



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

**THE BRIDGE**

# THE BRIDGE

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# VICAR'S LETTER

Personally, this was the year of returning to strength and health, as well as starting to re-engage with passions and ideas. 2023 was a year about returning to “normal,” whilst moving into new things. For example, I stopped being the parent of primary school children. These lines in the sand of “transition” are important but actually many things stay the same. I’m still in the same parental role but the context has shifted slightly.

It felt like we relaunched our churches in 2023 and regained the strength that we had in 2019. So it was a year of transition, but also returning to and continuing in “normal”. We’re still re-emerging, building teams and getting used to giving and serving again.

As we came back together in many ways and rebuilt in many ways, we were rebuilding our confidence in God whilst taking time to heal and overcome all that had come our way. We are in the middle of repenting and believing (Mark 1:15). Some of us are trying to have the confidence to step out again after disappointment, others having felt stifled and stuck by external events are now being liberated.

It’s possible to debate long and hard as to whether it is possible to change the mind of God. It’s interesting to look at key figures in the Bible; Abraham (Gen 18), Moses (Exodus 32) and many of the prophets. They seemed to be able to convince God to change His ideas or targets or to know that He was saying one thing to produce a different effect: repentance. Yet we know that God is unchangeable and unchanging and knows all things. He sees the end from the beginning. He has a grand plan that nobody can thwart. He’s already won. So this has been a year of endings and beginnings. We have moved forwards in key ways.

It’s been a real joy to see the Garden of Hope, Soup Lunch, Memory Café, Dandelions and other events in Canley and Westwood appear like spring bulbs pushing through the surface. We’ve added new team members and expanded roles; having a whole year of Erin with us has been a great gift.

We’ve also said goodbye to Sarah and the Ashelby family. There have been many momentous endings and beginnings which I think will have huge repercussions over the coming five years and we continue to be a church that not only works in our space but sends out to ripple across the city and beyond.

We have also welcomed many back to church, especially the Ahmad family; fruitful missionaries returning to join us as we walk into a new season.

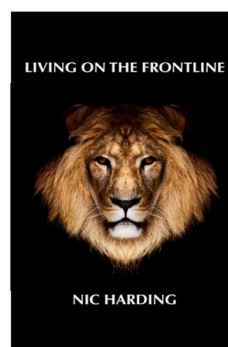
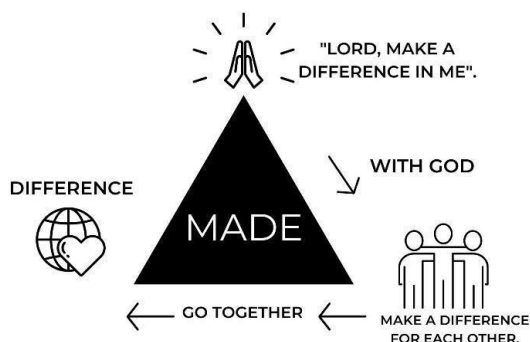
We serve and love a God who by His very nature is relational. Everything good grows from relationship. It hurts when we say goodbye, but we know that new faith relationships are always around the corner as we partner and share faith.

Beginning a relationship in support and prayer, then putting on a worship event together gave me a new friend in Steve Elton. This alone would have been a very good outcome, but it would not have made it into my report to the church! Instead, what grew from that friendship was an idea from God's heart, that Hope Springs and St John's join and hopefully "go forth and multiply", "being sent on our way by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:4).

Relational support received from and given to St James (Fletchamstead / Tile Hill) via various relationships has also led to further partnership, planning to join The Bridge from 2025 while we seek to appoint an Associate Vicar for St James and The Bridge in 2024. We change and transition in community, knowing that to be a growing organism is always to be in transition, whether on a personal, family or community level.

After nine years as Vicar here and following the call to pioneer transformation, I'm looking to the academic year of 2024/25 as the point where the trees will have taken root and their strength will have been built to bear much fruit (John 15) as they remain connected to the Lord.

I am full of hope and faith that we can share God's love effectively together and enter a season of much fruitfulness. However, I am also very aware of the spiritual battle we are walking into. A battle where we have the capacity to overcome if we will choose to live by our call:



This means each one of us choosing to become self-feeding disciples of Jesus, giving and receiving in committed relationships and communities, expressing our faith together in ways that bring others to know Jesus and bring the Kingdom.

I'm inviting all of us to read and put into practice my good friend, Dr Nic Harding's practical book *Living on the Frontline*, about living in the victory that Jesus won for us on the cross and winning the battle we face each day. This is the preparation we need to have life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

The message of sin, the world and the enemy is to give in. To chase comfort and ease, the things of this world. We're tempted to walk away from the battle and allow the call to discipleship to be something we do as an afterthought, an add on.

But this is our primary call for this life and prepares us for the next. Yes, we're bruised, battered and things can be tough, but we live to be a band of siblings on mission together, chinking a glass, looking and seeing the love and shared experience in every eye after a week spent pushing back the darkness in harmony with one-another. As we invite Him to be with us, and we are a community in covenant relationship, we can keep going until we see the victory.

*David*

# **CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT**

## **St Stephen's Church**

It has been a pleasure to serve this year as Churchwardens for St Stephen's, helping where we have been able to encourage the fantastic and inspiring activity that happens in our small part of the world.

God has blessed us with a wonderful group of people that make up the St Stephen's church family and it is great to see the different aspects of the Holy Spirit at work amongst us. As we look at our church services and community outreach activities we are reminded of 1 Corinthians 12.12 and see the demonstration of how, through each of us, He has blessed us with a variety of gifts and talents. Brought together there is a great amount of creativity, care and wisdom that spans generations and cultural boundaries that make our church a special place.

We are grateful to all those that have helped serve the church this year. To Jenni, Anna and the wider Bridge staff team for supporting the church and to Sarah Ashelby for her dedicated leadership of St Stephen's over the years of her training and curacy. We will be praying for Sarah as she moves on to her new role as Rector at All Saints, Allesley.

We look forward to 2024 when Erin Gilmour will be joining us as Associate Minister. We are excited for what God has in store. God is good.

*Tom and Katie*

## **St John's Church**

Throughout 2023, we have seen a lot of change in St John's. Erin has worked so hard to help us become more missional and championed the church to be active in this.

We had great success in our “Afternoon in the Garden” event, even with the rain and finishing in the church! Later in the year, we came together for Bonfire night with volunteers making sure there was an incredible firework display and of course the hospitality of our community ensuring we were fed and watered.

Soup lunch has gone from strength to strength, now to the point that it will look to start its own Alpha course in 2024!

We are blessed that while Erin will be working less with St John’s in 2024, she is staying in The Bridge and will continue to bless our communities.

This year, we also came together to see Caroline ordained priest and are thankful for her work in the Garden of Hope. This is a unique and special place for many in our church and it has really allowed us to encounter God in new and exciting ways.

In 2024 we will finally be able to get the flat roof replaced and watertight! We are so thankful to the team who came to help make this happen, and their continuing efforts towards looking at the pitched roof and the vision for the church as a whole.

Next year we will also be blessed to have Hope Springs church come and join us, exploring their future with us. I know many within the church welcome the opportunity for a 3rd Sunday service again and are intrigued and interested in how Hope Springs approach worship and church. We see this as a fantastic opportunity for both churches to learn and grow together for the glory of God’s kingdom.

David has been preparing and will take his Sabbatical in 2024. With the change in recent years, we encourage and pray for rest and rejuvenation

for David. The role of priest is not easy, and we pray that during this time David can draw closer to God and come back with a new vision and energy for our churches.

Our communities are growing vibrant and we have many looking to volunteer in the wider life of the church (though we would always appreciate more). We continue to pray for direction and growth and be Spirit-led in our future.

*Ben and Carolyn*



# JOINT COUNCIL REPORT

The purpose of the Joint Council is to work with the Vicar to advance the whole mission of the Church in the parishes of Canley and Westwood. It is a registered charity, and its members are the charity's trustees. They are:

Clergy (ex-officio members)

- David Hammond, Vicar
- Erin Gilmour, Associate Minister
- Sarah Ashelby, Curate
- Caroline Hammond, Curate

Elected members (Base, year of the APCM when their term ends)

- Laura Dawson (Canley, 2026)
- Tom Hickinbottom (St Stephen's Churchwarden, 2024)
- Matt Jermyn (Canley, 2025)
- Jonathan Martin (Canley, 2024)
- Ben Packwood (St John's Churchwarden, 2026)
- Michelle Robinson (St John's, 2024)
- Jan Sayer (Burton Green, 2025)
- Jeff Smailes (St John's, 2026)
- Graham Thomas (St John's, 2025)

Four members are elected from Canley, four from St John's and one from Burton Green, and the elected members must include at least one Churchwarden from each parish. Members are elected for three years at a time, and three of the nine elected members will complete their three-year term each year.

During 2023 the Joint Council met seven times. Topics discussed included student, youth and childrens' work, building and roof repairs, staff recruitment and clergy calling. Safeguarding, finances and Eco-church are standing items on every agenda.

# **SAFEGUARDING REPORT**

Safeguarding continues to be a high priority for the Bridge as we believe that keeping all people safe is of paramount importance.

- During 2023 we continued to have a Safeguarding Team made up of Laura Dawson, our Bridge Safeguarding Officer, Emily Newbury, St Stephen's Safeguarding Champion and Rebecca Torpey, St John's Safeguarding Champion.
- Safeguarding continues to be a key agenda item at the Joint Council and the leadership team have ensured that we are compliant with the Church of England's Promoting a Safer Church Policy.
- Jenni Dunne has continued to focus on updating volunteer's DBS checks this year and we have made some significant progress in this area. There has been an improvement in our figures for Safeguarding Training. Thank you to the volunteers who act promptly when they have received emails asking them to complete either of these tasks.

# STAFFING REPORT

Staffing at The Bridge continues to change with each season (and 2023 has seen plenty of change!), but it also presents us with lots of opportunities. The team has continued to grow and develop across 2023 with several answers to prayer for provision.

During 2023 we said;

- a goodbye to Ros as Administrator at St John's
- a hello to Liz as voluntary Administrator at St John's
- a goodbye to Alison as Children's Discipleship Enabler at St John's
- a hello to Anna as Children's Discipleship Enabler across The Bridge (and then a temporary 'see you later' as she went on adoption leave)
- a hello to Amy as our Children's Discipleship Enabler Adoption Cover
- a temporary 'see you later' to Sarah as Operations Minister she went on maternity leave
- a hello to Beth as Operations Manager Maternity Cover

We are excited for 2024 and all that God is doing and will continue to do. He has been so faithful through every trial and adversity, as well as in the good and fruitful times. In all situations our staff is growing together and we see the goodness and faithfulness of God worked out in each one of them.

# **ST STEPHEN'S CHURCH, CANLEY**

## **Congregation**

2023 has marked a year of deepening connections and exploring new horizons in faith and community engagement at St Stephen's. It has also seen Sarah Ashelby finish her curacy placement with us. We have been richly blessed by Sarah's leadership during her curacy and the seeds of her investment in people will live on into the life of the church and surrounding community for years to come.

Our church family has shown tremendous support for one another and for the wider Canley area through various initiatives. Special thanks are extended to those who have dedicated their time and skills, particularly through volunteering that keeps our church a welcoming and nurturing place to be.

We have welcomed several guest speakers during the year helping us to connect more with our mission partners and have enjoyed working together to achieve a bronze Eco Church award which included a sermon series on creation care. The church continues to explore faith in Jesus in a family friendly atmosphere where everyone is welcome.

## **Connect Groups and Contact Groups**

The Connect and Contact Groups have continued to be vital in offering spaces for more intimate fellowship, prayer and bible study. These groups have been instrumental in facilitating personal growth and stronger bonds within our church family, playing a role in the ongoing process of renewal, spiritual growth and providing a structure of support to our church family.

Our two children's Connect groups have continued in 2023 supported by Anna Martin and team. These have been instrumental in helping our young people explore faith through the themes of construction and creativity. These groups have been very popular and have shown a real opportunity for mission in our young people with many of them wanting to invite friends.

## **Outreach and Community Engagement**

Our commitment to embodying the "MADE in Canley" mission — making a difference every day — has continued. Our outreach efforts have included:

- Litter picks in Canley
- Creative family engagements during school holidays (Hobby Hub)
- Continued support for our local food bank and food hub services
- Active participation in community enhancement projects, such as the Canley Parade and Canley Big Lunch
- Our ever popular Nativity Trail which sees many local people coming to the church building for an interactive trail following the story of the nativity
- Our alternative carol service, Carol'oke, which mixes traditional carols with performances from our talented church family members, young and old(er)

Our outreach activities have not only provided practical support but have also opened avenues for meaningful conversations about faith, hope and love. The church's involvement in local governance and community planning initiatives, including the Canley Playing Out programme, underscores our commitment to being an integral part of our community's fabric.

As we reflect on 2023, we are filled with gratitude for blessings we have experienced. We move forward with anticipation for the ways in which God will continue to work in and through St Stephen's Church, Canley, to impact our congregation and the wider community positively. We are also excited for the start of Erin Gilmour's ministry of leadership at St Stephen's beginning in 2024.

*Tom Hickinbottom*

*Churchwarden*

## **Children & Youth**

This has been a year of some change in the team. Anna continued as St Stephen's Children's Worker until she was appointed as the Bridge Children Discipleship Enabler. Then in August she went on adoption leave and Jenni stepped in to help coordinate and keep things running smoothly. Amy was then appointed as Children Discipleship Enabler Adoption Cover in late November.

Throughout the year, Kid's Connect groups continued. After a break in the autumn term, we relaunched with our Christmas special and are excited to see them fully running again in 2024 with a vision to grow into youth groups. It has been a joy to see how our children have engaged through these groups, as well as exploring prayer together.

Our outreach to our local families has also been a wonderful area of growth and engagement. We held our Easter Trail and Nativity Trail in St Stephen's which were both very well attended with around 100 coming along to hear about the Easter and Christmas stories. Hobby Hub continued (crafts, games, refreshments and films during school holidays) which was a huge hit with the local community. We were also able to take a trip to see The Gruffalo courtesy of Warwick Arts Centre as outreach to Canley families.

Thank you so much to the wonderful team of volunteers who make all of this possible. The team at St Stephen's looks forward to all God has in store for children and their discipleship journeys in 2024.

*Jenni Dunne*

# ST JOHN'S CHURCH, WESTWOOD

## Overview

It is a great privilege to write this report, sitting at my desk already three months into 2024. I feel very encouraged when I look back over 2023 and remember where God has been at work in St John's.

We started with a strong focus on prayer with our monthly meetings, laying a foundation of prayer for new growth. As we moved through the year it was great to see the church begin to regain strength and new ideas and plans began to emerge. It was not an easy year by any stretch of the imagination, but as we continued to press into God we began to feel as though we were beginning to slowly come out of the fog into a wide open space.

Dandelions, Memory Cafe and Art Group continue to be a place of connection and reaching out. Soup Lunch, which was launched in December 2022, also continues to be a great initiative where lots of people from different demographics enjoy the welcome, comfort and companionship of a shared lunch.

Our Connect groups, now established, have become places of deep relationship and discipleship and we started huddles for those who had taken leadership roles. We joined together as a whole Bridge Wide family in our "pilgrimage" to New Wine (I say pilgrimage as it did feel like that at times, thanks to the great British weather!). Our 'Afternoon in the Garden', which was actually inside, was a great success and gave us an opportunity to welcome the local community into the church.

The beginning of September marked the re-energisation of our kid's group with a new curriculum and lots of new leaders. We also launched



our Sunday youth group which began to meet in The Shack during our morning services.

Autumn also brought with it change as we welcomed Beth, Operations Manager Maternity Cover, and Amy, Children's Discipleship Adoption Cover, both who have settled into life at The Bridge really well and have both brought with them fresh energy and life. We announced our exploration of partnering with and hopefully eventually joining with Hope Springs... This is to be worked out throughout 2024.

Autumn's highlight was our wonderful Bonfire Night in the Garden of Hope with hot dogs, hot chocolate and many many sparklers. We even had a fireworks display! Lots of people joined in, brought their friends and we even had our new students bring their housemates along. It was a brilliant evening and one I hope can be repeated again in 2024!

I am so thankful that, although at times difficult, I spent 2023 leading St John's. I am thankful to my development team, Ben, Carolyn, Jeff, Sarah and Kathryn who have worked hard behind the scenes to support and champion the numerous initiatives and changes throughout the year.

I am also very thankful for each and every person who has tirelessly given up their time and energy to serve St John's, be that in front of church, with the children and young people, making St John's a welcoming and hospitable place. You are all so valued. Thank you!

May 2024 be a year of new life and growth!

*Erin Gilmour*

## **Students**

In 2023 the students began to work out what sustaining a small group looked like for them without a student worker in post. They've built deep and meaningful relationships and organise socials for people of peace to join in with. In the summer we advertised for a Student Worker and unfortunately were unable to recruit for the role. Erin and a wonderful team of volunteers, including myself, Kath and Andy Poole, Jeff Smailes and Jonathan and Hannah Lidbetter poured time and energy into our welcome to St John's with events, goody bags and attending church fairs and searches. We've introduced two monthly rhythms, Sunday lunches with members of the wider church family, Carolyn Howarth taking a lead on this, and also a monthly event led by the student team for students to engage with.

The student community has grown in size and the new year brings new life with Mark Ahmed taking a lead as the team recalibrates to listen to what God is saying for the new season and covering it in prayer. Campus is full of open minds and hearts and there is hope to see our student ministry grow as we equip and enable mission amongst students.

*Sarah Packwood*

## **Children & Youth**

This year has been one of change throughout the children's team at St John's. Alison brilliantly led children's work until Easter. Following Alison, Erin led children's work as Associate Minister of St John's and in late November, Amy was then appointed as Children Discipleship Enabler Adoption Cover. Amy has been instrumental in coordinating children's work going into the new year and we're excited to see what 2024 brings.

Groups flourished in 2023 to very large amounts, with some sessions being attended by up to 92 children! Our 0-5 team have enjoyed leading sessions throughout the year. This group was led by Min and a group of super leaders; Caroline G, Anya and Olya, as well as a group of volunteers who helped support on an adhoc basis.

Our 5-11 group have developed their relationship with God as well as each other during the year. The children have enjoyed a range of sessions including learning about the Heroes of the Bible and going out together into the Garden of Hope. We have a wonderful group of committed volunteers who help us to run these sessions. We are so appreciative for all who give their time to nurture the faith of our children at St John's.

Rebecca leads a great team of volunteers, running our mid-week babies and children's group; Dandelions. This group has a large number of parents and children who attend most weeks, often going on to attend other events run by The Bridge.

In November we had a Bonfire Party at St John's, which was well attended by lots of Bridge families and their friends which they invited. It was a really special time to celebrate together and reach families in our community.

We are grateful for the amazing support of Susie and Nick Romney, with Rebecca who lead a spectacular pre-school 'Pop-Up' nativity service with the support of the Dandelion team helping with the craft and the Refresh team helping with the refreshments. It was really well attended and was a huge hit.

Throughout this year we have been praying for provision in youth work. We launched our Sunday youth groups in The Shack and are excited to further grow our youth ministry in 2024. Looking back, we are so grateful to

everyone who made children and youth work possible at St John's. You are all wonderful and it wouldn't have been possible without you!

## **The Garden of Hope**

It has been a great year for The Garden of Hope project. There is a fantastic team of volunteers (which has grown this year), who turn up regularly on a Monday morning for coffee and gardening. Since people have taken responsibility for different areas the whole thing has become a lot more manageable (Kathryn Hammond's brilliant idea!).

It has been great to work with people who have good gardening knowledge as this is not an area of strength for me. The gardening team have even continued to meet through much of the winter this year and surprisingly Mondays have been mostly dry.

It has been great to develop the spiritual side of the project over the last year through running a number of retreats including: a couple of art retreats, gardening retreats, a walking retreat, a reading retreat, a reset retreat and even retreats for a couple of other churches. These retreats have been attended by both Christians and those exploring faith. We have also hosted events including: a couple of sessions for the Diocesan New Worshipping Communities Taster Day, Dandelions Toddler group in the summer, the Christian Union Summer Ball, two Ukrainian afternoon Tea Parties, a Palm Sunday service, various Community Sundays and a wonderful Bonfire Night event where we met loads of new people from our local community.

Since the wooden signs went up last year (thanks Cliff), we have seen many people passing through the garden including people of different faiths and nationalities – often commenting on how peaceful they find the Garden of

Hope. It has been great to hear such positive feedback from many people who are frequent visitors. We recently received this email:

*"I just want to drop a line and thank you very much for creating and maintaining the Garden of Hope. It is a lovely serene area, and I have been enjoying visiting it often!"*

The funding bids were successful (thank you Jesus!), so we have been able to invest some money into creating a raised beds area in liaison with the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, who have referred a couple of people to grow vegetables. We have also brought a couple of sheds and are in the process of purchasing a sit on mower. It has been wonderful to watch the Garden of Hope grow and develop as people care for it. We are excited for all that God will do this year in the Garden of Hope and one of our key next developments will be to put up an outdoor post-mounted notice board so that we can advertise retreats etc. to visitors of the garden. Look out for this year's retreat programme coming soon...

If you'd like to get involved in this project please email:

[caroline@thebridgecoventry.org](mailto:caroline@thebridgecoventry.org)

If you have any furniture in good condition, cuttings of plants you can offer, boulders, stones (any size), bricks or slabs please do get in touch. Or you'd like to financially give to the work of the project you can do so

here: <https://thebridgecoventry.churchsuite.com/donate/fund/ojcmchjg>

*Caroline*

# **TRINITY CHURCH, BURTON GREEN**

When we (John and Becky Finlayson, Dave and Isabel Merrifield, and Jan Sayer, later joined by Kathryn Hammond) agreed to take over leading the church in Burton Green, more recently known as Trinity Church Burton Green, we were excited by the history of worship, prayer and prophecy over the village (dating back to the first services held in the school hall in 1909). It is a place that has been prayed over for much of the last 115 years.

Before the pandemic, we had a small (about 20+ regulars) but flourishing congregation. During the pandemic, we thrived as a church on zoom, meeting every week online on Sundays; there was real support, care and prayer for all. Since the pandemic, we have lost many people who used to attend Trinity Church Burton Green. Some died, some moved away, some were called by God to serve in other churches (including St John's), and a few just never returned.

In January 2024, the decision was taken to stop meeting as a congregation in Burton Green. This was a sad and hard decision, but one that we all agreed on. Nearly all the remaining attendees will rejoin first-Sunday rhythms at St John's.

As we reflect on our time in leadership, our thoughts are also drawn to celebrate those that have been part of the congregation and leaders over the years: Mike and Dorinda Holt, John and Barbara Gardner, Jerry and Sue Marshall, Alison Goodall, and Carol Currington immediately spring to mind. We honour them and all those who went before, for their service and faithfulness.

We confidently trust that God's kingdom will come in Burton Green, in His time. And maybe, in time, the church in Burton Green will once again be replanted. Of the leadership team, John and Becky, will no longer be part

of St John's, sensing God's calling elsewhere, though they will continue to live as incarnational missionaries in the village. Dave and Isabel are exploring possibilities with God. Kathryn and Jan will continue working and worshipping at St John's as before.

# **FABRIC REPORT**

## **St Stephen's, Canley**

This report outlines the condition and status of the fabric of St Stephen's Canley for the current year, noting that no material changes or alterations have been made to the property. It serves to document the upkeep and preservation efforts in maintaining the church in accordance with the guidelines and requirements of the Church of England.

### **Building Exterior**

- **Roof and Gutters:** The roof tiles and gutters have been inspected and cleaned. The flat roof above the vestry is likely in need of repair or replacement in the near future.
- **Walls and Windows:** The walls and stained-glass windows remain in good condition. The window in the nave has a small hole. The toilet windows are in need of replacement and will likely need to be before next winter as the wooden frames are in poor condition.
- **Doors:** The main entrance and side doors are in reasonable condition, the vestry door was fully replaced during the year and the other doors remained.

### **Building Interior**

- **Nave and Sanctuary:** Both the nave and sanctuary are in reasonable condition, though they could warrant redecoration. The floor in the sanctuary is in need of replacement as elements of the laminate flooring are lifting up and causing a trip hazard. This has been mitigated with tape for the time being. The chairs are in good condition.
- **Electrical Systems:** The electrical systems, including lighting and heating, have been regularly tested and are fully operational. The



kitchen circuit is limited in its capacity and would warrant an upgrade when possible.

- Plumbing: There are no known issues with the plumbing.

## **Churchyard**

- Landscaping: The churchyard is well-kept, with regular maintenance of the grounds. The pathways and lawns are in good condition, with no significant changes.
- Boundary Walls and Gates: The boundary walls and gates have been inspected and are in stable condition, requiring no immediate attention.

## **Maintenance**

Routine maintenance tasks have been carried out consistently throughout the year to ensure the preservation of the church's fabric. This includes cleaning, inspections, and minor repairs as necessary.

## **St John's, Westwood**

Two great working parties took place during 2023 to keep the grounds in good shape. Many thanks to all who turned up and helped.

Concerning repairs and renovation to the flat roof - all approvals are in place, grant funding has been secured and a contractor has been appointed. Work is due to start in January 2024.

There was a whole church meeting about the need for a main roof renovation project. Preparation work for this continued with a number of 'expert' surveys being commissioned. Meetings were held with the Diocese fundraising team and building project section to understand what support

was available and how to prepare for such a major project. A whole church meeting is planned for March 2024.

Particular thanks for the ongoing service of Dave Cass and Phil Dunkerley who carry out many minor fixes as well as general maintenance jobs.

# FINANCIAL REPORT

## Finance Report – full details in the year end accounts

The Joint Council of the Bridge Benefice, Coventry has now been in operation for 3 years. The Charity Commission has sanctioned that the existing charity registration of St John's can be re-named 'The Bridge Benefice Coventry' whilst keeping the existing charity number. The accounts of the two Parishes of St John's Westwood and St Stephen's Canley were transferred to the Joint Council on 1st January 2021 and this is the report of the combined accounts. The Bridge has three bases namely St John's Westwood, St Stephen's Canley and Trinity Burton Green.

The Bridge Benefice was in deficit by £4,654 (all funds) for 2023. The performance for unrestricted funds only is as follows:-

In comparison to 2022 and the forecast budget income the following changes occurred:

- Planned giving was £214,016 including Gift aid which was below the budget of £259,500 (82% of budget). In 2022 giving was £209,519.
- Gift Aid was £39,575 of the planned giving. In 2022 Gift Aid was £36,297.
- The trading activities of Occasional Offices, room hire and car park rental totalled £16,571 (2022 was £12,269). This was ahead of their combined budget by £6,055 or 58%.
- Overall income was £230,684. This was £39,316 or 14.6% below the planned budget of £270,000 income for the year; however, it was £8,796 above 2022. In 2022 overall income was £221,888.

In comparison to 2022 and the forecast budget expenditure, the following changes occurred:

- The total cost of staff was £75,561. This was 19% below the budget of £93,500. In 2022 it was £88,443.
- Groups and meetings expenditure was £12,075. The budget was £13,540, so came to an underspend of £1,465. In 2022 it was £11,153.
- Spend on buildings, equipment etc. was £55,671, compared to the budget of £50,060. In 2022, £43,974 was spent on buildings etc.
- Parish Share was as planned at £80,000. In 2022 it was £76,225.
- Gifts to supported organisations was on budget at £32,400. In 2022, £22,000 was given to these organisations.
- Overall expenditure was £258,303. Compared to a budget of £270,000, so an underspend of £11,697 or 4%. In 2022 it was £243,865.

Overall, this resulted in a deficit of £27,619 in 2023 on unrestricted funds. In 2022 the deficit was £21,978. This leaves cash in the bank at year end of £28,505 in the general account plus £21,913 in a designated building fund for St John's, so a total of £50,418 in unrestricted funds.

Thus, the finances of The Bridge Benefice are in a weaker position at the end of 2023 with unrestricted and designated funds representing 19.5% of the turnover in 2023 which is above the target range of 10% to 15%. In 2024 the Bridge needs to at least cover costs to sustain a stable financial position.

To grow the continuing work of the church, as we hope to do, we need to encourage some further increases in regular giving.

The buildings at both St Stephen's and St John's require investment:

- At St John's the outcome of the 2020 Quinquennial inspection will require major investment in the fabric of the church building, initially a new flat roof (estimated c£90,000) followed before 2025, where a new roof for the main church building plus associated add-ons will be needed. This is yet to be costed but it is likely to be over £1,000,000.

- At St Stephen's an initial consultation has taken place on the possibility of working with the Canley Community Centre to build a new building which is both a church and a community centre. Further preparatory work will commence in 2024.

God's generosity and blessings are again recognised by the Joint Council as He continues to grow His work, and we continue to seek His will to further develop and grow His kingdom through His churches St John's Westwood, St Stephen's Canley and Trinity Burton Green.

*Jeff Smalles*

## **ELECTORAL ROLLS REPORT**

This report is for the year January to December 2023. The Electoral Roll includes the two congregations of St John's and St Stephen's. We began the year with 151 people on the electoral roll – 114 in St John's and 37 in St Stephen's. In September two people left St John's, so we ended the year with 149 people on the roll – 112 in St John's and 37 in St Stephen's. There were no changes at the time of the APCM in April 2023.0

## **DEANERY REPORT**

David Hammond continued as Area Dean, having stepped into the role in 2022. This year there has been a continued commitment to praying together and building relationships between churches.