

Gorse Hill
BAPTIST CHURCH

Annual Report & Financial Statement

2023

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Annual Report 2023	3
Charitable Objective	3
A Message from our Church Secretary, Shirley Westall.....	4
A Message from our Moderator, Martyn Cook	6
Organisational Structure	8
Charity Trustees.....	10
Our Leadership Team	11
Church Life	12
Children and Young People	13
Media	15
Band of Brothers	16
Administration	17
Church Facilities.....	17
Community	19
Stepping Stones	19
Mission Support	22
Lettings	25
Finance Report	26

Annual Report 2023

The Charity Trustees¹ present their Annual Report and Financial Statement for 2023. The Charity, called Gorse Hill Baptist Church², has been registered in the Central Register of Charities since 29th December 2008.

The Charity registration number is 1127294.

Charitable Objective

The Charity is governed by a Constitution which states that the purpose of the Church is the advancement of Christian faith according to the principles of the Baptist denomination. The Charity may also advance education and carry out other charitable purposes in the United Kingdom and/or other parts of the world.

Public benefit

The Trustees have paid due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit in deciding what activities the charity should undertake. The Trustees consider that they have acted for the public benefit.

The Church occupies premises which are held by The West of England Baptist Trust Company (West) Ltd, on Trusts which are entirely compatible with the above objective.



¹ 'Trustee' mainly refers to the Minister/Treasurer/Secretary and Deacons, i.e. those who are involved in the day-to-day operation of the Church. Where this is the case, the term used in this report will be 'Deacons' or 'Diaconate'.

² Referred to in this Report as 'the Church'

A Message from our Church Secretary, Shirley Westall

2023 has been a year of challenge, expansion and encouragement for Gorse Hill Baptist Church. We are in our second year without a minister, and are actively searching for the right person to join us in this capacity. Our Children and Families Worker, Jacob Barron, got married in June and moved to the south coast to enable his wife to continue her training. As a church, we have risen to the challenge of providing the things these paid members of staff covered including, among others, preaching, pastoral care, children's work, youth work.

Our vision continues to be "Knowing God, to make Him known", to grow our knowledge of God and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. Central to this are our 10.30am Sunday services, with age-appropriate classes for children and young people. On the first and third Sundays of each month we have a prayer-focused evening and a Bible teaching-focused evening. We have enjoyed a number of diverse visiting speakers, who have brought us God's message in a variety of styles. Our congregation on Sunday mornings continues to increase in diversity, representing a wide range of ages, cultural identities and Christian experience.

The Church runs house groups across the town which meet regularly. As well as studying the Bible, discussing our faith and getting to know each other better, these groups provide pastoral care and other support to those that attend.



A natural outcome flowing from our vision, worship and teaching is outreach into our community.

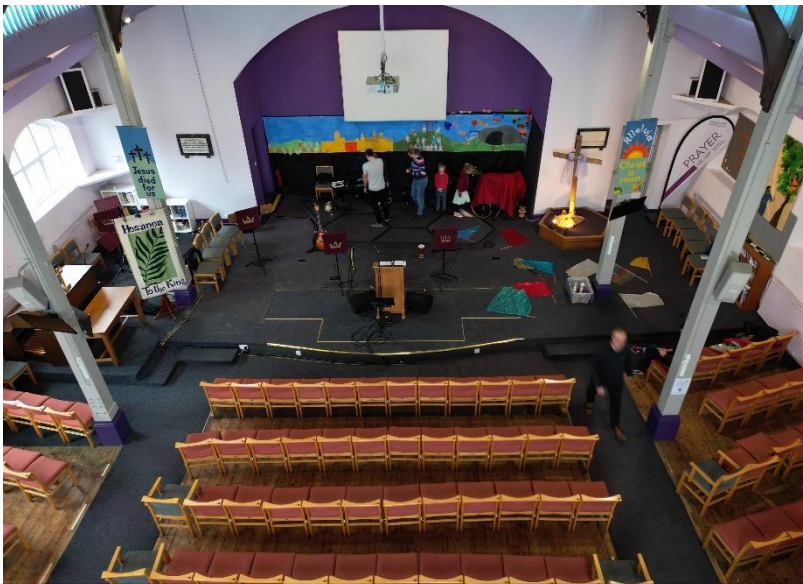
Jesus said: 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

These words from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25:35-36, are core to our aim of helping make God known. Later in the report you will find more information about the many ways we do

this, including the Stepping Stones Project, within which we house and run a Community Fridge and Boxes of Hope, provide a warm space and café, plus classes chosen to meet the needs of the community; examples of these include cooking with a slow cooker, CAP Money Management and teaching English to those for whom English is not their first language.

Many people in our society struggle with loneliness. We provide an antidote to this in events we provide to the community, such as Friends and Fun, which meets monthly on Monday afternoons for the over-50s and Lunch Club, which meets on Tuesdays in term-time to provide a hot meal and an opportunity to socialise; numbers are growing. On Fridays we have Pram Club for parents and carers of pre-school children, Children's Friday Club for children in years 4-6 children and Ignite for young people in years 7-13.

We again ran a Family Fun Day for our local community of Gorse Hill, which was very well attended.



Gorse Hill Baptist Church is so much more than the building we worship God in. We are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose motto is 'Knowing God to make Him known.' Our aim is to live in the hope He gives us and share that hope to the community around us.

This year the Deacons have reviewed every policy and updated where necessary. All our policies are available on our website. They have initiated an update of all contact details held by the church.

This was the year we finally broke with the tradition of sitting on pews. These were replaced with chairs, gifted to us by another church. In turn, we blessed a number of other people and organisations with our pews. This change has given us flexibility to experiment with new layouts for our services and the ability to open up the room to new activities.

A Message from our Moderator, Martyn Cook



Often during a pastoral vacancy, churches either stand still or even decline in membership and mission/outreach activities, as they wait for a new minister to be appointed to take them forward. This has not been true of Gorse Hill Baptist Church. As another year has passed, it has been a year of challenge and change, but also of growth and encouragement as new members have joined, cultural diversity has increased, attendance at worship services has been maintained or increased and mission and outreach have continued to grow.

There is so much going on at here: children's work, homegroups, music group, worship leaders, pastoral care and prayer. It is a thriving church that is striving to fulfil its calling to "go and make disciples" and "teaching them".

In particular, I have been encouraged by the work of Stepping Stones, especially the Community Café on a Monday and Thursday, which continues to expand to meet the needs of those who attend physically, mentally and spiritually. On the occasions I have attended, everyone I have spoken to has said how grateful they are for somewhere to come to be supported, helped, encouraged and to simply be able to sit and talk. For some it is the only time they get out of their homes to meet and talk to other people. This offers the opportunity for volunteers to develop new friendships, meaning people are more open to hearing the Gospel and being told that Jesus loves them. Who knows what seeds are being planted? The staff and helpers pray regularly for the work being carried out. This is just one example of the ways in which GHBC is serving the Lord in its local community. It only works due to the dedication, faithfulness and commitment of those who give their time in so many ways week by week to God's love.

During the year, the Church faced many issues and challenges, not least with the maintenance and repair of its buildings, in particular the repairs of the roof and parapet of the extension. I want to commend our current facilities manager and his team as they ensure the buildings continue to be fit for use in the long term.

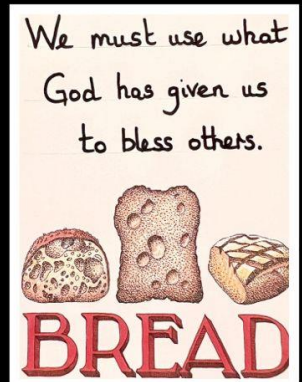
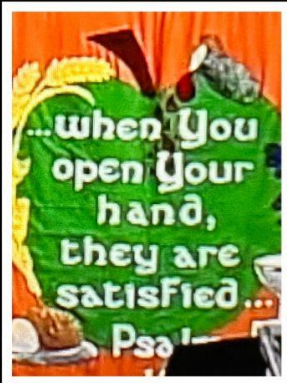
The work of the Transition Search Team on the appointment of the next Minister has continued to seek the way forward, trying to overcome the delays and frustrations of the new Baptist Union process, plus the reduction in the number of accredited Baptist Ministers and of those who are seeking a new pastorate. The church is aware that God's timing is not the same as ours and therefore we need to be patient and faithful and, as well as praying within services and members' meetings, a regular prayer meeting is held on this issue.

The Diaconate has continued to work together, encouraging and supporting each other as they work through issues and lead. The current Secretary and Treasurer have now come to the end of the maximum-allowed 9 years' service, just one example of the dedication shown by a great many people.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Cook

Martyn Cook, Moderator



Organisational Structure

In accordance with the Constitution, the members appoint Charity Trustees, which include the Minister, Church Secretary and Treasurer, collectively known as the Diaconate. They are responsible for the day-to-day management and oversight of the Church's operations, together with the financial and legal aspects of the Charity. All Charity Trustees are aware of the specific guidance issued by the Baptist Union and the Charity Commission and have confirmed that they will act in accordance with such information and directives.

The Trustees have appointed Martyn Cook as moderator during our time of ministerial vacancy, to help guide us through the process of searching and selecting a new minister. The members and broader fellowship have been involved in producing our Church Profile and minister specification. A search team has been created to work through receiving and processing applications, then bringing suitable applicants to the membership.

With the exception of the Minister, all Deacons are elected for an initial period of up to three years, after which they are eligible for re-election for two further terms of three years. They are then required to step down for at least one year, before being eligible for reappointment.

Members of the Church are accepted in accordance with the constitution, through a personal profession of faith in Christ and are people:

- whose conduct corresponds with the beliefs and practice of the Church
- who accept the Declaration of Faith
- who have followed the Lord's command and example in Believer's Baptism (unless exceptional circumstances apply)

The Church has a policy of open membership where, at the discretion of the Members' Meeting, a person may be accepted into full membership following public profession of their faith. The list is constantly being reviewed to reflect members who have left but not resigned. At Christmas 2023, the number of members stood at 112.

The Church continues to review its organisational structures, processes and activities to deliver its objectives. We meet together on a regular basis, as elected leaders and as a gathering of committed members, to seek guidance and direction from God through prayer.

Matters for consideration by the Members' Meeting may be tabled by the Deacons or by members. Though the Constitution permits decisions to be made at Members' Meetings by appropriate majorities, the Church seeks to work by consensus wherever possible.

All members are encouraged to take an appropriate part in the spiritual and practical tasks involved in the furthering of the Charitable Objectives. This is explained to all prospective members in a personal interview.

Charity Trustees

Minister

Pastoral vacancy since 10 July 2022.

Secretary

Shirley Westall (*appointed 2021*)

Treasurer

Ian Burbidge (*re-appointed May 2021*)

Deacons

Elizabeth Mildenhall (*re-appointed March 2022*)

Gary Pictor (*re-appointed March 2022*)

Julie Harris (*re-appointed March 2023*)

Vicki Payn (*re-appointed March 2023*)

Rebecca Tromans (*re-appointed March 2023*)

Matthew Wright (*appointed May 2021*)

Adam Sibley (*appointed September 2020, stood down March 2023*)

Finance Team

Ian Burbidge - *Treasurer*

Ian Burbidge - *Payroll & Accounts*

Julie Harris - *Gift Aid, Income and Banking*

Peter Morris - *Assets and Inventory*

Beverley Bolt - *Internal Audit (appointed March 2022)*

Brian Mildenhall - *Utilities Manager*

Property Trustees

The West of England Baptist Trust Company (West) Ltd

Little Stoke Baptist Church

Kingsway

Bristol BS34 6JW

Independent Examiner

James Gare

Monahans Chartered Accountants

Hermes House, Fire Fly Avenue,

Swindon, SN2 2GA

Banker

Lloyds TSB Bank PLC

Swindon Branch

5 High Street

Swindon SN1 3EN

Solicitor

Wood Awdry and Ford

3 St Mary Street

Chippenham SN15 3JL

Registered Address: Gorse Hill Baptist Church, Cricklade Road, Gorse Hill, Swindon SN2 1AA

Our Leadership Team

The members re-elected three deacons in 2023, giving a team of five deacons, secretary and treasurer.

The deacons met monthly, except during August, to receive reports, act within agreed and delegated guidelines and make recommendations to the membership. The team had away days in May and November, though due to financial limitations, these were held at church.

The different teams and events within the church have been divided up and each has a member of the leadership team responsible for it.

Church Life

Pastoral Care

Our mission statement (see below) is displayed on the wall in church as a reminder to everyone. It sums up all that pastoral care in this church stands for. It is love in action, caring and supporting each other, which is what we strive to do.

The Pastoral Care Team met regularly over the last year to discuss pastoral issues and ensure we care for both regular and new attendees. To ensure this, we have divided the fellowship into care groups, each with a Care or Home Group Leader. Care group lists are regularly looked at and revised.

During the meetings we discuss people we have not been seen at church for a while. Our 'missed you card' is sent out and we aim to follow it up with a phone call, to ask if they need any support or help.

We have concentrated on welcoming visitors and new people attending the church, encouraging those who have attended a few times to engage with us more. We encourage them to fill in one of our welcome cards and introduce them to a Care Leader. We believe it is important for new people to feel welcome, to have the opportunity to become part of a group, if they choose to do so, and to know who their Care Leader is.

We take Communion to people living in care homes or who are housebound, bi-monthly or more often if they prefer. This has been welcomed and is a good way to show people they are still important and cared for by the fellowship.

People leading regular church activities are invited to the start of pastoral care meetings, to give an update on their group and on any pastoral needs that have arisen, so we can support them, and we regularly update the Diaconate about any problems, prayer needs, issues, and any needs for further support for members of the fellowship.

The pre-service church breakfasts provide people with more time to get to know each other and have become a regular feature in the church calendar, with more of the fellowship attending; they create a 'buzzy' and welcoming atmosphere on those Sunday mornings.



Sometimes pastoral care is giving somebody a lift to help them achieve what they couldn't do alone. Sometimes it's holding up something that would overwhelm them.

Children and Young People

Regular Sunday Morning Groups: Creche, Kidzone and Inferno: On Sunday mornings our children and young people join the main service at the start and then leave to go to age-appropriate groups for around 45-60 minutes. We run a creche for our youngest members, from birth to 3-4 years old. We have 2 Kidzone groups, broadly split into 3-6-year-olds and 7-11-year-olds with some flexibility relating to the abilities or maturity of each individual child. These groups follow a programme of work that will take them through the whole Bible, with breaks to cover the Easter and Christmas stories. Inferno, our teenage group, is more discussion-based, relating the Bible and Christian teachings to contemporary issues. Across all of our children and young peoples' groups we place huge importance on safeguarding and safer recruitment and meeting all requirements.

Our Regular Friday Groups

These groups have had a boost in popularity, with several children and young people transitioning up to the next age group at the start of the 2023/4 academic year.

CFC (Children's Friday Club): our popular group for primary-aged children continues to run early on Friday evenings. New leaders have been recruited, along with some young leaders of secondary-school age. The children enjoy a variety of crafts, games, a Bible story and prayer each week. A large portion of this club is made up of children from the local community.



Many children who attend our clubs came to the Fun Day with their families.

Ignite: our Friday night youth club is open to all in school years 7-13. This year we saw an influx of year 7s in September, but the loss of some of the regular older young people as they transitioned from school to college. We have a strong team of leaders and each week sees a variety of sport, craft, chill time and a Bible memory verse with free tuck for those who can remember it the next week. Attendance is currently free but there is a charge for the tuck shop.

Pram Club: is a weekly, term-time toddler group, which is open to anybody with preschool aged children. At a cost of £1 per family per session, the session aims to build relationships with those who attend, enabling us to offer support and share our faith.

During 2023 we have seen between 15-25 children each week and have offered them activities including free play, craft and bike time.

It's exciting to see the group continue to grow with both new and returning members, and to see some of those people attending other church activities. We will continue to encourage this.

Seasonal Events: these run at key points in the Christian calendar and focus on inviting families from the local community to share with us and learn something of our faith. At **Easter** we held a **drop in cafe**, making the most of the flexible space in the sanctuary since the removal of the pews. We had an egg hunt, crafts and hot-cross buns with drinks; there was a steady stream of visitors. We ran two **Re-Create** sessions, which have been running for many years. All ages are invited to attend for a variety of themed crafts, followed by a story in the sanctuary and a light lunch together. On average we see around 30-40 children with their parents or carers at this event. In 2023 we were, unfortunately, unable to run our popular **Light Party** as a safe, positive alternative to Halloween, due to volunteer illness. In December, alongside our **Sunday Advent services**, we held a **Christingle** service on a Saturday afternoon. This was well attended by families both from within and outside of our usual church fellowship



There were plenty of volunteers to join the paramedics!

GHBC's Community Fun Day

2023 saw our 13th annual Community Fun Day held on Edinburgh Street Rec. We had the highest attendance yet, with over 1,000 people of all ages coming to enjoy games, inflatables, crafts and BBQ, all free of charge. Particular attractions this year were the Paramedics, ambulance and other emergency equipment, and the Fire Brigade, who brought along a couple of engines. These were called away to an emergency, demonstrating how vital these services are.



This event takes a huge amount of planning throughout the year, by a core team, plus a large team of volunteers on the day from dawn to dusk.

Due to financial constraints, funding for this event was not included in the church budget. The fact that individuals within the church donated to ensure it happened, is an indication of how important the people in the church think this event is.

Schools work

We continued to enjoy a positive relationship with our local schools and support them in providing RE. We join up with Florence Street Mission Hall to provide 9 assemblies per term in 7+ local primary schools and it is always encouraging to receive an enthusiastic reception by both staff and pupils. Each assembly contains a Bible story, a song, a period of meditation and

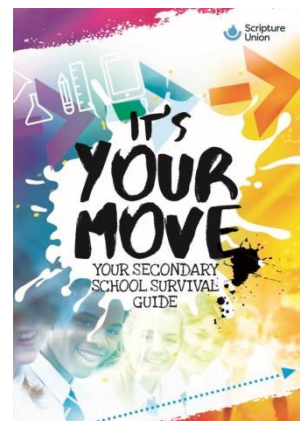


If you want to know what actually happened, it's always best to investigate the evidence for yourself.

an explanation/application of the story. The Parables of Jesus provided a theme for many assemblies during the year. The scripts are written by the team and are acted out, as this is found to keep the children engaged. In many schools the assembly is repeated and adjusted to suit Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Assemblies are carried out in accordance with guidelines set by SACRE (Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education in Swindon) and link into the National Curriculum for RE. Some 2,200 pupils are present at these assembly sessions each term.

We were able to welcome 5 schools into our building to take part in the Investigating Easter and Christmas Unwrapped presentations. At Easter we had approximately 330 children and adults who engaged fully with a lively presentation of the Bible story of Easter; at Christmas we had approximately 300. We received positive feedback from staff such a *'As always, another lovely morning for the children to interact and learn more about Easter.'* *'Fantastic engagement from all the children 10/10 to church team.'* *'The layout and options were great for all range of learning.'* *'Very easy for children with different abilities to work and enjoy the event. Every need is catered for. The children better understand the Bible story of Christmas.'*

In the summer, we provided 180 Scripture Union 'It's Your Move' booklets to the Year 6s of 3 local primary schools. These were presented on our behalf by Janet and Adebola from Florence Street Mission Hall, as part of events to prepare the children for their move to secondary school.



Media

As with previous years, this year we have continued with our hybrid services due to demand. We still have a significant number of people who watch our services online either exclusively, if they

have yet to physically return, or when they are unable to attend the church building. For those who can't make it to church, or who may miss the live Facebook feed, video recordings and audio recordings are available on the church website and on YouTube, with sermons uploaded as podcasts on Apple Music and Amazon Music.

We are grateful for those who volunteer to run the AV setup and especially to the new volunteers, of whom we have had quite a number. Co-ordinating the cameras, sound, song

words, presentations and the occasional video is a much trickier task than you might imagine, let alone streaming it to Facebook, and it requires a number of people working together as a team.



The GHBC Weekly Newsletter and GHBC prayer emails have continued to be crucial in keeping everyone up to date, providing us with channels for important information and it has been good to have a new editor for this.

As well as hybrid church services, we have continued to conduct hybrid members meetings, allowing people to attend virtually if they aren't comfortable mixing, have childcare commitments or are away at the time. This has been a great success, allowing audience participation and interaction from within the church or at home.

Band of Brothers

Band of Brothers has continued to run very successfully with a number of well attended events, including skittles evenings playing against other churches, Scalextric racing and the ever-popular curry evening!

It has been encouraging to see this important area of men's fellowship continue and we pray it will continue to facilitate more contact with men outside of the church, as well as helping to build friendships between the men of the congregation itself.

Flourish

Flourish, a ministry for the women of the fellowship, has yet to restart. We hope that this will be re-launched during 2024.

Administration

Church Facilities

The following works were carried out in 2023:

To comply with **Health & Safety regulations**, annual inspection/servicing of key facilities items were carried out to:

Boilers, thermostatic mixing valves, fire alarm system, emergency lighting, and kitchen appliances, electrical equipment and fire extinguishers. Rodent inspections are regularly carried out, to help maintain a high standard of hygiene. Kitchen grease trap cleaned.

Decorating works: External front and back timber doors were repainted; decoration works to Cricklade Hall and main sanctuary were touched up.



New Works completed:

- A new video wall screen was installed in the main sanctuary.
- Completed the replacement of the main sanctuary wooden pews with modern cushioned chairs.
- Rear controlled door access system was completely refurbished and updated to current specifications
- A new dishwasher & freezer was installed in the kitchen.
- A new doorbell system was installed to the 3 entrances.
- New permanent hand sanitiser dispensers have been installed to the 3 church entrances
- New door signage was fixed to the 3 downstairs toilet doors.
- The ground floor accessible toilet had various fittings installed to comply with current regulations eg full length mirror, coat hook, small shelf for those with a colostomy bag.
- All the toilet, kitchen/kitchenette facilities were fitted with new hand gel dispensers.
- New notice boards were fitted to Cricklade Hall, Bright Room and entrance foyer.
- A new mobile leaflet display unit has been purchased, for the use in Bright Room and Cricklade Hall areas.
- The ladies' toilet was fitted with a new hand dryer.
- Poulton door received a new dado protection plate.
- A new computer screen table & chair was installed for the AV team

Repair works:

- Various minor carpentry, electrical and plumbing repairs were carried out.
- All the blue cushioned chairs upstairs were refurbished and, where necessary, repairs carried out to the fabric, stacking buffers and floor protectors.
- Replaced 2 External high-level lights with LED light fittings
- Survey works were carried out to the church roofs to identify what needs repairing. Roof design solutions have been prepared and construction planning works completed. It is intended to carry out major roofing repair works in 2024.

Health, Safety & Environmental Health

2023 has seen the Compliance Team adapt to better support the Church in its mission to serve the community in these challenging economic times. The team grew, adding new members to cover specialist areas such as COSHH, and areas of Church operations such as Stepping Stones and ministries aimed at adults. We focused less on the diminishing threat of Covid and more on adapting our building and ways of working to allow us to open up to the general public more, while keeping our Covid-19 Secure procedures to hand and available, should we ever need to use them again.

We passed a comprehensive external audit, assuring us both practically and spiritually that we were doing all that we should to fulfil Christ's command to love and care for one another, as well as providing a framework to assure funders and partners of our credibility to deliver social and economic change within the local community.

On this footing we move forward into 2024 to meet the practical, pastoral and spiritual needs of our community and members, ensuring their safety and wellbeing as they meet with us and with God. The Compliance Team will continue to adapt in its structure and the work that it produces, be that risk assessments, policies, training or routine checks as required, to support the Church in serving the community that God has called us to serve.

Safeguarding report

There have been no major issues requiring reports to other agencies. DBS are continuing to be approved or updated as required.

Community

Stepping Stones

2023 has been a very busy year, when the Stepping Stones project has continued to see an increase in demand for all services. Matthew Chapter 25 verses 35-40 explain exactly what the team aims to achieve each day:

“For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes, and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

We aim to demonstrate God’s love in action to all the people that we come into contact with each week.

Our **Boxes of Hope** project continues to see an increase in demand. We work very closely with a wide range of agencies around Swindon and take referrals from many professionals for families that are struggling. We have now delivered 10,105 food parcels, feeding 14,514 adults and 18,424 children.

All our food parcels are delivered by an amazing group of volunteers from church who aim to get alongside the families and build relationships with them. All our food parcels contain Christian literature and information on events that we are running at church.



Dear Steve & 'The Bag of Hope Team'
God Bless you all!
Thank you very much for our
'Bag of Hope', it really helped me.
My daughter loves Frozen, so very
grateful for the Frozen II Stationery set.
Many Thanks for support at this time.
Kind Regards

Our theme for the Boxes of Hope project is Hope, as it says in Psalm 33 verse 22:

'Let your unfailing love surround us Lord, as our hope is in you alone. '

The Community Fridge is open three days a week from 11am-2pm. Our volunteers pick up food waste from many of the supermarkets from around the town, which would have previously gone to landfill. The food then is redistributed to our customers. On average we have 130 customers every day that the fridge is open. On our busiest day we had 172 visitors! Since opening, we have had 38,905 visitors and have prevented 111,238 kgs of food from going to landfill, which is a massive achievement. The fridge is a fantastic way of getting people into the church building on a regular basis. We are getting to know our regular customers well and are at a point where we have some good relationships with them, giving us many opportunities to get alongside them and share our faith. Some of our customers have attended church activities such as Lunch Club, Pram Club and some of them have attended Sunday services.



Our **Drop in Café** is now used as a Warm and Welcome Space for Swindon Borough Council. We are open twice a week from 11am-2pm, offering a cup of tea/coffee or soup and a roll for 50p, with customers are welcome to stay as long as they like. Many have made friends while visiting us and arrange to meet each other regularly at the café. A variety of agencies regularly attend the Community Fridge to offer advice and support: Citizens Advice Bureau, Healthwatch, Thames Water, Swindon Carers, Staff from Great Western Hospital, Gamblers Anonymous. The local PCSO and the Live Well team offer their advice to our customers, signposting them to other services that can support them, as appropriate. We offer a free book swap and a pre-loved clothes table.

We have additional volunteers who regularly attend the café, sit with our customers, getting alongside them, befriending them and chatting to them. We offer opportunities for prayer on a regular basis.



We have recently added a **Knit and Natter** group to our Thursday Café, which has been very popular and well attended.

Over the last year we have run many regular **Adult Learning Classes**.



On Mondays we run an **ESOL class** (English for Speakers of Other Languages). This has been very popular, as we are based in an area where a high percentage of ethnic minority groups live.

On Tuesdays there is a **craft class**.

On Wednesdays we run a **Slow cooker class**

On Fridays we run an **adult Maths class**.

In the past we have run **CAP Money Management** classes and are planning on starting these again soon, as well as adult literacy classes.

We have been extremely fortunate during the last year that we have been awarded enough grant money to be able to continue the services that we offer. We have been awarded money from the Swindon North Central Parish Council to run a localised food poverty, alongside two other local charities, The Night Shelter and the Salvation Army.

We never cease to be amazed at how the Stepping Stones project has grown and evolved and continue to be excited at the way God is working in and through us. We pray that we may be open to God's leading and continue to work for him in our local community.



Lunch Club

Lunch Club meets every Tuesday during term time, serving a freshly cooked, nutritious, home-cooked, 2-course meal, all for £5. Initially for the over-50s, we have widened this to anyone who wishes to attend. People attend for many reasons and it provides an opportunity to socialise over an enjoyable meal and to meet new and old friends regularly. Not only does it provide a hot meal and help combat some of the loneliness that is endemic in our society, but it brings people into our building who would not normally engage with us, providing the opportunity to share the love and salvation of Jesus with them. The event is run by volunteers, who cook, set up, wash up and, importantly, chat to the guests. The team are always happy to have new volunteers and new guests

Table tennis

The table tennis group is a small group of 6-10 people, who meet for 2 hours every Monday morning. People support each other in many ways and welcome newcomers. Each participant pays £1 per week, with all the money being donated to Mary's Meals, to help feed children around the world.

Friends and Fun

Friends and Fun meets once a month on a Monday afternoon, offering a variety of activities such as craft, quizzes and colouring. Originally meant for the over 50s from Lunch Club, they now welcome anyone who wants to join in.

Some people stopped coming during the pandemic, some becoming housebound. Every month a newsletter is sent out with a Christian message. This letter is a source of comfort and friendship to many and regular calls are received from people saying how blessed they are by its content. Costs of postage and refreshments is partly funded by the 50p-per-session fee and partly by donations of stamps and food.

Mission Support

Despite challenging times, we have steadfastly upheld our commitment to mission support, generously distributing our resources to assist those in need. Our financial contributions, drawn from general income, supported various Christian initiatives including Webnet/Home Mission, Baptist World Mission, Swindon Youth for Christ, Leprosy Mission, TearFund, Centre Mokili, Educación Plus, Angel's Orphanage, Night Shelter, Harbour Project and Mary's Meals.

Throughout the year, we also launched several appeals that successfully raised additional funds, particularly for Operation Agri, Spurgeons, emergency responses by Tear Fund, and our Christmas appeal benefiting The Leprosy Mission. Our total contributions for the year surpassed £30,000.

Details of the above mission support can be found in our accounts section.

We gave donations in kind to the Harbour Project, namely essential items such as toiletries and new clothing.

Many individuals from the church support a wide range of causes directly and such support is not recorded in our accounts.

Elsewhere in this report you will read of many other examples of our outreach. Collectively, this represents our calling to share the gifts we have been given by God with those both near and far.

Webnet/Home Mission provides a wide range of support to Baptist Churches across the UK. This includes support to retired ministers and technical advice to churches, such as legal advice,



Paul and Sarah Brown work in Chiang Mai, Thailand, supporting and empowering in particular women.

HR and property services. New churches can receive support and many community projects take place because of the financial support given by Webnet.

The Baptist World Mission (BMS) tackles the injustice and suffering of the deeply disadvantaged in desperate places around the world. They work to see the flourishing of people with the fewest opportunities, who are the furthest behind and most excluded.

We have a close link to Baptist missionaries Paul & Sarah Brown, praying for them and welcoming them to our church when they are in the UK. Paul & Sarah work directly with those in Thailand whose lives have been difficult and challenging giving hope for a better future.

Swindon Youth for Christ is now a resource centre offering support to youth workers across Swindon. They work in partnership with local churches and communities, bringing hope to thousands of young people in Swindon each year.



Leprosy Mission is a global organisation leading the fight against leprosy. Following Jesus Christ, they seek to bring about transformation, breaking the chains of leprosy and empowering people to attain healing, dignity and life in all its fullness. Leprosy Mission is focused on goals of zero Leprosy transmission, zero Leprosy disability and zero Leprosy discrimination. Their work includes diagnosing and treatment, reconstruction, plus caring for disabled people, fighting stigma and advocating for change, and pioneering research. During the year Chris Stratta from Leprosy Mission visited us to lead a service.

This year **our children** chose to support Leprosy Mission with their weekly offerings. They gave £170 to be used to buy goats for poor families affected by this disease.

This year our **Christmas Appeal** raised over £4,000 to help **The Leprosy Mission** working to transform the lives of children affected by this devastating disease. As well as treating the disease and giving the children a full cure, Leprosy Mission work to get the children back into education and accepted by their community.

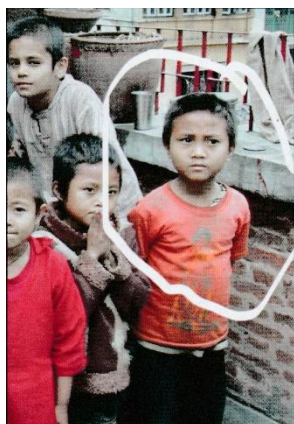
Tear Fund is a charity that partners with churches in more than 50 of the world's poorest countries. They tackle poverty through sustainable development, responding to disasters and

the challenges posed by global warming, and challenging injustice. They believe an end to extreme poverty is possible.

Centre Mokili is a medical centre in Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It has its roots in the Baptist faith and our connection with them spans many years. The people of the DRC have suffered years of extreme poverty and violence. Centre Mokili provides much needed health care, including a maternity unit. Our support is used to buy essential medicines, normally every other month, through a scheme first established by international governments to ensure safe medicines are supplied. Over recent years more than 3,000 patients have received essential medication provided by our donations.

Educación Plus works in the shanty towns in San José, Costa Rica. Our connection with them goes back many years. Their focus supports young people gain access to education, providing an alternative to street life, drifting into one of the many gangs that persist and drug addiction. The cost of education is often too much for many very poor families - uniforms, books, pens, pencils all have to be paid for. Educación Plus helps with these costs. They also run summer camps and regular youth meetings, where young people can develop healthy attitudes and resilience.

Angel's Orphanage is a special family in Nepal. Initially 22 children were brought together and, for the past 15 years, have been supported by a small local UK charity. The children are a mix of true orphans, given up children and some rescued from the streets. They are now thriving young people on the verge of independent adult life. There are currently five girls at home, three have just completed nursing study and are about to begin their working careers; two are studying at college hoping to start university during 2024. Of the boys at home, four are still studying and two are in the early stages of work-related training. Those who have left are working independently and many have reconnected with their village families.



Juniper 15 years ago...



...and Juniper now



Swindon Night Shelter offers a safe, warm and secure place to spend the night for anyone over the age of 18 who has nowhere else to sleep. Everyone is accepted and treated with dignity. In a world of homelessness, addiction, fear, rejection and marginalisation, the Night Shelter aims to come

alongside the needy to show that somebody does care. They aim to minister to the spiritual as well as the emotional and physical needs of the homeless and vulnerable, by being a visible testimony of Jesus Christ. They work closely with churches and individual Christians in Swindon and surrounding area.

During the year we supported **three Emergency Appeals** via Tear Fund. A total of £1,200 was given to the appeals in response to the Gaza humanitarian needs, the earthquake in Turkey, and the hunger in Ethiopia.

For a summary of all of our giving to charities we support please see note 8 to the accounts

Lettings

During the course of 2023 the number of Brazilian churches regularly hiring our main church has increased to three.

Our bookings have increased during daytime hours, as we have been running a number of sessions through the Adult Learning Hub. The exact courses can change but they use our building for 2-3 groups on a regular basis.

We continue to have a regular slimmers' group, a number of one-off hires for parties and other churches hiring for get togethers.

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.
Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature:



Date: 3rd May 2024

Finance Report

Gorse Hill Baptist Church

Cricklade Road
Gorse Hill
Swindon SN2 1AA

01793 534193

ghbc.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1127294