

WHEATLEY URC

ANNUAL REPORTS

2018



Annual General Meeting

Sunday 2nd September 2018

11.30 am

WORSHIP MINISTRY TEAM

Revd Pauline Main

The Worship Team met three times during the year. Many thanks to the members of the team for their ideas and concern for the worship of our church, not just at meetings, but during the whole of the year.

Baptismal bowl and stand

Jack Thorn, a student from Rycotewood College, which teaches furniture making, was commissioned to design and make a wooden stand for the new baptismal bowl. This was completed in time to be used for the first time at a baptism service on June 17th, conducted by Colin.

Holy Communion

As mentioned in last year's report, Pauline and Colin agreed to swap the Sundays on which they led Holy Communion, so that Colin now leads on the first Sunday and Pauline on the third. As a result, Church Meeting was moved to the first Sunday so that Pauline could attend. Since this has meant that those preparing the Sunday afternoon teas have less time to do so, members of the congregation are encouraged to help put out tables etc to help.

Lent and Easter

The usual series of Breakfast Meditations were held during Holy Week, with leaders from St Mary's, Wheatley Community Church and ourselves. This year there was an overall theme to the meditations, based on a short book by Stephen Cottrell called *The Nail* (many thanks to Laurence for her suggestion of this material). We felt that the theme was helpful both to leaders and participants, but that some of the leaders had not entirely kept to the brief of quiet, reflective meditations. Perhaps a preparatory meeting of leaders would be helpful next year. The Maundy Thursday Tenebrae service and Easter Sunday services were, as usual, much appreciated.

Harvest

The Harvest service led by Colin, on the theme of "the five senses", was very well received by all. Our Harvest service in 2018 will be held at Sandy Lane Farm.

Advent and Christmas

The Advent Ring this year had a different "flavour": inspired by the theme of 'Feasts and Festivals', Pauline Shelley made an advent wreath cake, iced and decorated with traditional holly, ivy and candles. Despite temptation, it remained intact until Christmas, when it was shared out and eaten!

Christmas services went well and according to plan. It was decided to hold the Carol Service on the morning of December 24th, to avoid a clash with St Mary's Crib Service. The Worship Team felt that this did not detract too much from the

atmosphere, and suggest that this be the pattern for future years. The service on Christmas Day was held at the earlier time of 9.15 am, to enable Pauline to go on to Marston for a joint service there with Summertown. This worked well for all three churches and again, the suggestion is to repeat this pattern in future.

Laurence once again organised and led a service for *The Longest Night*, on December 21st, particularly aimed at people who find Christmas a difficult time. This is hopefully becoming a regular feature of our Christmastime worship, as people from all of our churches become more aware of the kind of service it is, and recommend it to others.

Shared services

There was a lay led, joint service with St Mary's on 31st December. This went very well, with a full church and people in the gallery, and seems a good plan for this Sunday when ministers tend to have a Sunday off.

In January there was a short service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This was arranged rather at the last minute, and not especially well attended.

There was no shared service for Pentecost, but in August a joint service linked to the Children's holiday club is being arranged.

The Worship Team are rather concerned that arrangement of joint services has recently been rather haphazard, and suggests a pattern be re-established. Wheatley Area Churches also has joint services on its agenda. One matter to consider is whether joint services should be URC/St Mary's or involve all of the WAC churches.

Elements of worship

A prayer workshop was held in August, particularly aimed at those leading intercessions, but open to all. There was input from Pauline and Colin, and helpful discussion. Pauline has promised to provide some written guidelines for intercessors, but these have yet to materialise!

Music is a much-valued part of our worship. The contribution of Frances Simpson in providing our organ music, and in gathering singers together before services, is much appreciated: once again, many thanks to her for her thoughtful contributions in the "incidental" music and postlude, as well as in the hymns. During the year we have occasionally tried out a variety of music (or silence) during the distribution of communion, including Taize chants and hymns sung quietly. Quiet music seems to be preferred, and people having to look up words in hymn books to be avoided.

As ever we are extremely grateful to the various creative folk in the church who enhance our worship in visual ways; Pauline Shelley with her artwork, and Allison Towner for the flowers deserve special mention, as well as those who help

and support them. We are very fortunate to have such a range of gifts in the church.

Preaching rota

As usual, many thanks to Laurence for her efficient organising of the preaching rota, and to all those who have led worship throughout the year. Especial thanks to our in-house lay preachers, Richard Bainbridge and Laurence herself – your services are much appreciated

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Robert Harding

I always prepare for writing my report by looking back at the last two or three as well as reminding myself what was in the elders' minutes over the past twelve months. So picking up some themes from a year ago; I note that future ministry of the URC in the Oxford area has been moved forward by the appointment of Helen Garton at St. Columba's and Cumnor, but there is still a great deal to be sorted out regarding Pauline's future role and how a team might work. Another item from last year is the project now known as 'Cogwheel', about which you will find a separate report. Our 'Eco-Church Bronze Award' was mentioned as something we hoped to build on. Some progress has been made, but we are waiting for the completion of the building and refurbishment works we have in hand, before thinking about pursuing a possible 'Silver Award'

As far as new initiatives are concerned a number of ideas have been developing as a direct, or some cases indirect, consequence of our 'away-day' in February. Follow up work on this is yet to begin, but we are actively aiming to register our church for 'same-sex marriages', as well as looking at the idea of signing up to 'Inclusive Church,' an organisation which promotes many of the ideals we hold dear. In time, we plan to investigate the idea of becoming a 'dementia friendly' church. So, we have much to be thinking about and hopefully developing.

One of the signs of a successful church is apparently one that knows its strengths and concentrates on them. If this is the case, then our work among the older generation in the community, particularly those living alone, goes from strength to strength, with the two lunch clubs, the Not-So-Young club and the afternoon teas. This is great outreach work and I estimate around twenty members of the congregation are involved as helpers one way or another. Another of our strengths is the involvement of so many of us in the ministry teams, which continue to do such effective work. **Please remember that we are always looking for new volunteers, and like to encourage folk to swap from one team to another from time to time.**

I think it is interesting to reflect that a church community such as ours has taken the URC's annual theme of 'Walking The Way' very literally, with walks in Thame and Oxford so far, and one on Otmoor planned for August. We have also revived our series of 'Faith Journeys', fitting beautifully into this theme.

Finally some goodbyes, some hellos and some thanks. Goodbye to Michael Walsh, from Our lady of Lourdes, a very good friend for many years, who left for Ireland a few months ago. Goodbye, at least in one sense, to Ann Ashmore who ran a 'Mothers and Toddlers' group in the hall for many years. We extend our thanks and best wishes to both of them. Goodbye to Ann Bettess' Traidcraft stall, though thankfully not to Ann or Roger. This was a wonderful service both to the church and 'The Traidcraft Foundation' over many years, and we give thanks for that. Hello to five new church members, Ann Gajda, Mike and Elaine Matejtschuk and Martin and Emma Jee. What a joy to have five new members in such a short space of time. As far as saying thank you is concerned, I know we all work together for our church and community, so to pick out individuals can be difficult. However I am sure we all wish to give a vote of thanks to those who lead our worship, Pauline, Colin, Richard, Laurence and Mark, and to Frances for her continuing and much appreciated work as our musical director, and on a personal note, my thanks to Ellen for all her support for me in the last three years.

Next year promises to be even more challenging and exciting. 'Bring it on' as they say in some circles.

THE COGWHEEL PROJECT

Mark Williams

A summary of the Financial Position of the Project at the 28th July 2018, is printed separately, as a one-page A4 document.

The aim of the Cogwheel Project is to develop our buildings so they remain accessible, fit for purpose for the 21st century, and an inspiration to all who enter. Our planning started in 2016. By the summer of 2017 we had appointed architects, and they had proposed three options for rebuilding or refurbishing the back rooms. In October 2017 we chose to demolish and rebuild them. The new space will be called ***The Mulberry Room***.

Our Synod Officers encouraged us to undertake surveys to see what other work might be necessary to update our facilities. The surveys turned up little that we did not already know. The hall needs a new roof, a new floor that doesn't give splinters, blinds on the windows, echo suppressant on the walls and a hearing loop. Much of the west wall of the church is damp and there are cracks that need investigating, and tiles on the west roof of the church are slipping. We expected

that the total bill would come to around £290k; if we did everything on the list it would cost a further £50k, so choices may have to be made.

The generosity of everyone has been amazing. Church members and friends have pledged over £100k towards the costs (this comes to £120+ with Gift Aid), and during 2018 the wider community gave or pledged £10k, the AllChurches Trust awarded £3k, The Congregational and General Trust, £10k, and the Wessex Trust, £116k (and offered a loan of £30k should we need it). As you will see from our Treasurer's report, around £70k of our own pledges have been realised, and if all goes well, with the external grants we will have around £260k towards our target. There is still further to go, but the fundraising team has four applications pending and we are still getting generous support from members and friends (such as members of the Not So Young club and the Table Tennis club). So we remain optimistic that we'll get near enough to our target by the end of October ready for the work at the start of the New Year. (We already have the funds for the Mulberry Room, so it is only the refurbishment that will be dependent on how much extra there is in the pot).

The reason for doing this project goes wider than the buildings. We have always seen our facilities as a gift to the community. But what does the community need and wish for in the 21st century? As part of its work, the Cogwheel Project Team has consulted widely. First, we held an Awayday at Friends House on the theme 'the Future of our Church' where we heard from a sixth former from Wheatley Park School, and from the Chair of the Wheatley Society, and had the chance to discuss communication, the future of the URC, our message, as well as the specifics of the new building.

The Cogwheel Team has also consulted a range of people and organisations, including existing and potential users, as to their future plans and the needs within the local community. These consultations include the District & County Councillors responsible for Wheatley, ASDA (Wheatley) Community Champion, Parkinsons UK, Fusion Youth and Community, and the local NHS mindfulness-in-midwifery service. We have also kept in close touch with our Care for the World Ministry Team which has developed links with Mid-counties Co-op, Asylum Welcome and Sanctuary Hosting.

The feedback we have received has shown us five ways we might extend our mission to meet the needs of the local population:

- *For elderly people:* a number of our activities are already drawing together elderly and particularly elderly single people from the community. Could we extend this by hosting *memory cafes for people with dementia*?
- *For young people:* our work with young people (*Pulse*) is already addressing a particular local issue as there is little other similar provision for young

people in the area. Could we go further and provide *break-out groups, crafts and larger discussion meetings*?

- *For those seeking silence, peace or spiritual growth:* our mindfulness sitting group draws together both church and non-church people, but the congregation has the necessary expertise to go further. Could we offer *mindfulness meditation classes for the local community especially for expectant parents, those with long-term disability and those who feel 'burnt out'?*

- *For the church's Adult Education:* the church's Adult Christian Education Team already organises discussion groups and events for those who wish to learn more about faith in the modern age. Could we organise *open forum discussion meetings* that bring together people from inside and outside the church.

- *For refugees and asylum seekers:* the church has already consulted with the charities Asylum Welcome and Sanctuary Hosting about the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the local area. Could we set up *a hub for families that are hosting refugees and asylum-seekers?*

In these ways, as the building project moves ahead, we will continue to reflect on how these and other facilities can help, in very practical ways, to further our vision and mission.

ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TEAM

Tom Goss

The team is composed of: Tom Goss (co-ordinator), Sybil Beaton, Bobbie Stormont and Mark Williams.

There was a well attended and very enjoyable Creative Day in the Church Hall and Sanctuary on the 26th November 2017 in collaboration with other church members and ministry teams. It is hoped to repeat this day in 2018-2019 - watch this space!

Thank you to our Minister Pauline, to Nigel, Minister of St Mary's, and Cara who led three Bible Study groups in February 2018.

Future Events: Bobbie and Cara are planning an opportunity to participate in a small group to explore where you are on your journey and renew heart, mind and spirit using the book 'a Hidden Wholeness' by Quaker, Parker Palmer. They will create a context for careful listening, small group conversations, silence and reflective journaling. There is no start date planned for this yet and more information will follow as the planning progresses.

We will be selecting a Montgomery Trust topic for the broader community in Wheatley.

We will be initiating an event to explore what meaning the 'The Inclusive Church' has for us, as church members.

Finally: We have not met much this year due to an 'involuntary detention' by two members whilst on holiday in NZ. However, we will continue to meet again on a regular basis and plan to initiate one off events over the coming year which we hope will be attended and enjoyed by all. The ACE team will next meet on the 18th of October 2018.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE MINISTRY

Malcolm Benson

It is always a pleasure when we have families with young children worshipping with us and we hope they feel welcome despite the fact that we do not have a traditional 'Sunday School'. However the Pulse Youth group continues to meet on a Sunday evening and numbers are gradually increasing. New help is always welcome and we are hoping to recruit extra female helpers. The evening service led by the young people earlier in the year was well supported. Other ways in supporting outreach to youngsters are through the holiday club and the 'Extreme' after school club at the primary school. Please hold these activities and the needs of the local young people in your thoughts and prayers.

TREASURER AND FINANCE MINISTRY TEAM

Chris Shelley

The Income and Expenditure Account and Schedules to the 31st December 2017 are printed separately as a 2 page A4 document.

The team members for the last year have been Chris Shelley (Treasurer), Bob Webster, Christine Bainbridge and Robert Harding.

Our offerings in 2017 increased by about £700 over 2016 and for 2018, from the figures seen so far, it appears that our total offerings could increase by about £1,000 over 2017. A very encouraging result.

The Gift Aid figure of £13,286 in the 2017 accounts, represents claims for two years: 2015 - £6,794 and 2016 - £6,492. I anticipate that the claim based on our 2017 financial year, which I am in the course of preparing, will be in the region of £6,500.

Our special collections for charities almost doubled last year, compared with 2016, mainly due to two Disaster Emergency Committee appeals, for East Africa and Myanmar.

The Buckland Hall retreat did not go ahead, so the miscellaneous income item for this is offset by refunds of the deposits, in the expenditure section of the

accounts. Similarly, with the 'Big Day Out' which also did not go ahead and the refund of deposits.

Our main expenditure, as always, is the payment to the URC Ministry and Mission (M&M), which for 2017 was £20,484 and for 2018 will total £20,640. This payment goes towards the stipends of ministers in local pastorates, church related community workers, ministers working in special category posts and resource centres for learning.

In April 2018, under the 'Big Church Switch' initiative, we transferred our gas and electricity supplier from Ecotricity to Solarplicity. This ensures that we remain as 'green' as possible with our energy supplies and with unit costs being slightly lower, should also save us some money in the process.

In the miscellaneous expenditure for 2017, there is a payment for £3,545 for the Feasibility Study for our building project. This was partially offset by a URC grant of £2,000 (misc. income). This has subsequently been transferred to our 'new building project' bank account.

Towards the end of 2017, you will recall that we decided to make a loan of £1,000 over 5 years to the Oxfordshire Credit Union. Further charitable/outreach payments of £6,186 were made for 2017. We also decided that the monthly payment of £50 to Fusion would stop at the end of 2017, although we would continue to support them with any requests for finance, which would be considered as and when required. This monthly £50 was redirected for 2018, to the YMCA - Room Sponsor scheme.

You will see annotated in the 2017 accounts, against our total assets, that a figure of 'up to £7,000' had been earmarked for the stonework repairs to our High Street wall. This figure, now that the work has been completed, will in fact be about £6,000. This will be our main maintenance expenditure for 2018, plus approximately £2,000 for the upgrading of our fire security precautions, following the Fire Risk Assessment carried out in February this year.

As you can see, the Gift Aid scheme is an excellent source of extra income for us and if anyone would like to sign up to the scheme or would like further information, please let me know. There is no additional cost to you and the main criterion, is that you pay sufficient tax to cover the 25% of your annual giving, which we can claim back from HM Revenue and Customs, in any one year.

I am obliged to remind those currently in the Gift Aid scheme, that if your tax position changes, so that the tax you pay will not cover the 25% of your annual giving that we claim back, you must please let me know.

Also, if you would like to join our offertory envelope scheme or pay your regular offering directly into the Church bank account, then please speak to me.

Finally, many thanks for your continued generous giving!

HOSPITALITY MINISTRY TEAM

Catherine Harding

The team continues to co-ordinate the refreshments for Sunday morning coffee, shared lunches, the anniversary and the fête during the year and to try and find different ways to decorate the church for the anniversary, Christmas and Easter. We review past events at our meetings to try and ensure that we are ministering effectively and look to make changes where necessary. We would welcome more help serving coffee on Sunday mornings.

FLOWERS ON SUNDAY

Allison Towner

It is always a pleasure to have the flowers in the sanctuary and the porch. Sometimes very elaborate, and sometimes very simple, but they are given and placed with love and dedication to enhance the decoration of the church. We appreciate – and give thanks – to all those who give their time and flowers to Wheatley United Reformed Church.

PASTORAL CARE

Ann Bettess

There were no major innovations in our activities this year. Members of the team continued to visit people who would otherwise be socially isolated, in their own homes or in nursing homes – mostly in the Triangle Care Home.

The Not-So-Young club, which our team supports, is flourishing, with bingo, outings and visiting speakers. Local supermarket ASDA made a grant for the purchase of a bingo machine and provided cakes and helpers for a Christmas party.

The tea parties on the first Sunday of the month continue to be popular. Without naming names, at least 2 new guests this year have derived huge benefit from coming to them. It was a first step towards re-engaging in social life for both of them. This demonstrates the value of drawing people to an undemanding, inclusive social event.

The teas were never intended to be a fund raiser, but at the request of our guests we put out a collection bowl for the Alzheimer's Society. Our records show that in our short first year, May to December 2016, we sent £202.58. Next year January to December 2017 we sent £276.34, and already for the first 6 months only of this year we have sent £216.40.

Two of us now help at the Community Emergency Foodbank at St. Francis church in Hollow Way Road in Oxford where it has been held every Tuesday and

Friday for ten years. Forty different agencies refer desperate people to us, who come with a numbered form and receive a wide range of mainly tinned food from a standard list. We thank the congregations who give the food so generously, and Wheatley's Coop which supports us. Sometimes other supermarkets give fresh vegetables, bread etc. which clients can take. As volunteers we do our best to make people feel welcome with a smile, a cup of tea or coffee and a listening ear. We cannot solve their problems but hope they go away feeling more positive. Frances has written more about this Foodbank for the next Newsletter.

THURSDAY PRAYER BREAKFAST

Ann Hardiman

This year has seen an increase in the numbers coming to Prayer Breakfasts on Thursday mornings, often ten of us. The really pleasing thing is that the group has become ecumenical which was how it was set up some decades ago. We meet at 8am in church for prayers for the world, for the communities in which we live and for our churches, for compassion and for action. Then comes breakfast at which we occasionally welcome some of those who arrive early for the meditation group which begins at 9 o'clock. Do get up early one Thursday and join us!

MONTHLY COFFEE MORNINGS & CHURCH OPEN

Barbara Joiner

It is many years now since the first Thursday coffee mornings, run then by Marjorie Jackson and Vera Shepherd, but we still continue in the same vein. We have regular people who come but sometimes we get a visitor to the village who happens to see the notice outside, which is great. Usually they look round the church and admire the simplicity of the Sanctuary. On average we use one full coffee pot enough for 12 people. We also have a few books for people to borrow or swop. I am always grateful to all who help, in particular Frances Simpson, Zena Knight and Moira Watson.

TABLE TENNIS

Pat Simpson

The Table Tennis Group in the URC Hall continues in popularity on Friday mornings at 10 am until Noon. All equipment is supplied, and it is open to everyone, on a come-when-you-can basis. It is a very good-natured and easy-going group who enjoy the companionship and exercise.

The donation of £1 each session from each member last year allowed a contribution of £500 towards the use of the URC Hall. There is also a continuing voluntary collection for the Cogwheel Building Project this year, and so far this has raised £117.90.

Unfortunately this year one of our members suffered a broken hip in a fall but is now recovering well. The annual lunch, a very sociable event, was again held in January at “The Harvester”. Do come, meet friends, have a cup of coffee and a biscuit and have fun too.

TAIZE PRAYER AT 3 BARNS CLOSE, HOLTON

Christine And Richard Bainbridge

We now meet twice a month. The number of people coming is small but we believe that it fulfils a need for some people and provides a moment of quiet and reflection. It is possible to use material that might be difficult in a larger context. It allows everyone to participate and contribute which again is not always possible in a normal service.

We have invited people over the years but are now resolved to see those who come doing so on a varied basis. As in other areas of the church an ageing group have commitments and opportunities which is to be celebrated.

We provide a haven for people to come and go and will continue to do so while we can.

CARE FOR THE WORLD

Liz Barry

Our team has increased to 9 members this year, though not all being able to attend each meeting, and our thanks go particularly to Pauline for her regular support and contribution.

Women’s World Day of Prayer focused on Suriname and was held in Wheatley on the snowiest day of winter. Despite the icy weather more men and women attended than last year, the conditions adding to the poignancy of this world wide movement which allocates grants to international aid projects, this year with the theme of ‘All God’s Creation’. The service had been weeks in the planning, with participants coming from all the Wheatley churches and community.

This year we have put much of our energies into researching how best to proceed with our commitment to help (mainly Syrian) refugees in Oxford. Both Asylum Welcome and Sanctuary Hosting gave challenging presentations at an open meeting one morning in February and answered many questions. This was

followed by a Fairtrade Soup Lunch attended by over 40 people from churches and the village community. A further meeting of interested parties enabled us to draw up a list of what we could offer to Asylum Welcome, and our representatives have attended their 'Open House' and visited to discuss practicalities. Following a CCOW [Christian Concern for One World] conference, it was agreed that a Wheatley group might be established to take this forward at some future date, when time and individual commitments permit. The Team has now circulated a letter proposing a date of February 16th next year to reappraise and take stock.

On behalf of the church we have agreed to respond to the appeal by the Refugee Council Therapeutic Service by donating the proceeds of the harvest festival collection on 7th October.

The links with the Co-op have provided help with the soup lunches and the fete, while giving their staff opportunities to fulfil their required hours of community service. They have pledged to give funds in support of both the Cogwheel Project and our collection for the Oxford Community Emergency Foodbank.

The work of Christian Aid and also our commitment to Fair Trade are supported by the Team and reported elsewhere under WAC and Traidcraft.

TRAIDCRAFT

Ann Bettess

Since the final stall on 17th June this year, there has been no Traidcraft stall. This is very sad for a church which sees itself as concerned about world justice.

We miss the opportunity to support fair trade, and do not have the impetus to campaign on justice in world trade. Perhaps a new Fair Trade group could change the emphasis of the role, with a bit less loading and unloading boxes, and a bit more talking and writing articles? Could you assemble a small team to have a go?

MAINTENANCE MINISTRY TEAM

Chris Shelley

During the year the team comprised Chris with Tony Barry, Malcolm Benson and Bob Webster and dealt with a number of minor issues as they have arisen, mostly to do with noisy and inefficient plumbing and heating. Events have been overtaken somewhat by the Cogwheel Project, which has involved us in numerous surveys of the building and its various parts and uses. These have

thrown up a number of issues, which will mostly be dealt with as part of the wider Cogwheel Project.

Following the Fire Safety Inspection, we realised that we were not in compliance with the latest Fire Protection Regulations for church buildings and hadn't been for some time, so with immediate effect, works were implemented to make the escape routes from the Sanctuary and Hall areas to the rear exit of the building safer and more compliant, which included fitting emergency lighting to toilets and corridors and door closers and fire resistant sheeting to the main escape route doors in an attempt to bring them up to 30 minute fire resistance. The doors will be reviewed again as part of the ongoing project and possibly replaced with more effective and attractive purpose made doors. The emergency lighting will be continued into the new building.

These doors must never be propped open, particularly when there are numbers of people in the building, as the safety of people seeking to escape could be seriously compromised in an emergency situation. Appropriate notices are yet to be placed on or near these doors and in other places to remind us how to properly observe the regulations.

The Building Surveyor's quinquennial type survey of the whole building flagged up that there were several areas of damp in the lower parts of walls that will need addressing and that plaster cracks are reappearing above and below the west wall window in the Sanctuary area. Whilst the structural engineer who has looked at the cracks is not unduly concerned, he has recommended that it would be prudent to place tell-tales over the stonework beneath the plaster to establish how much movement might be taking place. We are currently waiting on a local builder to fix the tell-tales. It was also suggested that we should investigate the church roof water drainage and soak-away arrangements outside and beneath the window in question, in case this was causing some seasonal "heave" at the base of the wall, causing cracking at the weakest point of the wall, being the head of the window.

We have also had the Sanctuary floor sanded and re-sealed this year, which is the first time it has been professionally re-sealed since it went down about 18 years ago. It now looks very good again.

Finally, after much to-ing and fro-ing with various contractors about work dates, Chris has recently managed to get the defective stonework in the front High Street wall of the Church replaced and re-pointed by a very local firm of stonemasons so that it looks tidy and is wind, bird and waterproof, again. A harder Portland Stone with a distressed finish has been used, which should have a longer life in this very exposed position and should weather, to blend in with the surrounding local stone.

We shall continue to serve as best we can over the next twelve months but the usual day-to-day maintenance works are likely to be swallowed up within the bigger picture of The Cogwheel Project.

COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY TEAM

Phyllis Williams

The communications ministry team continue to support the activities of all our ministry teams through the production of the newsletter, maintaining leaflets and stationery, looking after our audio-visual systems, and ensuring our noticeboards and online presence are maintained.

Newsletter

After many years Barbara Joiner has decided to give up editing the newsletter on a regular basis and we thank her warmly for all the work she has done for us. Bobbie Stormont has accepted the challenge and Jim and Moira continue to share the load. Ann Hardiman distributes the paper copies and keeps in touch with old members. Contributions are welcome to the email address <newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk>

As well as producing a paper copy for all members and friends on the fourth Sunday of the month, our Newsletter archive is available for download at wheatleyurc.org.uk/about/newsletters/. We have decided with the blessing of the elders to make this freely available as it is no longer necessary to obtain a password in order to access it. In order to do this we will in future no longer include our 'News of the Church Family' feature in the interest of the privacy of those involved. The online version of the newsletter is a useful facility for friends who have moved away from the area and who want to keep in touch, but any members and friends of the church can register to be able to access it. It is not necessary to discontinue receiving the paper copy but some have chosen not to receive a paper copy and to rely on the online version, which makes a very small saving in postage.

Stationery

Zena keeps an eye on our stationery, leaflets in the foyer etc. but we are always grateful when anyone notices that something needs to be updated!

Online Presence

We maintain a presence online at www.wheatleyurc.org.uk and a Facebook page [@WheatleyURC](https://www.facebook.com/WheatleyURC). If you are a Facebook user please like us! Events are posted in both these places as well as in the Newsletter.

Sermons Online

We continue to put a selection of sermons online. These can be listened to at wheatleyurc.org.uk/worship/sermons/ or click through the link from the front page of the website. In the past year we have 30 sermons available online and they have been downloaded an average of 43 times each. The most any one sermon has been downloaded is 100. But older recordings are still being listened to so that the number of times a sermon is listened to increases with the length of time it has been online. We now have an archive of 213 sermons from 41 preachers since we began recording in May 2010. The total number of times a sermon has been downloaded is 28,582, an average of 134 times per sermon and 3 of those older sermons have been downloaded over 750 times.

Noticeboards

Posters have been produced for the Fete, for Wheatley Area Churches Easter services, for One World Week. Every effort is made to keep notices tidy and up-to-date. We hope to be able to produce some more attractive large posters for general use in the coming year.

Audio-Visual System

We continue to make good use of the AV system. As with all technology it requires a degree of 'tweaking' to keep it in best condition. We would really appreciate more help with this.

CHRISTIAN AID

Liz Barry

This year, with encouragement from Christian Aid, and help from the coordinators and supporters in the other churches and the village, we delivered envelopes with a request to return them to a Merry Bells event, or to 82 High St. Of the envelopes that were returned, most contained larger amounts, certainly more Gift Aids, and less 'shrapnel'. In all £.2,371.83 was donated and almost half was gift-aided, which should produce a further £293. Many thanks to all concerned.

In July a representative from St Mary's Church and I attended a feed-back and brainstorming session with Christian Aid staff for Bucks, Beds and Oxon at which many groups reported doing things differently this year, many as in Wheatley. Other suggestions for the future included targeting local shops, the post office and nominated homes in each road, and establishing secure collection points for the week of collection.

In Wheatley donations were down this year due to the design of the envelopes which were too 'wordy' and need a clearer message. There was a

reluctance to fill and return envelopes when house to house collecting was stopped. There were too many other events happening on the day of the Merry Bells ‘Tea Party’. There were safeguarding issues around door-to-door collections for older people. Discouraging reports from Haiti and overseas agencies generally. Next year we will try collections at railway stations with better publicity for a big event at the end of the week and we will encourage TEXT donations.

BUSTER’S JAZZ APPRECIATION GROUP – FROM HILL TO BEECH

Tony Barry

People may recall that Buster’s was formed as a fundraiser for the last major Church refurbishment project at the turn of the last century, charging people £10 per head for a series of 5 or 6 music & games evenings with suitable refreshments being offered. These included talks and/or a demonstrations to illustrate a style or genre of jazz music. It was hosted at our house on Old Road and accordingly became affectionately known as **“Buster’s on the Hill”** and was overseen by Buster the cat, who usually made him self scarce at the first bar of music or sometimes on the arrival of the first guest! It proved so successful, that we just carried on and attracted folk from beyond the church family. It has been interesting to see how much interest there is amongst the people of Wheatley for this type of music and from our more popular traditional beginnings we have come to embrace modern jazz and blues music as well.

As Buster’s got larger, we moved into the Church Hall on fifth Fridays of the month and we became redubbed as **“Buster’s off the Square”**, but sans chat!

During its life Buster’s has also promoted several jazz events, including a big-band concert in The Primary School with a band called “Soundforce” in which local Granary Church musician Karl Turner (now a family member of Wheatley Community Church) was one of the trombone players. It raised £800 to buy a new fishing boat for a Thai fishing village, after the tsunami had wrecked all their boats. We were invited to name the boat – we called it Sound Buster! (“Soundforce” are still making music locally and I heard them this summer, at one of Oxford City Golf Club’s monthly big-band evenings.) Also, a couple of years ago, we were partners with Holton Village Hall Committee in promoting a concert by George Haslam’s Abingdon Big Band and a small group of young London musicians, to raise money for Holton Church’s Restoration Appeal and a new fund being set up by the Whitworth Family to help aspiring young musicians, in memory of their musician son James, tragically killed in a London traffic incident. (James had been a Wheatley Park student friend of Ed Shelley’s and had played his saxophone at an early Buster’s evening on at least one occasion). Buster’s has also inspired a series

of Wheatley Area Churches evening jazz services, in the past, at the URC and a couple of recordings of celebrated jazz masses which we played in the church.

Buster's is a private members group that exists to meet local folks shared interests in jazz music and raises money by donations for various charities and local causes and links church members with non-church folk from the village and embraces the URC's aspirations for continued community outreach.

This "year" we have only had two meets, both at our new home in Beech Road, ("**Buster's on the Beech**"?!) where we played some early "vinyl" on Good Friday, which included a Fred Waring's Pennsylvania Glee Club Singers rendering of "The Holy City" and a spiritual version of "The Easter Story". On the second meeting we revisited the music of New Orleans with a potted historical tour of musicians associated with the city from the early 20th century "Storyville" days of drunkenness and prostitution to its present day incarnation as a 21st century tourist venue. However, in lieu, many group members have been enjoying live dinner jazz on a regular weekly basis with Alyn Shipton's band "Cat Among the Pigeons" at The Lassco Three Pigeons pub venue at Milton Common.

After our last meet in July, we were able to send £45 to Asylum Welcome in Oxford.

New jazz loving members are always welcome.

WHEATLEY AREA CHURCHES

Tony Barry

The year started with Edna Ackroyd in the Chair (St Bartholomew's, Holton) and ended with John Guy (Our Lady of Lourdes) in Office for the next two years, having been unanimously voted in at the May AGM. Val Farmer (St Mary's) remains as Hon. Secretary and Margaret Wilson (St Mary's) remains as Hon Treasurer. The Committee for 2017/18 is made up as follows:

Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Wheatley. (2) John Guy and Mike McIlvenna

St Bartholomew's Church, Holton. (2) Rev. David Bendor-Samuel and Edna Ackroyd.

St Mary's Church, Wheatley. (3) Rev. Nigel Hawkes, Val Farmer and Margaret Wilson.

Wheatley Community Church (2) Pastor Dustin Fox and David Evans.

Wheatley United Reformed Church (2+1?) Rev. Pauline Main, Tony Barry and **A.N.OTHER, please!?**

Wheatley "Fusion"* Youth & Community (1) Gordon Ewbank. "Fusion" nationally has been re-branded this year as "Shift" Joint events organised and/or supported by the committee this year were:

"Fusion" Summer Holiday Kids' Week.

Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust Annual "Ride & Stride",
One World Week Events and publicity,
Remembrance Sunday Service in St Mary's & The Memorial Garden,
Distribution of Christmas Cards around the village,
The Village Carol Service at St Mary's,
A short Service of Carols at The Triangle Nursing Home
Carol Singing at Asda,
The Women's World Day of Prayer at The URC,
The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
Some sharing in Winter House Groups,
Lent Soup Lunches in aid of Christian Aid
Distribution of Easter Cards around the village,
Holy Week Breakfast Meditations at The URC
Good Friday Stations of The Cross at Our Lady of Lourdes, before
The Good Friday Procession of The Cross around the village,
followed by Hot Cross Buns at St Mary's,
"Fusion" St George's Day Family Festival,
Distribution of Welcome Leaflets and Invitation to new residents at Mill
Green
Hosting of a BBQ at St Mary's Vicarage for New Mill residents,
Distribution of envelopes for Christian Aid Week,
Hosting of a Christian Aid Week Event at The Merry Bells for receiving
envelopes.
Picnic Lunch and AGM at The Merry Bells and The Bensons' garden,

Also, throughout the year:

The ad hoc distribution of Welcome Packs to new residents, a weekly youth group at The URC and monthly Friday morning visiting to the Triangle Nursing Home.

Next year - More of the same and Chairman's aspiration to formally register all the churches and possibly even The Village as being "**Fair Trade**". (URC already is).



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