
Year Review



2017



1 Church - 5 Locations

The local church is the hope of the world

Team Rector's Report

My brothers and sisters,

What a joy to share in this wonderful benefice and our common sacramental life. In 2017 we were fortunate to have Ross join us as Curate in the team (in July) and Ness join us as Team Vicar (in September). And we have seen another significant change as the Parish of Minster Lovell joined the Parish of Witney and we became the Benefice of Witney - two parishes united in a common cause. It is good to be working much more closely together as we share so much.



One of my heroes, Oscar Romero once said, *'Living in Community is not a matter of choice but of calling. Christianity demands, by vocation, the forming of community.'* Our communities have to embody the values of the Gospel and be leaven to the world, extending God's Kingdom. Bishop Steven in his challenge puts it that we are called to be a Christ-like community, **Contemplative, Compassionate and Courageous**.

As we seek to live out the calling of community we have to encourage one another to see God as an active agent in our lives, and tell again the stories that form and shape us to be those who know the light of the gospel. In our benefice we see so many examples of sacrifice, generosity and teamwork. I want to thank all who make this such a wonderful place and who open our churches to new comers and take the good news out into the places we serve as we seek to form community - not a matter of choice but of calling.

Grace and Peace

Toby Wright

Rector of Witney & Vicar of Minster Lovell



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inherit
kingdom **Blessed** mourn thirst
Contemplative
spirit poor righteousness
hunger **mercy** filled
Compassionate meek
merciful pure in heart
heaven children of God
Courageous
comforted peacemakers

1. Mission

- We are an inclusive church embracing a hospitable Christianity.
- We are five Church of England churches, some large and some small, serving the town of Witney and the villages round about.
- We are here to worship God and to help each other to grow in faith.
- We are committed to living our lives in the love, joy and hope of the risen Christ.
- You can find us in church, in schools, in hospitals, village halls, supermarkets, nursing homes, up late with the Street Pastors, at the toddler group... wherever people are.



2. Financial Summary of the Parish of Witney

Statement of Financial Activities as at 31st December 2017

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total funds	Prior year total funds
Incoming resources					
Income from:					
Donations and legacies	£ 170,853	£ 338,094		£ 508,947	£ 217,659
Other trading activities	£ 36,937	£ 5,798		£ 42,735	£ 45,779
Investments	£ 32	-		£ 32	£ 53
Charitable activities	£ 12,041	-		£12,041	£ 14,584
Other incoming resources	£ 10,578	-		£ 10,578	£ 2,431
Total income	£ 230,441	£ 343,892	-	£ 574,333	£ 280,506
Expenditure on:					
Generating funds		£ 952		£ 952	£ 342
Generating voluntary income	£ 5,586	£ 930		£ 6,516	£ 4,108
Charitable activities	£ 227,759	£ 383,515		£ 611,274	£ 257,255
Other resources used	-	-		-	-
Total expenditure	£ 233,345	£ 385,397	-	£ 618,742	£ 261,705
Net income/expenditure before transfers	(£ 2,904)	(£ 41,505)	-	(£ 44,409)	£ 18,801

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2017

	2017	2016
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	£16,846	£18,819
	£16,846	£18,819
Current assets		
Debtors	£13,859	£2,042
Cash at bank and in hand	£144,073	£149,386
	£157,932	£151,428
Liabilities		
Creditors: Amounts falling due in one year	£59,860	£10,920
Provision for liabilities due within one year	£0	£0
	£59,860	£10,920
Net current assets less current liabilities	£98,072	£140,508
Total assets less current liabilities	£114,918	£159,327
Total net assets less liabilities	£114,918	£159,327

The Parish of Witney Finances

The total income for the year ended 31st December 2017 was £574,333 while total expenditure amounted to £618,334.

Both 2017 income and expenditure figures reflect the fact that a number of major projects have been progressed across the Parish during the year; the repair and refurbishment of the chancel roof at St Mary's, the repair and restoration of the floor at St John's, Hailey and the installation of a new lighting scheme at Holy Trinity.

The core operating costs for the Parish as a whole were £233,345. This includes a one off expense relating to the installation of the new lighting scheme at Holy Trinity; excluding this one off cost, the day to day running costs of the Parish over the year amounted to £204,898. Unrestricted income totalled £230,441 resulting in a small operating loss of £2,904 approximately equivalent to the increase in Parish Share between 2016 and 2017.

We are extremely encouraged and hugely grateful to report that the giving from across our congregations to support the running of the Parish has increased by 11% over 2016 to £145,024. This covers 70% of our core costs, with the remaining income coming from Festivals, Grants, Weddings & Funerals and Church Lettings.

2.1 Hailey DCC Finances

The major emphasis this year at St John's has been fundraising and subsequent resulting work on our floor project. During 2017 roughly £37,000 for this project was raised through fundraising, donations and grant applications. The majority of the work has been completed and about £53,000 was spent in 2017. We still have in the region of £22,000 in our floor fund to complete the work on the floor and associated updates in the church. In total we have raised around £86,000 and spent in the region of £64,000. In addition to the fundraising related to the floor project, we have continued to raise money for our general fund through our monthly Village Lunches, which in 2017 raised £1700 with an additional amount of £1300 raised for charity from other events.

Marjorie Otley

2.2 HT DCC Finances

We completed our final planned major refurbishment to the church in 2017, the lighting project, which was a great success. The remaining amount left from Prue Carpenter's legacy along with some generous donations achieved our goal. VAT was been claimed back quickly after each payment leaving us with a reasonable balance of just over £18K at the end of 2017, however, we have two remaining invoices to pay to finalise this project which will reduce our balance further.

Near to the end of 2017 a problem began to appear with Holy Trinity's organ and so we start 2018 with this potentially large additional cost looming. The roof requires a small amount of tile repair that has thankfully been quoted as a small sum. We are aware that our funds will possibly be shortly depleted and so we are conscious that a fundraising plan must be put in place to maintain a healthy balance in our account.

Marilyn Wathes

2.3 SM DCC Finances

Upkeep of the fabric continues to be a challenge, but we have been able to undertake minor repairs in addition to the main Campaign (dealt with elsewhere) which, of course, does affect the amount of other income we can expect. The main fundraising event for St Mary's general funds is Witney Feast and this continues to attract many visitors into the church. The monthly Acoustic Room event is a valuable regular income, and we are really grateful to Jean and Colin Greenway for organising this.

We have benefitted from a generous legacy from the late Ben Baughan to be used for the development of our choir and music; a donation to enable a wooden statue of our Lady of Walsingham to be displayed has also been received.

Our funds continue to be in a good state, although we never know when we will need to find a few thousand pounds at short notice to deal with an emergency repair. Thanks are due to all who have contributed or fundraised to enable us to continue to welcome visitors to our magnificent building.

Ian Meyrick

3 Review of the year

3.1 Witney Churchwarden's Report

The Parish has seen further progress on maintenance and improvements to our churches. We are thankful to everyone who gives so generously of their time and money, sometimes in the most discreet ways. We are so grateful to all who hold positions of responsibility here, in a voluntary capacity, and we extend our gratitude to include Michelle, in the Parish Office, and our paid organists Francis Rumsey and Paul Francis.

We are very fortunate in having an extraordinarily capable Ministry Team ably supported by our retired clergy without whom we couldn't function in the way we do.

A group from the parish had a happy and successful trip to the Holy Land guided by Alastair Blaine, last February.

We have enjoyed another year with a Beer festival, WFoFaD and, as a first, the Oktoberfest, along with a highly successful ball in June.

The Parish said its farewells to Neil and Jill Traynor, Harriet (and Asa) at a special evensong in February. Jill had accepted the post as warden for the Pathfinders Fellowship and thus the family found themselves residing in W8! Neil was much appreciated in the parish with his particular skills in funeral ministry, in addition to baptisms and marriages. He had a fine understanding of The Liturgy and Early Church Music, alongside tremendous administrative capabilities.

The clergy have held collective worship in six schools, with several schools visiting St Mary's during the Feast, when they learned about The Holy Trinity.

The Clergy visit and administer the Sacrament, assisted by members of our congregations, to residents of: St Mary's Mead , Fernleigh and Richmond Village, along with Cedar Court, Middletown Grange, Mill House and Merryfield House.

As a parish, we have walked in the Oxfordshire countryside, met together for meals and social activities, visited people and welcomed newcomers into our midst.

We said fond farewells to Alastair Blaine after four happy years, and waved him off to become a chaplain in the Royal Navy. Alastair contributed enormously to the life of, and the humour within, the parish!

Ross, our curate, was ordained deacon at Christchurch in June 2017 and we look forward with enthusiasm to his ordination to the priesthood this June.

We are very fortunate in having Ness who joined us as Team Vicar in September, and congratulate her on having survived two house moves in 6 weeks. It is a delight to have both Ness and Ross on the Ministry Team. We warmly welcome Martin who is married to Ness, and their two children, Barney and Nadia.

The Parish Retreat was held at St Mary's convent in Wantage in the autumn, led by Toby and Ness.

Minster Lovell has joined the Parish of Witney and, combined, we have formed the Benefice of Witney. We look forward to our on-going partnership and to getting to know each other more.

Finally we remember the souls of the faithful departed, those whom we have loved and see no more. May they Rest in Peace and Rise in Glory.

Josie Holmes & Charlotte Tremain



3.2 Minster Lovell Churchwarden's Report

The PCC of St Kenelm's at Minster Lovell voted unanimously early last autumn to explore the possibilities of joining the Witney Benefice – and here we are!

By late autumn the Revd Toby Wright and his team had welcomed us into the circle of churches comprising the Benefice.

Becoming part of the Witney Benefice has meant a welcome return to a more traditional rite – albeit with an earlier service time. We have spent much time in the last year sorting our priorities and are reassured that, despite the changes, our congregation has been supportive and encouraging. We look to the future with faith and renewed optimism.

Judith Warwick & Kirsty Strainge

3.3 Witney PCC Report

The PCC met six times during the year.

- The PCC received regular reports from individual churches and approved faculties for work at St Mary's, Holy Trinity and St John's, Hailey.
- The Benefice of Witney now includes the Parish of Minster Lovell and the two parishes have started working and worshipping together.
- The Safeguarding Policy for working with children and vulnerable adults has been revised.
- The PCC is grateful for the work put in to producing a detailed report on all aspects of Communications in the parish, both how can improve communications within the parish and ways in which we communicate with others. Work has started to take this forward and implement some of the recommendations.
- The PCC has reviewed the terms of reference of the Finance committee, the Personnel committee and District Church Councils.
- The PCC has reviewed the Health & Safety policy, Fire Safety policy, Equal Opportunities policy, Financial policy and procedures, Conflict of Interest policy, Marriage Policy, Baptism policy, Whistleblowing Policy and policy for the Admission of Children to Holy Communion.

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- The PCC organised a meeting with a representative of the Fire Service to look at fire prevention and management of fires in our churches.

Kate Lockwood

3.4 Fabric Reports

3.4.1 Saint Mary's Church Fabric Report

2017 has been a busy and expensive year for St Mary's. The most obvious change has been major works on the chancel. This involved the removal of asbestos and the installation of a new Stonesfield slate roof. A new cross was also fitted to the apex of the gable end.

The chancel has been redecorated. This involved repainting and the creation of a Vault of Heaven on the ceiling which depicts the night sky as it was when a glider crashed into the spire of St Mary's during the Second World War. Some of the ribs on the ceiling were painted green with a gold vine leaf pattern.

Other works include:

- The lock on the South door was replaced.
- Old plaster was removed from the South wall and three coats of new lime plaster were applied.
- Taps were replaced and a new Dimplex storage heater fitted in the toilet area.
- Three LED lights have been fitted in St George's Chapel and new high level lamps in the nave.
- A new dimplex storage heater installed in the toilet area.
- Temporary repairs to part of the floor because of wet rot and Death Watch beetle damage. The floor is still a cause for concern and the problem is spreading. The replacement of the floor is now a matter of some urgency.

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- The septic tank has been emptied and has been found to be in a bad condition. It may be necessary to get connected to the mains drainage soon.
 - A new lock on the glebe gateway.
 - Silt has been removed from all the gulleys and catchpits.
 - The West door has been treated with Tung Oil.
 - The front gate pillar masonry has been repaired having been hit by a vehicle.
 - A Cedar of Lebanon had to be cut back to make it safe after being damaged by heavy snow.
 - From the above it will be apparent that 2017 has been both busy and expensive and due to ongoing problems with the floor and the septic tank 2018 is also likely to be busy and expensive.

Nicola Carter

3.4.2 Holy Trinity Church Fabric Report

The main focus of attention this year was the complete renewal of the lighting in the church, vestry and Trinity Room, which took place over the summer. We were able to use the church on Sundays using temporary “fairy lights”. We now have a variety of lighting settings to use at the push of a button for different occasions, and we are able to light the east window in the evenings to make the building a more visible presence on the green.

In the summer a working party cut down a very overgrown laurel bush in the churchyard which has also made a big difference to the views of the church. Agreement was finally reached with the Town Council to cut back and raise the lower branches of several of the trees to open up the churchyard even more and to prevent branches overhanging the roof of the building. This work was done in February 2018.

The Quinquennial inspection took place in March, with no major problems reported. Some slates need replacing on the roof and

repointing on the outside of the church and boundary walls. The DCC will undertake to do the various repairs over the next couple of years.

The oil candles have been replaced with new ones and work well. The regular servicing took place for the heaters and fire extinguishers and PAT testing.

Lorna Whitehouse

3.4.3 Hailey Church Fabric Report

Whilst normal maintenance was carried out to St John's church over the period, the year was inevitably dominated by talk, followed by action to renew our sinking floor.

Having opened on the low note of a rejection of our application for assistance with funds to replace the whole floor, it ended on the high note of not only a new Block and Beam floor covering three fifths of the floor area but also refurbished and extended heating and lighting systems, a new servery, and a new toilet to disabled standards contained within a redesigned vestry.

The opportunity was also taken to move the font to its rightful liturgical position adjacent to the Main Door.

Elpie Lewis & Sue Drew

3.4.4 Curbridge Church Fabric Report

The Church Building is in good repair with little outstanding from the Quinquennial Inspection of 2016. A roof ridge tile was replaced by a volunteer and a generous donor paid for a further stretch of Churchyard wall to be rebuilt. Internally the wood block floor was sanded and resealed, the old carpet removed and a new carpet put down in the sanctuary which was paid for by the Friends of Curbridge Church. We hope to have another morning of Churchyard tidying when the weather has improved.

Tim Partridge

3.4.5 St Kenelm's Church Fabric Report

After renovation of our main roof five years ago, we now face repair of our side aisle roofs, and an update of our store room and basic facilities into an exhibition area, with servery and disabled cloakroom. We await the end of the bat breeding season before work commences on the roofs in the autumn.

Judith Warwick and Kirsty Strainge

3.5 Church Reports

3.5.1 Saint Mary's Church Report

What an exciting year this has been. Thanks to monies from the Heritage Lottery Fund and many generous donations we have been able to renew and repair the Chancel roof. The project also included the refurbishment of the interior of the Chancel including a new lighting system and a decorated ceiling commemorating events in Witney during the Second World War. Fund raising for this major project was ably spearheaded by Robin Brunner-Ellis and Judy Brooks.

On 25th January the newly installed Bishop of Oxford, Bishop Steven visited St Mary's as part of his tour of the Witney Deanery.

As in previous years one of the first events in February was a confirmation service presided by Bishop Colin, Bishop of Dorchester followed by a shared lunch.

During the summer we held our usual festivals such as the Beer Festival in April followed shortly afterwards with the Food and Drink Festival in May. Both drew in many people from Witney and surrounding areas and raised considerable amounts of money for the upkeep of our churches.

On a lovely summer's evening in June a Grand Ball was held in the church to raise money for the Sepsis Unit in the John Radcliffe Hospital and also church funds. This was a well supported and a very successful event.

The following day 18th June we said farewell to our Curate Alastair Blaine. After the Sunday morning service there was a presentation of gifts and a cheque from the whole parish. A song with actions had been especially written with a nautical theme as he was now planning to become a naval chaplain after four years with us. This was followed by a bring and share lunch on The Leys recreation ground with games for all.

Also during June interviews took place for a new Team Vicar. Ness Whiffin was duly appointed. Her licensing by Bishop Colin took place on 6th September in St Mary's supported by many people from her previous parish in Wiltshire and from the Witney parish. The service was followed by refreshments.

Ross Meikle joined us as Alastair's replacement and his ordination as deacon took place at Christ Church Cathedral on 1st July followed by his first service in St Mary's the next day.

Bishop Steven joined us for the annual Witney Feast celebrations presiding over the 6-00pm service in the church followed by the fairground service on the gallopers.

St Mary's continues to be a significant place of worship in Witney. We experience many visitors from all over the world and our congregations continue to grow throughout the year.

December is our busiest month. It includes many school carol services, some by candle light, and also the Mayors carol service. Radio Oxford used the church as a venue to record a carol service. This included carols and songs sung by school choirs from Witney. It was then broadcast on Christmas Day.

On Christmas Eve nearly a hundred children attended a crib service in the afternoon. Also the carol service at 6-00pm was attended by over four hundred people when a collection was held for the Fire Fighters Charity.

Josie Holmes

3.5.2 Holy Trinity Church Report

Holy Trinity is hugely grateful for its marvellous new lighting system, made possible by the late Prue Carpenter's substantial bequest,

alongside generous contributions from members of the congregation and a grant from OHCT.

We held a very successful Wreath Making event before Christmas, under the artistic guidance of local florist, Rachel Jones, which raised almost £500 for the parish general fund.

Holy Trinity enjoyed the hosting of the Benefice Advent Carol Service and Ross Meikle's Desert Island discs.

Our choir had a good day out at the Free Choirs Festival in Worcester Cathedral in the autumn and we welcomed a record number of people to our own Service of Lessons and Carols.

Numbers were up at Midnight Mass and Christmas morning too.

Anyone interested in joining the choir which rehearses on a Wednesday evening may contact Paul Francis francisoxo@aol.com.

Our Vision Group is meeting on a regular basis.

We are thrilled to have welcomed Ness to the Ministry Team as Team Vicar, in addition to Ross, a little earlier in the year, as our curate.

It has been a great sadness to say farewell to Ann and Phil Platt after many years service across this parish in a variety of ways. They will be greatly missed.

We are always appreciative and thankful for the work that is carried out by members of the congregation, without which we could not function.

We remember David Claremont and Maurice Edwards who served and supported Holy Trinity in differing ways, both of whom died in 2017. May they Rest in Peace.

Charlotte Tremain

3.5.3 Hailey Church Report

This has been an eventful year in the life of Hailey Church.

We have welcomed Ness and Ross into the parish, and are delighted to have them amongst us, together with all the clergy who support us. Thank you to all the team for their leadership of all our services and for their pastoral care. We appreciate the time they are able to

spend with us, although at times we do feel a little distant from the parish communication hub.

The main news is that the Floor has been Fixed. Over the past two years we have raised sufficient funds through many fundraising events, generous local donations and the support of a variety of trusts, to fulfil this project, and it is now very nearly complete. You can read all about this in the fabric report, but we now have a level floor, a vestry, a bigger disabled loo, a galley kitchen, improved heating and lighting, and much more useful space at the back of the church.

All in all, this is a great result, and a huge thank you goes to Michael Drew who has project managed the whole scheme, and to all the local businesses who have carried out the work. Now we are thinking of what new, imaginative things we can do with our lovely church.

We became a peripatetic congregation during the works and this has been a positive experience; most of our Sunday services were held in Hailey School Hall, and a big thank you goes to Debbie Davies for allowing this. Other services were held in Breach Wood, Middle Farm, Swanhall Barn, Witheridge farmyard, and our Remembrance Day service was held in the Subaru Garage opposite the village War Memorial.

Our Thursday services were held in Middletown Grange where we welcomed residents joining us. Now the church is open again we continue to have services there twice a month, and are looking towards becoming a Dementia Friendly church.

The churchyard has coped with the building works remarkably well, and we are planning a hands-on day in early March to tidy things up.

There are many people to thank for their great contributions throughout the year. John Haskell and Sue Drew, as sacristans, have managed to pack up all the items we needed for each service, and then transported them to wherever we were going, with amazing diligence. A big thank you to our organists Amalya, Barbara and Jeremy, who give their time and talents so generously, and to our servers, Kate and Yvonne.

There are too many others to name individually but you will know who you are, and we say thank you very much for making Hailey church the friendly, supportive and prayerful place that it is.

The church in Hailey is closely involved in all village events, and organises the monthly Village Lunch. We are looking to start some new activities in our enlarged church space. Hailey Festival in June sees the annual Rounders Match, Fete, Scarecrows and much more, all of which involve the church.

We welcome the school for its major services throughout the year.

We look forward to a new year with excitement to see what innovations Hailey can create.

Onwards and upwards!

Elpie Lewis & Sue Drew – Deputy Wardens

3.5.4 Curbridge Church Report

In the past year we have consolidated and sought to prepare a welcome for people moving to Curbridge. Several developments are being planned or built which could double the population of the village so the challenge will be great. We have also had several special services such as the Harvest Festival, and a Remembrance Service, but unfortunately the Candlelit Carol Service which usually fills the church had to be postponed due to heavy snow. We held it with our Sunday morning Communion on the following Sunday with a number of extra people there.

We had 6 Baptisms with the church full on most occasions and about 3 funerals or thanksgiving services but no weddings this year.

In the summer we said farewell to Alastair who had been responsible for the pastoral care of Curbridge and we wish him well as a Chaplain in the Royal Navy. Gary Mulligan continues as Deputy Warden but Betty Hughes stepped down as the other Deputy Warden after a number of years in the post although she still does a lot of work in preparing for the services and helping to count and sort out the collection. We are grateful to Esther Partridge and Judy Marshall who play the organ and to the Friends of Curbridge Church who raise

funds for the Church Building and Churchyard and to the Parish Council who continue to help fund the care of the Churchyard.

Tim Partridge

3.6 Saint Mary's Inspiring Change Report

Honouring the past – renewing the present – inspiring the future

Little did we think in January that replacing our last major roof would inspire the introduction of new colour and meaning into St Mary's interior.

Our 2016 investigations prompted Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to increase funding from £143,000 to £227,700, leaving us with £129,350 to raise. Local people through *Raise the Roof* sponsored all 4,000 slates and local trusts gave an additional £69,000.

After the arrival of scaffolding and 4,000 limestone slates in June, the roof was removed, revealing the need to remove the asbestos ceiling. The opportunity of a new ceiling, new lighting and internal scaffolding cemented our plans to apply to create a unique ceiling commemorating the courage and fortitude of local people during WWII.

Work was postponed until November when 160 years of dirt was cleaned from the 28 ceiling ribs, 75 solid gold leaf stars were laid on a mid-blue 'vault of heaven' and the wing and tail lights of four planes connected with Witney during WWII painted.

1970s restoration works were reversed: removing emulsion from carved medieval details and cement render replaced with lime plaster on the lower east wall. Emulsion on all vertical walls was painted over with a breathable paint.

Robin Brunner-Ellis

3.7 Witney Deanery Synod Report

There were three Deanery Synod meetings in 2017, the first in February at St John's, Carterton; the second at St John the Baptist, Burford in June; and the final one in November at Holy Trinity, Witney.

At each of these meetings a treasurer's report was given and there was time to share news from the different churches in the Deanery.

In June Roger Faulkner from Open Doors gave us a very moving talk about the work of Open Doors. His account of the persecution of Christians in some countries, particularly in some parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia was at times painful to listen to and made us all realise how lucky we are to be living in a country where, and at a time when, we are free to practice our faith without fear.

In November Alison Webster, the Deputy Director of Mission and Jane Perry gave a presentation on the report *For Richer, For Poorer*, a study of poverty in the Oxford Diocese. After this presentation synod members were given the opportunity to break into small groups to consider the findings as they related to the Witney Deanery.

Nicola Carter

3.8 Mothers' Union Report

Faith in Action was our theme for 2017. So we enjoyed talks about the Late Night Café, Adventure Plus, Child and Family Aid in Romania and the curate's journey to the priesthood.

In November we held a service to highlight the 16 days of Activism against Gender-based Violence where we were joined by members of other local branches and members of the parishes' congregations which was very successful.

The branch has met its financial obligations to Mothers' Union and the church again this year, but has also raised an extraordinary amount of money for M.U. causes through the generosity of the members. They have also given of their time by knitting 96 items during the year for S.C.B.U at the Oxford Radcliffe hospital. We even found time to make over 100 Christmas cards towards the 1500 needed by the chaplain for the prisoners in Bullingdon Prison.

Witney Parish Mothers' Union Branch meet in the Winchester room on the second Wednesday of each month at 2pm.

Membership is open to anyone who has been baptised and who will support our aims and objectives. You don't have to be a mother, just believe in the importance of strengthening family life in society.

3.9 Acorn Parent and Toddler Report

We have enjoyed another good year at Acorns. The numbers have kept up to an average of 20 adults and 30 children most weeks. Through the year at least 80 families came to the Group from Witney and beyond. We had a 'dip' in numbers in the Autumn when we couldn't open until October, because the lighting was being changed but by Christmas we were back up to strength, and all enjoyed the entertainment, food and gifts at the annual party

The children are brought by parents, grandparents or carers, sometimes fewer parents than others attend, but all enjoy the mornings with us. We have made a number of Polish families welcome, as well as others from Turkey, Spain and South Korea and other places too. Many return regularly and we are sad when they leave us for nursery or pre-school groups. Often we are told it is the best Tots Group in town.

We have new younger helpers doing a short shift, which is great, but more are needed to keep the group going into the future. We thank them, our regular helpers and refreshment ladies for their commitment which we greatly appreciate, knowing the Group wouldn't function without them. Thanks too, to Ness and Ross who gave us all a boost when they visited, by taking an interest in what we were doing. Anyone is welcome any Thursday morning during term time. If nothing else, it is interesting to see the Church being used in a completely different way.

Esther Partridge

3.10 Seniors' Lunch Club Report

The seniors lunch at Saint Mary's takes place each month following on from the 11 o'clock Wednesday Eucharist. Up to 60 guests are catered for meaning that in the last year we have served in the region of 700 lunches. The benefits of the lunches include: provision of a nutritious meal, the creation of a valued social event, and the lunches themselves acting as an anchor for the provisions of wider pastoral care; the lunches are not an ends in themselves.

Potential growth areas over the next few years might include review and development of the kitchen and facilities at St Mary's, exploring

ways in which sustainability of the lunches can be strengthened and further developing the provision of pastoral care in the context of the lunches. For further information please contact nigelchappelle@gmail.com , or on 07494602657

3.11 Women's Group Report

The Women's Group is aimed at women from across the benefice who are in their 20s to 40s (ish). The group met on Sunday evenings, monthly, throughout 2017. Each meet varies and in 2017 included a chocolate evening, drinks out, walking, a shared meal and advent reflection.

For more information, email kayleigh.jane10@gmail.com

Kayleigh Lucas

3.12 Faith with Spice, Men's Curry Group Report

We've continued to meet at Shaan with a good turnout of regulars, including some men who do not frequently attend our church services. Our recent speakers include Mark Thomas and Ross Meikle, both new to the ministry team.

If you're interested in joining us, even if just once to see what it's all about, email ross@witneyparish.org.uk

3.13 Wholeness and Healing Report

The healing and wholeness ministry continues in the benefice, centred around a monthly Service held at one of our churches on Tuesday afternoons, led by Tim Partridge and Joy Hance, assisted by Mark Thomas. It is valued by the regular attenders, by those who come occasionally for specific needs, and by those on whose behalf we pray and administer the laying on of hands. It is also a valuable support to the weekly chaplaincy in Witney hospital exercised by Mark Thomas.

In order to help us consider the best way to continue this ministry, it would be useful to know both from those who do and who can't attend, what the best monthly practice, day and time might be in the future.

Mark Thomas

3.14 Prayer Shawl Ministry

At 2pm on the first Thursday of each month at a group of knitters and crocheters from our parish churches meet together over tea and biscuits. Each session starts with prayers. The main purpose of the meeting is to make shawls and pray for the recipients. Once completed, the shawls are blessed then wrapped and given as gifts to people who are known to be in need of a bit of comfort.

Since the group was formed this ministry has grown considerably. It is a very practical way of showing our love and support for others. During 2017 more than 20 shawls were given as gifts, each one hand delivered and the many letters of thanks are an indication of how much this form of ministry is valued.

New people are very welcome to join us. For more information please contact Georgina Evans, 7 Grangers Place, or telephone 01993-706942.

3.15 Schools Ministry

We continue our involvement with many schools in our benefice. Ross has taken over involvement with West Witney school from Alastair. Toby has started a Theology and Ethics group at the Henry Box School.

The ministry team now take collective worship to St Kenelm's school in Minster Lovell. Recently, Oxfordshire based Christian charity *BeSpace* brought Prayer Spaces into Witney Community school, which members of the ministry team helped with.

3.16 Care Home Ministry

A number of pastoral visitors and clergy regularly visit the Care Homes, Residential Homes and Nursing Homes within the Benefice. This is for either one-to-one visits to talk and listen, or just sitting quietly with someone, or leading Eucharist Services, or administering holy communion for those unable to attend a Service. Often we have conversations with support staff or a resident's family member. These kinds of encounters can often be extremely poignant as we find ourselves in a relationship of trust; it is always a privilege to be

alongside people at critical stages in their lives whilst maintaining the boundary of confidentiality. Sometimes we are able to be present to support someone who's nearing the end of their life.

We usually rely on others telling us that someone would like a visit; it's important that this is communicated with us discreetly.

3.17 Our link with Parish of Voxtorp in Växjö Diocese, Sweden

Five of us from Witney spent three days visiting our Swedish link parish in October 2017: Toby Wright, Mark Thomas, Ross Meikle, on their first visit to Voxtorp, with Charlotte Tremain and Martin Peirce. The purpose was to review the link and map the way forward. Both we and our Swedish friends are keen that our relationship should grow. Key themes to explore together remain: friendship, spirituality and mission. We agreed that it is time now to make our link more formal, with a brief document setting out our commitment to each other.

Magnus Hullfors the Parish Priest is retiring with Ulrika Zwaard succeeding him. She will be licensed on May 13th. Ulrika's link with us goes back to 2012, when she was one of the overseas missionaries joining our Parish Mission.

A group will come to Oxford and Witney, with Ulrika, from April 18th to April 23rd. There will be opportunities to sing together, and to build new friendships. We look forward to raising the profile of our friendship link within our Witney community.

3.18 Doyennes

We are a group of ladies (50ish plus) who meet locally to socialise. For many years we have met once a month for an evening meal, but more recently we have also started to meet for coffee once a month, which is proving to be popular. We do not have a set programme and our meetings are very informal.

There are about 18 who meet fairly regularly, but there is no "membership" and all are free to join us as and when their diaries allow them to, and we usually have 6 or 8 for coffee and up to 8 for

the evening meal. To ensure as many as possible are given the opportunity to join us, we alternate our meeting days each month.

For coffee we meet on either the first Tuesday or Wednesday morning of each month at the Blanket Hall, High Street, Witney. For our evening meals we meet on either the third Monday or Tuesday of each month at The Holly Bush (Mondays) or The Three Horseshoes (Tuesdays), both in Corn Street, Witney.

If any ladies would like to be kept informed of future dates and venues by email, please let me know (email: davidrtaft@hotmail.co.uk) and I'll add your details to the email list.

Linda Taft

3.19 Study Groups

Largely following the liturgical year for groups during the seasons such as Lent and Advent, we have been developing and broadening our study group programme.

We held a three day Parish Retreat in October at the Community of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage as well as a Quiet Day in Freeland. The Advent course took the form of a Book Study.

Using either published material or creating our own, we now have on offer a wide range of study groups, one-off discussions, exploration sessions, and talks all of which are intended to deepen our pilgrim journey and encourage our participation in the Diocesan vision of being a Christ-like Church. Details about all of these groups can be found in our new booklet '*Exploring Spirituality Programme*'.

3.20 Book Circle

The Book Circle, meets in the Winchester Room at St. Mary's on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 2.30. The membership is informal and although we have many regulars, others, who come only when a book or activity particularly interests them, are welcome. We arrange transport when we can, so do ask if you would like to come but need a lift.

Our members are not all from the churches of the benefice and it is good to have a wide range of ideas and opinions.

We like our programme to include recommendations from every-one in the circle which means we have an eclectic mix of fact and fiction; modern, classical, spiritual and secular books all feature. Some of our most memorable sessions have been based round poems chosen to fit a theme. Recently the subject was *Birds*. Wonderful!

Sometimes we have a play reading, and although the casting can be bizarre (and parts are usually shared), it is very enjoyable.

If Dors had her way we would watch *It's a Wonderful Life* once a year but we do occasionally have a film so you see we do not restrict ourselves to the written word. At Christmas we each selected and spoke about a winter picture. The discussion this provoked could have continued long after our usual finishing time of 4 p.m.

In August we like to have an outing instead. In 2017 Liz Wiltshire arranged a mini-bus to Burghclere. This year we hope to go to Compton Verney, an art gallery in Warwickshire.

The Hidden Life of Trees (Wohlleben), *Persuasion* (Austen), *A Room with a View* (E.M. Forster), and *Hidden Lives* (Margaret Forster) are already on the list for 2018 but look in the weekly news sheet for information about us. Do not be embarrassed to come once just to try the Book Circle. Anything you say will be listened to seriously but you won't be nagged if it's not for you and you don't come again.

Personally I never come away from the Book Circle without having learnt something and without having appreciated the friendship generated within it.

Bridget Walton

3.21 Silent Prayer

The Silent Prayer Group continued to meet throughout 2017 with varying numbers attending, average of 10 most weeks. Everyone is always made welcome.

We have a short reading from a Spiritual writer, Richard Rohr or Laurence Freeman, for example, then have half an hour of silent prayer, using our 'mantra' to keep us focussed.

We enjoy refreshments after the Prayer time.

Esther Partridge

3.22 Street Pastors

Street Pastors are out and about in Witney on Friday and Saturday evenings. There is a rota of people with a minimum of three people out at a time. Each duty starts around 10.15pm and finishes roughly around 3am so each duty is usually around 5 hours. During the year 2017 I have been on duty with the Street pastors on average once a month.

While on duty we offer

- Physical support; flip flops, bottles of water and lollipops. We can also offer basic first aid; space blankets, wound care as well as calling for assistance, ambulance or Police if necessary.
- Psychological support; this involves listening and comfort if people in distress.
- Spiritual support; offering the message of God's love and telling interested parties about our individual faith and Christian journeys.
- We also support the town council by collecting glass bottles, so removing potential weapons. We sweep up broken glass, so helping to keep the streets safer, cleaner and tidier.
- We foster good relations with bouncers, publicans and taxi drivers.

For more information contact Kay Labate via email address; Labatekay@gmail.com

Jo Gribben

3.23 Holy Land Pilgrimage

In February a group of 13 people went to the Holy Land led by Alastair Blaine. We spent four days in Jerusalem before heading north for a peaceful few days by the Sea of Galilee.

Highlights of the pilgrimage included

- A very emotional Eucharist early in the morning on the shore of the Sea of Galilee

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- Listening to Alastair singing *Bitter was the night* as we stood in the prison cell believed to have been part of the house of Caiaphas the High Priest where Jesus spent the night before he was crucified
 - Kneeling alone at the foot of the cross in the Holy Sepulchre

To quote some pilgrims:

'The pilgrimage really brought the bible to life for us'.

....'a very special and profound spiritual experience that made us feel closer to God and to each other'.

'[In the Holy Sepulchre] people of all denominations from all over the world were praying, singing, walking, sitting quietly lighting candles, kneeling at tombs. All of these things in my heart made an enormous patchwork of Humanity, Love and Faith.'

We would highly recommend it if you ever get the opportunity to go there yourself.

3.24 Charitable Giving (Parish of Witney 2017)

£113.35 The Children's Society

£211.46 Hope and Homes for Children

£211.47 Water Aid

£211.27 Citizens Advice Bureau

£997.40 Christian Aid

2000+ envelopes delivered to houses in Christian Aid week

£46.33 Witney Food Bank

17 bags of food to the Food Bank

£92.86 Grenfell Tower Appeal

£315 Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust

£645 Open Doors

£1440 The Sepsis Unit at the John Radcliffe hospital

£311.38 Save the Children Yemen Appeal

138 Christmas Boxes for Teams4U

£138 Salvation Army

A bag of hats, scarves etc for The Porch Steppin' Stone Centre

A bag of hats, scarves etc for Witney Besom

25 boxes of non-perishable goods for Witney Besom

£800 Fire Fighters Charity

£5882 Round Table charities (Beer Festival)

£232 Rotary Charities (Witney Feast)

£120 Toilet twinning

Use of church at charity-discounted rates (inc NCT and Cecily's Fund)

3.25 Christian Aid Week

The Parish's efforts in Christian Aid Week were different from previous years. Instead of door-to-door collections, often requiring collectors to be out 3 or 4 times in a week, we decided that we would only provide information to each house on how they could give on-line or via the phone. We added extra labels to the envelopes saying that we would not be collecting but, if you wanted to donate, please use one of the methods shown on the envelope. There were some very positive results from this, most notably that there was a greatly increased number of volunteers to deliver the envelopes. This enabled us to cover many more streets than previous years, as the commitment usually meant only about an hour of delivery time. Of course, we do not have a measure of success to this increased coverage - Christian Aid were unable to tell us what the response from the OX28 postcode alone had been - but it is very good that we were able to tell more people in the Parish that the Anglican churches of Witney care about the injustices of this world.

We have decided to repeat the "delivery only" strategy in 2018 as well, learning from the lessons in 2017. The labels will make it clear that, if the donor wants to, they can also send money directly by post, go to a high street bank or drop the envelope in at one of the churches. We hope that the success of 2017 will encourage even more volunteers to pound the pavements for an hour or so in 2018!

Chris Riley & Louisa Nutt

3.26 Late Night Café

The café has been running on Saturday nights under the umbrella of Churches Together for nearly ten years on the Market Square. We serve hot tea, coffee, chocolate and soup or cold water from 11.00 pm – 2.30 am: free, for everyone, not just homeless people.

We work with the street pastors, pray together before we set out, and appreciate their practical help. We have flip flops for sore feet and hand out warm fleeces if needed (clothes can disappear if left unattended).

The police believe we help keep the town feeling safe, and occasionally send us customers for a sobering drink before starting for home. We enjoy being there, whether people want to talk or relax quietly, away from a noisy atmosphere, or an unwelcome friend. People give us money generously, but we do need more helpers if we are to continue.

Rosemary Peirce & Nick Hance

3.27 Hailey Village Lunch

This happens in the Village Hall on the third Wednesday of every month and has been going now for about 12 years. It is organised by a stalwart gang from the church.... furniture movers, table layers, taxi service, cooks, washers up, raffle ticket sellers.

The main course is usually a casserole/ sausage creation/ lasagne/ shepherds pie sort of thing, followed by an amazing selection of hot and cold puddings created by a wonderful rota of folk from around the village. The cost is £6 and this money goes into our DCC funds.

We never know how many people are coming but so far we have never run out of food, catering for 30/40+ people. Christmas usually sees more people, but this year the snow that day was a bit tricky so numbers were down a bit.

All in all, it is always a happy occasion, and we are delighted to welcome new visitors.

Elpie Lewis

3.28 Witney Hospital Chaplaincy

I took over the hospital Chaplaincy in the summer of 2017. It is one of six Community Hospitals in the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. I visit on Thursday afternoons, and am happy to be with, talk, listen to and pray with any of the patients on either of the two wards. There is also an Emergency Medical Unit.

My ministry is both to patients and staff, and I have run a training session for the clinical and non-clinical staff, drawing on both my experience as a parish priest, and as a director The Gold Standards Framework Centre, the Social Enterprise Keri set up to train health and social care workers to give better care the last year/s of life.

Jill Carter from St Mary's assisted in giving the hospital sanctuary a facelift.

The hospital is faced by challenges common across Oxfordshire and further afield: the difficulty of putting together social care packages to enable patients to leave hospital and go home, and the challenge of filling staff vacancies. But it is well managed, in good heart, and the care that is offered is excellent.

Mark Thomas

3.29 Youth

Numbers are good for Junior Church and Groundbreakers at St Mary's, though we are short on volunteers and in a process of prayerful discernment whilst also thinking creatively about how we can best manage the resources we have.

Sunday school continues to be offered at Holy Trinity. Hailey offers an engaging space at the back of church for children when present.

We recently admitted a Groundbreaker to Holy Communion, with several others attending the classes. A class called *Introduction to the Bible* is being offered. Conversations are beginning about how our churches might best serve the secondary school students in our parish.





inherit **Blessed** mourn thirst
kingdom **Contemplative** righteousness
spirit **poor** hunger **mercy** meek filled
Compassionate merciful pure in heart
heaven children of God
Courageous comforted peacemakers