

Cornerstone Church Colchester

Annual Report 2024

Report on the Charity's Activities

Preaching and Teaching

2024 began with a preaching series in Romans chapters 5-8 to consider the implications of the link between justification and union with Christ. This was interspersed with a continuation of the series in the gospel of Luke, which then extended into the summer period. A thematic series on leadership was pursued throughout the summer, interspersed with occasional preaching. The series in Luke's gospel continued into the Autumn period, and then a series in Philippians began. Christmas was characterised by Old Testament passages, especially the book of Isaiah.

Kids' Work

During the Sunday services, the children go out into their groups for a talk, followed by a game and craft relating to the talk. In 2024, there have been talks and activities for the children looking at series such as: 'What is Church', 'Jonah', 'Growing Up', 'Back to School', 'With God Together', 'Meals with Jesus', 'Who Am I?', 'The Wonder of Easter', and 'We Need Jesus'.

Throughout the year, Sunday morning activities have been led by a small team of 9 leaders who are all DBS checked and have received training on safeguarding children. The younger group had around 4-8 children who attended weekly. The older group looked at either a similar series to the younger group, or questions relating to the sermons. The older group varied in numbers between 2 and 5 throughout the year.

Students

The Church continues to welcome students from Essex University to our Sunday morning services. A group of between 6 and 12 meet regularly at Sunday lunch time for food, games and discussion. A small number of students study the Bible one-to-one with members of the Church and several students have completed the Christianity Explored sessions. One student was recently baptised. Students contribute to the life of the wider Church community and three students have become Church members.

Termly games evenings have been run in a home in conjunction with Friends International, a charity seeking to grow friendship and faith with international students, and whose work has been promoted in other local churches.

Music

Music at Sunday services has typically been led by a small group of Church members, with the aims of leading the Church family in sung worship to praise God and encourage one another, and promoting the messages of the Christian faith. A variety of suitable music has been used, typically selected to match themes that are addressed in a service.

Recorded music has often been used for all or part of the music provision in services, to allow rest for the musicians or to make the music provision more manageable, and enables us to incorporate a range of musical styles and include background music before and after a service. Music is

occasionally featured at Church events, such as Carols with a Pint. The Church pays for appropriate CCLI licences to meet its needs, and song use is reported through CCLI.

Church Events and Socials

This year saw the formation of a new Events Planning Sub-Committee. This group is made up of a small number of Church members and is chaired by a member of the Church Council. This group has successfully planned and run a number of events with evangelistic talks, as well as social events for men, women and the whole Church family. Social events have included two men's walks, a women's karaoke night and craft morning, and a family beach day. Events have been well-attended and have provided a bridge between the Church and the wider community.

Evangelistic Focus

There were several times of evangelistic focus in 2024, for the promotion of the Christian faith. Training in door-to-door evangelism took place in the Autumn. Two Christianity Explored Courses were run as groups, in addition to one-to-one sessions. Other evangelistic events included: Valentine's Biscuit Decorating, Easter Fun Day, Women's Afternoon Tea, Quiz Night, Bonfire Night, and Carols with a Pint. We also had a 'messy church' style service at Christmas that was attended by Church family and a number of guests.

We welcome people every Sunday to our services and there have been over 60 visitors, both Christian and not.

Roots & Shoots

Roots and Shoots started in May 2023, and is an outdoor after-school club for preschool and primary aged children and their parents/carers. Sessions in 2024 ran on Monday afternoons across February to July, and then from September to October.

We have had contact with 14 children and their families across 2024. At the sessions we introduce children to nature through outdoor activities, which was followed by a snack and a short Bible talk.

Food Bank

In keeping with our Church's objectives of care for our members and society, particularly those suffering hardship financially in the current climate, each week at our services we collect donations from our Church family of items that Colchester Foodbank are asking for. The foodbank volunteers are always appreciative of the donations we give.

In keeping with our Church's objectives of care for our members and society – particularly those suffering hardship financially in the current economic climate – at our services the Church family collects donations of items that Colchester Foodbank are asking for.

A volunteer, who does the weekly collection, says the size of the donations has been an awesome 22kg and generally an average of 4-5 kg in weight. This is quite encouraging as it makes such a big difference in the lives of those in severe need. The Foodbank volunteers are always appreciative of the donations we give and are always encouraged.

The Church family can be encouraged as these gifts are made – *"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"* (Acts 20:35)

Pastoral Support

Pastoral support is overseen by the Senior Pastor, an elder, the Women's Pastoral Lead and an Assistant Women's Pastoral Lead. Men's and Women's Discipleship Groups began 2024 following the preaching series in Romans and seeking to provide a pastoral "toolkit" by which members of the Church could be encouraged to pastor one another. This was followed up in the summer in Discipleship Groups by studies focussed on "Caring for One Another" – a book by Edward T Welch – which emphasised the practical aspects of this from the perspective of an approach encouraged by BCUK (Biblical Counselling UK). The men's group typically numbered between 3 and 5. The women's group has had around 5-8 attendees at each session. This is a reduction in number in both from 2023. Attempts were made to foster other groups outside these, particularly for men, with little success. The Discipleship Groups have been a place of sharing and support with the challenges of life – marriage, work, friendship and family – and how we put the teaching of Jesus Christ into practice in our lives.

Visitation of those in need in the Church family took place, including the support of those experiencing health and/or social challenges.

The membership course was run 4 times, with 7 new members joining the Church. Monthly celebrations of the Lord's Supper, following the liturgy of the Prayer Book, were held in local homes.

In the summer, a "Trough Group" was trialled for 4-5 upper primary and secondary aged boys, at which food, Bible study and discussion was offered, the aim being discipleship and mentoring. This was appreciated by the attendees and their parents, and so regular meeting began in the autumn term.

Pastoral support was also offered to students attending the regular student lunches, in both relational counsel and support with health challenges.

Care for leaders within the Church included enabling times of rest and stepping back from the demands of Church leadership according to the principle of "people before programmes". This enabled refreshment and a restoration to these roles.

Safeguarding

The Safeguarding Co-ordinator and Deputy Safeguarding Co-ordinator continued to consult with the organisation ThirtyOne:Eight, which provided safeguarding advice, DBS services and training as appropriate. Those holding voluntary roles within certain areas of the Church's ministry and activities that require a level of trust were recruited in line with the Safer Recruitment Policy (including appropriate checks and references), which involved 5 new recruitments. Yearly reviews were carried out for 7 of the volunteers in existing roles, with some yearly reviews being carried over to the first quarter of 2025. Additionally, a yearly review with the Senior Pastor was completed.

Safeguarding is a standing item on the agendas of both Church Council and Trustees, and a commitment to relational, plural and accountable leadership enables safeguarding against spiritual abuse by those in power, and protection from those who seek power inappropriately. The Church continues to practice the highest standards of safeguarding, including training appropriate to the voluntary roles people serve in.

Two safeguarding disclosures were managed to satisfactory conclusions in 2024, with advice sought from ThirtyOne:Eight and other appropriate organisations on both occasions. Appropriate risk assessments were communicated to the Church Council, and pastoral care was actioned.

Leadership and Governance

Cornerstone Church Colchester was established as a charity (CIO) in February 2023. The Church Report for 2023 was submitted to the Charities Commission, in accordance with governance requirements.

The Trustees of the charity have met 6 times in 2024, where questions were asked to ensure that the charity has been fulfilling its objects and legal obligations, and that decisions of the Church Council reflected the will of the Trustees. At the Annual Meeting of Church Members in April, a change in Trustees was communicated to the Church members – one Trustee came to the end of their term, and another stepped down for health reasons; two new Trustees have taken up these positions.

Day-to-day leadership of the Church is overseen by the Church Council, which includes Elders and Deacons along with other Church members. The Elders and Deacons met 10 times to lead the Church spiritually and in plurality. The Church Council met 12 times and effected the practical and pastoral organisation of the Church. In addition, the Church Council had a weekend away in November, where they discussed and prayed about a vision for the next 5 years to support growth and the maintenance of a loving community.

The Church Rules define many areas of how leadership and governance within the Church functions, in conjunction with the Constitution. The Church has policies approved by both the Church Council and Trustees within the following areas; Employment, Finance, Data Protection, Health & Safety, Catering With Care, Fire Safety, Safeguarding, Safeguarding Against Spiritual Abuse, and Safer Recruitment. The Church also has Standard Operating Procedures in the following areas; Children's Work on a Sunday morning, Compiling Services using 'Presenter', Supporting Mission Partners, and a Pastoral Confidentiality Flowchart. Additionally, Terms of Reference are set for; Elders & Deacons, the Events Planning Sub-Committee, and the Finance Sub-Committee.

The Church Council have a yearly plan to ensure that policies and procedures are reviewed periodically. Additionally, an important part of the Church's governance within Health & Safety is the risk assessment of all Church activities/events.

Finances

The finances of the Church are overseen by the Treasurer and Treasurer's Assistant, with support from the Finance Sub-Committee. Church finances are managed through Stewardship and held in a Church bank account. The Senior Pastor was self-employed from January until August, and was then employed by the Church from September onwards.

Report on the Charity's Finances

The Church's financial position remained strong during 2024. Our financial income allowed us to recruit our Senior Pastor in September, as the first employee of the Church. We had originally planned to recruit in April (at the start of financial year), but it was decided by the Church Council and Trustees to delay recruitment until the relevant governance and employment documents were finalised, which took longer than initially expected.

The charity received an income figure of £46,433. The charity's expenditure was £29,229.

Cornerstone Colchester benefits from the fact that most funding comes from Church members and external supporters, primarily through regular monthly giving via our Stewardship Giving account.

There is no dependency on grants or other types of funding from external sources.

Those contributing by monthly standing order can choose the level of their support with no minimum amount set.

Supporters can also give via a physical donation box. This is dual checked regularly and signed for, before being paid into our bank account.

Our General Fund receives all income and uses it to cover the running costs of the charity. The charity has no investments, fixed assets, or loans. It makes no grants and spends nothing on fundraising. We have no recruited members, and all posts are currently filled by volunteers.

We give 10% of our total income from 2024 away to other selected local, national and global charities.

We have had an independent examination of the accounts completed, and the report can be found on the following page.

Report to the Trustees of Cornerstone Church on the accounts for the year ended 31st December 2024

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity for the year ended 31st December 2024.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the Act. In carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Charity as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed: 

Name: Kate Prestwich

Member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales

Date: 7/3/25

Reports approved by Church Council on 19/03/25 and Trustees on 24/03/25.