

Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames

ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

Park Road, Abingdon

**ANNUAL REPORT
YEAR ENDING
31ST DECEMBER 2022**

PERSONNEL 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2022

Clergy

The Revd Charles Miller (Rector)

The Revd Paul Smith (Vicar)

Canon Charles Mashedor (Associate Priest)

The Revd Jen Brown (Associate Priest)

Churchwardens

Joyce Kelly (elected 2019)

Louise Heffernan (elected 2021)

Deanery Synod Representatives

Sue Scott (from 2017 re-elected 2020) (from 2021 also on **Diocesan Synod** and **Bishops Council**)

Alex Scott (from 2020 also on **Diocesan Synod**)

PCC Members

Hilary Clare (until 2022), John Clare (until 2024), vacancy

DCC Officers

Vice-Chairman John Clare

Treasurer Susan Read

Secretary Hilary Clare (until January 2022), Glynne Butt (from September 2022)

DCC Members

Keith Bowman (until 2025)

Glynne Butt (until 2023)

Beryl Clements (until 2024)

Frank Debney (until 2023)

Sau Ming Ng (until 2023)

Nicola Ng (until 2024)

Catherine Ng (until 2024)

Hilary Clare (until 2025)

Laurie King (co-opted October 2022)

The **Standing Committee** is composed of the Vicar, Churchwardens, Treasurer and Secretary.

The **Fabric Committee** is composed of the Vicar, Churchwardens, Keith Bowman, and Frank Debney.

Other Officers

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|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Stewardship Officer | Julie Woodley |
| Electoral Roll Officer | Keith Bowman |
| Pew Leaflet | David Duce |
| Registers | Hilary Clare |
| Church Safeguarding Officer | Carol Bowman |
| Church-in Abingdon Representative | Vacant |

VICAR'S REPORT

It was a huge relief that during 2022 we were able to return to more familiar ways of worshipping and meeting together after the restrictions of the pandemic. It must be noted that Covid was still very much around, however, (as it is at the time of writing this report), and some of us tested positive during the year.

As in every year there were challenges, but there were also achievements and things to celebrate, for which we must be grateful.

I want to begin by mentioning the three main challenges I think we have had before us and then move onto the achievements and things to celebrate. I will then conclude my report with an item on ministry.

Challenges

1. Finance

Our financial situation has been stretched and challenged even more during this year due to the increase in energy costs. I know that the issue of our pledged giving was a heightened anxiety for some during the time of our Annual Stewardship Renewal at Christ the King. This was apparent to me when I returned from my sabbatical. With the increased pressure on people's finances who give so faithfully this adds further to the challenge before us. I want to express my gratitude to all for their pledged giving and for reviewing what you were able to give at the time of our Stewardship Renewal.

There is now a finance group across the parish who, I hope, will be looking at some of the financial challenges that our three congregations have in common. Notwithstanding this new and positive endeavour, I think it is important that in 2023 we, as a congregation, look more closely at the issue of stewardship, by widening our thinking to include our gifts and talents in the service of God as well as what we contribute financially. In order for this to happen, I shall be inviting the Diocesan Stewardship Advisor to come and speak to the congregation. Such people in the diocese hold these roles in order to provide support to congregations and we contribute to what they offer through our parish share. It is appropriate that we use their expertise. I plan to issue this invitation for late summer/early autumn in advance of the District Church Council (DCC) considering its budget for 2024.

2. Heating and Sound System

There is no doubt that during 2022 the matters of the heating and the sound system have exercised us considerably. A lot of DCC time has been spent on these two issues and I want to thank those who have worked hard to think these matters through and to begin looking at solutions. I want to record my thanks to David Duce for the monitoring of how much heating we have used and for reporting it so diligently in the pew leaflet week by week.

By the time we meet for the Annual District Church Meeting we will have received the report on the findings of the Energy Audit, which was organised for us by Louise, our warden. This audit will have highlighted some of the ways in which we might be able to both save energy and money by considering improvements and changes that could be made.

We have continued to experience difficulties with the sound system. Following consultation it was agreed that it may help if I preached and read the notices from the lectern. I am pleased that this has made some improvement, not least for the choir who hear very little in the chancel, but there is still a way to go. I am grateful to Keith and Ming on the DCC who have been looked at possibilities for enhancing the current sound system and laid before the DCC a set of options. This is still something the DCC are working through in 2023. Can I make a plea that people give either myself, a warden, or Keith or Ming, feedback on how they are affected by the current limitations of the sound system. I am passionate about people hearing well in church, and so it is important that people communicate their experience, especially during this time of assessment.

3. Volunteers

I preface this observation about volunteers by emphasising that, as in so many things (including the strain on finances), most churches throughout the country are experiencing the same challenge. We are faced with the reality that there are not enough people to do everything. That means that more work falls to fewer people. I will name two examples. We have seen a change in those who are unable to clean the church and fewer people reading in church and leading intercessions. I believe the latter example is less challenging to resolve and is something I wish to address during 2023, but the former is perhaps less easy. I am most grateful to those who have cleaned the church so faithfully over the years and have now had to step down. There is now a smaller group of people able to help and so we have appealed for others to join them so that the burden is lightened, and people are not having to be 'rota-ed' so regularly.

Achievements and Things to Celebrate

Week by week, month by month, we are blessed with a high level of commitment within our congregation. This should be noted by us all and I ask you to join with me in giving thanks for you all who contribute faithfully in many ways. We need to be both thankful for this, while at the same time, find ways of drawing in those who have their own gifts and talents to offer, which may, at this point, not be used to the full.

We have a smaller group of servers whose ministry was particularly affected during the pandemic as we navigated our way through regulations and then as a whole congregation faced the disappointments of more lockdowns. I want to record my gratitude to each of them for their ongoing commitment week by week.

We are blessed in having the choir who enhance our worship with their music each Sunday. I want to acknowledge their hard work and for their continued ideas both in and outside of worship to raise our musical reputation within the congregation and throughout the parish.

A substantial amount of money was raised for church funds through various events. This was in excess of £5,500 before contributions to charities, and the money which was given to TAB and TARIRO. We express our deepest thanks to all involved, especially to Nicola, Louise, and Helen for their imaginative ideas and hard work. It is a significant achievement not least in these times of financial constraint for everyone.

We welcomed The Revd Elizabeth Birch as our preacher in Holy Week and for the Triduum. Elizabeth took a fascinating theme for each of her seven addresses: 'The Stuff of Salvation: Materials of Redemption and Hope' where each day she looked at various materials which we encounter in the passion narrative ranging from metal to bread, and water and wine to stone. It was a very enriching week with Elizabeth's input and we were great blessed by her ministry and contribution.

It was a special joy that we could honour the request of Deacon Corinne Smith, who worked with me here until she went to live permanently on the Isle of Wight, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of her ordination to the diaconate on Sunday 2 October when we observed our Patronal Festival. Deacon Corinne deaconed the mass, and because it coincided with my sabbatical, her friend and colleague, Canon Nick Fennemore, with whom she had worked in hospital chaplaincy in Oxford for some years, came to preside and preach. Deacon Corinne was joined by many guests and received the typically generous hospitality of you all, including a beautiful, celebratory cake. It was a wonderful occasion and I know Deacon Corinne was deeply touched by the welcome and kindness she received on that day. Thank you to you all for making that possible for her.

Ministry

I want to offer my thanks to all my clergy colleagues with whom I have worked during the past year. In particular I want to express my gratitude for those who provided cover during my period of Annual Leave and Sabbatical Leave (1 August – 14 November), both to those who minister in the parish and those who joined us from across the diocese.

For those of you who have not had the opportunity to read about my sabbatical a report is available in the February 2023 edition of *A Candle in the Window*, the parish magazine. It was an enriching time and very good to make my first visit to Mucknell Abbey in Worcestershire. Furthermore, it was very exciting to embark upon what has become a new journey into learning to paint and to work with the challenges and joys of watercolours. Inevitably, a sabbatical provides the opportunity to reflect over a period of time and to consolidate one's thinking. I realised again just how much of my ministry is taken up with administration and how, in common with so many clergy throughout the church, this holds me back from missional activity and the work of pastoral care.

It was a great disappointment not to be able to appoint a secretary for me after two attempts. This needs careful attention again during 2023 and to see how we can attract the right person to secure an appointment to ease the burden which is something, even in the medium term, which is not sustainable. I also discerned that I do a lot of 'doubling-up' as vicar of both my two churches. Some of what I do can be done jointly with the two churches, not least to reduce meetings, and I am delighted that the wardens of both St Michael's and St Nic's have agreed that meeting with me together is a step to make a difference. We began to think that through on my return from sabbatical in mid-November and will be making it happen as we progress into 2023.

Finally, I want draw attention to the fact that during 2023 we shall at some point bid farewell to Canon Charles Masheder and Felicity whose ministry we have enjoyed since November 2019. Charles has brought a depth of experience, wisdom and care which has been a huge blessing to us all. We shall miss both Charles and Felicity but always be grateful to them for their contribution during the last four years.

Concluding remarks

I conclude my report by saying a huge thank you for all you do in the life of our congregation. I owe a special debt of gratitude to our wardens, Joyce and Louise, for support and for all they have done for us in the past year. I am indebted also to David Duce for the work he does in preparing the Sunday liturgies, and for worship at other times, and not least the Sunday pew leaflet.

This comes with every blessing and the assurance of my prayers for you all.

Fr Paul Smith, Vicar, February 2023

CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT 2022

Worship and services

Thankfully, we were able to continue our services in 2022 without any Covid restrictions. We held a Sung Mass at 09.30 on a Sunday and a Said Mass on Thursday at 12.30. In addition we held services on certain Holy Days (e.g. Epiphany, Dedication Festival, All Souls Day,)

Holy Week was celebrated with Mass on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. On Maundy Thursday we observed the Mass of the Lord's Supper and on Good Friday morning a short inter-active children's service was held, this was followed by the Liturgy of the Passion in the afternoon. The Lighting of the New Fire and Easter Vigil was celebrated on Holy Saturday, and this was followed on Easter Day by The Sung Mass of the Resurrection.

For the first time in 3 years our Christmas celebrations commenced with a Crib Service and was followed by our Carol Service. Mass was celebrated on Christmas morning.

We had 1 Baptism, 2 Weddings and 6 Funerals in 2022.

We are incredibly grateful to our honorary clergy and our clergy for enabling us to worship at St Michael's.

Outreach

Abingdon School were able to hold their Leavers' Service for the first time in 3 years, and also held their Lower School and Parents and Boarders' Carol Services. They also held Choral Evensong Service. St Nicolas School held their Christmas Service, and it was lovely to see all the children enjoying themselves, some with Christmas hats and jumpers.

The Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride was held as usual. We opened the church to meet and greet the cyclists and offered refreshments.

The Albert Park Singers continue to use the church for their rehearsals and held 2 concerts during the year; both were enjoyable occasions.

Abingdon Passion Play held a Come and Sing of *Handel's Messiah Part 1* in aid of fundraising for the 2024 Passion Play.

During the year, concerts were given at the church by the East Oxford Community Choir, Oxford Pro Musica, Abingdon Music Festival, Harmony InSpire.

We held a very successful Autumn Fair which raised funds for both the church and the Abingdon Foodbank. Many thanks to both Louise and Nicola for organising it and to the volunteers who helped. There were also several fundraising initiatives in aid of church funds. We held a very successful Floral Extravaganza, The Dog Café after Mass on Sundays in the summer, and a Piano Recital. Thank you to Helen, Hilary, John, and Nicola for all their efforts in organising these events.

The church room is used by one group on a regular basis. It has been hired on an ad hoc basis during the year, but we have not gone back to pre-pandemic hiring of the room.

Fundraising

We continue to support:

The Abingdon Bridge (a local charity that provides support and guidance for young people) and Tariro (a youth charity in Zimbabwe),

The Porch Day Centre (supporting homeless people in Oxford) to whom we gave money this year instead of Harvest gifts,

Oxfordshire Historic Churches by sponsoring Louise Heffernan for the Oxford Ride and Stride.

Volunteers

As usual, we would like to thank all our volunteers who help keep things running smoothly. The folks that come in and do the cleaning, the flower arrangers, the safeguarding officer, those who do the odd vital jobs – fixing things or sorting out the heating or sound, those who make the coffee, the vergers at weddings and funerals, the writers or contributors of the pew leaflet and website. We thank you all.

Many thanks

To all who help in our worship – those who serve at the altar, our sacristan, our organists, readers and intercessors, our dedicated choir members, our bellringers (who now ring us in before Mass as well as during the Eucharist), to the DCC members, and all our sidepersons.

We are especially grateful to all the honorary clergy, clergy, and members of the congregation who helped during Fr Paul's sabbatical.

Finally, a big thank you to Fr Paul for his leadership, support, kindness, and love. Let us continue to pray for the Lord's blessing on him.

Joyce Kelly and Louise Heffernan February 2023

ELECTORAL ROLL

In March 2022, the roll underwent a simple revision to consolidate the amendments made since the previous year's revision.

At the conclusion of the 2002 revision the roll contained 68 names, two more than at the same time the previous year. During the year there had been one name removed and three were added. There were no changes of name or address notified.

Keith Bowman January 2023

FABRIC REPORT 2022

Routine maintenance was conducted as usual during 2022. The organ was tuned, the PAT testing carried out, the fire alarms and extinguishers serviced, the heating system maintained.

Our gas contract was up for renewal in November and after much hard work, the Fabric Committee finalised a new contract. As will have been seen in the updates in our pew leaflet, the energy bills have increased considerably due to the energy crisis. We also finalised a new contract for electricity and hope to work with the Parish Energy Basket next year, which may give us a more favourable rate

As a result of the Quinquennial Inspection 2021, the replacing of the beam filling at the end of the North Aisle was undertaken by Donkins. There is of course still further work to be carried out due to the Quinquennial Inspection.

Joyce Kelly and Louise Heffernan 2022

LABYRINTH INSPIRED ACTIVITIES 2022

Silent Reflections

2022 marked the 11th year of our monthly *Silent Reflections*. In the normal way these are held on the last Tuesday evening of the month from 7.30 – 8.30 pm. As people arrive, they sit around the outer edge of the labyrinth while the theme is introduced. After which, they either remain where they are or move round the church for shared silence and personal reflection, with the opportunity to walk the labyrinth. Themes were produced this year by Fr Paul, Rosalind Rutherford, Sue Scott and Sue Sheppy and the material, as well as being available in church, was circulated to those on our Silent Reflections List, some 46 people, and was also put on St Michael's website by David Duce. In January we held *Silent Reflections At Home*, as we clashed with the Church Dedication service and in March, because I had Covid! At 8.30 pm, we gathered for the final prayers, after which refreshments were offered in the south transept. From the nine in-church sessions, 69 visits were made overall from 18 individuals.

Circle Dancing/Moving into Stillness

Weekly *Circle dancing*, led by Mary Williams, returned to church in January with strong and sustained support. Our monthly *Moving into Stillness* sessions also resumed at the beginning of the year. Elizabeth Mitchell led us once again into a beautiful combination of dancing to Taizé chants interspersed with two periods of silence, for which we were seated round the edge of the labyrinth. There were eleven sessions in all with 75 visits being made from 13 individuals. A central display for both sessions always include lit candles, and, at the end, the light is sent out to those in most need of it.

Advent Labyrinth Walks

The church was open on Tuesday the 6, 13 and 20 December between 11am and 12 noon, and again in the evening from 7pm - 8pm. Material for reflection and simple activities were available for the different stages of the walk. The Advent themes this year of *Waiting*, *Journeying* and *Birth* were based on three poems by R. S. Thomas and excerpts were used from Carys Walsh's book: *Frequencies of God: Walking through Advent with R. S. Thomas*. Advent candles were lit in the centre of the labyrinth.

Prayers were read at the different sessions by Rosalind Rutherford, Carol Bowman, Eileen Duckett, Gill Squire, Laurie King, and Sue Scott. 35 visits were made overall from 15 individuals.

Occasionally requests are made to walk the labyrinth, and these come to Carol Bowman through whom arrangements are made for these personal visits.

Sue Sheppy February 2022

MUSIC REPORT 2022

St. Michael's choir is small, but with some extremely competent singers among our ranks, we have been able to sing to a high standard. This has been most obvious in regular unaccompanied communion hymns where we have also been able to include occasional solo singing. Both of our regular organists have been willing to lend voice as required to fill any gaps!

The Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols is our annual highlight. The choir was augmented by a small number of extra voices and the quality of the singing was impressive.

Collaborating with such good organists as Graham Howell and Malcolm Pearce has greatly enhanced our worship throughout the year and the congregation generally has developed a tradition of remaining seated to listen to - and applaud - the concluding voluntary. On the occasional Sunday we are without an organist, Glynne Butt has played our lovely piano.

Having such a fine instrument has also enabled us to host several concerts this year, among them a solo piano recital by Mami Shikamori which packed the church and also the final concert for Abingdon Music Festival. On a rather more humble level, we have ourselves used the piano for things such as music at the Christmas Fair and for informal entertainments on occasions.

Albert Park Singers continue to rehearse weekly in the church and our warm relationship with them is reinforced with Glynne's appointment as musical director. They generously share the proceeds of their concerts with the church.

Glynne Butt February 2023

SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2022

The DCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to the House of Bishops guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults) and has worked in line with the Church of England Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance.

The Parish Safeguarding policy was updated in July 2022.

Safeguarding information and policies are included on the church website and on the church noticeboard. Hiring of the church and church room is subject to acceptance of our safeguarding policies and practices.

Safeguarding is on the agenda of the DCC as a standing item. The safeguarding officers of the three churches in the parish have met together and presented common reports to the PCC. Work on the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard has progressed. Role descriptions are being prepared for church

officers as defined by the diocese. There is still scope for further collaboration between the churches to achieve a greater degree of consistency where appropriate.

All members of the DCC completed the Basic Awareness training module, and those who are also members of the PCC have completed the Foundation module. A significant effort was made by these people, and also those other members of the church taking the BA or higher levels of training, to ensure a virtually 100% record by the end of the year. DBS certificates are up to date. This acceptance by the congregation of the necessity of awareness and training has been encouraging but we must continue to raise the profile of safeguarding as an integral part of our communal church life.

Two requests for advice on safeguarding issues relating to vulnerable adults were referred to the Diocesan Safeguarding Team by the Team Vicar and the Church Safeguarding Officer during the year.

Carol Bowman St Michael's Safeguarding Officer February