

# THE BENEFICE WITNEY



Year in Review 2021-2022

**ST MARY THE VIRGIN**  
Witney

**ST JOHN THE BAPTIST**  
Curbridge

**ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST**  
Hailey

**HOLY TRINITY**  
Witney

**ST. KENELM'S**  
Minster Lovell

Called to be a community  
of mercy and kindness



## RECTOR'S REPORT

My brothers and sisters,

What an extraordinary time it has been. It is a relief to be once again able to open up our lives and start to re-build our community engagement across the benefice. And much has happened! This last year we have been very fortunate to have Laverne join us as Schools Chaplain and Youth Worker in the team and Jackie join us as Pioneer Ecumenical Minister and Julia as our Anna Chaplain caring for older people. We have also seen James begin his time at vicar-school and so he is now formally here as an Ordinand in training. A number of years ago I quoted one of my heroes, Oscar Romero who said, *'Living in Community is not a matter of choice but of calling. Christianity demands, by vocation, the forming of community.'* Our communities have to embody the values of the Gospel and be leaven to the world, extending God's Kingdom. As we emerge into the world again, these words bear revisiting. We are called into our communities afresh to be yeast and light within the places we find ourselves.

I remain in awe of all those in our benefice who are so committed to sacrifice, generosity and teamwork. I want to thank all who make this such a wonderful place and who open our churches to new comers and take the good news out into the places we serve as we seek to form community - not a matter of choice but of calling.

Grace and Peace

Toby Wright

Rector of Witney & Vicar of Minster Lovell

Called to be a community  
of mercy and kindness

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## 1. VISION STATEMENT

Called to be a community of Mercy and Kindness

Our vision continues to be that we are Called to be community of Mercy and Kindness. Much has been developed in our continuing to strive to live this out during these demanding Covid times. An example of this is the outstanding response we have had to the Hardship Fund which has raised many thousands of pounds to help those in need within the community.

This vision of Mercy and Kindness continues to be a guiding lamp to our actions. Mercy has been said to be 'love's second name' and as we have pursued our vision, we have developed our focus with the Standing Committee using the 5 Marks of Mission which focus us in these areas:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

To respond to human need by loving service

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

God of mercy and kindness

deliver us from every temptation to act with anything less than kindness towards those we encounter,  
speaking the truth in love.

Teach us afresh the way of true mercy

that heaps burning coals through deeds of loving kindness;  
for it is your kindness, your mercy,  
in which we trust and hope. Amen.

## 2. FINANCE

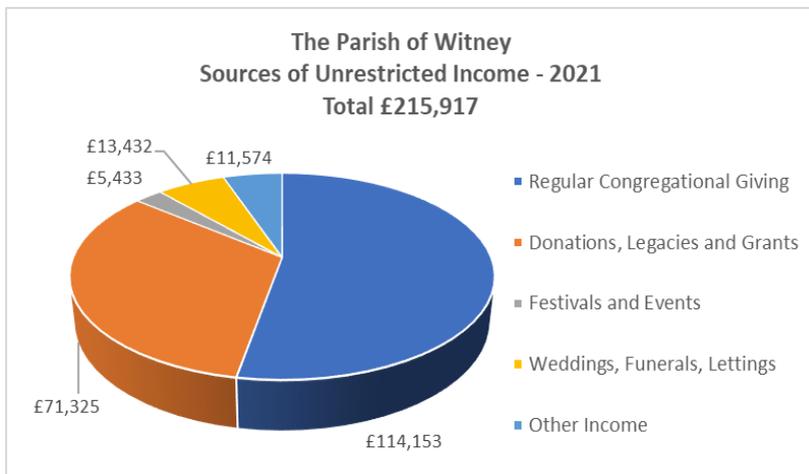
### 2.1 Financial Summary for the Parish of Witney

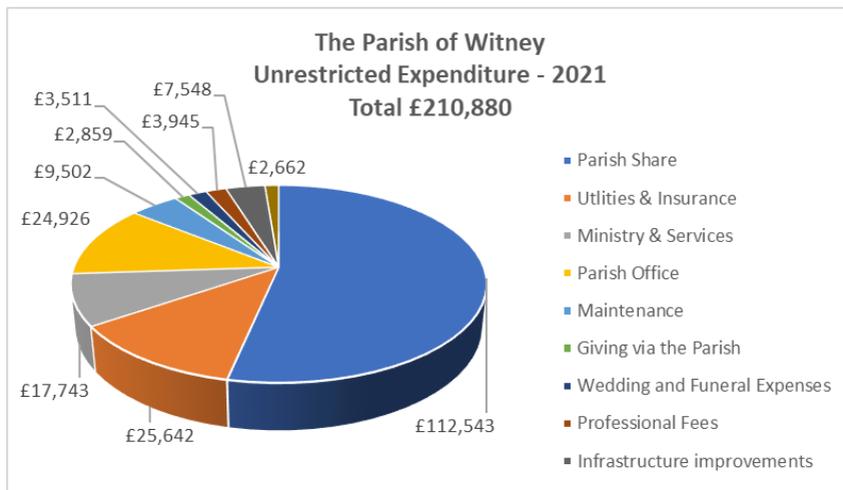
The financial health of the Parish in 2021 is as a result of the continued extraordinary generosity of everyone in our congregations. We remain hugely grateful for every gift, whatever the amount, as cumulatively, they have allowed us not only to continue, but to grow our ministry in a number of areas.

The total income for the year was £337,442 and total expenditure amounted to £243,853. These figures reflect a substantial increase in giving into Restricted funds, notably in support of the next stage of renewal and renovation projects being progressed within the St Mary's Inspiring Change programme, and initial funding for the role of the Schools Chaplain and Youth worker across the Benefice.

The core operating costs for the Parish were £210,880 while unrestricted income totalled £215,917 resulting in a small operating surplus of £5,037. This outcome in part reflects the response to a further general appeal for funds in 2021, totalling nearly £46,000. As a result, the Parish was able to cover its operating costs in full including 100% payment of our allocated Parish Share.

The breakdown of core operating income and expenditure is shown in the charts below:





Our regular congregational giving (inclusive of Gift Aid) amounts to 54% of our total operating costs. Ideally, this should be between 70% and 80% of our total costs to provide the Parish with the necessary financial security over the short to medium term. As such the PCC has agreed that we will launch a further appeal in 2022, to suggest to those who have given in response to previous appeals that they might consider increasing their regular donations. This decision was made acknowledging the pressures that many might be under, given the recent significant rises in fuel costs and general inflation, and also the desire to support humanitarian aid needed in so many parts of the world.

**St Mary's** ended the year with a bank balance of £8,129. This fulfils the requirement of the Reserves Policy.

**Holy Trinity** ended the year with a balance of £26,460. This fulfils the requirement of the Reserves Policy.

**Hailey** ended the year with a bank balance of £8,438. This fulfils the requirement of the Reserves Policy

*Jeremy Lasman,  
Witney PCC Treasurer*

### 3. REVIEW OF THE YEAR

#### 3.1 Witney Churchwardens' Report

2021 remained an extremely demanding year for all the churches in the Parishes, as we had to continue to respond to the challenges of the on-going pandemic. We are therefore hugely grateful for both the wisdom and efforts of our Ministry Team, PCC/DCCs, Churchwardens, Deputy Wardens and a whole raft of volunteers for their hard work to ensure that we could continue to offer safe services of worship and occasional Offices for our community.

We must pay particular thanks to Claire Hermon, Elpie Lewis and Charlotte Tremain who are standing down after many years of service to the Parish as deputy wardens at St Mary's, Hailey and Holy Trinity respectively. Charlotte and Elpie have previously been Churchwardens as well. Their passion for the Parish and their service has been hugely appreciated and of great benefit to all.

*Kate Banks & Jeremy Lasman*

*Witney Churchwardens*

#### 3.2 Witney PCC Report

Since the last APCM in May 2021 the PCC has held seven meetings.

- The PCC has worked alongside the ministry team, to ensure the safe re-opening of our churches for private prayer and regular worship. Covid Risk assessments have been regularly updated, in line with C of E guidance.
- The PCC endorsed the appointment of an Ecumenical Pioneering Minister; and a sixth place of worship has been established within the benefice at Windrush Place.
- The PCC has appointed a Schools Chaplain and Youth worker
- The PCC has overseen the instigation of an Anna Chaplaincy within the benefice,
- The PCC has adopted the C of E online Parish Dashboard to assist in monitoring safeguarding practices.

- The PCC reflected on recent C of E reports highlighting safeguarding concerns with a view to ensuring the parish follows best practice.
- Faculty applications were submitted for icons and St Mary's and for work at St John's Hailey.
- The PCC has responded to Natasha's Law, aimed at improving information about food allergens.
- A new architect has been appointed to conduct quinquennial inspections and to oversee improved accessibility and roof repairs at Holy Trinity.
- The PCC has worked with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to have signs installed showing the presence of war graves in our churchyards at St John's Hailey, Holy Trinity and Crawley
- The Safeguarding Policy has been revised for 2022.
- The Volunteers Policy; Health & Safety Policy; and Disciplinary & Grievance Procedures have all been reviewed.

*Kate Lockwood*

*Witney PCC Secretary*

### 3.3 Minster Lovell PCC Report

The Council have met every two months when Covid-19 restrictions have permitted.

Matters discussed over the past year have included the introduction of new afternoon services twice a month on Sunday afternoons at St Kenelm's Hall, for children and families. The PCC were wholeheartedly in favour. We also discuss special services during the year – Harvest, All Souls, All Saints – for example, with reference to other churches/services in the Benefice.

The "Crawley Aisle" development (installation of a new kitchen and cloakroom) has been in abeyance, but discussions and updates took place every time a PCC meeting was held.

We have agreed a new noticeboard outside the church, and wording has been decided.

Several minor discussions on matters concerning the churchyard, grave spaces and churchyard maintenance took place.

The future use of St Kenelm's Hall is an ongoing project, involving several village organisations.

*Judith Warwick*

*Minster Lovell PCC Secretary*

### 3.4 FABRIC REPORTS

#### 3.4.1 St Mary's Fabric Report

In contrast with the previous year, 2021 saw a significantly reduced requirement for ad hoc maintenance in St Mary's. The main issue that we have had to address during the year was the theft of some lead flashing around the toilet block and South Aisle. This resulted in a successful insurance claim being submitted and the missing flashing has now been replaced.

In order to stop significant water ingress into the building, again around the South Aisle and toilet block, we have increased the frequency of gutter clearance especially during the Autumn and Winter, to stop a build-up of debris in the gutters and down pipes, causing excess rainwater to overflow the flashing, and flood into the building.

We have upgraded the internal notice boards to present much more attractive and informative information regarding the Ministry Team and some of our current key initiatives.

We continue to be hugely grateful for the work of the volunteers who regularly turn up for church cleaning and ad hoc maintenance, without whom the fabric of the church would easily fall into disrepair.

*Jeremy Lasman*

*Churchwarden*

### 3.4.2 Holy Trinity Fabric Report

There are no major works to report this year. All the gutters have been cleaned and churchyard maintenance carried out. The organ has been tuned and repaired and the annual servicing of fire extinguishers, boiler and heaters and PAT testing completed.

Minor fault with lights not turning off. Rako suspected overheating heat sink potentially attributable to faulty component. Out of warranty but replaced with reconditioned unit. Plans are underway for the new north roof together with improving facilities for the disabled. The Quinquennial Inspection will be in April.

Storm Eunice has seen further slates off the roof on both north and south sides along with trees shedding minor branches, some dead wood and some not. The council will be approached again to review the proximity of trees and the new architect, Peter Preston, will include his professional opinion on this in the QI.

*Dair Henderson & Charlotte Tremain*

*Deputy Warden*

### 3.4.3 Hailey Fabric Report

#### Fabric

The boilers have warmed the building on a regular basis and our use has improved ventilation. The wooden fittings improved but required the carpenter to visit so that doors and panels all fit, slide, and close once again. Routine PAT testing fire extinguisher servicing were all carried out, but I overlooked the lightening conductor service, and the steeple jacks will be visiting shortly. Another tile fell out and was replaced, and a recent shower has shown up a leak in the guttering but it is in hand. I am pleased to say that the basement has remained free of flooding. Some of the soft furnishings are gradually being returned to use following the easing of Covid restrictions and a greater understanding in how the virus is transmitted.

The Oxford Diocese completed an energy footprint assessment in April and published it in time for Great Big Green Week (GBGW).

We have worked our way through the Eco Church survey and have completed the bronze award.

### Churchyard

The churchyard has continued to be a source of joy." I have always loved the idea that it is "the Rector's Garden", and we treat it as such, like an extension of the religious space, another area in which to venerate our God and his/her creation.

Spring last year we had a snowdrop project. Motivated by these little symbols of hope, many hundreds were planted along the pathway. We had asked the whole village, church going and not, to donate some snowdrops, and we had lots, by the bucket full left for us to plant. As I write I can just see them poking up through the moss and grass; a natural metaphor concerning those of us emerging into the light after all this darkness. One thing is certain, that in years to come it will be a meadow of snowdrops, and welcome all who wish to enjoy their sunny faces in the cold February wind.

Our neighbours in Yew Tree Cottage had some work done to their cottage and asked to knock a hole in the adjoining wall to go back and forth to the road rather than through the house. The building work is practically finished, and the builder will block off the hole in the wall and the stone mason will finish the repairs to the wall shortly.

In the autumn we had another churchyard tidy up, attended by the "usual suspects" but we saw some new faces too, drawn in by enjoying working in the churchyard

Lastly, Roger, who has mown the grass in the churchyard for longer than anyone can remember, has decided to step down from this responsibility. He has offered to continue to help as an unpaid volunteer in the tidy-ups but not to do the regular cut. This presents the DCC with a problem and an opportunity which will be resolved this year. All in all, a good year and we look forward to the coming one.

*Robin Carr & Elpie Lewis*  
*Deputy Wardens*

#### 3.4.3.1 Friends of Hailey Church Report

The *Friends of Hailey Church* continue to support Hailey DCC with grants for the non-fabric running costs of the Church. These include cleaning materials and tea and coffee etc.

It has been a quiet year for larger grants, but we remain open to any and all requests made by the DCC.

*John Haskell*

#### 3.4.4 Curbridge Fabric Report

The church building is in generally fair condition. The quinquennial inspection took place seven months ago but we still await the written report from the surveyor. Some tiles need to be reset on the roof, but parishioners have undertaken gully clearing themselves. A roof leak has also been dealt with by the same means. Small areas of paintwork are in urgent need of redecoration. A recent electrical inspection identified three items in need of repair and replacement; these have been undertaken and a fully satisfactory certificate of safety has been issued. The church path is degrading and will need repairs in the mid-term future.

*Ian Galletley*  
*Deputy Warden*

#### 3.4.5 Minster Lovell Fabric Report

The Gutters around the Church have all been cleared and the vegetation on the Porch roof has also been cleared.

Bird mess has been removed from the interior of the tower and a glassless window blocked with an acrylic sheet to prevent birds coming in.

The under-pew heaters, as recommended by the Diocesan Energy Audit report, have now all been installed and working well.

We are now in the process of having plans drawn up for the North Transept (The Crawley Aisle) for new WC and kitchen facilities as well as an area for exhibiting (Visitors Centre).

Once we have secured a Faculty, we will then press ahead for various grants for this much needed area.

Our next big project is to re-roof the Chancel as recommended at the last Quinquennial report.

*Brenda Bennett*  
*ML PCC Treasurer*

### 3.5 CHURCH REPORTS

#### 3.5.1 St Mary's Church Report

It is with great delight that we were able to re-open our beautiful ancient House of Prayer through 2021 to once again serve the various communities for whom the church is a centre (with appropriate caution, and following government and central church guidelines). It has not only been such an encouragement to see St Mary's once again used for worship, the daily office, prayer vigils and as a meeting space for schools and young people's activity, but also as a space open to the wider community.

In particular, it was wonderful to see the church once again full of stall holders and visited by so many from the town and around about for last autumn's Festival of Food and Drink. Many thanks to Claire Hermon and her enthusiastic team for their work in planning and hosting this re-start to our wider festival ministry.

*Jeremy Lasman*

#### 3.5.2 Holy Trinity Church Report

The Pandemic continued to dominate our lives in 2021 with our Churches re-opening at the end of April. The churchyard group met on the afternoon of 25<sup>th</sup> April at HT to clear the area, on the outside of the church walls, of weeds and debris and to attack the ivy.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> we had our first Eucharist with a choir of just four to minimise spread of the virus.

As Hugh White travelled south on the Pilgrimage of St Sigfrid, so some of us joined him for stretches along the way.

As life began to become a little more normal so we stepped back from the regular phoning of people across the parish to ensure that they were okay.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July the PCC and DCCs met, outdoors at St Mary's, for drinks. It was a joyful occasion.

In July, an evening walk around Ducklington Lake took place ending with a picnic on Church Green.

Choir practice restarted on 18<sup>th</sup> August.

Big Green Week: Members from HT attended events at St Mary's and ran a stall.

Ride and Stride happened on 11<sup>th</sup> September, visiting a number of churches and just the one hostelry.

A litter pick took place to demonstrate care for our environment locally.



Our annual barbecue took place in September this year. Proceeds went to BBOWT.

We were sorry to say farewell to Elizabeth and Phil Bloomfield and to Martin Kettle.

We have organised, through the council, a disabled parking bay immediately outside the church gates.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has offered a plaque to indicate that our churchyard contains the burial site of soldiers who fell in WW1. We accept this with respect and honour and the plaque will be fitted in 2022.

We have welcomed new people into our midst.

A successful Messy Mass was held in September. A presentation was made to Kerry thanking her for many years leading Junior Church. She will be greatly missed.

Exploring Spirituality Programme: Professor Federico Varese, from HT, spoke illuminatingly about his latest book 'Mafia Life'.

103 filled shoe boxes were sent to children in Eastern Europe, at Christmas.

Christ the King was celebrated with Messy Mass with a large number of children present, resplendent in velvet curtains and home-made crowns. It was good to welcome Laverne, our Benefice youth worker too.

A project to replace the north roof becomes a reality with the hope of improving facilities for disabled people.

A Christmas card was printed, and delivered, with the offer of prayers for those who would like to be remembered. Replies went to Ness.

The congregation supported, financially, 20 Christmas hampers for families at Witney Community School.

Service of Nine Lessons and Carols was cancelled. Wisdom won the day with the risk of high viral load and potential for large numbers in church.

A sale of chocolate and items for Christmas took place in aid of Holy Trinity.

It was a joy to be in Church on Christmas Day for the celebration of the Eucharist and to sing carols again. No midnight mass was held at HT.

*All social events and services were held in accordance with Government ruling.*

We remember those in our congregation who died this year: Dick Peace, Joan Hill, Jay Stoneham, Howard Brayton, Philip McCormack, Don Staples. May their souls through the Mercy of God, Rest in Peace and Rise in Glory.

*Dair Henderson & Charlotte Tremain  
Deputy Wardens*

### 3.5.3 Hailey Church Report

Looking back through my diary for 2021 there seems to be an infinite number of **zoom** connections for services and meetings, and that rather sums up the activities of the early part of the last year, with restrictions on what we were allowed to do within the church building.

But **connections** between our congregation, and other folk, were maintained through phone calls, emails and outdoor visits when possible.

Gradually as summer progressed, we were able to open the church under COVID restrictions and life took on a very small semblance of reality

We set up a gallery in the Church Porch, otherwise known as the **Porch Gallery**. Starting with Spring we followed the seasons, initially welcoming paintings and drawings, and later we had a very big collage of pictures celebrating nature in all its wonderful forms.

This segued rather beautifully into the **Great Big Green Week** in September, when the church was the focus of a celebration of all things natural.... bees, flowers, trees, bugs, birds, creatures, and much more besides, were the focus for that week, when we were delighted to welcome many visitors to explore both the church and the churchyard, and to contribute their ideas for improving our use of our world's resources.

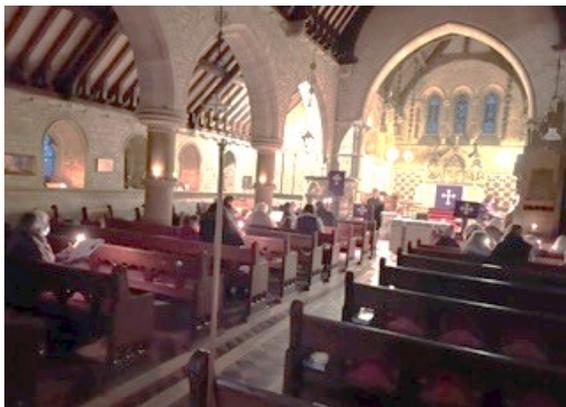
**The Lights of Remembrance** evening at the end of October saw us opening the church for conversation and coffee, but not the usual mulled wine. We had a lot of visitors through the evening, lighting nightlights to put on graves or within the church.

We also had **the Tree of Remembrance** in the porch which was covered in names and messages both on the night and for many days after. The tree was then kept in the church, and has only just been removed, laden with names and messages.

**Remembrance Day** provided a wonderful opportunity for our outdoor service by the War Memorial accompanied by Caryl Lansley playing her cornet so beautifully for Reveille. This was

followed by the **Dedication of our Armistice Stone** in the churchyard behind the war memorial. The Crawford family were with us. They had very generously donated funds in memory of Alan Crawford to finance the creation of this special stone, carved by Alec Peever.

**A Christingle Service** was held during Advent in conjunction with Hailey School. This was a delightful candlelit event, raising funds for the Children's Society.



As in the last couple of years, nearing Christmas, **the Big Crib** was created in the churchyard, near the entrance. This always proves to be a delight, and despite all the storms and torrential rain, the crib withstood everything, and was admired by young and old.

As Christmas approached, we realised it would not be possible to have our usual carol service, so we planned an **Outdoor Carol Singing** event, moving the piano out into the churchyard. About 50 people attended the evening, together with some of our friends from Middletown Grange joining in from the car park next door. A good sing was enjoyed, and we feel that this is something we can repeat in the future, whatever the circumstances.

Our link with **Middletown Grange** has been rather weak recently due to COVID restrictions. We hope very soon to be able to restore this, holding weekday services in there once again, and to welcome residents back into the church.

**Thank you:** There are so many people we would like to thank for the care and support they have given to Hailey Church and its congregation during this particularly difficult year.

- Thank you to the clergy for their care for us all;

- To all the congregation who encourage one another and help to keep the wheels of St John's oiled, and the machinery in good working order.
- A special mention here for John Haskell who just "knows how things work, and can mend them when they don't!", and also acts as the Village Uber!
- To all the DCC members for keeping the show on the road,
- And finally to our organists, Jeremy and Barbara – who help us to sing with gusto despite having to wear our masks!

*Robin Carr & Elpie Lewis*  
*Deputy Churchwardens*

#### 3.5.4 Curbridge Church Report

The church's only activity over the last year has been the maintenance of regular weekly services, in addition to special worship at Christmas, baptisms and one funeral.

The 'Friends of St John's' was resuscitated in 2021 in order to gain access to funds long lying dormant in its account. This process is nearing completion.

*Ian Galletley*  
*Deputy Warden*

#### 3.5.5 Minster Lovell Church

Despite the difficulties of the last two years, St Kenelm's church community continues in good heart. We are ably led by Hugh, and were pleased that, even with Covid 19 restrictions and delays, he managed to complete his pilgrimage through England and Sweden. A light-hearted celebratory evening was held in October.

The Sunday services have continued as normally as has been possible. Our Sunday attendance stands at a constant 15-20. We had a very well attended evening service for All Souls'. The united village service on Remembrance Sunday was well supported.

We have missed our St Kenelm's Day Patronal Festival for two years, and look forward to holding a celebration this July.

Our major change, initiated by Hugh, and with the help of Laverne and Jacky, has been the introduction, from December 2021, of two new services on a Sunday afternoon in St Kenelm's Hall. This is an outreach initiative, in the hope of bringing families and those living in the upper village into our church community. We started with a service for St Lucia, and a Crib service, in December, and we are encouraged by recent numbers attending. We have dropped one morning service a month at the church, and this seems to be acceptable to our congregation, who are supporting the Hall services wholeheartedly. It was good to hold our usual Christmas services – Midnight Mass and a Christmas Day morning family service. Both were very well attended. We are hoping to re-establish our occasional united services with the local Methodists this year.

Those serving on the PCC remain committed and supportive. We currently have a vacancy for a Churchwarden.

We have been held up by Covid-19 restrictions in our project for a new kitchen/cloakroom, but hope that 2022 will show considerable progress.

*Judith Warwick*

*PCC Secretary, Minster Lovell*

### 3.6 Safeguarding

Over the last year the parish has continued to develop its safeguarding practices. As our buildings gradually reopened and we met more face to face, we have reviewed and updated our policies to ensure they are as relevant as possible. We have also continued to review our online policies as many activities are still held this way.

- Training for all PCC/DCC members, children's workers, pastoral visitors, and other roles, has taken place online using the C of E's new training materials. Courses covered include

basic, foundation and leadership modules, safer recruitment and domestic abuse.

- Concerns have continued to be reported and dealt with as needed.
- The PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.
- Risk assessments, including for Covid, have been reviewed and put in place as we gradually reopened.

*Alison Spicer*

*Parish Safeguarding Officer*

### 3.7 Personal Discipleship Plans

During Covid people have continued to be offered Personal Discipleship Plans as ways of growing closer to God and developing our own following of Jesus. Some have happened online which has enabled the process to continue, although it has certainly slowed the whole thing down.

I was pleased to be able to make my maiden speech at the General Synod this year and part of that was around PDPs in the Diocese and the Benefice here. I was also involved with Kate L in a video produced by the national church and which was used at a recent Diocesan Synod commending PDPs to other parishes.

We hope to develop our work further to encourage people to make use of the PDP process in the coming year.

*Toby Wright*

### 3.8 Exploring Spirituality Programme

This past year for the Exploring Spirituality Programme has been a slightly challenging one as we decided to continue offering almost everything on zoom, aside of our Morning and Evening Prayer for which we moved to the Sanctuary at St Mary's to give us a little more breathing space!

For the most part, being on zoom has had its attractions, as for evening events it's meant people either didn't need to come into a

church building over the darker colder months, and even if feeling a little 'under the weather' could still attend virtually. We've been able to continue, therefore, with presenting a varied Programme.

From the feedback obtained, highlights have included Prof Alister McGrath leading us in a session on Apologetics; Hugh reading a part of William Langland's *Piers Plowman: The Harrowing of Hell*; a wonderful experience learning about the Pearls of Life Bracelet (connecting us with our Swedish friends); Ann Taylor on the Parish Nursing scheme; and Fr Peter Groves on the Ministry of Reconciliation.

Quiet Mornings are well received and we hope to offer more.

There were a number of Lent courses ranging from Old Testament discussions with Toby to 'Come and See' for anyone exploring faith.

It's great when people tell us what they'd like to see in the Programme for the following year and those ideas are currently being looked at. Although some would welcome more groups meeting in person, others are happier continuing online and so we'll endeavour to offer a variety of ways of delivering the Programme as we look ahead.

*Ness Brunner-Ellis*

### 3.9 Youth Work and Schools Ministry



On average, we support and disciple nearly 2000 young people per week, both in schools and church groups, working largely with primary school aged and 11-16-year-olds. Meetings with children and young people vary from Chaplaincy to Junior Church.

Since joining the benefice, our youth work and schools ministry has included

- Collective worship in schools, building relationships with headteachers and school staff;
- establishing a Thursday Girls Group at Henry Box;
- having a movie night/friend night with Young Disciples;
- becoming a Youth Lead for WOFAD (Women for Fair Development);
- organising prayer spaces;
- Junior Church and Groundbreakers at St Mary's;
- Messy Masses at Holy Trinity;
- the St Kenelm's Community Centre Family Church;
- community outreach on Windrush Place, led by Jacky Bone;
- starting to develop a team of Youth support;
- .... and more!

*Laverne Williams*

*Youth work and Schools Ministry*

### 3.10 Young Disciples

Young Disciples have been meeting regularly in person since September 2021. As well as our usual games and fun, we have been exploring a number of topics, such as prayer, the Bible and the persecuted church. We are now



digging deeper into the basics of the Christian faith with the Youth Alpha course – and we're very excited to head to the Yellow Braces youth camp in July!

*Rebecca Coatsworth*

### 3.11 Benefice Youth Council

The Benefice Youth Council (BYC) is a group of young people aged 11 to 18 who meet once a month, (usually the first Sunday of the month, however, this may vary depending on availability), to discuss different topics, ideas, and opinions. In doing this we hope to achieve better plans for the youth ministry and the church.

- Current adult lead Lindsey Macfarlane
- Current co-chairs Esther Hardie and Millis Nutt who both took over from Nadia last September
- Secretary is Loretta Barker
- Thanks to Nadia for chairing the council so efficiently
- Continue to meet once a month online
- Environment focus last year, and a couple of the council joined the wider environment group to make their youth voices heard
- Service participation increasing, firstly with an environment 'sermon' last year where they outlined their vision for ways the church and the congregation could help, including bringing reusable cups for after the service
- Candlemas participation in service with readings, welcoming, acolyting
- Raising funds for hoodies and for attendance at diocesan youth camp
- Recruitment campaign to encourage new members to join and to find a new junior rep. Sissy Southey was the previous junior rep and has now stayed on as a more senior member of the council
- Website-youth council have a page on the Benefice website outlining who they are and what they do, designed and written by the council

*Lindsey Macfarlane*

### 3.12 Windrush Estate

The last year saw the appointment in July 2021, of the Rev. Jacky Bone, a Baptist minister working with the benefice as a 'Pioneer Ecumenical Minister'. Primarily, she works with an ecumenical team reaching out onto Windrush Place and Colwell Green large new housing developments in the West of Witney.

During the late spring and early summer of 2021, the team connected with the community through face book and by delivering weekly craft packs to 50 families per week for 20 weeks, getting to know the community and its needs. At

Easter 2021 the team created an Easter bunny hunt and every family also received a copy of the Easter story.

June and July we ran an outdoor toddler group which grew into a successful drop in fun afternoon each week, for older children during the August with crafts and games.



In September the team ran, for the second time, their annual 'Teddy Bears Picnic.' This was popular, with 30 families booking to come.

We launched a 'Messy Church' in the School in October. 33 families have attended, we usually get around 20 families on each Sunday.

We run a weekly toddler group in the new community room at the school and join in with any community events they are running.

The team also obtained an allotment on the new allotment site with Rev Jacky and Ness leading an opening service of blessing in October.

At Christmas we provided 50 Christingle craft packs which families brought to our outdoor carol singing events on the development.

The whole team are part of the Diocese 'Greenhouse' (Google 'Greenhouses Oxford Diocese' for more information).

We are so grateful for the support of those behind the scenes looking after our safeguarding and insurance and administration,

*Jacky Bone*



### 3.13 Anna Chaplaincy

Anna Chaplaincy is a Community-based chaplaincy, working in partnership with the local church, promoting the spiritual welfare of older people. It is person-centred and offers spiritual support to older people, in residential and private homes wherever they may be – their relatives and any care professionals involved.

I have been in post as an Anna Chaplain since September 2021, getting to know my patch and establishing relationships across the benefice. I have met other Anna Chaplains during networking sessions and completed my basic training, with more to follow later in the year. Despite the constrictions of the pandemic throughout the autumn and winter, it has been a privilege to forge links with Richmond Village, Fernleigh, Cedar Court and Millers Grange Care homes – four of the six homes across the benefice.

The established monthly Eucharist at Richmond Village now also has another monthly visit to residents on their care floor, with other care homes beginning to open their doors to visits during the

spring. My new WhatsApp Prayer Support Group has proven to be a great support to me in these last months. The Prayer Shawl Group have been knotting crosses for care home residents to hold. I hope to distribute some of these soon.



The last two years have been a particularly difficult time for many older people living alone and unable to get out independently. One of the great joys of my ministry is the privilege of being able to visit and begin to get

to know people and listen to their stories. I am hopeful that 2022 will see the nucleus of a team of Anna Friends from across the benefice, willing to give an hour or more of their time to this wonderfully worthwhile and rewarding outreach ministry.

*Julia Bee*

### 3.14 Charitable Giving

£13,906 distributed through the Benefice Hardship fund  
£446 Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust  
£62 Médecins Sans Frontières  
£50 Terrence Higgins Trust  
£500 Salvation Army  
£50 Eco Church: A Rocha UK  
£85 Children's Society  
£573.47 Tear Fund  
103 Christmas shoeboxes to Easter Europe  
Large bag of hats, gloves and scarves for The Porch  
20 hampers for Witney Community Primary School families  
Regular donations to Witney Food Bank  
U can donations to Besom

### 3.15 Benefice Environment Group

The Benefice Environment Group was formed a year ago, and has achieved a lot in that space of time. All our churches are working towards Eco Church awards, with Hailey already having been awarded a Bronze certificate for their eco-friendly approach.

We held a very successful public meeting called Turning the Tide in Great Big Green Week 2021, and are planning an even bigger event for GBGW this year.



Other initiatives include a new monthly meeting with speakers from different environmental groups, held in St Mary's on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month, with the aim of connecting people with eco-projects they'd like to work with; recycling for toner and ink cartridges and plastic pill packaging; and bird boxes in newly created wild areas in the churchyards. We hope to get more people involved going forward, especially young people.

*Kate Banks*

### 3.16 Healing Ministry

The regular meetings of a group from across the Benefice had to be suspended with Covid and they have yet to start again. However, there has been much prayer offered for healing ministry during this season.

It was good to be able to offer a healing Eucharist at Saint Mary's around Saint Luke's with the laying on of hands and anointing. It will be good to be able to once again find ways of developing this important ministry now restrictions have eased considerably.

*Toby Wright*

### 3.17 Prayer Shawl Ministry

The group was formed in the Parish a few years ago. We meet on the first Tuesday of the month in each other's houses in turn.

Set prayers are said together at the beginning of the meeting and at the end.

We knit or crochet shawls of varying colours and patterns. When completed the shawls are blessed by a member of the ministry team as part of a morning service. They are then given to anyone we know who is in need of spiritual comfort and warmth.



*Josie Holme*

### 3.18 Mothers' Union

The branch recommenced meetings in August 2021 after 18 months, due to the pandemic. We have 22 members but at present the average attendance per meeting is 12. We have some members who remain reluctant to meet in person but it is hoped that will change in the coming months.

Despite our small numbers we were able to make 100 Christmas cards for the prisoners in Bullingdon prison. We were also able to send a sizeable contribution for Ronald McDonald house. We were able to send 28 blankets, 25 cardigans and 31 hats to S.C.B.U for the premature babies.

The branch will continue in 2022 with a varied programme as always but will be run by a committee, as Barbara Eaton has stepped down as leader.

*Barbara Eaton*

### 3.19 Hailey Village Lunches

The Hailey Village Lunches have sadly been few and far between in 2021.

We managed three, I think, in September, October and November. Numbers were very reduced but it was still so good to see those who could manage to come. We were socially distanced and had strict Covid rules but nonetheless those who were able to join us enjoyed the coming together.

2022 has already welcomed the Village Lunch and we look forward to many more.

*Elpie Lewis*

### 3.20 Doyennes

Doyennes is a sociable group of women who meet twice a month, once for coffee and once for a shared meal in one of the many local restaurants. We are open to anyone who wants to come along to meet new friends and try out the various eating venues in the town.

After over a year of not meeting imposed on us by Covid, we started to book venues with outside spaces last summer, so that we could meet together and still adhere to the government's distancing rules. As the weather got colder, and the pandemic seemed to be diminishing, we had two meals indoors, with record numbers attending. The last meeting of the year should have been a bring and share supper in the Winchester Room with the Ah-men group, but sadly the rise of the omicron variant meant that we decided to cancel, to keep all members safe in the lead up to Christmas.

Despite the stop-start nature of our meetings during 2021, we have seen a rise in the number of members that come along, and it has been very obvious how much we are all enjoying meeting up again after so much isolation. So far this year, we've already had a very nice meal at Café Rouge and some enjoyable coffee mornings, and we're looking forward to welcoming more new members in 2022.

For information about coffee mornings, please contact Linda Taft

For information about dinners, please contact Kate Banks

### 3.21 Book Circle

The Book Circle is continuing to be enjoyed by a small group who meet in the Westminster Room at St Mary's at 2.30pm on the third Tuesday of each month, unless there is a clash with church festivals such as Easter. We have read some fascinating books such as "*Kiara and the Sun*" by prize winning author Kazuo Ishiguro. The resulting discussion throws up plenty of interesting ideas. New members are always welcome.

*David Burton*

### 3.22 Link with Bor in Växjö, Sweden

Correspondence by email and phone kept us in touch with Voxtorp, where kyrkoherde Ulrika took some time out from parish work, with Magnus Hullfors, her predecessor as kyrkoherde and well known to us in Witney, standing in. Some months after Ulrika's return to parish duties, we heard from her that, after 10 years in Voxtorp, she would be moving at the beginning of February 2022 to a new post as komminister in Värnamo, not far away. We wish her all the best in her new position. Heidi Sydmark has been appointed komminister in Voxtorp and Magnus is again acting kyrkoherde prior to the making of a permanent appointment, hopefully in the spring of 2022.

There was a little in-person contact. The St Sigfrid's Way passes through the village of Ohs and the 2021 inaugural pilgrims, Hugh White among them, stayed there overnight. Magnus presided at an evening Mass in the church and he and Elisabeth, his wife, and Margarita Jönsson, who has visited Witney, walked a stage of the pilgrimage; a pleasing one in the eye for link-disrupting Covid!



*Hugh White*

