

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

England & Wales · Charity number 1127323

Details

Other names BSMC

Status Registered

Legal form Previously excepted

Registered 2008-12-30

Register [View on the Charity Commission register](#)

Contact

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Activities

Objects: The purposes of the Methodist Church are and shall be deemed to have been since the date of union the advancement of -(a) the Christian faith in accordance with the doctrinal standards and the discipline of the Methodist Church;(b) any charitable purpose for the time being of any Connexional, district, circuit, local or other organisation of the Methodist Church;(c) any charitable purpose for the time being of any society or institution subsidiary or ancillary to the Methodist Church;(d) any purpose for the time being of any charity being a charity subsidiary or ancillary to the Methodist Church.

Activities: Religious Activities

Classification

- **How:** Other Charitable Activities
- **What:** Religious Activities
- **Who:** The General Public/mankind

Geography

- **Area of benefit:** UNDEFINED
- Essex
- Hertfordshire

Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2024-08-31	£127,446	£116,772	-	-
2023-08-31	£128,106	£102,687	-	-
2022-08-31	£90,345	£102,705	-	-
2021-08-31	£86,636	£102,929	-	-
2020-08-31	£147,321	£108,663	-	-

Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Rev Gill Hulme	Chair	2017-09-01
ANDREW NELSON PICKERING		
ANNE CHRISTINE NEAL		2022-04-23
Angela Finbow		2024-06-01
Brian Unitt		2017-06-06
CHRISTINE MARGARET LEACH		2012-06-04
Frieda Wilson		2018-04-29
Jacqueline Mary Finbow		2024-06-01
Julia Last		2023-10-01
Karen Lesley Quelch		2021-05-25
Kin Hang Stephen Chan		2025-10-22
Lynne Sarah Adams		2025-06-01
MRS M DRAPER		
Mark John Wiffen		2023-10-30
NORMAN CHARLES HUNTLEY		2013-05-08
Patricia Ann Simpson		2021-05-25
Richard Michael Ling		2025-10-22
Stanislaw Mackowiak		2022-06-12
Susan Copland		2023-04-23
Susan UNITT		2016-05-08
Terence Copland		2019-05-12

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

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Accounts



ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2025

Open to God Open to You Open to Each Other

You can be sure of a warm welcome whatever brings you or your family to the Church - a curiosity to find out more about the Christian faith or to attend one of the many activities we have. Find out what is going on at www.bsm-church.org.uk.

From the Minister

This has been a year of change, a year of saying goodbye to well-loved Church members who have been promoted to glory, of also saying farewell to Peter, our cleaner, who had been with us for a very long time.

But it is also, thankfully, a year where we say hello to new friends and worshippers, to new helpers and Welcomers in the Oasis, to Rev Frank Okai-Sam as our Superintendent of HAEBC, to Stephen as our new Church Cleaner, to Debbie as a new helper at Girls Brigade and to welcome old friends and new into formal membership.

We have much to celebrate! Amy, our Outreach Worker, has been with us for a year now and the Oasis Lounge has started new initiatives; some have worked amazingly well, others have a slower burn – but that is ok. As we listen to those who come into the Lounge and try new things, some will catch the imagination, others will be quieter activities. I have been particularly grateful for Amy's support in setting up the Holy Week trail and, because it coincided with Terrific Tuesdays, we gave out around 50 children's activity packs (with chocolate eggs as well, of course). With my three-quarter time working and not being around for the last week of the month, I personally have found the support of Lynn in the office, Amy and the Stewards team really helpful.

The Oasis Lounge celebrated its third birthday in May – and what an amazing morning we had. It was lovely to see people who normally only come during week days worshipping with us and to hear from three of our regulars what a difference the Oasis Lounge has made to them, as well as listening to our group leaders.

We also welcomed Stuart Watkin, from the Learning Network, to lead us in considering how our Church and the Oasis Lounge links in with the Methodist Way of Life. He got us working together to group our journey under the 12 'stations' of serving: flourishing, challenging, telling, living, sharing, being open, learning, caring, noticing, worshiping and praying. The post-it notes have been compiled and written up (thank you Lynn) and are attached as an appendix to this report. The Church Council discussed some difficult issues this past year - succession planning, filling vacant posts, safeguarding, health and safety and, of course, whether or not the Church should register for same-sex marriage (see the God in Love Unites Us report on the Methodist website). We held constructive open meetings about this but, sadly, they were not well attended. After much prayer and hearing from both sides regarding living with contradictory convictions, Council decided that we would not be registering. This has hurt a number of people but my prayer is that we will continue to hold one another in love. As a Church, we hold a variety of views on a number of theological viewpoints so, please, continue to hold in your prayers those who found this decision saddening and upsetting.

I said at the Oasis Lounge celebrations that a lot of individual prayer goes on in the Lounge and prayers, written and placed on the prayer tree, are spoken out loud at the Tuesday Bible Study. However, reading that list from the post-it notes, I was struck how outward facing we are as a Church (and, by the way, this is acknowledged by non-Christians and other churches in the town) but I wonder how we are fed, how our discipleship grows? I wrote last year that:

'The work that goes on during the week is underpinned by prayer and fellowship through the House groups, Bible studies and fellowships and also the love and care given by our amazing Pastoral visitors. The worship of the community is vital – for if we are not grounded in God's love, and open to the Spirit, how can we share the good news with others?'

I would like us to consider this at this year's ACM. Do we need more house groups on different days/times? What sort of Bible Study do people prefer? (You don't, by the way, need to be well versed in the Bible to join in as the point of Bible study is to become more familiar with our sacred

text). What about Prayer groups? Should we have a set time of prayer each week whether at home or at Church so we meet and listen to what God is saying to our hearts?

As always, we rely on our musicians, readers, audio and technical team, Stewards and many others to enable and enhance the worship of the whole community. But, behind the scenes, there is also the work of the Property Committee, Finance, Church Council members and our Safeguarding Officers because, without these, our Church community could not function effectively. Often, though, you see the same names appearing on multiple lists and in multiple roles – when reading the Report you will see what I mean. I am so thankful that all our Stewards are prepared to continue for another year but their task would be so much easier if four became six! Maureen should have a long service medal as Pastoral Secretary but she really needs to step down and hand over to someone – could this be you?

I encourage you to prayerfully consider what God is calling YOU to do over the coming year. Could you volunteer one afternoon a week to be a Welcomer or to man the Chatty Café table, to go onto the Sunday coffee rota, to help Amy with the Carnival stall, to learn a new skill on the sound desk, take notes at the Finance meeting twice a year, become a Steward, take the flowers to someone who is housebound, encourage a friend or neighbour to come to Church, bake a cake for the Songs of Praise service – the list of opportunities goes on and, if you think “I don’t feel I can do the role as it is already being done”, remember when God calls, God equips and everyone is a beginner at some stage!

As you read through the enclosed reports, give thanks for the work of God in this place and pray for all those whose names appear in the reports and the work that they do. Please also pray for all who come into our premises each day, that they will find the love of God within their lives.

Every blessing

Revd Gill Hulme

HAEBC

As reported last year, the Charities Commission refused to approve any form of constitution for ecumenical areas such as HAEBEA, and we therefore had to split the governance of the Methodist Churches and the United Reformed Churches, and so the Herts and Essex Border Circuit (HAEBC) was formed.

The former members of HAEBEA were, however, able to approve a Partnership Agreement that allows us to continue to share planning of worship services and retain our ecumenical links with the URC churches, which I feel is a real bonus.

HAEBC has also undergone a change of Superintendent, as Revd Blair Kirkby retired and Revd Frank Okai-Sam joined us last September. Everyone has worked hard, and I am pleased to report that the transitions have gone as smoothly as possible. We are blessed with willing and able people on the HAEBBC Meeting, and a new part time Circuit Administrator has now been appointed, easing the pressure on Revd Frank Okai-Sam as well as on our Church Manager, Lynn Graseman, who had been doing the quarterly plan.

The Circuit encourages Churches in mission, and grants are available for this; and the Circuit is also looking for an Eco-champion to liaise with, and link to, District initiatives, as we aim to become Eco Churches and strive for Net Zero.

Frieda Wilson

Pastoral Report

As part of my job, I keep the database up to date, recording any changes in membership as well as in the Church family as a whole. For the Annual Report last year, I wrote that our Church Membership stood at 119 and this year the number is 103. Some members have sadly died, others have been recorded as Ceased to Meet or transferred out. We also welcomed one new member from another denomination.

We are, of course, not just statistics; we are people, all part of our Church family. As well as our Church members, we do have several people worshipping with us, many on a regular basis. This number also fluctuates and it is good to see new faces in our congregation. It is very important that we all play our part in welcoming newcomers.

Fortunately, most of our regular worshippers are now coming back to Church but there are still some who feel unable, for various reasons, to return and we miss them all. Some are able to follow our worship online which is a great benefit. We are very grateful to the Tech Team for this.

I also attempt to maintain a community roll and this is changing rapidly with more people coming through our doors each day when we are open, some on a regular basis. The Oasis Lounge is aptly named; it does provide an oasis of calm for all visitors but particularly for those who are going through troubled times in their lives.

Once again, my thanks go out to all our lovely pastoral visitors and to all who give pastoral care in so many ways by a visit, a phone call, a lift to Church, taking flowers or a card sent with love on a special occasion.

Maureen Draper
Pastoral Secretary

House Groups

Renewal

There are 12 of us in the Renewal group which continues to meet the first and third Tuesday of the month to study the Bible and pray together.

This year we began by exploring the simple, transformative practice of a daily, quiet time with God using a course on the 24/7 Prayer website called Be Still based on Brian Heasley's book of that name. We then studied Habakkuk, which was an exploration of what it really means to place our confidence in God and we have just finished another 24/7 course based on the book by Pete Greig, God on Mute - the problem of unanswered prayer, which took us through the days of Holy week from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday. We found this very empowering and thought provoking.

We enjoyed a Christmas Social and Bring and Share and now look forward to a Summer meal out at a local restaurant.

We give a donation at each meeting and then, at an opportune time, a sum is given to support a charity. This year we have given money to the Air Ambulance, Mercy Ships and Fund for Human Need.

Many thanks to June and Robin Whitbread for their hospitality.

Chris Neal

Tangent

A small group of us continue to meet on an irregular basis dependant on everyone's availability. Our meetings try to remain on topic with a bible discussion but often go off on a Tangent! We take it in turns to host and lead. Occasionally we have a social gathering.

Karen Quelch

Gambet

The Gambet house group meets at the home of M&S on a Monday afternoon at 2pm where they enjoy in order; food, friendship and fellowship, rounded off with a hymn and prayers [see weekly notices for exact date]. We arose from two original alpha groups, Gamma and Beta, around the turn of the century. The book we study is even older but made fresh, current, relevant and interesting with talks and video presentations.

Most recently whilst studying Joseph and his enslavement in Egypt, we digressed and shared both happy memories of holidays in that country and reflected on the fact that Egypt has always welcomed strangers and refugees. In the Fustat area of Old Cairo is the Well, in the synagogal grounds of the Ben Ezra Synagogue, where Moses was reportedly placed in his basket and found by the pharaoh's daughter.

Nearby in the Coptic Quarter is the Church of Abu Serga, also known as the Church of Saints, Sergius and Bacchus. The Church is built over a cave where, according to tradition, the Holy Family sought refuge for three months whilst fleeing Egypt.

We offer an invitation to all who want to join us on our journey of discovery.

Mike Haworth

Youth Work

Girls' Brigade

Since the last Annual Report I wrote this time last year, we have been quite busy as a group. After Holiday Bible Week, we have increased our numbers with some of our girls coming from HBW after being given one of our leaflets. Currently we have eight girls ranging from age 4-18 and we also have a new helper who started back in September 2024. As a group, we have had the opportunity to do other things within the district, including bubble zorbs and battle archery for the N:counta and N:spire groups to the advent craft day for the N:vestigates and N:gage groups. In addition to this, we are extremely proud of Rowan and all the girls and officers from the Cambridge and Forest Edge District who took part in the Remembrance Parade in London. Other things that have happened over this year is us celebrating with the Church our 75th Anniversary, Julie's retirement and my commissioning in March and becoming an Associate member of Churches Together. Helen and I are so thankful for the support we have received over the last year from other Girls Brigade Companies within our District, the Methodist Church

and the consistent support from Gill who has been coming down on the weeks that she works. We have a social media presence on Facebook sharing what we have been up to each week.

Jordan Stringer

Enhancing Our Worship

Music from the Organ Bench

Since the last Report, changes have brought in the use of pre-recorded accompaniment to hymns during some of our services. Brian has spent some time getting the speed, tone and instruments right on the settings and, in the main, this has worked very well. We have also been lucky to add John Evans to our list of Organists on the rota, as well as Chris Neal and Carrie To. My thanks, also, go to Stephen Rapkin for his continued support.

I continue to be grateful to all who are able to assist in providing music for our services, in whatever way they can, when I am not able to be there.

It continues to be an absolute privilege to take part in the final services of so many of our friends and to give them a good send off. Since the last Report I have played for the funerals & thanksgiving services for Jo Bennett, Joanna Heath, John Simkins and, most recently, George Goldspink. I have a folder of Order of Services with 43 funeral and thanksgiving services going back to 2010.

Mark Wiffen

Whilst not having a regular choir during the year, we had an ad hoc choir for the Church Anniversary Service, led by Revd David Mullins, in June 2024. The choir sang an introit, "Lead me, Lord"; an anthem "For the Beauty of the Earth"; a blessing "The Lord bless you and keep you"; as well as leading singing in the congregational hymns.

For the Christmas Carol Service on 22nd December 2024, there was a quartet of instrumentalists who played a selection of Christmas music while the congregation was arriving. The ad hoc choir then started off the singing with the first verse of "Once in Royal" and continued to lead the congregational carols throughout the service as well as singing four items on their own: "Gloria, Gloria"; "Torches"; "O come with me to Bethlehem" and "Jubilate".

Hilary Eves

Church Flowers

We continued again this year with flowers provided by members for the beautiful vase given to us by Fullerton United Methodist Church and displayed on the Communion Table. As it is a simple bouquet which can then be taken out to either a person of the giver's choice or a pastoral recommendation, we have been able to fulfil all the dates to the end of the year. So, a big thank you to all those people who have offered to contribute. Thank you to Sue Hayter for the Advent ring and Cynthia Friend for the Easter wreath, April Stublely and Alison Watson for pedestal displays for special occasions and the team of ladies who made the posies for Mothering Sunday.

Chris Neal

Outreach

Outreach Worker Report

This report outlines recent initiatives and achievements that have significantly enhanced the profile and service offerings of the Oasis Lounge. The efforts reflect a commitment to community engagement, safety, and inclusiveness, ultimately fostering a welcoming environment for all attendees of the Oasis Lounge.

Our social media presence has seen a notable increase, effectively reaching a broader audience and promoting our upcoming events and services. This enhances community involvement and awareness of the Oasis Lounge as a valuable local resource.

I have successfully organised charity partnerships, leading to the opening of the Lounge every Monday morning. Additionally, we have arranged for a charity to open the Oasis Lounge once a month on a Friday afternoon, providing ongoing support and resources for our community.

All Saturday coffee morning slots for 2025 have been filled. Furthermore, a new Lego Club has been introduced on Fridays during school holidays, catering specifically to primary school children and fostering creativity and play.

A food hygiene certificate has been given to us by the Council, resulting in the highest mark achieved. Additionally, two cooking courses were completed with several regular attendees. I have connected us with more local charities, enhancing our community profile. Notably, we successfully applied for a Tesco grant, which will provide financial support for future events and activities. Moreover, we are now officially recognised on the Hertfordshire map as a breastfeeding-friendly venue.

My efforts to promote the Oasis Lounge have included participation in several community events, such as the annual Bishops Stortford Carnival, Bishops House and the local library. Our presence at these events has fostered greater visibility and engagement with the community. I now contribute to the monthly Bishops Stortford flyer online, further sharing the news and updates about the Oasis Lounge.

Through consistent interaction with our regulars, I have built meaningful relationships with many visitors, enhancing the community spirit within the Oasis Lounge. A recent volunteer drive has successfully attracted new supporters, and the Lounge was decorated for Valentine's Week, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. Additionally, I have initiated Bingo sessions on Mondays.

In summary, over this past year, I am continually evolving the offerings at the Oasis Lounge to meet the needs of our community and these initiatives reflect our dedication to creating a supportive and engaging environment.

Amy Farrer

Open Church Oversight Group

This group continues to be involved in deciding our mission in the town and in coordinating information learned from being open during the week, but now works with Amy, our Outreach Worker, who we were delighted to welcome in April last year. As the OCOG only meets every couple of months or so, an Outreach Worker Management Group (Revd Gill Hulme, Maureen Draper, Steve Watson and Frieda Wilson) has been formed so that Amy can more quickly get

feedback on new ideas and initiatives she would like to pursue, and we are working hard to ensure this meets her needs. The current members of the OCOG are:

Chair/Secretary	Frieda Wilson
Minister	Revd Gill Hulme
Stewards	Pat Simpson, Terry Copland, Julia Last, Stan Mackowiak
HAEBC Reps	Pat Simpson, Steve Watson, Frieda Wilson
Pastoral Secretary	Maureen Draper
Premises Representatives	Norman Huntley, Brian Unitt
Finance Representative	Steve Watson
Activities Representative	Alison Watson
Kitchen Supplies Representative	Sue Unitt
Kitchen Equipment Representative	Ella Bisschoff
Former Mission & Outreach Chair	Chris Neal

The Group will, from time to time, draft in others when their input is needed but if anyone would like to join the group on a permanent basis, please speak to me.

The Oasis Lounge continues to be a welcoming place for a variety of people and we are thrilled that our Church membership is also growing.

We have had a few difficulties to overcome in the past year, including the return to the Oasis Lounge of someone who stole from the Lounge, and the necessity to ban one or two people for limited timespans, but we are learning all the time, and good reporting also means that any Safeguarding issues will have background information available.

A WhatsApp group for all the Welcomers that Amy set up has made communication much easier, particularly when a welcoming slot needs to be filled, but getting enough Welcomers remains one of our thorniest problems. We would love more people to join us and Alison or I can arrange for you to shadow someone if you're interested but unsure what is involved. But, if you feel this is not for you, then please pray for the work in the Oasis Lounge – Kingdom work that makes us Church every day of the week, not just on Sundays!!

Frieda Wilson

Communication

This year I have continued to produce the slides for the screen presentations in the Oasis Lounge and entrance. The presentations have evolved over the past three years to include seasonal or event references, alongside advertising our activities and providing a little bit of something to think about. This is a way of bringing the word of God and inspiration to those who are 'passing by' and forms part of our mission and outreach work. It is sad that I have had to include our behaviour expectations in order to remind people what is acceptable on our premises. However, it is a necessary slide.

There are usually about 44 slides, each on the screen for 30 seconds meaning that the presentation takes between 20 and 25 minutes. Important slides are duplicated to appear more frequently. We don't advertise for outside events or groups as this would mean there would be too many slides and it's difficult to know where to draw the line.

I know that people do read the slides as I am told when I get things wrong. I am happy with that – at least you read it!

Alison Watson

Social Media

A big thank you again to our Church Administrator, Lynn Graseman, for bringing her expertise to the website. I help with updates when necessary.

We have a Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church Facebook Page with information about events, activities and special services that Gill Hulme, Lynn Graseman and Amy Farrer manage. We have over 415 followers. In addition, we can post our events to other Facebook groups such as What's on in Stortford? and Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation. These allow us to reach people in the area who might not follow our page.

We also have a private Facebook Group of 157 members to date with shared prayers, news, anecdotes and humour.

Much gratitude must be given to Richard Ling and Brian Unitt, ably assisted by Sue Unitt, Alan Draper, Frieda Wilson, Lynne Ling, Norman Huntley and Stephen Chan for their sterling work each week streaming worship and, again, to Brian and Richard for developing the video screen facility in the Oasis Lounge. Special thanks, also, go to Alison Watson who, so ably, keeps the screens up to date.

Chris Neal

Thursday Friendship Group

We are a friendly group of ladies who continue to meet on the second and fourth Thursdays each month, normally in the evening in the Oasis Lounge. We have a varied programme having talks, social evenings and exploring the local area.

Once a month we support the Church by running the Thursday coffee and cake mornings and we also raise money for charity throughout the year. Last year we gave £650 to the Thirst Café which supports local young people. This year we have selected the local Citizen's Advice Bureau as our chosen charity.

We are always pleased to welcome new members. If anyone is interested, please contact Maureen Draper or Christine Leach.

Christine Leach & Maureen Draper

Wilos Lunches (Widow/ers and soLos)

We continue to meet approximately every four weeks with an average of 10 people. It has become a very friendly group, enjoying lunch out together after Church, with no washing up!

Angela Finbow/Frieda Wilson

Knit and Natter

This year at Knit & Natter, Yvonne (one of our attendees), has been doing crochet lessons which has proved very popular. Some of her pupils have gone on to make blankets now! We continue to make items to send to Ukraine refugees via UK Aid - blankets, cardigans, and toys. The blankets are usually done as a joint project with several people knitting the squares and others sewing them into blankets. Along with social prescriber, Guppy, and Yvonne, we have set up a

new evening craft group called Creative Connections which launched on the first Wednesday of May and it will continue each month into the future.

Kate Rowe

Craft and Chat

We continue to meet on the second and fourth Tuesday mornings with a small group of a few regular crafters who come as much to chat as they do craft. Some people bring their own knitting or sewing while others like to have a go at whatever I have dreamed up and provided. You may have noticed the paper flowers that are on the Oasis Lounge tables or the previous felt ones which we made. Before Christmas we found different ways to create angels to be put around the town.

Sometimes we get out the paints or a mix of materials and just follow our fingers to see what we can create, other times we are more disciplined and follow instructions. Whatever we do there is always a lot of chat and plenty of smiles. It's a supportive and welcoming group and you would be most welcome to join us.

Alison Watson

CAMEO (Come and Meet Each Other)

We have now been meeting in the Oasis Lounge on the second Tuesday of each month (excluding August) for three years. Our membership has remained constant although we often have new or less frequent members join us and they are always welcome (just add another table). The format remains basically the same: talk, reminisce, support each other and enjoy each other's company. This is accompanied, of course, by tea and cake.

We do mark the Christian festivals: unfortunately, I missed the April meeting but Jean, one of our members, gave out Easter bags to everyone (I did get one on my return) and they were much appreciated. Gill H joined us one afternoon during this past year and we took Holy Communion together, which was lovely. Some members said that they preferred doing this together as a community rather than in the home setting so this is something we must try to fit in with Gill again.

My thanks once again to Chris and Ruth, my two co-helpers, and to Lianne who often joins us on a Tuesday afternoon as an extra helper.

Maureen Draper

Special Cup 2025

We continued to meet up on Wednesday afternoons. Our goal is still to provide a safe space where visitors can relax with a cup of coffee/tea, have a chat, play a game, complete a jigsaw - if they wanted. We can report that we succeeded in our main purpose. A few visitors and volunteers of Isabel Hospice became regulars and some even part of our team. We thank everyone who helped us in different ways to render this service, especially when we needed someone else to take our place.

Jan and Ella Bisschoff, Richard and Lynne Ling, Rose Cheyne

The Card Stall

We continue to operate the card stall in the Oasis Lounge on a 'self-service' basis with payment at the servery. This works well with over £1,500 generated for Church funds last year. As well as cards, a small selection of gifts is held and if there is anything particular you would like us to stock, please speak to us.

Steve and Alison Watson

Thursday Coffee Morning

Over the past year the Thursday coffee morning has continued to run. We are pleased to welcome our regular guests as well as any visitors. Thank you to all who bake and help run the coffee morning. We will be pleased to welcome anyone who would like to join the team.

Sue Unitt

Bridge for Beginners

We have now been successfully running Bridge for Beginners for over two years, on the first and third Friday of each month between 10 am-12noon. Many of the players have been coming since we started.

As this is for beginners, we play basic Contract Rubber bridge which is the most popular variation for casual play. However, if people want to join clubs or partake in tournaments we can give guidance on duplicate bridge.

Bridge is a very social game and, it has been said, by far the greatest card game of all, and it can provide immense challenge and enjoyment for the rest of your life, once you learn how to play. A quote by Alex James, bassist in Blur says, "*Bridge is utterly compulsive once it has got hold of you. It isn't too hard to learn and the joy is that you can play it and actually start enjoying it before you get very good. You can take it on at any level that you want.*"

We would like to thank the Church and all the people who set the tables up in the Church, ready for us to start playing as soon as we arrive.

Anyone wanting to learn, or just play, is always welcome.

Alan Draper and June Whitbread

Friday Froglets and Terrific Tuesdays

Friday Froglets continues to work well. We now have about 30 children who attend most weeks with numbers being a bit lower when the weather is good. Feedback tells us that Mums/carers say it is a great space & that they like the fact Froglets is quite peaceful, giving them time to get a bit of a breather.

John continues to be the star of the show with the children. He is exceptionally good at story-telling and leading the songs. Since last year, we have tried to get people confident to enter the sanctuary space by holding special story-time in the Church. We had our own mini Harvest Festival with the story of Ruth; we learnt about the Nativity at Christmas and, at the Easter just gone, we told the story of the resurrection. Some key stories are quite hard to put across as the

children's average age is about two/three but we hope that the carers get something out of it, too.

Terrific Tuesday has not been as busy with quite a few children being family of members of our own Church. This is an outreach opportunity and, as those attending Friday Froglets have expressed a wish for something like that on a Friday, we are changing to Fantastic Fridays with the first one on Friday, 30th May. Let's pray it continues to be successful.

Karen Quelch

Safeguarding Report

Open Church

We recently celebrated the third anniversary of the opening of the Oasis Lounge. It was a wonderful celebration of all that has been achieved and is being achieved every week. It is now at the centre of our mission and outreach work, which has been made possible by the steadfast efforts of Gill, Amy and many, many volunteers. Highly successful though it has been, we now encounter a much broader range of safeguarding issues than was the case three years ago. The appearance of a distressed and troubled potential visitor at that celebratory service (although dealt with very well indeed at the time) highlights some of the challenges that we now regularly face. We must be alert to the potential pitfalls that such an open-door policy inevitably presents. We have taken steps to try to ensure that we manage and minimise risks. It is essential that we remain vigilant and that safeguarding our employees, volunteers, and visitors is our priority.

Barbara Daniels was the Circuit Safeguarding Officer between August 2024 and the start of May this year, when she resigned from her post. She was responsible for delivering safeguarding training for volunteers, which had to be delivered by two individuals. It proved very difficult to deliver training during this period. I assisted in providing online training in March for a number of individuals within the circuit, none of whom were from our Church. Little other training took place during these nine months. At the time of writing, I am unaware of the Circuit's plans for delivering safeguarding training.

Andrew Pickering – Co-Safeguarding Officer

The Wider Community

Methodist Homes for the Aged

The Church continues to support the work of Methodist Homes. Last year £641.60 was sent. This was made up from Methodist Homes Sunday, Christmas card box, Christmas Day collection and a donation from the Church.

Christine Leach

Action for Children - 2024-5

Action for Children is a leading Children's charity in the UK with special connections to the Methodist Church.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us throughout the year, whether with help or money.

The total at the end of the year was £1,382.70. This consisted of the Christmas collections, the post box and a coffee morning. Also, some generous one-off donations.

If you are interested in helping, want to donate or just find out more at any time, please see me.

Norman Huntley

Action for Children Home Collecting Boxes

The number of people with home collecting boxes continues to fall as less people are using cash, but I emptied people's boxes during March and April and was recently able to send £245.38 off to Action for Children. For those who no longer feel a home collecting box works for them (which includes myself!), I have encouraged people to set up regular giving via the Action for Children website.

Frieda Wilson

Christian Aid

Once again former members of the now defunct Christian Aid Committee helped me to run two coffee mornings over the last 12 months to raise funds for Christian Aid. The one in September 2024 raised £289.00 and the one in March this year raised £248.00. At BSMC we also had Christian Aid collection envelopes on the Church chairs on 18 May, just as Christian Aid Week 2025 finished, and the funds raised from this totalled £195.00.

Frieda Wilson

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford (CTBS)

A big thank you to Mione Goldspink for her many years of service as our representative to the quarterly Forum, for her two years as Chairperson and many more on the Enabling Group. I am delighted that Lynne Adams has offered to become our new representative.

There are now 15 Churches who are members of CTBS and seven Associate members including our, most recent, Girls Brigade.

A successful Carol Singing was held again in Jackson Square with a 40 strong CTBS choir formed by Nathan Collins from St Michael's. At the same time, a coffee morning in the Oasis Lounge was held and all the money collected went to the Holy Trinity Night Shelter.

The United Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was held on a very wet afternoon on Sunday, 26th January, at the Baptist Church, led by Revd John Walford and Anderson Munhoz from New Life Church, delivering an address emphasising what unites us more than divides us.

The Good Friday Service and Walk of Witness was again well supported with a wonderful Service at St Michael's led by Revd Derwyn Williams with participants from other Churches. People then walked through the town to our Church with banners and palm crosses to give to people and, after a short act of worship, we welcomed over 200 people into the Oasis Lounge for refreshments and (hot) cross buns.

On Saturday, 7th June from 10am-12noon there will be another Pentecost Prayer Breakfast at the Barnabas Centre. This was well received last year and, this year, pastries and tea and coffee will again be available as people look at the stalls of information in the Foyer from the different

organisations within, and beyond, CTBS. The morning will conclude with an Act of Worship in the Sanctuary to pray for what we have seen and read.

We were involved with Love Stortford last year and hope to take part this year.

Chris Neal, CTBS Honorary Secretary

Property Report - 2024-25

There has been one major project completed this year. The seals on the windows at the back of the building were showing severe signs of ageing. There were also minor leaks around some of the opening windows. These have all been replaced with windows meeting the latest requirements. They are better insulated and the finish may reduce the heating effect in the Summer. So far, no issues have been reported but with Summer approaching, please let me know if you have a problem. The final cost was just under £18,500.

The lighting in the back office was completed. This has reduced the energy use and done away with the regular need to replace the tubes. Better lighting and no more flashing bulbs.

The other major project which needs to proceed is the refurbishment of the Wesley Hall and kitchen. We now have a preferred contractor. The hold up at the moment is the exact detail of the work to the drain at the back. As I write this, we expect to get a detailed visit shortly. There are possible problems if we reduce the current overlap with the damp course which could increase the risk of flooding so there is no quick fix. Sorry, but this is a case of watch this space. A project that has been progressed is the fitting of some form of cooling in the Oasis Lounge. The Oasis Lounge has suffered from overheating in Summer. There is only limited ventilation and improving this will not entirely solve the problem. An Air Conditioning Company has surveyed the room and has suggested a solution which should deal with this. Following Church Council approval, a quote has been accepted and work is due to take place in May. As with the installation of the windows, please look out for any closed areas and respect any instructions to avoid the workspace. Unfortunately, the Oasis Lounge will be out of use for four days during the installation. The cost will be approximately £23,000, inclusive of VAT, to complete.

There are a number of minor jobs around the building which will need attention. This will probably involve the usual replacement lights, etc., and small areas of decoration.

It is proposed to do a deep clean in the near future (date not available as I write this). Again, please look out for any information requesting you to avoid working areas. Some of this may show up additional areas requiring decoration or attention.

If you spot something that doesn't appear to be operating correctly, is broken or missing, please fill in the details in the incident book in the Upper Foyer. It is important to do this even if you have told either one of the Property Committee or the Church Manager. We do monitor this book on a regular basis.

Norman Huntley

From the Senior Steward

Since the last ACM, the Church has continued to thrive with all its activities and lettings. The whole building can be in use at times with little room for manoeuvre. I'm often mindful of how we got to this position, of people past, who contributed so much to the Church in so many ways but who are no longer here or unable to witness the transformation. At George Goldspink's funeral, recently, I thought of how he used to make the cross for Easter from the tall Christmas

tree. There have been so many over the years who have shown their faith, love and commitment to the Church and, when and where possible, we should always try to remember them.

We are now part of a new Circuit, HAEBBC, and have access to a larger pool of preachers for Sunday services. We are getting used to different styles of worship while maintaining tradition. We are having more café style services starting with breakfast, which is always an incentive. If the Oasis Lounge regulars won't come into the Church, we'll go out to them! These have been very successful.

Gill has written about the need for more volunteers in so many spheres. If you attend Church on Sundays and enjoy the services and fellowship and would like to do more, please consider helping in some way. It is always rewarding and especially beneficial to leaders of groups who spend time preparing and providing for the different activities now available.

As always, I wish to thank Gill and the Stewards, Terry, Stan and Julia, for all their support and effort over the year and as we carry on into another. There is a lot of 'behind the scenes' activity and we all work well together as a team. Please consider joining us for a trial run as there will definitely be departures next year.

As a final thought, I end with the first verse from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 5, which I think illustrates all that we try to strive for as a Church: *'Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins'.*

Pat Simpson

Finance Report

Last year we reported that we had set a budget showing a shortfall of £10,000. Our actual results showed a surplus of £10,674 and our final accounts to August 2024 follow this report, presented in a similar format as last year. Our main account is our 'General' account and this is followed by restricted funds covering Redevelopment, Legacies and Benevolence. Following the notes to these accounts is our budget for the current year.

WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM (LAST YEAR)

General Account

We set a budget showing a deficit of £10,000. We finished the year with a surplus of £10,674. This compares with the previous year's surplus of £25,419. This is a good result for the year and the major variations from the original budget need to be highlighted:

- **Offerings higher by £12,000** – due mainly to one-off envelope giving which had not been anticipated of £9,000 and gift aid £1,000 more than budget due to the higher giving
- **Lettings lower by £1,600** – due to £1,500 due but not received by the year end
- **Bank Interest higher by £1,100** – due to higher rates and higher bank balances
- **Admin costs higher by £4,600** – due to an increase in the hours for the Church Administrator and appointment of the Outreach Worker. Neither were forecast at the start of the year.
- **Premises costs higher by £2,600** – due to higher than anticipated gas and electricity costs
- **Repairs lower by £18,500** – due to much of the anticipated premises work not being undertaken during the year

Historically 85% of our income has come from offerings with 10% from external lettings. However, this year offerings accounted for just 74% of income. We are relying more on external lettings and other income. It is encouraging that over 70% of our giving is by regular standing order, although this is down on the previous year. Together with envelopes and cash, total giving was some £8,000 previous years. Our overall income is now above pre pandemic levels.

The majority of our costs are fixed and we are not able to make corresponding savings if income drops. Costs at £115,400 were 15% higher than the previous year as set out above.

Redevelopment Scheme

The redevelopment account was closed during the year and the final balance of £23,903 was transferred to the general account. This represents the surplus achieved on the project and has now been 'ring fenced' for further premises expenditure.

Other Accounts

Legacy funds make up a large portion of our reserves and some have restricted uses. During the year we received no new legacies and with interest added, we finished the year with £95,742 available to us. The small benevolence funds are 'ring fenced' for specific purposes.

WHERE WE ARE (THE CURRENT YEAR)

Current Year Budget

The budget for this year (2024/25) follows the accounts for last year. This shows a surplus of £5,600, however this is after premises costs of £10,000. If these had been taken out of reserves (which has been done on some previous occasions), a surplus of £15,000 would have been seen. This is more in line with last year's outcome. We are forecasting income to be slightly down on the previous year and expenditure of a similar level.

How We Are Doing This Year Against Budget?

After six months, it appears that some of the premises work will not be completed this year, which will positively impact the budget. We are predicting income slightly down on budget and all expenditure other than premises costs will also be in line with budget, which would result in an overall surplus of £6k compared with the budgeted surplus of £5.6k

Analysis of Giving

- Regular giving by members (excluding one off gifts) has been steadily increasing over the last three years and has now returned to pre covid (and refurbishment) levels.
- A 7-year analysis of giving shows:

2024-25	89k (Estimate)
2023-24	94.0k
2022-23	85.3k *
2021-22	81.5k *
2020-21	81.4k
2019-20	76.5k
2018-19	85.9k

* Adjusted for gift aid received after the year end

Support from Circuit and District Funds

We are grateful for the financial support we continue to receive from Circuit and District funds. Circuit has agreed to cover half of the cost of the Church Manager position - £8,000 per annum. The full cost of the Outreach Worker is covered by grants from District and Circuit. Without this support, these costs would have to be covered from a combination of additional giving and drawing on our reserves.

WHERE WE ARE GOING (THE FUTURE)

Next Year – Can we maintain a surplus budget?

It is difficult to predict if we can maintain a balanced or surplus budget. Each year we are attempting to sustain or increase our income against a background of reducing members and this can only be achieved by a combination of increased giving and maximising our lettings income. We predict additional costs as our fixed price energy contract comes to an end and potential additional premises costs.

Giving & Gift Aid

We are very conscious that the current unpredictable times continue to affect many people in a number of ways. We are grateful to all those who give generously and selflessly on a regular basis to support the work of the Church, both in financial terms and with the giving of time and talents. We are also grateful to those who have increased their giving this year – thank you. This giving is vital for us to both sustain our current activities, but more importantly extend our mission in the town and wider community.

I would encourage everyone to prayerfully review their current giving and consider if they are able to help us maintain the required income necessary to maintain a balanced budget. Tax relief on giving (Gift Aid) forms a vital part of our income and in the last tax year we were able to claim £19,000 back in Gift Aid. I would ask all tax payers to ensure they advise Christine Leach of all giving to the Church – both regular and one off – to ensure we claim this income. If in doubt as to what is claimable, please speak to Christine.

The Finance Team

Managing the Church's finances is a team effort and I would like to record my grateful thanks to Lynn Graseman who, as Church Administrator, deals with all aspects of lettings, banking and expenditure. She is supported by Julie Finbow & Sue Unitt as offering counters. Christine Leach continues the invaluable task of maximising our income from the complex area of Gift Aid and Sue Haworth deals with payroll, pension and tax issues. Thank you for the support and expertise you provide.

Steve Watson

Treasurer

May 2025

Risk Review

The Managing Trustees are conscious of the need to identify and mitigate risks to the assets, employees and volunteers of the charity. With this in mind, a number of risk mitigation policies are in place and reviewed on a regular basis. These include:

- Safeguarding policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving property proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving financial proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Cash Handling policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Insurance policy
 - Reviewed December 2024 and the level of cover considered adequate
- Health & safety policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2025

Steve Watson

Treasurer

May 2025

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024

	NOTES	2023/2024	2022/2023
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular	1	74,035	65,240
Gift Aid		19,137	19,960
Donations		877	1,160
Total Offerings		94,049	86,360
Donations - Church organisations	2	9,948	13,205
Lettings Income	3	15,381	17,125
Fundraising Events	8	4,287	8,742
Sundry Income	4	752	174
Bank Interest		1,657	508
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		126,074	126,114
Funds Received For External Organisations		1,372	1,992
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		127,446	128,106
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Circuit Assessment		43,400	43,395
Mission donations		4,970	4,450
Worship	5	3,692	3,234
Administration	6	14,774	10,097
Premises	7	36,570	31,025
Repairs		6,454	6,328
Small Capital Items		5,540	2,166
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		115,400	100,695
Funds Paid To External Organisations		1,372	1,992
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		116,772	102,687
Net Surplus (Deficit) for the Year		10,674	25,419
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2023		52,536	27,117
Transfer from Redevelopment Scheme		23,903	
Connexional Pension Reserve Fund Refund		10,856	
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2024	9	97,969	52,536

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

REDEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024

	NOTES	2023/2024	2022/2023
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular			1,350
Donations		40	100
Total Offerings		<u>40</u>	<u>1,450</u>
Fundraising Events			418
TOTAL INCOME		<u>40</u>	<u>1,868</u>
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Contractor Stage Payments		-	23,842
Professional Fees		-	1,651
Transfer to Church Account		23,903	-
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		<u>23,903</u>	<u>25,493</u>
Net Surplus for the Year		<u>(23,863)</u>	<u>(23,625)</u>
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2023		23,863	47,488
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2024	10	-	23,863

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

LEGACIES ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024

	NOTES	2023/2024	2022/2023
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2023			
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes		91,080	87,711
<u>Income</u>			
Bequests		-	784
Interest TMCP		<u>4,662</u>	<u>2,585</u>
		4,662	3,369
<u>Expenditure</u>			
		<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2024			
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	10	<u>95,742</u>	<u>91,080</u>

BENEVOLENCE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024

Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2023			
Nat West		429	323
<u>Income</u>			
Communion Services		<u>538</u>	<u>206</u>
		967	
<u>Expenditure</u>			206
Donations		100	100
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2024			
Nat West	10	<u>867</u>	<u>429</u>

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2024

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

	2023/2024	2022/2023
<u>NOTE 1 - REGULAR OFFERINGS</u>		
Standing Orders	51,610.00	51,863.00
Envelopes	18,741.00	10,662.00
Cash	3,684.00	2,715.00
	<u>74,035.00</u>	<u>65,240.00</u>
<u>NOTE 2 - DONATIONS CHURCH ORGANISATIONS</u>		
Thursday Coffee Mornings		
Oasis Lounge	7,658.00	9,054.00
Cardstall	690.00	2,130.00
Boys Brigade	0.00	121.00
Company at Christmas	500.00	500.00
Thursday Group	100.00	100.00
Food Bank	1,000.00	1,300.00
	<u>9,948.00</u>	<u>13,205.00</u>
<u>NOTE 3 - LETTINGS INCOME</u>		
Regular Lettings	11,858.00	12,840.00
One Off Lettings	3,417.00	4,126.00
Saturday Coffee Mornings	106.00	159.00
	<u>15,381.00</u>	<u>17,125.00</u>
<u>NOTE 4 - SUNDRY INCOME</u>		174.00
In Memory	500.00	
Carol Service for Warm Spaces	167.00	
Sundry	85.00	
	<u>752.00</u>	<u>174.00</u>
<u>NOTE 5 - WORSHIP</u>		
Organists	1,280.00	1,097.00
Copywrite & Music	809.00	1,413.00
Friday Froglets & Terrific Tuesdays	998.00	
Expenses	605.00	724.00
	<u>3,692.00</u>	<u>3,234.00</u>
<u>NOTE 6 - ADMINISTRATION</u>		
Church Manager	10,565.00	7,813.00
Outreach Worker	1,836.00	
Publications	132.00	55.00
Website	243.00	243.00
Photocopier	0.00	24.00
Paper & Printing	328.00	0.00
Auditing	330.00	312.00
Dona Card Payment Machine	0.00	492.00
Bank Charges	544.00	605.00
Miscellaneous	796.00	553.00
	<u>14,774.00</u>	<u>10,097.00</u>

NOTE 7 - PREMISES

Cleaner	12,505.00	13,062.00
Insurance	5,193.00	5,043.00
Power	13,334.00	7,941.00
Windows & Cleaning	1,283.00	1,007.00
Water	116.00	60.00
Waste Disposal	849.00	372.00
Boiler	690.00	744.00
Pianos & Organ	126.00	186.00
Fire Extinguishers	265.00	255.00
Telephone	837.00	946.00
TV License	169.00	159.00
Sundry expenditure	1,203.00	1,250.00
	<u>36,570.00</u>	<u>31,025.00</u>

NOTE 8 - FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Warm Spaces Grants	1,000.00	
Christmas Fayre	888.00	
Bric-a-Brac & Plant Stall	2,000.00	
Brass Band Concert	227.00	
Garden Party	60.00	
Christmas Quiz	112.00	
	<u>4,287.00</u>	<u>8,742.00</u>

NOTE 9 - BANK BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2024

NatWest - 2 Accounts Combined	71,799.00	31,470.00
Central Finance Board	<u>27,037.00</u>	<u>21,495.00</u>
	98,836.00	52,965.00
Less:		
Benevolence Account	<u>867.00</u>	<u>429.00</u>
	97,969.00	52,536.00

NOTE 10 - SUMMARY OF FUND BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2024

General Account	97,969.00	52,536.00
Benevolence Account	867.00	429.00
Legacies Account	95,742.00	91,080.00
Redevelopment Account	<u>0.00</u>	<u>23,863.00</u>
	<u>194,578.00</u>	<u>167,908.00</u>

APPENDIX (to Gill's Report – Post-it notes)

Oasis Lounge - Yellow	Church - Pink	Outside - Blue
NOTICE		
Bible Study	Easter Labyrinth, Open Prayer Space	Tangent, Renewal, Gambit
		Through the Roof

OPEN		
Open to All	Worship open to all	
Coffee Mornings	Refreshment at services	Company at Christmas
Coffee Mornings, Knit & Natter, CAMEO, Craft & Chat, Bible Study, Friday Froglets, Bridge	Building is open at some point 7 days a week	Pastoral and Community visiting, Walk of Witness (outside service), Outreach to Ukrainian & Syrian immigrants.
Knit & Natter, Craft & Chatter, Mindfulness Colouring		Accessible toilet, Inviting Bulgarian Fellowship to use Church
GB, Memory Café, Special Cup, -Food Bank, CA		
Coffee Mornings, Cooking with Friends, Airfryer Course		
Building is open 7 days a week		
Knit & Natter		
Friday Froglets and Terrific Tues		
Knit & Natter		
Outside organisations using facilities, warm Space, Coffee Mornings, OL open most of the week, CAMEO, Bible Study & Prayer		
House Groups		
Transmitting Services to housebound		
Open to All – Nationality, Orientation, Ability		
Beginner's Bridge		
Company at Christmas		
Terrific Tues, Friday Froglets, Lego		
Isabel Hospice		
Terrific Tuesdays		
Welcoming Homeless		
Community Support		
Toddler Group		
Warm Space		
Care for those who have less opportunities than us		
CAB, Clarion Housing		

OL - Yellow	Church - Pink	Outside - Blue
SERVE		
Warm Space	Refreshments at services	Pastoral Visiting
Serving <u>everyone</u> who comes in		Companionship, Friendship, Pastoral Churches
Home Instead – help for carers		Foodbank, CAB, Clarion Housing
A welcome space for everybody, Homeless, Friendship, Oasis Church sometimes		Visiting Sick and those who are not mobile live the life, Support – HBW
Isabel Hospice Coffee Mornings		
LEARN		
Bible Study	Bible Reading	Renewal Group Studying God's Word – meeting fortnightly. GAMBET Group meets from time to time to explore the Christian faith (originally ALPHA course – 2 groups amalgamation of BETA & GAMMA)
	Preaching God's Word	
PRAY		
Individual Prayer as needed in Oasis Lounge	Fellowship, Worship, Welcoming, Communion, Music, Technical Presentation, Offering Peace	Pastoral visiting prayers
Prayer Tree	Prayers offering Peace Flowers for housebound	Prayer at home for others
Prayer Corner	Pray Worship	
Pray with our visitors	Learn through worship	
Bible Study Prayer		
CARE		
Warm Spaces	Share Fellowship at worship	Street Pastors
Coffee Morning, Worship, GB, Exercise, Building open daily as a warm space Food & drink always available, activities every day.		Pastoral visiting Thurs & Sat stall outside Witness - Friendship
Open to Night Shelter People		Foodbank
Cooking with those in need		Pastoral visiting

Isabel Hospice Coffee Mornings		Pastoral Team
Warm Spaces		Company at Christmas
Bible Study & learn, welcome all comers whoever they are		
Encouraging young people with GB and Friday Froglets		
The Memory Café for people with memory loss and those who care for them.		
Toddler Group		
Special Cup		
Welcome homeless		

OL - Yellow	Church - Pink	Outside - Blue
TELL		
Share Bible Study in the Oasis	How do we show visitors our faith	Holiday Bible Week
Screens in Oasis and entrance		Whitechapel
Streaming Services		GB, Friday Froglets
		Easter Trail
LIVE		
Show love by showing you care	Preacher Share	Eco Church
		Pastoral Visiting
		Recycling
FLOURISH		
Oasis – Open Door and Welcome	Praying for climate crisis	Charity coffee mornings
Open for other people to use the premises, e.g. charity coffee mornings, welcomed the Bulgarian Church & assisting them with a place of worship		
Collection and recycling of blister packs		
Gardening plant sales		
GB & Friday Froglets		
WORSHIP		
Girls Brigade Outreach	Pastoral Care for each other	Listening to worship songs at home
Bible Study	Dementia Worship	
	Sunday worship, Songs of Praise & Communion services	
	Sunday Worship Mornings	
	Churches Together	

	Music	
	Froglets Seasonal worship	
	Music Tech Presentation	
	Worshipping together – Hear God’s Word	
	Sunday Services, Songs of Praise, Celebration Services	
	Afternoon Worship Songs of Praise	
	Sharing the Church with friends, Singing, Dancing - modern and traditional, greeting people	
	Acceptance, hymns, organ music, concerts comfort, messages	
	Worship, Fellowship, Welcoming, Greetings	

OL - Yellow	Church - Pink	Outside - Blue
CHALLENGE		
Issues that have no easy resolution – Beyond the Church’s capability	Choir for a Day	Supporting Charities that we have learnt about in Church
Women of Grace	Learn to help others and pray for them	Tangent House Group
Challenge views of those who come in	Stall outside, services, Bible Study, Stewards, Greeters, Music, Choir, Organist, Praying	Stall Outside, welcomers, facilitate Bulgarian Church, Pastoral Visitors, facilitate Foodbank
Challenge injustice of those who come	Fairtrade refreshments	
Memory Café		
Companionship Groups		
Companionship, Friendship, Acceptance groups, Froglets		
Keep Fit		
Friday Froglets, Coffee Morning, Stall outside, Knit & Natter, Bulgarian Church, Chess, Bridge, Terrific Tuesdays, Dementia Groups, Isabel Hospice, Greeters, Girls’ Brigade, Warm Space, coffee/drinks available		
Open to the community. Anyone can come in and feel welcome		

OL -Yellow	Church - Pink	Outside - Blue
SHARE		
Friday Froglets	Bible Study	Choir for a Day
Jigfest	Reaching out through Technologies, e.g. YouTube	Outside Stall
Refreshments, tea & coffee, talk to people, greeters at the front of the Church		Notices and Screens
		Walk of Witness
		Outside Stall
		Street Pastors
		Charity Coffee Mornings
		Angel Bombing
		Easter Cards to local businesses

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

England & Wales - Charity number 1127323

Accounts



ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2024

Open to God Open to You Open to Each Other

You can be sure of a warm welcome whatever brings you or your family to the church - a curiosity to find out more about the Christian faith or to attend one of the many activities we have. Find out what is going on at www.bsm-church.org.uk

From the Minister

In the last two Annual Reports, I have spoken about 'rollercoasters'. Little did I know that the ride, over the last twelve months, was going to get so rough on a personal basis.

As you are aware, during my Sabbatical, whilst also caring for Graham, I was diagnosed with breast cancer which, fortunately, has been treated successfully. My phased return, following my treatment, was then interrupted by Graham's death, compassionate leave and, in early Spring, another phased return. During this time, and indeed all through the last twelve months, I have been incredibly supported by all the Church members and those who use our premises, both in prayer and in practical ways, too. People have walked alongside me as I learn to cope with the new title of widow. The love and kindness that I have experienced has been amazing and the sense of community and care extends beyond our Sunday services. The Isobel Hospice mornings, our regulars in the Oasis lounge, the WiLos lunches and our caring congregation have strengthened and encouraged me and your love has shone through my dark times. You have indeed ministered to your Minister.

As the Bishops Stortford Circuit, you were kind enough to grant me a three-year extension, which takes me to 2025. However, for personal reasons, I have asked that this be extended for one more year to 2026 (which will of course be subject to a vote at the September Circuit meeting). Meanwhile, HAEBEA has granted my request to drop to part-time working 75% of my hours but on a three week out of four basis. I feel that this will enable the Churches and the Circuit to be able to plan more easily and will mean that I can visit my family in Scotland a little more as I hope to retire there.

But I know that you haven't just walked alongside me but countless other people who come across our threshold with multiple needs, vulnerabilities, hurts and concerns. You have provided a safe space, not just in the Oasis, but also for those who have started tentatively to come to worship. The simple act of sitting quietly with the person who is alone cannot be underestimated. Our Lent theme of Unbounded Love has been lived out to the best of our ability and through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. This was brought home to me as I sat with a family of a new Church member who was critically ill. They told me that this person loved coming to the Church because they have found and received unconditional love here and that brought some peace and healing, even through that family's pain.

Some Churches, when their Minister is absent, go into 'standby' mode, pausing decisions or waiting for their return to start new mission opportunities. I am greatly encouraged that BSMC is not one of those Churches! This past year, not only did you start the new initiative of Terrific Tuesdays during the school holidays, you built on that success by launching Friday Froglets for toddlers and their carers. It must be said, if you want a quiet coffee on a Friday morning, the Oasis is possibly not the best choice as it is buzzing with little ones. Thanks go to the flexibility of the Beginners Bridge for moving into the relatively quieter space of the Church (no, they can't use the Wesley because the Ukrainian language classes are there and the Upper Vestibule and Retreat are full of buggies; our premises are full!) I am also greatly encouraged that Girls Brigade has restarted, too.

The other wonderful initiative has been the scoping of the Outreach worker's post – and the advertising, interviewing and selection of our newest member of staff, Amy Farrer. She is working Monday to Friday with occasional evenings and Saturdays and is going to be co-ordinating our welcomers and volunteers, being on hand during the day in the Oasis as well as looking for new opportunities. We are fortunate that Amy's skillset also includes expertise in social media and she is also focusing on recruiting more welcomers and volunteers, as well as raising the profile of what we are about – sharing God's unbounded love with the people of Stortford.

The work that goes on during the week is underpinned by prayer and fellowship through the House groups, Bible studies and fellowships and also the love and care given by our amazing Pastoral visitors. The worship of the community is vital – for if we are not grounded in God's love, and open to the Spirit, how can we share the good news with others? We rely on our musicians, readers, audio and technical, stewards and many others to enable and enhance the worship of the whole community. But, behind the scenes, there is also the work of the Property Committee, Finance and Church Council members and our Safeguarding Officers because, without these, our Church community could not function effectively. Often, though, you see the same names appearing on multiple lists and in multiple roles – please read the attached report and you will see what I mean. I am so thankful that all our stewards are prepared to continue for another year but their task would be so much easier if four became six!

I encourage you to prayerfully consider what God is calling you to do over the coming year. Could you volunteer one afternoon a week to be a welcomer, one evening a month to be with our Girls Brigade as an extra adult, to go onto the coffee rota, join a House group or Bible Study, learn a new skill on the sound desk, take notes at the Finance meeting twice a year, become a steward, take the flowers to someone who is housebound, weed the front garden occasionally, encourage a friend or neighbour to come to Church, bake a cake for the Songs of Praise service – the list of opportunities goes on!

As you read through the enclosed reports, give thanks for the work of God in this place and pray for all those whose names appear in the reports and the work that they do. Please also pray for all who come into our premises each day, that they will find the love of God within their lives.

Every blessing

Revd Gill Hulme

HAEBEA

The Bishop's Stortford Methodist Circuit (our church and Stansted Free Church) joined the Herts and Essex Border Ecumenical Area (HAEBEA) in September 2023, so that finally we were no longer a one minister Circuit (as District had long wanted); and we gained access to a number of excellent additional preachers, as well as enabling Gill to relinquish her Superintendent duties.

Unfortunately, despite repeated applications, the Charities Commission will not approve any form of constitution for ecumenical areas such as HAEBEA, and therefore, for legal and financial reasons, the only option now available to HAEBEA is to split the governance of the Methodist Churches and the United Reformed Churches within the area in two. A new Methodist Circuit (Herts and Essex Border Circuit – HAEBEC) will be formed, and the URC churches will now report directly to their Eastern Synod (with the ending of URC Districts a few years ago, there is no URC equivalent to a Methodist Circuit).

However, whilst we have been forced to split the legal/governance aspects of our area, there is a strong desire within the HAEBEA grouping to maintain our ecumenical working as far as possible, and in particular, in terms of worship, pastoral care and outreach. Work therefore continues towards formulating a partnership agreement for these purposes and we look forward to sharing in the benefits of this ecumenical collaboration.

There is, therefore, a certain amount of flux in the HAEBEA situation at present but I am greatly encouraged that the ecumenical links we have built thus far will continue to be strengthened.

Frieda Wilson

HAEBEA Area Executive Member

Pastoral Report

As part of my job, I keep the data base up to date, recording any changes in membership as well as in the church family as a whole. For the Annual Report last year, I wrote that our Church Membership stood at 129 and this year the number is down to 119. Some members have sadly died, others have been recorded as Ceased to Meet or Transferred Out.

We are of course not just statistics, we are people, all part of our Church family. As well as our Church members, we do have several people worshipping with us, many on a regular basis. This number also fluctuates and it is good to see new faces in our congregation. It is very important that we all play our part in welcoming newcomers.

We are pleased that so many of us are able to meet for worship on a Sunday morning but we continue to be very grateful to the Tech Team for transmitting our services through YouTube for any who are unable to join us physically.

At the start of my report, I mentioned the Church data base so would take this opportunity to remind you that we do hold your details on this. It is used purely for administrative purposes and we do not pass your information on to any other organisation. I also attempt to maintain a community roll and this is changing rapidly with more people coming through our doors each day when we are open, many on a regular basis.

Once again, my thanks go out to all our lovely pastoral visitors and to all who give pastoral care in so many ways; by a visit, a phone call, a lift to Church, taking flowers, or a card sent with love on a special occasion.

Maureen Draper
Pastoral Secretary

House Groups

Renewal

There are 12 of us in the Renewal group which continues to meet the first and third Tuesday of the month to study the Bible and pray together.

This year we have been studying Ecclesiastes using Alistair Begg's compelling and challenging YouTube series of 10 talks Chasing the Wind, David Coffey's three talks on being Salt and Light with studies from John's Gospel and Linda Watson's helpful short talk on her approaches to prayer.

We enjoyed a Christmas Social and Bring and Share and now look forward to a Summer meal out at a local restaurant. We give a donation at each meeting and then, at an opportune time, a sum is given to support a Charity. This year we have given money to Stort Valley Schools Trust and Street Pastors.

Many thanks to June and Robin Whitbread for their hospitality.

Chris Neal

Tangent

We continue to meet on an ad-hoc basis. We try to meet monthly but it really depends on everyone's diaries.

Last year we used the Bible month Study Guide for Revelation - this was an interesting exploration. We are currently looking at a different subject each time and this depends on who is leading the meeting.

Karen Quelch

Gambet

Finally, after emerging from the restrictions of 'Covid 19', we felt able to resume our fellowship moving from meeting in the evening to the afternoon. So, on 19th June 2023, we embarked on the 10-part series, ReFrame, developed from a live course produced by the Regent College in Vancouver in 2010. The Bible based DVD has helped us to see Jesus in new ways and then be filled with joy and confidence to live every aspect of life fully for Him.

Mike Haworth

Youth Work

Girls' Brigade

Girls Brigade has restarted positively back after our short sabbatical. Helen and I have taken over as acting co-team leaders. We are thankful for the support that we have received over the last term from other Girls Brigade companies within our District and the Methodist Church. We would appreciate your continued support as we continue to get things going. Last term we have had three regular girls attend. We also have Rowan who is completing her Advanced Young Leader training. Helen and I are thankful to Revd Gill Hulme for coming each week and supporting us to make sure that there are enough adults. We have a social media presence on Facebook sharing what we have been up to each week.

Finally, we would like to thank Julie Finbow for her many years of service, leadership and dedication to sharing the love of God with the girls that attended throughout her time as Team Leader.

Jordan Stringer

18+

This group has ceased to meet as part of the wider church community. They have created lasting friendships and continue to meet socially as their busy lives allow.

Jacqui Finbow

Enhancing Our Worship

Music

from the Organ Bench

Over the years, we have been extremely lucky as a Church to have had four organists at our disposal. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end and, since the last AGM, we have lost Joey and, now, the time has come say a massive thank you to Stuart Boorman who will pull the roller shutter over the organ for the last time on 5th May. Stuart has decided that the time has come to retire. He has been playing for 67 years and deserves a rest. We are so grateful for Stuart's commitment to our services over the years and we wish him well for the future.

So, it is down to myself and Stephen Rapkin, who can only commit to afternoon services, assisted occasionally by Chris Neal on the piano.

The music in services is an integral part of worship. As my availability cannot be every week, we are looking towards technology to support worship when we are not able to provide an organist, or pianist, live.

We are fortunate that we have a Tech Team who are able to do this and look forward to developing how this works over the coming months.

Times are changing, so we ask that everyone bears with us as we get used to new ways of providing musical support to worship.

Mark Wiffen

Singers from BSMC met with others from Churches in the new HAEBEA Circuit to sing at the special service held at St Andrew's Church, Harlow, on 9th September 2023.

The choir and instrumentalists joined together for the Christmas Carol Service at BSMC on Sunday 17th December 2023. Unfortunately, I was unwell on the day so was unable to be there!

Hilary Eves

Church Flowers

We continued this year with flowers provided by members for the beautiful vase given to us by Fullerton United Methodist Church and displayed on the Communion Table. As it is a simple bouquet, which can then be taken out to either a person of the giver's choice or a pastoral recommendation, we have been able to fulfil all the dates to the end of the year. So, a big thank you to all those people who have offered to contribute. Thank you to Sue Hayter for the Advent Ring and Cynthia Friend for the Easter Wreath and Ruth Banks, Alison Watson and Mione Goldspink for pedestal displays when needed during the year for special occasions.

Chris Neal

Outreach

Open Church Oversight Group

This group directs our mission in the town and coordinates information learned from being open during the week. The group meets every eight weeks or so and we have tried to include people representing all the different aspects of our Church. The current members are:

Chair/Secretary	Frieda Wilson
Minister	Revd Gill Hulme
Stewards	Pat Simpson, Terry Copland, Julia Last, Stan Mackowiak
HAEBEA Area Reps	Karen Quelch, Pat Simpson, Steve Watson, Frieda Wilson
Pastoral Secretary	Maureen Draper
Local Preachers	Karen Quelch
Premises Representatives	Norman Huntley, Brian Unitt
Finance Representative	Steve Watson
Activities Representative	Alison Watson
Kitchen Supplies Representative	Sue Unitt
Kitchen Equipment Representative	Ella Bisschoff
Former Mission & Outreach Chair	Chris Neal
Outreach Worker	Amy Farrer

The Group will, from time to time, draft in others when their input is needed but if anyone would like to join the group on a permanent basis, please speak to me.

The Oasis Lounge continues to be a welcoming place for many people, and we are now seeing some of those who first came to the Oasis Lounge regularly attending Sunday services.

How we do things keeps evolving as we gain more experience: we now offer toast and jam/marmite/Nutella, as well as cuppa soups and biscuits, and we now have CCTV in the communal areas, which has recently proved useful. We also have Amy starting as our Outreach Worker and we are excited about the additional possibilities she may have in store for us and the Oasis Lounge. Watch this space!!

The biggest challenge, though, remains finding enough Welcomers to fill all the slots each month. Do please take the time to look at the rota for the coming month and sign up for a session or two. It is a lovely way to serve but if you are worried and you would like to shadow someone first, to see how things are done, then we can easily arrange this – just speak to Alison or Frieda. And if you do nothing else, please pray for this mission work – The Oasis Lounge is proof that church is not just for Sundays!!

Frieda Wilson

PowerPoint Display Screens

The rolling slides on the Oasis Lounge and entrance TV screens advertise our activities as well as featuring bible verses, hymn lyrics and other motivational slides to encourage and inform anyone visiting or passing by. I hope that the presentations are well received as part of our mission and outreach.

Alison Watson

Social Media

A big thank you again to our Church Administrator, Lynn Graseman, for bringing her expertise to the website. I keep the Home page up to date and update the other pages.

On Facebook, we have a Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church page with information about events, services, and a daily prayer from The Methodist Church website. We have over 276 followers and over 4,000 people seeing posts in the last month and over 300 responding. We also have a Facebook Group of 150 members to date with shared prayers, news, anecdotes, and humour. In addition, we can post events that then show up in everyone's feed as Events in Your Area, as well as engaging directly with Facebook groups such as What's on in Stortford? and Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation. These allow us to reach people in the area who might not follow our page. We also use both Facebook and Twitter to share Methodist Church faith-based articles and social injustice articles that we wish to bring to people's attention, and we sometimes tag in others to our posts re events such as our local newspaper. Both Twitter and Facebook feeds show on our website's front page, allowing people who do not use social media to see them. We are also able to put a link to our website and the YouTube page, which provides people with an easy access route to watch services live or rewatch them later.

Much gratitude must be given to Richard Ling and Brian Unitt, ably assisted by Sue Unitt, Alan Draper, Frieda Wilson, Lynne Ling and Norman Huntley, for their sterling work each week streaming worship and, again, to Brian and Richard for developing the video screen facility in the Oasis Lounge and Alison Watson who so ably keeps the screens up to date.

Chris Neal

The Instagram account is linked with the Facebook account which means that the posts of photos and videos that have been shared via Instagram are also shared onto the BS Methodist Church Facebook page. Throughout Lent, one of the Lent reflection posts that was put onto social media was recognised by the Methodist Church and used as part of one of their Unbounded Love reflection videos. I hope, through the use of the right hashtags, posting regularly and engaging with commenters we will be able to use it to its full potential in regard to what is happening within the Oasis Lounge and Church life such as Lent and Advent reflections, Girls Brigade and Holiday Bible Week. One of the pieces of content that has had a good reaction, too, was from Easter Sunday's 'Transformation of the Cross' video which had approximately 115 views on Instagram and approximately 400 views on Facebook.

Jordan Stringer

Thursday Friendship Group

We are a friendly group of ladies who continue to meet on the second and fourth Thursdays each month, normally in the evening. We have a varied programme having talks, social evenings and, in the Summer, explore the local area.

Each month we support the Church by running the Thursday coffee and cake mornings and we also raise money for charity throughout the year. Last year we raised £575 for the Brain Tumour Trust. This was in memory of one of our members. This year we are raising money for the Thirst Café which supports local young people.

We are always pleased to welcome new members. If anyone is interested, please contact Maureen Draper or Christine Leach.

Christine Leach & Maureen Draper

Wilos Lunches (Wldow/ers and soLOS)

We continue to meet on average once a month. We have up to 19 in the group and the number of people coming on the day determines where we eat!

This is a very friendly group who enjoy each other's company after Church and eating a meal together, rather than going home to eat on their own.

This group has also been very helpful to those who have recently moved to this area and are new to our Church, to quickly make new friendships.

Angela Finbow

Knit and Natter

Our numbers are around 16 - 20 per week, sometimes more, and we have new people joining occasionally.

Many of the knitters want to knit for charity and we have been knitting for Ukrainian refugees. We recently sent the following on the lorries: 59 chicks, 3 rabbits, 4 large blankets, 2 cot blankets, 4 scarves, 3 pullovers, 14 hats, 10 mitts and 15 babies' cardigans.

The group continues to provide fellowship to all the people who come and we are able to provide yarn to the knitters for the charity knitting from yarn donations kindly given to our group. We also have needles for people to use as well.

Kate Rowe

Craft and Chat

On the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, anyone is invited to come and try craft. Some bring their own projects to work on and some enjoy having a go at whatever has been provided. You might have seen some of our efforts around. From flowers made from cupcake cases, Christmas decorations and Autumn wreaths we have tried sewing, painting, laminating and sticking. We are always pleased to accept gifts of crafting materials and resources.

Alison Watson

CAMEO (Come and Meet Each Other)

As I explained in last year's Report, this is a new group which I began with help from Chris Neal and Ruth Mutimer on the back of the Tuesday Afternoon Fellowship that closed due to low numbers. As previous leaders of this group, we all felt sad that we no longer saw some of the members and we felt there was a need to provide some way of meeting each other and just chatting.

We have now been meeting regularly on the second Tuesday of each month from 2.30-4pm in the Oasis lounge since the Spring of 2022. It is purely a social occasion; we have no format apart from providing plenty of tea or coffee and cakes, quite often home-made. This not only proves to be popular with our members, both male and female, but also with the various guests that come through our doors. Our numbers remain steady although, sadly of course, our oldest member Kathleen has recently died just after celebrating her 99th birthday.

Maureen Draper

Special Cup 2024

We continued to meet up on Wednesday afternoons. Our goal is still to provide a safe space where visitors can relax with a cup of coffee/tea, have a chat, play a game, complete a jigsaw - if they wanted. We can report that we succeeded in our main purpose. A few visitors and volunteers of Isabel Hospice became regulars and some even part of our team. We thank everyone who helped us in different ways to render this service, especially when we needed someone else to take our place.

Jan and Ella Bisschoff, Richard and Lynne Ling, Rose Cheyne

The Card Stall

We continue to operate the card stall in the Oasis Lounge on a 'self-service' basis with payment at the servery. This works well with over £2,000 generated for church funds last year. As well as cards, a small selection of gifts is held and if there is anything particular you would like us to stock, please speak to us.

Steve and Alison Watson

Coffee & Cake

We have continued to serve Coffee and Cake every Thursday and Saturday morning over the past year. Thank you to all our volunteers who bake and run the coffee mornings. It is not as easy to fill each Saturday as it once was as many of our groups no longer exist. Please speak to Alison if you would be able to run a Saturday coffee morning for a Charity or Church funds. Sue would like to hear from anyone willing to help staff or bake for Thursday coffee mornings.

Kris, from Snap Fitness, has continued to run a 15 minute keep fit session on a Thursday which our guests look forward to.

Sue Unitt & Alison Watson

Games on Friday & Bridge for Beginners

Games on Fridays ceased in January when Friday Froglets began but there is always a selection of games available in the cupboard in the Oasis Lounge. Bridge continues on the first and third Fridays of the month with a dedicated group improving their skills under the guidance of Alan & June. If you are looking to learn a new skill, please come and join us.

Steve Watson

Friday Froglets and Terrific Tuesdays

Friday Froglets is working well. We now have about 20 children who attend every week but, since January, we have seen about 50 different children. Mums/carers say it is a great help and time for them to get a bit of a breather. We have quite a few Italians, some Romanians and one Spanish lady. John & I are now building up a rapport with some of the parents/carers which is really nice and, hopefully, we will be able to take it to another level soon and perhaps invite them to Church. Terrific Tuesday has not been as busy as last Summer but still well attended.

Karen Quelch

The Wider Community

Methodist Homes for the Aged

The Church continues to support the work of Methodist Homes. Last year £641.60 was sent. This was made up from Methodist Homes Sunday, Christmas card box, Christmas Day collection and a donation from the Church.

Christine Leach

Action for Children

We had two successful coffee mornings during the year collecting the total of £380. Thank you to those who helped, especially Kate and the Renewal house group.

There have also been several other collections at various events during the year. All the money from these goes to help vulnerable children and families which Action for Children supports.

Most of the previous group have now retired so, if anyone is interested in helping, please contact me at any time for further details.

Thank you to all who supported Action for Children events this year.

Norman Huntley

Action for Children Home Collecting Boxes

Whilst the number of people with Home Collecting Boxes has decreased as less people are using cash, I was pleased to empty people's boxes recently and was able to send £420.36 off to Action for Children at the end of March this year.

Frieda Wilson

Christian Aid

Although there is no Christian Aid Committee in Bishop's Stortford, former members do get together to run two coffee mornings a year to raise funds: the one in September 2023 raised £188.00 and the one in March this year raised £262.00. There will also be Christian Aid collection envelopes on the church chairs on 19 May, as Christian Aid Week 2024 finishes, so Church members can donate.

Frieda Wilson

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford (CTBS)

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford (CTBS) is an organisation which enables Christians of many different traditions to work and worship together, thus enriching and bringing blessings to us all. The new Chairperson is Revd Claire Finlay from St James and the Vice chair is Dave Perry, who runs the Holy Trinity Night Shelter.

Activities during the past year have followed the established pattern. In June, Churches did their own separate activities for "Love Stortford Week", and then came together for the Town Carnival procession and stalls and activities on Sworders Field. In August, there was the ever-popular

Holiday Bible Week – a real opportunity to reach out to un-churched families. Carol singing in December had to be in a different place in Jackson Square this time and at a different time of day. Only four singers turned up, which was disappointing, but the Town Band was magnificent and £200 was collected for the Child Contact Centre. Also in December was Company at Christmas, on Christmas Day, held in our Methodist Church. It was once again a very happy and successful event. During the coldest months of Winter, Holy Trinity Night Shelter was open, giving shelter, food, advice, and general assistance to homeless people. In February, for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, there was a United Service at St James, Thorley, attended by members of seven different Churches. For Lent, Churches “did their own thing” and then joined together for the United Good Friday Service at the United Reformed Church. This was led this year by the Revd. John Walford of the Baptist Church. After this came the Walk of Witness through the Town, ending at the Methodist Church for hot cross buns and warm drinks. I am always delighted that our Church is able to host this event.

There are various groups which are associate members of CTBS and one of them is the Ukrainian Hospitality Support Group which I have the privilege of co-ordinating. We have been helping the Hosts and Guests for two years, and they are gradually finding jobs and independent accommodation. We continue to run twice weekly meetings and language lessons. We marked the second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February with a short, simple ceremony/Service in our Methodist Church. Our Ukrainian Guests are very sad and depressed at the moment, as they face the reality that there is no prospect of an end to the war. They live in a permanent state of anxiety and fear for the safety of their loved ones back home. All we can do is to give them hugs and pray for peace. We help them to raise money to send back to their hospitals. We give goods to send on the lorries but it all seems so inadequate. We pray most fervently for PEACE.

Mione Goldspink.

Property Report

Although this year has been relatively quiet on the property front, it hasn't been completely problem free. The most prominent item was the replacement covering on the roof over the Foodbank. Leaks were noted after even light rain and this was traced to the deterioration of the covering on the flat roof and accumulation of water in dips. Fortunately, no damage occurred to the Foodbank stock. While looking at this, the roofing engineers pointed out that all our flat roofs have coverings reaching the end of their lives. A watching brief from now on.

We continue to replace our lighting with LED assemblies as, and when, it requires any attention. The next item is the back office where the current fluorescent tubes are failing (anybody who has had to sit under a flashing light will appreciate the issue). This should also improve the light quality for the Foodbank staff using this office.

One job which has been moving forward rather slowly to date is the refurbishment of the Wesley Hall and rear kitchen. We have now set a basic budget for this and the process of getting quotes/specifications together is underway. The aim is to improve the hall in three ways. First, the walls will be covered with smooth boarding, with the addition of insulation where appropriate. The ceiling will be lowered, again to both improve the appearance and improve the insulation. The general appearance and decoration will bring the whole room up to a clean condition with smooth walls.

A start has been made on the rear kitchen with the replacement of the gas cooker. All cookers on the premises are now of a common electric type. This will be followed by replacement of the kitchen tops and flooring both of which are worn and need to be brought up to date. Finally, re-decoration to improve the general appearance.

In parallel with this, all the double glassing units at the back (not just the Wesley Hall) are really life expired. Over recent months we have had some minor leaks requiring some remedial work. Replacement will bring these up to the current standard for insulation effectiveness.

At the moment we have an outline budget of £100,00 for the three items; hopefully, most will be covered by available funds both internal and external.

Reference the drainage at the back mentioned last year. This has been monitored since Thames Water did some clearance work in the rear drain. We continue to look at possible long-term changes that will reduce the risk further by allowing the water to escape more freely without impeding the normal use by both the Foodbank and ourselves.

You may have noticed some closures of toilets in the last year. Apologies for this but some required lengthy delays due to spares problems. If you find any building issues like these with toilets, lights, leaks etc. report these quickly. Please fill in the incident book in the Upper Foyer if you find anything, however minor. Please do this even if you have verbally told a member of Property, Church Manager or others.

Norman Huntley

From the Senior Steward

As Senior Steward you get to have a more in-depth knowledge of the Church. I am always amazed at how hard people voluntarily work to keep the Church open weekly for most of the day. So much goes on quietly and without recognition and we should be truly grateful for the commitment and effort put in by many. My continued thanks go to the Stewards and Church Leadership Team. We are pleased that Gill has returned to us mindful of her past, stressful months. We hope, with our continued support and that of a new Outreach Worker, some of her thoughtful plans can come to fruition.

The Oasis Lounge continues to be an attraction for not only the general public but for organisations and groups wishing to hire the premises. However, due to its success and, for some, becoming their second home, we have had to install CCTV cameras. These have been placed to help keep safe our staff and volunteers and are situated in entry and exit areas. They will only be looked at when and if an incident occurs as has happened rarely, but on occasion.

We must not forget, though, our Mission, which is also to encourage people into the Church sanctuary. It is a fact that many of those that were running the Church years ago are the same as those doing it now. As Romans 10 tells us: *'how can they (all of us) believe if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear if the message is not proclaimed? And how can the message be proclaimed if the messengers are not sent out?'* We must not be afraid to tell people why our Church is open to everyone and why we do the things we do. It is to help bring others to faith through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This Report will need to be approved at the Annual Church Meeting and we will also need to make various appointments. Gill has outlined in her Report where and when help is required and the positions that need to be filled. Another is a new Churches Together representative. Mione Goldspink has done sterling work for many years in this role but now wishes to retire. We are fortunate to have an active CTBS and, if you value all what goes on in our other marvellous Churches and the events we plan together, please consider replacing her. Vincent Van Gogh (famous artist) once said *'Great things are not done by impulse but by a series of small things brought together'*. Let's build on our successes and look forward with hope to the future.

Pat Simpson

Finance Report

Last year we reported that we had set a balanced budget with income matching expenditure. Our actual results showed a surplus of £25,419 and our final accounts to August 2023 follow this report, presented in a similar format as last year. Our main account is our 'General' account and this is followed by restricted funds covering Redevelopment, Legacies and Benevolence. Following the notes to these accounts is our budget for the current year.

WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM (LAST YEAR)

General Account

We set a balanced budget showing income matching expenditure. We finished the year with a surplus of £25,419. This compares with the previous year's shortfalls of £12,360 and £16,293. This is a good result for the year and the major variations from the original budget need to be highlighted:

- **Offerings higher by £5,700** – due mainly to gift aid nearly £5,000 over budget as a result of additional GASDS on cash donations and £1,000 which was due the previous year
- **Donations higher by £10,800** – the Oasis Lounge significantly exceeded our expectations, £1,000 of the card stall related to the previous year and the Foodbank donation related to warm spaces
- **Lettings higher by £6,100** – we have seen an increase in regular and occasional lettings since the Oasis Lounge has become established
- **Fundraising of £8,700** – this had been omitted from the budget as it has been directed towards the refurbishment for the last few years
- **Premises costs higher by £3,000** – due to extra cleaning costs associated with the Oasis Lounge
- **Repairs higher by £3,800** - due mainly to boiler and roof repairs

Historically, 85% of our income has come from offerings with 10% from external lettings. However, this year's offerings accounted for just 68% of income. We are relying more on external lettings and other income. It is encouraging that over 75% of our giving is by regular standing order and this has stayed stable. Together with envelopes and cash, total giving was similar to previous years (when adjusted for gift aid received after the year-end). Our overall income is now above pre pandemic levels.

The majority of our costs are fixed and we are not able to make corresponding savings if income drops. Costs at £109,695 were similar to the previous year.

Redevelopment Scheme

We set up a separate Redevelopment Scheme account under the control of the project team. This is the final year that separate accounts will be prepared. During the year we raised a final £1,868 from donations and fundraising. After the retention paid to the contractor and associated professional fees totalling £25,493, a final balance of £23,863 was held at the year end. This represents the surplus achieved on the project and has now been transferred to the General account, but 'ring fenced' for further premises expenditure.

Other Accounts

Legacy funds make up a large portion of our reserves and some have restricted uses. During the year we received one new legacy of £784 and, with interest added, we finished the year with £91,080 available to us. The small benevolence funds are 'ring fenced' for specific purposes.

WHERE WE ARE (THE CURRENT YEAR)

Current Year Budget

The budget for this year (2023/24) follows the accounts for last year. This shows a deficit of £10,000; however, this is after premises costs of £25,000. If these had been taken out of reserves (which has been done on some previous occasions), a surplus of £15,000 would have been seen. This is more in line with last year's outcome. We are forecasting income to be slightly down on the previous year and expenditure of a similar level (excluding one-off premises costs).

How We Are Doing This Year Against Budget?

After six months, it appears that a large portion of the premises work will not be completed this year, which will positively impact the budget. We are predicting income at a similar level to budget and all expenditure other than premises costs will also be in line with budget. We predict just £10k of the £25k premises expenditure to be spent, which would result in an overall surplus of £14k compared with the budgeted shortfall of £10k

Analysis of Giving

- Regular giving by members (excluding one-off gifts) has been relatively flat over the last three years and is now returning to pre Covid (and refurbishment) levels.
- A 7-year analysis of giving shows:

2023-24	83.0k (Estimate)
2022-23	85.3k *
2021-22	81.5k *
2020-21	81.4k
2019-20	76.5k
2018-19	85.9k
2017-18	89.2k (inc one off giving of £4.5k)
* Adjusted for gift aid received after the year end	

- We are relying on a smaller number of donors each year, giving is static, but costs are increasing. This is not a trend we can allow to continue, especially as Circuit is covering £8,000 of our costs each year. If we had to cover these costs, this would increase our annual deficit.

Support from Circuit Funds

We are grateful for the financial support we continue to receive from Circuit funds. They have agreed to cover half of the cost of the Church Manager position - £8,000 per annum. Under a recent agreement with HAEBEA, the Church Manager funding has been agreed on an ongoing basis. Without this support, these costs would have to be covered from a combination of additional giving and drawing on our reserves.

WHERE WE ARE GOING (THE FUTURE)

Next Year – Can we maintain a surplus budget?

It is difficult to predict if we can maintain a balanced or surplus budget. Each year we are attempting to sustain or increase our income against a background of reducing members and this can only be achieved by a combination of increased giving and maximising our lettings income. We predict additional costs as our fixed price energy contract comes to an end and potential additional premises costs.

Giving & Gift Aid

We are very conscious that the current unpredictable times continue to affect many people in a number of ways. We are grateful to all those who give generously and selflessly on a regular basis to support the work of the Church, both in financial terms and with the giving of time and talents. We are also grateful to those who have increased their giving this year – thank you. This giving is vital for us to both sustain our current activities but, more importantly, extend our mission in the town and wider community.

I would encourage everyone to prayerfully review their current giving and consider if they are able to help us maintain the required income necessary to maintain a balanced budget. Tax relief on giving (Gift Aid) forms a vital part of our income and, in the last tax year, we were able to claim £18,000 back in Gift Aid. I would ask all tax payers to ensure they advise Christine Leach of all giving to the Church – both regular and one-off – to ensure we claim this income. If in doubt as to what is claimable, please speak to Christine.

The Finance Team

Managing the Church's finances is a team effort and I would like to record my grateful thanks to Lynn Graseman who, as Church Administrator, deals with all aspects of lettings, banking and expenditure. She is supported by Julie Finbow & Sue Unitt and their team of offering counters. Christine Leach continues the invaluable task of maximising our income from the complex area of Gift Aid and Sue Haworth deals with payroll, pension and tax issues. Thank you for the support and expertise you provide.

Steve Watson
Treasurer
May 2024

Safeguarding Report

Safeguarding remains at the centre of our Mission. As we expanded and extended our activities, the safeguarding issues have increased.

The training that is necessary for all those in roles that involve contact with others has also involved those who are involved in Company at Christmas and the Ukrainian Hospitality Support Group. Before 2023, those involved in Company at Christmas had not undergone such training. Of no less an undertaking has been the DBS checks necessary for all those in these roles. Sue Swan has completed all these checks. Sue has also been 'acting' Safeguarding Officer for the HAEBEA Circuit since the resignation of the former some nine months ago. Sue has also done these checks for the other Churches in the Circuit. The role is a considerable responsibility involving a tremendous amount of work for a volunteer, as evidenced by the fact that the post is currently being advertised as a salaried position. Sue deserves the thanks of both the Church and the Circuit.

The extensive range of activities that we offer presents challenges in terms of ensuring the safety of staff, volunteers and the visitors that we welcome. We have experienced a small number of issues with individual visitors but our volunteers have managed such incidents very well. The installation of CCTV was, in part, to address these concerns.

Both Sue and I have completed the Advanced Safeguarding Training Module during the past year.

Andrew Pickering
Co-Safeguarding Officer

Risk Review

The Managing Trustees are conscious of the need to identify and mitigate risks to the assets, employees and volunteers of the charity. With this in mind, a number of risk mitigation policies are in place and reviewed on a regular basis. These include:

- Safeguarding policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving property proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving financial proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Cash Handling policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Insurance policy
 - Reviewed December 2023 and the level of cover considered adequate
- Health & safety policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2024

Steve Watson
Treasurer
May 2024

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

	NOTES	2022/2023	2021/2022
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular	1	65,240	66,302
Gift Aid		19,960	13,982
Donations		1,160	250
Total Offerings		86,360	80,534
Donations - Church organisations	2	13,205	3,031
Lettings Income	3	17,125	6,680
Fundraising Events	8	8,742	
Sundry Income	4	174	10
Bank Interest		508	90
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		126,114	90,345
Funds Received For External Organisations		1,992	1,911
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		128,106	92,256
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Circuit Assessment		43,395	53,392
Mission donations		4,450	4,525
Worship	5	3,234	2,982
Administration	6	10,097	9,191
Premises	7	31,025	27,604
Repairs		6,328	2,411
Small Capital Items		2,166	2,600
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		100,695	102,705
Funds Paid To External Organisations		1,992	1,911
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		102,687	104,616
Net Surplus (Deficit) for the Year		25,419	(12,360)
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2022		27,117	89,477
Transfer to Redevelopment Scheme			40,000
Contribution to Connexional Pension Reserve Scheme			10,000
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2023	9	52,536	27,117

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

REDEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

	NOTES	2022/2023	2021/2022
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular		1,350	10,460
Gift Aid		-	9,315
Donations		100	22,016
Total Offerings		1,450	41,791
Donations - Church organisations		-	150
Fundraising Events		418	4,160
SUB TOTAL		1,868	46,101
Transfer from Church Funds		-	100,000
Grants		-	68,000
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		1,868	214,101
 <u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Contractor Stage Payments		23,842	495,139
Professional Fees		1,651	24,537
Insurance		-	133
Kitchen Fitout		-	28,223
Furniture / Flooring		-	18,878
Audio Visual		-	3,238
Planters / Sundry fittings		-	3,822
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		25,493	573,970
 Net Surplus for the Year		 (23,625)	 (359,869)
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st Sept 2022		47,488	407,357
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2023	10	23,863	47,488

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

LEGACIES ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

	NOTES	2022/2023	2021/2022
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes		87,711	93,617
<u>Income</u>			
Bequests		784	54,000
Interest	TMCP	2,585	94
		<u>3,369</u>	<u>54,094</u>
<u>Expenditure</u>			
Contribution to refurbishment		<u>-</u>	<u>60,000</u>
		-	60,000
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2023			
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	10	<u>91,080</u>	<u>87,711</u>

BENEVOLENCE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2022

Nat West		323	998
<u>Income</u>			
Communion Services		<u>206</u>	<u>75</u>
<u>Expenditure</u>		<u>206</u>	<u>75</u>
Donations		100	750
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2023		<u>429</u>	<u>323</u>
Nat West	10	<u>429</u>	<u>323</u>

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

	2022/2023	2021/2022
<u>NOTE 1 - REGULAR OFFERINGS</u>		
Standing Orders	51,863.00	51,629.00
Envelopes	10,662.00	12,529.00
Cash	2,715.00	2,143.99
	<u>65,240.00</u>	<u>66,301.99</u>
<u>NOTE 2 - DONATIONS CHURCH ORGANISATIONS</u>		
Thursday Coffee Mornings		211.44
Oasis Lounge	9,054.00	1,428.80
Card Stall	2,130.00	
Boys Brigade	121.00	1,390.98
Company at Christmas	500.00	
Thursday Group	100.00	
Food Bank	1,300.00	
	<u>13,205.00</u>	<u>3,031.22</u>
<u>NOTE 3 - LETTINGS INCOME</u>		
Regular Lettings	12,840.00	5,027.20
One Off Lettings	4,126.00	1,585.20
Saturday Coffee Mornings	159.00	68.00
	<u>17,125.00</u>	<u>6,680.40</u>
<u>NOTE 4 - SUNDRY INCOME</u>		
Funeral	100.00	
Easyfunding	44.00	
Sale of Equipment	30.00	10.00
	<u>174.00</u>	<u>10.00</u>
<u>NOTE 5 – WORSHIP</u>		
Organists	1,097.00	896.50
Copywrite & Music	1,413.00	1,517.38
Expenses	724.00	568.44
	<u>3,234.00</u>	<u>2,982.32</u>
<u>NOTE 6 - ADMINISTRATION</u>		
Church Manager	7,813.00	7,020.81
Publications	55.00	76.80
Website	243.00	243.00
Photocopier	24.00	19.99
Paper & Printing	0.00	300.22

Auditing	312.00	300.00
Dona Card Payment Machine	492.00	
Bank Charges	605.00	231.41
Miscellaneous	553.00	999.00
	<u>10,097.00</u>	<u>9,191.23</u>

NOTE 7 - PREMISES

Cleaner	13,062.00	9,356.03
Insurance	5,043.00	5,364.70
Power	7,941.00	8,318.85
Windows & Cleaning	1,007.00	876.63
Water	60.00	1,315.47
Waste Disposal	372.00	365.56
Boiler	744.00	234.00
Pianos & Organ	186.00	124.00
Fire Extinguishers	255.00	168.60
Telephone	946.00	816.39
TV Licence	159.00	159.00
Sundry expenditure	1,250.00	504.51
	<u>31,025.00</u>	<u>27,603.74</u>

NOTE 8 - FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Warm Spaces Grants & Donations	3,430.00	
Christmas Fayre	1,832.00	
Bric-a-Brac & Plant Stall	1,380.00	
JigFest	1,179.00	
Cardstall Donation	500.00	
Garden Party	356.00	
Christmas Quiz	65.00	
	<u>8,742.00</u>	<u>4,160.00</u>

NOTE 9 - BANK BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2023

NatWest - 2 Accounts Combined	31,470.00	13,313.75
Central Finance Board	21,495.00	14,126.23
	<u>52,965.00</u>	<u>27,439.98</u>
Less:		
Benevolence Account	429.00	323.00
	<u>52,536.00</u>	<u>27,116.98</u>

NOTE 10 - SUMMARY OF FUND BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2023

General Account	52,536.00	27,116.98
Benevolence Account	429.00	323.00
Legacies Account	91,080.00	87,711.70
Redevelopment Account	23,863.00	47,488.00
	<u>167,908.00</u>	<u>162,639.68</u>

BISHOPS STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

BUDGET FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 AUGUST 2024

INCOME

Offerings	82,000
Donations - Organisations	10,000
Lettings Income	17,000
Fundraising	5,000
Bank Interest	500
TOTAL INCOME	114,500

EXPENDITURE

Circuit Assessment	43,400
Worship	3,400
Mission donations	4,700
Administration	10,000
Premises	34,000
Repairs	25,000
Small Capital	4,000
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	124,500

OVERALL SHORTFALL	10,000
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BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

England & Wales - Charity number 1127323

Accounts



ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2023

Open to God Open to You Open to Each Other

You can be sure of a warm welcome whatever brings you or your family to the church - a curiosity to find out more about the Christian faith or to attend one of the many activities we have. Find out what is going on at www.bsm-church.org.uk

From the Minister

Dear Friends

I said last year that it had been a rollercoaster of a year for the church with the redevelopment project and, to continue the metaphor, we stepped onto that rollercoaster ride in faith. I have been amazed at what God had in store for us!

Thanks to the openness, dedication and time spent that you will see when you read the reports that follow, opening out the church has done so much more than we could have imagined. There is a sense that God's mission is always there before us, we just need to catch up – God is there in our communities as well as our churches; we need to join with the work that God's Spirit is already accomplishing.

I believe that this is becoming evident in the church becoming a community hub and working with various charities to enable us to offer a safe, warm and welcoming space as we live out the Gospel. In particular, the Isobel Compassionate café on a Wednesday has been a really good example of working together. To explain what I mean, I was asked to do a funeral last year of a non-church member and the remaining partner was, basically, in pieces. Chatting with their Social prescriber at the funeral, they were invited to the Compassionate café and, as a result of this, also came to know about and attend Company at Christmas. This person still pops in and I often say a prayer with them which seems to bring comfort within the loss and grief.

This is the case with many people who have, over the past year, become regulars in the Oasis Lounge; a listening ear is offered, if required, and a short prayer often follows. This is Kingdom work, making space for people's stories to be heard, a safe space where people are welcomed and not judged and this is leading to some attending worship, which is wonderful. We are also showing God's love in action to those who may have been so hurt by previous experiences of church that it will take a very long time for them to even think about coming in on a Sunday.

It has been good too, to be able to use our sanctuary for things like the Teddy Bear trail and the Jigsaw festival and, by the time you read this, the Easter Prayer Trail. These things bridge the gap for those who don't normally come to church and the teddy bears, in particular, gave the charities that use our premises a place to showcase their work in an accessible way. I would like to thank Lynn Graseman for all her support in such matters; her skill and artistic flair have been so very helpful.

Time and time again, I hear from non-church folk that this is a welcoming space – and that is so good to know – we are ploughing the field so that the seed can be sown! For some, it is a very big step to set foot inside a church building and I cannot stress enough how proud I am of the welcome that our volunteers give.

We have, over the cold weather period, also had guests from the Night Shelter, some of whom have, again, become regular visitors now that they have housing and, last week, I heard someone at the bus stop inviting the people there into the church for a cuppa – and I might add she is not a church goer.

I said last year that putting the mission plan into action was the most critical part of the redevelopment and, for me, I never dreamed that it would work in the wonderful way that it has. I admit that I was slightly worried about running Bible studies whilst coffee was being served, people were doing jigsaws, playing a game of chess or even dozing in the armchairs. But that was lack of faith on my part. We haven't had people turn tail because we are reading the Bible or praying, in fact, some visitors have joined in and others have listened quietly from the safety of the jigsaw board!

All this is due to the hard work, time and love that our welcomers and volunteers give; it is very much a team effort – so thank you from the bottom of my heart. Every single person who has their name in the reports that follow has been working so hard in the underpinning structures, in finance, premises, admin, music, worship, technology, rotas, fellowship groups, pastoral visiting, cake making, crafts, fundraising as well as ‘front of house’, so thank you for all you do behind the scenes as well as in front!

A huge thank you, too, for your ministry towards me and to Graham as we have had our own personal rollercoaster of emotions, following Graham’s cancer diagnosis and subsequent hospitalisations and your understanding in the limits that this has placed on what I can do on a weekly basis.

I have been strengthened and sustained by your prayers, sensitivity and practical help. You, as a church, are the reason I have been able to continue in my ministry even though this has been curtailed in many ways. I hope to return from my Sabbatical refreshed and able to meet the challenges of a new phase of joining with the HAEBEA circuit.

Every blessing



Revd Gill Hulme

The New HAEBEA is almost here!

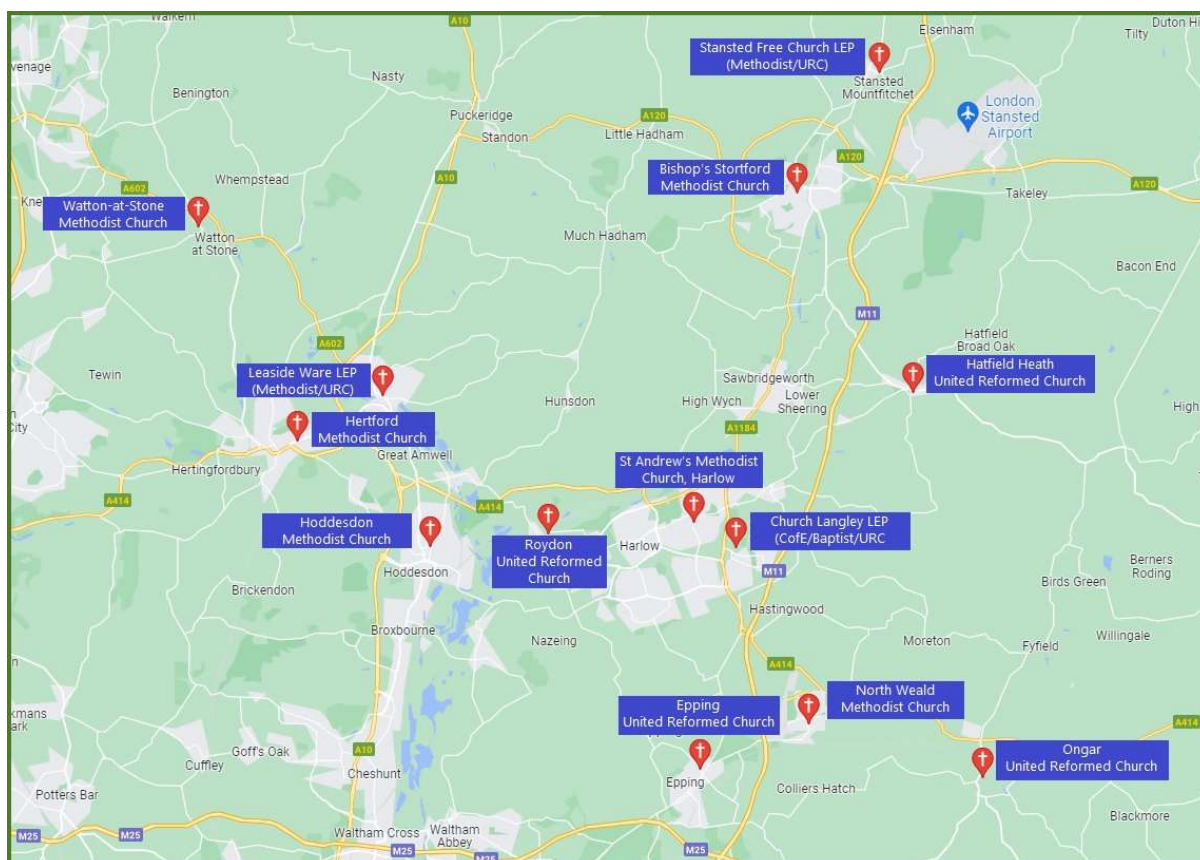
As some of you will be aware, for some time we have been urged to join with a neighbouring Circuit as we are now a comparatively small Circuit within the Methodist Connexion. We are also (unusually) a single minister Circuit - something that is not good for the incumbent and which may make recruiting a replacement when Gill retires in 2025 difficult.

Therefore, on 1 September, Bishop’s Stortford Circuit and the Herts and Essex Border Ecumenical Area will officially come together to form the new Herts and Essex Border Ecumenical Area. It will be composed of twelve churches including four URCs, three Local Ecumenical Projects, five Methodist churches and will be staffed by three Methodist presbyters, one and a half URC ministers, a full-time administrator and a strong team of local preachers.

A lot of preparations have been made, including meetings, to deal with finance and governance issues. A joint preaching plan has been in place since December so we have already been enjoying the considerable benefits of hearing preachers we may not have heard before. All in all, it is very exciting. There will be more resources for mission and a larger area within which to serve. For all of this, we give thanks to God. Our Celebration Service to commemorate the new HAEBEA will take place on 9 September 2023, at 4 pm, at St Andrew’s Methodist Church, Harlow, with the Methodist District Chairman to preach, David Chapman. Please put it in your diaries now!

See below for a map of the HAEBEA area as at September 2023.

(N.B: North Weald Methodist Church has since closed).



Pastoral Report

As part of my job, I keep the database up to date, recording any changes in membership as well as in the church family as a whole. For the Annual Report last year, I wrote that our Church Membership stood at 134 and this year the number is 129. Some members have sadly died, others have been recorded as Ceased to Meet or Transferred Out. We also welcomed one new member from another denomination.

We are of course not just statistics, we are people, all part of our church family. As well as our own members, we do have several other people worshipping with us, many on a regular basis. This number also fluctuates and it is good to see new faces in our congregation. It is very important that we all play our part in welcoming newcomers.

Fortunately, most of our regular worshippers are now coming back to church but there are still some who feel unable, for various reasons, to return and we miss them all. Some are able to follow our worship online which is a great benefit. We are very grateful to the Tech Team for this. I also attempt to maintain a community roll and this is changing rapidly with more people coming through our doors each day when we are open, some on a regular basis. The Oasis Lounge is aptly named; it does provide an oasis of calm for all visitors but particularly for those who are going through troubled times in their lives.

Once again, my thanks go out to all our lovely pastoral visitors and to all who give pastoral care in so many ways; by a visit, a phone call, a lift to church, taking flowers, or a card sent with love on a special occasion.

Maureen Draper
Pastoral Secretary

House Groups

Renewal

In September, it was with great joy that the twelve of us began meeting again twice a month in person. This year we have been using the course, ReFrame, presented by Regent College, Vancouver and the Washington Institute of Faith and Culture and we have found it helpful, challenging and refreshing. Our lives are increasingly complex and so is our modern world. As a result, as Christians we often struggle to connect what we believe with what we do day by day. ReFrame addresses this challenge through the 10-week, film-based series that helps us as Christians connect faith with all of life, whether that be tending a garden, caring for children, pastoring a church, or negotiating a business deal and especially for us welcoming people into our refurbished building. ReFrame draws on the experience of the disciples on the Emmaus Road as recounted in Luke 24 and seeks similar transformation amid real life. The course invites participants to *encounter* Jesus in their everyday circumstances, *understand* the meaning of Jesus' life and work in the biblical story, and *respond* to Jesus in practical and creative ways. ReFrame helped us as Christians open our eyes to see Jesus in new ways and then be filled with joy and confidence to live every aspect of life fully for him.

Chris Neal

Tangent

We continue to meet monthly, usually in person though sometimes online or as a hybrid with some people in the room and others joining on a computer if they cannot make it. We have been working through "Zeo" by Matt Summerfield, breaking down Romans 12 into 42 separate reflections. We have also met socially, most recently going out for dinner and bowling.

Chris Collins

Gambet

The group did not meet in the year ending August 2022. As with many organisations, the restrictions of Covid ... However, as Rev David Mullins reminded us recently, "Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time". Vision with action can change the world [inscription on a church wall in Sussex c. 1730]. We therefore do intend to meet again this year.

Mike Haworth

Youth Work

Girls' Brigade

We continued to meet throughout 2022, albeit very few in numbers. In the Autumn we held a 'bring a friend' evening and were pleased that three extra girls have since then been regular attenders. We took part in the Remembrance Day parade, had a stall at the Church Christmas Fayre and the Christmas Tree Festival at Holy Trinity, as well as Young Leader training and our usual Tuesday night activities.

Since January we have commissioned Jordan as a leader but, unfortunately, we have been without Debbie Townsend, due to her ongoing health issues.

Despite the lean times at the moment, in the words of our motto we seek, serve and follow Christ. The future is uncertain but we are hopeful and pray the way forward will be made clear.

Julie Finbow

18+

This is a group who have, over the years, had a connection to BSMC. It is a social group who meet on the first Wednesday of the month, normally in Wetherspoons. Numbers can vary greatly but, normally, there are five/six of us to share a meal and drink whilst catching up with what is happening in each other's lives.

Jacqui Finbow

Enhancing Our Worship

Choir/Music Group

Most of the year we have not had a choir or musicians but we did have a few singers for the Remembrance Sunday service.

We had a small music group for the Christingle Service and the Carol Service singing was led by a choir who also sang a couple of anthems. It was lovely to be joined by Rowan and Freja Clark with Freja singing the solo first verse of "Once in Royal".

A trio of instrumentalists joined the organ in accompanying the carols and also played a few Christmas pieces before the service.

Hilary Eves

Church Flowers

Flowers this year continued to be provided for the beautiful vase given to us by Fullerton United Methodist Church and displayed on the Communion Table. As it is a simple bouquet which can then be taken out to either a person of the giver's choice or a pastoral recommendation, we have been able to fulfil all the dates to the end of the year. So, a big thank you to all those people who have offered to contribute. Thanks to Mione Goldspink and Ruth Banks for their help decorating the Church for Harvest, Cynthia Friend for the Advent Ring and Easter Wreath and Ruth Banks and Alison Watson for pedestal displays when needed during the year for special occasions.

Chris Neal

Outreach

Open Church Oversight Group

This is a group that was formed to coordinate all we are learning from being open during the week and to direct our mission in this town, and as such it has replaced the Mission and Outreach Group. The group meets every eight weeks or so and we have tried to include people representing all the different aspects of our church. The current members are:

Gill Hulme – Minister

Terry Copland – Steward

Maureen Draper - Pastoral Secretary and CAMEO
Julie Finbow - Catering & Girls Brigade
Norman Huntley - Chair of Property Group
Christine Leach - Thursday Friendship Group
Stan Mackowiak - Steward
Chris Neal - former Chair of Mission & Outreach Group
Karen Quelch - Local Preacher
Pat Simpson - Steward
Brian Unitt - Property and Technical team
Alison Watson - Saturday Coffee mornings, and person who does the rolling TV displays, takes care of the plants and oversees the welcomers' rotas
Steve Watson - Church Treasurer
Frieda Wilson - Steward and Chair of this group
The Group will, from time to time, draft in others when their input is needed, but if anyone would like to join the group on a permanent basis, please speak to me.

We are all very pleased with how things are progressing - there is always a good atmosphere in our Oasis Lounge, and welcomers are often told how lovely our place is and how welcome people are made to feel. Synergy between the various groups and activities is increasing, and many people now choose to have a coffee in our Oasis Lounge rather than a coffee shop because they know they will run into someone they know.

Being open so much has brought its own challenges, but the group has addressed these as they have arisen and we continue to make amendments to how we do things to accommodate different situations and new insights. The biggest challenge remains finding enough Welcomers to fill all the slots each week because most of the time we need two welcomers on duty. It really is a lovely thing to do, and not difficult - and you do not have to commit to any regular day/time: simply look at the rota for the coming month, compare it with your diary, and see when you would be able to do a session. And if you want to shadow someone first to see how things are done, then we can arrange that, too. Please consider prayerfully whether you could engage in this aspect of our church's mission - church is not just for Sundays!!

Frieda Wilson

PowerPoint Display Screens

The screens in the entrance and in the Oasis Lounge are a window on our world to everyone who passes by on the street or comes into the lounge. Having volunteered to put together the first selection of slides to advertise the groups that meet on our premises, I find that the number has gradually increased to include short bible texts, prayers and information about festivals, etc. It seems a perfect way to extend our mission and inform people about our faith. I update the presentation at the beginning of every week so please keep your eye on it; you never know what gems of information you might find hidden.

We have taken the decision not to advertise events that do not take place on our own premises because we were beginning to get so many requests that our own events were getting crowded out and a line needed to be drawn.

Alison Watson

Social Media

A big thank you again to our Church Administrator, Lynn Graseman, for bringing her expertise to the website and keeping the Home page up to date whilst I update the other pages. A link to our Sunday service is on the Home page along with links to Twitter and our Facebook page. Lynn has

also added a link to Just Giving and Text to Donate information to enable people to donate to the Redevelopment Fund.

Facebook enables us to reach a wider audience. We have a Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church page with information about events, services and a daily prayer from The Methodist Church website. We have over 200 followers and over 2000 people seeing posts and over 600 responding. We also have a Facebook Group of 128 members to date with shared prayers, news, anecdotes and humour. In addition, we can post events that then show up in everyone's feed as Events in Your Area, as well as engaging directly with Facebook groups such as What's on in Stortford? and Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation. These allow us to reach people in the area who might not follow our page.

We also use both Facebook and Twitter to share Methodist Church faith-based articles and social injustice articles that we wish to bring to people's attention, and we sometimes tag in others to our posts re events such as our local newspaper. Both Twitter and Facebook feeds show on our website's front page, allowing people who do not use social media to see them. We are also able to put a link to our website and the YouTube page, which provides people with an easy access route to watch services live or rewatch them later.

Much gratitude must be given to Richard Ling and Brian Unitt, ably assisted by Sue Unitt, Alan Draper, and Norman Huntley, for their sterling work each week streaming worship and, again, to Brian and Richard for developing the video screen facility in the Oasis Lounge and Alison Watson who so ably keeps the screens up to date.

Chris Neal

Thursday Friendship Group

We are a friendly group of ladies who meet on the second and fourth Thursdays each month in the evenings in the Oasis Lounge. We have a variety of meetings including talks, craft, and social evenings. At the Platinum Jubilee we enjoyed recalling our memories of the Queen's Coronation and are now looking forward to celebrating the King's in May. All our celebrations do seem to include food in some way.

Once a month we support the Church by running the Thursday coffee and cake mornings and we also raise money for charity throughout the year. Last year we raised £210 which we presented to Gill Hulme for the Fund for Human Need – a large proportion of this was made at a garden party kindly hosted by April Stubbley. This year we are supporting a Brain Tumour charity following the death of one of our members.

We are always pleased to welcome new members. If anyone is interested, please contact Maureen Draper or Christine Leach.

Christine Leach & Maureen Draper

WiLos Lunches (Widow/ers and soLOS)

We continue to meet approximately every six weeks. Numbers vary but we have 10 members, who from time to time, after church, enjoy a lunch together, good conversation, lots of laughter and no washing up!

Contact Angela or Frieda if you live alone and would like to join us. Details will be in the notice-sheet.

Angela Finbow

Knit and Natter

Since moving into the Oasis Lounge the numbers have increased and everyone loves being there. We have a core of people who come every session and some who come occasionally; this is actually nice as it is easy to catch up with people whilst sitting to knit and crochet.

We have done lots of charity knitting, in particular for Ukrainian refugees – we have made lots of cosy scarves and mittens for Mione to give out. We had a stall at the Christmas Fair and sold lots of our stock – we need to start knitting lots of new pieces for this year's stall!

Some people from the town wanted to learn to crochet and one of our members sat with them for several weeks to get them on their way. One or two have joined the group. We are still making blankets and baby cardigans for both Ukraine and Africa.

Most of all we just have fun chatting and stitching.

Kate Rowe

Craft and Chat

On the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, visitors to the Oasis Lounge are invited to join in with craft and chat. People bring their own craft or they can do activities set up. Throughout the year I have set up painting with watercolours and acrylic paint, quilling, embroidery, paper flower decorations and card making.

Some weeks we have quite a few people, others we are a select few, but always there is happy chatter and creativity. I'd like to thank Julie Finbow for her support and for standing in when I am away.

Alison Watson

CAMEO (Come and Meet Each Other)

This is a new group, which I began with help from Chris Neal and Ruth Mutimer on the back of the Tuesday Afternoon Fellowship which had been closed due to low numbers. As previous leaders of this group, we all felt sad that we no longer saw some of the members and we felt there was a need to provide some way of meeting each other and just chatting.

I trawled through the TAF records and wrote to each member and many responded positively so CAMEO was born and started meeting in the Oasis Lounge in the Spring of last year. It is purely a social occasion; we have no format apart from providing plenty of tea or coffee and cakes, quite often home-made. This not only proves to be popular with our members, both male and female, but also with the various guests that come through our doors. We have also welcomed one lady from Sawbridgeworth, who had no previous link to our church but has been coming regularly since our first meeting. We have also had Methodist guests from Enfield who have joined us on several occasions.

We thank those who bring our members on a Tuesday afternoon. We meet on the second Tuesday of the month, from 2.30-4pm and would welcome new members.

Maureen Draper

Special Cup 2023

We meet up on Wednesday afternoons. The goal is to provide a safe space where visitors can relax with a cup of coffee/tea, have a chat, play a game, complete a jigsaw - if so wanted. We can report that we have succeeded in our main purpose. A few visitors have become regulars and one even part of our team. We thank everyone who has helped us in different ways to render this service, especially when we needed someone else to take our place.

Jan and Ella Bisschoff, Richard and Lynne Ling, Rose Cheyne

The Card Shop (renamed)

Finally in May last year we were able to reopen the Shop (now the Card Shop) based on a large table in the Oasis Lounge. There is just about enough room to display most of the cards, bookmarks prayer cards and wooden crosses, etc., (the rest are in little drawers under the table). I am very grateful to Steve & Alison for finding the display baskets and racks and John Simkin's generous donation of money to pay for them!

We don't have room to show more than a few books but have plenty to sell at half price!

Unfortunately, sales are slower than when we were visible from the Street although the Lounge has many visitors every day into the Warm Space!

Don't forget that there is a large selection of cards with Bible texts suitable for every occasion. Come and have a look!

Ruth Banks

Coffee & Cake

Since the opening of our refurbished premises in May 2022, we have served coffee and cake every Thursday and now every Saturday. A very faithful few cover Thursdays - more help, especially with baking, would be welcome. Alison Watson recruits for the Saturday times and these are sometimes proving difficult to staff. We encourage charities to run Saturday mornings to raise funds and awareness but we have lost a number of those who ran coffee mornings pre-Covid.

The decision not to charge but ask for donations has generally been welcome and not having to handle cash has been a bonus.

The Thursday morning 15 minute keep fit session with Kris has proved to be very popular. It is good to see some of our old regulars back and also to welcome new regulars and it would be good to see a few more of our church family joining us.

Julie Finbow, Sue Unitt & Alison Watson

Coffee with Games

The Oasis Lounge is open on Friday mornings for 'Coffee & Games'. Guests are invited to join us for a selection of card and board games. We also occasionally play carpet bowls and have started 'Bridge for Beginners' twice per month. A small regular group can usually be found most Fridays, with others joining occasionally, and everyone is welcome.

Steve Watson

The Wider Community

Methodist Homes for the Aged

Total money given to MHA was £525. This was from the Christmas day collection and Christmas card box together with a donation from the Church.

Christine Leach

Action for Children

In the past year we have had one coffee morning and several donations. The total raised was £527.95. Thank you to everyone who contributed - all the money goes to help vulnerable children and their families. If there is anyone who is interested in helping in the future, please contact Norman and find out more.

Norman Huntley

Action for Children Home Collecting Boxes

Despite the change in our spending habits that Covid has brought, those who have home collecting boxes for Action for Children remain faithful and, in September 2022, we were able to send a total of £407.62. If anyone would like a home collecting box, please tell me and I will be pleased to let you have one.

Frieda Wilson

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford (CTBS)

Since our last Annual General Meeting, there have been a variety of joint CTBS activities. In the summer, - "I Love Stortford" week and the Town Carnival took place and were rated very successful. Holiday Bible Week was also very good.

The new activity of helping Ukrainian Refugee Guests has occupied a great deal of time and effort from many people and all the Churches. We held a public meeting on April 23rd in the Markwell Pavilion and launched the Bishop's Stortford Ukrainian Guests Support group. I have become the Co-Ordinator of the group. There are about 30 volunteers, some from the Churches and some from none. This includes 15 language Teachers who give their time for free. There are 39 Hosts. There are many different individuals and organisations, from across the town, who have given help in various ways from time to time. Several Churches have offered us the free use of their premises and we have taken up the offers of The Charis Centre on Mondays, St Michael's and St Joseph's on Wednesdays, the Methodist Church on Fridays and URC on Saturdays.

In December, there was Carol Singing in Jackson Square with the Town Band. It was a bitterly cold day and there were difficult traffic delays but people, somehow, managed and donations totalling £150 were received. This was shared between the YMCA and the Child Contact Centre. Company at Christmas returned as a face-to-face activity, welcomed with much rejoicing now that Covid restrictions have been lifted. It was the first time in our refurbished Methodist premises and it was a great and very happy success.

Unfortunately, in January, the usual United Service was cancelled for a variety of reasons.

In April, at Easter, the United Service in the United Reformed Church on Good Friday is planned as usual but the Walk of Witness through the Town will be modified as there is no permission for road

closures. People will walk on the pavements, in small groups. There will still be a short “Service” outside our Church and then lots of (not so) Hot Cross Buns inside! I am always delighted that our church is able to offer this hospitality to our fellow Christians.

Our own Minister, Revd Gill Hulme, has completed more than her Term of Office as Chairperson of CTBS and I would like to thank her very much for her service over the last 18 months. The search for a new lay person to take over is now underway.

CTBS, as an organisation, allows us all to meet and work with Christians from other traditions. I think that our lives are enriched and we all receive blessings from this fellowship.

Mione Goldspink.

Christian Aid

Although there is no longer a Christian Aid Committee in Bishop's Stortford, former members did get together to run two coffee mornings to raise funds: the one in September 2022 raised £305.72 and the most recent on 11 March this year raised £220.50.

Frieda Wilson

Redevelopment Project

Our new facilities have been open for around a year, following our official opening celebrations over the weekend of 30th April–1st May 2022 and the upgraded building seems to be working well. In this time there have been a few relatively minor snagging items which have been addressed by the builders.

Since the official handover, we have been adding facilities to suit our needs, including large screen TVs to provide a more dynamic and flexible replacement for noticeboards, a new sound system and seamless high-speed Wi-Fi throughout the premises. My thanks to all who have participated in this work.

We have also started using a keyless entry system, installed after the official handover. This allows regular ‘keyholders’ to enter using a key card or fob. Casual hirers can be issued with a code number which is activated only for their event. This not only provides improved control but also removes the need to issue physical keys to hirers.

The enhanced atmosphere and facilities have been well received and it is great to see increasing use of the premises both in terms of longer opening times, a wider range of activities and increased numbers of visitors.

Brian Unitt

Redevelopment Project – Financial Report

The Project completed on 27 April 2022, but the final sum to be paid to the builders had not been agreed because they were claiming additional costs which we disputed. However, I am pleased to report that after detailed negotiations in January 2023, the builders finally accepted our lower offer in full and final settlement.

Once the build contract started, my financial forecasts had identified that less VAT would be charged than budgeted because of the way that zero rated VAT was applied to the extras on the

contract, funded from the contingency. Together with savings from professional fees and lower costs related to the kitchen fit out, the Co-ordination team was able to use these savings to reinstate the curved handrail and glass entrance door to the Oasis Lounge during the actual build phase. We were also able to afford items which had previously been omitted from the budget due to cost constraints, for example the Oasis Lounge furniture and sound system upgrade.

The final cost was brought in under £750,000 and our income exceeded budget. Members pledges exceeded £100,000, external grants came to £78,000 and an inspired fundraising team raised £21,000 in just over three years, despite COVID restrictions. All of this has resulted in a surplus of £25,000. Given the delays in completing the Project, increases in material costs and the unbudgeted items added back in, this is a significant achievement.

This surplus will be transferred to Church funds and ring-fenced for the upgrade of the Wesley Hall, which had been taken out of the Project scope as one of the early cost saving measures.

A summary of the financial performance is shown below, based on the detailed report provided to the Finance Committee at their meeting on 15 March 2023.

Financial Summary				
		Actual	Budget	Variance
		£	£	£
Income		773,512	768,000	5,512
Costs		(748,193)	(768,000)	19,807
Surplus		25,319	0	25,319

Gary Spilman

Redevelopment Project Treasurer

Property Report

The refurbished Oasis Lounge has been completed and has had time to bed in. This is a great achievement but it does show up that we need to turn our attention back on the rest of the building. We have in the past year or two been doing “basic maintenance”, the most visible being the continued policy of replacing our lighting with LED assemblies whenever there is a problem. There was a minor leak in the Wesley Hall roof that required work on the gutters and slates. Also, in the last year, during the normal gas inspection, it was found that more major work was required on the internal and external flues of the front boiler: apologies for the unreliability this caused.

In the past few months, a full set of building condition reports has been carried out. These include the delayed quinquennial report (waiting for the building work to be completed), an electrical report, a fire alarm systems report and an emergency lighting test. These, of course, have shown up the need for several maintenance and age-related replacement requirements but, fortunately, no major unknown issues. The immediate issues with the emergency lighting are in hand along with some of the simpler tasks.

One ongoing item that is moving forward is the drainage issue at the back of the building. The increased instance of prolonged thundery rain over the last few years has revealed that we need to make it easier for the water to drain away. There have been a couple of false starts on this but we are now looking to alter the path along the side of the building to reduce the water trap that

currently exists. Several of the items in the quinquennial report also relate to issues in this area that will be affected by this work and will be the major focus in the first part of the year.

The Wesley Hall also needs attention. This is commonly used by outside organisations so needs to be presentable. One thing the new build has also shown up is how poorly insulated the older halls are so there are good reasons to feed this in as soon as possible.

Maintenance is an ongoing item. So, if you spot something that needs attention, please note it in the incident book in the upper foyer.

Norman Huntley

From the Senior Steward

It is unusual to become Senior Steward in just your second year but this somehow came about. Having last been one in 2001-2002 much has changed, namely that many of the tasks that all Stewards had to perform then are now done by other members of the congregation. This included the weekly Notices, counting, recording and banking the Collection and finding Greeters. So, thanks go to Frieda Wilson, Julie and Angela Finbow for fulfilling these all-important tasks.

This last year has seen the vision of the redevelopment start to take shape with action. The Church has become a busy and vibrant space with occupants entering the building every day. When the flags are out, the Church is open. We have introduced 'Welcomers', members of the Church community, who greet our guests as they enter. Other charities and organisations use the Church for its events, meetings and coffee mornings. We have become a 'Warm Space' for those who are finding life tough and unable to keep up with rising costs. They know that, along with the warmth of the building, they can have soup and a roll, cake, biscuits, fruit and drinks and, importantly, someone with whom to chat. The two big screens in the entrance and hall and the board outside advertise all events and Church Services. An information leaflet on all the week's activities is regularly updated for people to take away and a booklet available to signpost people for additional help, if required. The Church website continues to inform those outside the area of Services and other events that might be of interest.

We also share our premises with the Bulgarian Church. This has been a rewarding partnership and we have grown closer as a result. The Church is now seeking membership of Churches Together.

I would like to say a big thank you to our past Stewards, Chris Neal, Jacqui Finbow and Lianne Steen, who still help out when needed; former ones, Julie Finbow, Karen Quelch and Sue Unitt, who step into the breach and to our current ones, Terry Copland and Stan Mackowiak. I single out Frieda, who as well as being an amazing Steward, produces the weekly notice sheet. As one who has taken over when she has had the temerity to go on holiday, I know the time spent on it. Frieda takes leave of her Steward duties this year after having served so faithfully for five years, two as Senior Steward. Thank you so much, Frieda, for everything you have done and, so willingly, continue to do.

Thanks go again to our wonderful technical team – Brian Unitt, Richard Ling, Alan Draper and other helpers on a Sunday morning. They still live stream our Services on YouTube for those unable to attend in person and their commitment to this role week by week is remarkable.

This year and last has been a challenging year for our Minister, Gill, her husband, Graham, and their family. Despite this, Gill has continued in her additional role as Chair of Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford as well as performing her other duties. She has managed this alongside Graham's hospital appointments and other recurring, difficult circumstances. Thank you, Gill, for your hard work and we wish you well in your Sabbatical starting on the 24 April.

So, now we continue the good work into the future. The Church seeks to make a difference in the community. As well as offering people a warm space, refreshments and company, we want them to know why we are doing this. The book of James (chapter 2) in the Bible says that faith and good deeds go together. It is not enough just to have faith. It is our faith and love of God and Jesus that propels us forward. We need to encourage folk in the lounge to take a further step into the Church and with love and purpose it can be achieved. Indeed, we are already seeing the fruits of this.

This report will need to be approved at the Annual Church Meeting and we will also need to make various appointments. We need at least one, if not three Stewards and a Premises Committee Secretary. We need more Welcomers to sign up on the sheets provided and helpers with coffee mornings and after Church services. Even if you can do it just once in a while it will make all the difference. You, also, will feel greatly rewarded as I do when welcoming people to our beautiful church.

Pat Simpson

Finance Report

Last year we reported that we had set a budget showing a deficit of £10,000. Our actual results showed a deficit of £12,360 and our final accounts to August 2021 follow this report, presented in a similar format as last year. Our main account is our 'General' account and this is followed by restricted funds covering Redevelopment, Legacies and Benevolence. Following the notes to these accounts is our budget for the current year.

WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM (LAST YEAR)

General Account

We set a budget showing a deficit of £10,000, at a time when we were unsure of the timing of the reopening of the premises for lettings following completion of the refurbishment. We finished the year with a deficit of £12,360. This compares with the previous year's shortfalls of £16,293 and £6,476. Our income was in line with forecast and our expenditure £2,700 above forecast.

85% of our income has historically come from offerings with 10% from external lettings. With parts of the premises closed for a large part of the year due to the redevelopment, lettings income continued to be affected. It is encouraging that over 75% of our giving is by regular standing order and this has stayed stable. Together with envelopes and cash, total giving was similar to the previous year (when adjusted for gift aid received after the year-end). Lettings income and donations from internal organisations was just £9,700 compared with over £15,000 pre pandemic. Our overall income is currently some £10,000 below pre pandemic levels.

The majority of our costs are fixed and we are not able to make corresponding savings when income drops. Costs at £102,700 were similar to the previous year. The resulting deficit of £12,360 has again had to be covered from our reserves

Redevelopment Scheme

We set up a separate Redevelopment Scheme account under the control of the project team. During the year we raised £46,101 from donations and fundraising and received a further £68,000 in grants. After building costs and professional fees totalling £573,970, a balance of £47,488 was held at the year end. This is just a snapshot of the finances of the project during the year and the full income and expenditure appears elsewhere within this report.

Other Accounts

Legacy funds make up a large portion of our reserves and some have restricted uses. During the year we received one new legacy of £54,000 and used £60,000 as a contribution to the Redevelopment Scheme. With interest added, we finished the year with £87,711 available to us. The small benevolence funds are 'ring fenced' for specific purposes.

WHERE WE ARE (THE CURRENT YEAR)

Current Year Budget

The budget for this year (2022/23) follows the accounts for last year. The initial budget showed a deficit of £10,000, which we considered was unsustainable. As a result, we agreed a reduction of £10,000 in our Circuit Assessment and therefore set a balanced budget with income matching expenditure. We assumed a similar level of giving to the previous year, together with an increase in lettings and donations from internal organisations of £4,500. Expenditure was forecast as slightly down on last year.

How We Are Doing This Year Against Budget?

After six months, we are still predicting a break-even situation, with income matching expenditure. However, both income and expenditure are forecast at £18,000 ahead of budget. Giving is slightly down on our predicted level and lettings income is lower as the premises have remained closed for longer than anticipated. Expenditure is currently in line with forecast.

With regards income, the Oasis Lounge is generating more income than anticipated (£5.5k), which together with fundraising income (£4.5k) and donations to support our Warm Spaces initiative (£3.5k) have contributed to income some £18k ahead of budget. With regards to expenditure, cleaning costs are higher (£3k), together with boiler repairs (£2.5k) and anticipated premises works to stop further flooding at the rear of the premises (£12k) all contribute to expenditure some £18k ahead of budget.

Analysis of Giving

- Regular giving by members (excluding one off gifts) has been flat over the last three years but has dropped considerably from pre Covid times, with 2019-20 particularly hit by the effects of Covid.
- A 7-year analysis of giving shows:

2022-23	82.0k (Estimate)
2021-22	81.5k *
2020-21	81.4k
2019-20	76.5k
2018-19	85.9k
2017-18	89.2k (inc one off giving of £4.5k)
2016-17	83.3k

* Adjusted for gift aid received after the year end

- I would normally give a breakdown of giving between standing orders, envelopes and cash, but this is not possible this year. As mentioned earlier, historically 75% of our regular giving has been by standing order and we are blessed that these have continued and, in some cases, increased during the last 2 years. In addition, many members who would normally

give by envelopes or cash have made either regular or one-off payments direct into the bank and I would like to thank those who have done so. Whilst giving by cash and envelope is static, it is still below pre pandemic levels. I would be happy to speak to anyone wanting details of how to make a donation.

- We are relying on a smaller number of donors each year, giving is static, but costs are increasing. This is not a trend we can allow to continue, especially as Circuit is covering £8,000 of our costs each year. If we had to cover these costs, this would increase our annual deficit.

Support from Circuit Funds

We are grateful for the financial support we continue to receive from Circuit funds. They have agreed to cover half of the cost of the Church Manager position - £8,000 per annum. The Church Manager funding has been agreed for a further three-year period until August 2025. Without this support, these costs would have to be covered from a combination of additional giving and drawing on our reserves.

WHERE WE ARE GOING (THE FUTURE)

Next Year – Can we maintain a balanced budget?

It is difficult to predict if we can maintain a balanced budget. Each year we are attempting to sustain or increase our income against a background of reducing members and this can only be achieved by a combination of increased giving and maximising our lettings income. We predict additional costs as our fixed price energy contract comes to an end and potential additional premises costs.

Giving & Gift Aid

We are very conscious that the current unpredictable times continue to affect many people in a number of ways. We are grateful to all those who give generously and selflessly on a regular basis to support the work of the Church, both in financial terms and with the giving of time and talents. We are also grateful to those who have increased their giving this year – thank you. This giving is vital for us to both sustain our current activities but, more importantly, extend our mission in the town and wider community.

I would encourage everyone to prayerfully review their current giving and consider if they are able to help us achieve the required increase necessary to help to balance our budget. Tax relief on giving (Gift Aid) forms a vital part of our income and in the last tax year we were able to claim £14,000 back in Gift Aid. I would ask all tax payers to ensure they advise Christine Leach of all giving to the Church – both regular and one off – to ensure we claim this income. If in doubt as to what is claimable, please speak to Christine.

The Finance Team

Managing the Church's finances is a team effort and I would like to record my grateful thanks to Lynn Graseman who, as Church Administrator, deals with all aspects of lettings, banking and expenditure. She is supported by Julie Finbow and her team of offering counters. Christine Leach continues the invaluable task of maximising our income from the complex area of Gift Aid and Sue Haworth deals with payroll, pension and tax issues. Thank you for the support and expertise you provide.

Steve Watson
Treasurer

Risk Review

The Managing Trustees are conscious of the need to identify and mitigate risks to the assets, employees and volunteers of the charity. With this in mind, a number of risk mitigation policies are in place and reviewed on a regular basis. These include:

- Safeguarding policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving property proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving financial proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Cash Handling policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Insurance policy
 - Reviewed December 2022 and the level of cover considered adequate
- Health & safety policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2023

Steve Watson
Treasurer

APPENDIX

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BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2022

	NOTES	2021/2022	2020/2021
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular	1	66,302	65,992
Gift Aid		13,982	14,448
Donations		250	1,000
Total Offerings		80,534	81,440
Donations - Church organisations	2	3,031	825
Lettings Income	3	6,680	3,490
Sundry Income	4	10	-
Bank Interest		90	31
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		90,345	85,786
Funds Received for External Organisations		1,911	850
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		92,256	86,636
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Circuit Assessment		53,392	53,392
Mission donations		4,525	3,625
Worship	5	2,982	2,446
Administration	6	9,191	8,670
Premises	7	27,604	30,319
Repairs		2,411	
Small Capital Items		2,600	3,626
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		102,705	102,079
Funds Paid to External Organisations		1,911	850
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		104,616	102,929
Net Deficit for the Year		(12,360)	(16,293)
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2021		89,477	105,770
Transfer to Redevelopment Scheme		40,000	
Contribution to Connexional Pension Reserve Scheme		10,000	
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2022	9	27,117	89,477

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

REDEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2022

	NOTES	2021/2022	2020/2021
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular		10,460	13,340
Gift Aid		9,315	8,586
Donations		22,016	24,148
Total Offerings		41,791	46,074
Donations - Church organisations		150	285
Fundraising Events	8	4,160	5,709
SUB TOTAL		46,101	52,068
Transfer from Church Funds		100,000	
Grants		68,000	430,000
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		214,101	482,068
 <u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Contractor Stage Payments		495,139	111,848
Professional Fees		24,537	12,557
Insurance		133	1,233
Kitchen Fitout		28,223	
Furniture / Flooring		18,878	
Audio Visual		3,238	
Planters / Sundry fittings		3,822	-
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		573,970	125,638
Net Surplus (Deficit) for the Year		(359,869)	356,430
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st Sept 2021		407,357	50,927
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2022	10	47,488	407,357

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

LEGACIES ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2022

	2021/2022	2020/2021
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2021		
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	93,617	106,627
<u>Income</u>		
Bequests	54,000	
Interest TMCP	94	140
	54,094	140
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Audio Visual equipment for service streaming		6,051
Wesley Hall flooring		1,091
Asbestos removal from boiler room		6,008
Contribution to refurbishment	60,000	
	60,000	13,150
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2022		
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	87,711	93,617

BENEVOLENCE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2022

Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2021		
Nat West	998	1,098
<u>Income</u>		
Communion Services	75	
<u>Expenditure</u>	75	-
Donations	750	100
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2022		
Nat West	323	998

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2022

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

	2021/2022	2020/2021
<u>NOTE 1 - REGULAR OFFERINGS</u>		
Standing Orders	51,629.00	50,937.00
Envelopes	12,529.00	10,796.70
Cash	2,143.99	4,258.00
	<u>66,301.99</u>	<u>65,991.70</u>
<u>NOTE 2 - DONATIONS CHURCH ORGANISATIONS</u>		
Thursday Coffee Mornings	211.44	-
Oasis Lounge	1,428.80	-
Boys Brigade	1,390.98	
Company at Christmas		200.00
Thursday Group		125.00
Kickstart		200.00
Girls Brigade		-
Food Bank		300.00
	<u>3,031.22</u>	<u>825.00</u>
<u>NOTE 3 - LETTINGS INCOME</u>		
Regular Lettings	5,027.20	3,040.00
Saturday Coffee Mornings	68.00	
One Off Lettings	1,585.20	450.00
	<u>6,680.40</u>	<u>3,490.00</u>
<u>NOTE 4 - SUNDRY INCOME</u>		
Photocopier	10.00	
	<u>10.00</u>	<u>-</u>
<u>NOTE 5 - WORSHIP</u>		
Organists	896.50	178.10
Copywrite & Music	1,517.38	1,330.68
Expenses	568.44	937.30
	<u>2,982.32</u>	<u>2,446.08</u>

NOTE 6 - ADMINISTRATION

Church Manager	7,020.81	7,040.13
Publications	76.80	130.60
Website	243.00	234.00
Photocopier	19.99	36.49
Paper & Printing	300.22	374.73
Auditing	300.00	600.00
Bank Charges	231.41	
Miscellaneous	999.00	254.53
	<u>9,191.23</u>	<u>8,670.48</u>

NOTE 7 - PREMISES

Cleaner	9,356.03	8,370.76
Insurance	5,364.70	3,916.27
Power	8,318.85	7,498.34
Windows & Cleaning	876.63	682.64
Water	1,315.47	2,001.31
Waste Disposal	365.56	352.43
Boiler	234.00	1,302.00
Pianos & Organ	124.00	60.00
Fire Extinguishers	168.60	326.13
Telephone	816.39	665.24
TV Licence	159.00	159.00
Sundry expenditure	504.51	839.13
	<u>27,603.74</u>	<u>26,173.25</u>

NOTE 8 - FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Balloon Race	694.31	
Hand Made Cards	681.00	
Frieda Haircut	475.73	
Plant Sale	440.00	
Christmas Fayre	378.15	
Quiz Night	350.00	
Goldspink Tea Party	210.00	
Just Giving	132.51	
Name the Teddy	128.00	
Christmas Quiz	125.00	
Craft Fair	100.00	
GB Games Night	100.00	
Baby Photos	90.00	
Easyfunding	85.00	
Saffron Sight	74.00	
Pompoms in Jar	56.70	
Book Sale	40.00	
	<u>4,160.40</u>	<u>5,708.64</u>

NOTE 9 - BANK BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2022

NatWest - 2 Accounts Combined	13,313.75	51,137.59
Central Finance Board	14,126.23	39,338.12
	27,439.98	90,475.71
Less:		
Benevolence Account	323.00	998.00
	27,116.98	89,477.71

NOTE 10 - SUMMARY OF FUND BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2022

General Account	27,116.98	89,477.71
Benevolence Account	323.00	998.00
Legacies Account	87,711.70	93,617.00
Redevelopment Account	47,488.00	407,357.00
	162,639.68	591,449.71

BISHOPS STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH**BUDGET FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 AUGUST 2023****INCOME**

Offerings	80,600
Donations - Organisations	2,450
Lettings Income	11,000
Sundry Income	0
Bank Interest	50
TOTAL INCOME	94,100

EXPENDITURE

Circuit Assessment	43,400
Worship	3,500
Mission donations	4,600
Administration	9,500
Premises	28,100
Repairs	2,500
Small Capital	2500
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	94,100

**OVERALL SURPLUS /
SHORTFALL****0**

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

England & Wales - Charity number 1127323

Accounts



ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2022

Open to God Open to You Open to Each Other

You can be sure of a warm welcome whatever brings you or your family to the church - a curiosity to find out more about the Christian faith or to attend one of the many activities we have. Find out what is going on at www.bsm-church.org.uk

From the Minister

Dear Friends

It feels like it has been a rollercoaster of a year: starting a major building project during lockdown was a huge step – a step of faith indeed. The Steering Group have worked incredibly hard over these last twelve months, Brian Unitt dealing with all the complications of our building (as you can see from his report), liaising with the Quantity Surveyors, Architects and builders as we discovered hidden secrets beneath walls and concrete. Gary Spilman has kept us to budget, which with a project of this size is no mean feat, and we are also grateful to Karen Quelch for helping secure the grants which have been vital to the success. Then Steve Watson dealt with the legal issues, kept us together and on plan, and the Mission Group headed by Chris Neal, and the Fundraising Group headed up by Frieda Wilson, both worked extremely hard. What I am trying to say is that it was very much a team effort and we need to voice our thanks to all who have made it a success.

At times, as delays occurred, it felt like the new entrance and Oasis Lounge would never happen, Anne and Andrew Brown our preachers for the opening weekend were so understanding, re-arranging their diaries to cope with the different opening days. In springtime, our patio at the manse was ablaze with colour, as Graham had planted up different bulbs ready to go into the church garden once the builders had finished in February, then March and then April/May!

And now we all can't quite believe that the opening weekend went so well, that the space is so beautiful and that, despite a few teething problems, the vision is starting to be realised.

We decided to walk before we could run, opening up Tuesdays-Thursdays 10am-4pm, but hopefully this can soon be extended. Thank you to everyone who has volunteered and helped in whatever way to make this possible. We also knew we wanted this to be a community space, open to God, open to all, so wanted to work with other charities and organisations. Tuesdays we decided to keep more as a church input day, with crafts and Knit and Natter in the morning and Cameo once a month in the afternoon, with Bible Study and prayers on the other Tuesdays. At the moment we are studying the book of Acts, and we end the session praying for the names on the prayer tree. It has been interesting to see the reaction of those just popping in for a coffee when the Bibles are out! On Wednesday mornings Isabel Hospice are running their Compassionate Café (which is open to everyone) and have wellbeing courses running out the back in the Wesley Hall; and then in the afternoon A Special Cup provides a listening service as well as games and a chat. Thursday is coffee and cake in the morning, and I have just heard that from July the CAB will be running a fortnightly volunteer hub all day in the Wesley Hall. On Fridays although not open yet to the general public, we are providing a safe space for the BS Hospitality group to meet, and for Ukrainian guests to practice their English, whilst hosts can share experiences.

The Oasis Lounge is starting to be a place to meet – last Thursday two young Polish mums joyfully chatted whilst their toddlers played, which brings me to my next point – we really need to get a parent and toddler group running again! Pastor Bojidar from the Bulgarian Fellowship has volunteered his wife Terri to help and I know that some of their other mums will also be willing, but we need individuals from our church available to make the refreshments and sing songs! As the days are filling up fast, I thought that Mondays 9.30-10.30 would be the best, in the Wesley for play, and then parents can, if they wish, come into the Oasis for coffee. Please let me know if you can help – it would be good to get this up and running in the next couple of months, as we currently don't provide anything (apart from a children's area) for young families.

There is a danger in any building project for a weariness to set in, or a sense of 'well we managed it, and now we can relax'. However, this next phase of putting the mission plan into action is the most critical one. Alison Watson has done sterling work in getting the welcoming rotas up and running – but we need more people on them! We also need someone to take on the reins of organising these. As well as volunteers for our mid-week session, Julie Finbow, Sue Unitt and

Christine Leach need help with the coffee and cake mornings. Most of all we must not lose sight of what underpins this openness to our community.

Yes, we are passionate about being a community space; yes, we want that space to be welcoming, accessible and open to all; yes, we want to show our hospitality by serving decent coffee and asking for donations rather than a set amount – but in doing all of this I want to stress that we do what we do, because we want to share God's love for all.

We need to be fed ourselves, to be able to 'feed' our neighbours, and that means opening God's word and hearing the good news in our lives. It means meeting together in worship. (I am also so grateful that our tech team, Brian Unitt and Richard Ling, have enabled those who are housebound to continue to worship with us via our YouTube channel). But worship is not just down to the preacher. Musicians, PA operators, greeters and of course stewards form the structure that enables the worship of God's people. Because of lockdown, a number of our stewards have graciously stayed on above their required 3 years. The church they serve now needs to release them with our grateful thanks, so we need people to step up and be stewards so that Sunday worship can run smoothly and feed the congregation, and worship God aright.

We also need organisers behind the scenes, to enable the church to flourish. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Erica Spilman as Church Council Secretary, and to Polly Bodsworth as Property Secretary for all their support and hard work over the years – but we need as a matter of urgency to fill these posts at the Annual Church Meeting.

Lastly but by no means least – I would like to give my grateful thanks to Frieda Wilson who as senior steward has been such a rock during this rollercoaster of a year, and to the stewards team, Jacqui Finbow, Lianne Steen, Pat Simpson, Terry Copland and Chris Neal, and of course to Maureen Draper as Pastoral Secretary, and to Lynn Graseman our Church Administrator whose role has shifted considerably over the last 12 months.

I would also like to thank everyone for their hard work, prayers, friendship and love for both myself and Graham over the last twelve months.

Every blessing



Revd Gill Hulme

Pastoral Report

As I prepared to write this report, I naturally read last year's, and this ended with the thought that my 2022 report would reflect on a very different year to that of 2021. To some extent it does, as we are at last relaxing, with the security of an excellent vaccination programme to rely on and the fact that this latest Covid variation is not quite as bad as those that preceded it. However, for much of the year we were still very nervous, and people were not too sure what we could or could not do. However, people are now coming back to church, and it was lovely seeing so many of you when we opened our refurbished premises at the end of April.

Pastoral Visitors continue to keep in touch by various means, either by visiting or phoning. We were able to distribute Easter leaflets this year which went out with invitations to our opening events. Membership cards were distributed earlier in the year and a new Church Directory hopefully will be produced for the Autumn.

It has been a quiet year for changes. Last year the Membership figure was 138 and this year the number is 134. However, we have still seen some movement. Some of our members have moved away and transferred to other churches and we have had one death, but we have also welcomed some new members to our church family. Hopefully we continue to be a welcoming church and in this we can all play our part.

My thanks once again to all the lovely caring pastoral visitors with which this church is blest.

Maureen Draper
Pastoral Secretary

House Groups

Renewal

We have continued meeting twice monthly via Zoom and are now looking forward to meeting in person in May.

We have studied the Gospel of John for most of this year using Biblical Frameworks Book by Book series with the video, writing and thoughts of Paul Blackham, Anne Lotz Graham and the late Richard Bewes of All Souls Langham Place. As we studied John, we found ourselves taken to the basic and central gospel truths of the whole Bible, and then how John took us deeper into those realities. This Gospel expands our view of Jesus, showing us again and again that He is the eternal Son of the Father, the divine Mediator over the whole creation and the Lord of the New Creation.

As we meet again, we will be engaging with a Christian Aid study about climate justice. This series will take us on a journey through scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, to help us to reflect on and resource ourselves in the journey to climate justice.

Chris Neal

Tangent

The six of us have continued to meet monthly on Thursdays, initially on Zoom but more recently face to face again. We have been working our way through “Zeo”, an interesting book by Matt Summerfield about Romans 12, which has prompted good discussions, often resulting in the usual tangent discussion after which our group is named!

Chris Collins

Spirituality Today

This group ceased to meet. Several reasons contributed:

- Health conditions
- Impact of Covid restrictions, etc
- Personal circumstances

It is with sadness but also with gratitude for the blessings received during our time together in the past.

Revd Jan Bisschoff

Gambet

In accordance with National, Methodist Church and local Church guidelines on Covid-19, Gambet held no in person meetings during the reporting year.

Mike Haworth

Youth Work

Girls' Brigade

We resumed weekly meetings with the girls in September and, although our numbers are very small, the girls we have are very regular and full of life. All our older girls have undertaken some Young Leader training and we hope they will continue to be involved in the group. We would love to see the group expand and would welcome girls of any age.

Julie Finbow

Boys' Brigade

Unfortunately, due to low numbers (both of boys and of leaders) the Boys' Brigade has ceased to meet.

18+

This is a group who, over the years, have had a connection to BSMC. It is a social group who meet on the first Wednesday of the month, normally in Wetherspoons. This last year has included a mixture of virtual and in person meet ups. It feels very good to now be getting back to regularly meeting together at the pub. Numbers can vary greatly but normally there are 5/6 of us to share a meal and drink whilst catching up with what is happening in each other's lives.

Jacqui Finbow

Enhancing Our Worship

Choir, Young Singers & Worship Band

Due to the coronavirus pandemic the Choir, Young Singers & Worship Band have not met since early 2020. We were, however, able to put together an ad hoc choir and music group for the Circuit Service on Sunday 1 May 2022 when Andrew and Anne Brown joined us. Because of the lack of numbers, we will not be resuming the Choir, Young Singers or Worship Band on a regular basis for the foreseeable future, but I feel sure we'll be able to have an ad hoc choir/music group again for special occasions.

Hilary Eves

Church Flowers

Flowers this year have been provided for the beautiful vase given to us by Fullerton United Methodist Church and displayed on the Communion Table.

As it is a simple bouquet which can then be taken out to either a person of the giver's choice or a pastoral recommendation, we have been able to fulfil all the dates to the end of the year. So, a big thank you to all those people who have offered to contribute. For Easter and the Grand Opening Ruth Banks and Alison Watson excelled in their pedestal displays and we are grateful for them using their talent in this way.

Chris Neal

Outreach

Social Media

A big thank you again to our Church Administrator Lynn Graseman for bringing her expertise to the website and keeping the Home page up to date. A link to our Sunday service is on the Home page along with links to Twitter and our Facebook page. Lynn has also added a link to Just Giving and Text to Donate information to enable people to donate to the Redevelopment Fund.

Twitter and Facebook enable us to reach a wider audience. On Facebook we have a Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church Page with information about events, services and a daily prayer from The Methodist Church website, and a Facebook Group of 117 members to date with shared prayers news, anecdotes, and humour. In addition, for events such as our opening day we can post events that then show up in everyone's feed as Events in Your Area, as well as engaging directly with Facebook groups such as What's On in Stortford and Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation. These allow us to reach people in the area who might not follow our page.

We also use both Facebook and Twitter to share Methodist Church faith-based articles and social injustice articles that we wish to bring to people's attention, and we sometimes tag in others to our posts re events such as our local newspaper. Both Twitter and Facebook feeds show on our website's front page, allowing people who do not use social media to see them.

Instagram is used for more visual posts, ie one image = many words, and can reach a different demographic to Facebook and Twitter. The church Instagram page has now started to become a bit more active than it had been previously. Through this we are able to share items such as some of the preparation in the lead up to the opening weekend and some of the day itself, as well as advertising things that are happening, for example Holiday Bible Week sign up. We are also able to put a link to our website and the YouTube page, which provides people with an easy access route to watch services live or rewatch them later.

This year we have used Zoom to hold meetings and to enable our groups such as Renewal to meet.

Much gratitude must be given to Richard Ling and Brian Unitt, ably assisted by Sue Unitt, Alan Draper, Olive Rowe and Norman Huntley, for their sterling work each week streaming worship and again to Brian and Richard more recently developing the video screen facility in the Oasis Lounge, for which Alison Watson has so ably created the input.

Chris Neal with Lynn Graseman and Jordan Stringer

Thursday Friendship Group

We are a friendly group of ladies who meet on the second and fourth Thursdays each month in the evenings. In the last year we managed to keep in touch with each other, initially with zoom meetings and then by meeting in members' gardens. Earlier this year, we also went on some local walks planned so we could end in a coffee shop.

We have now resumed meetings at the Church where we have had interesting speakers and social evenings. Our recent talks have included one on being a Chaplain to people who use the river Stort and another from a most inspiring blind lady who gave an account of her life and what she *could* do rather than what she couldn't.

We usually raise money for charity throughout the year but this has rather been curtailed this time due to circumstances. However, we did manage to give a little to the Church Redevelopment Fund.

We are always pleased to welcome new members. If anyone is interested, please contact Maureen Draper or Christine Leach

Christine Leach & Maureen Draper

WiLos Lunches (Widow/ers and soLOS)

Sadly, we have not been able to meet for lunch together for about two years, because of Covid.

However, we have recently decided to meet together again on Sunday 29 May, and we look forward to this becoming a regular event once more.

Angela Finbow

Knit and Natter

We started meeting up again in October 2021 and we met in the Upper Foyer at first, but it was a bit chilly, so we moved into the Church. This was (of course) only temporary and we now meet in the Oasis Lounge. The knitters love the new lounge and seem very comfortable. The lighting is very good for ensuring no stitches are dropped!

Our first project together was the giant love heart currently on the front of the Church, made up from small knitted/crocheted love hearts. Everyone joined in with this project and we enjoyed doing something together again. One or two even took the plunge and learned how to crochet as the love heart was small to work on but challenging enough to learn new skills.

Some people were not able to come back after Covid but we have some lovely new people who have joined so we are currently getting to know them. Next we are going to knit scarves for the welcome boxes issued to Ukrainian refugees moving into Stortford.

Kate Rowe

Wrinklies Walkers

Once again, I have to report that the Wrinklies have not met in the last year, at first due to Covid and latterly due to my personal circumstances. There is no doubt that the Wrinklies is a much-appreciated social activity for its members, and it is my intent to arrange a walk and lunch as soon as possible. However, if anyone is able and willing to take over as leader, either on a temporary or permanent basis, please let me know.

Roger Foot

The Bookstall

As the Bookstall was all packed up and living in our dining room and garage, there has been very little trade. Some people have phoned and asked for specific cards which I have posted or delivered. Regular orders of Bible reading notes have been posted and I have received cheques in payment.

The highlight of the year has been the beautiful cards printed by Martin Gunn from his wife, Bee's watercolours, selling for £2 each. So far we have sold enough to pay over £600 into the Redevelopment account!! Christmas cards and Easter cards were displayed after services and have nearly all been sold.

We are delighted to have the use of a table to display our cards and books in the Oasis Lounge until the Displays are available in the foyer. One former customer who moved to Scotland has recently ordered a Bible, which I sent to her!

Ruth Banks

Thursday Coffee Morning

During the Redevelopment Project it was decided to integrate the Thursday coffee morning with the general opening program and be renamed 'Coffee and Cake' once the project was finished. Accordingly, the Coffee Morning account has been closed and all proceeds from 'Coffee and Cake' are now paid directly into the church account.

Sue Unitt

The Wider Community

MHA

Donations totalling £498 have been sent to MHA from the Church. This is made up as follows:

MHA Sunday	£148
Christmas Card box	£100
Annual Church donation	<u>£250</u>
	<u>£498</u>

Christine Leach

Action for Children

As with most things this was a quiet year for the Action for Children group. However we did bank £377.11 - mostly from the usual Christmas post and collections, although the total also includes a number of small donations. Thank you if you have donated online or direct to Action for Children, as this seemed the simplest way this year. And thank you to Julie Finbow who did a dedicated service in less-than-ideal circumstances.

Thank you also to everyone who has a home collecting box and who somehow, despite all the lockdowns and restrictions, still managed to put away money for Action for Children so that we were able to send them £725.92 in December 2021.

Now that things have settled down a bit post Covid, and without the distractions of the refurbishment work, we can look forward to a better year for 2022/3. If anyone would like to get involved please contact Norman Huntley.

Norman Huntley (AfC Group) & *Frieda Wilson* (Home Collecting Boxes)

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford continues as a flourishing organisation, and the exchange of ideas and friendship and the fellowship between members of the different congregations is enlightening and enriching. However, the Covid-19 pandemic continued to affect many of our joint activities for the greater part of 2021. The week of Prayer, 7-13 June, held over 5 nights at 5 different Churches, was very poorly attended. But the National Prayer breakfast in Parliament, broadcast live to the Charis Centre on 25 June attracted a reasonable number of people and was attended by our MP. Holiday Bible Week in August was kept deliberately small and was held as a hybrid event, partly by Zoom and partly face to face. The theme was witnesses.

In November, at the AGM, our own minister, Revd Gill Hulme, was elected as the new Chairperson for CTBS. I am sure that she will be excellent in this role.

By December 2021 lockdown was being eased slightly and carol singing in Jackson Square was possible on 3 December, but people were cautious about attending for fear of catching Covid and missing out on family gatherings at Christmas. No Christmas Card delivery took place – instead there was a joint advertisement about all the Christmas services in the local Independent Newspaper and in the Flyer magazine. Company at Christmas was not possible as a big, family-style party, but Christmas ready-meals and goody bags were delivered to everyone on the guest list on Christmas Day.

After Christmas, the new Covid variant hit us, and the winter Week of Prayer was marked by a Hertfordshire Prayer Service on Zoom. But in April 2022 the Good Friday walk of Witness was permitted and it followed the traditional pattern; starting at the United Reformed Church with a joint Service and then walking to the Methodist Church for drinks and Hot Cross Buns – served cautiously (because of Covid) in our Wesley Hall. The Easter Egg Trail throughout the Town, telling the Easter Story in a clear and accessible way, was a very happy success once again.

We have all missed being together for many proper meetings over the last two years, but, on the occasions when we have been together, we are aware that there is still a very strong bond of friendship and fellowship between our different congregations. The desire to witness jointly to our community is still very strong. We all hope that Covid will soon be finished and that we will be able to meet together again without any worries.

Mione Goldspink.

Christian Aid

Whilst the decision was taken at the March Christian Aid Committee meeting to close the local Christian Aid group and there was therefore no house-to-house collection this year, we did have a collection in our church in May 2022 which raised £475 (helped, no doubt, by the decision to donate the collection taken during our CTBS service on the afternoon of 15 May to Christian Aid). Once Gift Aid is added to this, the total Christian Aid will receive is £539.54. In addition, Frieda has contacted her former Committee colleagues and they are enthusiastic about doing a Christian Aid coffee morning one Saturday – not sure exactly when just yet, but keep an eye out for the date.

Frieda Wilson

Redevelopment Project

Shortly after last year's ACM we signed a formal contract with our preferred building contractor, T J Evers, and building work started in late May 2021, initially with a target completion date in mid-December 2021.

Inevitably, with a large project such as this in an old original building which has been extended multiple times through the years, there have been a number of surprises. These have resulted in a significant extension of the planned timescale and have required close cooperation between our professional advisors, the building contractors and ourselves.

The opening of the new facilities was celebrated with a public open day on 30 April and a service of dedication on 1 May led by Andrew and Revd Anne Brown.

I would like to express thanks to all who have provided help and support, particularly with choice of colours for walls and flooring (always a contentious subject) and with design of the kitchen. Work continues with fitting out the new spaces to suit our needs, including audio-visual equipment and seamless Wi-Fi coverage throughout the whole premises.

This has been, at times, a challenging project but exciting to see everything coming together, particularly towards the end, marking the culmination of many years of deliberation, prayer, planning and anticipation. It is now up to all of us together to make good use of the whole of our premises to serve our community however we are called.

Brian Unitt

Redevelopment Project – Financial Report

At the Extraordinary Church Council meeting on 15 April 2021 the latest forecast project cost for the Redevelopment of £767,862 was approved. It was also reported that despite the financial commitments from District, Circuit and Church members, there was a potential income shortfall of £276,000. This arose from the uncertainty about the timing of the remaining Circuit contribution of £160,000 (which was dependent on the sale of Braughing), the balance of funds not yet raised of £96,000 and the fact that £20,000 of member pledges would not be received until after the project completed. These three elements total £276,000. Therefore, it was agreed to obtain a loan facility from Chapel Aid for £300,000, so that the project would be fully financed. The reason for applying for more than £276,000 was to provide some headroom should the pledge money not come in when expected. The Chapel Aid loan was finalised on 20 May 2021, enabling the project to start on 24 May with a contractual completion date of 17 December 2021.

Work continued in researching grant organisations and completing their extensive questionnaires. We were very grateful to receive £60,000 from the Benefact Trust (formerly Allchurches Trust); £8,000 from East Hertfordshire District Council and £5,000 from both Bishop's Stortford Town Council and the Brazier Trust. At the same time, the fundraising team continued to raise money despite Covid restrictions which prevented certain events from going ahead. This included £3,700 raised from Frieda's "To Baldly Go..." event (when she had her head shaved).

Following the sale of the chapel at Braughing, Circuit transferred over the remaining funds and with the income received from grants, successful fundraising and further significant donations from Church members, the loan facility was no longer required, being formally cancelled on 31 January 2022.

The table below shows the results of the tremendous efforts by everyone to raise funds. Whilst the income is short of target by £6,641 at the end of the build period, this is not a problem, since income from pledges and Gift Aid will continue over the next few years leading to a surplus of around £10,000.

Redevelopment Project Income Stream Status - 31 March 2022								
		31-Mar-21			31-Mar-22			Increase in Income Forecast
		Income Received	To Be Received During Build	Income at End of Build	Income Received	To Be Received During Build	Income at End of Build	
		A	B	C=A+B	D	E	F=D+E	G=F-C
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Income								
Church Reserves		0	100,000	100,000	60,000	40,000	100,000	0
District Grant		0	20,000	20,000	20,000	0	20,000	0
Circuit Grant		0	240,000	240,000	400,000	0	400,000	160,000
Member Pledges		66,430	8,620	75,050	96,649	8,080	104,729	29,679
Gift Aid		7,383	8,609	15,992	15,942	0	15,942	-50
General Donations		5,498	0	5,498	9,026	100	9,126	3,628
External Grants		10,000	0	10,000	78,000	0	78,000	68,000
Fundraising Events		24,824	0	24,824	33,074	350	33,424	8,600
Total		114,135	377,229	491,364	712,691	48,530	761,221	269,857
Loan Draw Down				276,498			0	0
Total				767,862			761,221	-6,641

The build cost includes the contractor's costs, a contingency and also an assumption of the amount of VAT that can be saved. Any work which directly relates to improving accessibility is zero rated, saving 20% VAT, though this does not apply to the cost of relocating the kitchen and the toilet facilities. The build cost is fixed subject to additional work requested by us and any claims from the contractor for unavoidable costs. On top of this are the professional fees from our architect, quantity surveyor, structural engineer and VAT advisor. The table below summarises the main costs that total £767,862.

				BUDGET		
Redevelopment Project Cost Analysis				Net	VAT	Total
				£	£	£
Builders	Pre Contingency Contract Value			514,195	102,839	617,034
	Contract Contingency			50,000	10,000	60,000
	Internal Contingency			5,000	1,000	6,000
	Zero Rated VAT Impact			0	(37,441)	(37,441)
	Total			569,195	76,398	645,593
Professional Fees				71,091	14,218	85,309
Kitchen/Bookshop Display				30,800	6,160	36,960
				671,086	96,776	767,862

During November 2021, the contractor identified issues with the entrance area that meant they had to move a manhole cover and drainage pipes, which put the contract completion date at risk. Later, they discovered the concrete in that area was reinforced, causing additional work and delays. Additional work was also required to fit a new fire alarm system, upgrade electrical systems and fire doors, and complete necessary stone repairs around the windows, none of which could have been foreseen. As a result of this additional work the build costs have increased beyond the contract value.

However, through careful management of the contingency and the identification of savings in other areas, particularly VAT, we were able to purchase furniture for the Oasis Lounge, even though it was not in the budget.

These delays led to an extension of the contract by 19 weeks, with completion achieved on 27 April 2022. This leaves us facing a delay claim from the contractor for around £27,500, which our quantity surveyor will be negotiating to reach agreement on who is responsible for the major delays.

It has been a challenging year with a lot of surprises along the way. Notwithstanding the uncertainty as to the final project cost and whether the surplus income of £10,000 referred to earlier will be enough to settle the contractor's claim, the team feel confident that, with the continued support from Church members, the project can be wrapped up within budget.

Gary Spilman

Redevelopment Project Treasurer

FINANCE REPORT

Last year we reported that we had set a budget showing a deficit of £19,000. Our actual results showed a deficit of £16,293 and our final accounts to August 2021 are in the appendix, presented in a similar format as last year. Our main account is our 'General' account and this is followed by restricted funds covering Redevelopment, Legacies and Benevolence. Following the notes to these accounts is our budget for the current year.

Where We Have Come From (Last Year)

General Account

We set a budget showing a deficit of £19,000, at a time when we were unsure of the ongoing financial effects of the Covid 19 pandemic and the timing of the redevelopment project, and we finished the year with a deficit of £16,293. This compares with the previous year shortfall of £6,476 and surplus of £2,448 the year before that. Our income was £7,500 above forecast and our expenditure nearly £5,000 above forecast.

85% of our income has historically come from offerings with 10% from external lettings. With parts of the premises closed for the majority of the year, firstly due to Covid and then the redevelopment, both income streams continued to be affected. It is encouraging that over 75% of our giving is by regular standing order and this has stayed stable. Together with envelopes and cash, total giving was up £5,000 on the previous year. Lettings income and donations from internal organisations was just £4,300 compared with over £15,000 pre pandemic. Our overall income is currently some £15,000 below pre pandemic levels

The majority of our costs are fixed and we are not able to make corresponding savings when income drops. Whilst costs were some £9,000 greater than last year, they included over £4,000 of boiler repairs which related to the previous year but were not paid until after the year end. When this is adjusted, costs were similar to the previous year. The resulting deficit of £16,293 has had to be covered from our reserves.

Redevelopment Scheme

As the redevelopment scheme is progressing, we have set up a separate account which is under the control of the project team. During the year we raised £52,068 from donations and fundraising and received a further £430,000 in grants. After building costs and professional fees totalling £125,638, a balance of £407,357 was held at the year end. However, this will be required to cover the remaining expenditure in the current year.

Other Accounts

Legacy funds make up a large portion of our reserves and some have restricted uses. During the year we received no new legacies and used £13,150 on the audio visual equipment for live streaming services, asbestos removal from the boiler room and replacing the Wesley Hall flooring. With interest added, we finished the year with £93,617 available to us. We will utilise £60,000 of these funds as part of the church contribution of £100,000 towards the redevelopment scheme and the balance is forecast to be c£34,000 at the end of this year. The small benevolence funds are 'ring fenced' for specific purposes.

Where We Are (The Current Year)

Current Year Budget

The budget for this year (2021/22) follows the accounts for last year. We set the budget back in September last year. At that time it was difficult to predict when the premises would reopen for lettings following the refurbishment. We took a cautious view and set a deficit budget of £10,000. We assumed a small reduction in giving together with an increase in lettings and donations from internal organisations of £6,000. Expenditure was forecast as slightly down on last year.

How We Are Doing This Year Against Budget?

After six months, we are predicting a full year deficit slightly in excess of the £10,000 budget. Giving is slightly down on our predicted level and lettings income is lower as the premises have remained closed for longer than anticipated. Expenditure is currently in line with forecast.

Analysis of Giving

- Regular giving by members (excluding one off gifts) has been flat over the last few years but has dropped considerably over the last three years, with 2019-20 particularly hit by the effects of Covid.
- A 7 year analysis of giving shows:

2021-22	80.0k (Estimate)
2020-21	81.4k
2019-20	76.5k
2018-19	85.9k
2017-18	89.2k (inc one off giving of £4.5k)
2016-17	83.3k
2015-16	86.9k

- I would normally give a breakdown of giving between standing orders, envelopes and cash, but this is not possible this year. As mentioned earlier, historically 75% of our regular giving has been by standing order and we are blessed that these have continued and, in some cases, increased during the last 18 months. In addition, many members who would normally give by envelopes or cash have made either regular or one-off payments direct into the bank and I would like to thank those who have done so. Whilst giving by cash and envelope increased during the year, it is still below pre pandemic levels. I would be happy to speak to anyone wanting details of how to make a donation.
- We are relying on a smaller number of donors each year, giving is reducing, but costs are static. This is not a trend we can allow to continue, especially as Circuit is covering £7,500 of our costs each year. If we had to cover these costs, this would increase our annual deficit.

Support from Circuit Funds

We are grateful for the financial support we continue to receive from Circuit funds. They have agreed to cover three quarters of the cost of the Church Manager position - £7,500 per annum. The Church Manager funding has been agreed for a further three year period until August 2025. Without this support, these costs would have to be covered from a combination of additional giving and drawing on our reserves.

Where We Are Going (The Future)

Next Year – Can we return to a balanced budget?

It is still difficult to predict our finances for next year, but it is very likely we will again set a deficit budget. Firstly, as we move into more 'normal' times, it is still difficult to predict if and when some members will return to worship and what effect this will have on overall giving. Secondly, with the refurbishment recently completed, it is still too early to forecast what this will mean to our costs, how the premises will be used and the overall effect on lettings income. Hopefully some of these uncertainties will be clearer when we come to set the budget later in the year.

Giving & Gift Aid

We are very conscious that the current unpredictable times continue to affect many people in a number of ways. We are grateful to all those who give generously and selflessly on a regular basis to support the work of the Church, both in financial terms and with the giving of time and talents. We are also grateful to those who have increased their giving this year – thank you. This giving is vital for us to both sustain our current activities, but more importantly extend our mission in the town and wider community.

I would encourage everyone to prayerfully review their current giving and consider if they are able to help us achieve the required increase necessary to help to balance our budget. Tax relief on giving (Gift Aid) forms a vital part of our income and in the last tax year we were able to claim over £14,400 back in Gift Aid. I would ask all tax payers to ensure they advise Christine Leach of all giving to the Church – both regular and one off – to ensure we claim this income. If in doubt as to what is claimable, please speak to Christine.

The Finance Team

Managing the Church's finances is a team effort and I would like to record my grateful thanks to Lynn Graseman, who as Church Administrator deals with all aspects of lettings, banking and expenditure. She is supported by Julie Finbow and her team of offering counters. Christine Leach continues the invaluable task of maximising our income from the complex area of Gift Aid and Sue Haworth deals with payroll, pension and tax issues. Thank you for the support and expertise you provide.

Steve Watson

Treasurer
May 2022

Risk Review

The Managing Trustees are conscious of the need to identify and mitigate risks to the assets, employees and volunteers of the charity. With this in mind, a number of risk mitigation policies are in place and reviewed on a regular basis. These include:

- Safeguarding policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving property proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving financial proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Cash Handling policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Insurance policy
 - Reviewed December 2020 and the level of cover considered adequate
- Health & safety policy
 - Due to be reviewed and updated following the completion of the redevelopment project

Steve Watson

Treasurer
May 2022

From the Senior Steward

Well – that was a year to remember! Filled with highs and lows, difficulties and triumphs, and, at the very last, the easing of the pandemic and the completion of our Redevelopment Project!

A huge thank you to the Stewards, Chris Neal, Jacqui Finbow, Pat Simpson, Terry Copland and Lianne Steen, who have worked so hard to keep the church open and worship happening when we were allowed – Covid precautions meant a great deal of extra work cleaning and sanitising both before and after services to keep everyone as safe as possible. And thank you to everyone for bearing with the necessary precautions (social distancing, doors open, face coverings worn, etc) so we could make our services somewhere most people felt safe to come. It has been hard for everyone, because different people felt very differently about what precautions were necessary, but we are a loving congregation and we were all simply trying to do our best in unprecedented times.

Thank you also to the wonderful tech team – Brian Unitt and Richard Ling and their various helpers on a Sunday morning. They have enabled our services to be live streamed on YouTube so they can be watched as they happen, or accessed later if this suits the watcher better, and I know that some older members treasure this opportunity to be part of our congregation even though, for them, attending church is not possible.

And through all this, Gill Hulme has led our congregation in new and different ways, inspiring and challenging us, and I am grateful for her friendship and advice, which has made my role as Senior Steward so much easier.

So where now? We are feeling our way forward with the new opening times for our church and finding out what works and what doesn't. We do still need more people to welcome folk into our wonderful premises – a friendly face by the door can be the difference between someone simply looking in or actually coming in and engaging with people – and you don't have to commit to, say, every Wednesday morning: there's a June calendar on an easel in the Oasis Lounge and you can simply sign up for the sessions that month that suit you, so do please consider what you can do. And the new foyer is a wonderful place for people watching!!

This report will need to be approved at the Annual Church Meeting in June, and, as Gill mentioned, we will also need to make various appointments at that meeting. We need three Stewards, a Church Secretary and a Premises Committee Secretary – there's no point in us giving generously to the Redevelopment Project and then not committing to work for the life of our church. The new premises will not, by themselves, keep our church alive – we need to do that.

And if you are not in a position to help practically, please pray! Prayer underpins everything we do and is so vital – your prayers are greatly valued and they do, absolutely, make a difference.

We have come so far in the past year, and I appreciate many people will feel they need a break after all the effort of the last twelve months, but the possibilities that lie ahead are exciting, and, with God's help, I believe we can reach more of the people of Stortford with the wonderful Good News that Christ revealed. I'll finish with Matthew 28, verses 18-20:

Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

He is indeed with us – thanks be to God.

Frieda Wilson
Senior Steward

APPENDIX

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BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

	NOTES	2020/2021	2019/2020
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular	1	65,992	59,667
Gift Aid		14,448	15,678
Donations		1,000	1,197
Total Offerings		81,440	76,542
Donations - Church organisations	2	825	4,442
Lettings Income	3	3,490	5,272
Sundry Income	4	-	83
Bank Interest		31	236
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		85,786	86,575
Funds Received For External Organisations		850	3,148
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		86,636	89,723
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Circuit Assessment		53,392	52,090
Mission donations		3,625	4,485
Worship	5	2,446	2,801
Administration	6	8,670	7,354
Premises	7	26,173	25,899
Premises (Previous Year boiler repairs)		4,146	
Small Capital Items		3,626	422
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		102,079	93,051
Funds Paid To External Organisations		850	3,148
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		102,929	96,199
Net Deficit for the Year		(16,293)	(6,476)
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2020		105,770	112,246
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2021	9	89,477	105,770

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

REDEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

	NOTES	2020/2021	2019/2020
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular		13,340	2,865
Gift Aid		8,586	7,356
Donations		24,148	36,424
Total Offerings		46,074	46,645
Donations - Church organisations		285	446
Fundraising Events	8	5,709	10,507
SUB TOTAL		52,068	57,598
Grants		430,000	-
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		482,068	57,598
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Contractor Stage Payments		111,848	-
Professional Fees		12,557	11,327
Insurance		1,233	-
Fundraising Income Share		-	2,137
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		125,638	13,464
Net Surplus for the Year		356,430	44,134
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2020		50,927	6,793
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2021	10	407,357	50,927

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

LEGACIES ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

	2020/2021	2019/2020
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2020		
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	106,627	92,712
<u>Income</u>		
Bequests		13,303
Interest TMCP	140	612
	140	13,915
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Audio Visual equipment for service streaming	6,051	-
Wesley Hall flooring	1,091	
Asbestos removal from boiler room	6,008	-
	13,150	-
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2021		
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	93,617	106,627

BENEVOLENCE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2020		
Nat West	1,098	937
<u>Income</u>		
Communion Services		211
	-	211
<u>Expenditure</u>		
Donations	100	50
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2021		
Nat West	998	1,098

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

	2020/2021	2019/2020
<u>NOTE 1 - REGULAR OFFERINGS</u>		
Standing Orders	50,937.00	46,446.00
Envelopes	10,796.70	8,456.30
Cash	4,258.00	4,764.86
	<u>65,991.70</u>	<u>59,667.16</u>
<u>NOTE 2 - DONATIONS CHURCH ORGANISATIONS</u>		
Thursday Coffee Mornings	-	1,750.00
Bookstall	-	600.00
Company at Christmas	200.00	500.00
Tuesday Afternoon Fellowship	-	534.55
Thursday Group	125.00	125.00
Kickstart	200.00	200.00
Girls Brigade	-	-
Badminton	-	132.00
Food Bank	300.00	600.00
	<u>825.00</u>	<u>4,441.55</u>
<u>NOTE 3 - LETTINGS INCOME</u>		
Regular Lettings	3,040.00	4,292.60
Saturday Coffee Mornings	-	20.55
One Off Lettings	450.00	959.20
	<u>3,490.00</u>	<u>5,272.35</u>
<u>NOTE 4 - SUNDRY INCOME</u>		
Funerals	-	44.00
Other	-	38.50
	<u>-</u>	<u>82.50</u>
<u>NOTE 5 - WORSHIP</u>		
Organists	178.10	982.90
Copywrite & Music	1,330.68	921.64
Baptism/Communion	-	-
Expenses	937.30	896.70
	<u>2,446.08</u>	<u>2,801.24</u>

NOTE 6 - ADMINISTRATION

	2020/2021	2019/2020
Church Manager	7,040.13	5,951.17
Publications	130.60	170.00
Website	234.00	477.00
Photocopier	36.49	64.54
Paper & Printing	374.73	-
Auditing	600.00	-
Miscellaneous	254.53	691.01
	<u>8,670.48</u>	<u>7,353.72</u>

NOTE 7 - PREMISES

Cleaner	8,370.76	7,947.82
Insurance	3,916.27	3,907.60
Power	7,498.34	7,949.93
Windows & Cleaning	682.64	1,507.53
Water	2,001.31	1,064.58
Waste Disposal	352.43	443.69
Boiler	1,302.00	-
Pianos & Organ	60.00	434.94
Fire Extinguishers	326.13	362.53
Telephone	665.24	312.02
TV License	159.00	157.50
Roof Repairs	-	1,056.00
Damp Survey	354.00	-
Sundry expenditure	485.13	755.20
	<u>26,173.25</u>	<u>25,899.34</u>

NOTE 8 - FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Frieda Haircut	3,305.00	
Fairtrade	958.48	
Watson Garden Party	670.16	
Sale of Plants	250.00	
Manse Garden Party	225.00	
Hand Made Cards	200.00	
Jigfest 2019	100.00	
	<u>5,708.64</u>	<u>10,506.92</u>

NOTE 9 - BANK BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2021

NatWest - 2 Accounts Combined	51,137.59	111,413.29
Central Finance Board	39,338.12	17,763.45
	<u>90,475.71</u>	<u>129,176.74</u>
Less:		
Benevolence Account	998.00	1,098.00
Amounts to be Paid to Others		9,005.30
Legacy to be paid across		13,303.37
Amounts not yet received	-	-
	<u>89,477.71</u>	<u>105,770.07</u>

NOTE 10 - SUMMARY OF FUND BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2021

	2020/2021	2019/2020
General Account	89,477.71	105,770.07
Benevolence Account	998.00	1,098.00
Legacies Account	93,617.00	106,627.00
Redevelopment Account	407,357.00	50,927.00
	<u>591,449.71</u>	<u>264,422.07</u>

BISHOPS STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH**BUDGET FOR YEAR ENDING 31 AUGUST 2022****INCOME**

Offerings	81,000
Donations -	
Organisations	2,000
Lettings Income	6,500
Sundry Income	500
Bank Interest	0
TOTAL INCOME	90,000

EXPENDITURE

Circuit Assessment	53,400
Worship	3,500
Mission donations	4,500
Administration	8,500
Premises	25,000
Repairs	4,500
Small Capital	600
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	100,000

OVERALL SHORTFALL	-10,000
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BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

England & Wales - Charity number 1127323

Accounts



Bishop's
Stortford
Methodist
Church

ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2021

You can be sure of a warm welcome whatever brings you or your family to the church - a curiosity to find out more about the Christian faith or to attend one of the many activities that are now restarting. Find out what is going on at www.bsm-church.org.uk.

From the Minister

Dear Friends

I thought at first about starting off with the often repeated words: 'Its been a very strange year', but we all know that. So I would like to focus on how the Holy Spirit has been equipping us, as God's people, to respond since 23 March 2020.

I firmly believe that the Spirit has been moving in different ways during lockdown. I know it has been very difficult not being able to worship or meet together in person apart from a short respite last summer. However we have been able, via technology, to worship 'on the web'. As a church we have been extremely fortunate to have people with the skills and know how to make this happen, and I am grateful that the Church Council voted last September to invest in equipment that makes streaming on YouTube so much easier, and of course to Brian Unitt, and Richard Ling for the installation (along with help from Revd Jan Bisschoff and Mike Haworth amongst others). It is a testimony to their skills that BSMC has been asked to host both the representative District Synods which took place over Zoom.

We are also fortunate in that we have a large number of hymns that had been recorded prior to lockdown, and whilst there are lovely professional versions of hymns available on line, it has been really good to hear our own congregation singing their hearts out, when we have been prevented from singing together in worship. These services are reaching far wider than our normal Sunday congregation. I have received many letters of appreciation, and would like to quote from a recent one (from a couple who are not members, and occasionally visit):

"We love joining the Sunday Services and we found the Good Friday service was extremely stimulating – we passed it on to a couple of friends who described it as 'absolutely first class'. We have also enjoyed being able to join in with the on-line study group. Please thank everyone involved with the on-line services and long may they continue. They are so beneficial."

I have heard positive comments from members too, some of whom have caring responsibilities which have made it very difficult to worship in person, and others who have had to have times in respite care, but because of the wonders of modern technology can still feel connected with BSMC. It has been very moving to have people reading Scripture (via an on-line recording) who wouldn't normally have been able to make the journey up to the reading desk, or who have been self-isolating because of long standing health issues.

Over the past 15 months we have had to get used to new ways of meeting. With lockdown, it has been easier to arrange extra Church Council meetings, and zoom meetings have the benefit of not having to travel late at night, but you can get a little 'zoomed out' if you aren't careful, and the virtual coffee mornings on a Saturday with the quiz each week, though enjoyable is no substitute for actual coffee, cake and natter in person. We need to take things slowly though, and to put safety first, so I would like to thank the stewards team, our senior steward Frieda, and our safeguarding officers for all the work that they have put in on our Covid compliance Risk Assessment, and in so many other ways, so that when we resume live worship at Pentecost, we can do so in as safe an environment as possible

Of course, not everyone has access to online resources, so I am very grateful for all the help that our Church Administrator, Lynn Graseman, has given to ensure that the Worship at Home resources together with a pastoral letter are printed each week and make it to the post on time. Local Preachers have had to alter their way of working and get their service details to Lynn by Tuesday of each week, and they too have stepped up to the mark (and had to get used to being videoed too!).

The ongoing work of the Property Committee was also challenged by the flooding last August, but we now have new flooring in the Wesley Hall and Youth Room. Our social action during lockdown has mainly been giving the Foodbank the wherewithal to be able to expand their offering to meet the spiralling need within the town. For most of the lockdown they were needing to use all of our

halls, but they have now paid for and equipped a redesigned Youth Room and made a new storage and packing area in part of the Wesley Hall (with the added benefit of tidying up the side wall there). We have also continued to support Whitechapel Mission, and other charities like All We Can, Christian Aid, Action for Children and Easter Offering.

I believe that as a church, we have been in a more fortunate position than some others in our town, because we have such an amazing network of pastoral visitors. I have heard other clergy struggling to get telephone trees in place, whereas because of the sterling work of Maureen Draper and her team, visitors knew exactly who to phone, and did so. The love, care and devotion that has been shown one to another within BSMC is very, very precious. People have found imaginative ways to care, from cards, letters and socially distanced walks to occasional garden visits and doorstep chats. Groceries have been delivered, mobile phone calls made whilst waving through windows, and in some areas like my road, doorstep carols and open air services have taken place. We have also engaged with the work of Churches Together, which has included daily Facebook prayers for three months, virtual prayer walks and latterly the Truth and Treasure Easter Trail using QR codes, which opened up the opportunity to engage with families and share the Good News of the resurrection.

Alongside all this, in challenging circumstances, planning for the redevelopment project has been going ahead, with online meetings with Architects, builders, Quantity Surveyors and Grant making bodies. The Steering Group have pulled out all stops to make this a reality, and by 24 May we should have started work. Thank you all for your prayers and also for your commitment and financial support (and for all those who have helped clear out the cupboards!) – our building will be, by the end of December, fully inclusive and accessible and we will be ready to undertake new exciting Mission opportunities.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is asking us to prayerfully consider – what next! Lockdown has given an opportunity to pause – to reprioritise, both as individuals considering what really matters to us, such as family and friends, and the way in which we value people (like key workers), and also time to consider as a church what God is calling us to do.

Just because we have always done something in a particular way, does not mean we should always continue. We have been given the space to think and pray about what our community needs are, and how we, as a church, can address them. A small example of this was at Christmas. We have always had a lovely large, real Christmas tree, enjoyed by both our congregation and visitors alike. This year we decided as there were no Carol concerts, we would have a small remembrance tree and therefore were able to give the money we would have spent on the real tree to the Salvation Army Toy appeal instead.

Over the coming months the District is hosting Mission training, and two of our Mission and Publicity committee will be attending – and asking us to think about what lessons we have learnt from lockdown, what we can do differently as a church, what we need to take up, and what we need to put down.

Yes, it has been a hard, strange year. We have lost so many loved ones, and we haven't been able to mourn them properly. We have had to make many sacrifices in terms of our freedom, we long to hug our family and friends again, we long to sing at the tops of our voices. But in amongst all our loss and pain, we should give thanks for the way in which our church has kept going in different ways, give thanks for people's care, generosity and love. Above all, give thanks for the love that God gives us, and be assured, no matter what the future brings, when God calls us to step out in faith, then the Holy Spirit will equip us to do just that.

Every blessing



Revd Gill Hulme

Pastoral Report

As I write this report after what has been a very difficult year for us all, I note that our Membership Number is now 138 compared to last year's figure of 154. In that period, we have lost twelve dear Church Members and four have sadly been registered as 'Ceased to Meet'. Two further members of our congregation have also died.

In a normal year, our Pastoral Visitors would hope to visit folk on their list about four times a year delivering leaflets at Easter, Church Anniversary, Harvest and Christmas. This of course varies according to individual situations and often they make contact during our Sunday morning worship but due to Covid restrictions we have had to keep in touch mainly by phone, letters and cards with the occasional doorstep conversation or in the garden if the weather allowed. It has definitely not been the same. Gill has constantly urged us to stay safe and stay connected; no doubt we have all tried to follow the first directive and the second one has certainly been embraced by many of you as there have much telephone and online chatting taking place. We are a church family and do miss the normal contact we have with each other. The Weekly Notices, Worship on line or at home and the Pastoral Letters have all played their part in keeping us connected.

We have not been able to take church flowers out this year of course and are no longer able to give lifts to church on an official basis. The church directory for 2021 has now been printed and is currently being brought or sent out by pastoral visitors along with those membership cards which have not been sent out already.

Once again, I thank the pastoral team for all they have done this year and I would also give my special thanks to Gill for her guidance and leadership and a listening ear.

I hope and pray that next year's report will reflect on a very different year.

Maureen Draper
Pastoral Secretary

House Groups

Renewal

At first, we were disappointed when we went into the first Lockdown that we would be missing our Renewal meetings but after a few hiccups we have embraced Zoom and continued our twice monthly meetings. They have been a great source of strength during this tough time in nurturing our faith and friendship.

We finished our study of Romans with the support You Tube talks of David Pawson and the thoughts of John Stott. We then turned our study to 2 Samuel and the sins and failures of King David and how he was a sign and a witness to a greater King – Jesus. This took us fittingly up to Christmas when we able to have a virtual Christmas party and enjoy one of Robin's quizzes again.

In the New Year we used a Lent Course and videos from Church Action on Poverty. 'Life-Changing Stories' takes five Bible studies from the book of Acts. They offered challenging new perspectives of a God who is on the side of the poor and the oppressed and how people on the margins were empowered to go out and change the world then and now today in these difficult times.

All members then joined Gill's excellent Lent Course 'Woven'. with inspiring thoughts and material from Rev Michaela Youngson.

Chris Neal

Tangent

The six of us have continued to meet online using Zoom monthly on Thursdays. We have recently been working through "Zeo" by Matt Summerfield which is designed to be a daily devotional working through Romans 12. Each verse is broken down into 2-3 manageable chapters, packed with thought-provoking insights and discussion points on Paul's writings and challenging us to live fully alive in the spirit. We have also met (online) for socials, most recently playing "Outsmarted", a game similar to Trivial Pursuit but which works particularly well online and has constantly updated questions.

Chris Collins

Mothers and Others

Mothers and Others started in the late 1980s when Lindsey Hughes' daughter Elle and my youngest son Ian were both pre-schoolers. Mollie Lungley, Christine Leach and Marion Coulton very kindly looked after the toddlers to allow the mums some very welcome chatting time.

Lindsey carried the group on faithfully in her own inimitable style for many years until she and Dave moved away. I took over for a while, then Jan Atkins. Lockdown presented its own challenges – we tried Zooming and walking – but didn't recapture the essence of the group that once was.

I think it is time therefore to formally close it down and trust that other opportunities for friendship, fun, spiritual input and showing kindness to others will arise – especially as we all pull together to fundraise and share our vision for our new post-Covid way of life and worship in the refashioned space of our sanctuary and halls.

Lynne Ling

Spirituality Today

We didn't meet up due to the pandemic. We will meet up when possible.

Revd. Jan Bisschoff

Gambet

Writing this in May 2021 it is difficult to remember the world as it was in 2019, with regular Church and House group meetings. It is now 13 months ago that abruptly life paused and technology became the alternative, for some.

Looking forwards to meeting again face to face are the Gambet group, as they managed just one socially distanced meeting over the summer.

Mike Haworth

Youth Work

Girls' Brigade

This last year has been strange as we have not been able to meet face to face. We kept in touch with the girls at Christmas and Easter and hope that we will be able to meet up again soon.

We are sorry that Sue Unitt has decided to retire and thank her for her many years' service and commitment.

I anticipate that this will be my last report for Girls' Brigade as I too intend to retire at the end of the next academic year.

Julie Finbow

Boys' Brigade

Boys Brigade did not meet for a period of time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, part way through the Autumn term we started meeting online using Zoom and the fantastic materials provided by BB headquarters. These materials cover the areas "Get Active", "Get Adventurous", "Get Creative", "Get into the Bible", "Get Involved" and "Get Learning" and we try to develop a balanced program (as far as meeting on Zoom allows).

We have lost a number of our members but we still have a core of 5 boys and 3 officers who meet most weeks (during term time) for 40 minutes. We had a couple of other boys join once or twice but as they are the usual football-mad individuals, found that it did not currently meet their needs. We are hoping that at some point we will be able to meet up face to face (socially distanced) and then we are hoping that we will get more of the boys return to join us.

Chris Collins

18+

We are a group of young adults who over the years have had a connection with Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church. Over the past year we have continued to meet virtually on the first Wednesday of the month. It obviously is not the same as meeting in person but has meant that we have been able to stay connected. We have had a solid core group with others feeling comfortable to drop in when they can.

Meeting virtually has meant that we have been able to meet with and catch up with those who no longer live locally. It has been wonderful to be able share together. We have welcomed a new member to the group, heard about moving and new jobs, how jobs have been different during covid, met and come to know housemates, heard of weddings and babies, and seen a glimpse of each other's houses. We have also seen how hair just keeps on growing.

We are looking forward to hopefully being able to meet together in a beer garden soon.

Jacqui Finbow

Enhancing Our Worship

Choir & Young Singers

Due to the coronavirus pandemic neither the Choir nor Young Singers have met since early 2020. However, some members of the Choir did record, individually in their own homes, a hymn for use for one Sunday online service. It was a lot of work for the technical team to put the recordings together, so it has not been done since. We are looking forward to a time when we can sing together again.

Hilary Eves

Worship Band

Due to the Covid restrictions, the band has neither rehearsed nor played for worship during the last 13½ months.

Church Flowers

With the church closed for much of the last year, there has been no call for flower arranging, and both Susan Hayter and Cynthia Friend have now resigned as organisers and flower arrangers. Anyone who would like to take on this role is welcome to speak to either Susan or Cynthia to find what it involves, or to any of the stewards if they are happy to be appointed.

Outreach

Social Media

A big thankyou to our Church Administrator Lynn Graseman for bringing her expertise to the website and keeping the Home page up to date. A link to our Sunday service is on the Home page along with links to Twitter and our Facebook page. Twitter and Facebook enable us to reach a wider audience than ourselves. Recently Lynn has added a link to Just Giving and Text to Donate information to enable people to donate the Redevelopment fund.

On Facebook we have a Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church Page with information about events, services, and news from Churches Together and The Methodist Church, and a Facebook Group of 105 members to date with shared news, anecdotes, and humour.

This year we have used Zoom to hold meetings; meet our groups, Renewal, Mothers & Others and Thursday Group; coffee mornings and initially worship before using You Tube. Much gratitude must be given to Richard Ling and Brian Unitt, ably assisted by Kanye Hulme and Olive Rowe, for their sterling work each week streaming worship, and for developing and organising the purchase of equipment to make services as professional as possible.

Chris Neal

Thursday Friendship Group

We have tried to keep in touch with all our members in the last year. We had a few groups of 6 meeting in different members gardens last summer and since Christmas we have managed a few Zoom meetings. We are looking forward to warmer weather when we can meet outside again. We think it might be some time before we are able to resume our meetings in the Church premises.

Each year we try and support a couple of charities. Last year we were the last group to have a Coffee Morning at the Church in March and with other money raised earlier we were able to give £285 each to the Church redevelopment fund and to the Scanner appeal at the North Middlesex hospital.

Any ladies interested in joining our friendly group, please contact Maureen Draper or Christine Leach.

Christine Leach & Maureen Draper

WiLos Lunches

Sadly, we have not been able to meet for over a year, which has been particularly difficult for people living on their own. We have kept in touch with our group via other church zoom meetings or telephone calls.

We very much look forward to meeting again for lunch on a Sunday, when we can and people feel safe and happy to do so.

Angela Finbow

Knit and Natter

We have not met for over a year. We did consider zoom but many of our members don't have the technology for this. I have been in touch with most of the members by phone and many have carried on knitting up squares for blankets for a school in Africa.

Kate Rowe

Wrinklies Walkers

The Wrinklies Walkers last met on 17 February 2020 when the walk, led by John Banks, ended with a meal at the "Catherine Wheel". It was there that John announced his retirement as leader of the Wrinklies and that Roger Foot would be the new leader. The first walk planned by Roger on 17 March 2020 had to be cancelled, due to Covid 19. It is hoped that it will not be too long before we can safely meet again to enjoy the fun and fellowship we share as a group.

John has been a magnificent leader of the Wrinklies for over 25 years, with his unrivalled knowledge of local footpaths taking us new to places, then organising the meals in the local pubs at the end of the walks. All this supported by Ruth, particularly on the occasions they welcomed us to their home, Pippins Meadow, for a shared meal. We owe both John and Ruth a great big Thank You for all they have done to give us so much enjoyment.

Roger Foot

The Bookstall

Very unfortunately due to COVID 19 the Bookstall has remained closed for just over a year!

I have managed to sell some Christmas cards and more recently loads of Easter cards; a few people have ordered books and Bibles and there have been many requests for get well and sympathy cards!

As the Bookstall stock is now in my dining room while the building work gets underway, if you need something or want to order a new book, please phone or email me. I will be glad to help.

Ruth Banks

Thursday Coffee Morning

Along with many other activities, Thursday coffee mornings had to close at the end of March due to the Covid pandemic. From September 2019 until March 2020 we raised £1594 for Church funds. Thank you to all those who helped in any way. With the refurbishment of the New Hall commencing soon and with Covid restrictions in place we are unable to say when we will be reopening, but hopefully soon.

Sue Unitt

Badminton

Badminton club has now ceased permanently. Due to the redevelopment project and COVID we have not met since March 2020. We will not be meeting again on the church premises, however there are opportunities locally to maintain a club of sorts within the local sports community, but this depends wholly on a regular commitment from the club members.

Mark Wiffen

The Wider Community

MHA

There has been no activity this year except for an annual church donation to MHA. Avril Woods has now resigned as our church's MHA representative, and we would like to thank Avril for the work she has done for MHA over several years.

Anyone willing to take on the role of MHA representative can speak to Avril to find what it involves, or to any of the stewards if they are happy to be appointed.

JMA

This is no longer running.

Kate Rowe

Action for Children

Unfortunately we have not been able to hold any significant events this year. We do have to thank Hilary for her Christmas Quiz. This made over £180.00. Also, people were directed to make on-line donations at various times including the Christingle Service.

Likewise, the home collecting boxes were not collected in this year and many people find they now rarely use cash, so the contents of these boxes may well have suffered. However, we are hoping that they can be collected shortly, as restrictions ease.

It is important to continue to hold all our children in our prayers. Some have sailed through the COVID-19 pandemic without many problems. However, many of the children already under pressure from family and socially will have suffered disproportionately from the social isolation and in particular with their education. This will unfortunately affect them for many years to come. Action for Children will have an ongoing requirement for our support.

We urge you to keep up to date by visiting their website at <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk>.

Thank You.

Norman Huntley & Frieda Wilson

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford

Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford continues as a flourishing organisation, and the exchange of ideas and friendship and the fellowship between members of the different congregations is enlightening and enriching.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the shutdown of community activities during 2020 meant that nearly all the Churches Together activities had to be cancelled.

There was no joint Good Friday Service and no Walk of Witness. The June week of prayer, and all the activities for Love Stortford week and the Town Carnival were similarly cancelled. In November, the Annual meeting was held by Zoom. There was a Service of remembrance at St. Michaels on 8 November, but no carol singing in Jackson Square in December. Christmas Services were advertised in the local newspaper and not by delivering Christmas cards to every house.

But, a lovely new initiative was a Virtual Choir, made up of volunteers from all the churches. They sang together by Zoom and their rendition of "Joy to the World" was absolutely beautiful. Company at Christmas was reduced to delivering pre-packed Christmas Dinners and gifts and doorstep Greetings, but no company.

The January 2021 Week of prayer - most Churches had separate activities, but St. Michaels Church opened their Zoom meditations to everyone. Similarly, Easter celebrations were by You tube, Zoom and radio. But, there was an Easter Egg treasure hunt organised through the Town and supported by many shops. It told the Easter Story in a clear and accessible way, and was enjoyed by many families, with over 150 children completing the trail over the four days.

We have all missed the genuine fellowship that exists between the different congregations, and the desire to witness jointly to our community. We fervently hope that Covid restrictions will soon be lifted and that it will be safe for us to meet together again.

Mione Goldspink.

Christian Aid

In 2020 we were unable to do the house-to-house collection at all, and we were also unable to have either of the coffee mornings we had planned for June and October. However, we did send £400 from our October 2019 coffee morning and other donations, and the BSMC e-envelope raised £190 in lieu of the house-to-house collection. In addition, there may well have been other donations direct to Christian Aid that we were unaware of, as all church reps put appeals in their church's notices.

Cards for Good Causes also did not happen in 2020, although we encouraged our congregations to go to their website and buy online.

All in all, as for so many of us, 2020 was a frustrating year.

The 2021 house-to-house collection has again not been possible, but this year Christian Aid produced a delivery only envelope, which we have used. Ideally, the filled envelopes can then be dropped off by people to a central collection point, but we were unable to find anywhere for this, so we instead put a sticker on the envelopes encouraging people to give via the alternative methods detailed on the envelope (ie either online or by telephone). We will have no way of knowing how much is raised this way, but it is the best we can do in the circumstances and the delivery of the envelopes alone is a witness. For BSMC members, I have created an e-envelope, and I am pleased to see that donations have already been made via this method.

We look forward to being able to resume coffee mornings and will be interested to see what response Christian Aid get this week from the delivery only envelopes, especially as, with more and more people not having any cash in their homes, the future of the house-to-house collection may need re-thinking.

Frieda Wilson

Redevelopment Project

In June 2020 after preparation of detailed drawings we asked three potential building contractors to submit tenders for the redevelopment work. Unfortunately, even though all had previously expressed interest, only two of these responded and there was some delay while we obtained a third quotation. After careful evaluation and due diligence, we selected a preferred contractor.

We had been hoping for a significant grant from the central Methodist Connexion but, as a result of the Covid pandemic, they decided not to award building grants for the Methodist years 2020-21 or 2021-22. Accordingly, we had to defer some lower priority elements of the project but have been careful not to compromise the basic principle of creating an attractive building accessible to all with improved facilities and reduced environmental impact.

Following unanimous approval from Church Council, we have submitted a Letter of Intent to the selected contractor and expect to sign a formal contract shortly. Building work is scheduled to start in late May for completion in mid-December.

Brian Unitt

Redevelopment Project – Financial Report

The building work tender completed in September 2020 and three companies responded. Following due diligence and discussions with two of the companies, the preferred contractor was approved in February 2021. A detailed review of cost saving opportunities by the Steering Group in conjunction with the contractor resulted in the total cost being reduced from £800,000 to £770,000. A Letter of Intent to a maximum of £70,000 was approved by Church Council in April 2021 to enable the contractor to start planning the work and ordering long lead items.

Significant progress has been made in raising money despite the decision by Connexion in 2020 to defer grant making to 2022. This meant that our grant application for £100,000 had to be replaced with other income. Fortunately, the initial target for member pledges of £70,000 including Gift Aid has already been over-achieved and so the target has been increased to £130,000.

Four grant applications have been submitted for funds in excess of £50,000 and we have already received £5,000 each from the local Town Council and the associated Brazier Trust.

The project is due to start on 24 May 2021 but not all of the income will be readily available to fund the project. Many grant organisations take several months to review and prioritise their grants; the cash flow from member pledges will continue well into the future; Circuit is in the process of selling the chapel at Braughing which may delay the final tranche of income of £160,000, and we have also not been able to re-start fundraising events yet due to the pandemic. Therefore, Church Council approved a four-year term loan facility of up to £300,000 from Chapel Aid and we await their decision.

Redevelopment Project Income Stream Status - Mar 2021									
	Source of Funds	Agreed in Principle	Estimated Future Income	Cash Received To Date	Cash To Be Received During Build	Cash Received By End of Build	Minimum Loan Facility	Loan Repayment	
	A	B	C=A-B	D	E	F=D+E	G=A-F	H=A-F	
Income	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Church Reserves	100,000	100,000	0	0	100,000	100,000		0	
District Grant	20,000	20,000	0	0	20,000	20,000		0	
Circuit Grant	400,000	400,000	0	0	240,000	240,000		160,000	
Member Pledges	104,610	90,210	14,400	66,430	8,620	75,050		29,560	
Gift Aid	25,287	21,687	3,600	7,383	8,609	15,992		9,295	
General Donations	5,498	5,498	0	5,498	0	5,498		0	
External Grants	65,500	10,000	55,500	10,000	0	10,000		55,500	
Fundraising Events	46,967	24,824	22,143	24,824	0	24,824		22,143	
Total	767,862	672,219	95,643	114,135	377,229	491,364	276,498	276,498	

Gary Spilman

Redevelopment Project Treasurer

From the Senior Steward

The last year has thrown up very different challenges from those I envisioned when I took on being a steward! For much of the year, attendance at our premises on a Sunday has been absent, and we have had to find new ways of being a church family and of worshiping, and I have greatly appreciated the support of the whole steward team – Sue Chapman, Jacqui Finbow, Norman Huntley, Chris Neal and Lisanne Steen. In particular, I must thank Chris, who has stayed in post for an extra year, and Norman, who agreed to be a steward for a year and has now done two! We really need a couple of people to step forward and join our lovely stewards team so Chris and Norman can retire – do have a word with me, or any of the other stewards, if you think you may be able to help.

The re-opening of church in the summer of 2020 meant we had to learn how to write risk assessments and ensure that all the Covid safety measures required by both the government and the Methodist Church were implemented. For our friendly, loving congregation, the concept of meeting for worship but not for social chats was difficult to grasp, and not being able to sing was particularly difficult.

Huge thanks are due to the technical team of Brian Unitt and Richard Ling (assisted by Kanye Hulme, Olive Rowe and Jan Bisschoff) for their innovation and tireless work behind the scenes, ensuring that all our services are available on our YouTube channel. When we cannot be in our church building, we can still worship together on YouTube – and praise the Lord these services are reaching a much wider audience than our in-person services did previously. I look forward to our services continuing to be broadcast on our YouTube channel, even when we are fully back to in-person worship.

Through all this, our minister, Gill Hulme, has been tireless and inspirational in her leadership, coping not only with the vastly different circumstances that the pandemic has brought but also with the challenges of our Redevelopment Project, and I have valued her guidance.

Now we have the excitement of a start date for the redevelopment works and the anticipation of a fully accessible building at the end of it. There is still much to do in the way of fundraising, and in finding our way forward in mission, but I am sure that with God's help we will be equal to the task. If you wish to help, or have ideas to share, I am heading the Fundraising Committee and Chris Neal is heading the Mission and Publicity Committee, so do speak to either of us at any time – you can contribute without joining a committee!!

And all our work and our very being needs underpinning by prayer. You may feel unable to help in practical terms, or monetary means, but your regular prayer for our church and our plans is the foundation on which everything is built, and every bit as valuable as other works. When we can do nothing else, we can still pray, and we have a God who loves to communicate with us.

Thank you all for your support, and for the privilege of being part of your church's leadership team.

Frieda Wilson
Senior Steward

FINANCE REPORT

Last year we reported that we had set a budget showing a deficit of £1,950. Our actual results showed a deficit of £6,476 and our final accounts to August 2020 follow this report, presented in a similar format as last year. Our main account is our 'General' account, and this is followed by restricted funds covering Redevelopment, Legacies and Benevolence. Following the notes to these accounts is our budget for the current year.

Where We Have Come From (Last Year)

General Account

Whilst we set a budget showing a deficit of £1,950, we could not have foreseen the financial effects of the Covid 19 pandemic and we finished the year with a deficit of £6,476. This compares with the previous year surplus of £2,448 and surplus of £5,952 the year before that. Our income was nearly £10,000 below forecast and our expenditure nearly £5,000 below forecast.

85% of our income has historically come from offerings with 10% from external lettings. With the premises closed for nearly 6 months, both income streams have been affected. It is encouraging that over 75% of our giving is by regular standing order and this has stayed stable. Envelope and cash giving was down £4,000 on budget, lettings income was down £2,000 and donations from internal organisations down £3,000.

The majority of our costs are fixed, and we are not able to make corresponding savings when income drops. We were able to make some savings, predominantly from not having to cover Braughing assessment following their closure, and overall savings of nearly £5,000 were achieved. The resulting deficit of £6,500 has had to be covered from our reserves.

Redevelopment Scheme

As the redevelopment scheme is progressing, we have set up a separate account which is under the control of the project team. During the year we raised £57,598 from donations and fundraising and after ongoing professional fees, a balance of £50,927 was held at the year end.

Other Accounts

Legacy funds make up a large portion of our reserves and some have restricted uses. During the year we received a legacy of £13,303 and with interest added, we finished the year with £106,627 available to us. We will utilise some of these funds as part of the church contribution of £100,000 towards the redevelopment scheme, and the balance is forecast to be c£40,000 at the end of this year. The small benevolence funds are 'ring fenced' for specific purposes.

Where We Are (The Current Year)

Current Year Budget

The budget for this year (2020/21) follows the accounts for last year. We set the budget back in September last year. At that time it was difficult to predict when the premises would reopen for worship and lettings. We took a cautious view and set a deficit budget of £19,000. We assumed a further drop in giving of £3,000 together with a significant drop in lettings and donations from internal organisations of £6,000.

Expenditure was forecast at a similar level to last year, however it will also include £4,000 of boiler repairs which were carried out last year, but not invoiced until this year. As a result, total expenditure is forecast to be £4,000 higher than last year.

How We Are Doing This Year Against Budget?

After six months, we are predicting a full year deficit slightly in excess of the £19,000 budget. Giving is in line with our predicted level, although lettings income is lower as the premises have remained closed for longer than anticipated. With the planned reopening of the premises for worship later this month, giving may increase, but with the commencement of the refurbishment project, the majority of rental income will not recommence until 2022.

Analysis of Giving

- Regular giving by members (excluding one off gifts) has been flat over the last few years but has dropped considerably over the last two years. This is despite us gaining giving from former members of Saffron Walden and Braughing.

- A 6 year analysis of giving shows:

2020-21	73.5k (Estimate)
2019-20	76.5k
2018-19	85.9k
2017-18	89.2k (inc one off giving of £4.5k)
2016-17	83.3k
2015-16	86.9k

- I would normally give a breakdown of giving between standing orders, envelopes and cash, but this is not possible this year. As mentioned earlier, historically 75% of our regular giving has been by standing order and we are blessed that these have continued and in some cases increased during the last 18 months. In addition, many members who would normally give by envelopes or cash have made either regular or one-off payments direct into the bank and I would like to thank those who have done so. However, we have been affected by a drop in cash and envelope giving as a result of not worshipping at church and I would be happy to speak to anyone wanting details of how to make a donation.
- We are relying on a smaller number of donors each year, giving is reducing, but costs are static. This is not a trend we can allow to continue, especially as Circuit is covering £7,500 of our costs each year. If we had to cover these costs, this would increase our annual deficit.

Support from Circuit Funds

We are grateful for the financial support we continue to receive from Circuit funds. They have agreed to cover three quarters of the cost of the Church Manager position - £7,500 per annum. The Church Manager funding has been agreed for a five-year period until August 2022. Without this support, these costs would have to be covered from a combination of additional giving and drawing on our reserves.

Where We Are Going (The Future)

Next Year – Can we return to a balanced budget?

It is very difficult to predict our finances for next year, but it is very likely we will again set a deficit budget. Firstly, in the current uncertain times we do not know when we will return to a normal pattern of worship in the premises. Secondly, with the refurbishment commencing later this month and continuing until the end of the year, we will have a period with little rental income and are unsure which of our previous regular users will return to us. The position will hopefully become clearer over the next few months.

Giving & Gift Aid

We are very conscious that the current unpredictable times continue to affect many people in a number of ways. We are grateful to all those who give generously and selflessly on a regular basis to support the work of the Church, both in financial terms and with the giving of time and talents. We are also grateful to those who have increased their giving this year – thank you. This giving is vital for us to both sustain our current activities, but more importantly extend our mission in the town and wider community.

I would encourage everyone to prayerfully review their current giving and consider if they are able to help us achieve the required increase necessary to help to balance our budget. Tax relief on giving (Gift Aid) forms a vital part of our income and in the last tax year we were able to claim over £15,600 back in Gift Aid. I would ask all tax payers to ensure they advise Christine Leach of all giving to the Church – both regular and one off – to ensure we claim this income. If in doubt as to what is claimable, please speak to Christine.

The Finance Team

Managing the Church's finances is a team effort and I would like to record my grateful thanks to Lynn Graseman, who as Church Manager deals with all aspects of lettings, banking and expenditure. She is supported by Julie Finbow and her team of offering counters. Christine Leach continues the invaluable task of maximising our income from the complex area of Gift Aid, and Sue Haworth deals with payroll, pension and tax issues. Thank you for the support and expertise you provide.

Steve Watson

Treasurer
May 2021

Risk Review

The Managing Trustees are conscious of the need to identify and mitigate risks to the assets, employees and volunteers of the charity. With this in mind, a number of risk mitigation policies are in place and reviewed on a regular basis. These include:

- Safeguarding policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving property proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Policy for approving financial proposals
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Cash Handling policy
 - Updated and reviewed by Church Council March 2021
- Insurance policy
 - Reviewed December 2020 and the level of cover considered adequate
- Health & safety policy
 - Due to be reviewed and updated following the completion of the redevelopment project

Steve Watson

Treasurer
May 2021

ACCOUNTS

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

	NOTES	2019/2020	2018/2019
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular	1	59,667	65,239
Gift Aid		15,678	19,053
Donations		1,197	1,605
Total Offerings		76,542	85,897
Donations - Church organisations	2	4,442	7,672
Lettings Income	3	5,272	8,065
Sundry Income	4	83	225
Bank Interest		236	312
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		86,575	102,171
Funds Received For External Organisations		3,148	3,794
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		89,723	105,965
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Circuit Assessment		52,090	54,200
Mission donations		4,485	4,270
Worship	5	2,801	4,429
Administration	6	7,354	9,552
Premises	7	25,899	25,833
Small Capital Items		422	1,439
SUB TOTAL - GENERAL FUNDS		93,051	99,723
Funds Paid To External Organisations		3,148	3,794
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		96,199	103,517
Net Surplus (Deficit) for the Year		(6,476)	2,448
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2019		112,246	84,608
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2020	9	105,770	112,246

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

REDEVELOPMENT ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

	NOTES	2019/2020	2018/2019
<u>INCOME</u>			
Offerings:			
Regular		2,865	
Gift Aid		7,356	
Donations		36,424	440
Total Offerings		46,645	440
Donations - Church organisations		446	156
Fundraising Events	8	10,507	672
SUB TOTAL		57,598	1,268
Transfer from General Funds			8,062
Grants		-	-
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>		57,598	9,330
 <u>EXPENDITURE</u>			
Professional Fees		11,327	2,537
Fundraising Income Share		2,137	-
<u>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</u>		13,464	2,537
Net Surplus for the Year		44,134	6,793
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2019		6,793	-
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2020		50,927	6,793

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

LEGACIES ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

	2019/2020	2018/2019
Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2019		
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	92,712	92,113
<u>Income</u>		
Bequests	13,303	-
Interest TMCP	612	599
<u>Expenditure</u>	13,915	599
Premises Projects	-	-
Mission Projects	-	-
	-	-
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2020		
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes	106,627	92,712

BENEVOLENCE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2019		
Nat West	937	1,137
<u>Income</u>		
Communion Services	211	260
<u>Expenditure</u>	211	260
Donations	50	460
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2020		
Nat West	1,098	937

DEVELOPMENT SCHEME ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

Bank Balances B/Fwd 1st September 2019		
Nat West	-	4,791
Income		6,077
Expenditure		2,807
Transfer to Redevelopment Account		8,061
Bank Balances C/Fwd 31st August 2020		
Nat West	-	-

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

GENERAL ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

	2019/2020	2018/2019
<u>NOTE 1 - REGULAR OFFERINGS</u>		
Standing Orders	46,446.00	46,543.00
Envelopes	8,456.30	12,851.70
Cash	4,764.86	5,844.09
	<u>59,667.16</u>	<u>65,238.79</u>
<u>NOTE 2 - DONATIONS CHURCH ORGANISATIONS</u>		
Thursday Coffee Mornings	1,750.00	3,750.00
Bookstall	600.00	1,750.00
Company at Christmas	500.00	500.00
Tuesday Afternoon Fellowship	534.55	350.00
Thursday Group	125.00	125.00
Kickstart	200.00	200.00
Girls Brigade	-	200.00
Badminton	132.00	347.00
Food Bank	600.00	450.00
	<u>4,441.55</u>	<u>7,672.00</u>
<u>NOTE 3 - LETTINGS INCOME</u>		
Regular Lettings	4,292.60	5,987.20
Saturday Coffee Mornings	20.55	137.66
One Off Lettings	959.20	1,940.20
	<u>5,272.35</u>	<u>8,065.06</u>
<u>NOTE 4 - SUNDRY INCOME</u>		
Funerals	44.00	
Youth	-	117.78
Other	38.50	106.89
	<u>82.50</u>	<u>224.67</u>
<u>NOTE 5 - WORSHIP</u>		
Organists	982.90	1,663.45
Children & Youth	-	86.55
Copywrite & Music	921.64	879.59
Baptism/Communion	-	62.98
Expenses	896.70	1,736.54
	<u>2,801.24</u>	<u>4,429.11</u>

NOTE 6 - ADMINISTRATION

Church Manager	5,951.17	6,052.59
Publications	170.00	50.40
Website	477.00	-
Photocopier	64.54	143.90
Paper & Printing	-	326.13
Auditing	-	2,304.00
Miscellaneous	691.01	674.75
	<u>7,353.72</u>	<u>9,551.77</u>

NOTE 7 - PREMISES

Cleaner	7,947.82	8,002.84
Insurance	3,907.60	3,812.26
Power	7,949.93	7,004.80
Windows & Cleaning	1,507.53	1,115.17
Water	1,064.58	938.55
Waste Disposal	443.69	537.55
Boiler	-	1,488.00
Pianos & Organ	434.94	474.00
Fire Extinguishers	362.53	485.15
Telephone	312.02	558.76
TV License	157.50	154.50
Roof Repairs	1,056.00	
Sundry expenditure	755.20	1,261.41
	<u>25,899.34</u>	<u>25,832.99</u>

NOTE 8 - FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Bike Ride	4,735.25
Bric A Brac	2,000.00
Folk Concert	1,663.50
Jig Fest	1,160.10
Xmas Fair	646.07
Garden Party	212.00
Carol Quiz	90.00
	<u>10,506.92</u>

NOTE 9 - BANK BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2020

NatWest - 2 Accounts Combined	111,413.29	105,064.51
Central Finance Board	17,763.45	7,552.19
	129,176.74	112,616.70
Less:		
Benevolence Account	1,098.00	937.00
Amounts to be Paid to Others	9,005.30	1,184.00
Legacy to be paid across	13,303.37	
Amounts not yet received	-	- 1,750.00
	105,770.07	112,245.70

NOTE 10 - SUMMARY OF FUND BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 AUGUST 2020

General Account	105,770.07	112,245.70
Benevolence Account	1,098.00	937.00
Legacies Account	106,627.00	92,712.00
Redevelopment Account	50,927.00	6,793.00
	264,422.07	212,687.70

BISHOP'S STORTFORD METHODIST CHURCH

BUDGET FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

INCOME

Offerings	73,500
Donations - Organisations	1,000
Lettings Income	3,000
Sundry Income	500
Bank Interest	200
TOTAL INCOME	78,200

EXPENDITURE

Circuit Assessment	52,100
Worship	3,000
Mission donations	4,500
Administration	8,000
Premises	25,000
Premises (previous year)	4,000
Small Capital	600
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	97,200
 OVERALL SHORTFALL	 -19,000