



**Annual Fellowship
Meeting 9:45am
9th April 2022.
Reports**

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Elders' Report, March 2022

The members of the Oversight at Bethany are Steve Crago, John Peck, Robert Wills and Phil Edwards.

We would like to start by once again saying thank you for your prayers and your support during another exceptionally challenging year.

Obviously, the past year has again been dominated by the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic and many of our activities have been suspended. Nevertheless, it has still been an eventful year.

Here is a summary of events during the past year:

January - early May 2021

After Christmas (2020), due to the large increase in the number of Coronavirus cases on the Isle of Wight, we decided to close the hall and meet only via Zoom. During this period our Sunday worship comprised an online (Zoom) Sunday meeting with a Breaking of Bread at 9:45am, which had been enjoyed by many in the previous lockdowns.

One change was made to the format this time, though: Steve Crago kindly paid to have the maximum meeting time for Zoom extended beyond 40 minutes, which allowed us to include a time of Bible teaching in the meeting and enjoy a time of fellowship afterwards.

These meetings continued weekly (with different people leading) until meetings in the Bethany building recommenced in May.

When Steve Crago was the Sunday speaker, He also prepared a YouTube video of the Bible message for the benefit of those unable to attend the Zoom meeting - a practice he has continued after we started meeting again in the Bethany building.

We were, of course, able to continue with Tuesday night prayer meetings on Zoom. These meetings have continued weekly even after the end of the lockdowns and are now a permanent fixture on the Church calendar; the Zoom meetings have been far better attended than the physical meeting used to be!

During this period (and also later in the winter months) occasional Friday Quiz nights were held on Zoom, with quizzes set by either Phil Harris or Phil Edwards. These allowed us to see each other and chat and relax together informally.

During this period we tried to keep in touch with the members of the fellowship by the production of roughly fortnightly e-mail newsletters (thanks to Steve Crago for masterminding that) and by means of WhatsApp conversations (thanks to Phil Harris for setting up the group). This, together with the Tuesday night prayer meeting on Zoom (which, of course, we were able to continue) and the Quiz nights helped us maintain a sense of belonging and fellowship.

We were, however, aware that some people in the fellowship aren't online in various ways. As we weren't able to visit during lockdown we tried to keep in touch by posting out newsletters to those who didn't have e-mail and by use of the telephone. It was so encouraging to see members of the fellowship (not just, or even especially, the Elders) recognising the need to "bear one another's burdens" in this way.

Grace Fry went to be with the Lord on 27th April. Her funeral was held at Bethany on 25th May.

May

On 23/05/2020 we were able to resume our Sunday morning meetings in the Bethany building. The meetings were the same format as that introduced during the autumn of 2020 (i.e. a single meeting per week on Sunday mornings at 10.30am) and subject to the same social distancing and Health and Safety restrictions as before. Initially the meetings just comprised prayer, Breaking of Bread and a Bible message.

Initially there was no singing. The only music was either pre-recorded or (occasionally) instrumental music played on solo guitar.

For the Breaking of Bread, people were asked to bring their own cup, bread and wine (non-alcoholic if required). However, for those who had forgotten, one or two bread rolls were provided inside paper bags, and miniature bottles of red wine were provided and put in place at least three days ahead of any Breaking of Bread meeting (and not subsequently handled).

July

From 25/07/2021 the singing of hymns and worship songs recommenced, but with the recommendation that members of the congregation kept their face masks on during the singing. (Everyone complied with this recommendation).

Matthew Brunt passed away on 1st July. His funeral was held at Bethany on 30th July.

Questionnaire (July-August)

As, due to Covid-19, we were not comfortable holding an Annual Fellowship Meeting this year, at the end of July the Elders sent out a questionnaire to the congregation to gauge their opinions on how we want to structure our meetings and other Church issues. The questions asked were:

1. Have you usually been able to attend Sunday services when they've been running?
2. What have you missed in our Sunday services during Covid? What have you found good?
3. Should we continue with our present kind of all-in-one Sunday service, or go back to having separate Breaking of Bread and Morning Worship, or do something else entirely?
4. Do you have specific comments on the service times?
5. Would you be happy to have bread and wine provided and brought round instead of bringing your own? (Pre-cut bread and wine in individual cups). If "yes", alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine?
6. How could pastoral care be improved from now on? (We recognise that it's not just the elders who do this).
7. Which online opportunities (web site, Facebook page, Zoom meetings, YouTube videos, email newsletters) during the lockdowns did you find most useful? What uses should we make of online media in the future?
8. Should the weekly prayer meeting continue on Zoom or become an actual meeting at the church?
9. How can outreach be improved from now on?
10. As a church, what have we generally got right or wrong during Covid?
11. Would you want to attend a fellowship meeting to think about these issues, either in September/October or early next year?
12. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

The responses were collated and assessed. A summary [based on the one circulated to the fellowship in August] is given below:

It has certainly been a challenging couple of years. However it has not only given us the opportunity to try doing new things (using new - to us technology such as Zoom and on-line videos) but has also forced us to re-evaluate everything that we do at Bethany – something that was, perhaps, long overdue.

We're encouraged that Bethany has come through the Covid pandemic and the lockdowns fairly well. Even though for a few extended periods "Bethany had left the building", Bethany and its work carried on. Admittedly it started slowly, but perhaps that was inevitable considering the suddenness with which the pandemic came upon us.

During this time, it has been encouraging to see members of the fellowship (not just, or even especially, the Elders) using their various gifts to maintain and encourage the fellowship, even in the periods of lockdown when we were forced to completely isolate. This is where the old "Brethren" (Biblical) tradition of "every member ministry" has been of great benefit to us: we are not divided into doers and spectators; Bethany is not just something we "do" on Sunday – it is who we are – we are a community – a family.

Granted, it is inevitable that there are almost certainly things that, with hindsight, we could have done differently, but it's not clear exactly where we could have done much better. We made good use of communications technology early on: by email newsletters and WhatsApp conversation we mostly kept the fellowship "in touch" with a feeling of belonging. Zoom quiz nights, prayer meeting and Breaking of Bread services worked well.

We were concerned about those who were not connected in these ways and we still are, but we hope that phone calls and posted copies of the newsletters filled this gap.

The fellowship have mostly embraced Zoom and we're therefore now able to plan to use it more in the medium future. We offer to help anyone who wants to do this and needs help getting set up. The weekly prayer meeting will continue on Zoom as it turns out that this is actually better attended than a physical meeting would be. The web site www.bethanyiow.co.uk, Facebook page and individuals' YouTube channels continue to be important too.

Technical issues meant that when Sunday meetings restarted in the building, we weren't able to successfully stream live services on Zoom. [A live streaming of a service was not successfully achieved until December – see below].

The responses in this survey helped us formulate a plan for Sunday morning services. The present combined format, seating arrangements and 10:30 start time seem popular and logical, so we have continued with them, with bread and wine being brought round as soon as we assessed that it was safe to do so.

Several people expressed regret about losing our traditional open Breaking of Bread service. We don't think we can return to that in the foreseeable future, but there seems to be a place for it to mark special church occasions such as Good Friday.

It's heartening that most respondents think that pastoral care is working reasonably well. We aren't in the role of a government agency or health service and can't offer professional help, but we do try to learn one another's needs, visit, phone and pray for each other. The intention is to "bear one another's burdens" as the Bible says, as far as we can. This seemed to continue even through lockdown and wasn't carried on only by elders; thanks to everyone in the fellowship who spent time serving others or told us of particular needs.

There's a continuing concern for those who might feel isolated because they're alone and not online so we can never go fully "virtual". However, the WhatsApp group and weekly Zoom prayer meeting have turned out to be instrumental in sharing news and trying to make sure we haven't missed anyone.

Coming to outreach, it was noted that this isn't just centred on the church building: it's a responsibility of individual Christians to always be ready to explain the hope we have and show Christ's love to others in practical ways. In the building, we think Sunday mornings as we're developing them are fairly welcoming and good for presenting the gospel to visitors. Having a "Christianity Explored" or "Alpha" course could be good in 2022, but we didn't think it was wise to start one going into the winter.

This survey was a great help to us in learning what people think about the way forward and it's given a strikingly united picture. Because of this – and due to the practical difficulties – it was decided to leave having a Fellowship Meeting until spring 2022.

August - September

Reg Lupton passed away on 20th August. His funeral was held at Bethany on 10th September.

October

From 10th October we felt it was safe to provide and distribute the bread and wine for Holy Communion (Breaking of Bread) to the congregation. The bread was pre-cut into individual cubes and the wine was provided in individual cups (with a proportion of the cups filled with an alcohol-free alternative). The bread and wine was taken round to the congregation by two (face-masked) stewards, to minimise interaction.

Heating

Back in May 2021, John Peck was obtaining quotes for replacement heating systems. These ranged from individual electric radiators, Infrared radiators to a centralised electric Powermatic System (We had a gas Powermatic before). Powermatics are very expensive and so the search was limited to an infrared type of heater. Even with infrared heating, new and heavier cabling would be required. Also the balcony would need heating.

In July it was found that with the heating we wanted, we would require 3 phase mains. John contacted SSE for a quote. Along with John, Julia and Steve visited St Martins Church in Wootton which had 22 infra-red heaters. The heat could be felt as soon as the heating was turned on.

We needed to have a working system by October 2021.

In August after talking to the Infrared radiator manufacturer, John discovered that we did not have to have 3 phase electricity. This was just as well as Union Street would have to be closed and the road dug up so that a 3 phase cable could be laid. The cost of this was quite prohibitive.

The Infrared Heater Company said that we could have 6 or 8 2Kw infrared heaters. They did say that we could have non glow heaters but these would be less efficient and would cost an extra £90 more each.

We decided to go for the 8 2Kw infrared heaters.

In September the heaters arrived. Also an extra one for the balcony. Garry Jones (the electrician) said that for cleaning infrared lamps, a feather duster should be used. There should be no ball games so that the heating bulbs are not damaged. Work to install the heaters began.

Concerning the gas pipe going round the building, it was decided to leave as is. Also as it is made of steel it won't be worth much.

October: In use the heaters were found to be too close and rather hot, so heaters were raised and angled up incrementally to make the arrangement more comfortable.

One heater (2nd back from piano) kept activating one of the trip switches. An extra cable was put in to see if this improved the situation.

In November we found that the heater still tripped. John asked to have it referred to the manufacturer.

On Saturday 11th December we were due to have a Coffee Morning in the hall in Bethany. We had turned on all of the heaters and were just vacuuming the floor when all the heaters and lights went out. The main fuse had blown. John (Peck) came in to check and then he called the SEB to come and look at it, as this fuse can only be replaced by the SEB. Meanwhile, we moved the Coffee Morning to the Homestead which seemed to be enjoyed by all. The Engineer arrived during the Coffee Morning and he found that though the housing for the fuse said that it should be 100 amps, it was in fact 60. 60 amp fuses can take brief overloads but not for long. The 60A fuse was replaced with a 100A. Apparently (according to Jeremy Fry) a 60A mains fuse was common practice in the 90s but these days even domestic housing has a 100A fuse.

Concerning the problem heater, we are waiting for a replacement bulb as the manufacturer agrees that there is a fault.

Operation Christmas Child shoebox appeal (December)

Again, Operation Christmas Child gave people the option to "Pack a Shoebox Online", and we know that a number of people in the congregation took up this option (as they did the last time).

We became the drop off and storage point for the shoeboxes which we didn't do the previous year. We didn't have the usual large number of shoeboxes which was understandable. John Peck became the contact for the deliveries, and when the time came to load the boxes on to the van, John Peck and Helen Edwards were able to help.

Christmas

Due to Covid-19 restrictions we were not able to hold all of our usual Christmas activities this year. However, this year we were able to have a Christmas tree (thank you Val and Tess) and the Hall had Christmas decorations both inside and out (thank you Andrew).

Also we were able to hold our 6pm Candlelit service of nine lessons and carols on Sunday 19th December. This service was successfully live-streamed on Zoom.

As Christmas Day fell on a Saturday this year, it was decided not to have a special service that day. The Christmas Sunday service on 26th September was led by Steve Crago.

Bernice Sheen passed away on Christmas Day.

Bethany Evangelical Church Trustees **(as at 1st January 2022)**

Name of trust: Bethany (Isle of Wight) Trust.
(Charity Commission for England and Wales registration number: 1182622)

S Crago (Secretary; cheque signatory).
P Edwards.
J Peck (cheque signatory; appointed person for marriages).
R Wills.
P Young.

Note: Under the trust's constitution (paragraphs 9-12), the Trustees are appointed for fixed terms, but are eligible for reappointment after these terms expire. Reappointments are for a period of 3 years after which the trustee must either retire or be reappointed again. S Crago and P Edwards were initially appointed for 4 years (term ending 31/12/2023), R Wills and P Young were appointed for 3 years (term ending 31/12/2022) and J Peck was appointed for 2 years (term ending 31/12/2021). John Peck has agreed to carry on as a trustee and was reappointed (at the Elders/Trustees meeting of 28th August 2021).

Home Groups

At the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020 all face-to-face meetings were suspended, both those at the Bethany building and those meeting in homes.

Prior to that there were three home Bible study groups: two meeting in Newport and one in East Cowes (although one of the two Newport groups had not met for some time before the lockdown started).

None of these home groups have met since then, and there are no plans to restart them - it is felt by the leaders of the three groups that they have served their purpose, and served it well, but that (as they stood) they have had their day.

However, we have not abandoned the principle of midweek evening meetings, or even home Bible studies; we recognise that we need to be adaptable. We are considering having some outreach meetings later in the year (when circumstances allow) - perhaps involving the "Christianity Explored" or "Alpha" courses. "Recently, Tess started a Bible study group at her home and Robert Wills has helped with this when required. (For more about this, see Robert's "Bible Reading Group" report below.)"

Phil Edwards

Bible Reading Group

Before the interruption of Covid, the Bible Reading group was an outreach which met on alternate Wednesdays in the side hall. Its main purpose was to encourage Bible reading in an informal setting for people who were not already accustomed to it.

This stopped during Covid so instead I continued preparing the short Bible readings and presented them as video talks on YouTube. These are all in a YouTube "playlist" which can be found online here: tinyurl.com/2usv7x59 .

However, around the end of 2021 Tess started a small group in her home for people who wanted to know more about the Bible. This was really quite amazing; the idea came from people who wanted it rather than Tess herself. This group began reading the gospels of Matthew and Mark.

Now the members of that group and some of the old 2020 group are looking forward to meeting at Bethany again, on Wednesday evenings as we used to. We hope that this will have already got going by the time of the annual fellowship meeting, as the first session is planned for 30th March. After that, it will probably be on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month.

We're planning to use a similar format to before, having a simple supper together at 7pm, then reading a Bible passage (continuing the gospel of Mark) followed by a short discussion and a prayer time. It will be flexible though, and responsive to the needs of people in the group.

Anyone is welcome but the group is really intended as an outreach and to help people who don't already know the Bible well. We need to know numbers in advance for catering purposes, so if you want to come or bring anyone, please let Robert, Valerie or Tess know first. Also, please pray for us.

Robert Wills

Tuesday Night (Zoom) Prayer Meeting

Before the Zoom Prayer meeting on Tuesday, I send out an invitation by Email giving the link to the Zoom meeting and to ask if anything should be prayed for. Various friends may send details of things to be prayed for which I put in to a document and then email out to those that have asked for these details (about 5 usually). Then Tuesday I send out a WhatsApp message to again give the details of the Zoom Meeting with a link as a reminder.

If you have anything for prayer, please let us know.

The format for the Zoom prayer meeting was to have a brief reading from the Bible and then to show the list of prayers to all on Zoom so that they can see it (not everyone has a printer). We are gradually expanding the first part so that we can pause and think what the scriptures are saying to us. There is an opportunity for all to pray and at the end there is a bit of fellowship. We don't use breakout rooms (a feature of Zoom) any more but this does mean that only one person can talk at any one time. In spite of this we do manage to have fellowship with each other after the meeting.

Steve Crago

Bethany Church web site

www.bethanyiow.co.uk

Window on Bethany Evangelical Church

I consider the Bethany website as a window on our Church, where people can look in and see Bethany!

Clicking the links to "What is Christianity" and "What we believe", I hope directs people to viewing us as being a group of Christians who believe that the teachings of the Bible and Good News of Jesus Christ is fundamental to us as Evangelical Christians.

Holiday Church

Our Bethany web site has proved a popular source of information for holiday makers who search for a visiting holiday Church. Visitors to the website can read about our Bethany Church history and our links with Isle of Wight Youth for Christ team. There is a link to help people find us on Google Maps, together with general service times. They can contact us via a secure messaging service. Through this resource we have been pleased to receive a number of holidaying Christians and shared time and worshiped together.

Bethany Members

Bethany members who access the website will see the monthly diary/notices, find the latest Covid-19 restriction news, catch up on sermons, some sermons have video links, which is particularly useful if you have missed a few Sundays, or just to listen again. The members area is password protected – (if you don't know the password – please see me, Steve, Phil E or Robert). The members area offers a zoom link to the Tuesday night prayer meeting, It identifies the elders of our church and offers links for specific items of prayers for them and the work they endeavour to do on our behalf. There are links identifying our charitable status; it shows who our Church trustees are and links to our AGM and reports, cleaning rotas, offerings to missionary societies we provide funds

to – such as Echoes of Service. There is a link to one of our own receiving the MBE from the Queen! There is a picture gallery! Some of the photos are a bit scary (how young we all looked), also the County Press report of the 1976 opening of Bethany Evangelical Church in Union Street.

New fresh look!

At the beginning of 2022 our website has received a major face lift and a new fresh look. Please take a tour of your website, I hope you find it worthwhile.

www.bethanyiw.co.uk

Phil Harris

“Coffee and Chat”

A ladies Coffee and Chat zoom was started in October 2020 during the COVID 19 restrictions. About 6 of us zoomed every other Thursday morning with our mugs of coffee to chat and share a bible verse. The group was (and still is) not restricted to Bethany members, which meant that we could meet with Bethany friends from the past.

Since last summer, several times, we have enjoyed going out for coffee. Sometimes we have even ended up having lunch too!

We're now thinking of meeting at Bethany, which we did for the first time a few weeks ago. We keep in contact with each other via WhatsApp.

I'd like to think it is a group where we feel we could invite Christian or non-Christian friends to.

Julia Crago

ACCOUNTS

BETHANY EVANGELICAL CHURCH – 2021 Accounts

	INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
	2021	2020	2021	2020
	£	£	£	£
General offerings/donations/interest	8,875	6,268		
Gift aid payment (HMRC)	958	613		
Special offerings	218	711	2,480	1,025
Gifts to speakers			315	385
Catering				104
Building Fund		299	3,377	4,885
Gas, water & electricity	168	2,318	4,322	3,908
Books & stationery		15	200	200
Equipment				
Maintenance/Miscellaneous			1,971	2,494
Totals	10,219	10,224	12,665	13,001
Expenditure excess	-2,447	-2,777		
Balance at 01 01 21	39,434	42,211		
Balance at 31 12 21	36,987	39,434		

Here is the treasurer's report for 2021. Thanks again for trusting me in the role.

Overall, income and expenditure were both very similar to what they were in 2020. As in 2020, there was a lot of expenditure required to sort the heating system for Bethany. People are still being very generous, with several giving by standing order.

Helen Edwards (Treasurer)

March 2022

Secretary's report

I would like to commend to you this verse from the Bible:

1 Corinthians 1:17 (NLT)

17 For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News - and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.

Wait a minute, this is Paul the Apostle writing and he is saying that he doesn't want to use clever speech when he preaches. Paul didn't want to show how clever he was, instead he wanted to point people to the Cross of Jesus and then it would be the work of the Holy Spirit to show the hearers their need of Jesus. In our personal witness, we don't need to be clever, we just need to tell the truth, and let God speak to the hearts of people around us.

Thank you again for all your prayerful support.

The number of members of Bethany is about 67.

Grace Fry went to be with the Lord on 27th April.

Matthew Brunt went to be with the Lord on 1st July.

Reg Lupton went to be with the Lord on 20th August.

Bernice Sheen went to be with the Lord on Christmas Day.

Last thing, I should mention the other activities that happen at Bethany. Youth for Christ operate out of the Homestead and True Vine Young People meet there on Monday evening. Also The Medina Community Choir are using the Bethany building on Monday and Thursday evening.

Steve Crago