing this means the church is in decline as the abnormal nature wouldn't be a good data base from which to draw any long-term conclusions. To the contrary, in the last 12 months we have also had the joy of seeing adult baptisms and members join the church family this last year which is cause for celebration and joy and we continue to welcome new people into the church family on a regular basis.

What is clear is that resources are more limited to what they were a few years ago. Our finances have held well considering, but we will have to be mindful of our situation in this next year to ensure the church remains in a secure financial position and I have every confidence that the trustees will guide us with wisdom and discernment. We are also finding it difficult to find people to fill some roles in the life of the church, but we do believe that God will provide and once more this is quite a common difficulty that churches have to face.

What should encourage us is the number of new or modified ministries that people are stepping into: Alpha, the Worship band, The coffee bar, Little Lambs, Prayer team, mid-week reflections etc. We also have other groups that continue a long tradition of being part of church life such as the flower arrangement teams, Man Friday, Pastoral visitors, Property and finance, Messy Church, Women's fellowship amongst many others.

What is clear is that as we move forward, we need to be able to have a clear vision about who God is calling us to be in this new season, as well as a strategy that will help us achieve that vision. No church can be all things so part of this process will be to discern what distinct features our church is called to have, and subsequently where our resources should be directed, and where they should not. The foundation of this will be a new mission plan that the leadership team is currently going through a process to develop, and this will be presented to the church in this next annual year. Please do pray for this because nothing we do should be separate from God and prayer is fundamental for everything that we do.

My final thought is to ponder on a comment I frequently hear, that we are 'living in strange times' (a phrase I've no doubt said myself a number of times over the last few years). In truth every generation has dealt and overcome difficulties just as we will in this generation, and it is part of our human nature to adapt and respond to changing contexts. There is no need for us to worry, but instead trust God and know that he has already called and equipped us to do the work that is before us and through our faith and love we will help our community see the Kingdom of God.

What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecc 1:9)

Blessings

Jason

(Rev Jason Cooke)

Church Life

Membership

Deaths: Phyl Bennett, Brian Jordan, Dorothy Donald, Sylvia Holly, Ken Mumford, Sue Withinshaw, Jean Smith, Heather Price, Cicley Cockwell, Ron Cockwell.

New members: 4

Transfers in: 8

Transfers out : 3

Total 180

Pastoral Worker and Pastoral Visitors

Our grateful thanks and appreciation for the diligence of the 26 Pastoral Visitors who regularly keep in touch with those on their lists throughout the year. It is essential for the care and wellbeing of the church fellowship.

Our aim is to try to allocate all members to one of the Pastoral Team whose responsibility it is to keep in contact and give support where needed.

The Pastoral Team meets with Rev Jason three or four times a year to discuss and share news about pastoral care at High Street church. Appropriate training for the improvement of pastoral care is arranged from time to time.

Anne Crawford

Prayer

There is an email chain for requests for prayer and telephone messages for those who do not receive emails. This continues to be an invaluable means of communication and a great source of comfort and healing. Other prayer opportunities have restarted as Covid restrictions have lifted with small groups meeting during the week and a time of prayer before Sunday services.

Church Leadership

The Church's Leadership Team have continued to meet regularly (normally monthly) to discuss and prepare the way forward for HSMC. Many aspects of church life are constantly reviewed and, of course, resulted in adjustments and new approaches during the period of Covid-19. All that we try to do are based on the principles of the 'Methodist Way of Life' (Worship, Learning & Caring, Service and Evangelism)

The team are currently evaluating the responses from a survey of the church which formed part of the Sunday morning service in early May. This is being carried out in order to produce a new mission plan for our church.

During the past 12 months the team have also looked at :

- 'God in Love Unites Us' = with particular reference regarding whether to allow our premises to be used for same sex marriages.
- The formation of a Worship Planning Team
- Establishing a Chaplaincy Team at HSMC
- The safe reopening of our Coffee Bar.

Worship

With the lifting of Covid restrictions it has been a joy to get back to full maskless worship. During the year we have seen a gradual increase in numbers worshipping regularly as the confidence has returned. Our Sunday morning worship continues to be the focal point of church life with a good size congregation and we give thanks to the stewards, musicians and technical team that enable it all to happen.

Children and Young People

Over the past year Junior Church has continued to meet every Sunday providing an important place for our young people to learn, play and explore their faith.

Christmas Shoeboxes

We were able to continue to organise the collection, checking and packing of shoeboxes to be transported to countries like Romania, Belarus and Bosnia where some of the children are living in desperate circumstances. The boxes are filled with toys, toiletries, writing materials, games and sweets to delight the children, most of whom have no possessions at all.

The team tries to involve as many people from our community as possible in this activity and promote a warm and friendly atmosphere in which to check the boxes. Over 1000 boxes were checked before they were collected by Teams4U to transport and distribute where needed.

Church Premises

During the past twelve months, we have been pleased to welcome back users to our premises. They have gradually returned as the Covid restrictions have eased and we are currently at about 70% of our pre-pandemic level of use.

We have, as regular room-users on licences, Volunteer Link-Up, Witney Food Revolution (a food bank/food recycling project) and Aspire (a youth support and development organisation). In November 2021 we signed a three-year lease on the shop unit with Golden Threads (a tailor) and we have tenants in the church flat on a one-year tenancy agreement.

The Coffee Bar is coming back to life with a new team of volunteers.

The automatic front and back doors and the fob entry control system recently installed have helped to make the building more accessible to users and raised the level of security when the building is closed.

We remain grateful to our employees who handle bookings, cleaning, room setting-up and security. Maintaining our premises is a continual activity, with Man Friday volunteers doing a myriad of small jobs to look after the building and surroundings. We are about to place an order for repair work on the Wesley Centre stonework. The gutters and slates on the north side of the Worship Area need attention.

The Newland chapel is also part of our responsibility, and we are grateful to those who look after it.

We are fortunate to have gas and electricity purchase contracts which run until 2024 at the "old" prices. We are commissioning an energy survey to identify how we can reduce our energy

usage in the short term, and what we should aim to do in the long run to control costs and to become more eco-friendly.

Keith Crawford - Property Secretary

The Church in the Community

As a church we are proud of the building that we have and are even more delighted in the way that the community is able to use it. Room bookings are increasing once more, and the Methodist Church remains one of the most used buildings in all of Witney. Activities on our premises are varied and include activities such as toddler groups, life skills courses, weight loss groups, dance classes, brownies and guides, art classes, baby support groups, music recitals, Ukrainian drop in, homeless drop in, Aspire (supporting young adults), Community Fridge, Community Larder and much much more.

The coffee bar is now open 5 days a week once more and continues to be a place for people to come and relax and find peace.

The building continues to be used well for ecumenical work in Witney, hosting Witney Well (a churches together outreach event) as well as concerts for WICS (Witney Inter Church Singers) and the churches together prayer breakfasts.

One of the excitement developments looking ahead is the recruitment of a Chaplaincy Lead. This role will recruit and train a team of chaplains from across the churches in Witney who will then offer chaplaincy at community events, church events, within our building and around the town centre. Loneliness and mental health are two of the key issues affecting the community at this time and we look forward to offering what help we can in these issues and more.

It is fair to say that High Street Methodist church is an integral part of the community in Witney, and we should be encouraged in the difference that we are making.

Staff and Volunteers

The operations of the Church are only possible with the support of our small paid staff and the around 175 volunteers who put in many hours across the year.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is an important aspect of our church life. It is essential that policies and procedures are in place to ensure that everybody in the church and those that use our premises are kept safe from any sort of harm and to prevent, as far as possible, incidents from arising and, if they do, to ensure that they are efficiently and appropriately dealt with.

The following is taken from High Street's safeguarding policy:

'High Street Methodist Church strives to ensure that its safeguarding policy...are brought to the attention of everyone and applied to everyone...This is not the same as treating each person as though they were under suspicion. It is more a matter of taking sensible measures to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults, and recognising that it is the responsibility of us all.

A robust safeguarding policy, if followed, also serves to protect those who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults who may inadvertently place themselves in a vulnerable position...Malicious accusations can also wreck the lives of those against whom they are directed.

'We are concerned with the wholeness of each individual within God's purpose for their lives, the life of the community and the life of the world. We seek to safeguard all members of this church community, irrespective of whether they are Church members, adherents or visitors, and irrespective of their age.

'We are committed to:

- the care and nurture of, and respectful pastoral ministry with, all children, young people and adults
- the safeguarding and protection of all children, young people and adults who may be vulnerable
- the establishing of safe, caring communities which provide a loving environment where there is informed vigilance as to the dangers of abuse.'
- The safeguarding reference group is made up of the minister, centre manager, senior steward, safeguarding officer, minister's PA, a church member involved with children and families, a Newland representative, the pastoral secretary and a property representative. When a health and safety officer is appointed, they will also attend.

The safeguarding group has continued to meet and ensure that our policies, processes and procedures meet the changing demands and situations that occur.

Treasurer's Report

Summary

The accounts of the church have been prepared and are presented as required by the Charities Commission. These present the full picture of the activities of the church and combine both the normal church operation and the funds for the building projects.

The accounts show an overall deficit of £9,351 (2020: £16,717) with unrestricted funds showing a deficit of £342 (2020: £21,814) and restricted funds (mainly the organ fund showing a deficit of £9,009 (2020: surplus of £5,097).

The continued impact of Covid, caused both by government restrictions and caution amongst the population, has had a significant impact on the church. While church giving has been maintained, lettings have significantly reduced with this year being 45% below 2020 which was itself 42% lower than 2019. We were able to reduce costs (property and staff costs down by 57%) and used the furlough scheme for our staff. We were also supported by the circuit with a rebate on the assessment of £22,960 and received Covid support grants of £12,952 (2020: £10,000). Restricted funds reduced as we were able to complete the work on the Organ,

Overall unrestricted church funds have decreased very slightly over last year with the amount in unrestricted funds at £33,563 (2020: £33,905) which represents 21% of our reduced expenditure and 14% of normal expenditure (2020: 14%). This is very low and our focus is now on ensuring we have enough cash over the coming months.

The restricted funds of £13,293 are primarily the funds received relating to the refurbishment project along with funds held for the benevolent fund.

Reserve Policy for High Street Methodist Church for the year end 31st August 2021

In 2007 Church Council agreed a Fund target of six months average expenditure (approx £119k in a normal year). With the impact of Covid shutting our building we are, significantly below this level and are currently more concerned with controlling cash on a day to day basis. When we are able to get back to normal running we will need to review both our policy and implement plans to rebuild reserves over the coming years.

Policy for Restricted Funds

We have identified restricted funds relating to the Refurbishment Project, The Benevolent Fund, The Cream Tea Fund and the Shoe Boxes. Monies held relating to these funds totalled £13,293 at the 31st August 2021. The monies are held within the general church funds but identified separately within the monthly accounts reporting with income and expenditure allocated accordingly and the outstanding value protected.

Ian Prince, ACMA Treasurer