



St Mark's Church

LEAMINGTON SPA

Reports from the groups and activities at St Mark's Church Annual Parochial Church Meeting **May 2023**

What does the
Children and Families
Worker's role entail?

Who cleans
the church?

What is
FIRs?

What local
organisations
are we involved
with?

What about
the
environment?

For answers to all these and more, please read on...

This is a collection of reports about the activities that have taken place over the last year from the many groups that make up the body of St Mark's. It is in addition to the 'Annual Report and Financial Statements of the PCC' which is the 'official' report from the Parochial Church Council and Churchwardens.

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INTRODUCTION – Charlie Evans (Churchwarden)

This year has been a mixed year where we have said fond farewells to our Curate, Heather Elson and our Vicar, Jo Parker. Both of their shoes will be hard to fill but we are looking forward to the next stage for St Marks and are now in the process of recruiting the next incumbent.

Church has broadly returned to normal post COVID. The 10am service is well attended and steadily growing, we are privileged to have a number of talented leaders and preachers who are helping us to continue through the interregnum. We are still running the livestream to cater for members of the congregation who cannot join us and we are fortunate to have a regular online turnout to church.

The Sunday evening service has a small but regular congregation and is a more conversational service with emphasis on curious learning and sharing.

Thursday's service is well attended, the more traditional service and the cafe start has developed a really welcoming community.

Ros has continued to develop our relationships with the local schools and families.

The staff team continue to work hard to keep everything running in order and we would struggle to achieve anything at all without the very long list of volunteers who continue to give their time and effort to move us forwards.

We are so grateful to all those helping us, so thank you!

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WORK - Ros Davies

We are all enjoying being together in our different groups learning about God, having fun, and cementing friendships. We are continuing to use the Roots material which seems to work well for everyone.

Scramblers and Climbers: Reception and Yr. 2-3

We have combined these groups together. The children enjoy hearing one another's news. They share snacks whilst reading and listening to

the chosen Bible passage. We encourage and support discussion, which is often very lively.

The aim is that whatever we do, the session is fun as we learn about God and the Christian faith. We encourage the children to have a positive experience with the leaders and their peers. The children are extremely supportive and caring towards one another.

Clare Jennings, Bev Turner, Sheila Robinson, and Lynne Thomas assist.

The children are enjoying making a prayer poster.



Explorers: Yr. 4- 6

April Harris runs Explorers, currently assisted by Sophie Harper, who will be stepping down after many years. Our

huge thanks go to her for all that she has done. This group meets in the hall. Alongside using the Roots booklet, they plan some great activities, supporting eco church by making bird feeders and boxes. They also arrange various fundraisers throughout the year.

Pathfinders: Yr. 7+

Vandella and Tom King run this group, they meet in the upper room for breakfast before their session begins. They plan various social events throughout the year and recently organised a pancake party.

Our Explorer group children join Pathfinders on the 1st Sunday of the month.

Extra help is needed in this group on the 1st Sunday of the month. If you feel you could assist, please do let us know.



Having fun at the pancake party.

Youth Group:

Our Youth group meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month, 7.00-8.30pm in the Upper Room. Sandy Smith runs this group. She was previously assisted by Michael Ashton and Tanya Khera–Butler. Michael has now stepped down and Tanya has had a baby, so is taking a break. Our thanks go to Michael and huge congratulations to Tanya, Simon and Izzy. Earlier in the year, Sandy and the youth group enjoyed a sleepover in the upper room. They were accompanied by Charlie and Amanda. Sandy is planning a camping trip for the summer, Jo who was previously our vicar has offered her back garden and is looking forward to welcoming them. If you would like to assist Sandy during the group, please do have a chat with her. She also needs help with the camping trip.

St Marks Crèche:

St Marks crèche is set up with toys, snacks and drinks allowing parents and toddlers / babies to take time out of the service if they want to. It gives them their own space to enjoy when the older children go to their groups. Parents and carers are now able to watch the service due to the generous donation of a new TV.

All Age services, 2nd Sunday of the month 10.00 am:

I have worked with Jo for many years planning and delivering these services, although I will miss her, I look forward to working with others and in particular the children/young people. They are currently confidently and happily joining in writing meaningful prayers and reading beautifully. Andrew McEvoy continues to ably lead the music team for our sung worship.

After discussion we agreed with our uniformed groups that we would hold 3/4 parade services a year – we do look forward to having them with us. As always, our nativity service was just wonderful. The children helped to narrate. We had a talking donkey, and a brilliant camel.

Baptisms:

I continue to coordinate baptisms. This allows me the perfect opportunity to get to know families who live within our parish and to welcome them to St Mark's for their baptisms and when they visit over the year – so many of them attend various services during the course of the year.

Summer Fun:

We ran summer fun throughout August, once again this was a great success and was attended by many of our local families. Nikki Hill and Jo helped with this.

Schools work:

We maintain an active presence in both Milverton and Brookhurst schools, delivering assemblies and offering pastoral support sessions to various children. Both Milverton and Brookhurst visit church for the Experience journeys throughout the year. These support the RE curriculum whilst encouraging the children and teaching staff to visit us at St Mark's. In turn these sessions allow us the opportunity to offer a really warm welcome.

Milverton came into church for their nativity service in December. Brookhurst children and parents also came to church for their Christmas performance.

I hugely enjoy being “**A Champion of Friends at Milverton**” I run playground activities for the children to join in with– this allows the opportunity for relationships to continue to grow.

Emscote House nursery:

In July, Emscote nursery came to church for the children's graduation celebration. The church was full of proud parents and grandparents. Afterwards they shared a picnic together on the front lawn.

Toddler groups:

Our toddler groups run on Wednesday and Thursday mornings in term time from 9:15 – 10:45am. Both days are popular with our local community, parents, grandparents and carers enjoy a relaxed atmosphere with an opportunity to meet and chat with others over tea /coffee and toast while their children play. Our helpers in these groups are currently, Angela Middleton, Joan Bowden, Sidney Syson, Nikki Hill, and Anne Tarrant.



Highlights:

Our children continue to grow in confidence both in their groups and in our services. I look forward to more of their involvement.



Jo's final service with us, was both joyous and sad. Jo baptised Maeva and Ellis. Dulcie was a great helper!



Maeva was mesmerised by Jo as she sat and watched her during the final song. Behind Maeva: Everyone brought a stone forward during prayer to help us to remember something important and built a cairn around the cross.

Thank you:

To our wonderful volunteers who support the Children and Families work in so many areas.

So, if you are involved in or support the children's work in any way, a huge thank you. Whether it's as a volunteer for the Sunday groups, toddler groups, or whether it's running the sound desk, or whether you bring along hay bales for our nativity service.

Please do continue to pray to give thanks for all that is good, and for our wonderful volunteers without whom the children's work could not happen.

Thank you to our staff team Amanda and Fiona, who are encouraging and supportive; to Marcella and Charlie who work quietly and tirelessly for us and who have taken on extra work in the absence of a vicar; to Ellie and James who are helping with baptisms; to Amanda, Marie and all visiting clergy who are helping to keep things running for us.

Thank you to Jo who gave us all so much. She was a joy to work with, I will miss her hugely!

The St Mark's Children's and Families work aims to:

- 1:** Encourage the growing (strengthening) of faith throughout childhood.
- 2:** Support children and their whole families in matters of life and faith.
- 3:** Develop further a loving, nurturing church community who welcome children fully.

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

SMALL GROUPS – Amanda di Giovanni

Small Groups have an important role in fulfilling our new vision statement from 2022: "Belonging... Believing... Becoming... A community of believers, sharing God's love with the world." Meeting together with usually 4-8 other people during the week on a regular basis to chat, read and discuss God's word and how to apply it to our lives, and pray for one another, really builds on our Sunday or Thursday worship as "we seek to encourage belonging and nurture believing, together becoming followers of Jesus who share God's love with the world."

We have 8 groups with a total of 65 members. Most meet weekly on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday evening. One meets on a Wednesday morning by Zoom. The groups use a variety of resources. Some follow the sermons and use questions set by the preacher, others are more adventurous and find resources to meet the needs of the group.

The vision for our groups is 'CALLED' to follow Christ:

Christ centred
All involved
Loving community
Learning together,
Evangelistic Heart
Demonstrative service

Small Group Leaders' Meetings have been held roughly termly on Zoom or in person. In the autumn of 2022 I visited most of the groups and hope to do this on an annual basis.

I would like to thank all the leaders, co-leaders, facilitators and hosts for their commitment over the year.

If you would like to join a small group please let me know, we operate a "try before you buy" policy – if you don't think the group is right for you, then please feel free to try another one.

CHAPLAINCY AT ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA COLLEGE

- Marie Calvert

We are back at college most weeks, engaging with students and staff over the lunch break. We offer sweets and blessings (typed on bits of paper) and have had some encouraging moments of connection and conversation. There are some students from Brazil and also Bangladesh, visiting here for the first time, so it's been good to be a friendly presence while they find their feet. Students mostly take a sweet and a blessing, but some recently chose to have a blessing rather than a sweet which is interesting.

A couple of learning mentors we've spoken to have been really encouraging about our presence there: *'so many students have mental health problems, and find it hard being in groups or crowds. And some have been so affected by Covid that they struggle to engage face to*



face. So any kind of human connection is really helpful.' Our team has grown, and I'm hugely grateful to each of them: Rani Clare, Pam Griffin-Booth, and Bev and Ray Kirton. We recruited some extras at Christmas and had a great time singing carols in the foyer. A number of students and staff joined in with us, which was great. And even some of the cool ones hung around nearby. We're going to take Easter eggs in at the end of this term too. If anyone else would like to join the team please do get in touch – there is definitely room for more!

MISSION REPORT

Our commitment to giving a tithe of our income to individuals and organisations working in a variety of different areas of mission continues (see below). Last year this comprised around £13,350, details can be found in the Missionary and Charitable Giving section of the 2022 accounts. The Anglican Communion has 5 Marks of Mission:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Open Doors: serving the persecuted church around the world. Please see their website for information about the invasion of Ukraine and implications for Christians should religious freedom be ended.

Tear Fund: addressing people's physical and spiritual needs, working in over 50 of the world's poorest countries.

CORD: working to build peace and bring relief & reconciliation to troubled parts of the world – Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Laos, Myanmar.

CPAS: has transformed its ministry in the past couple of years, running many courses in church leadership and associated support virtually as well as their camps for children and young people (Ventures and Falcon). A number from St Mark's have participated in these camps.

CAP: in partnership with other churches we are funding a full-time worker to help local people tackle debt issues, ably supported by Beryl Chisholm and a team of many from local churches.

Local organisations and ministries: Leamington Street Pastors, Nightlight, Foodbanks, Crossteach, Helping Hands (we collected shoeboxes for people in need in addition to financial support), Inclusive Church, Thrive Youth Ministries, A Rocha UK (Eco Church), The Royal British Legion, Churches Together in Leamington, Student Christian Movement.

Dan and Phillipa Munday: Now working in Nepal as Church Missionary Society associates. Dan in healthcare and Phillipa in education.

ECO CHURCH – Lisa Fletcher

The Eco Church Group meet once every quarter, usually online but we have had one or two meetings in-person which have allowed us to look at the church gardens.

In the past year we have been looking at the church heating, energy usage and ways to be more economical through use of thermostats and timers. In looking at our carbon footprint the PCC agreed to pay an amount to the [Climate Stewards](#) to carbon-offset our annual gas usage.



In September there was a short preaching series on the theme of "Creationtide". Sophie and Lisa took part in a Sunday service with Sophie speaking about changing climate and the floods in Pakistan while Lisa spoke about using carbon footprint calculators to make lifestyle changes. Sophie promoted a Tearfund appeal for Pakistan and over £380 was raised on the day.

Amanda sold "Real" Advent calendars with fair trade chocolate in the lead-up to Christmas, selling around 24. She is currently selling fair trade "Real" Easter eggs.

The recycling station in church is being used and managed well, collecting hard to recycle items such as blister packaging, dental items, biro's and, recently added, spectacles.

Some members of the Eco Team met with two staff from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to discuss how to make better use of the church gardens for wildlife. The Trust staff suggested several ideas and also suggested consulting the church congregation and local residents. This would also give us an idea of support and potential volunteers for any work involved. As a start we would like to incorporate more flowering plants for pollinators in one or two areas of the gardens. The Trust have offered to assist us in this work.

The Explorers group spent one Sunday morning making wooden bird-nesting boxes that will be mounted on the exterior of the church hall. Thank you to Charlie Evans for preparing the wood and bringing the tools to make them and to April for organising the session.



We plan to hold an Eco Fair in June, involving local relevant businesses and organisations as well as Eco-themed activities for children and families. We will promote the fair to local residents and schools as well as via other churches in Leamington Spa. Planning work for this has just got underway.



Lastly, Lisa and Sophie recently attended a support group for anyone that is part of a church Eco Team in Leamington Spa. It was held at St Paul's church and was organised by Tricia West who is the Deanery Environmental and Creation Care Rep for Warwick and Leamington Deanery. It was encouraging to meet people from other churches on the same journey to care for God's creation. We talked about our plans for an Eco Fair at St Mark's and people were keen to support us in any way they can, such as promoting the fair and even helping on the day. There was enthusiasm for local churches to work together more on environmental issues.

CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY (CAP) -

Beryl Chisholm

As CAP Money Local Coordinator, I am responsible for organising these courses. It's a 2-week course, lasting 2 hrs each, which aims to help people to manage their finances better; live within a budget; clear debts & save for the future.



In 2022 we were able to run 4 courses. The 1st one was on zoom; then we had 3 new venues - The Gap Warwick, Saltisford Church, and the DWP, Brandon House Leamington. It is always a challenge to find people who want to do the course; however we are happy to run the course for just 1 person. Jesus did things for 1 individual person, and we believe God sends to us the people who need to be there. This is exactly what happened on the last course of 2022. No one turned up on week 1 and then 1 lady came on week 2 and it was just right that it was just her as she would never have told us what she did if there had been more people on the course. We were also able to bless her with a food parcel from the Warwick Lions Food Parcel Collection. Myself and other Money Coaches blessed her and her 3 children with some Christmas gifts. Finally Warwick Lions provided her with a fridge freezer.

Since Autumn 2022 we have been attending Job Fairs at DWP, Brandon House in Leamington and the course mentioned above was as a result of the Job Fair. We are now being invited to each of their Job Fairs and will run a course at DWP in Feb, with hopefully more to follow.

We have now been given the opportunity to run courses at The Brunswick Hub, the first one being in March. They have previously had a 6-week Money Management Course provided by Warwickshire County Council but people have not attended these. Maybe 6 weeks is too long. Instead they are prepared to offer our 2-week course and it will be a wonderful opportunity to reach people who need us. 3 people attended the course and one of them is now working with CAP to deal with his debts.

From a conversation with a Warwick District Council employee, she is going to promote the course in various community hubs so there will be more opportunities to reach people.

We believe that the CAP money Courses are an important tool in helping people manage their money effectively. It puts you in control of your money instead of your money being in control of you.

We now have 6 Money Coaches – 4 are members of St Mark's; 1 from Myton Church and 1 from Saltisford Church.

We have been running courses for over 12 years. The first one which I ran was in Sept 2010 but there was one before that run by Andy Smith who was the Debt Centre Manager. Over the 12 years we have run 76 courses and 257 people have attended.

CLEANING – Nikki Hill

Regularly: the brasses are beautifully polished, even if not always on display; the carpets hoovered; toilets cleaned; certain areas taken care of by individuals. Occasional Saturday morning 'spring cleans' have taken place & this system seems to be working - we've had fun doing this as you can see from the photo. Amazing what you discover about the church building whilst dusting, polishing, hoovering, climbing ladders & tripping electrics! All enabled by fresh 🍷 & posh 🍕.



We are so very grateful to all who keep the place looking good & protected, even as they're going about on their other commitments. There are a few jobs 'outstanding': a full clean of the hall kitchen, crockery cupboard & trolleys are urgent, as well as a fabric clean of some hall complex chairs. We would also welcome someone taking on keeping the glass porch door panels clean in the church & again very grateful to Ruth Smith who has quietly polished them for many years.

FIRS LUNCH - Sidney Syson

Friends in Retirement (FIRS) is slowly building up numbers again with just under 30 people each month enjoying a 2-course hot meal and lively company in the Hall. FIRS is open to everyone so please take the opportunity to invite anyone you know who is lonely, or who lives on their own. We serve a really good lunch at 1pm, on the second Tuesday of the month, for just £5.

We couldn't do it of course without a great team of volunteers. Our thanks go firstly to our cooks, Katy Fermor, Nikki Hill, Jackie Sanders, Jane Wigman and myself, ably assisted every month by Margaret Jakiel and Jane Knifton. The cooks couldn't do it though without the help of Beryl Chisholm, Peter and Kath Hambleton, Chris and Anne Tarrant, Lynne Thomas, Richard Sanders and others who set tables and help clear up, plus Beryl provides interesting quizzes to keep our minds sharp.

GARDENING – Amanda di Giovanni

It seems like a quiet year in gardening terms. We had a working party in the spring focussing on the area behind the hall. This removed various items left by Bright Sparks Preschool a few years ago, formally created a "log pile house" behind the BBQ, identified the beginnings of a Blackthorn hedge which we plan to nurture over the coming year, and reseeded the grass – which is growing well to the delight of Peter who cuts all the grass!

There was a tidy up session in the autumn, and the 'Bluebell Project' continues. Bluebells have come up, but they are delicate when small and are easily trampled so we are working on the best way to protect them whilst maintaining the area as fun place to explore.

Last month a few of us met with people from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to consider options for making the grounds more wildlife friendly in a way that we can manage. There are lots of ideas, most of which are best implemented in the autumn. If you would be interested in helping please speak to me or Lisa Fletcher.

Thank you to those who come in on a regular basis to keep the gardens looking nice, and to those who join working parties, it makes a huge difference. If you would like to look after a bit of the church garden please do have a word with me.

RAINBOWS – Julie Brown

The 10th Leamington St Marks Rainbows was selected by Girlguiding to trial the enrolment of 4-year-olds into the unit, which turned out to be a success. As a result, many other units across the UK are now following suit. The unit has become increasingly popular, and parents are encouraged to add their children's names to the waiting list at www.girlguiding.org.uk.



The Rainbows and their leaders have worked really hard this year on building confidence, encouraging each other, understanding our feelings. We remind each other to be kind and helpful, to honour our Promises and reflect on our beliefs.

The unit has also been involved in community outreach, including delivering Easter eggs to the children's ward at Warwick Hospital and participating in a sponsored sleepover for Mollie Ollie's Wishes, a charity for terminally ill children.

Throughout the year, most of the girls achieved Gold, Silver, or Bronze awards, and four young leaders received Young Leader's and Duke of Edinburgh Awards. We sent cards to Queen Elizabeth celebrating the Platinum Jubilee, and cards to King Charles offering



condolences. Some lovely replies were received which excited and impressed us all.



We attended various events including an overnight stay at a PGL centre, winning the Midlands County Photo Shoot, and attending the Midlands County Day at Hatton Country Park, where the Rainbows learned about first aid skills and participated in science experiments. Rainbows continued to work on a range of skills and badges throughout the year.



St Marks Rainbows also took part in the Christmas tree festival at All Saints in Leamington and supported Ups and Downs charity. We all sent gifts and a poster to Rev Jo and enjoyed the service we were all invited to.

Lastly, we participated in the World Thinking Day event, which led to new connections with USA Daisies, Sheffield, Scotland,

Bahamas, Canadian Sparks, and South Africa Teddies. We continue to keep in contact with our amazing World Groups and look forward to sharing news soon with St Marks.



BROWNIES - Cathy Thorpe

The Brownie unit continued to grow back throughout 2022, as we all became used to being and working together again. We are pleased to see how the girls have developed over the year - from being definite individuals to being able to help each other more and work as a team. Kindness and listening to each other have been particular skills we have endeavoured to develop, and the girls have enjoyed the fun activities and challenges we presented.

We enjoyed a Spring Walk in Priory Park to remind us of the beauty of nature and we continue to enjoy the open space around the church to

‘Have Adventures’ with the parachute, hunts and racing games. We walked around the neighbourhood to look at issues that needed addressing.

We have achieved Skill Builders such as ‘Can you hear me’ for First Aid training towards the ‘Be Well’ Theme. We planted sunflower seeds to encourage the Brownies towards the ‘Grow Your Own’ Interest Badge and to consider the people of Ukraine.

The girls were very keen to develop Party-planning skills and we marked our late Patron’s Platinum Jubilee with an event for all the Brownies in North Leamington District, the first coming-together for a long time, which was great fun for all. At Christmas they practised these skills again, inviting parents to join us for games, refreshments and to enjoy their musical performances.

September saw the start of ‘Know Myself’ challenges and we talked more about roles and responsibilities. Lend a Hand remains our Brownie motto and we aim to help the girls consider this with friends, family and the wider community. We again used the national ‘Parliament Week’ activities to focus the girls to discuss some current issues and then to mark Remembrance Day.

The Brownies love to start the evening with a lively, noisy run-around game and are encouraged to organise this amongst themselves. We then are grateful to have the hall space to move around different activity stations as we sit and make things or carry out team challenges.

Thank you to all at St Mark’s for continuing to support us in our Brownie team. We now have Mole, Hedgehog, Bumble Bee and Hare to help the girls at meetings, and our Young Leader too.

“From Christ the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Ephesians 4: 16



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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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