



S T P E T E R ' S
Y a t e l e y

Annual Report
2023

THE VICAR'S REPORT

Our Vision is for St Peter's to be a Church that is Rooted, Seeking and Reaching:

- Ø Rooted in Word and Spirit
- Ø Seeking God in Prayer and Worship
- Ø Reaching out in the Presence and Love of Jesus

In my report last year, I described 2022 as a year of discovering what the post-pandemic Church looked like and wondered: "So where are we, at the start of 2023? New service structures, plans for an Additional Needs Toilet, another Church Weekend ... and much more." As is usual in such a report, all that could be anticipated were events and plans with no idea of how things would "be" in 12 months' time. If 2022 was discovering what the post-pandemic Church looked like, 2023 was perhaps a year of working out what it meant to "be" such a church.

2023 was a year of further change, as some people came, others left, new initiatives such as Called 2 Be (women's ministry), More To Give (for our senior members), Empower (the equipping of us as a Church) began to take root, and there were a few surprises, such as the unexpected appointment of a Youth Pastor. New service structures, building distinctive congregations at 9.00am and 10.30am on a Sunday, have settled and begun to grow.

It was a year when we looked to move forward in several areas: the longed-for project to build a Toilet for those with Additional Needs began to take shape, we felt the call to make 2024 a Year of Reaching Out and began planning for it, and we seemed to achieve a degree of stability in the day to day life of St Peter's.

The businesses seemed to bounce back from the tough years of the pandemic, with a new Business Board taking oversight, guiding and managing their growth and providing the structure that brings security.

The financial challenges that have been increasingly seen in recent years became a matter of concern in 2023. Partly as a result of the pandemic, partly the financial squeeze across the nation, partly due to the changing nature of the congregation and other issues, balancing the books has been increasingly hard and achieving a budget for 2024 proved highly challenging, Church finances have been largely propped up by the businesses in recent years, despite the generosity of many, and until our loan to the Diocese is paid off in 2-3 years' time, we have to be very careful with all of our spending, especially capital spending.

We did the usual things – Gospel on the Green, a Church Weekend (at home with a guest speaker), a quiz evening, a Harvest supper, concerts and numerous other events. Our Church groups adopted to changing needs in various ways. Church life was as busy as ever in 2023.

And so to 2024. The Year of Reaching Out. The building of the new Toilet facility. The year when we build on the new post-pandemic foundations. It will be exciting! In John 10, where Jesus talks about him being the Good Shepherd, he says this: "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." We seek to see what God has in store for us in 2024 with the confidence that comes from listening for the Shepherd's voice and following it.

9 A M S E R V I C E

The 9am congregation has been both blessed and challenged over the last year by every aspect of our worship services, for which we give thanks. We have appreciated great bible-based preaching and teaching from clergy, LLMs and others and are also very grateful to have such gifted worship leaders, musicians and singers. In addition, a wide range of people contribute to worship through exercising their gifts in various ways with willingness, serving the congregation with commitment and dedication, all of which makes this congregation a cohesive family that is rooted, seeking and endeavouring to reach out.

Over this year we have enjoyed three very different meals together and these very well attended occasions have been opportunities to get to know newcomers and each other better and to share fellowship. There is a strong feeling of friendship and support within the congregation and every endeavour is being made to be aware of pastoral needs and to follow up issues with visits or phone contact.

1 0 : 3 0 A M S E R V I C E

This year, as we have prepared for and begun the year of reaching out, we have focused on tweaking and improving elements of the service to be a more welcoming and accessible service to newcomers. As part of this, we are looking at how we can welcome all newcomers but particularly young adults and families because we recognise there are certain demographics that we could be catering to better. This includes revamping our All Age worship, building on the work that has been done in this area with a different format of All Age service called GLOW. As we develop these services over the coming year we would value feedback, critical or positive, to refine them further. Our worship team has been growing over the year and it has been a joy to see more youth regularly using their incredible gifts in the band thanks to Chloe's encouragement. We are looking forward to the coming year and would love you to be praying for ways to engage with newcomers, for interest in the upcoming Alpha and that we would be attentive to God's Spirit as he leads us.

P A R I S H O F F I C E

2023 was a busy year for us in the Parish Office. We continued to be the first point of contact for many in the community and we enjoyed helping people with various enquiries during weekday mornings. The volunteers that helped in the office were invaluable assisting with photocopying, laminating, banking, checking on supplies, safeguarding administration and distribution of church communication.

Maureen King

H O M E G R O U P R E P O R T

Home Groups are often the pillars that provide strength for a Church and the established Groups that have formed over the years in St Peter's have continued to provide the strength for individuals to grow and flourish within the wider Church. The changes in the life of St Peter's meant that the established relationships of Home Groups have provided mutual support and encouragement. Home Groups are intended to be places where All are involved, we Become disciples, we Create Community, we Do the work of reaching out and, most of all, we Experience Jesus.

Having spent a year looking at what it meant to be Distinctive Disciples of Jesus, we spent the first two terms of 2023 asking how the Spirit changes us by growing His Fruit in us and how the Spirit equips us with His Gifts. In September 2023, we began a year long journey from Genesis to Revelation, taking the Autumn Term to observe "The Big Picture" of the Old Testament. We discovered more of God's plan of salvation as well as the realities of Biblical heroes and that, actually, some of them were just like us!

One change in 2023 was the arrival of emPower, not just as a celebration on the fourth Sunday evening, but with other events, especially bringing together all the Home Groups, at least once a term, to look at some topics together. The response to these evenings has been great with enthusiastic and good numbers coming along.

And for 2024 – the aim, certainly in the second half of the year, will be to look at what our Home Group structures look like in the "new reality" of where we are as a Church, to ask how we can develop the gift of having so many people involved, and seek to build our pillars stronger!

Tim Storey

P R A Y E R M I N I S T R Y T E A M S

We have teams of people at the 9am and the 10:30am services, as well as our monthly emPower service at 7pm, who are willing to pray with anyone attending these services. The teams are congregation members who have undergone training and are DBS checked and have completed the Church of England basic Safeguarding course. Prayer is an essential part of our lives and our church services, and our teams aim to make it as easy as possible for members to seek prayer. Prayer teams can be found either at the back of church in our dedicated 'prayer corner' or in the Chapel, sometimes during the service but always after each service. Whoever is leading or preaching at the services is also able and willing to pray with you. Don't miss an opportunity to pray for the week ahead of you, or to have one of the team pray God's blessing over you.

Linda Hoskins

2023 FUNDRAISING FOR THE COMMUNITY HUB

Despite the shadow cast by the cost of living crisis, our fundraising events continued to be well supported in 2023 and we were able to raise over £7,700 from our annual programme. Funds received help to repay the loan taken out for re-building Chaddisbrook House in 2016; this is scheduled to be fully repaid by August 2026.

2023's two biggest fundraisers were again the annual Yateley Fayres - Christmas (£2,063) and May (£1,360). Good contributions were also made by the Rockaoke (£1,342), Quiz Night (£1,138) and Discoveries Blankety Blank (£717). A huge thank you goes out to our team of volunteers, without whom none of these events would be possible.

Our fundraising is both essential financially and is always a lot of fun. We have yet another exciting schedule of events lined up for 2024!

Nick Norton

SAFEGUARDING

There have been no reports of safeguarding concerns during the period under review. Efforts have been made to improve awareness within St Peter's family, by posting contact information in Church buildings and online.

Work is in progress in several areas to ensure that:

1. New applications for DBS certificates are assessed for their suitability for the role under consideration.
2. Role descriptions are prepared by the Team Leaders of the various groups.
3. Existing DBS holders are sent timely reminders regarding the expiry of their certificates. These used to be valid for five years but this was reduced to three some time ago.
4. DBS holders are required to undertake training, depending on their role within the Church. Efforts are being made to make sure that personal records held by St Peter's contain relevant details of training as well as a copy of the current certificate. In line with similar organisations, and good practice generally, refresher training should be undertaken every three years, in line with renewal of the DBS. The training is usually online and administered at a Diocesan or National level.

Personal data in connection with DBS, is held confidentially within, but separately from, the St Peter's IT systems.

Ian Young
Safeguarding Officer

WELLSPRING

Monday-Friday from 8.30am-9am

This an 'open to all' devotional time in the presence of God every weekday morning in the Chapel. There is a core group of 5/6 members and we would love you to join us any morning that you are able too. We usually start with a worship song (courtesy of Youtube) and then read a bible passage and see what God is saying to us; our discussions vary each day as God reveals different things to each of us. We use technology (phones) to access commentaries which help us understand some passages! We share humour and our passion for Jesus and to see the town of Yateley revived by His presence. Come and join us one morning.

Linda Hoskins

THE BUSINESS BOARD

The Business Board are delighted with the performance of both our businesses this year. Café 46 has been steadily increasing its sales all year, setting several new sales records and ending up with annual sales of just under £168,000, 12½% more than budgeted. Meanwhile, the Discoveries team have done a brilliant job recovering from a drop in sales early in the year to finish the year with sales of a little over £175,600, just under 2% below budget. But importantly, costs have been controlled so well that the budgeted profit was only missed as the result of a one-off equipment purchase.

What this means is that the total profit from the combined businesses was £46,845, nearly £15,000 better than the £32,000 budgeted. Note that these figures are calculated after the £30,000 the two businesses contribute to the repayment of the Diocesan loan has been deducted.

Every year, we give 10% of our profits to local community based projects. Last year, we supported a local charity, Harry's Hat, which campaigns to raise awareness of Hydrocephalus, and Yateley Swimming club's project to replace their hoist for swimmers with disabilities. Both of these were selected because they are local and we have connections to them through our volunteers. This year, we are going to sponsor shirts for the girls and the all-inclusive teams at Yateley United football club, and help fund our own St Peter's youth café. We also provide direct help to local charities such as the Hope Hub in Camberley and Children's Hospital Pyjamas through donated goods and collections in our businesses.

We are very grateful to our two managers, the staff and the office team at St Peter's who make all this possible. We would also like to thank all the volunteers who are the life-blood of the two businesses and without whom we could not function. We are always interested to hear from new volunteers, so if you would like to spend a few hours a week helping these two fantastic and successful businesses, making a contribution to your local community and supporting the church's work, we would love to hear from you!

Richard Quarterman
Business Board (Chair)

CAFÉ 46

2023 was a successful year for Café 46. New furniture was purchased and the café layout was rearranged. The benches were painted in the garden to make it look fresh and inviting, as well as introducing our outside area ordering system to make life easier for the volunteers.

Birthday Celebrations and Anniversaries were catered for, and we introduced Afternoon Teas which have proved very successful.

The café is a popular meeting place with regular bookings including the walking group, Mothers Union and Yateley Society to name a few.

From all the staff at Café 46, a huge Thank you to all our volunteers and customers, we appreciate and value every one of you.

Jen Trevena

DISCOVERIES

Discoveries has had another successful year, both financially and supporting the local community.

We held two special events this year. Although these raise extra funds, the main objective is to invite customers and friends along, welcoming those who may not necessarily attend St Peter's. The first was our version of the game show 'Blankety Blank', expertly hosted by Tim, and we thank him for his support. This was accompanied by a delicious two course meal prepared by our wonderful volunteers. It was a fun evening. The second was our ever-popular Bright Night, which was a sell-out. An informal evening of shopping in Discoveries, followed by a wonderful meal shared in the Church, we had lovely feedback from those attending, and hope to be able to accommodate more people next year.

As usual, Discoveries attended the May Fayre and the Christmas market, with various stalls manned by staff and volunteers.

It was unfortunately a very sad year, as we said goodbye to many volunteers, some passing away and some with health issues. They are all missed, and their support and friendship will never be forgotten. On a lighter note, we were fortunate to have some lovely new paid staff and volunteers join us, and as always, we supported young people with their DofE volunteering and Work Experience.

Donations are still dropped off by appointment, which means that we can monitor levels and keep the working area safe, and most people appear to be happy with the system. We are very grateful to all those who donate, and we never seem to be short of goods. We continue to source outlets for those items that we cannot sell, to reduce the amount of waste going into landfill. Our most recent have been outlets for bras, and writing implements.

Sue Harkins

DISCOVERIES UPCYCLING PROJECT

The Discoveries Upcycling Project officially started in September 2021, meeting in the Oasis Room at St Peter's Church, on Fridays from 1pm to 3pm.

The aim of the group is to use items and materials donated to Discoveries that they are unable to sell in the shop and would otherwise be recycled or (as a last resort) destined for landfill. This includes pieces of fabric, odd balls of wool, card making materials, amongst other things. The various items made by the members are either used by the members themselves or given to the shop to sell, the proceeds going mainly into community projects. Items include tote bags, peg bags, hair scrunchies, Pom Pom wreaths, makeup bags, Christmas decorations and gift tags.

The group are a lively bunch with a variety of skills and the members enjoy sharing these skills whilst enjoying a lively, sociable afternoon.

In 2023 we had a presence at the Yateley May Fair, The Eco Fair on the green by the shop and the Christmas Market selling items we have made and chatting to people about the aims of the group.

Sue Harkins

BELLRINGERS

The highlight of the past year was being able to ring for the Coronation. It was a special occasion for us all and one we were proud to be able to accomplish. The 'Ring for the King' project encouraged more people to come forward and try bellringing. We now have two rapidly advancing ringers welcomed into our band. With these additions we now have one bell per person which does not allow for anyone to be absent so Yateley ringers have to rely upon visitors to complement our numbers. In turn we ring with other local towers to ensure that they, too, continue to ring.

If you missed the chance to try ringing and would like to learn please come and join us any Thursday evening at 7:30pm and find out more about our lovely tower bells and how we ring them.

Pat Johnson

TABLE TENNIS

The club meets in the Church on Tuesday afternoons. We play a mixture of single and double matches which cover a wide range of abilities. New members are always welcome for an afternoon of exercise, friendship and a lot of banter!

Eileen Portsmouth

KNIT & KNATTER

The group has continued to thrive and while there is lots of nattering, this year we have been even more prolific in the amount of knitting produced. Our Christmas lunch was enjoyed at the end of February, as we were all much too busy to fit it in earlier.

Although fundraising is not our primary aim, the group has been able to support various appeals including "New Pyjamas", the Community Pantry and St Peter's own Community Hub, as well as donating items to hospitals and care homes in the area. In addition we were able to support the British Legion's poppy appeal, making more than 180 poppies, raising £863.

The Christmas Market proved to be another successful event with several sales, some interesting chats and lots of contact cards handed out with invitations to join us on Friday mornings from 10am-12pm in the Oasis Room.

We have now settled down to our usual "pattern" of much knitting, sewing and crochet, with a great deal of chatting and laughing. Members can drop in when they are able, learning new skills from each other and meeting crafters from all over the area. Come and join us any week you have free - you'll be guaranteed a warm welcome.

Contact Sheila Hill on 07717 307 477 or by email sheilageek@gmail.com for more details.

"I thoroughly enjoy the Knit and Natter group, meeting up with like minded ladies."

"I look forward to catching up with all my friends at the group, hearing their news and seeing the lighter side of life for a couple of hours...what a tonic!"

"I found the group when I was looking for someone to finish a project my mum had started before she unexpectedly passed away. I started attending the weekly catch ups and am very slowly learning how to knit. St Peter's is a friendly, supportive group of ladies who do amazing projects for the Community and raise funds for various charities with their talents."

"I don't know what I would do without the group, especially as I live on my own. I really love it"



MEN'S BBB BACON BUTTY BREAKFAST

Men's Breakfasts have been a regular feature at St Peter's for about 35 years. Five Breakfasts have taken place since the last APCM and the cost has stayed at £3 per person. These have been times of encouragement and enjoyable fellowship. 36 men have attended over this period, some of whom are not regular attendees at Sunday services at St Peter's and attendance has averaged about 20.

Speakers have included Stuart Bailey on 'Christians in Politics', Richard Page on 'Out of the Depths into Chaplaincy', Graham Beckett on 'Christians in Business' and Paul Taylor, Manager on 'The Triangle Bookshop and Christian Resource Centre'. The latter speaker set up a bookshop following the breakfast to which all were invited and he thanks the Church for their support of this. There has also been an opportunity for people to share their own stories.

Future Breakfasts have been booked for:

- 11th May with Revd Peter Findley from Forest Kids, Ash
- 5th Oct with a time for sharing of stories
- 9th Nov with Graham Foxwell on Mental Health Issues.

We are grateful for the team who help with cooking, welcoming, leading worship and handling the finances and to Naomi Brown for publicity. We would encourage more men to attend and invite friends.

Roger Howes



As we grow in faith into the women God is calling us to be, I am pleased to say we were blessed last year as we reached out to our ladies from St Peter's Yateley and beyond.

In 2023 we had two breakfast meetings in April and July and then in October we stepped out in faith and held a ladies day conference. We are pleased that this ministry has grown and we now welcome in excess of 50 ladies to each event. Our guest speakers always encourage and challenge us in our Christian walk with the Lord.

This coming year we have two breakfast meetings booked in March and June and a lunch booked for November.

Thank you to all those who give time to support me and Fran Harrison in this ministry.

Martine Silvester-Norton

MORE TO GIVE

The team has been really thrilled that this café style service continues to be well attended and we receive regular feedback on how much everyone enjoys it.

It was our desire from the beginning to keep each meeting fresh and different and we feel that we have achieved this. It was also our desire to give encouragement and opportunities for everyone to try something new or perhaps pick up something abandoned a while ago. We had a great response to our call to “Tell your story and give God the glory” and those stories were shared with the church congregations for three whole months in a row and were a great blessing.

We will continue to share more of our stories in church in the coming months.

A pilot group was run of the Omega Course which is aimed at people wanting to explore what faith means in later life. There were some excellent discussions and pooling of our experiences, another group will take place this year beginning in April.

We believe wholeheartedly that everyone has More to Give no matter where they are on their life journey.

Sue Anderson, Ranjan Emmanuel, Vera Grey

THE OASIS COMMUNITY CHOIR

Singing with joy, singing with praise, singing together! The Oasis Community Choir consists of members of St Peter's Church congregation and the wider community who come together on a Thursday evening between 8pm and 9.15pm in the Oasis Room at St Peter's Church. We enjoy singing a variety of music both sacred and secular, from classical to pop, and have a lot of fun doing so! The group is also there to promote fellowship and we will often start a rehearsal with tea and biscuits and occasionally finish with a visit to the Dog and Partridge!

In May 2023 we gave a concert with local Clarinet Ensemble, Liquorice Stix. There were many songs to lift the spirits, followed by tea and cake and a time to get to know each other. Whilst most of Yateley were experiencing a power cut at the time of the concert, the church itself was not affected and the concert was a great success, raising £460 towards St Peter's Church and Yateley's Vision for Youth. In December we enjoyed singing at the Yateley Christmas Market and preparing some new carols for the St Peter's Church Traditional Carol Service. This year we look forward to singing at the Yateley Industries Summer Fête and raising further funds for our local community.

No music experience is necessary, so do come along and join us!

Kate Cassleton

CREATION CARE GROUP REPORT

The Creation Care group stopped functioning during the year due to changes in circumstances of most members. However, that does not mean that nothing is happening.

Within the churchyard:

- Hart District Council have carried out their required general management and safety work, including removal of dead or dangerous trees. They also provided a number of young yew trees which have been planted along the boundaries.
- Yateley Society provided surplus tree saplings/whips from the Woodland Trust. These have been planted along the Discoveries and footpath boundaries to replace those that died in the 2022 drought.

The bird boxes were used and broods reared successfully.

Within the community:

- The Eco Fair was run with Yateley Society and Yateley Town Council in June 2023. This year it will be combined with Yateley Town Council's "Feel Good Festival" on September 21st.

Within the church:

- The Fabric Committee is looking at possibilities for insulating the sanctuary ceiling and grant availability for solar panels.

Within 2024:

- We need a new team with time and availability, but above all, enthusiasm.
- Plans to work with other community groups such as the Royal British Legion and Yateley Society to have more resources to care for the churchyard in particular.
- Develop a strategy to work towards our Eco Church Silver award.

Michael Duncalfe





In September 2023, I started as Youth Pastor at St. Peters and have thoroughly enjoyed my time getting to know the young people and their families. We have 6 young people who are committed to coming regularly and a further 3 who come occasionally and love getting stuck in when they are around.

At Christmas we went on a youth and families bowling trip, and had some fun socials, such as roasting marshmallows around the campfire and minute to win it challenges. These have been great to build fellowship and fun into the youth ministry. Last term, during our Bible study time, we looked at some different characters in the Old Testament. We enjoyed looking at what we can learn today from the different characters and how that applies to our own life and faith. This term we are looking at Life Skills and thinking about how God is interested in every part of our lives and wellbeing.

We are excited to launch a new Youth café in April 2024. This will provide a space for young people and a real blessing to our community. We would love for you to pray for this new venture.

Chloe Pollington



The St. Peter's WLTDO? events started in February 2016. During that first year the average attendance was 9 dads and 14 children. As the word continues to spread, the popularity of the meetings has increased and 2023 saw an average attendance of 21 dads and 31 children matching the 2019 pre-pandemic figures.

The July event saw a record total of 63 Dads, Granddads and children in attendance where both old and new families enjoyed a fun-filled morning with breakfast butties, snacks, creative craft activities and, of course, the ever-popular bouncy castle. We continue to build bridges with the local community and were thrilled when one of our new WLTDO? families took centre stage as Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus in one of the 2023 Crib services.

WLTDO? creates a space whereby dads, granddads, male carers and their children can have fun and socialise together. It strongly underlines St. Peter's ongoing commitment to 'Reach out in the Presence and Love of Jesus', demonstrating God's love for all people. It is a privilege to lead such a dedicated team enabling this to happen and I thank them for their fantastic commitment and hard work. Together, we look forward to another vibrant and fruitful 12 months.

David Jolly



Wayfinders, our parents and toddlers' group has grown this year. We regularly have over 40 children aged 0-4, brought by their parents, grandparents and a number of childminders (our record number is 53!)

It is a joy to watch the children grow and develop through singing and listening to Bible stories, doing a variety of crafts, and playing with a vast array of toys.

Over 90% of those who attend the group do not attend church, so it is such a special ministry. We pray for the children by name, that God will produce the fruit in their lives as they hear the Bible stories and sing about God's love.

We are always looking for volunteers to come alongside the parents, to chat and share their joys and concerns. Please feel free to message me, or any of our team members if you have a heart for families and time to give.

Gill Weeks

"Jesus is the light of the world," and there is no better place to experience this than by spending a Monday morning at Wayfinders. Run at St Peter's Church by a group of wonderful ladies; you will receive a warm welcome whether it's your first time or you are a frequent visitor. Whether you are a parent, Grandparent or special carer to your children, Gill and her team will make you feel like you belong. They go to extra lengths to learn the names of the children who come, care and pray for those children and in turn become your friends.

The morning begins with song time followed by a bible story and appropriate craft. There is then time for free play and conversation. (Plus a bonus coffee and biscuit.)

Having attended Wayfinders for many months now, the children that I care for look forward to their morning inside the safe space of St Peter's. Come along and join the fun!

"Wayfinders is a group for under 5's held at St Peter's on Monday mornings. It's very well attended and sometimes even bursting at the seams!

It's run by the loveliest team who grab the children's attention and help them learn and talk about simple bible stories.

There's time for singing, craft and playing and I haven't seen a child attend who hasn't had a lovely time.

It's a very welcoming group and environment which is open to anyone within Yateley and surrounding areas, and sees many people attend who don't often go to church. My toddler looks forward to it every week!"

CONNECT

Connect is a relatively new support group for parents of children with additional needs. We meet in Café 46 every other Tuesday evening to chat and encourage each other, while drinking hot or cold drinks and eating cake!! (brought by Gill!!!)

The group has grown in the last year and we usually have around 4 – 7 coming in an evening and 23 members in our WhatsApp Group.

Being part of this wonderful group of parents is humbling and heart-breaking at times. But it is a privilege to be able to pray for and sometimes with them as they navigate the difficult, sometimes impossible path of getting a fair and appropriate education for their children.

Here is what some of them wrote about the group:

“I have found a safe space where I can completely relate to other parents.”

“Gives us an opportunity to learn and share experiences with others. We are all made to feel cared for and have met new people through the group who really understand in ways that no-one else does. I have a new tribe thanks to this group.”

“This group saved me at what was a very dark period of my life. Parenting an autistic child can be lonely and desperate, but this group gave me hope and friendship and restored faith in Christ’s community of wonderful volunteers.”

“Lovely to be able to meet parents in similar situations, to advise and listen in times of need. Feeling understood helps me to feel less lonely on this complication journey. Sometimes coming along for a cuppa, cake and well- needed laugh is the highlight of my week.”



KIDZ CHURCH & MINI CHURCH

We have a dedicated team of leaders who plan and lead Kidz Church every month. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work and love for the children in our groups.

Although we have over 40 children on our register, we usually have between 8 and 21 children on a Sunday morning.

From April last year, we were teaching the children about Moses, Joshua and King David. From September we have been following the adult themes, so re-visiting the stories we did last year of God’s big story from the Old Testament to the New.

In September we started a group for under 4s in Bethany lounge. We call the group Mini church and we meet on the 1st and 3rd Sundays until we get more leaders. We have had between 2 and 6 children, sometimes with their parents. We have a story, godly play, retelling the story, some songs and a craft. This is a special ministry, and we would welcome more helpers to plan or lead this group.

OPEN THE BOOK

It is almost ten years since a team first set out from St Peter's to run Open the Book assemblies in local primary schools. Team members have come and gone during that time but our weekly visit to Newlands School has remained constant throughout. Since December 2022 we have also been welcomed regularly into Cranford Park School.

Our mission is to present Bible stories to the children, many of whom miss out on the important experience of good storytelling. Material is provided by the Bible Society. This year we are using our fifth set of stories! All of them will teach lessons that are important to us in our Christian lives.

But it's not a passive experience for the children! They are invited to participate by taking on roles, dressing up as characters in the stories and reading some of the lines themselves. We have a vast collection of costumes and props, as well as cue cards with words and phrases for the whole school to call out so that they are taking an active part in the story as well.

There are regular encounters with children who recognise us out of school, which we regard as a privilege and a sign that what we try to share with them has found its mark. Every session is prefaced with prayer, including thanks that we feel very blessed to be able to sow the seeds of God's word into so many young lives. It is a joy for all of us, as part of a dedicated and creative team, to see these eager young people inspired to use their imaginations as they act out such wonderful Bible stories.

We would be grateful for your prayer support as we visit the schools and prepare our assemblies on Wednesday mornings—thank you.

Margaret Keane, Sue Anderson, Mike Manisty, Gill Weeks, Gail Ollason.



