**REPORTS ON CHURCH ACTIVITIES FOR APCM 2024**

**Safeguarding 2023**

* Safeguarding is on the agenda of each PCC meeting
* We have updated and checked the PCC Policy for working with children and adults.
* Displayed relevant safeguarding posters at the back of church and in front porch.
* Continued with individual online safeguarding training offered by Diocese of Gloucester.
* A link to safeguarding is on the front page of our website
* We now have our own Parish Safeguarding Dashboard where we check our safeguarding responsibilities set by the Diocese of Gloucester .
* We have updated DBS checks where necessary.

Liz Hale is the Parish Safeguarding Officer for children and young people

Nick Ardagh Walter Parish Safeguarding Officer for adults.

John Hale DBS Evidence Checker

*Liz Hale*

**Junior Church and creche report 2023**

Junior Church, which is held for school age children, meets each Sunday during the school term. We meet in church at 11am for the first part of Morning Worship.

During the year we have had lots of activities outside in the church grounds including making bird feeders with pine cones and peanut butter on the RSPB weekend, making a nature cross and going on prayer walks. We thank God for his amazing world and all that he has created.

Treasure hunts around the church grounds are one of the youngster’s favourite activities and at the end of a session we are often seen wandering around the church yard looking for hidden items.

We especially enjoyed looking for hidden Easter eggs on Easter morning and the Easter trail which is put around the churchyard during the school holidays.

We have enjoyed looking at Max 7 videos, including The Paralytic Man, The Good Shepherd, The Good Samaritan and the Parable of the Wise and Foolish builders, where we made marshmallow and cocktail stick houses and tested how strong they were when flooded with water on sand and rock.

As much as we enjoy being outside we also like to meet in the undercroft when the weather is wet and cold.

We really enjoy our time together and young people are always welcome to join us.

There are always older activities for them at the back of church in the school holidays.

Creche is continuing to be held at the back of church for preschool children and it is working very well with two members of the creche team on duty each week. It is lovely to hear the children in our church. The toys and playdough are very popular and by being at the back of church, the creche team are taking part in the service at the same time. It is good that parents are also in the service and have overall responsibility for their young children.

Helen Jackson and Julia Constable help Liz Hale with Junior Church and there is a team of eight who make up the creche helpers.

Thank you to them and to all who pray for us.

*Liz Hale.*

**Messy Church 2023**

It has been another super year at Messy Church with large numbers of children and adults joining us each month and so good to see lots of dads and grandads who seem very comfortable to be amongst us all.

Our theme in January was Zaccheus and we were delighted that the OpenThe Book team told the story of ”Jesus and the Taxman”. There were 70 children and 63 adults enjoying all the crafts and activities that afternoon.

In February we enjoyed learning about ”The Good Samaritan”. The wounds and first aid station were very popular as were the bandit masks, We all enjoyed the DVD telling us about the story.

We always enjoy celebrating Easter at Messy Church and also Pentecost, when we used pyrography to burn designs into wood.

When the weather is fine and not too windy we enjoy holding Messy Church outside in our church grounds. This was possible for our June session “The Two Houses”, as it was our last session before the school summer holidays, we enjoyed ice lollies and parachute games.

Always very popular is our Light Party where we remember that Jesus is the Light of the World. It was held in October just before the children went on their school holiday. We carved pumpkins, made firework pictures with salt and glue, played hoopla in the dark and enjoyed making and eating pizza. Everyone had a glow light at the end and of course we played the very popular doughnut on a string game. 91 children and 67 adults attended, which made it a very busy afternoon.

We finished 2023 with our “Messy Christingle and Christmas”, with everyone making their own Christingle and Christmas decorations. What a joy to see all the candles lit at the end for our short service. This year there were 79 children and 71 adults present.

Each Messy Church we have a DVD or OTB, or sometimes both, and we love singing to ‘I Sing Pop’.

Messy Church would not be possible without the commitment of a huge team and we are very fortunate to have such a dedicated group of people, a big “thank you” to everyone.

Liz Hale

**Little Stars**

Little Stars is an open-to-all group for preschool babies and children and their carers.

They meet in church on Monday mornings from 9.30am in term time. Toys, singing, sometimes a story, coffee and cake and most importantly friendship and fun make up this lovely group.

It is run by Elaine Penney and she loves to be joined by church members. Help is always welcome.

Do pray that this warm welcoming space in our community will be a witness of the churches love.

Pop in on a Monday to see what goes on.

*Sue Pouncey*

**Monday Mums report for APCM 2024**

Monday Mums meet every Monday during term time for a bring and share lunch and Bible study.

We currently have twelve members of the group and take turns to host the meetings. We also welcome members who are no longer able to meet with us regularly due to work or other commitments, so our hostesses often have to welcome a crowd!

Recent Bible studies include a study of Psalms, we followed the Lent Course and have just begun a study of “God’s Big Green Book”, a study of environmental issues.

Our Bible study is followed by a time of prayer for issues local and wider ranging, and for those we support with our prayers.

Looking back, Monday Mums is a long standing group which I have been part of for possibly 20 years, and it was well established before that! I would like to thank all those who have hosted Monday Mums over the years, it is a very important part of my church life.

*Jenny Tocknell*

**Report on Stroud Area Deanery Synod for May 2023 to April 2024.**

The Deanery Synod followed its normal pattern of three Wednesday evening meetings in the year (May, October, February). This year Jenny Bernard has joined me as a second deanery synod rep for St Mary’s. The Stroud Area Dean is **Revd Sue Murray**, of Bisley benefice; **Margaret Sheather** is Lay Chair of the Synod meetings. There is some regular business at each meeting in communicating updates on Diocesan and national synods, and “green shoots” - snippets of encouraging news- within the deanery, but the main interest is usually provided by a guest speaker.

Deanery Synod met on 10th May last year with **Rev Canon Dana Delap** visiting, and representing the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). She led a workshop session on creative use of church buildings and advocated early consultation with the DAC about ideas we might have for extending or changing the use of our buildings. There was also discussion of a motion formally tabled to be reviewed at Diocesan Synod, to reduce the period of “vacancy” after an incumbent leaves his/her parish. Several parishes in the deanery had recently experienced particularly long vacancies.

The Synod then met on 3rd October (n.b. I did not attend this meeting). There was discussion of the response received from Bishop Robert about filling clergy vacancies, and about difficulty that smaller parishes have in filling “officer” posts (wardens, secretary, treasurer). **Rev Simon Howell** gave an account of the Festival of Wonder now happening annually at St Laurence Church in Stroud, how it is funded, and what it aims to achieve in outreach. **Jennie South**, recently appointed Eco-ambassador for the deanery, gave a presentation about her role and what she is hoping that individual churches will do to support sustainable living. There followed some discussion and feedback, about the challenges the topic gives us.

The most recent meeting was on February 7th this year at which **Lisa Gardner**, Diocesan Director of Finance presented her role, her organisation, the activities she is responsible for, and the financial challenges the church faces at Diocese level. There is a group working to devise a new method of calculating the Parish Share that each Parish is asked to pay, which is mainly for funding of stipendiary clergy. This new method has not yet been published (as of now in April) but I can’t help feeling that our challenge remains that, in the medium-to-long term there has to be more money raised or there will be fewer stipendiary clergy.

If anyone is interested in being Deanery Synod representative of St Mary’s, do come and have a word with me or Peter.

*Andrew Pemberton, lay representative from St Mary Woodchester*

**Lunch-with-Friends**

With our tenth anniversary fast approaching in September this year, Lunch with Friends has had another successful year. It remains an important highlight in the monthly calendar of many of our guests who otherwise may not get out to share a meal, and it is highly valued in the village. It’s also a great example of the church working with our broader community… Many of our regular volunteers now come from outside the congregation and it is a real delight to work alongside local people from many walks of life – guests and helpers – who might not otherwise ever consider coming into the church.

Sadly, coming into the start of 2024, a few of our regular guests are no longer with us which means we are now welcoming new-comers – Please see this is an invitation for all of us to talk to older neighbours whenever we get a chance and see if they would like an invitation – especially if they are new to the village. Lunch club is typically held at 12.00 noon on the third Friday of the month at the back of church and includes a hot main meal followed by dessert, tea & coffee. We cater for meat-eaters and vegetarian diets as well as diabetic and gluten-free guests.

As always, Christmas was the best attended meal in 2023 with 65-70 guests, but we typically welcome 45-55 plus 10-15 volunteers each month. The Christmas feast was particularly memorable this year with a wonderful traditional meal and the enthusiastic participation of Year 6 from Woodchester school. The children sang us carols from their end of term concert and introduced themselves; handing out Christmas cards & presents of shortbread and chatting to all our guests – a really happy opportunity for cross-generational interaction. Another highlight was a cream tea in May to celebrate the King’s coronation. Many of our guests and volunteers enjoyed having their photograph taken in the very best company!





As ever, we are enormously grateful to our sponsors – including the Parish council, the village shop, Bottle Green Drinks, Woodchester House and Country Quality Meats in Nailsworth – and, of course, to all our hard-working volunteers. With the help of our sponsors, volunteer donations of food and financial donations from those guests who can afford to after each meal, we are blessed to be able to cover associated church heating & energy costs, fund future meals and make the occasional donation to valued local charities such as the Stroud Foodbank.

Thank you to everyone who helps in any way. Lunch club is a great example of St Mary’s serving our community in the way church should work and it would not be possible without the enthusiasm and support of a lot of people. Please join our happy bands of volunteers if you have any free time, once a quarter and THANK You for praying for us whenever you can.

*Liz Cole & LwF team*

**Thursday Evening Bible study group.**

Our group meets by Zoom on a Thursday evening with occasional holiday breaks. We have seven regular members and we have had a few extras for the recent Lent Course. We find it a rewarding session, usually of traditional bible study followed by time of prayer and always some informal discussion of how we are all getting on with life’s challenges!

The year has seen us complete two study books. The first was “Christian Community” by Rob Suggs, in the Life Builder Study series. This book took us through 10 studies of passages from different parts of the Bible, focused on the importance of community as central to the Christian message and teachings. We found the studies gave us valuable new angles on how we treat each other and what our Heavenly Father expects of us.

Then we reverted to a traditional format of following a book of the Bible through from beginning to end: in our case, the Book of Joshua in the Old Testament (the “Cover to Cover” Bible study in 14 sessions covering the 24 chapters). This is not a book that offers up many of our Sunday readings, but what caused us particularly to reflect and pray was reading about the people of Israel occupying the land of Canaan under Joshua’s leadership, with violence and ruthlessness, whilst we saw the news of today’s Israel invading Gaza and showing so little mercy on its people. Whilst the violence in the Book of Joshua may be abhorrent to us, there are still lessons for us to learn about following God’s will.

We are now continuing (from 25th April) with John Stott’s study guide covering the Sermon on the Mount.

Do let me know if you are interested in joining.

*Andrew Pemberton*

**Prayer Group report April 2023-April 2024**

Prayer group continues to meet at Gail's home in Woodchester on a Wednesday evening starting at 7.30 with coffee/tea and occasionally cake and lasts for approximately an hour depending on prayer needs.

Sometimes there may only be 3 of us but other weeks we can be 8. The prayer group is been such a source of comfort and strength to each of us throughout the year. There is something about praying together in a small group sharing our cares, concerns and also giving thanks that brings us closer to one another and to God.

We sometimes find when asking if we can prayer for someone that they prefer the idea of a smaller group of people they know rather than the request going on the prayer chain to people they probably do not know. It goes without saying that all prayer requests remain confidential within the group.

In December we enjoyed a social gathering a for a meal at the Royal Oak and usually enjoy a summer social with a bring and share supper.

We had a break over Christmas and during Lent so that members could attend the Lent course instead. This is always reviewed each year. During the summer there are often several weeks when we do not meet because of holiday commitments.

We now also have WhatsApp group now which has proved invaluable for keeping up to date and in contact with each other and also for urgent prayer requests.

Being part of the prayer group is an uplifting experience and anyone is welcome to join us. It is helpful to know if you are going to come before hand so do contact Gail on 07875028671/email [gailembirch@gmail.com](mailto:gailembirch@gmail.com)

*Gail Birch*

**Woodchester Endowed Church of England School Foundation Governors’ Report for the APCM April 2024**

*Our church school seeks to inspire children to live, learn and flourish together so we may become everything God has created us to be.*

*Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1Corinthians 12: 14-16)*

The governing body has grown in strength, skills and numbers this year with the recruitment of two new Foundation Governors and one Parent Governor. We now have only one Foundation Governor vacancy. New governors have launched themselves into their roles, undertaking training and quickly playing a full part in our monitoring and supporting the school at a range of events. We are aware, however, that we continue to lack specialist skills in areas of business and finance. We will also struggle to find a replacement for the current chair, a role which requires more time than most volunteers are able to offer.

In keeping with all schools, the financial position of the school remains challenging but some innovative management decisions have ensured that we have avoided a deficit budget for the time being. A grant to improve our energy efficiency has paid for installation of LED lights, an environmentally friendly measure which should reduce our electricity bills in the years to come. A water leak, discovered after water had been pumping into the ground beneath the building for some time, meant new pipes on the premises and possible large charges for the leakage. Given the age of the building, there will be more challenges to come.

The release of funds for the sale of the house driveway has delivered very useful funds, allowing us to pay off the remaining debt to the Diocese for the new school entrance work. Hard work over a number of years by Trustees is very much appreciated. We are in the process of setting up a new Trust, to include Governors and the Head from the school, before discussions about the use of the rest of the money, which has to be spent on capital projects, get underway. FOWES, our PTA, continues to provide much needed funds. A Christmas Jingle and Mingle event, arranged last minute when the planned event had to be cancelled, was particularly successful as a social event and fundraiser. A combined Stay and Play and Governor run Cake Bar event may be repeated in the summer term.

The school has seen some significant staffing changes over the year. At the request of the Head, Mrs Pennington, a Co-headship was established from September 2023 with Mrs Pennington remaining as head for three days and Mrs Loomes, still Year 6 teacher, taking the lead for the remaining two days. In April Mrs Jordan, our Year 1 and 2 teacher and English lead, will take a break to welcome a baby. Maternity leave cover has been very hard to find, part of a wider recruitment crisis in teaching and we are grateful to Mrs Pennington who will cover three days for this term. As Mrs Pennington has decided to retire as Co-head at the end of August, Governors have recently undertaken a full recruitment process, with support from both Diocese and the GCC. After two days of activities and interviews, the panel decided to offer the position to Mrs Loomes from September 2024. We will be very sad to lose Mrs Pennington whose faith and energy have shaped every aspect of the school community and vision. However, we look forward with confidence to the continued development of the school and the protection of its Christian identity under its new Headteacher.

Leaders have continued to look for developments to support all aspects of our children’s development. The outdoor play initiative OPAL has seen changes in the use of recreational spaces and the provision of a range of free items to encourage imaginative play. A Reading Shed in the playground provides a haven for quieter playtimes and stems from the school’s active encouragement of reading for pleasure. Children continue to enjoy a wide range of opportunities in sport and music, Atlas providing some afterschool clubs and Mrs Tye developing our own school band which has performed proudly in the termly worships in church. Activities are made available to all, with support provided where required to ensure no child misses out.

The school continues to enjoy close links with the church with celebration worships in the building. After lengthy discussions, Governors and PCC members agreed on the selection of a new Bible to give Year R. The school noticeboard brings the daily life of the school into the church building with updated photos and newsletters. The children sang to delighted Lunch with Friends guests at Christmas and helped with the distribution of gifts. The commitment of the Open the Book team is much appreciated by staff and children. The school actively promotes attendance at Messy Church and children speak with enthusiasm of their participation. Church members have responded to a request to take part in RE lessons and there are plans to make further use of those prepared to share their faith with the children. Another member of our church family runs the Woodchester Chess Club. The school now knows that it is very likely to be inspected by SIAMS during the next academic year and Governors are focusing on providing monitoring information and support for the RE lead who is working hard to adjust the curriculum andsource appropriate resources.

Governors remain very grateful to the Woodchester team of Teaching Assistants, teachers, Co-heads, Midday Supervisors, Atlas and music staff and cleaners who contribute to the body which is our school. We look forward to the challenges of next year confident in our vision and aware of the many blessings the school enjoys.

*Visit the school website https://woodchesterprimary.co.uk if you would like to find out more about what has been going on at school.*

*Sally Bull, Chair of Governors*

**Churchwarden report on ‘fabric, goods and ornaments’**

The church and its grounds are kept as a beautiful place to meet God by many of our church family, and also by some friends in the village.

The Tuesday gang has continued to keep the churchyard neat and faithfully to mow the grass: due to illnesses, our need is pressing for more help with mowing. Some money from old churchyard – maintenance bequests has been used to buy a new, self propelled mower. The lavender bed has been kept weeded and watered, and a tree-planting scheme has been started with sponsorship from a number of the congregation, and more planting will happen in the autumn.

In the churchyard, we need permission from the Diocese for a new area for interment of ashes, and a decision should come soon.

The church building has needed some significant pieces of maintenance work. Our Tower Captain, with expert help, has done some internal work to reduce the volume of sound from the bells impinging on our closest neighbours – and also to reduce the problems that pigeons cause by dropping sticks which clog up the roof gullies.

The windows were worked on by a specialist firm – the ones up the Tower still need therapy – and the roof was worked over too. Beforehand, a helpful volunteer took pictures from a drone, to help plan the work. An annoying occasional leak from the roof seems to have been stopped by the roofer, who gave a positive report on the roof, saying that it should last many, many years if we continue to maintain it.

The Spire needs some complicated work by stonemasons who don’t mind heights, and our surveyor is gradually progressing preparations for this. At the same time, there will be measures to stop water from getting into the bell chamber (where it rots things) and to keep the pigeons at bay.

There have been visits to the church by a Diocesan committee with expertise in church buildings, and then by their heating advisor. They have made comments about our wish to reorder the church to allow more open space, and also about the implications for heating the church in future, which indicate that we may need to do more planning and discussion first, as we will need to use electric heating once our boilers expire. In the meantime, Nick Ardagh-Walter has installed some near invisible secondary glazing to reduce the “cold radiator” effect of some windows on the north side.

We continue to be thankful for the need for more space (and fewer cold draughts) for Lunch with Friends and Messy Church, and continuing to plan for this will be a major focus for the coming year.

The Archdeacon sent a specialist to check that the parish was filling in, and storing, its records correctly (they are an important historical document): all was found to be as it should be, thanks to the good services of Diana Fowler and more recently David Hood.

*Nick Ardagh-Walter and David Pouncey*

**Open the Book**

Open the Book aims to tell stories from the Bible using a format of short, simple, enjoyable and engaging dramas for the children at Woodchester Primary.

Our team is comprised of 4 or 5 adults from the church. With the help of costumes and great props we present these dramas during school assembly on Monday mornings (and sometimes at the occasional Messy Church). We encourage the children to take part and to engage with the stories by acting and speaking. On occasions the whole assembly joins in as ‘raucous crowds of people’ which is great fun. The dramas are always preceded with an introduction and end with a simple message and a short prayer. Sometimes we ask the children a few questions about what they have seen to reinforce the meaning of the story.

We all thoroughly enjoy putting on these short dramas. Its challenging but great fun. Its lovely to see the children engaging with and enjoying it too and leaving assembly singing with smiles on their faces.

If you would like to help us, no special knowledge or talents are required. We guarantee you will enjoy it! So if you are interested in being part of this exciting outreach please contact Carla Spencer on 07594685137

*David Hood*

**Report for St Mary’s Woodchester APCM 2024 – Eco Church.**

Eco-Church is a scheme managed by the non-denominational Christian charity A Rocha. It provides a pathway via Bronze, Silver and Gold awards for churches (including their congregations) to progress towards fully-sustainable practices in the interests of caring for God’s creation.

As a Benefice we embarked on this journey in the summer of 2023. Starting with the A Rocha questionnaire that is means of assessing ourselves and scoring the “points” needed for each award.

We – meaning any of us wanting to learn and champion our progress - meet at monthly Saturday breakfasts around the Benefice, which are publicised in Common Ground and What’s On. Please give us a try if you haven’t been to one, and are interested.

Over the months since last July at our breakfast meetings we have met Jennie South, the “Eco Ambassador” for our Deanery, who is a fount of knowledge and encouragement; we have explored methods of calculating our personal carbon “footprint”; we have learned about sustainable ways of arranging flowers, coping with Christmas, recycling, re-using and repairing, using “greener” products for household cleaning, and deciding how to clothe ourselves more sustainably. And there are plenty more topics to come.

At Woodchester we now have our Bronze Eco-Church award – let’s now aim for Silver. And please check the noticeboard for the latest Eco-tips.

*Andrew Pemberton*