



Serving God,
Cowley and Headington

Cowley Team Ministry

St James and St Francis
Churches

Report 2024 – 2025

Presented to the
Annual Parish Meeting and
the Annual Parochial
Church Meeting
18 May 2025



Cowley Parish: Working not just for a better Church but a better Cowley and Headington

**The Parish of Cowley,
St James and St Francis Churches
Parish Activities Report 2024 – 2025**

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**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING AND
ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING
HELD ON SUNDAY, 21 APRIL 2024,
COMMENCING AT 12.30 PM WITH SHARED LUNCH
AT ST JAMES CHURCH CENTRE**

Minutes to be read alongside the Annual Report 2023/2024

PRESENT: The Revd Geoff Bayliss (Team Rector) (in the Chair) and 35 members of the clergy and congregations

1. WELCOME:

The Team Rector welcomed everyone to the meeting, and the meeting opened with prayers.

2. APOLOGIES: Apologies were received from Elwira Lubos and Maureen Stone.

**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – OPEN TO PEOPLE ON THE
ELECTORAL ROLL:**

3. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING, 23 APRIL 2023:

The Minutes were **UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED** by the meeting. Those in attendance were asked to let the Chairman know during the meeting if they spotted any errors.

4. REPORT OF CHURCH WARDENS:

The report from Christine Woodman and Maureen Stone was accepted, and the two Church Wardens were thanked for their hard work during the year. It was noted that Maureen Stone felt it would be the right time for her to stand down as Church Warden, and she was thanked for the help she had been able to give. Christine Woodman reported that she enjoyed being Church Warden and would very much like to continue in this role although she had been in the role for seven years.

5. ELECTION OF TWO CHURCH WARDENS 2024/2025:

One person had been nominated – Christine Woodman. It was noted that Churchwardens were (re-)elected annually at the Meeting of Parishioners and could serve a maximum of six years followed by a two-year break unless the rule was previously suspended by the Meeting of Parishioners. The meeting **UNANIMOUSLY AGREED** to suspend the rule, and **UNANIMOUSLY AGREED** that Christine Woodman should be appointed as Church Wardens for 2024/2025.

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING:

6. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING, 23 APRIL 2023: The Minutes were **UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED** by the meeting.

7. ELECTION OF PAROCHIAL REPRESENTATIVES: There were no nominations for PCC members. The current membership consisted of:

Sally Hemsworth – to 2025
Marie Paterson – to 2026
Sue Philcox (See Minute 8)
Emily Sommerlade – to 2026
Norah Shallow – to 2026
Lesley Williams – to 2025

As Sue Philcox was appointed as Deanery Synod Representative, this meant that there were only five members of the PCC, with seven vacancies.

8. **APPOINTMENT OF DEANERY SYNOD REPRESENTATIVES:** The Parish was entitled to three representatives – Maureen Stone and Chris Woodman were appointed last year, and a nomination had been received for Sue Philcox to become the third representative of the Parish. The nomination was **AGREED**.
9. **APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER OR AUDITOR:** The meeting appointed Richard Mohun as the Independent Examiner.
10. **ELECTORAL ROLL:** Lesley Williams, Electoral Roll Officer, reported that one more form had been received. Next year would be the once every 6 years full renewal of the electoral roll. Her full report was shown on page 7 of the report.
11. **ANNUAL REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PARISH**
GENERALLY: The meeting accepted the report, which would be circulated widely in the Parish so that people had an opportunity to read the reports received. The following comments were received:

School Governors: Thanks were given to School Governors for their hard work and for all their involvement at schools. All schools say how much they enjoy their involvement with the church.

Mothers' Union: Although this was working to an altered structure it was thriving and growing.

Thanks were given all those who helped the church.

12. **FINANCE:**
 - 12.1 **Report by Treasurer – Presentation of Draft Accounts 2023** It was an embarrassment not to be able to report on the Parish Accounts for 2023 but, unfortunately, the Treasurer had taken maternity leave sooner than expected. Measures were being taken in relation to the 2024 accounts.

It was reported that the Parish Share would be going down which would be very helpful to the Parish. Gift Aid work was being done and bringing in good income. However, the Parish had many regular financial commitments such as insurance, utility costs, etc which were increasing.
 - 12.2 **Mission Giving in 2024:** The meeting was happy to continue the policy of giving 5% of planned giving.

12.3 Parish Mission Prayer and Giving Policy: The PCC reviewed this policy annually.

13. A REPORT ON THE FABRIC, GOODS AND ORNAMENTS OF THE CHURCHES: The report circulated to the meeting was accepted.

Work was on-going on the inventories and the terriers.

14. REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE DEANERY SYNOD: The report was accepted.

15. OTHER MATTERS OF PAROCHIAL OR GENERAL CHURCH INTEREST: NIL

16. QUESTIONS – OPEN FORUM: NIL

17. ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING 2024: The Rev Geoff Bayliss thanked everyone for attending this meeting and indicated that a date would be announced for the next meeting.

The meeting closed with prayers.

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Report from Church Wardens

Disappointedly, I am the only Church Warden of this Parish as the vacancy created by Maureen Stone's resignation has not been filled. However, in writing this report I have had support from Shirley Costar who is very active at St Francis and has given me details of all the activities which have taken place at that end of the Parish.

I have been Church Warden at St James for 8 years and have enjoyed every moment of it. You only have to step into our beautiful church, and you can immediately sense a feeling of warmth and welcome which is what we strive to portray. Many have said that they have chosen St James as their church because of the welcome they received.

To make St James more accessible to families we changed the timing of the 11am service and brought it forward to 10am. This has worked well and is very popular with families who come to the All-Age Family Service which we hold on the third Sunday of the month. St Francis also holds a similar service on the first Sunday of the month.

Our Christmas Tree Festival was slightly different from previous years. A Saturday was chosen, and all the events took place on that day with many Christmas trees and decorations adorning the church. Different activities took place throughout the day and it was very busy and enjoyable. The money raised went to our two special charities ROSY and SEESAW. Thank you, Lesley, for taking so much time and effort organising this special day.

We had a Spring Sale in May and a Craft and Gift Fair in November. Both raised well-needed funds for the church, as the upkeep is continually increasing as costs spiral.

Stacey continues to look after St James and St Francis and she also helps Chris and Pam keep the church looking so well-cared for.

The prayer spaces for the local schools have welcomed many children who love coming and listening to Bible stories and joining in with various crafts which are displayed in St James.

The Lent course this year focused on The Kings Speech and a book by Hilary Brand - 'Finding a Voice'. It was very well received and we analysed many different aspects of the film. We enjoyed a meal beforehand and the evening ended with Compline. Many of us would welcome a similar programme for 2026.

Liam left us last summer and is now looking after St Peter's Church in Wolvercote. We miss him very much but are so pleased that he is able to carry out God's work, which is so important to him.

Things have also been busy at St Francis - with coffee (and cake) mornings held in May, June and November, which raised well-needed funding for the church. One of the coffee mornings was organised by a local keep fit group who rent the hall for their activities.

In July, the Deanery Eucharist was held at St Francis and in November the licensing service for Elwira Lubos was held at the church. A wonderful service, celebrating that one of our congregation had been called to serve as a lay minister. The service was full of joy and love. The party afterwards marked this special occasion with raising a glass of fizz and a most beautiful cake.

Both churches celebrated their Patronal Saints Days during the year (St James in July and St Francis in September) - these are always lovely times, celebrating our saints together.

In addition, both churches were open in September for Open Doors and Ride and Stride. At St Francis, one of the visitors indicated he had not been in the church since he was a young boy, he now looked in his 60's. He saw the church was open and wanted to come in to bring back memories. Similar things happened at St James when visitors recognised Rosanne Butler as "their teacher" of many years before and memories of schooldays followed.

St Francis started the new year with its Games and crumpets afternoon. More crumpets eaten than games played. The right balance I reckon!!

In March a Table top sale, organised by the Co-op raising money for their charity of the year, The Samaritans (last year they supported St James Church). There were plenty of stalls to buy from and a very modern hearse was put on the forecourt, filled with balloons for people to guess how many balloons there were. St Francis Church were able to join in with this event supporting the Co-op and raising money for the church too.

Other events that have gone on throughout the year - mother and toddler group Little Stars, Messy Church, Prayer Space, flower arrangers, who decorate the church for Easter, Harvest, Remembrance Day, and Christmas.

St Francis Church Hall is well used by so many different groups, bringing the local community into our wonderful church. The Community Food Bank opens every Tuesday and Friday at St Francis church hall, with a lot of work going on in the background on different days. It is good to know that the number of bookings at St Francis increased greatly during the year.

Our doors are open to welcome whoever comes in. We hopefully shine out God's love. Long may St Francis and St James churches serve their community.

My thanks go out to Geoff, Mark and Max and the many volunteers who make our services and different activities so special.

Let us continue to do God's work, caring for one another and following the example that was given to us 2000 years ago.

**Christine Woodman
Church Warden, St James**

Election of Church Wardens 2025/2026

The nominations will be reported at the meeting.

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

Election of Parochial Church Councillors 2024/2025

The Parish is able to appoint twelve Parochial Church Councillors and, as these are appointed on a three-year rolling cycle, there are nine vacancies for 2025/2026. The nominated names will be announced at the meeting.

The ex-officio members of the PCC are:

- Rector
- Any individual holding a license from the Bishop for this parish
- Church Wardens – these are elected annually.
- Deanery Synod Representatives (already elected on a cycle that is defined nationally).
- This does not leave very many members. Treasurers and Secretaries are appointed by the PCC (not the APCM) and are normally persons elected on to the PCC by the church membership. Rule 13 makes provision for when that is not possible. The current position on the PCC is as follows:

| 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Run to April 2025 | Run to April 2026 | Run to April 2027 | | Run to April 2028 | Run to April 2029 | Run to April 2030 |
| Church Warden | Church Warden | Church Warden | | Church Warden | Church Warden | Church Warden |
| Church Warden | Church Warden | Church Warden | | Church Warden | Church Warden | Church Warden |
| 1 (Sally Hemsworth) | Deanery Synod Rep | 4 (Vacancy) | | 1 (vacancy) | Deanery Synod Rep | |
| 3 (the late Sheila Collett) | Deanery Synod Rep | 3 (vacancy) | | 3 (vacancy) | Deanery Synod Rep | |
| 5 (Lesley Williams) | Deanery Synod Rep | 6 (vacancy) | | 5 (vacancy) | Deanery Synod Rep | |
| 7 (vacancy) | 10 (Sue Philcox) | 10 (vacancy) | | 7 (vacancy) | 10 (vacancy) | |
| 11 (vacancy) | 8 (Norah Shallow) | 12 (vacancy) | | 11 (vacancy)) | 8 | |
| 9 | 9 (Marie Paterson) | | | | 9 | |
| | 2 (Emily Sommerlade) | | | | 2 | |

Mrs Sunita Masih was co-opted on to the PCC in 2018 representing the AALC. This appointment was reviewed in 2021, and it was agreed that Mrs Masih should continue as a co-opted member of the PCC

Appointment of Deanery Synod Representatives

The Parish has three Deanery Synod Representatives, and two were appointed covering the period 2023 – 2026 (Christine Woodman and Maureen Stone). Maureen Stone resigned as Deanery Synod Representative and Sue Philcox was appointed in 2024. There is, therefore, one vacancy.

Appointment of an Independent Examiner

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting is asked to appoint an Independent Examiner. Richard Mohun has indicated that he is willing to undertake this role.

Electoral Roll Church Membership 2025

2019 was the last once every 6 years full renewal of the electoral roll; 2025 has been the latest.

The roll is a membership list of all those committed to the life and work of the Parish – by worshipping regularly, praying with and for us, attending Parish groups and activities, donating money and time.

The only qualifications required are to be resident in the Parish, baptised, 16 or over, a self-declared member of the Church of England (or a listed church in communion with it). If you are not resident within the Parish, you need to attend worship at least monthly for over six months and still meet the other conditions.

There's an official Church of England application form and additionally the Parish of Cowley asks you for some other personal details, particularly those for an emergency contact and any accessibility and health information. This information is of course completely confidential and is held securely.

The discarded 2024 roll recorded, at the last APCM, a total of 99 members : 20 at St Francis Church and 79 at St James. 25 were not resident within the Parish. 2 members were added during the year but 3 died. We honour the memory of Margaret Weller, Helen Beetham, Roy Grant.

The new 2025 roll records a total of 89 members : 20 at St Francis, 69 at St James. 22 are not resident within the Parish

Whilst we hold confidential information of electors' home address, phone number(s) and their next of kin/close friend for use in case of emergencies, the publicly displayed roll contains names only, in line with the UK GDPR regulations. Electors may request sight of their entry on the roll at any time to check it for accuracy. The document is password protected and the forms are boxed and locked away.

When a new roll is created, all the previous forms are shredded.

Lesley Williams, Electoral Roll Officer

ANNUAL REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PARISH GENERALLY

Cowley Team Ministry

Background

The Cowley PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Team Rector in promoting the whole mission of the church: pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It is responsible for the Church of St James the Apostle, Beauchamp Lane, the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Hollow Way and St James Church Centre, Beauchamp Lane.

Our Vision

"To live out God's purposes for us, make Christ known in Cowley and to raise up a new generation to love and serve the Lord."

Our Core values

Prayer: *Prayer is conversation with God in which we speak from our hearts and listen to God's by the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is a central element of life in the parish of Cowley. Nothing will happen without prayer*

Bible: *God has spoken to his people and to the world through the Bible. It contains basic instructions for life and is an essential element in knowing God and learning to live a life worth living.*

Community: *We are called to live in community. We are called to serve one another, to be an encouragement to those who are having a hard time, to sing and laugh and cry together in the journey of life. We are called to be brothers and sisters in our lives together.*

Membership

Members of the PCC are either ex-officio or elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. During the year the following served as members of the PCC

Team Rector: The Revd Canon Dr Geoffrey Bayliss

Curate: The Revd Liam Cartwright
The Revd Joshua Horder

Anglican Asian Living Church: Zeenath (Sunita) Masih

Church Wardens: Christine Woodman
Vacancy

Deanery Synod Representatives (2023)
Sue Philcox
Christine Woodman
Vacancy

Elected Parochial Church Council members:

Richard Dyson (co-opted)
Valerie Goodall (co-opted)
Sally Hemsworth (PCC Secretary)
David Hodges (co-opted)
Marie Paterson
Norah Shallow
Emily Sommerlade (Treasurer)
Lesley Williams (Electoral Roll Officer and
Safeguarding Officer)

Additional Active Ministers

Revd Mark Oxbrow
Revd Max Diaz Butron

Church Committees

The PCC operates through a number of committees, which meet between full meetings of the PCC.

Finance Committee: Oversees the general financial dimensions of the work of the Parish by monitoring income and expenditure.

Standing Committee: Membership consists of Team Rector, Vice-Chairman of PCC, Church Wardens, Treasurer, and the PCC Secretary. It makes decisions if required between PCC Meetings.

St James Church Committee

St Francis Church Committee

These committees attend to all matters relating to the ministry, mission and maintenance of their churches. In addition, St James Church Committee deals with matters relating to St James Church Centre.

Annual Congregational Meetings have not been held, and the committee memberships are due to be reviewed shortly.

The current membership of St James Church Committee is:

Gilly Burns
Valerie Goodall
Sally Hemsworth
David Hodges
Josie Rignall
John Vivian
Lesley Williams

The current membership of St Francis Church Committee is:

Shirley Costar
Gwen Denny
Sally Hemsworth
David Hodges
Haleh (Holly) Safavi
Norah Shallow

Church Statistics 2024

2023 figures in []

The average Sunday attendance in 2024 was 91 [74] – 31 [25] at St Francis and 60 [49] at St James.

There were 4 marriages (4 at St James, 0 at St Francis), 11 baptisms (10 at St James, 1 at St Francis), 8 funerals held in church (8 at St James, 0 at St Francis) and 9 services conducted by members of the Parish Ministry team at the Oxford Crematorium.

The total number attending worship in the Parish on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 2024 was 99 [102] (87 at St James, 12 at St Francis), with 58 [95] communicants (46 at St James, 12 at St Francis).

The number attending worship on Easter Day 2024 was 105 [98] (73 at St James, 32 at St Francis), with 88 communicants (58 at St James, 30 at St Francis).

PCC Review of the Year

There have been five PCC meetings since the last APCM Meeting – September 2024 (two meetings), November 2024, February 2025 and May 2025. At the May meeting the draft accounts were discussed, when it was agreed that, with some small amendments, Richard Mohun should be asked to inspect the accounts.

Membership of the PCC remains lower than is desirable. Following last year's Annual Meeting three people were co-opted on to the PCC and with the existing four members that means we are five members short of where we should be at - and the congregation is requested to pray for us to find more members called to help the work of the parish. Being a member of the PCC can be an enjoyable, engaging and fulfilling activity and does not need to be onerous, given the relatively small number of meetings each year.

Ministry Team/Service Times:

The PCC continually reviewed the work of the Ministry Team, and were delighted with the Rector, with Mark Oxbrow, Max Diaz Butron and the two curates, Liam Cartwright and Joshua Hordern, as well as the lay members, Lesley Williams and Jo Duckles. Elwira Lubos was licenced as an LLM in November 2024 and has taken a number of services.

While delighted by the opportunity that arose for Liam Cartwright to become Interim Minister and provide maternity cover from summer 2024 at St Peter's in Wolvercote, the PCC was extremely sorry to lose Liam's services in Cowley. It is hoped that he will continue to keep in regular touch with this parish.

Service Times were continually reviewed, and the PCC was happy to approve the change of service times at St James on Sundays, with the main service now at 10.00am each week. The PCC monitored the knock-on effect of needing separate Presidents at St James and St Francis each week rather than one minister covering all the services. However, the change has been popular with the congregation and there have been few issues with the ensuring good cover. Mark Oxbrow, in particular, was

thanked for his flexibility in leading services most weeks. The role of Max, Josh and Elwira was also recognised and greatly appreciated. One downside that was discussed was the effect on the availability of volunteer bell-ringers, especially from Iffley church, and the number of regular St James bell-ringers is currently much depleted.

Low congregation attendance figures were still of concern, although numbers were starting to increase. The introduction of monthly family services at both churches from October was carefully monitored by the PCC and, from (an expected) slow start, numbers have consistently grown, with a large number of children attending. The introduction of short plays retelling bible stories has been very popular and involving for younger (and older!) congregation members. The enhanced refreshments after these services have also been popular.

The lack of a designated Church Warden at St Francis remains a serious concern, and the Rector has stressed that the role is not necessarily onerous and provides scope for the individual to shape it to their talents and interests.

Members have again been saddened by the loss of members of the congregation, people who had played a large part in the running of the churches over many years.

Finances:

Concern was expressed at every meeting about the budgetary position of the Parish. There were some issues in receiving up-to-date financial information through much of 2024 and the poor financial position was not fully recognised until the autumn. A “Fill the Gap” campaign was launched in early October 2024 to raise the £10,000 deficit and this achieved its target by the very start of 2025. The PCC was extremely grateful for the generosity of the parish in achieving this target.

Financial reporting has much improved since the New Year in terms of its timeliness, so that any shortfalls in future funding should be recognised more readily, and measures put in place sooner. There was regular discussion of the church funds and ensuring that the current and deposit accounts remained ethically invested and worked hard to accrue the best interest rates possible for the parish, while maintaining the appropriate levels of accessibility in order to be able to call on the funds when required.

However, it is noted that long-term, donations are down, and that the single biggest cause of this is the declining congregation numbers. Growing the church membership is the best way forward, both financially and of course to spread Jesus’s word. The family services have started to have a positive impact in this respect.

The PCC was also involved with:

- Ensuring that Gift Aid was collected assiduously, to allow the maximum amounts to be gathered as quickly as possible. Sue Philcox was thanked for her hard and diligent work in this respect.
- Letting charges for the use of the church premises were reviewed, and charges increased, particularly for winter bookings to cover the increased use of energy in the winter half of the year.
- The parish contracts for energy supplies of gas and electricity came to an end and there was consideration by the PCC of how best to renew the contracts. An independent consultant advised on the best options, although this was not as successful as had been hoped. The PCC agreed that the lowest priced contracts were best, so long as the electricity was on a green tariff and it was recommended

that a fixed contract for three years be taken out, if advantageous, as prices are only expected to increase.

Church Buildings:

- Decoration of the Main Hall at the Church Centre was completed and the rubber caps (ferrules) at the base of chairs in the Church Centre were replaced, to stop them scraping the floor.
- The walls of St Francis Main Hall were repainted and the floor re-sanded and sealed; light fittings in the corridor were replaced using more efficient LED bulbs.
- Repairs, maintenance and decoration were planned and carried out at both churches in line with the recommendations of the recent Quinquennial Reviews and ongoing needs.
- Plans were discussed and progressed to repair the fabric of the Church noticeboards at both churches and update the St James information, with the new Sunday service times.
- A replacement shed for the Church Centre is being investigated and planned.

Communion Assistants and Sidespersons:

The PCC agreed the following list for Communion Assistants and Sidespersons - it was hoped that both lists might be extended.

COMMUNION ASSISTANTS:

| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Alex Aris | Pat Chambers |
| Shirley Costar | Jo Duckles |
| Gwen Denny | Valerie Goodall |
| Elwira Lubos | David Hodges |
| Haleh (Holly) Safavi | Rachel Jefferies |
| Elsie Tshabalala | Sue Philcox |
| Elaine Ulett | June Smith |
| | Lesley Williams |
| | Chris Woodman |

SIDESPERSIONS:

| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Shirley Costar | John Booty |
| Jane Coutanche | Rosanne Butler |
| Gwen Denny | Pat Chambers |
| Esme Forbes | Iris Geens |
| Lyn Lord | Valerie Goodall |
| Elwira Lubos | Ruth Goodwin |
| Haleh (Holly) Safavi | Sally Hemsworth |
| Norah Shallow | David Hodges |
| Maureen Stone | Rachel Jefferies |
| Elaine Ulett | Christine Knevet |
| | Sue Philcox |
| | June Smith |
| | Carmy Strzelecki |
| | Lesley Williams |

Policies: The following policies continue to be reviewed annually, with updates to each meeting:

- Data Protection – Cowley Parish Audit Data
- Health and Safety
- Safeguarding
- Parish Mission Prayer and Giving.

This year saw safeguarding refresher training for many members of the parish involved in leadership roles. Lesley Williams was thanked for all her work in organising, leading and monitoring this training.

A new lone-working policy was approved to ensure the safety of those finding themselves working alone in any of the church premises.

David Hodges
Secretary to the PCC

Team Rector's Annual Report

Give thanks to the Lord our God and King his love endures for ever! (Psalm 136)

As I start my ninth annual report I need to give thanks. Thanks to everybody who is involved in Cowley Parish Church. Those linked with St James, St Francis, our schools and all our satellite activities. 2024, and the beginning of 2025, has been an amazing season. It has had the balance of life's joys and sadnesses but consistent throughout has been a strong love for each other, a strong love for God and a heart focussed on building a church and community that is good for all.

Our sadnesses have included the death of much-loved friends: Brian Tidy, Margaret Weller, Una Dean, Helen Beetham, Roy Grant, each bringing a richness to our fellowship that has been unique. Each missed in their own special way. Each looking forward to a room in our Father's heavenly dwelling: a place prepared especially for them. 'May they rest in peace and rise in glory'. As we have lost people to the heavenly realms, so we have been joined by others. New face, new joys and new friendships. *God is good! His love endures for ever.*

2024 was a busy year for the Parish, four weddings, 17 funerals, 11 baptisms and 6 confirmations. All this alongside weekly opportunities: school assemblies, lunch clubs, toddler groups, prayer spaces, fund raising activities, Bible studies, Messy Church, home groups, catechesis, governance activities, maintenance challenges administrative duties etc. etc. The list of people to thank is enormous.

In 2024 finances were a challenge. It costs over £1,500 a week to run the parish. 75% of that comes in from donations. We are so thankful for every penny that is given and every penny that can be claimed back from the tax man! Equally we are thankful for every gift that reduces our visible costs. Our people are very generous people. It is a response to our very generous God. Together we responded to the need in an amazing way. The 'Fill the Gap' campaign did indeed 'fill the gap' in our finances. Thank you so much. *God is good! His love endures for ever.*

In 2024 our relationship with the AALC continued to deepen, with both Revd Mark and myself heavily involved in the life of this wonderful community. It continues to be a joy when we share the opportunity to worship and study together. *God is good! His love endures for ever.*

We have some particularly good examples of children's' work. Our All-Age family service, Messy Church and preschool groups (Seashells and Little Stars) are the envy of many of the churches in Oxford. But we are aware of so much more we could do! Provision for children's work on Sunday mornings needs developing. As does our

provision for youth and young adult discipleship. Resources are our biggest challenge. By resources I mean volunteers; adults to lead activities. There is so much potential! Alongside our brothers and sisters in Littlemore, Iffley and Blackbird Leys, and as part of a larger diocesan project, we put in a bid for some national funding for work in this area. Sadly, it was not successful. The ideas and vision are spot on. We just need to find a different funding source to further the work. *God is good! His love endures for ever.*

Lay leadership: We have some brilliant lay leaders. These serve both liturgically and across the broader life of the church. Thank you to each and everyone involved. Our leaders of the first part of the Sunday liturgy give us a resilience that enables us to maintain our values without relying solely on the ordained. We are thankful for Mark and Josh and Liam who, in this season have done so much. Revd Liam has been covering a maternity leave in Wolvercote. A great opportunity for him, and a way we have been able to offer a blessing to the broader church in Oxford. He is currently looking for his first incumbency rated post. Our blessings go with him and his family. We have one serving Churchwarden. She is doing a brilliant job, but needs a colleague. Traditionally this has been a member of St Francis Church. But that is not a legal requirement. Our Churchwardens can come from anywhere across our beautiful parish. *God is good! His love endures for ever.*

It truly has been an amazing year. Together we can be thankful for so much. Together we can look forward to what God has in store for us in the coming years. Together we can celebrate that *God is good and His love endures for ever! Hallelujah.*

Revd Canon Dr Geoff Bayliss
Rector of Cowley

Curate's Annual Report

Thank you so much to everyone in the Parish for their continued support as I train as a self-supporting curate in Cowley! Thanks especially to Geoff for his constant encouragement and understanding.

In the last year I have continued to spread my time on Sundays between St James, St Francis and Grace Church Cowley, where we as a family - my wife Claire, Luke (10) and Peter (8) - are on most Sundays.

Some highlights for me have been working with Elwira in her new role as a Lay Reader; the Remembrance Day service at St Francis; celebrating Advent and Christmas together; and presiding at the eucharist on a very full Easter Day service at St James. Claire, Peter and Luke loved being there too!

At Grace Church I have been able to serve in a variety of ways with a good deal of preaching, leading services and pastoral care.

Throughout the whole year, there have been all the little opportunities for connecting up people across the different parts of the parish. Times when we can come together as a whole church across the parish are wonderful and I'm really looking forward to the Pentecost celebration in Templar Square in June.

As many will know, I carry on serving as the Professor of Christian Ethics in the University of Oxford with all the opportunities to bear witness to Christ that this brings.

Thank you so much for your kindness, love and prayers! I'm looking forward to carrying on our shared ministry together as the people of God in Cowley for many years ahead.

The Revd Joshua Hordern

Anglican Asian Living Church

In 2024, we initiated our standard services and programs, signalling the start of an exciting journey for AALC. We held a festive New Year celebration, with the goal of enhancing our organisational framework and promoting growth in both spiritual and numerical aspects. Furthermore, we successfully completed the application for BMO (Bishop's Mission Orders).

The AALC is presently governed by four Trustees, including the current Rector of Cowley Parish. The Trustees oversee the charity's operations and make key decisions, while the worship leaders and Trustees are responsible for the daily management.

In 2024, we scheduled the baptisms and confirmations for several of our AALC members to be finalised in 2025.

The Cowley Team Ministry has played a crucial role in providing vital ordained spiritual, pastoral, and sacramental support to the AALC whenever required, which has been greatly uplifting.

The operations of the church at AALC are effectively overseen by the Trustees, who convene monthly. Our services are consistently livestreamed on Facebook, facilitated by Dylan, our Digital Co-ordinator. Jasmine Masih, a trustee at AALC, organises the schedule to guarantee that all Worship Leaders can lead on Sundays and deliver sermons during our Wednesday gatherings. Currently, Sunita and Salina, two of our Worship Leaders, are in a discernment process, and other church members are also provided with opportunities to lead our Wednesday meetings and church services.

The AALC continues to offer its monthly youth services, creating a platform for young people to work together and assume leadership roles, thereby nurturing their development as future leaders of the church. It is genuinely uplifting to observe their significant progress in confidence and abilities as they take on diverse responsibilities during the service.

The ministers of the Cowley Team Parish have played a crucial role in supporting us after Richard Chand's departure by leading worship services, delivering sermons, and officiating holy communion. The congregation deeply appreciates their commitment, and as a gesture of gratitude, we contribute £50 to them each Sunday from the AALC offerings collected during the service.

All church members have successfully completed safeguarding courses, with Lesley Williams actively supporting the maintenance of current training, while Jasmine Masih has been designated as the Assistant Safeguarding Officer for the AALC.

In 2024, the AALC has experienced significant growth in worship, welcoming numerous international guests, including worshippers and pastors, who have inspired the local community to participate in AALC activities, resulting in substantial growth in this area. Additionally, we organized a successful seaside trip this year post-Covid, marking a positive step forward for church members to resume regular activities.

As we move forward, our partnership with the Cowley team parish ministers will continue to thrive as a cohesive community. The AALC has seen spiritual growth, and we encourage our members to deepen their involvement within the church. Furthermore, we have reinstated refreshments at the St James Church Centre, creating a chance for fellowship and the exchange of our faith with all.

Zeenath (Sunita) Masih

The Cowley Parish Link

Our weekly pew news sheet covers both churches and includes an insert with the collects and Bible readings for the day.

We still weekly deliver a copy to 18 parishioners; thanks are again expressed to Chris Booty, who has continued to walk many a mile, delivering the majority of those, with others also taking a few.

Link is posted on the Parish website and e-mailed to those who have requested that service.

When there is a lot, or something special to announce, a Link Extra supplements the main publication and event/information flyers are inserted regularly, in the hope they may be passed on to neighbours and friends.

Content for inclusion should generally reach the Editor by a Wednesday evening but in fact, the typing and copying are more often a Friday/Saturday task, unless otherwise indicated in advance, because of personal commitments.

link@cowleyteamministry.co.uk

As the leaflet contains significant dates and information about the life of the Parish, as well as often topical issues for prayer, it is offered as an important, integral part of our worship, for use at home; it is disappointing when it is discarded in church.

Spare copies are always available in both churches and in St James Centre to take for absent members, interested neighbours and friends. Do ask if you need more!

Lesley Williams, Editor

Cowley Chronicle

The Chronicle is the parish magazine of Cowley and is published ten times a year. It is printed monthly (except for double issues in July/August and December/January) and is in the churches on the first Sunday of each month. Help is still given by Lesley Williams and Chris Booty with deliveries to those not attending church, and this help is very much appreciated.

Following appeals for articles we have attracted a variety of subjects from amusing to serious, and there is a continual appeal for “something different” to mix with the regular articles.

This is the ninth year that Nicki Stevens and Sally Hemsworth have been the editorial team. They continue to enjoy searching for articles, compiling the document and distributing – but, of course, if anyone wishes to join the team this would be very welcome.

As with the Link, the Chronicle aims to keep its readers informed of all the different activities throughout the Parish – but on a monthly basis. Reports from the Church Committees and the Parochial Church Council, the Church Warden, details of social activities and dates of activities are regular items as well as general information on the Christian year and extracts from the Parish Archives. Over the last couple of years, Rosanne Butler has written about her time teaching at St James Old School – it would be lovely to expand this and include details of the history of the school up to the time a couple decided to make it their home.

We do not attract many advertisements – so if you know of someone who would like to advertise please let us know. Of course, if someone wishes to take on the job of finding advertisements they would be a very welcome member of the team.

The editorial team would like to thank all those who have contributed regularly over the last twelve months. Their contributions have been much appreciated.

If you feel you would like to get involved with the collection of articles or would like to contribute, please let the Chronicle Team know. Articles can be delivered to the Chronicle Team at the Parish Office or submitted by email to office@cowleyteamministry.co.uk.

Sally Hemsworth and Nicki Stevens

Children’s Church, St James

We have continued with our aim: “During our regular Sunday morning worship, to have space at the back for the children to meet with a leader, to tell a bible story and have a related craft activity.” This takes place after the gospel reading so the children join in with the first part of service. It has continued to work well. We have been able to welcome regulars and visitors to join us. As part of the service, the children love joining in with sharing the peace. They stop what they are doing and love turning to the people around them and enjoy saying, ‘Peace be with you’. We encourage them to receive a blessing too when their families are receiving communion.

Over the year, we have read many bible stories and created many different crafts. Some of the children know the stories well and for others it appears it is the first time they have heard them. Please pray for these families and the children’s Christian journeys.

The creche area is always welcoming with many different toys. It is so lovely that it is used each week and by young visitors to the church whenever the church is open. We have different people who keep an eye on it so that toys are sorted in various

boxes but no-one on a regular basis. Do consider offering to check on it, so the boxes are kept in a tidy way. Do pray for our families and for those thinking of joining us.

Mary Bayliss

Home and Study Groups

The following Home Groups have been meeting:

- Home group hosted by Mark Oxbrow @ 13 Annesley Road alternate Wednesday evenings. *Contact Mark 07985 631 816 markoxbrow@aol.com*
- Home group hosted by Rosanne Butler @ 18 St Omer Road alternate Thursday mornings, 10:00-11:30 am. *Contact Rosanne 01865 453 257*
- Power House: Praying for God's Kingdom to come to Cowley and Headington. Hosted by Geoff Bayliss @ The Ranklin Room, St James Church Centre every Thursday 19.15 – 20.45.

ReFresh

This year, we have enjoyed meeting on Wednesday mornings from 9.30am – 11am in St James Church centre, in the Ranklin Room to hear a talk/sermon. A cup of tea or coffee is offered when we arrive and a quick chance to catch up before we begin more formally. Recently we have watched a series of sermons from St Aldate's. There is always plenty to get us started. It is encouraging to hear of churches who are supporting young people, particularly those in their late teens. Sometimes the stories told in the sermons, we know are aimed at them, and it challenges us to try and understand some of the current trends and how we can speak into their lives. God is moving in this city, and the Holy Spirit is encouraging those of deep faith and some that are very new to the faith.

We have a short time to pray together. It is good to also talk about some of the challenges we face in a confidential and safe space. The group is such that individuals attend as and when they are available. So please do consider joining us. Just turn up!

Mary Bayliss

Messy Church

It has been such a blessing this year to continue running Messy Church. Our numbers fluctuate: when we meet on the same day as Seashells or Little Stars in the holidays more people come. Having said this, it is always a joy to celebrate Christmas on a December Saturday and Easter on Good Friday.

In May, we looked at the story of Pentecost and the church's birthday. The children made cards, crowns, prayer paper chains, badges and party bags and we played some games.

In August, we looked at the story of Jesus calming the storm. The activities included: boats, mini seafood craft, floating and sinking experiments, windsocks, rain sticks and bubble printing.

In October, the theme was Shine a light. Here the children created stained glass windows, a lantern, an edible candle, leaf printing to create a fire picture, a 3D candle, a candle holder, and they experimented with invisible glass.

At Christmas, we had a Messy Church Christingle at which we all made a Christingle and crafts mostly themed on the Christmas story. It was lovely to have the service at the end in St James Church amongst the many beautifully decorated Christmas trees. In February, we met in St Francis' Church. The theme was Fearfully and wonderfully made. This included an edible face, "who is amazing? you are," mirror craft, snowflakes, fingerprinting, a heart craft and a woven mat.

At the time of writing, we are looking forward to Easter Messy Church. This will include hot cross buns, Easter baskets and cards, a Easter story craft, bunny and egg wreath, an Easter chick and egg thaumatrope and of course freestyle painting.

The format for each Messy Church is roughly the same. They are welcomed by a team of welcomers guiding them in and chatting to both adults and children. We have playdough and toys for the younger ones to play with. Crafts are placed on tables across the halls. Each table with hopefully a leader has a craft/activity. This helps those who join them, to guide them through the simple activities and to chat with the children. The most creative table is the painting table!! This is usually manned by one ever-patient leader. During this time, drinks are served alongside croissants and pain-au-chocolate: Simple brunch type food is our hospitality. Just after 11am, everyone joins together in a simple act of worship with action songs, the theme's bible story and prayers. All the leaders join in to model us being church together, with clearing up left to the end.

For many people, Messy Church is now their church, and they look forward to coming and joining us. We are so grateful to all those who assist in its running in anyway: including praying for it and those who attend. Being there to chat, welcome, assist, serve, is all part of it. It needs a team of people, and we are blessed that people are willing to do that. But as always sometimes they can't always be there. So please do consider offering to help in some way. In addition, it is great to see activities led by young people choosing the one they feel most comfortable with. As the diocese is challenging us to be an inter-generational church with people of all ages joining together, hopefully Messy Church provides an environment where all are welcome. If you haven't been I suggest you join us sometime to see church 'done' in a different way to a Sunday morning.

Mary Bayliss

Open the Book

Open the Book is a fantastic resource that we use as a parish; nurturing the link and strengthening the connection between the church and our three Parish schools. Each child hears key stories of the Bible, as told in the new Storytelling Bible written by Bob Hartman, over a three-year period. There's also the chance for children and staff to help act them out with our teams. It is a pleasure to be part of it and a blessing that each of our three schools welcomes us in. Open the Book supports the schools in

their self-evaluation for SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) which encourages Parish and community involvement and the Christian distinctiveness of the school.

It is also a delight to be greeted enthusiastically by children in the supermarket, Templars Square, out on the street – and even by a group of teenagers on the cycle track to Tesco!

Lesley Williams, Jill Ling & Mary Bayliss plan and co-ordinate the schedule for the fortnightly visit ; the scripted story is therefore repeated three times by three different teams. Only Lesley is now involved in all three. Jill is our Props master, producing new costumes (basic tunics with add-ons), puppets and much else besides and sorting what we need for each story

The teams have shrunk further over the last year! They are now:

St Francis School: Thursday morning, rehearsing at 10.00 for a 10.30 assembly
Lesley Williams, Val Goodall

For part of 2024, we also welcomed Sheppard Li from Grace Church and Liam Cartwright.

St Christopher's School: Monday morning, 8.20 arrival for an 8.45 assembly so very little time to rehearse!
Lesley Williams, Jill Ling, Mary Bayliss

Church Cowley St James: Tuesday afternoon at 2.15 for a 2.45 assembly
Lesley Williams, David Cook, Geoff Bayliss (when he is free), Tishy Bruce

Please speak to Geoff, Lesley, Jill or Mary if you are interested in coming to observe &/or just talk about signing up. We do need more team members to cover holidays, sickness etc. and are increasingly using School staff to fill the gaps.

There is now a required registration scheme with the Bible Society which provides training and the materials : the Storytelling Bible from Bob Hartman, handbook file and on line resources. The Parish pays the annual registration fee for team members.

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book/>

Lesley Williams, Jill Ling & Mary Bayliss

Pastoral Network, St James

The Linkers and Buddies of St James meet every four months, if possible, to look through their list of our congregation, and check if anyone is living alone, or cannot leave the house, and would welcome a visit or a telephone call.

We must thank Chris Booty and Lesley Williams for delivering The Link and Chronicle to so many who cannot come to church and they are so grateful for the connection they still have with St James.

If anyone is concerned about a friend who they sit with or one that cannot come to church please have a word with me and I'm sure we can look into the reason and help

if necessary. Pastoral care is a very important part of our ministry, and we must make sure we are there for one another.

Chris Woodman

St Francis Pastoral Network - St Francis

At St Francis an informal system is in place. Each person has identified five people who they will keep an eye on. This works well, and is reviewed regularly by St Francis Church Committee.

Geoff Bayliss

Cowley Parish Mothers' Union

Cowley Mothers' Union is a Diocesan prayer group in which members commit themselves to pray for families across the world. They also pray for the worldwide work of the Mothers' Union itself.

The group meets on the third Monday of each month in St. James' Church Centre and has a current membership of twelve, including our rector, Reverend Geoff Bayliss. Each meeting opens with prayer and then goes on to welcome a speaker or share a chosen theme.

In 2024 we were fortunate to welcome our curate, Liam, who spoke on his work in the parishes of Wolvercote and Wytham. Another speaker was Jo Duckles, one of our faith leaders in the parish who took us on her journey of faith. Reverend Mark Oxbrow is a very popular speaker who always finds fascinating subjects to interest us. He gave a talk about convents and monasteries he has experienced all over the world.

It has become something of a tradition that the group pays a visit, once a year, to a local church. In 2024 we chose Horspath Parish Church. A very enjoyable afternoon which included a talk by a local historian, Mr. Brian Lowe, about the history and unique qualities of the church.

Each month our afternoon meetings end in a cup of tea and social exchanges. We also have lighter times with a musical once a year in the winter, a summer tea party and a Christmas celebration of Bible readings, carols and tea.

The main charity which is supported by our group is 'Ronald McDonald House' in Headington. This venue welcomes the parents of children undergoing surgery at the John Radcliffe Children's Hospital, who need a refuge at a critical and anxious moment in their lives. Several deliveries of much-needed items have been sent there, and we shall continue to keep up the good work in 2025.

In this way we keep our prayerful promise to ***'support marriage and family life'*** in our MU prayer each time we meet.

Rosanne Butler

St James, Cowley Bell Ringers

Looking back over the last year, we have had some joys and some sadnesses. We have rung the bells most Sunday mornings. Up until the change in the service times from 11am to 10am we have had 6 ringers most Sunday mornings. We are very grateful to the Iffley ringers who have joined us to make that a more joyful noise, when all 6 bells are ringing.

We have regular monthly bellringing practice on the 3rd Monday evening from 7.30pm to 9pm and the occasional special practice to learn a new skill, eg ringing a bell up and down and doing so with other bells. We are very grateful to ringers from the local area who come and support us and are excellent at challenging us to ring new methods.

The bells have been used for quarter peals, peals and the Radley course and other practice sessions.

Sadly, in November, Roy Grant one of our faithful bellringers died. We miss him so much. His wife Wendy and Laura, his daughter, are in our prayers.

We are very grateful to our local band of ringers, and to Christine Woodman and the other coffee makers who welcome us with a cup of coffee each Sunday morning before we ring.

Mary Bayliss



Singing at St James Church

Tuesday lunchtime singing continues at St James Church Centre and is much enjoyed by those who attend from both churches and from non-members of the churches. We encourage people to come along to gain from the benefits of singing.

Geoff Bayliss

Seashells and Little Stars

Seashells and Little Stars continue to provide a welcoming place on Monday and Tuesday mornings for children who are not at school or preschool and their carers. Our numbers fluctuate from week to week, but we rarely seem to feel too busy. We have had to work out where to park all the buggies on some occasions as the lobby at St Francis can't accommodate them all!! Having said that, although some come regularly, it seems that nearly every week we have a new face.

Hopefully we provide a safe space for conversations, support and just being there for one another. For some, conversation in English is a challenge, so we can help by having natural conversations rather than constructed ones like in a language course. Some parents ask about childcare/schools, and we can introduce them to childminders, nannies and other parents who use various nurseries/schools so they can make informed choices. Interestingly, there is a 3-way split of the adults coming to the groups: parent, childminder, grandparent. Each has their own different challenges and needs; it is lovely to have people meeting together of all ages offering friendship to one another.

Snacks and drinks are provided by kind volunteers, who also help put out and put away all the toys!! There is a skill to remembering in which box each toy goes and where that box goes!

It is wonderful to see a nervous child on their first visit blossom into one who comes running in wanting to play with their friends. Some adults model set routines during the session with sitting down to eat a snack, helping tidy up and joining in the singing; some show ways of speaking kindly to their children when the child hasn't behaved appropriately.

At 11am the 'tidy up' music is played, and everyone is encouraged to help put the toys in boxes and help carry them to the 'tidy up' table. We even have little ones who come and demonstrate the silent actions to head, shoulders knees and toes- just like Geoff, telling us they are ready to start. Singing can then begin. We now have a mixture of recorded and unaccompanied singing. It is lovely to have the musical instruments out and to do the actions to the songs. The animal puppets join in too! A bible story is told each week, which is preceded by the Wiggle song, and followed by "Our God is a great big God." We have a birthday candle lit each week so we can sing Happy Birthday to anyone present whose birthday falls around that time. We finish with sleeping bunnies and sleeping elephants. It is amazing, as the pink bunny appears some children lie down ready. Then we sing the goodbye song, followed by the children coming up to give us a high or low 5!! Timid ones develop into those who come forward unprompted by their adult!

During the year we give out leaving certificates to children to remind them of their time with us and to wish them well with their next steps.

We have a wonderful team of volunteers who set up and pack up the halls each week, prepare the drinks and snacks which we are so grateful for. So many thanks to them. Do consider joining us if you are free on a Monday or Tuesday morning, as we always need more volunteers for we can't all make it every week.

Mary Bayliss and the team

Safeguarding in Cowley Parish

Safeguarding is high profile in all settings which serve children, young people and vulnerable adults. It is required that we annually review our Parish Child Protection policy and practice, including procedures for checking and training all officers and volunteers who have regular contact with our youngsters, even when parents are present; and/or with vulnerable adults, in situations where trusting relationships may be developed. The PCC policy, based on a Church of England template, is reviewed at the first meeting of the calendar year; a safeguarding report is made to each PCC meeting.

The national system for vetting staff and volunteers is with the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS). The system is on-line, quick and efficient; administered by APCS. Our current volunteers for children in church activities, Seashells/Little Stars, Open the Book and the AALC Young people's group are all checked, as are any in leadership roles. Renewal is required every 3 years.

Volunteers also complete a form, outlining their experience and the role(s) they are undertaking, along with a confidentiality declaration. For new staff and volunteers, who are not known to us, we also follow safer recruitment procedures, requiring a reference from a previous or present employer or independent referee.

The national structured training programme for all church officers and volunteers includes: Basic Awareness for the majority of our volunteers which is an on-line course; it can be taken individually or delivered to a group.

Those with more responsibility and having direct contact with children and young people &/or vulnerable adults are required to take that *and* the Foundations course which can either be followed on-line individually or at a face-to-face group session delivered by a Diocesan trainer, which is preferred as it allows the chance for discussion. The next delivered course will be on Saturday 21 June, 9.30 for 10.00-12.30 at St James Centre.

The Leadership course is delivered live on-line using Zoom or face to face, over two sessions, with work to complete between, as is Safer Recruitment and Raising Awareness of domestic violence and abuse. Only the Parish Safeguarding Officer and clergy are now required to take the latter three qualifications.

Training is required to be refreshed every 3 years, and we have now just about caught up with the post-Covid backlog.

The extensive roles requiring training are : vergers, sidesperson/welcomer, flower arranger, bell ringer, office volunteer, chalice administrator, coffee server, church committee member, PCC member, Children's Church, Little Stars/Seashells worker, Open the Book team member, church warden, choir leader, pastoral link team member, prayer space leader, volunteer driver, prayer ministry team member, home group leader. Clergy & LLMs are trained and DBS checked directly through the Diocese

There is an on-line RAG rated 'Safeguarding dashboard' which generates the necessary actions for the Parish 'Promoting a safer church action plan'.

As a development of the dashboard, the Diocese has now bought in to a new on-line 'Safeguarding Hub' which will make the record keeping of volunteer registration, DBS and training MUCH easier – but the Safeguarding Officer has so far failed to find the time to enter all the baseline information.

The only safeguarding issues addressed during the year have been concerning the safety and welfare of several of our most senior members.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. So, anyone not included in the role list above who would like to undertake the basic awareness course is very welcome to access it. Contact Lesley Williams. safeguarding@cowleyteamministry.co.uk

We are also responsible for insisting that all users of our premises comply with the regulations and therefore monitoring that they do so in their policies and procedures.

Lesley Williams, Approved Parish Representative

Recycling in Cowley Parish (Co-Creators of the Earth)

We maintain our responsibility for caring for our environment and therefore getting our use of resources and recycling right. Oxford is an excellent local authority for its recycling services and makes things very clear in their leaflets to all households and on-line.

<https://www.oxford.gov.uk/goes-bin/goes-blue-recycling-bin>

There is also an Oxfordshire County Council waste wizard website/app to guide you.
<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/waste-and-recycling/household-waste/repair-reuse-or-recycle>

It is excellent that many of those packaging materials which formerly were a definite 'NO' for recycling can now be taken to collection points at some of our supermarkets, including Tesco and the Co-op. The guidance is that only if you can *stretch the material* and/or if you can *scrunch it and stays scrunched* should it go in the recycling bin

So, all the *crinkly style, non-scrunchy paper which covers packets of biscuits, bread rolls, packs of fruit and vegetables, bags and tubs of salad plus peel off tops plus ALL sweet and crisp packets* can be delivered to your chosen collection point. We really should be doing that with all the wrappers we generate in the churches and St James Centre kitchens: a target for the coming year, therefore, is to set up an easy system.

Please remember that low grade paper like *kitchen roll, napkins and raffle tickets* can now be put in the compost bin/food waste bin – NOT recycling

BUT it's *still absolutely always NO to polystyrene, hard plastic and wrapped broken glass – they MUST go to landfill.*

The aim is that eventually methods are developed for virtually all household materials to be recyclable. We have a role in praying for the campaign to ban single use plastics – progress is being made - and for the scientists, engineers and designers working to mitigate mankind's impact on God's creation,

Lesley Williams

Fairtrade Parish



Our Parish churches and St James Centre are now registered as 'Fairtrade Places of Worship'; we thus declare we are living by the Kingdom principles of caring for those who produce, process and transport our food and other goods. But we (*and 'we' means all of us*) must work harder to recognise our responsibility to understand more about and respond to trading issues; the impact of climate change on essential crops and therefore livelihoods around the world and the role we can all play in lobbying for fairer practice.

The PCC maintains its commitment to:

- always use fairtrade tea and coffee and sugar before/after services and in all meetings for which the church has responsibility
- move forward on using other fairtrade products such as biscuits, fruit, wine
- integrate Fairtrade into the life of the parish, during Fairtrade Fortnight and regularly during the year at events, with stalls and in worship

Fairtrade Fortnight moved from February to September in 2024 and celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Fairtrade Foundation and Mark. We again sourced products from Headington Fairtrade and from the Littlemore Road Co-op store on a sale or return basis, to stock stalls in both churches. Sadly, Headington Fairtrade closed early in 2025, following St Michael's Fairtrade in 2023, so we will have to think again about how we recognise Fairtrade Fortnight 2025.

By supporting Fairtrade, we become part of the Fairtrade movement. We aim to be creative with our promotion of Fairtrade!

Any non-fairtrade donations for our hospitality stock will be graciously received but, when fairtrade options - tea, coffee, chocolate, sugar – are readily available in the shops, the items will be passed on to the CEF.

We ask the generous donors either to source fairtrade items themselves or donate the cash for the catering team to do so. *Thank you!*

Lesley Williams

Parish Mission and Social (M&S) Planner

An ad-hoc group of us from the two churches meets for an hour every two/three months - virtually on Zoom because it's such an efficient use of time, although we miss the chat and biscuits - to co-ordinate and plan the special services and events across the Parish which aim both to bring the Parish together and to reach out to the community.

Some are regular monthly gatherings – including the new All-Age family services on the first and third Sundays of the month which are followed by bring and share fellowship time; the First Saturday café at St James; the Art and Faith group; the St James Gardening party - and we have again enjoyed meals before special services and the Lent course; Christian Aid Big Brunches; Crumpets and games; Cream tea or puddings with a quiz; the summer Rectory tea party. Thanks are expressed to all the organisers, hosts, cooks.

Everyone is invited to come to the M&S meetings, if they can manage Zoom – the date and time are announced in Link - &/or suggest ideas for events. We really would welcome proposals for completely new out-of-the-box events for our parishioners and/or friends and/or the people of Cowley!

The planner is displayed on church and St James Centre noticeboards and inserted in the Link.

Lesley Williams

St James Church Centre

Our Church Centre continues to be a very popular venue for a great number of activities. Many of our hirers have been with us for years and continue to be very pleased with the opportunity to use our facilities. We keep a close eye on the way the

Centre is used, and the hirers know this and appreciate and abide by our terms and conditions.

The Tuesday Lunch Club continues to thrive. It has been running since 2007 and we are very proud of this. The two-week system has been abandoned, and we welcome a maximum of 20 friends each week. All who come are very appreciative of the opportunity to eat with friends and they stay and talk long after lunch has ended. This also gives us the opportunity to remind them of other activities that are going to take place such as the Film Club, the First Saturday Café and the Spring and Christmas Fairs.

Thank you to all who use our Centre and to the volunteers who help with its smooth running. We are grateful for their continued support.

Chris Woodman

Film Club at the Centre

The club has now been running for thirteen years, with only a few missed evenings due to COVID lockdown, inclement weather or (on one occasion) sickness. The regular times and dates are 6.30pm on the second Friday of the month.

The club has been run as a private one, which means that there is a strict rule about membership and finances. At present we have 32 members whilst the total potential membership number is 50. There is no fee to join and no publicity either. A retiring collection is requested, and all profits go straight into parish funds. In 2024 our generous members contributed £501.15.

The evening begins with tea, coffee, and other refreshments, with these also being repeated during the interval. Everything is organised by member volunteers.

By showing a wide selection of films – from musicals, dramas and light-hearted genres – we aim to keep our members interested, and coming back for more!

Rosanne Butler

Art and Faith

A small, committed group have met regularly on the first Saturday of the month in the Church Centre. Members usually bring their own creative work to continue with and show to others. This includes painting, drawing, quilting, macramé and needle work; plenty of tips and ideas are enthusiastically shared.

This year we have set up displays on a central table with themes such as snowdrops, St. David's Day and colours with the aim of providing more inspiration for creative work. The St. James Christmas Festival was the focus for a couple of months as we worked on CD decorations for the large tree the group sponsored. We also made decorations for our own Art and Faith tree.

Each month we have enjoyed hot drinks and various homemade cakes. At 11-00am we have a pause for a short prayer taken from the book Pocket Prayers for Pilgrims compiled by John Pritchard.

New members are always welcome; no experience needed and we provide a variety of art materials.

John and Chris Booty

COWLEY CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL 2024
with the theme 'Follow the Star – calm and bright'
Thursday 8 - Sunday 17 December



Respite nursing for
Oxfordshire's
Sick
Youngsters



2024 was a renamed, revamped, much simplified, more manageable festival – held over just one weekend, with no banners and signs around Cowley, no quiz trail in Templars Square or from the Centre to the church; no trees sponsored for the schools and no paying concert.

Thursday was a 'tea, cake and decorate' day, successfully making the setting up of trees a social event

For the first time, we had one large tree, supplied at cost by the Oxford Sea Cadets at Donnington Bridge but also a selection of small trees, 24 in total : the 2 CCF charities, - 14 Parish groups and individuals, 1 school, 5 community groups, 2 businesses. Decorations for the big tree, apart from baubles from our stock, were made by 2 schools, 1 community group and by visitors to the festival.

It was a musical weekend with The Gospel Jazz Project playing for us at an early Friday evening soiree; Saturday afternoon there were two carol singing sessions, led by Geoff, sandwiching Rising Voices Community Choir presenting seasonal songs and readings. We thank the two groups for their continued enthusiastic involvement

Saturday morning saw a Messy Church Christmas with Christingles

The five travelling trees, happily sponsored again by the Central England Co-op Funeral Care, began their journeys as 'travelling trees following the star' on Advent Sunday and between them visited 6 schools, 11 community settings, 5 churches – including their weekly groups, 10 homes, the Festival events and were received back at the Carol service on 22 December, when representatives from our two charities described their work and the impact of our donations. The trees then remained in Church for Christmas

With a shortened festival, no open church drop-in times and no ticketed concert, the donations were obviously less than previous years but we were happy to be able to give £250 each to SeeSaw and ROSY, bringing the total over the years to £8,500 each, £17,000 overall.

Some quotes from the travelling tree travel log books :

Church Cowley School

Ayat age 4

I feel peace when I look at the sparkly lights on the Christmas tree

St Francis School

S tars are bright

T hey guide us through the night

A nd on the roof of the sky they lay

R epeated every day

Greyfriars School

I ask God to bless each person who reads this

I also pray for forgiveness.

The ‘Shellytots’ family

Thank you for sharing the travelling tree with us.

We enjoyed singing songs and dancing round the tree with the lights on!

Rose Hill Methodist Church – Community Cupboard

It’s been great to have the little tree at our Food Bank – sharing the love with those we reached out to with food. They found it very special.

We were pleased again to stock olivewood Christmas tree decorations made by craftspeople in Bethlehem, who are still unable to sell them as, with the continuing unrest in the region, there are virtually no tourists or pilgrims in the city. They reached us, to be sold at cost price, through Christian Concern for One World.

The 2025 festival will follow the same pattern over the weekend of Thursday 11 to Sunday 14 December, albeit still leaving trees in the Church for Christmas. We will also send travelling trees to visit homes and settings around Cowley – sharing the year’s national ‘Follow the Star’ theme, yet to be announced.

If readers of this report think they could be involved in the 2025 festival in any way.....please contact Lesley or Geoff. The first planning meeting will be on Thursday 23 May, 9:00; we would love for more people to join our very small group.

Thank you again to all who decorated a tree, stewarded, visited, donated.

contact : ctf@cowleyteamministry.co.uk

Lesley Williams – Convenor

Christian Aid

Christian Aid Week

7 days – so many ways to push back against poverty

Christian Aid Week 2024 celebrated the Christian Aid partners in Burundi – we learned about Aline who was taught how to form a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) and establish a steady income. VSLAs mean people can save for their future and borrow money to kickstart small rural businesses. Aline, who had been homeless and penniless, built up a business, a home and the ability to send her children to school.

We again used ‘delivery only’ CAW envelopes, each labelled to tell the recipient where it could be returned – St James Centre and St Francis Church for the local roads and two parishioners’ home addresses. The system doesn’t raise a huge amount in donations, but we will continue with it in 2025 in order to raise awareness of our Parish mission commitment and of the essential work of the charity to all those households which receive an envelope.

Templars Square allocated the charity stand to us for the whole week, which we used as an information point. We didn’t attempt to person it with games, tombola or active bucket collection, as we have done in days gone by!

Christian Aid Week 2024 total was £845 from:

| | |
|--|------|
| Envelopes returned through the ‘delivery only’ system and from worshippers in our churches | £324 |
| Buckets at the schools | £ 96 |
| Big Brunch concert with The Gospel Jazz Project | £330 |
| St Francis Keep Fit group coffee and cake morning | £ 85 |
| Virtual red envelope | £ 10 |

Additionally:

- Lesley Williams was sponsored for £300 for the ‘70k in May’ campaign
- January’s Big Brunch raised £220
- June’s QuizAid brought in £110

So, the 2024 Parish Christian Aid total was £1,475 with lots of added Gift Aid.

Thank you!

Note, for accounting reasons, this may not tally with the Parish accounts; some was paid direct to Christian Aid

Sadly, we have not managed to organise one of our very enjoyable Big Brunches since the 2024 Christian Aid Week – but we do mean to!

For Christian Aid Week 11-17 May 2025, we will continue our delivery only envelope coverage; but, with other Parish events and the Coordinator’s commitments, have been unable to include a Big Brunch or an attended stall in Templars Square but there will again be an information stall there, with delivery only envelopes available to pick up.

Lesley Williams is again registered for the 70k in May campaign but is using it for a challenge to cycle 80 miles in 2 days, to celebrate her 80th birthday. The on-line donation page and a paper sponsorship form will be available

We are anticipating our annual QuizAid on Friday 27 June, 6.30 for 7.00 which will be enhanced with music from The Gospel Jazz Project – that will be a special evening – a Quiz ‘n Concert!

Please contact Lesley Williams if you could be involved in any way with our Christian Aid commitment.

Lesley Williams

Community Emergency Foodbank (CEF)

The Community Emergency Foodbank (CEF) has had another busy year at our three sites at St Francis Church, Barton and Littlemore. The demand for food parcels has not diminished and we continue to feed on average 300 people per month. We struggle with food stocks at times as food donations have reduced, so we are having to buy food more than previously. We can proudly say that we have never turned anyone away due to lack of provisions. We continue to build good relations with our referrers and at times have to ask them to find additional food supplies when their clients are well over our limit of 5 food parcels a year. Luckily there are now alternative food larders etc in Oxford where people can supplement their food purchases when money is tight.

Over the last year we have successfully redesigned our electronic referral system, after 15 years since we opened CEF at St Francis Church. This has made our information gathering easier and more flexible.

Jane and her husband and dog Moses raised over £5.000 on a 2-week sponsored walk along the Severn River to Bristol in September and are off again this September walking the North Kent Coast, health permitting.

We are lucky to have a great team of volunteers helping at our three food bank cafes but we are always looking out for new volunteers either helping with warehousing or packing food parcels and chatting to people while they wait. If this is something you would be interested in getting involved with, do get in touch.

Jane Benyon

Friends of St James Old School

A stylish family home has now been created by Eddie and Ana Johnson and their children from St James Old School next to the church. Several years on, there's *still* some landscaping and cosmetic work to complete.

The 'Friends of St James Old School' technically still exists, albeit not actively; we will wind up once we have installed the long-promised plaque on the outside of the refurbished building, celebrating its heritage and the Lord Nuffield connection. The design of that remains stalled but we are in contact with the Johnsons – and still seeking inspiration for a suitable quotation to include.

We'd still love eventually to publish a booklet illustrating the school's history. There's lots of available evidence which Rosanne Butler and Les Hemsworth have in

their hands. We just need to put it all together – and would welcome help from anyone with such skills.

Lesley Williams, Chair

Parish Schools - Governors

We are privileged to have 3 of our ‘own’ Parish Schools – but therefore have the responsibility to provide Foundation Governors for each Governing Body. At **Church Cowley St James**, Bartholomew Road, only Geoff Bayliss fulfils that role; there is a vacancy for the second. The school is slowly moving towards becoming an Academy under the River Learning Trust.

St Christopher’s, Temple Road, is part of the ODST, Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust, and therefore has 3 Foundation Governors, appointed by the Trust, currently Mary Bayliss, Geoff Bayliss and Jean Holderness, who is also Chair of the Board.

Lesley Williams, June Smith and Geoff Bayliss serve as Foundation Governors at **St Francis**, which joined the ODST on 1 April 2024. Academisation means that school governance and responsibilities change and the Governor role is slightly different – but not noticeable to parents or children! The school will be celebrating its 50th anniversary later in the summer term and is appealing for memorabilia and stories.

Anyone interested in exploring the possibility of filling current (at CCSJ) or future Governor vacancies should talk to Geoff.

It is not an easy role: we are accountable and answerable for the governance, budget and attainment in the school, which requires quite a time commitment to meetings and school monitoring visits; and also to supporting the distinctive Church of England Christian nature of the schools - but it is rewarding and an excellent way of fulfilling our Christian responsibility to the families and young people of Cowley.

Lesley Williams

Church Cowley St James CE Primary School

No report was received from the school. We appreciate the pressure they are under and look forward to a report in the future.

St Francis CE Primary School

No report was received from the school. We appreciate the pressure they are under and look forward to a report in the future

St Christopher’s CE Primary School

As a governor of St Christopher’s School I said I would write a report.

At St Christopher’s Primary School our vision is to ‘have the courage to live life in all its fullness, to belong within our community, respect and love those around us.’ We

do this through nurture, learning and growing together. 'I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness.' John 10:10.

To include everything that happens at St Christopher's would be impossible, so I have decided to choose something from some of the classes, which has recently been shared on social media.

Alongside making good progress in phonics, reading, comprehension, maths, science and all the curriculum here are a few glimpses into what some of the classes and groups have been offered in the last few months:

- Daffodil breakfast, celebrating Eid after school with all invited, planting bulbs and seeds
- Year 5/6 football playing in the Oxfordshire FA league finals tournament, playing Maths games, sponsored skip
- Year 6 had a County lines talk delivered by Thames Valley police, Easter services and Prayer and Reflection spaces at Grace Church, visiting the Jack Peers outdoor centre in the new school mini buses, playing tennis at Oxford Spires School, Theatre Workshops
- Nominated pupils are now part of the Young Interpreter Scheme that helps support students who speak English as an additional language, and planting the new orchard.

From this snapshot, you can see a lot happens at St Christopher's.

Mary Bayliss

2nd Cowley Rainbows and 2nd Cowley Brownies

It feels slightly strange knowing that only 5 years ago, Guiding changed quite drastically when COVID hit. I look back on what we provided for our units and how we continued to "meet" even if it was only via Zoom. We made up packs that we delivered so that the girls could feel connected even if it was from afar. It was strange time, but we came through it and I believe it made us stronger.

Both units are continuing to grow with new girls joining all the time. We have been working hard on badges and experiencing new adventures. One Brownie, Ellie, has reached the amazing achievement of completing all the current interest badges available to Brownies and is hoping to complete her Silver and Gold Awards before leaving in the summer after spending nearly 5 years with us, having joined in Rainbows.

In December, we went to ICANDO which is in London, for a day of Christmas activities. The girls who went made cards, tree decorations, peppermint creams and a reindeer before having lunch. While we were there, they got the chance to meet the Chief Guide and her assistants (who also handed out badges) and then we took a walk to Buckingham Palace to have a look. It was a great day out, and everyone was tired by the time we got back.

We are planning another day trip in May with both the units, as well as planning other exciting adventures.

Abi Reynolds

5th Cowley Guides

5th Cowley guides have been working on their skills builders and unit meeting activities. Skills builders are the framework we work around to build new skills and knowledge. Skills builders cover a variety of topics including outdoor adventures, leadership and communication etc. Unit meeting activities are fun activities to do at regular meetings.

We have had three guides gain their bronze award, now working towards their silver award.

A few of our guides joined 2nd Cowley Rainbows and Brownies on a scouting and guiding day to Marwell Zoo.

Becky Wiggins

3rd Cowley Brownies

Another busy year with weekly meetings of 7–10-year-old girls from around 9 different schools.

Highlights included:

- Mini Olympics at a local school ended rather dramatically when we found a sibling had inadvertently locked the gates. Cue for an extra gymnastics event as the leaders helped the Brownies over the very high gates to waiting families.
- A visit from trainers for Hearing Dogs for Deaf People included a very lively and very popular young puppy!
- Reverse Advent Calendar with items brought in over 12 weeks before Christmas for the Community Emergency Food Bank
- Food
- Sleepover at the Oxford Sea Scouts building; an Anglia pyjama party with several thousand girls joining together on-line to share their Promise.
- Several GOLD awards, the highest possible as a Brownie. All very well deserved.
- Another joint outdoor campfire and indoor games with the Cubs.
- Cinema trip with Oxfordshire Guiding to see Moana 2, with linked activities.

Plus lots more activities and games prepared by the Guiders, using the six Themes of the Girlguiding programme each week.

Mandy, Izzy and Hilary

5th Cowley Rainbows

5th Cowley Rainbows have been enjoying many activities over the past year. We have been slowly working through badges, including the Skills Builders: Lead, Innovate, Influence and Live Smart. Their favourite activity was definitely working together to make a working marble run. We also started on the Nature interest badge to start girls on their own work from home. We are also slowly working through the UMAs (Unit Meeting Activities) as the girls work towards their theme awards, and hopefully Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards.

We partook in Christmas crafts during the season, as well as Easter themed activities in the term just gone. We currently have seven girls on our books (more have been invited but have yet to get back to us), with a few due to leave or move up to Brownies this summer.

Imogen and Sarah

37th Oxford Scout Group and Felix Explorers

No report received

Finance

The report circulated has been agreed by the PCC and is now ready for inspection. This year a new accounts system has been set up and, having been tested by producing the 2024 accounts, will enable quicker production of the accounts in the future.

The following team continue to undertake the financial work:

- Treasurer: Emily Sommerlade is responsible for reconciling statements and reporting
- Coding for Account System: Sally Hemsworth
- Donations/gift aid coordinator: Sue Philcox
- Banking at St Francis: Shirley Costar/Lyn Lord
- Banking at St James: Chris Woodman/Sally Hemsworth/Lesley Williams
- Contracts for energy and other facilities: Geoff Bayliss/June Smith
- Authorised to set by BAC payments for bills: Emily Sommerlade/Sally Hemsworth/Lesley Williams
- Payments by cheque: Emily Sommerlade/Sally Hemsworth/Lesley Williams/Chris Woodman

Mission Giving

2024 has been a catch-up year, and donations representing 5% of the Planned Giving income for each year have been given for 2022 and 2023. The recipient charities were:

The 2022 allocation of £1,600 was paid at £228.60 to each of the following organisations:

Agnes Smith Advice Centre
Asylum Welcome
Kids Matter
Waste2Taste

Archway
BeSpace
Oxford Community Soup Kitchen

The 2023 allocation of £1,402 was paid – £70 was given to ROSY and SeeSaw to top up the money given (£250 each organisation), and the following organisations received £222 each:

Agnes Smith Advice Centre
BeSpace
Kids Matter

Archway
Waste2Taste
Oxford Community Soup Kitchen

The amount for 2024 Mission Giving is £1,600, and the PCC will be asked to allocate this as soon as the 2024 accounts are inspected and agreed.

Parish Mission Prayer and Giving Policy

The PCC has reviewed and maintained this policy, first accepted in January 2021.

Our declared Parish mission statement

- to live out God's purposes for us
- to make Christ known in Cowley
- to raise up a new generation to love and serve the Lord

only directly references our Parish life in Cowley, ignoring our responsibilities to creation and to our worldwide brothers and sisters.

When the time is right, the PCC may consult, review and add to that declared vision to include a wider view of our mission stance in relation to : creation, the environment, humanitarian issues – to develop our knowledge and understanding of our role in and impact on God's creation and people.

The Parish has established a deeper mission relationship with a limited number of charities through the year. We demonstrate our Christian Love through action, prayer and giving; also responding as individuals and as a Parish to major natural and humanitarian disaster appeals.

Christian Aid: is a year-round commitment with a special focus on Christian Aid Week in May. We no longer undertake a door-to-door envelope collection but now use 'delivery only' envelopes, labelled with a return point – the two churches, St James Centre, a few homes - but we also aim to find creative ways of gathering donations both from Parish members and the public during CAW and through other events – two or three Big Brekkie/ Brunches, Quiz Aid and sometimes sponsored activities.

Harvest thanksgiving: we commit to giving food items to CEF and cash to Water Aid every year, so seek to share more information about their work from speakers and leaflets/websites/ media. We will engage with them by praying for them regularly, not just on one autumn Sunday a year. We maintain all year collection points in both churches for donated goods to CEF, which is based at St Francis church

Christmas: our Cowley Christmas Festival relationship with SeeSaw and ROSY demonstrates our recognition of the instruction to ‘suffer these little children to come to me’. The PCC may give approval for some or all Christmas service open plate collections to be added to the CTF donations, which are shared equally between the two charities.

We also value our Parish relationship with/involvement in: BeSpace (prayer spaces in schools) and Open the Book (Bible Society) and support them with personnel, prayer and donations.

The Parish Mothers’ Union prayer group also fundraises for the national MU AFIA (Away From It All) fund and collects goods for the Ronald McDonald House at the John Radcliffe Hospital, where families can stay when their child is receiving treatment.

A small number of parishioners participate in the sponsored September Ride and Stride, with the proceeds shared 50:50 between Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust and the Parish.

The Parish maintains the donation to parishioner nominated Christian/social causes of 5% of annual planned giving, ensuring that everyone learns about the recipient causes’ work and that we pray for them. It is another great, exciting statement of thanksgiving for all that we receive from our Father, in spite of the tricky state of Parish finances.

Of course, we maintain our own regular Parish fundraising to cover the costs of the Parish Share (£3,000 a month), worship, fellowship, outreach and buildings repair and maintenance, through stewardship, planned giving and annual events. the Spring sale with plants, Christmas gift and craft fair, film club and marmalade proceeds - and other small scale social occasions in both churches.

Thank you to all who give generously for all these causes.

Lesley Williams

Report on the fabric, goods and ornaments of the churches of the Parish

The work required under the Quinquennial Reviews for both churches was reviewed, and following this:

St Francis Church:

- The walls of St Francis Main Hall were repainted and the floor re-sanded and sealed.
- Light fittings in the corridor were replaced using more efficient LED bulbs.
- Other minor work listed in the Quinquennial Review was also carried out.
- Estimates are being obtained to replace the windows on the outside wall of the main hall/Sanctuary. This will give an idea of how much is required so that fund-raising can commence.

St James Church:

- Estimates are being obtained to ascertain the cost of repairing damaged stonework.

- Advice is being taken on how to proceed with the redecoration of the inside of the church.
- Snagging work on the toilet project is being reviewed, but it is thought this has been completed.
- The digital projection system continues to work well, but work on the sound system is under review.

Notice Boards:

- Plans were discussed and progressed to repair the fabric of the Church noticeboards at both churches and update the St James information, with the new Sunday service times.

St James Church Centre is not covered by Quinquennial Reviews, but work required is constantly reviewed by St James Church Committee. During the year the following work has been undertaken:

- Decoration of the Main Hall at the Church Centre was completed.
- Rubber caps (ferrules) at the base of chairs in the Church Centre were replaced, to stop them scraping the floor.
- A programme of redecoration, including outside decoration, is being prepared so that various parts of the Centre are decorated each year.
- A replacement shed for the Church Centre is being investigated and planned.
- The St James Gardening Team undertake regular work on the grounds, and additional help is obtained for grass cutting mainly, but sometimes this includes other gardening work.

No work has been done on the inventories and the terriers over the last year, but this is top of the list for 2025/2026.

Deanery Synod

Our deanery reps continue to do a great job.

Key topics for the past year have been: Youth and families work, parish share and working to make both our local churches the best and Oxford a place where blessing has been found for all. 'A good church and a good city'.

The deanery has experienced a good deal of ministerial change in the past year. There have been new incumbents in Iffley, All Saints Headington, Cowley St John, and St Clements. We are looking forward to new incumbents joining at Holy Trinity the Quarry and St Andrews Headington. It has been a time of change and readjustment.

Come the New Year, Geoff will step down from his role as Area Dean. So please pray that God will make clear his calling for the next person to hold that role.

OTHER MATTERS OF PAROCHIAL OR GENERAL CHURCH INTEREST



**Serving God,
Cowley and Headington**

Cowley Team Ministry

St. James and St Francis Churches

Financial Report

2024

**TOWARDS A
COMMON VISION**

Registered Charity number 1153602

Welcome!

Cowley folks have been worshipping at St James Church for nearly a millennium, and at St Francis Church for almost a century.

The work in our church community and our beautiful buildings constantly needs funds.

Donations can be made by:

- Cash or cheque
- Weekly envelopes
- Standing order at a bank
- Direct debit using the "Parish Giving Scheme" #270627190, or single donations using their website
- Payments into our bank account
[Name: Cowley (Oxford) PCC, Sort code: 30-12-51,
Account number: 01000840]
- By card using the QR code on our website
- By leaving a legacy

Please contact the Parish Office if you would like further information.

Financial Summary 2024

The churches have had a good year, moving into a positive position with much thanks to the Fill the Gap campaign and the generosity of the parish.

Whilst regular giving fell a modest £1k (2%), the targeted campaign generated £8.6k, exceeding expectations. Other fundraising also increased by £2k (89%), and St Francis impressively more than doubled the lettings income to £12.8k (103%).

Overall income from all sources for both unrestricted and restricted purposes has increased by 10% from £98k to £108k.

Across all funds and activities, the largest expenditure increase this year continues to be the utilities. Gas, electricity, and water have all increased in total by £2.9k (38%). The cost of living and increased activity have impacted the general expenses but the parish has made savings where possible. In total, costs have reduced £12k (11%).

General [Unrestricted] Fund

All donations to the Parish, not specified for a particular purpose, go into the General Fund used to pay our contribution to the cost of ministry and to support services in our two churches. Donations for the general fund are down by 2% to £46,566, from £47,549 in 2023. This is an improvement though on the 4% reduction in the previous year.

The fund held £16,882 at the end of the year. This has increased from last year, thanks mainly to the Fill the Gap Campaign, and would otherwise have made a small deficit.

The income from donors continues to cover our Parish Share which was £39,600. Parish Share is paid to the diocese to cover clergy stipends, housing, training, pensions, and administration.

Gift Aid is claimed from HMRC by the parish on donations from individuals who have made a Gift Aid declaration and from anonymous small cash donations. This is a 25% uplift on money given. The payments received were up to the end of August so some will fall into 2025 that relate to 2024.

Lettings in St Francis Church have been a great success in 2024, generating £12,771 (£6,289 in 2023). Parochial fees from weddings, funerals etc. have reduced 24% however, at £2,217 in 2024 (£2,914 in 2023). Fundraising has been very positive, up 89% to £4,230 in 2024 (£2,243 in 2023). Bank interest received within the investment and deposit funds has also risen £4,260 (76%).

Costs have reduced overall £4k (5%, mainly due to the reduction in the Ministry Parish Share of £9.9k, savings in service consumables and sundry expenses £2.9k, offsetting a £2.3k (28%) increase in utilities, and an increase in cleaning and maintenance of the churches, although this corresponds with the higher lettings income in St Francis.

Apart from the Parish Share, the General Fund is used for all the expenses relating to our two churches from gas and electricity to such other essentials as fire and electrical safety, insurance, office costs, communion wafers, light bulbs, and hand sanitisers, amongst many. The St James Church Centre gas, electricity and water comes from the St James Church Centre (Trading) Fund.

Other Funds

St James Church Centre (Trading) Fund (Designated)

Total income for the year was £21,402 (£23,065 in 2023), down 7% on the previous year.

Utility bills are the highest cost for the Centre. Expenditure was £19,099 (£19,017 in 2023), which includes a write off of historic balances £3.4k when the accounts were first set up on an accruals basis but not reversed. Without this, in year costs were £15,686 (reduced 17%).

The fund modestly increased to £37,214 at the end of the year (£35,203 in 2023).

St Francis Church Fabric Fund (Restricted)

This fund received half the interest from the St James Church Centre investment account. The fund is used for the maintenance of St Francis. There was no expenditure this year. At the end of the year this fund held £ 15,943.

St James Church Fabric Fund (Restricted)

This fund received half the interest from the St James Church Centre investment account. There was no expenditure in the year.

At the end of the year this fund held £19,892.

Feed- In tariff payments (Designated)

The 39 solar panels, on the roof of St James Centre building, additional funds were generated in 2023 and 2024 although British Gas has still not yet provided a figure. Each year is expected to be at a similar level to 2022 (£587). The balance held is £7,306.

St James Legacy Fund (Designated)

No change this year for the Audrey Smith legacy, the fund remains at £46,257. No restrictions have been placed on this gift. The PCC is considering designated purposes to make the best use of the legacy fund.

The Flush Fund for St James Church (Restricted)

This fund held £18,605 at the end of the year. A small amount was spent £495 for computer customisation.

St James Church Centre Endowment Fund

The capital in this fund is to be used only on the St James Church Centre building. £50,000 was placed in the CCLA CBF Church of England Investment Fund in 2010.

On 31st December 2024, the shares held in the fund were valued at £106,475 (2023 - £104,092).

Interest from this investment is paid quarterly and can be used for other purposes. It is placed equally in the Fabric Funds of St James and St Francis Churches. The total for 2024 was £2,890 (2023 - £2,845).

Funds under £5k

| | |
|---|--------|
| Bell Tower Restoration Fund (Restricted) | £1,005 |
| Outreach - Outreach (Designated) Fund | £42 |
| Youth Work Fund (Restricted) | £200 |
| Music (Designated) Fund (<i>see note i</i>) | £3,800 |
| Organ - Organ Restoration (Restricted) Fund | £2,990 |
| St Francis Activities (Designated) Fund | £1,361 |
| Friends Of St James Old School (Restricted) Fund (<i>see note ii</i>) | £4,011 |

Notes:

- i. Music (Designated) Fund* - to be used for organist payments (unless paid for as part of a wedding or funeral).
- ii. Friends of St James Old School (Restricted) Fund* - £4,011 was received in October restricted to payment for the group's commitment to install a plaque on the Old School building, acknowledging its educational heritage, and to produce a history of the school booklet. In accordance with the Friends' constitution, any remaining funds must be transferred to Church Cowley St James School.

Mission and Charity Giving in 2024

The 2023 Mission Giving allocation of £1,402 was approved by the PCC in late 2024, including £70 that tops up the ROSY and SeeSaw mission giving. The donations represent 5% of the 2023 Planned Giving income. This will be paid in 2025.

£222 each will be given to the following organisations:

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Agnes Smith Advice Centre | Archway |
| BeSpace | Waste2Taste |
| Kids Matter | Oxford Community Soup Kitchen |

In these 2024 accounts, the 2022 allocation of £1,600 was paid at £228.60 each to:

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Agnes Smith Advice Centre | Archway |
| Asylum Welcome | BeSpace |
| Kids Matter | Oxford Community Soup Kitchen |
| Waste2Taste | |

The mission giving allocation based on the 2024 accounts is £1,543 representing 5% of the planned giving of £30,853.

In early 2024, £500 was given to each of the children's charities ROSY and SeeSaw resulting from donations to The Christmas Tree Festival at the end of 2023. £600 was collected at the 2024 Christmas Tree Festival in December.

Services and fund-raising events held at the church raised £139 for Mothers Union for AFIA, £265 for WaterAid, £181 for Fairtrade, and £1,183 for Christian Aid.

Reserves Policy

The trustees have a policy of maintaining a minimum of three months of charitable expenditure. The total Unrestricted funds of £112,861 cover 14.4 months of charitable expenditure (£23,562 is 3 months expenditure for 2024).

These are the sums freely available for general use to further the purposes of the churches, and to keep the churches running. They are held at a level to withstand any short-term financial risks, particularly the inflation risk and ongoing economic

pressures for everyone supporting the church, and to ensure the church can continue running day to day.

The trustees will review these levels annually to keep pace with rising costs. Other restricted funds are available to meet emergency situations and repairs.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S INTERNAL REPORT FOR THE COWLEY (OXFORD) PCC ON THE ACCOUNTS FOR THE PERIOD 1 JAN 2024 TO 31 DEC 2024

The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Cowley, Oxford - also known as The Cowley (Oxford) PCC (comprising St James and St Francis churches).

As last year, I would like to thank Sally Hemsworth and Emily Sommerdale for their help and answering the few questions I had.

'Charity law requires the examiner's report to comment on three specific things: the accounting records kept, whether the accounts agree with those records, and whether the format of the accounts is correct.'

Accounting basis - receipts and payments

As permitted for charities that have less than £250,000 income, the charity records its accounts on a Receipts and Payments basis rather than on an Accrual basis, but the charity has retained for this year a Balance Sheet statement (that shows two legacy accrual accounts that have been written off), instead of presenting a 'Statement of Assets and Liabilities'.

["Charities registered in England and Wales that are not companies are allowed under section 133 of the Charities Act 2011 to prepare receipts and payments accounts provided the charity's gross income is not over £250,000"]

The Accounting Records - Types of Funds

Four types of funds are recognised: Unrestricted, Designated; Restricted and Endowment.

Within the scope of my analysis the funds have been accounted for and used correctly and no material breach of trust occurred in the reporting period.

Agreement of the Accounting Records with the Accounts in the Financial Report

I confirm that, on the basis of the checks I made, I consider the accounts to be consistent with the accounting records kept for 2024.

Format of the accounts

As mentioned last year, although Receipts and Payments accounting is being used a Balance Sheet is presented rather than a Statement of Assets and Liabilities.

24 June 2025

This is not a material matter as there is no statutory format for receipts and payments accounts and the account documents presented meet the statutory requirements of accountability.

NOTE: extract from Charity Commission Document CC16b Receipts and Payments Accounts:

‘What statements need to be prepared?’

The report and accounts of registered charities preparing receipts and payments accounts will usually consist of FOUR related documents:

THREE are prepared by the trustees:

- **A Trustees’ Annual Report** - Giving details about the charity’s activities for the public benefit in the year.
- **A Receipts and Payments Account** - providing an analysis of the incoming and outgoing cash for the year.
- **A Statement of Assets and Liabilities** - outlining the charities main assets and liabilities at the end of the year and including the cash balances at the year end shown in the receipts and payments accounts.

ONE document is prepared by either an independent examiner or an auditor. An audit or independent examination is only required if the charity’s gross income is over £25,000, or if the trustees choose to have an audit or an independent examination.

Most charities preparing receipts and payments accounts choose to have an independent examination of their accounts instead of an audit.’

MEETINGS HELD

Meeting 1.

I spent two hours on the 21st May with two of the trustees, Sally Hemsworth and Emily Sommerdale. Emily showed me in outline the new system for recording accounting transactions: an Excel spreadsheet model with tabbed interconnected sheets.

We went through the several items on the draft financial report to be addressed:

- The Net Income resources (before any transfers) figure was showing an erroneous figure which has been corrected.
- the CCLA CofE Investment Fund Account which should show the cost value of the investment of £50,000 but was incorrectly showing £53,270. *(See below Statement of Financial Activities)*

Meeting 2.

I had a further meeting with Sally Hemsworth on the 31st of May and did some random checks on the day-to-day source documents for the accounts - receipts, invoices, banking sheets, monthly bank statements etc. - which are kept in monthly pocket-folders.

Items identified/discussed during the meeting with Sally

- In the Balance Sheet detailed: Current Assets Account A1550 Cash in hand
I asked Sally about this given that the figure of £150 was the same as for the previous year. It turns out that there is no petty cash kept in the St James Office so the amount should be written off. Exactly when there ceased to be a petty cash box is not clear.
- One item that I came across was a rather unusual handwritten invoice from a Miss D.E.K. Starkey for APM Roofing Contractors, Swindon (Inv. 066 dated 26/04/24) who had done some gutter-cleaning work. I understand they will not be used in the future. *This lead to a discussion about how contractors/suppliers are selected and whether there is/should be a simple formal process that is followed and who signs it off.*
- Sally showed me a folder with various sheets to record monies received at services and events; and a document that sets out:
 - Flow chart of regular Finance work at Cowley Parish
 - The Work of the PCC Treasurer
 - List of Contracts
 - Segregation of Treasurer Jobs

This is an important document which should be updated as required and checked each year by the PCC e.g. it shows that Joan Coleman is a signatory and having access to the Lloyds account online.

Recommend that a named ring binder is used to keep the above and any other accounting processes to be followed.

An email exchange happened subsequent to the meetings to clarify several queries I had.

ACCOUNTS IN THE FINANCIAL REPORT

Three reports are provided:

1. Receipts and Payments Account for the General Fund

- *The 'Coffee monies St J.' account line is £0 for the year ending 31 Dec 2024 as it is now added to the 'Loose plate-St James'. If this is permanent then the Coffee monies account line should be deleted for 2025*
- The sub total figures from the General Fund form part (the main part) of the Unrestricted Funds category in the Statement of Financial Activities. The Receipts and Payments for any Designated Funds, which also fall under the Unrestricted category in the Statement of Financial Activities (on the basis that they can be undesignated) are not shown separately.
 - *Recommend that for next year a Receipts and Payments for Designated funds be provided to help clarify how the figures in the Statement of Financial Activities - Incoming Resources and Resources used for the Unrestricted Funds category - are arrived at.*

2. Statement of Financial Activities: which shows the incoming resources going into the three different kinds of fund - unrestricted, restricted and endowed - and the outgoing resources used from these funds.

There follows a section that shows any Transfers between the funds and then a Reconciliation of the funds. Two transfers are shown:

- One of the transfers is to remove an anomaly highlighted last year for the CCLA CofE Investment Fund Account which now correctly shows the cost value of the investment of £50,000 and not £53,270.

The amount of £3,270 was the balance of three other accounts (A1501 Current Account, A1505 CCLA Deposit Account and A1506 Lloyds Investment Account) that were shown as belonging to the Endowment Fund category which when totalled with the £50,000 of the CCLA CofE Investment Fund Account came to £53,270 which then erroneously became presented as the cost of the CCLA CoE Investment Fund Account. The £3,270 in this year's accounts have been transferred out from the Endowment fund to the Unrestricted Fund. [The market value of the CCLA CoE Investment Fund Account as at 31 Dec 2024 = £106,475 but as it is an unrealised investment value the cost value is what is shown in the

accounts]

The CCLA CoE Investment Fund Account is an Endowment fund to be used only on the St James Church Centre building (i.e. a form of restricted fund)

- *The Annual report states this is an expendable Endowment where the trustees can spend the capital, if necessary, but only on the St James Church Centre building. The income generated from this CCLA CofE Investment Fund Account is being split 50-50 between the St James' and St Francis's Fabric funds. I queried whether the income was similarly restricted in use. Emily understood this was stipulated by the donor and that Sally and/or Geoff might have the original document stating this.*
- The other transfer is for an amount of £1,600 that has been moved from the Unrestricted fund to the Restricted fund.
- *Emily explained that this was the transfer of 5% of the funds collected through planned giving to the Mission fund.*

Details of the items in each fund category is then shown in the 'Represented by' section.

One query in the 'Represented by' section:

- In the annual report under 'The Flush Fund for St James Church (Restricted)' it says: 'A small amount was spent £495 for computer customisation'
- *In the Statement of Financial Activities in the Represented by section it lists under the Restricted fund category 'Toilet in St James Church' (another name for the Flush fund ...?) and unless we are installing some Japanese like computerised toilet It seems the fund needs re-describing/naming if it is covering expenditure on computers.....*

3. Balance Sheet

Current Assets and Current Liabilities:

- Account A1550 Cash in hand
- *An amount of £150, the same amount shown in last year's accounts, was in the draft accounts for this year. However, Sally informed me that there is no cash-in-hand box kept in the office and the £150 doesn't exist. It has been written off in this year's accounts.*

- Account 205 Accounts Receivable and Account 204 Accounts Payable

Last year it was queried what the figures in these two accounts represented as they had remained unchanged for several years:

Accounts Receivable £2,024

Accounts Payable - £1,389 (i.e. an 'asset')

Giving a total value of £3,433 (£3.4k)

- *As stated in this year's Annual report under 'St James Church Centre (Trading) Fund (Designated)' these were historical balances when the accounts were first set up on an accrual basis but not reversed, and they have been written off in this year's accounts.*

FINANCIAL POSITION

No statement is required of the trustees regarding whether the charity is a 'going concern' financially, but the statement of assets and liabilities (balance sheet) is there to consider whether there is any issue regarding the charity being able to pay its bills and meet liabilities as they fall due.

- *From the prepared accounts, the financial position of the charity at 31 December 2024 can be seen to be that of a going concern.*

Other comments arising from analytical review

Lloyds Bank Current Account

It was highlighted last year that large amounts with no immediate use ought to be placed in a deposit/savings account to earn interest.

- *This has not been acted on and should be asap. As can be seen the amount in the current account at the year end 31 Dec 2024 was £89,302. If, say, £75,000 had been in a savings account then at, say, 2.5/3% interest it could have generated around £2,000.....*
- *The Audrey Smith Legacy fund (St James Legacy Fund (Designated)) is part of the amount currently being held in the Lloyds Bank Current Account. Could this be set up as an investment fund to be to generate income ?*

Accounting Software

The accounts are now being recorded in an Excel model.

- *My recommendation is that it would be worthwhile considering the recording of the accounts in an established online cloud-based accounting software like Xero if it has all the facilities required. It has an easy interface for data entry; an audit trail of all transactions and amendments; accounting reports available at a click of a button; and with facilities such as linking the accounting software directly to major banks like Lloyds.*

<https://www.xero.com/uk/accounting-software/connect-your-bank/>

Independent Examiner:

Richard J G Mohun

Charity Commission Guidance

I confirm I have read the CC guidance:

'Independent examination of charity accounts: Directions and guidance for examiners (CC32)'

I confirm that I have no involvement with day-to-day administration, control of, or significant influence over, the charity.

Richard

24 June 2025

Richard Mohun