



# Annual Report 2022

Informal Reports for the year ending 2022  
The Parish Church of St John the Evangelist, Newbury



St John the Evangelist

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## Associate Vicar

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### Introduction

After the shakeups of the last two years, 2022 came as a gift of regained stability whilst also finding space to grow. We were still feeling the effects - and the losses - of the Covid lockdowns, but we entered 2022 with a sense of anticipation for new opportunities.

Christingle in January 2022 was the first real opportunity to welcome children and families from St John's School back into a regular service in large numbers. Christingle is always magical, this particular service was an extra delight.

Delight turned to sorrows in the early months of the year as the military manoeuvres on the border of Ukraine turned into a full scale and brutal invasion. I think we were all shocked to see tired and vicious claims for land and power still being played out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and so close to home. St John's was involved in the organising out a Civic Vigil, and I was privileged to be asked to speak, a reminder that 'people kill each other over idols, only wonder brings us to our knees' (St Gregory of Nyssa).



Later in Spring, Stephen Kerry also transformed our proposed 'wildflower patch' into a 'Teardrop for Ukraine' - a symbol of hope and solidarity which many people appreciated and commented upon as they walked by.

The Greening Group added to these wildflowers with our very own 'Great Wildflower Plant' sessions, which drew children and families into hope-filled activities for the benefit of bees, butterflies, insects - and our neighbours.

As the year progressed so did the much desired community involvement we have been hungering for. It was a privilege for St John's to become more visible in Newbury as I was made Mayor's Chaplain in May.

It was also good to see the St John's Ladies Fellowship get themselves fully back into the swing of things with a full and stimulating programme. I was honoured to be asked to speak - which was a breathless joy as I tried to cover the history of modern art in an hour!

The arts have been a lifelong passion of mine and natural conversation partner with the world of faith, both inhabit the worlds of imagination and wonder beyond language. So it was a delight to host a number of excellent artistic events, concerts, recitals, readings, performances etc. (More to be included later in this report)

As our relationship with St Michael and All Angels in Enborne drew ever closer, and as our benefice PCCs continued to explore working together, it was a helpful to begin to embody the ways we could enrich each other's churches and communities.

Forest Church began in earnest in 2022; a gathering around a heart-warming fire in the grounds of St Michael's as we sing and think and reflect on the presence of God in nature and the seasons of life. Later in early autumn, after a few exploratory pilgrimages and get togethers, St John's launched 'Songs of Ascent' our monthly benefice mini-pilgrimage to Enborne, following the seasons and being inspired by the words of a chosen Psalm.

We saw a number of families with younger children join St John's this year, which is truly encouraging. Olive and others are ever helpful and welcoming, but there is a challenge as to how we can provide further interest, inclusion and inspiration for the younger members of our community. If anyone would like to be involved in a once a month 'Sunday School' please do contact me.

'1<sup>st</sup> Sunday' was a new initiative in 2022, hoping to make a sacred space for families with young children. This is presently 'on pause' as attendance was not strong.

On the topic of children, St John's Baby and Toddler group was fully back in action in 2022. It was sad to say farewell to Debbie Smith who had steered the group so well for so many years, but we were delighted that Dawn Smith offered to take over the leadership, working closely with Lindsey and Becky. I still find myself exhausted and usually injured in some minor way after 'energetic' storytelling. In the Autumn/Winter term we introduced the 'Candle Moment' where everyone in is invited into a very brief meditation and prayer for the world and our families.

In a year of trying to get back on our feet, it also became clear that this was a year of extremes, notable events and further changes. Climate change continues to threaten us, and is being addressed in numerous ways in church now. In the Summer we faced the hottest temperatures we have ever experienced in the UK, it was ironic - and appreciated - to offer our Church as 'the coolest place in Newbury.'

However, by the end of the year local charities, activists and churches were talking about the Cost of Living Crisis and the provision of 'Warm Spaces.' It has been an honour for St John's to host and lead the discussion and coordination of responses. It has been even more of a delight for us to begin our own 'Warm and Wonderful Soup Lunch' and to share hospitality with our community as we all gather, eat and chat around a shared table. This, to me, feels like the very foundation of what *living our faith* means.

My civic duties as Mayor's Chaplain meant that we were at the centre of Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee celebrations and then, only a few months later, her memorial. My final civic duties will be in 2023 as the new King Charles is crowned.

Our 'green presence' increased this year, through the Greening St John's group, and through hosting and contributing to various climate change meetings and conferences.

We said a farewell to Revd Julie Howell in 2022. It has been a joy to witness her development and growth, and to then go into her new post, but a real loss to our Benefice churches. We are thankful for all that Julie gave to us.

It was also a good thing to resume visits to Argyles Care Home on a regular basis through the year, and to continue bringing home communion to more vulnerable and isolated people in our community.

Covid finally got to me this year – and so well timed at the beginning of Holy Week!!! Oh, how I enjoyed (not) texting Revd Becky early on Palm Sunday to say that I would be out of action for the whole of the week including Easter. As ever, Becky proved her strength and grace and I was thankful for hers and Revd Julie’s cover in this time.

As many of you know, this came just after a very testing time for my family, and I was truly grateful for so many kind messages and gestures of support and love. Thankyou.



We were delighted to install our new chairs into church this year. They are versatile in many ways, including for our increasing use of the back of church for hospitality and welcome.

Talking of which, another new start; ‘And Breathe’ began in late Spring. A meeting point for parents after dropping children at school. It was a slow start, but gradually a group of parents gravitated towards this meeting; relationships have formed, friendships developed, and the most fascinating conversations have been had.

The iCAP project - creating a bright, open and accessible front entrance to the Church, was launched as a fundraising project on Passion Sunday. The challenge is big, and we would welcome anyone who would like to support our fundraising. I wish to thank all on this committee who have given so much time and commitment to this project so far. This is *our project - St John’s project*.

Occasional Offices continued through the year; 17 Baptisms, 1 Wedding (David & Claire O’Leary), 2 Wedding Blessings and 6 Funerals, plus 2 interments of ashes.

Christmas celebrations ended this most encouraging and eventful year. The Crib service was chaotic and magical, and Midnight Mass was truly glorious. Our own Carol Service was a moment of beauty and wonder. The Mayor’s Carol service, held at St John’s, was enriched by contributions from EightBells and Newbury Speakability. It was profoundly moving, a highlight of the year. The Christmas Tree Festival expanded yet again, welcoming more local groups and again funds were raised for Newbury Soup Kitchen and West Berks FoodBank.

As I often say - the Anglo-Catholic tradition is a *living tradition*. Together we continue to imagine how we become a place of welcome and hospitality to people in all their diversity, and to foster deeper relationships. We all desire to make St John’s a place of spirituality, comfort and exploration – even for those who may think that faith has nothing to offer them. We can, and do, offer a place to belong and to explore. We remain faithful to our

traditions of prayer, liturgy, sacrament and spirituality – whilst being realistic about the times and challenges we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

It increasingly feels to me like St John’s Church is enjoying a renewed sense of identity and purpose. There is laughter, friendship, diversity and welcome to others, there is a delight in prayer, worship, and theological exploration. In each of these moments we have the chance to embody the wonder of ‘the body of Christ’

### **And some thanks**

There are so many people to thank for ‘making church happen.’ Tea and Coffee is kindly offered through each week, and I’m thankful to those who dedicate themselves to hospitality. Servers and Sides-people have also served our worship well, and I’ve been encouraged by the sense of welcome that is experienced by visitors. Our Choir, led by Christopher Sears enrich our worship each week, and I am thankful for their gifts and passion, also to John and Jane Kane who have added to our worship at certain times. I also wish to thank the less visible volunteers, Cleaners, Flower-Arrangers and Gardeners who give hours of their time and keep our building and site looking beautiful.

In addition to the many unnamed people who have given to much, I wish to thank, as ever, our Churchwardens David Oats and Alison Foulkes for their encouragement, wise counsel and practical support; and all the PCC for the love, time and commitment they give to this Church, and to the parish in which we serve. Special thanks also to Kim Slade whose dedication to the role of treasurer has been inspiring. Huge thanks also to our Benefice Office Manager, Alex Brown, who continues to provide much-needed support in so many ways. And finally, I remain thankful to Revd Becky, our Benefice Vicar, for being an excellent colleague, guide and friend.

Revd Gary Collins  
Associate Vicar





### **Introduction**

During 2022 the Parochial Church Council (PCC) has met six times. The Standing/Finance Committee (SFC) has met to review the church finances six times, timetabled in advance of the PCC Meetings. In total, we held twelve meetings during 2022, compared with sixteen in 2021 (additional meetings were held during 2021 as we maintained a close review of pandemic impacts). Some individuals have attended all twelve meetings in 2022 (thank you!), and we maintained an average PCC attendance rate of 73% which was a little lower than 2021 at 84% (but still improved on the 70% recorded for 2021).

A record of the dates of the PCC Meetings, attendance levels, and a summary of each of the PCC Meetings held is provided in this report. Additional agenda items such as Projects and Finance which are also reviewed have been covered elsewhere in this annual report. I would like to thank Fr Gary, members of the St John's Standing/Finance Committee (SFC) and members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) for their support during 2022, which, with some relief settled into a steady and predictable rhythm as we put the pandemic behind us.

### **Summary of PCC Meetings**

#### **PCC 3 February 2022 – (94% attendance)**

In the first PCC meeting of 2022, we received an update from the Diocese on the new Parish Share formula. The Christmas Tree Festival raised over £1,400 for the Soup Kitchen. It was reported that new handrails have been installed. Revd Julie updated the PCC on the new Greening Group and its focus and Revd Gary updated the PCC that St Johns School assemblies were thriving.

#### **PCC 27 April 2022 – (69% attendance)**

This was an extra-ordinary meeting to review and approve the 2021 accounts.

#### **PCC 24 June 2022 (59% attendance)**

At this meeting appointments on the PCC were confirmed for 2022/23 and the PCC welcomed Andy Grace to the PCC.

#### **PCC 21 July 2022 (69% attendance)**

Revd Gary reminded the PCC that a replacement H&S rep was required with Revd Julie shortly to leave the parish. It was confirmed that all PCC members had now completed Basic Safeguarding. An update confirmed that activities to make the carpark safer (including new white parking bay lines) was well advanced. The Greening Audit Report was reviewed by the PCC. The coffee morning raised over £200 for essential running costs and Revd Gary reported that the Patronal Service was a great success. Revd Gary updated the PCC on plans to offer the church as a warm space for the winter months. The PCC discussed community outreach initiatives. As this was to be Revd Julie's last PCC, Revd Gary led the PCCs thanks, for all her hard work on behalf of St Johns, and wished her well for her new appointment.

### **PCC 15 September 2022 (64% attendance)**

It was reported that Ann Dixon had resigned from the PCC. Revd Gary led the PCCs thanks for all her hard work on behalf of the PCC over many years. Margaret Baker agreed to trial the H&S position. The PCC were provided with a link to complete training on 'Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse'. It was confirmed that our GDPR records were up to date. The new Social and Hospitality Group is now up and running and the PCC were updated on the new programme of events planned. The PCC received an update on the new LED lighting work in progress, planning for the Christmas Tree festival, and an update on the benefice expansion plans with a report due January 2023. An update was provided on the church opening times over the period of the Queens funeral.

### **PCC 24 November 2022 (86% attendance)**

At the final PCC meeting of 2022, there was a Deanery update on the Parish Share and updates on the Warm Church initiatives with confirmation that a Soup Lunch would start in church on Fridays from 2nd December. The PCC reviewed the new Financial Reserves Policy put forward by the treasurer. The PCC voted to accept the Benefice Expansion Task Force Report and Recommendations (11 for with 1 abstention). The Churchwardens confirmed completion of the LED lighting work and a report on the condition of the organ was reviewed by the PCC. There was an update from the Bishop of Oxford on Living with Love and Faith. Revd Gary provided words of encouragement for the PCC for the final PCC meeting of 2022. He felt that the last couple of months the church has been finding its rhythm again and that the church 'feels good'. Congregation was busy with some new faces each week, which is a really encouraging sign of progress.

### **Dates of meetings in 2022:**

#### **The following APCM has been held:**

24th June 2022

#### **The following PCC Meetings have been held:**

3rd February 2022

27th April 2022

24th June 2022

21st July 2022

15th September 2022

24th November 2022

#### **The following SFC Meetings have been held:**

21st January 2022

22nd March 2022

17th May 2022

14th July 2022

13th September 2022

10th November 2022



Sam Brown  
PCC Secretary



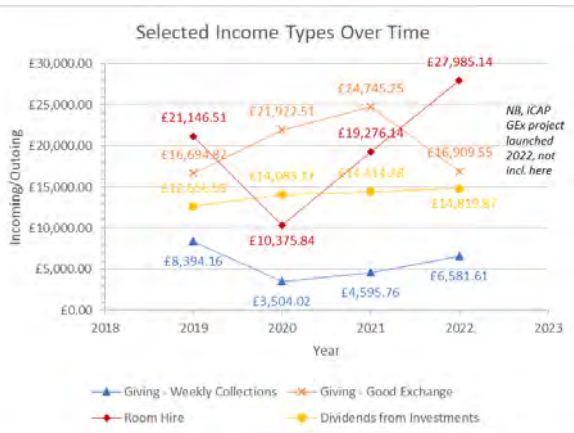
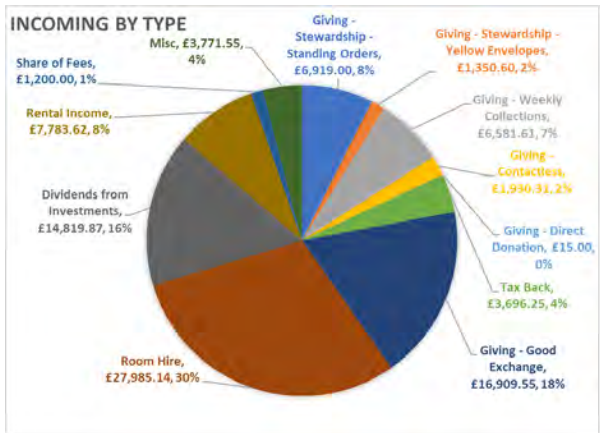


The annual audited accounts for the 2022 calendar year have been prepared by the accountants. By the time of the APCM, it is expected these will have been approved by the PCC, sent to the Diocese and commended to the APCM.

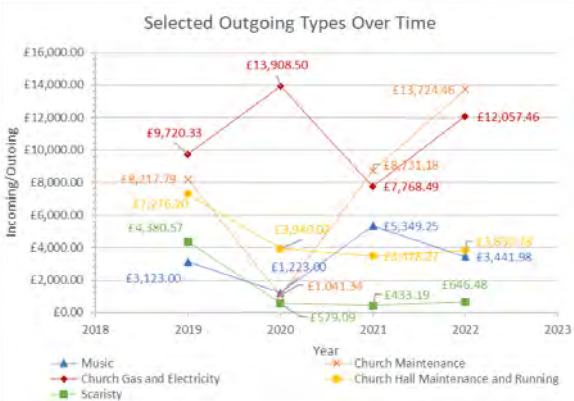
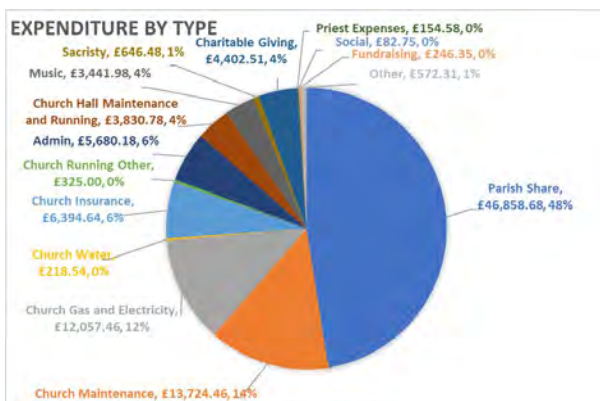
In 2022, it finally looks as though the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us. Despite the challenges of rising costs, energy in particular, the Church successfully fulfilled its financial commitments. In particular, the Parish Share was again paid in full by direct debit; this is the Diocese's preferred method of payment, which resulted in a discount on the total amount owed.

In March 2022, iCAP (Improving Community Access Project) was launched. This project aims to improve the accessibility, openness, visibility and welcoming of St John's Church for both its congregation and its community. This is to be achieved by providing a single access point for all to the Church through: external glass entrance porch with bi-parting automatic doors; ramp from entrance porch into main Church building; improved lighting in entrance area; and permanent holding open of the current inner and outer doors. An overall target of £162,000 has been set, although it is now considered the project will be funded and completed in phases. A Good Exchange project, which expires on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023, has been set up to raise funds and it has been awarded matched funding and several grants. At the end of 2022, approximately £20,000 had been raised. This money is considered 'restricted', as it was given for a definite purpose. The rest of this report considers other 'unrestricted' monies, unless otherwise specified.

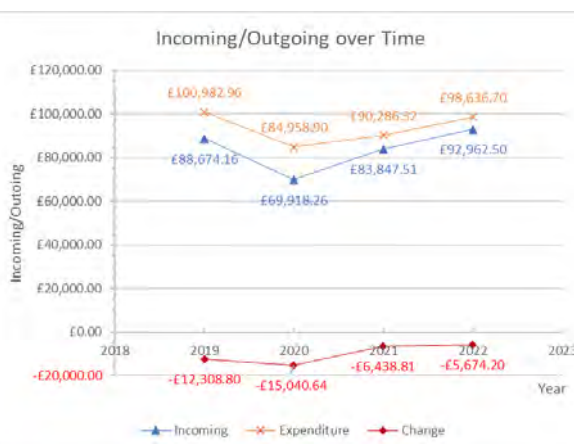
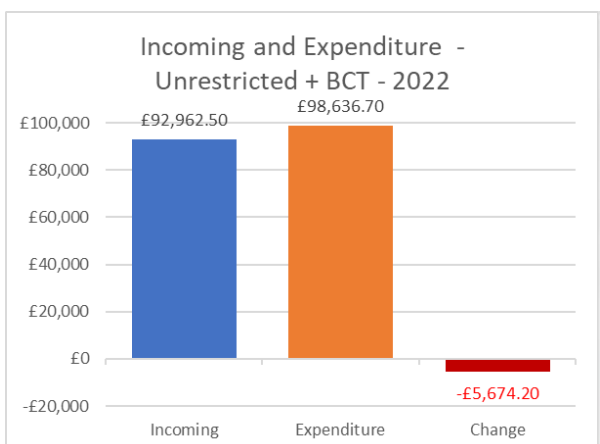
Many income streams in 2022 showed an increase compared to 2021 or remained steady. In particular, room rental income from letting out the Parish and St Richards Rooms exceeded pre-pandemic levels (£28,000 c.f. £21,000 in 2019). The biggest hirer in 2022, as per previous years, was St John's Pre-School. However, West Berkshire Council usage of the Church Rooms has grown dramatically in 2022 and now nearly matches that of the Pre-School. 37 Newtown Road was let for the whole year, so rental income was higher than last year (£7,800 c.f. £4,600 in 2021). Planned giving from standing orders remained constant (£6,900). However, there was a significant drop in income from Good Exchange Essential Running Costs giving (£16,900 c.f. £24,700 in 2021); this is likely because of iCAP and some donors giving their money to this project instead. Further income was derived from various investment holdings (from legacies, bequests and endowments), gift aid, applications to the Listed Places of Worship for VAT refunds, and St John's share of ministry fees. In total, all unrestricted income amounted to nearly £93,000 (c.f. £84,000 in 2021).



The main areas of expenditure for the year related to the Parish Share (approximately £47,000, the same as in 2021) and day to day running costs such as heating, electricity, insurance, cleaning, maintenance, mission and administration. Maintenance was much higher in 2022 than in 2021, including new chairs, remedial electrical works, new lighting and safety maintenance. Expenditure for 2022 totaled approximately £99,000 (c.f. £90,000 in 2021).



Thus 2022 ran at a deficit of approximately £6,000, with our expenditure exceeding our annual income. This was slightly less than the deficit in 2021. Despite this, it is still a deficit, which is not good. It is recognized that this gap must be reduced and closed. Expenditure should be constantly reviewed to ensure it is prudent, sensible and that the best value has been obtained, and opportunities to increase revenue, apply for grants, and digital giving should be exploited.



Whilst the 2022 yearly expenditure exceeded income, the finances are still on a reasonably sound footing, with all of the Church accounts in credit. This is due to generous bequests and legacies made by benefactors in the past. These continue to provide an investment cushion or reserve that can be called upon if required to cover excess expenditure. Indeed, the deficit in 2022 was paid for by a draw-down from our Easy Access Savings which contains money left to us as part of a legacy (this account is now empty) and a draw-down of £4,000 from 'The General Fund' Kath Gibbs Legacy. It is hoped that by increasing income and continued vigilance on expenditure the Church will become less reliant on certain bequests to cover the shortfall which can then be invested elsewhere.

The bequests and endowments (restricted and unrestricted) ended the year totaling £657,000, decreasing by approximately £71,000 since the end of 2021. This means they are now worth the same as they were in 2020. Although St John's aims that in 10 years' time (by 2033) revenue will increase / outgoings will decrease such that there is no operating deficit, in the short-term it is recognized there will be an annual shortfall which will need to be covered by drawing down part of the unrestricted, Kath Gibbs Legacy.

Given our very fortunate situation regarding our investments, the PCC have carefully reflected on our reserves policy and for 2023 this is:

*"St John's currently has an operating deficit of approximately £10,000 per year. It is the aim of the PCC that in 10 years' time, by 2033, St John's will break even (or better) every year. This is to be achieved by both decreasing outgoings and increasing income. As of the end of 2022, St John's holds £363,000 in reserves in the Kath Gibbs Legacy, 'The General Fund'. This money is intended to be used for the 'Benefit of St John's at discretion of the PCC'.*

*It is the policy of the PCC to retain a portion of these reserves. This amount will be enough to cover: 9 months' worth of general expenditure, salaries, parish share and average income; an amount for major emergency maintenance for both the church and 37 Newton Road; and an amount to pay St John's current operating deficit until 2033. In 2023, these figures are £139,000, £42,000 and £100,000 respectively, giving a total of £281,000.*

*This means that £81,000 of the reserves is available.*

*However, it is recommended that drawdown of this amount takes place gradually or as chunks for specific works until the target date for no operating deficit of 2033. Furthermore, such drawdowns must meet the following criteria: be for projects that serve the needs of the Church and Christian mission; and decrease outgoings and/or increase income (thereby contributing to the net zero operating costs target). Likely areas will include: green projects, improving community access (iCAP), boiler works, organ enhancements, community outreach or the church building.*

*Hence in 2023, assuming a gradual decrease in the reserves available, £8,000 can be withdrawn for projects, as well as £10,000 for deficit coverage. A larger amount up to £81,000 could be withdrawn for a specific project meeting the criteria if desired. The exact amount and project(s) to be enabled by the withdrawal will be decided by the PCC."*

Looking forward to 2023... As well as continuing to raise funds for iCAP, a new boiler/heating system will need to be installed - £40,000 has been budgeted for this. Organ works are to partially funded by monies from the PCC – a sum of £10,000 per year for the next four years has been agreed, with the first two years' worth of money being brought forward to the first year. Hence a total of £70,000 - £75,000 is expected to be drawn down

from the Kath Gibbs Legacy to cover these works as well as the deficit coverage. This is above the recommended £8,000 for 2023, but below the maximum limit of £81,000, as stated in the reserves policy. The financial implications of a potential extension of the benefice to include St Michael and All Angels of Enborne will have to be fully explored and understood, to input into the decision of this merger. A quinquennial report, to be carried out in early 2023, will also inform as to other works needed to the fabric of the church.

Many thanks to everyone who has helped me in 2022 with St John's finances, especially given the 'maternity leave' I had when our daughter Maggie was born. Thanks are particularly owed to David Oats, who makes money deposits and who helps with online banking transactions. Many thanks to my husband Aeron Slade, who has managed our Good Exchanges projects, the contactless Payaz system and who has been trying really hard to raise money for iCAP. A huge thank you to Roger O'Callaghan for managing many of our utility companies. And many thanks to Andrew Kingston, who has been helping with online banking.

Finally, enormous thanks to *you*, and your continued financial support to St John's. Knowing the state of our accounts, I see every day how important everyone's donations are to keeping this place of worship and community open and available to all. And hopefully we can make things even better. So thank you.

Kimberley Slade  
Honorary Treasurer





## Deanery Synod

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The deanery synod has met on three occasions since the previous annual report.

In October a physical meeting was held at St George the Martyr in Wash Common.

It has been noted in the last few meetings that the fears and challenges of the Covid-19 Pandemic will not end abruptly, and it will have waves for years to come, both financially and behaviourally. Despite this, it is a pleasure to see churches thriving; churches have learnt lessons from the pandemic, and many continue (as St George and St John) to offer an online presence, reaching further than the boundaries of the benefice.

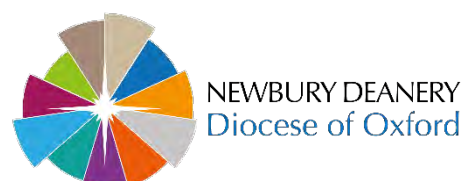
We now look, as a Deanery, to challenge another untimely demon in the form of the cost-of-living crisis. In October it was heavily discussed what churches can do to sustain the communities. Most, including St John's, are opening their doors, and hearts, for a "Warm Hub" solution to help tackle energy bills for individuals. Other members of the synod have shared their own experiences on facing this challenge and wonderful works of the Holy Spirit through his followers, that seem to buck a general trend of closing one's doors.

A summary of General Synod was given at which delegates worked, discussed, and debated tirelessly, wrestling with the most important moral issues of the day. Further work on Living in Love and Faith has been discussed, with contentions and confusion over the prayers issued for the blessing of same sex couples or relationships. Further such debate will take place in the July Synod.

In the October meeting the 2023 Parish share allocation was voted in favour by a show of hands. The Deanery Treasurer was pleased to report in the February meeting that every benefice and parish had met their Parish share in time and in full for the first time in four years. As usual two thirds of the resulting rebate will be distributed back to churches within the Deanery whilst adding a third to Deanery reserves. It is also noted within this report that the deanery will, for the next 12 months at least, be supplementing Walbury Beacon benefice to assist in paying for a full-time member of clergy so that proper time and effort can be paid to the benefice; this was voted by Deanery Synod by a show of hands.

The Deanery continues to ask of itself big questions about its place and identity, that it is more than a debating chamber for the Parish Share and Clerical Deployment. We ask for your prayers for Deanery, Diocesan, and General Synod.

Aeron Slade  
Deanery Synod Representative



## Serving Party Report

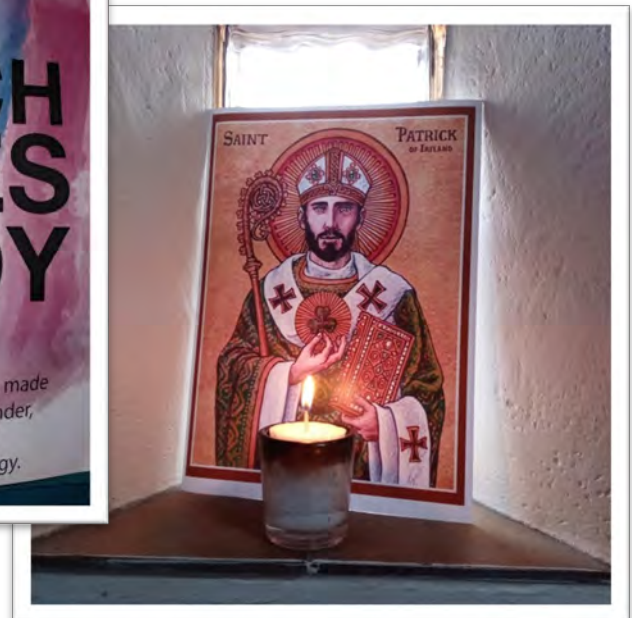
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As Covid restrictions eased we have tended to operate with two servers during the past year and sometimes three depending upon the requirements of the service. It is a great privilege to be able to serve and be a close part of Worship.

We have been delighted to be joined by Julie Cole as a new server and we welcome her to this role. Terry Taylor has also resumed as a server now the restrictions have ended and we therefore have a team of four adults who can rotate plus one of our younger members, Luke Kingston providing essential back up on occasions.

Our congregations and aspirations in worship are growing week by week. If anyone feels they may be interested in serving then please contact, or better still speak to Fr. Gary, Andrew or Clive about what is involved. We will be delighted to help with training and gentle guidance in this fulfilling role.

Andrew Kingston  
Serving Party



## Safeguarding

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The PCC formally reaffirmed The Safeguarding Policy on 24/11/2022. The PCC and the designated Safeguarding Officer have ensured that St John's Church is compliant with all aspects of safeguarding, using The Oxford Diocese guidelines. No church can be complacent with safeguarding issues and St John's has continued a programme of training for PCC members and others within the church.

A safeguarding item is on the agenda for every PCC meeting. Guidance has been sought throughout the year as to whether all PCC members need DBS clearance. With regard to training, as a minimum, all PCC members have to complete the following courses: co Basic Awareness, Foundation, and Domestic Abuse courses. Others, mainly clergy, have to complete The Leadership, and The Safer Recruitment and People Management courses. References for all these are found in The CofE APSC guiding booklet.

Current practice is for safeguarding forms to be completed every time an incident occurs and these are shared with clergy, the safeguarding officer and church wardens as appropriate. As the church grows, consideration will be made as to the introduction of the formal Parish Volunteer Role, as a safeguarding consideration in this recruitment.

Stephen Kerry  
Safeguarding Officer



Just who is *this* at St John's Pre-School today?!

## Electoral Roll

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In line with Church Representation Rules, the Electoral Roll was revised during the period from 24th March to 13th April 2022 (42 - 29 days before the APCM) and the revised roll was displayed on the 17th April 2022 more than 14 days ahead of the APCM. There were six new applications this year but unfortunately two people passed away during the year, taking the new total on the roll to 76 individuals, up from last year's total of 72.

Andy Grace  
Electoral Roll Officer



Saying a fond farewell to Debbie Smith who led our Baby & Toddler group.



Jennifer and Trish sharing laughter and hospitality at Christmas Tree set-up



## iCAP – St John’s Open and Accessible Future

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This project has the aim of creating a bright, open and accessible (for all) front entrance to the Church.

At the end of 2021 the proposed project had cleared all the initial design, planning and Diocese approval processes. Therefore during 2022 attention has turned to fundraising to enable the project to commence given a large sum of money will be required to bring it to fruition.

Fundraising was officially launched on Passion Sunday 2022. To date approximately £38,000 has been raised which is a sterling effort. This fundraising has also been supported by the Greenham Trust and the Englefield Charitable Trust. However, there is a long way to go to secure all the funding required and all donations are gratefully received.

The current plan is to undertake the project in phases so some of the work can commence this year. It is hoped that we will soon be able to move the electricity entry point and electric boards for the Church, create an opening for a new entry ramp and possibly construct the ramp depending upon available funds and the results of a tender process for the work. More good news regarding this will hopefully be forthcoming in the coming months.



## Sidespeople Report

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A sense of welcome and belonging are paramount to helping people feel at home in any church. At St John's we have a wonderful group of sidespeople who have carried out these duties during the past year. Our sidespeople have made every effort to attend when required and have covered for one another whenever that was not possible.

Aeron and Kim took an understandable break this year as they turned their attention to the nurturing of dear Maggie!

Thank you, dear friends, for being the welcoming face of St John's Church to newcomers. It must surely be down to you, as well as others, that once again our church membership has increased over the past year. Thank you.

### **Present Sidespeople** (if you would like to volunteer – or resume, please contact)

Graham Salter  
Aeron Slade  
Clive Loveless  
Jessy Joseph  
Stephen Kerry  
Aneta Kingston

Julian Greaves  
Kim Slade  
Jennie Marwick-Evans  
Eileen Taylor  
Judith Kerry

Fr Gary



## Community Relations

As we returned to something like (the new) normal, the bonds of trust, collaboration and friendship increased through 2022 with many community activists and organisations, such as Newbury Soup Kitchen, Fair Close Centre, West Berks Foodbank, Christian Aid, West Berkshire Climate Action Group, City Arts, Newbury Pride, Eight Bells for Mental Health, Newbury Speakability, Newbury Spring Festival, the Town Council, Cost of Living taskforce, West Berkshire Homeless, Community United and West Berkshire Council.

We were delighted to have been involved in stimulating and coordinating the Cost of Living responses in the area with other agencies, and particularly pleased to have begun our very own Warm & Wonderful Soup Lunch at the start of Advent 2022. In the same month we held our annual Christmas Tree Festival, another celebration of community which raised over £1,300 for Newbury Soup Kitchen and West Berks Foodbank.

The future continues to open out before us and we look forward to ways we can increase our collaborations, and show that St John's is both a church which cares, supports and prays for its community - but is also a resource, a shelter and a hub.



Clockwise to centre: Fair Close Jubilee celebration, 'Santa' visits The Newbury Soup Kitchen Christmas session, NSK visit St John's, Fr Gary at Newbury's 1<sup>st</sup> Pride march, Rod and Judy host Speakability Christmas celebration.



## **Warm & Wonderful Soup Lunch**

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In response to the cost of living crisis St John's started a soup lunch from mid-day every Friday, starting at the beginning of December. For that first week we had one pot of soup and just a few members from the congregation. The number of visitors grew quickly to between 10 and 20 with new faces exceeding the number from church every week.

A rota of volunteers was soon established, and we now offer two vegan soups – lots of exciting flavours have appeared - with bread from Hethertons.

All much appreciated.

Thank you to all who have made the delicious soups, those who have welcomed guests and those who have set up and cleared each week.

Alison Foulkes  
Churchwarden



## Health & Safety Report

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I was asked to take as Health and Safety Officer in September and I was fortunate to have a meeting with Revd Julie Howell before she left in which she explained the responsibilities of the role and gave guidance on the risk assessments already undertaken by herself and Jennifer. I hope to follow on from the great work done by Jennifer and Julie and know that I always have David Oats available to guide me.

Margaret Baker  
H&S Officer for PCC

We had been indebted to the Revd Julie Howell who in a previous life had been a Health and Safety expert and I was thankful for all her help concerning the strange workings of risk assessments! I gave up Health and Safety at the APCM 2022, and Margaret Baker has now taken over. I was pleased to see the concern for safer footpaths around the church was met by new parking and footpath markings for pedestrians and car users.

Jennifer Wright  
Former H&S Officer for PCC



the many skills of a churchwarden

## Art & Creativity at St John's

I remain passionate about St John's engaging with artists and creative workers in the local area. The Arts make the human spirit sing, they occupy the same territory – and the same questions – as religion; the things which are hard to speak of, experiences at the limit of language – both joy and pain and all that lies in-between. The arts are poetic, allusive and engage our imaginations as we seek to discover more of ourselves, our world and our neighbours. In its best moments this is what religion can be about – a place of wonder, curiosity and exploration.

It's been a joy this year to begin to flex those muscles again and to engage with local artists, poets, writers, choirs, musicians.

One of the many highlights was Newbury Spring Festival's Service celebrating the life of Ralph Vaughan Williams. A well attended and joyous celebration! We've hosted many other excellent choral presentations through the year, especially from Cecilia Consort and the Cromwell Singers.

It was a very special joy to welcome Down House School back in March 2022 after lockdown for the Christian Aid fundraiser, with a remarkable opening of a Ukrainian Prayer.

Colin Heber Percy read extracts from his excellent 'Tales from a Country Parish' Poet Steve Wallis and artist Isabel Carmona's excellent presentation of 'Climate Crisis Campfire Tales'

Towards the end of 2022, developments were under way with Open Studios for a collaborative art project in 2023 based on Holy Week, which will be rather special.





The St John's Greening Group continues to meet and discuss all things green – affecting the church, wider community and the world as a whole.

In 2022 we met:

27/01/2022

16/03/2022

28/04/2022

23/06/2022

22/09/2022

16/11/2022

**Green Audit** - Following on from the Green Audit in February 2022, a major focus throughout 2022 was the boiler, its age, inefficiency, and what the possible solutions could be, together with the installation of new LED bulbs.

**Planting** - Around the time of the start of the war in Ukraine, a teardrop shaped bed of wildflowers was sown in the grass outside St John's Church which gave a beautiful and moving display. In April we had the first community planting event where more patches of grass were cleared and wildflower seeds were planted on a lovely sunny day, with snacks and drinks provided. The planters were again used to grow vegetables and bulbs. Both the planters and the wildflower beds continued to provide much joy throughout the year.

**Recycling** – Tubs for recycling mobile phones and spectacles were placed in the church. Contact was made with West Berks Council about where more difficult items could be recycled, items that are not taken in the kerbside recycling, and this is ongoing.

**The proposal for cycle racks** were progressed to the point of going to planning.

St John's Church hosted several climate change talks and conferences, with the idea that St John's could become a venue for future talks and presentations.

**'Greenfest' in Hampstead Norreys** Some Greening Group members attended this innovative event and are looking at the possibility of having a stand in the future.

**St John's held a COP27 Vigil** which was well attended and very moving.

**ECO church (A Rocha)** continued to be on the agenda with a view to splitting the tasks down into smaller, manageable chunks that the Greening Group could gradually work through, to the point of achieving bronze award status.

**Revd. Julie Howell** moved on to her own parish in September, and so stopped leading the St John's Greening Group. She was given a card and gift of seeds as a thank you for all her hard work, guidance and dedication in helping to set up and run the Greening Group since it started on 25th March 2021.





## Music at St John's

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After the disruption caused by the pandemic, it was good once again to get back to a whole year's music making.

Sundays are, of course, the bread and butter of what we do. During Lent, to ring the changes and provide some variety, we introduced a different musical setting of the liturgy alongside some responsorial psalm singing.

In May, we hosted the opening service of the Newbury Spring Festival. The organisers were keen to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Ralph Vaughan William's birth with a liturgical performance of his Mass in G minor. With its rich Anglo-Catholic tradition, St. John's was the obvious choice of venue!

Indeed, the church continues to be a popular venue for a number of local musical organisations and several successful concerts have taken place here over the year.

We joined with the choir of St. George's for a harvest choral Evensong at St. Michael's, Enborne and again, just before Christmas, for a very successful Benefice carol service. As in the previous year, it began with a candlelit procession, providing an atmospheric start to the festive season.

It has been a real pleasure to welcome Sam Spaak and Melanie Brown into the choir loft over the course of the year. I would like to express my sincere thanks to all members of the choir who have generously given of their time & expertise on Sundays and major feasts over the year. We are small in number and new members will always be very welcome to swell the ranks!

Once again, I am extremely grateful to Andy Grace for being ready to step in at the ping of a text and for deputising on those times when I have been away.

Christopher Sears  
Director of Music



## Flower Arrangers

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Thank you to all who have kept our church decorated with fresh flowers this year. With such a small group of arrangers it has been a challenge so we are looking forward to the coming year with many new volunteers who have joined the rota recently.

Thank you to those who have given donations towards the rising cost of flowers – donations are always very welcome.

Thank you to Willow and Blooms who select such lovely blooms for us.

Alison Foulkes  
Churchwarden and Floral Team



## Fabric and Maintenance

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The general upkeep of the Church was exercised with due care and diligence during 2022. During the year, the usual maintenance work was carried out, including the PAT Testing, Fire Extinguisher Servicing and the annual service on the boiler. Unfortunately a month after the annual service, the boiler began to leak, and we have been advised that a repair is not possible or viable due to its age.

During 2022, much of our lighting in the church, Parish Room and St Richard Room, was been upgraded to LEDs, as was recommended in the Green Audit Report, carried out by an independent expert, partially funded by the Diocese. Twenty new chairs with arms, were purchased as recommended by the PCC, in particular, to make life easier for our less able users.

The outside slabs were power washed to stop them from becoming slippery in wet weather and the car-park was marked out with white lining, to maximise parking and to help keep pedestrians safe within a marked pedestrian footpath, after a Risk Assessment of the area, had been carried out.

A watch has been kept on the decorative standards in the Parish Room and St. Richard Room during the year, to ensure that these two community facilities and important income sources for the church, are kept at a high standard. Some redecorating, will be necessary during 2023.

Work on the grounds, grass, borders and memorial garden, has continued with enthusiasm by our gardeners Andy and Linda Norris, with help from Stephen Kerry and myself. Thanks to these people St. John's Church continues to present a very attractive face to the local community, on this very busy corner in South Newbury.

Our Quinquennial Report on the church and its buildings, will now be carried in 2023, this being the appointment offered to us by our Church Architects and Surveyors. This five yearly inspection is a requirement placed upon us by the Diocese and the Ecclesiastical Insurance company. This is bound to highlight works which will have to be carried out during 2023.



...not praying, simply fixing the pointing

David Oats  
Churchwarden

## Church Silver and Valuables

All of the church silver and valuables are in good order with no damage or losses sustained during 2022. Every Sunday I get to wash, clean and inspect the silverware that we regularly use, and these items are kept secure, by being locked away in one of our safes during the week.

David Oats  
Churchwarden



## St John's Ladies Fellowship

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We began our 8th year in good form by being entertained with the Barfield Handbell Ringers, followed by a tea party complete with celebratory cake.

The Programme for the rest of the year was very varied. We were delighted to have Ros Clow give another talk on the Newtown Road Cemetery, this time entitled 'Angels, Artists and Authors'. We enjoyed a craft session painting pots that had been hand crafted by our member, Julie Coles. The visit to the National Needlework Archive at Greenham Business Park was very interesting. We were able to admire the famous 'Country Wife' textile mural being restored there. This had been made for the 1951 Festival of Britain.

Lunch was enjoyed together at The Furze Bush Inn and again at the Newbury College Restaurant. The Beetle Drive was as popular as ever and the Quiz was another competitive challenge. But a real highlight of the year was the illustrated talk by Revd Gary on Modern Art which attracted some lively discussion. We made this an open meeting to anyone in the congregation that was interested. We have also extended a general invitation for members at St George's to join us when a meeting on our Programme may be of special interest to them.

During the year 2022 the running of our Fellowship was well supported by our small committee. Sheila Collins took over sending out birthday cards to all our members, as well as bringing the refreshments for our meetings held in the Parish Room. Ann Dixon and Julie Coles have both been very helpful. We are, indeed, grateful to all our members for their continued interest and enthusiasm. We do hope that our Fellowship is seen as a valuable contribution to the active life here at St John's and is a witness to the love and care we have for each other within the family of the Church.

Our membership is mostly between 25 and 30 and new members are always welcome. It has been decided that from 2023 we shall meet on the second Wednesday of each month in the hope this will be more suitable for several reasons.



Jenny Griffiths  
(with Jennifer Wright)  
SJLF Leadership Team

Pics. SJLF visit to Greenham  
Needlework Archive

## St John and St Nicolas School Report

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This current academic year, it has finally felt as though Covid is in the past, at least in terms of restrictions and illness. However, the effects of Covid will continue to be felt in schools for many years to come. At St John's, we have seen increasing numbers of children with higher levels of need both academically and socially. The 'Covid generation' will continue to come through our school for at least the next 8 years and so we will need to maintain our high standards of therapeutic care for all of our children, whilst keeping high expectations for all.

The past year has seen the school returning to a much more normal pattern of events, including a return to school trips for all year groups and in-school events, such as World Book Day. Last year, all of this seemed like a novelty to be able to carry them out again and I know that they are really appreciated by the children.

St John's School continues to work very closely with St Nic's as part of our federation, which is now nearly 18 months old. Our joint governing board have the interests of both schools very closely to heart and they continue to ensure through regular monitoring that the schools are held to account. In particular, the board has a SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) working party, which looks to ensure that the schools are maintaining their church foundations and their close relationships with St John's and St Nicolas Churches.

For me, the highlight of my time is seeing the amazing development of our Reception children, in particular. Their progress during their time with us is astonishing and this is particularly seen through the excellent strides that they make with their phonics learning over the course of the year.

Keith Harvey  
Executive Headteacher



For the good of all - through curiosity,  
creativity and love.



The last calendar year at School was particularly busy both with the curriculum, the effect of Covid and the Federation of St Nicholas School and St John the Evangelist infant and Nursery School. A happy transition now complete

The close association of the School and our Church started with Christingle, followed by children's Candlemass and regular services formed by Fr Gary to suit and appeal to this younger generation.

Morning Prayer was held on several occasions and a Church Open Day was organised for the children to explore, sample and experience all the treasures of the building and forms of worship.

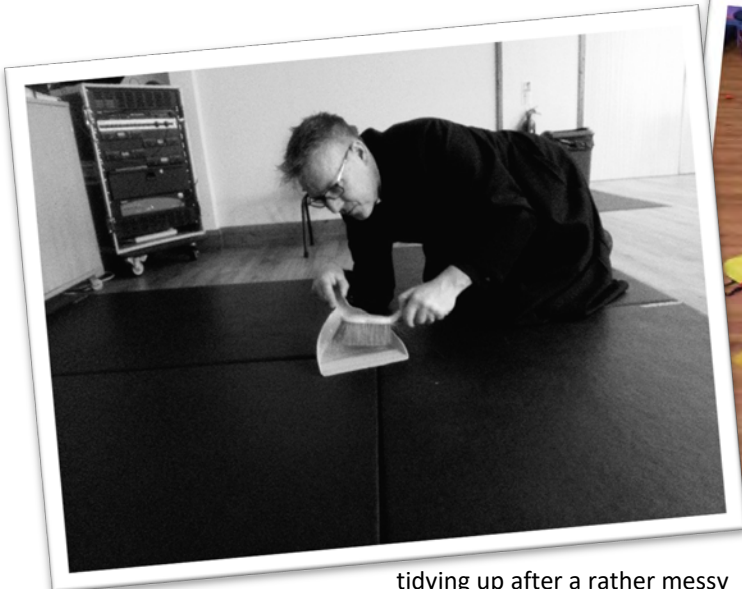
Special services were organised by Fr Gary for school leavers in July and new children were welcomed into our Church.

Special Harvest Festival was celebrated by the whole school and the Church was packed to capacity with children, parents and families.

Christmas Nativity was also celebrated and enjoyed by all the children and teachers, a huge contribution by all concerned. A special 'end of term' service also took place in Church.

Fr Gary regularly attended school for their worship and enhanced education at this foundation stage.

Clive Loveless  
Associate Governor St. John the Evangelist School



tidying up after a rather messy  
'sand-based' assembly at St John's school



## Still - Contemplative Prayer Group

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Every Thursday evening from 6-6.30pm sees a gathering of folk seeking silence and stillness. The benefice contemplative service, started many years ago at St George's by Revd Paul Cowan, has in the past attracted participants from a number of churches and none and after a re-start post - lockdown have this year found a 'home' in the Lady Chapel at St John's.

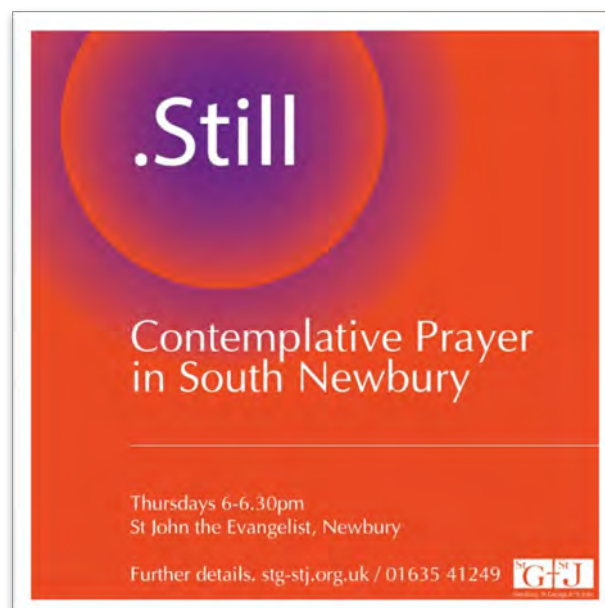
The format is simple: after a few minutes of chat as we gather, the facilitator for that evening leads us into 30 minutes or so of stillness. How we pass the time depends on the individual; our hope is that by placing ourselves in a quiet space, we can better be open to God. Though not primarily an intercessory gathering, we of course bring all of our lives into the space and uphold each other in prayer.

Everyone's contributions are valued; there are no 'experts.' This year we've been inspired by poetry, psalms, art, music, current affairs and Eco-Spirituality; we've prayed with the Benedictine, Catholic, Celtic, Evangelical and Jesuit traditions. Several members have connections with the Iona Community, Julian prayer meetings, the Quiet Garden Movement and Newbury Christians Climate Action, whilst others enjoy the quarterly Forest Church gatherings at St Michael's Enborne.

Thanks go to everyone involved. This includes a belated farewell to Jenny Linnell who moved away in 2021 and of course, Revd Julie at the end of her curacy. We miss you. Not forgetting ongoing encouragement from Alex and David, Revd Becky and Fr Gary.

We're always pleased to welcome new people. Please contact me or clergy for further details.

Jane Sigrist  
.Still





## St John's Babies and Toddlers

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This is my first year running Babies and Toddlers, after taking over from Debbie (thank you Debbie for everything!).

We have a focused activity each week to encourage the toddlers helping them and their parents/carers to make relationships and bring families together. Snack time is also done as a big group, the little ones love sitting together and enjoy having races once they are finished. We do a craft once a month this can be anything from colouring pictures to full glue and glitter art.

At the start of the year, we celebrated Christingle and the children made their own Christingles and loved seeing the giant one at the altar. It was lovely to see some of the families from the group at the Sunday service with their Christingles.

We have enjoyed lots of celebrations including Harvest, Valentines Day and Mother's Day, and we enjoyed mock-coronations to re-enact the Queen's Jubilee celebration!

We regularly welcome between 12 and 15 children and their parents or carers.

We celebrated Christmas with an end of term party, lots of dancing and games followed by a story at the Altar, which the children enjoyed, we were able to provide each child with a gift of a book which they enjoyed receiving from beneath our decorated Christmas tree.

We would like to say a huge thank you to our volunteers: Becky who attends every week to help set up, Lyndsey for all the help and support and Olive with her team of ladies for providing much needed tea and coffee, and Fr. Gary for always entertaining us with a story.

Dawn Smith  
Babies & Toddlers leader



## Churchwarden's Report

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Alison and I would like to say a huge thank you to Fr. Gary for his tireless dedication and commitment to St John's. We both very much value his wonderful, inspiring and welcoming ministry among us. We would also like to thank Revd Becky, Revd Julie, Revd Canon Rita and Revd Tom, for their hard work and support during 2022 as we more-or-less returned to normal church life. Thanks to their leadership, church attendance gradually increased during 2022, with lots of new faces attending on a fairly regular basis. The on-line offerings also continued to be made available during the year, as these proved to be very popular, even post Covid.

Grateful thanks also goes to Christopher Sears, our Director of Music, the choir and John and Jane Kane who have enhanced our worship during the past year, with beautiful music and singing. We have all enjoyed a wide and imaginative range of services and music.

A big thank you must also go to all PCC Members, who contributed numerous hours to the benefit of the church and have made many important decisions, which have enabled the smooth running of church business throughout the year.

At St John's, we have teams of servers, sides-people, flower arrangers, cleaners, readers, cake bakers, soup makers, tea and coffee volunteers and others in solitary roles, who help to keep the church running day by day, month after month, throughout the year. Alison and I would like to thank you all for your support and unfailing commitment. If you would like to join one of the teams mentioned, please speak to Alison or myself.

During the year we said a fond farewell to our very capable and well-liked curate, Revd Julie. Julie was a great help to us during her time with us and was able to offer us some very useful professional advice, especially in the area of Health and Safety. We will all miss Julie, but thankfully, she is only just over the border in Hurstbourne Tarrant, where she is looking after several churches, and will therefore be able to visit us regularly, (we hope), when her diary allows!

Alison and I continue to hope and pray that God will bless our benefice and everyone in it, as we move forward towards new challenges and opportunities in the coming years. We look forward to further exciting developments in the life of St. John's Church within our local community, the benefice and within Newbury as a whole.

Thank you all so much.

David Oats & (Alison Foulkes)  
Churchwardens



'Waiting for the moment' Carol Service 2022,



**A Purification**  
by Wendell Berry

At the start of spring I open a trench  
in the ground. I put into it  
the winter's accumulation of paper,  
pages I do not want to read  
again, useless words, fragments,  
errors. And I put into it  
the contents of the outhouse:  
light of the sun, growth of the ground,  
finished with one of their journeys.

To the sky, to the wind, then,  
and to the faithful trees, I confess  
my sins: that I have not been happy  
enough, considering my good luck;  
have listened to too much noise;  
have been inattentive to wonders;  
have lusted after praise.

And then upon the gathered refuse  
of mind and body, I close the trench,  
folding shut again the dark,  
the deathless earth. Beneath that seal  
the old escapes into the new.