

**Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Parochial Church Council
for the year ending 31st December 2023**



Incumbent:

In vacancy

Bank:

CAF Bank Ltd.

Independent Examiner:

Mr Ian Jarvis

The Guesten 15 College Green

Worcester. WR1 2LH

2023 Annual Report and Financial Statements

1. Aim and purposes.

The primary object of all PCCs is the promotion of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England.

The PCC (Powers) Measure 1956 states that the PCC 'is to cooperate with the incumbent', 'in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical'. The parish moved into vacancy in November 2023 and have continued to promote the whole mission of the Church, working together with the assistant curate, the rest of the ministry team, the staff team and the congregations.

The PCC is also specifically responsible for the maintenance of the fabric of the church buildings, the associated churchyards at St Matthias' Church and St Peter's Church and the maintenance of the Hall attached to the Church of the Ascension.

When planning our activities for the year, the PCC have considered the Commission's guidance on public benefit, particularly the specific guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. Our focus is to enable people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer- learning about the Gospel and developing their knowledge of the Christian faith;
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish;
- Working closely with the schools in our parish;
- Working with our local authorities and other public bodies, as well as our neighbours and wider community, in being of service to others.

To facilitate this work, it is important that we continue to invest in the maintenance and upgrade of the fabric of the three church buildings in our care and the associated Church Hall.

2. Objectives and Activities

2023 was a year when we saw ourselves addressing some acute issues, for example, the cost of utilities affecting our buildings, and then establishing firmer foundations, with strong shoots emerging in the Autumn, especially in our working with our community and with schools and young people in the parish. This momentum continues into 2024.

We should make special mention of Father Phillip, whose time with us came to an end, having led us through the COVID-19 pandemic, with several of the initiatives described in this report taking shape from his service among us.

We celebrated the ordination as a priest of our curate, James, and we are incredibly grateful to him and his wife Sarah, for their faithfulness to the parish, during this time of vacancy, when his care for the people is in a moment of flourishing.

We also said thank you to Sarah Maxwell-Phillips, who we are proud to support in her growth as an ordinand and we are delighted that she can pursue her calling, with the blessing of the National Church, at her studies and development at Ripon College Cuddesdon.

We are grateful for the backing of the Diocese of Worcester, in so many ways, but particularly worthy of mention is the enabling of the ministry of Ness (Vanessa Everitt) as Schools Chaplain, working with our church schools (Dyson Perrins, Northleigh and St Matthais'). We are very appreciative of the support of each of the schools' heads, staff and governing bodies, in this important ministry.

One of the innovations that we were able to instigate in 2023 was the parish's participation in the Community Builder programme led by Malvern Hills District Council, with Sarah Clark appointed as our own Community Builder. Making connections and enabling a groundswell of activity is a vital aspect of the ministry of any parish church, and this is a pathfinding example of what we are about.

This report is written by a collection of contributors drawn from the wide range of volunteers, staff and church leaders that have been brought together, we believe, by the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus, and watched over by God the Father, in service of our neighbours.

We are diverse in our backgrounds and outlooks, but we are united in our belief that we are all loved by God regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, ability, sexuality or creed.

In this report you will see the variety of worship and activities that we have been engaged in, with a continued willingness to try and succeed or fail in new things, as well as continuing the best of our traditions and generating new customs. This arises from our determination to be an inclusive parish offering a warm welcome to everyone who walks through our door.

3. Mission and Service

Worship

It has been a real privilege to support the parish in worship over the past year, which coincided with an unexpected vacancy and the addition of new and returning members to the ministry team. Worship in our parish would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of many faithful volunteers, we benefit from their ministry every time we meet together, it is difficult to express our gratitude in so few words.

During the vacancy we have tried as much as possible to maintain a stable pattern of worship for all our congregations, which have been ably supported by our ministry team.

Capacity

Decreased capacity in the clergy team has limited our ability to continue the following services:

- 8am Said Eucharist: 1st and 3rd Sunday
- Monthly 5pm Evening Services:
 - Choral Evensong
 - Compline

Pausing these services will allow our new incumbent time to consider the viability and missional opportunities of these times of worship, with the hope that new patterns for worship can be devised in the near future.

Current Pattern of Worship

We have seen good participation in worship this year. Although numbers of attendances at the 9:45 service are down on pre-COVID figures, the total average attendance for both congregations remains consistent, which demonstrates a healthy platform for growth and mission. All the churches have their main Sunday services live-streamed on Facebook.

- 9:45am Parish Eucharist: A traditional sung eucharist.
 - St Matthias Church: 1st and 3rd Sundays
 - The Church of the Ascension: 2nd, 4th and 5th Sundays.
- 11:15am Sunday Worship at St Peter's Church: A contemporary service with band led music and conversational Q&A sermons.
 - Contemporary Service of the Word: 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Sundays
 - Contemporary Eucharist: 4th Sunday.
- 5pm Taizé Contemplative Worship at The Church of the Ascension: a contemplative service with music from the Taizé community. Every 3rd Sunday.
- 10:30am Thursday Said Eucharist at St Matthias Church: a said Eucharist with refreshments and conversation after the service.

Seasons and Highlights

While it is not possible to mention all the heights of our year here, there are perhaps some events we should mention below.

Holy Week and Easter 2023

We began Holy Week with a celebration and procession from St Peter's to the Ascension on Palm Sunday, which marked the beginning of our Easter programme. It was important to provide space that would enable everyone to enter the story of Holy Week. We held services on each day, including Stations of the Cross, Taizé Worship and Evening Prayer. The Triduum began on Maundy Thursday with a celebration of the initiation of the Eucharist followed by the Watch. On Good Friday we included reflections on poetry, which was followed by receiving the reserved sacrament. On Easter Eve we marked the first Eucharist of Easter with a Vigil service. Easter Day began with a Dawn service at the church of the Ascension, followed by a Festival Eucharist at St Matthias.

Advent & Christmas

During Advent we were able to maintain a significant programme of worship including Advent, Contemporary, Outdoor and 9 Lessons Carol Services. Midnight Mass attendance was slightly down from previous years; however, our Family Service on Christmas Eve was well attended. This was largely affected by the days that Christmas fell on this year.



Outdoor carol singing at the Church of the Ascension, 23rd December 2023

Experimental Family Worship

We continued our experiments into All Age and Family Worship, with service held at Pentecost, Harvest and Christmas Eve and Mothering Sunday. These have enabled us to learn important lessons on how we are able to invite our schools and families to participate in worship, bringing our congregations together and enabling us to share hospitality and fellowship. Each of these services have demonstrated higher than average attendance figures, leaving a positive impact on those who attended, with our wider community of parents and teachers feeling comfortable in our church setting.

Doing church differently

We also experimented with two different offerings initiated by Alastair: a 'Breaking Bread' simple meal with non-liturgical eucharist; and a 'Spiritual Space' which used a light liturgical frame, with an adapted version of Night Prayer, and was centred around a group Lectio Divina process of meditative reflection on a Bible text, along with some simple chants (Taizé, Iona, etc.) that could be sung without musical accompaniment.

Ministry Team

We are enormously blessed by a wide variety of talented and gifted people who support our worshipping life, without whom the richness and diversity of our services would be diminished:

Clergy: Revd James Williams (Curate), Revd Dr Alastair McKay (Associate Priest); Revd Sue Beverly (PTO), Revd Mary Nobles (PTO), Revd Ted Stokes (PTO), Revd Ian Prior (PTO);

LLMs: Allen Hudson, Jacqui Green, Mike Hancox, Eileen Tomlin;

ALM: Deb Cook

Employed: *Vanessa Everitt (Schools Chaplain)*

Pastoral

Pastoral ministry remains at the core of our Parish life.

Pastoral Team

Over the past year we have made good progress in organising our pastoral team, with regular team meetings being held and critical information sharing taking a much more prominent role in our discussions. Eileen Tomlin and Olive Wickens have faithfully continued to support those who can no longer attend worship in person with Home and Care Home communions.

We have walked with people through difficult seasons of life and have been able to welcome new people into our faith.

This year we remember those departed into the presence of Almighty God, including:



Lis Wilson,
Mike (Boz) Brown,
Nick Maxwell-Phillips,
all of whom shared fellowship with and gave service to us in recent years.

Occasional Offices

2023 has marked an increase in those approaching us for baptism, wedding, and funeral ministry. It has been a particular highlight to have baptised people in each of our churches which demonstrates a growing association of place in the Parish. In addition to our own parish, we have supported Christ Church with occasional offices, which has meant that we have had the opportunity to provide ministry to the wider population of our town.

Pastoral Outreach

Alongside Bereavement Café

In spring we established the Alongside Café to support those for whom loss and bereavement. This has enabled us to build relationship with people in our community who have valued sharing their journey of loss. We are hopeful that this important aspect of our pastoral ministry continues to grow in the coming year.

Care Home Services

Eileen has continued to offer Care Home communion and services at important times of the year such as Christmas and Remembrance. It has been wonderful to hear the good reports of this work from home managers. We hope to strengthen this work in the future and increase the number of volunteers who minister in this area.

Next Gen: Children, Young People, Families and Schools

It has been a delight to see our Next Gen ministry climb to new heights after many years of faithful service in some areas. Each week the Parish engages more than 1000 tots, children, and young people through our various ministries, none of which could have been achieved without the faithful volunteering of parishioners.

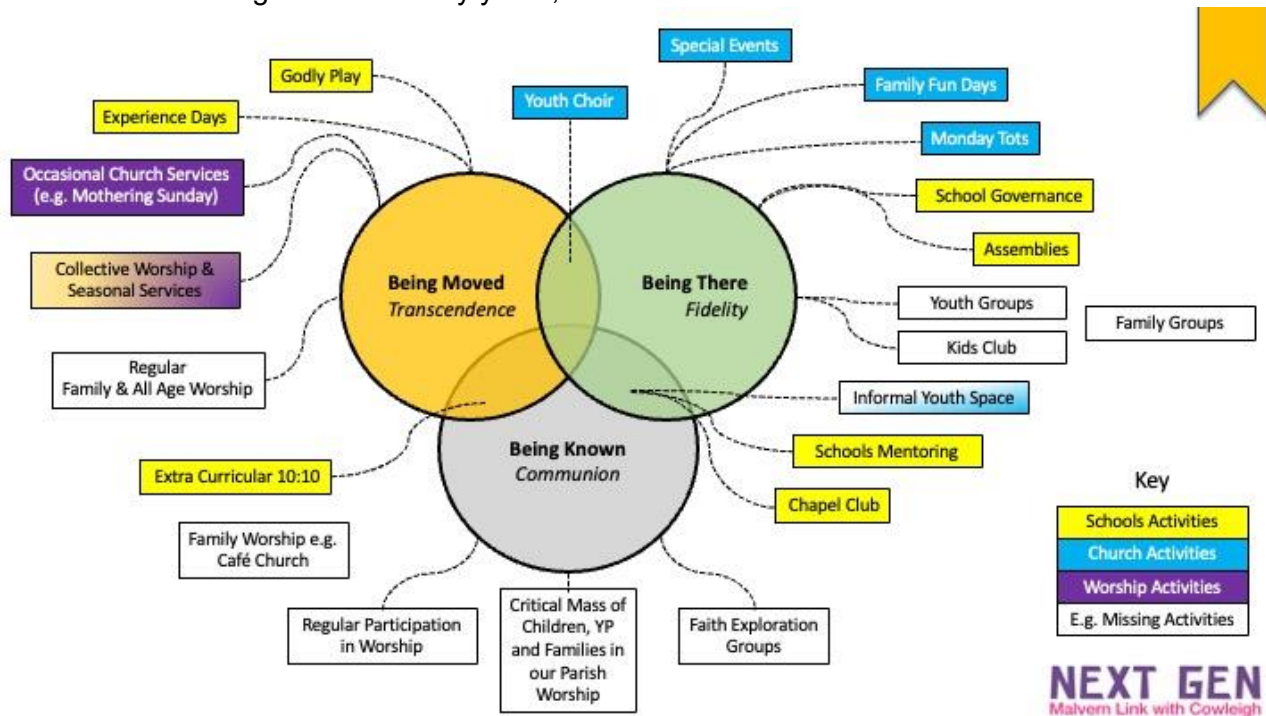
Next Gen Strategy

At the beginning of 2023 the parish met to help shape and develop our Next Gen strategy, taking the opportunity to pray and think through the opportunities ahead of us. In April we took time to consider some of the national and diocesan research that has been conducted in recent years, and identified the ways in which the parish was either already engaged or had the capacity to develop in these areas.

We adopted our three stranded strategy that allowed us to identify how each of our activities enable Next Gen participants to discover faith and belong to the life of our parish.

Divine Passion:	Visible in the church as	Forms of practice	Leadership
<i>Fidelity</i> “being there”	<i>A sacred solidarity</i> (e.g., the practice of exhortation)	<i>Compassion</i> <i>Youth Clubs</i>	<i>Coaches</i>
<i>Transcendence</i> “being moved”	<i>Holy moment</i> (e.g. the practice of pilgrimage)	<i>Play</i> <i>Praise and lament</i>	<i>Trail guides</i>
<i>Communion</i> “being known”	<i>The sacrament of one another</i> (e.g., the practice of friendship)	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Mentors</i>

We mapped all the areas we are currently engage in Next Gen activities, dividing them into Church, Schools and Worship based activities. This enabled us to pinpoint the gaps that we had the potential to develop new missional activities and strengthen our existing work with early years, schools.



Next Gen: Church Activities

From the perspective of Sunday Worship, it is hard to get a full picture sheer scale of activity that occurs within our Next Gen ministry, however it is by far one of our strongest areas of mission and ministry. Over the past year, through the dedication and hard work of our volunteers and team we have seen tremendous growth in this

area and are now in the blessed position to have one of the healthiest ministries to Tots, Children, Families and Young People in the Diocese of Worcester, and we suspect much further beyond.

From the feedback we receive, we know that this is having a huge impact, not only in the positive perceptions people have towards our Parish, but in revitalising our confidence in reaching out to those in our community.

As we look to the future, the Parish will consider how this ministry might be sustained, nurtured, and grown, so that we are able to continue sharing our faith, and being a positive Christian presence for the long term.

Monday Tots

Thanks to a small but dedicated team of volunteers, Monday Tots has continued to welcome very young children and their parents/carers throughout the year.

Most families arrive for the first part of the session which takes place in the church itself and includes mainly faith-based songs enlivened with actions, dance scarves or musical instruments followed by an opportunity for prayer and finishing with bubbles.



Although voluntary contributions towards the cost of the refreshments are welcomed, the service is provided freely for the community by the parish and average attendance between January and December 2023 was 21 children and 18 carers at each session.

Families then move into the Link room to enjoy playing and talking together. Activities include sensory play with water or sand, creative play with painting or play dough, books and puzzles, imaginative play with a pretend shop and kitchen and miniature animals and vehicles and physical play using the climbing frame or our much-appreciated roller coast ride.



Particular thanks to Alison and David, Olive, Kit, Julie and Ursula for all their help in 2023.

Deb Cook

Family Fun Days

In October we held our second Family Fun Day this time at the Church of the Ascension, and welcome children, families, and local groups from across our community. The day was well attended, and we were able to make good use of the church grounds. During the event we were able to do a small-scale consultation, which enabled us to refine our thinking around our new Next Gen activities. A special note of thanks to Ness and Sarah who worked hard to bring the day together.

Youth Choir

We continue to run our Youth Choir sessions and have been delighted to be able to award RSCM medals to young people who have put in a tremendous effort to learn the art of choral singing and sing in our church choir. Numbers have peaked and troughed for the session, and further promotion and activities have been suggested to help bolster these sessions.

Next Gen: Schools Activities

School Governance

We have strong relationships with all our Church Schools, and this is partly due to the dedication and hard work volunteer governors, an important aspect of our school's ministry that is often overlooked. During 2023 members of our parish have been representative in all our church school's governing bodies, providing support to school leaders and maintaining a Christian presence.

Special thanks to those who have served in these positions:

St Matthias' C of E Primary School:	Allen Hudson, Janette Sharp
Northleigh Church of England School:	Revd Phillip Johnson (Resigned 2023)
Dyson Perrins C of E Academy:	Revd James Williams, Tony Eberle
(Resigned 2023)	

Now that we are in vacancy there are a number of positions that have become open, which with prayerful consideration need to be filled.

Assemblies and Collective Worship

We continue to play an active role in Collective Worship, having a presence in all our Church School's every week.

Secondary School: This year Ness has been coordinating collective worship at Dyson Perrins, producing a 'thought for the week' and leading worship for the entire school, developing a small group of young people who support her in compiling acts of worship.

During Advent Year 7 attended St Matthias' to mark the first term of their secondary education. We are hopeful this will become a tradition that strengthens ties between the school and parish.

Primary Schools: We continue to lead Collective Worship each week in our schools, encouraging the participation of young people in all that we do. In particular, Ness has been working closely with Northleigh to support their Collective Worship ambassadors and enable student participation in all acts of worship.

Experience Events

We have held two Experience Events this year, enabling both our schools to learn more about important seasons in the Church calendar. In spring we held Experience After Easter and in the autumn Experience Harvest at St Peter's and St Matthias. A huge amount of preparation goes into these events, and volunteers from across our parish and beyond have supported them faithfully with resources and time. A special thanks to Ness and Sarah who coordinated these activities.

Chapel Club

Every day at Dyson Perrins there is Chapel Club which is an informal drop-in for students at break and lunchtimes that provides a safe, inclusive space for them to get away from the noise of the rest of the school. It is a space in which they can talk, hang out, play games and have the opportunity to ask questions about faith and prayer.

On Wednesdays there is Worship Wednesday which is a time set aside during lunch specifically for those students who would like to engage more fully in collective worship.

There are also opportunities for the whole school community to come together. On Friday mornings the chapel is open for prayer and every half term we have a Eucharist service.

Extra-Curricular Activities

For a term, both James and Ness went into school and delivered 10:10, a course that explores well-being. In addition. In September we were part of the pilot for the Archbishop of Canterbury's Difference programme for schools and youth clubs.

Godly Play

This year we have continue to support our primary schools with Godly Play, a wonderful resource that teaches the Christian story, by providing stimulating questions through the medium of play. Until the autumn Sarah Maxfield-Philips lead in this area, and her departure to theological college has meant a reduction in our ability to offer them on a frequent basis.

Next Gen: Worship Activities

Children and Family Services

We have continued to develop our experimental family services and look forward organising 4 more services in 2024.

Seasonal Worship Activities

All our Schools have attended our churches this year to celebrate important Christian festivals. These have been a wonderful opportunity to connect with parents and enable our schools to feel welcome in church.

Next Gen: New Activities

Responding to our strategy and consultation data we have been delighted to launch two new weekly activities that reflect our desire to connect with children, families and young people. We have been blown away with the positivity in which the parish has responded to these, both through giving and by volunteering their time to see them established.

Family Club

In October we launched our Thursday Family Cub, a group designed to provide children and their parents with an opportunity to connect with each other after the school day. The club usually involves a game and a craft activity and is always accompanied by a hot meal. We were able to set up the club after receiving funding from the National Lottery which has enabled us to purchase resources and promote the club to the wider community.

One of our aims in establishing the Family Club was to elevate some of the hidden issues of poverty in our community. Although it is not operated on a needs basis we are acuity aware that by providing a hot meal, we are responding to some of the coalface issues of the Cost of Living crisis.

We have seen a brilliant take up from parents from a variety of local schools in the community and have a sizable group of regular attenders. We are delighted that the Ukrainian community have found the sessions useful and have been blessed to learn more about their traditions and culture.



Youth Club

In the same month we also opened St Peter's Church to young people on a Monday evening. Most of the attendees come from Dyson Perrins and are connected in some way to the work Ness undertakes as school chaplain. Numbers of attendees has been steady, which has provided excellent conditions for the development of relationship and opportunities to support young people through the challenges of adolescence.

Team and Volunteers

We are extremely grateful to our team of dedicated volunteers, without whom we would not be able to develop these new activities.

Volunteers: Sue Fairchild, Ian Fairchild, Jacqui Green, Julia King, Rosemary Speck, Kit Roberts, Joe Everitt, India Parish, Craig Jones

The parish is blessed to have passionate, dedicated and faithful leaders whose vision and hard work has meant that we now have one of the healthiest Next Gen ministries in the diocese. Their commitment, in training, planning, and going beyond the call of duty should not go unnoticed in this report.

Team: Vanessa Everitt (Schools Chaplain)

Sarah Clark (Community Builder)

Sarah Maxfield-Philips (Ministry Lead – until September 2023)

If you would like to find out more about our Next Gen ministry, please take time to speak with one of our volunteers or team members who will be able to share more detail. Offers for help will be gratefully received.

MLWC in our Community

Community Builder Programme

The 'Community Builder Programme' has the purpose to support communities to be strong, resilient and sustainable. When people are given the opportunity to shape the outcomes of their community and make changes to things that matter to them, they lead more fulfilling lives. Funding for Community Builders comes from the Government's Containment Outbreak Management Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across the Malvern Hills District there are around nine Community Builders working in different settings, all working with residents and partners across the Malvern Hills District to strengthen community connections, reduce isolation and improve health and wellbeing.

MLWC took on a Community Builder, Sarah Clark, who started work in August 2023. Sarah has spent time working within many of the existing groups that we have within MLWC, particularly The Community Fridge. Sarah has supported Es Hoyle with the DMC social media and marketing. Sarah works collaboratively with Ness Everitt in the new Family Club and Youth Club, both new ventures that began in the Autumn of 2023.

Sarah worked with Es with the running of the DMC Fete on September 5th 2023 and with Ness and James (and wider team) in the planning and running of the Family Fun Day on October 7th.

Sarah has supported a member of the community to run a wreath making workshop on December 8th – this event strongly fulfilling the aims of the Community Builder Programme.

Sarah ran a quiz on November 18th which brought many of the church and wider community together.

Sarah has gained 2 small pots of funding for groups since August 2023 that will benefit those groups through into early 2024.

Sarah meets regularly with other Community Builders and has to regularly report to MHDC and local councillors on her role.

Community Fridge

The Community Fridge runs on Monday morning and Wednesday afternoon from the Ascension Hall. The purpose is to save supermarket food waste from landfill by redistributing food to anyone attending, and there is no cost. The food is either at its 'sell by' or 'best before' date and hence the supermarket have to dispose of it. We have an average redistribution of one tonne each month that is saved from landfill.

The sessions have a really strong community feel with volunteers from both the church congregation and the wider community assisting with supermarket collections and the sorting of food at the Community Fridge itself. We have an average of around 28 households attending each session, with around 35% attending both sessions. Although its purpose is to save food from landfill, open to anyone to attend, we do have a high proportion of people attending who are on low income and who really value the service to save on their household expenditure.



Warm Space/Friendship Group

The 'Warm Space/ Friendship Space' offers free tea, coffee and conversation run from The Ascension Hall. During the start of the Winter of 2023 it was run on Monday and Wednesday afternoons with support from 'Warm Space' funding via MHDC. Initially run by staff and volunteers from the church congregation towards the latter part of 2023 there saw additional members of the wider community volunteering their time. From the summer of 2023 the sessions altered slightly to run prior to and



alongside the Community Fridge sessions – many people attend both sessions, so it made sense to combine the two.

People attending the sessions have expressed how valuable they find them in building friendships and that for many people, it's one of the few places they go to mix with others. It is also a space where we can share church activities/ wider community information in an informal friendly way.

Open Gardens

We held a repeat of our "Love your neighbours' gardens!" on the weekend of 17th and 18th June with six gardens open three of which were new contributors drawn from the community. It was fantastic to have such a wide array of gardens to have a wander around, and although the numbers were not what might have been possible, there was a good spirit around all those who visited.

3 new folk who were visitors this year said they would be interested in hosting next year - the one possible change is not to hold the Open Gardens on the same weekend as the 3 Counties Show, but the following weekend in 2024, if there is the appetite and capacity to do so.

As well as it being a good community event, we raised £653.71 to go towards the facilities in the Ascension Hall that enable us to host the Community Fridge, Warm Space and our bereavement café amongst other forms of service in our neighbourhood.

SPARC

We continued to host Live & Local events and a number of other events in 2023 and began to bring together a team of people who can combine to run the St Peter's arts programme as a team, going forward. We are grateful to Sarah Maxwell-Phillips for all the work she did organising them, and the assistance given by Nick and Sue.

The church continues to be used by several arts organisations in particular our friends the St Peter's Printmakers who held an exhibition weekend in the Summer that has become an annual event showcasing the talents of their members.

MLWC Choir Report 2023

The regular choir sang services in all but three Sundays of the year, with three additional services in Holy Week and, with the Extended Choir, two carol services and six Choral Evensongs. We were sad to lose John, Sue and Nancy during the year, all for personal reasons, and we very urgently need new recruits. With Es's help, we have worked to encourage young singers to join us, though as yet with no success. Nonetheless, our small group of dedicated singers continues to provide a high standard of music to support and enhance our congregational worship.

The Extended choir comprises some 25 experienced singers, some travelling from Worcester, Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Hereford. These services follow the 1662 cathedral Evensong format and provide our regular choir with an opportunity to sing larger-scale repertoire of church music. We were lucky to have the services of Paul Charman (from Tewkesbury Abbey) as organist for most of these services. In July we joined the extended choir of Holy Trinity for a combined Evensong at that church. Sadly, the regular monthly choral evensong was discontinued from July, and choral evensongs are now only occasional events.

I would like to thank all those who have supported and encouraged our church music in Malvern Link, and especially our wonderful regular choir members, Eileen, Es, Liz, Joy, David and Martin.

Lunchtime Concerts at St. Matthias

At St. Matthias, we continued our regular series of Thursday lunchtime concerts until July, after which they moved to Christ Church. At St. Matthias. At St. Matthias these attracted audiences of around 60, with programmes usually featuring skilled local musicians. Thanks to all those who helped provide the popular hot potato lunches!

Peter Johnson, Director of Music



Malvern Dementia Centre



Malvern Link Dementia Meeting Centre is a parish resource offering ongoing warm, friendly and expert support to people and families affected by dementia. At the heart of the Meeting Centre is a social club where people meet to have fun, talk to others and get help that focuses on individual needs, all based on sound research evidence of what helps people to cope well in adjusting to living with the symptoms and changes that dementia brings. The focus of the Meeting Centre is on both the person living with dementia and their family.

The centre offers activities, information, support sessions for carers, a discreet singing session and events to bring us into the wider community, raising the profile of people who live with dementia and supporting our community as a whole.

In September, with the Ascension Hall becoming available, the centre was able to move from the Link Room to a more informal, airy and homely space, which also provides the opportunity for outdoor activities including gardening.

The centre, open one day per week throughout the year, 10.00am – 3.00pm, is run by two members of staff with the support of a team of trained volunteers. All have a real understanding of the emotional and practical challenges being faced, drawing a community together to create networks between members who help support each other. We aim to respect people with dementia, to challenge in a non-confrontational way, to allow every member of the meeting centre to feel that their opinion is heard and counted and to thrive as a member of the meeting centre community.

Originally funded by a successful bid to Worcestershire County Council working alongside the internationally renowned Association of Dementia Studies at Worcester University, the aim is for the centre to be self-funding over time. The initial grant ends early 2024 and currently membership fees are insufficient to achieve financial balance. Considerable effort has been put into marketing to ensure those recently diagnosed are aware of the centre and all it offers. Future plans are exciting, and we go forward in faith, spreading the gospel of this much needed community service, as we continue to provide this vital support to both those at the beginning of their journey with dementia and their loved ones.

Es Hoyle [Dementia Meeting Centre Manager], Jane James and Anne Hancox.

Report from the Bell Tower

It is quite some years since I last reported on the activities from the bell tower and a lot has happened in that time. The most significant being the COVID 19 pandemic and the enforced suspension of all tower bell ringing for almost a year. That event severely disrupted ringing and some previously competent ringers were lost, while others lost confidence in their ability to ring satisfactorily. When it was possible to resume ringing the restrictions regarding ventilation and spacing made normal ringing impossible; you may have noticed us ringing in 'thirds' at times rather than in the diatonic scale of F sharp – we could not ring adjacent bells as the ropes hang too close together.

Thankfully we are now back to normal ringing, and when at full strength, are capable of producing some very good ringing. Unfortunately, we are often not at full strength as some of our members are retired and may be away on holiday or visiting families. The latter has a tendency to coincide with the Church's major festivals of Christmas and Easter leaving us short of ringers on those occasions.

Before 'Lockdown' we had two young boys learning, but the year's stoppage saw them move to senior school and bellringing does not hold a lot of 'street cred' for teenagers, they have not returned. Other younger members are now at university reducing our numbers still further.

We do our best to ring for the 9:45 services at St Matthias' but it becomes difficult when the service is moved to 10:30 as some of our band move on to ring at The Priory for the 10:30 service there, or to attend church elsewhere.

On the positive side we have welcomed one new member - Stella Tew who has moved to Malvern from Birmingham; she is now a regular member of our band.

Ringling at St Matthias' is unfortunately out-of-sight of the congregation, and mostly, out of mind. That is not the case for some churches where it is carried out from the ground floor or a gallery. With current technology it is possible to overcome that by the use of cameras in the ringing room and belfry and screens in church, as has been done at towers such as The Priory and Ledbury and Bromyard, albeit as part of major works to rehang and augment their peals. Obviously, it would require some investment, but it is one thing I would like to see at St Matthias' at some stage in the future.

For those of us who do comprise the team of ringers at St Matthias' it is an activity that we enjoy as well as a service to the church. We are keen to see it continue and are happy to show people what goes on up the tower and teach anyone who may be interested.

Ian Panton – Ringing Master

4. Financial report 2023

Financial Report

Total income for the year ended 31st December 2023 was £238289 while expenditure totalled £250477 resulting in a deficit of £12188 as detailed in the accounts. We are grateful for the very generous grants received during the year, which are listed on page 11 of the accounts. These have enabled us to continue our outreach to the parish, including a Community Builder grant and School Chaplain grant, as well as Community Fridge and Dementia Centre grants and indicate our confidence for future growth. Thanks to the help of A Ministry Fund grant from the Diocese, we were able to pay our Ministry Share in full. Energy costs remain high but, thanks to an emergency appeal we raised sufficient funds to cover this. With the help of a stewardship campaign, our regular giving has increased and we thank everyone who has been able to support us in this way, it is greatly appreciated.

Reserves Policy

The Operational Reserve Fund contains £4663 following continued withdrawals from investments. We aim to increase this, so representing three months of expenditure, designated for emergencies.

Restricted and Endowment Funds

The PCC holds and administers a number of these funds as detailed on the Balance sheet. Restricted funds totalled £38351 as at 31st December 2023. The St Matthias Churchyard and Ecclesiastical Endowment Funds were sold this year, raising £19,473 and £19,031 respectively, to fund specific projects.

Designated Funds

The PCC designates additional unrestricted reserves to be retained for an agreed purpose. These are reviewed on an annual basis and returned to the general fund if no longer considered justified. Designated funds totalled £7406 as at 31st December 2023 as detailed on the Balance sheet.

Investments

The PCC held investment assets at 31st December 2023 as detailed in the Statement of Assets and Liabilities. St Matthias Income Fund showed a small rise in value over the year while St Matthias Growth Fund fell in value due to a withdrawal earlier in the year to top up funds. St Matthias Deposit Fund also fell due to a withdrawal to cover energy costs. With PCC approval, it is hoped to transfer some funds back to these as the dividends and interest they generate provide a valuable income.

My thanks go to Susan Maxfield-Phillips for entering all the figures onto QuickBooks over the year, Anne Hancox and Jenny Purser for banking the collections and envelopes, also to Peter Edwards for reclaiming the gift aid on donations which brings in an invaluable source of income.



I would also like to thank Eileen Watson and Graham Anderson for their help and advice since I took on the role as Treasurer.

Tony Eberle
PCC Treasurer

5. Buildings and churchyards - the fabric goods and ornaments of the churches

The Parish of Malvern Link with Cowleigh

MLWC PCC have four buildings in their charge, all of which are ageing but generally in a reasonable state of repair although there are some major issues with them all, as with all old buildings there is always maintenance and repairs to keep them functioning.

Church of the Ascension

This is the youngest Church in the Parish which also boasts a separate Church Hall where many community activities take place. Within 2023 the hall interior has benefited from repainting of the walls and ceiling giving it a light fresh feel, plus the laying of a new carpet to complete the warm comfortable space it now offers.

A jewel in the crown is the installation of a new kitchen which includes all mod. cons. eg dishwasher, on tap boiling water, lots of storage space etc. This now provides us with the charitable facilities we offer to the public.

Both Church and hall have had new security lights fitted over the front doors, all fire extinguishers and heaters serviced, all in good working order. The Church tower (which originally housed two bells, so it could still be known as a bell tower) has baffle boards missing on the north side. Further investigation is required to ascertain why this is. Otherwise, the Church building itself had no urgent issues. The biggest issue with the Church Hall is the exterior rendering which is coming away from the brickwork to the east facing gable end and the south facing walls. There is a tree which has taken root and growing from the apex of the east facing gable end of the hall.

Churchyard

The Church grounds were maintained and mown by myself so there is no great financial burden on the PCC. Although there may be an odd occasion where a contractor might be required. Fortunately there is no graveyard which reduces any possible complications.

St. Matthias'

St. Matthias' Church is the largest of the three churches and where the vast majority of weddings, baptisms and funerals take place. Fire extinguishers and heaters have been serviced. There is a heater on the south side of the church which is switched off due to a very noisy fan motor. The engineer could not provide an approximate cost for a repair as the bolts are very rusty and are very unlikely to be undone without causing more problems.

The other issue is the lighting or lack of it as there are several lights not working, I think around ten. We will investigate how we fix our lights in the short term, Fr Phillip having had a quotation for a complete replacement that is currently unaffordable.



The Link room heating is now very efficient and low maintenance. There are some negligible issues with the lighting which should be easily sorted.

Churchyards

There are two graveyards at St. Matthias both are at capacity level which are in debate as to what we do with them. The most favourable option is to close them and request that the Council take them over, and the PCC create a 'garden of remembrance.' This is in very early stages of discussion.

St. Peter's Church

This Church now has the benefit of a modern audio and video system which has attracted a new congregation by providing contemporary worship. The Church also provides space for SPARC and the Printmakers, as well as schools and youth activities.

The fire extinguishers and heaters serviced with one heater previously condemned/switched off but heating seems sufficient as it stands. The organ is out of order and is not up for repair as the worship etc. functions very well by alternative means.

There is a problem with the roof leaking on the south side of the building during heavy rain which is under investigation as to the best way forward, which will be addressed in 2024. The toilet and kitchen areas need updating.

Churchyard

There have several complaints about the overgrown state of the churchyard. One of the complainants has a young daughter interred there and was particularly upset about the overgrowth encroaching on the grounds. After I explained that the cost was becoming very expensive to maintain the grounds fully, she very kindly offered to contribute half the cost for the clearance. We gladly accepted her proposals and plans were put in place for the work to be carried out. This should make the grounds appear more cared for and create a greater chance of the Council adopting it so the PCC can close it.

Summary

Our buildings constitute a very important part of our ministry and without them we could not offer the community/public the services we provide. Hopefully we can budget accordingly to keep them in as good a condition as we can. We have a good team and I am confident we can achieve this.

Richard Tandy Churchwarden

Sacristans' report for 2023

We have two sacristans in the parish of MLWC serving the three churches.

Alison Sheehan-Hunt for St Matthias' and Susan Tandy for The Church of the Ascension and St Peter's.

The sacristans' role is to prepare all the necessities for the services, particularly Holy Communion.

They also care for the churches sacred vessels, vestments and altar frontals.

A lot of the vestments and frontals in all three churches are in need of some TLC, on this matter Alison raised concerns several times last year regarding the lack of heating in St Matthias' sacristy as it not conducive for vestments to be kept in this atmosphere.

Ordering for Sacristy supplies for all three churches is now done by Susan Tandy.

Alison would like to thank those who help her with moving the frontals/ cleaning brass etc.

Susan Tandy

6. Plans for 2024 and beyond

We are now in vacancy, which means that we are going through a period of reflection and development to prepare us to listen to what plans God has for us, following Fr Phillip's ministry with us. But we have much to do and plenty to be in 2024 as we continue to:

- follow Jesus in the many ways that He speaks with each of us;
- strive to share in life-building worship and contemplation of the love that we receive from God;
- seek to be a prayerful community that listens to God, to each other and our neighbours;
- discover and release talents as we get to know each other even better;
- offer a welcome that accepts all people for who they are without assumption or judgement;
- find ways of working together with others in meeting the needs of our communities;
- undertake the many initiatives that we have and put them on a sustainable footing;
- secure a strong financial base, with good reserves and an income stream that pays our way in the Diocese;
- grow a robust cohort of volunteers;
- ensure that we have refreshed ministers and staff all able to fulfil their callings;
- hope to be abundant in generosity, gratitude, humility, peace, beauty and truth.

7. Safeguarding

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). They have duly read and adopted the Diocesan policy regarding the use of Social Media, the Diocesan Safeguarding policy, and the policy regarding safer recruitment.

There have been twenty-one DBS applications in the year under consideration, and all were successful. Of these only 1 person has not completed both Basic and Foundation levels of training. They have completed the Basic level and are being pressed to complete the Foundation. Failure to do so may mean that, reluctantly, I have to ask them to withdraw from their volunteer post until it is completed.

The Diocese has been asked for advice, or notified of safeguarding concerns in two instances, with the safeguarding team receiving good support, advice and guidance. Relevant groups / individuals in the Parish are conversant with both the issues and any action taken, and concerns have been recorded, monitored and reviewed.

I regularly attended the PSO network meetings and acted upon any changes necessary with the permission of the PCC, and Safeguarding features on the agenda of every PCC meeting. I also kept the Diocesan Dashboard updated on a regular basis, though it is a 'living' document and runs in real time, so that its current status does not necessarily reflect the activity of the year this report reflects upon. We have very good compliance overall, in line with the Diocese as a whole.

There were several activities running in the Parish including Monday Tots, Community Fridge, Warm Space, the Dementia Meeting Centre, junior and senior choir, bell ringers and Alongside Café [bereavement group]. The Pastoral team continues to support and visit isolated, vulnerable and incapacitated members of our community, including care homes. Role descriptions have been developed for leaders and volunteers and everyone worked hard to comply with the safer recruitment process, with not only leaders but also all volunteers completing applications, supplying references and being interviewed. New groups – including a youth group and an after-school club are planned for the near future, and job descriptions etc will be developed for them as needed.

I should like to thank all leaders, volunteers, the PCC and clergy for their ongoing support, encouragement and faith in me as their PSO.

Joy Black, Parish Safeguarding Officer

8. Deanery Synod

This year has seen significant changes in the deanery as Malvern and Upton seek to work together to build God's Kingdom across town and rural parishes. Our Area Dean, Mark Badger has become the Archdeacon of Worcester. The new Area Dean is Gary Crellin, vicar of the Old Hills group. Sarah Kelsey, Sarah Maxfield-Phillips and Fr Philip all ceased to be in the Deanery Leadership Team. Maria Toman remains as Lay Chair, Derek Valentine as DLT Treasurer with Trish Mullins joining as DLT Secretary

We were pleased to welcome the Deanery Synod to the Ascension Church Hall for its meeting on 18th September 2023. Damian Herbert, from the Diocese Transformation Programme came as guest speaker to talk about Diocese Strategic Aims and was given a thorough grilling by those attending.

Mark Cook, who attended the meeting on 18th September as churchwarden

9. Structure, governance, management and administration

There are three churches in the Parish:

- The Church of the Ascension
- St Matthias' Church
- St Peter's Church.

All have equal status and together constitute the Parish Church. Each church continues to be used for worship and for additional activities in ways which reflect their location and varying attributes.

Financial and administrative control of all three churches rests with the PCC which is the responsible legal body. The financial statements for the Parish are prepared on a cash basis in accordance with the Church Accounting Regulations and Charity Commission Financial Guidance

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll, members of which are the electors of the PCC. There were 111 people on the Roll, revised in March 2023. Members elected to the PCC have a three-year term of office so that a third of the membership retires each year. Apart from the elected lay members (which include the lay chair), the Council includes the incumbent (the Chair) until October 2023 when he departed, , the curate, the churchwardens, a licensed lay minister and one representative from the Parish elected to serve on the Deanery Synod. (This has been increased to four in 2024).

The Parochial Church Council is the responsible legal body and receives reports on finance, fabric and other general matters at each of its meetings. In 2023 there were five substantive meetings of the PCC. Between meetings PCC members were also asked to ratify proposals by email communication.

Administrative Information

Details of the three churches in the Parish of Malvern Link with Cowleigh, within the Diocese of Worcester are listed below:

- Church of the Ascension, Somers Park Avenue, WR14 1XA
- St Matthias Church, Church Road, WR14 1LX
- St Peter's, Cowleigh Bank, WR14 1QP

The principal contact address is The Malvern Link with Cowleigh Parish Office, The Church of the Ascension, Somers Park Avenue, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR14 1XA.

The PCC is a body corporate (PCC Powers Measures 1956, Church Representation Rules 2020) and a charity registered with the Charity Commission – No 1133920.

The following served on the PCC in 2023:



Vicar and Chair: Revd Phillip Johnson (until October 2023)

Curate: James Williams

Licensed Lay Minister: Allen Hudson

Church Wardens: Mark Cook, Richard Tandy

Deanery Synod Representative: Joy Black

Elected members: Tony Eberle, Jane James, Esther Partridge-Warner (Chair from October 2023), Graham Anderson, Sue Tandy, Sue Fairchild (coopted from October 2023), Sheilah Daughtree (coopted from October 2023)

Honorary Treasurer: Eileen Watson (until May 2023) then Tony Eberle

Honorary Secretary: Susan Maxfield-Phillips (until May 2023) then Kit Roberts

Safeguarding Officer: Joy Black

Communications and social media

In September 2023 we established a group tasked with keeping our website and other social media refreshed and up to date and with making sure that we make the best use of the technology and software held by the parish. This includes maintaining our internet and live streaming equipment. The website has now been improved and a lot of out of date and inaccurate information removed - and content is in a much better place.