



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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