

## **Incumbent's Report to Tettenhall Wood APCM, 30 April 2023**

Please receive this report alongside the written reports from the Wardens, Treasurer, and other committees and organisations: I won't repeat everything, but please take the thanks expressed elsewhere as fully intended by me as well, as I especially thank the Wardens, Treasurers and other report producers for all their hard work through the year.

Every year is a challenging year. The Covid-years of 2020 and 2021 obviously challenged everyone, so 2022 looked much brighter as we sought to move the churches forward once more. However, for the life and ministry of our churches, recent months have been even more challenging. The sudden death of Rev Carol Harley not only removed a member of the ministry team, but left us emotionally reeling. At the same time, Rev Lin's cancer treatment has taken her out of active ministry for periods of time. My thanks to all who have come forward with added contributions and support through these difficult times.

Looking forward, first there's good news: Rev Lin has accepted the bishop's invitation to remain in this parish as assistant minister, so we look forward to her being fully fit once more. There's no shortage of things to do! With Rev Julia Cody leaving the Church At Perton, there will be an impact in this parish as I anticipate further calls on my time as Team Rector. Jane Brough has decided not to renew her licence as a Lay Reader, because of health issues. Jane's not going to disappear: she's continuing with her many other roles and as an occasional preacher, but I do want to pay tribute now for her Reader ministry, particularly her clarity, faithfulness and creativity in leading worship and preaching, and for the funeral ministry that has been so appreciated by the many bereaved families she has served. Thank you, Jane.

There is much to give thanks for in the life of our churches, with old ministries restored and new ones inaugurated over the past year. Numbers attending Sunday worship have stabilised, with a combined Average Sunday Attendance for 2022 figure of 93 (understandably higher than 2020 or 2021, but lower than pre-pandemic) and my feeling is that the early months of 2023 have been a little higher. Services from Christ Church have been regularly streamed, allowing for wider remote participation.

Real concern has been raised at how few families are now coming to church on a Sunday morning. This is in line with long-term trends, both locally and nationally. Whilst we will always welcome those who do come, the decision was made to use such fresh energies and resources as we have in a new approach. *Criss+Cross* (similar to 'Messy Church' elsewhere) invites families to come each month on a Sunday afternoon for Bible stories and worship, crafts and games, and food and fellowship. After small beginnings, we are starting to feel a regular group of families coming together in this new way of engaging with church.

A second response is to renew our focus on schools' ministry, which has fully resumed after the pandemic, with school services, *Open the Book* returning to its weekly schedule at Christ Church Infants; and at the Juniors, regular worship, Creative Church, and preparation of children to receive Holy Communion. We congratulate Christ Church Junior School on achieving 'Excellent' in its recent SIAMS inspection, tribute to how its Christian vision and values permeate every part of school life. Also, at Christ Church Infants' the Ofsted inspector began by commending the school on its Christian ethos promoting strong pastoral care. (The inspection was technically 'ungraded' but the previous 'Good' outcome was confirmed, with a tendency towards 'Outstanding'.)

As churches, our vision of course extends beyond those schools with which we have institutional connection, and it has been good to have had one or two opportunities at King's School, and Woodthorne School, and there's hope Castlecroft may be interested in the future.

Discipleship is another area where ministry has developed this year. In June, five adults from this parish were prepared for Confirmation. As a follow-up, we began the diocesan *Living Faith* course together. At the same time, the Thursday Book Club was established: about ten people meeting monthly for challenging discussion. This year's Lent course, inspired by the film, *The Man who Knew Infinity*, was well supported and much enjoyed – the purpose to help our members to relate their faith to issues confronted in the modern world.

The big one-off event of the year, a performance of the play *The Liberator* by Saltmine Theatre Company, did not produce the financial return we'd hoped for, but did something much more important – inspired all who attended with a vision of the life of Christ relevant to the modern world.

Meanwhile, most of the long-established activities returned, with coffee mornings, quiz nights and other social gatherings. *Place of Welcome* has been going from strength to strength, evidence to the demand for opportunities to meet and mingle (although sadly *Good Friends* at Good Shepherd has not restarted). Our churches keep working to reduce their environmental impact, with new forms of re-cycling, more energy-efficient lighting at Good Shepherd, and bike racks installed at Christ Church.

It has been a challenging year – but one with signs of new life and hope. What has been achieved has been through the efforts and prayers of the whole church community, each individual contributing in the ways each one can. We are enormously grateful to one another and to God, who guides us through all things, and provides for his church to which we all belong.