

1. Rector's Reflection for All Saints' Annual Church Meeting, March 2024

Let me start where I usually finish – with many heartfelt ‘thank yous’ to those who serve in our church community (and, as always, with apologies for only mentioning each person once – some would appear several times!): to Pat and Barny our brilliant churchwardens; to Ian our fantastic treasurer; to our church stewards (many of whom serve in numerous roles) Amanda, Carolyn, Dawn, Gloria, Paul, Wayne and Virginia, with particular mentions to Ayokunnu and Niki both stepping down for the coming year; to Sylvia, Rosie, Jane L, Philip & Birgitte G, Sue & John R, Philip & Joy D, Pauline W, Paul N, Ron, Allen, Pippa, Joan, Jacqueline, Jane & Eleanor C, Margaret E, Nzube, Teju, the Mitro family, John & Lydia, Samantha, Rachel, Beth and all who've faithfully served on Sundays and at other events and services; and to Nick & Sandra, Brian, Sandy, Trisha, Jovi, Cath S, Giles, Dan H, Afolabi, Justin, the Kingston family, Ann H and David M for their practical skills and support.

... and if I've neglected to mention anyone, please accept my profound apologies!

The above list is a wonderful testimony to the number of people who give their time and energy to our community life as a church family. In a season when many churches are bemoaning the loss of their volunteer culture, ours has grown – at least in breadth.

What would your highlight of the last year at church be? Here's a few which might be in your mind:

- A packed church for Easter Sunday
- The special service for the Coronation
- The new step-free access into church
- The continuing presence and popularity of Tuesday Afternoon Tea
- The Christmas Fayre
- The Epiphany party
- The Lent Course
- Bishop Steven's visit last weekend

There might be a highlight which matters uniquely to you; or it might just be the opportunity to meet with God week-by-week in worship. For all these highlights, both large and small, we give thanks.

I wanted to begin in this way, partly because gratitude is vital for our souls and good for our health, too! But also, because a more general assessment of the year is mixed. There have been many things to celebrate, but there are also significant challenges, as a brief revisit of last year's priorities makes clear.

This time last year, our church was growing quickly, and we set ourselves the task of integrating our newcomers more deeply into the life of the church. Although that has been the case for some people, a couple of whom appear on the list of thank yous above for the first time, sadly the growth we witnessed from 2021-2023 has not only stalled, our regular congregation is now ten or so fewer than it was in February last year. Simply put, numerically we're back to where we were before the pandemic. Our congregation receives many visitors – but only a small proportion settle with us. You could say that we have a wide-open front door (good) and also a wide-open back door (not so good)!

Our second priority was to balance new initiatives with strengthening old ones. Our new Children's Church was the most significant of these re-launches last year and we have five great leaders – however, the presence of a well-organised, fortnightly children's church has not been blessed with many children.

It highlights perhaps our greatest challenge presently: we are failing to reach and appeal to families. When you consider that there are more than 2,500 primary age children in our civil parish of Broughton and MK Village, and another 1,500 or so teenagers, this must give us pause for thought. Younger people are not just the future of the church, they must form a core part of our present, too.

Finally, we stressed the importance of being one community where all can be involved. The challenges inherent in the first two priorities above inevitably place strain on this third priority. If people aren't settling, they aren't serving (and maybe the latter is an important element of the former?). Similarly, if our main weekly worship is not appealing to the whole community, do we need to start something different to run alongside it – for example a service aimed specifically at families? I have always believed deeply in offering worship for everyone – but I don't think we can't meekly accept a situation where only 3-5 children (or two families) attend on Sunday, in an area where a third of the population is under 20.

This year, i.e. right now, I sense we are at something of a fork in the road. And the choice that lies before us is tricky, because one way is easy and the other is harder. The easy road would be to stay much as we are, which is perfectly viable in terms of our survival – at least in the medium term. We have a good core community which can sustain weekly worship on a Sunday with 40-50 attending, a few groups and ministries during the week, half a paid minister and the practical organisation required for a smoothly running church. And before I get onto the harder path, let me stress that these are all good things!

The harder path is more uncertain. It starts with hunger (you could say 'a godly discontent') – a hunger for more of God, and for a new vision of who, what and where God wants us to be over the coming few years. It will involve more toil, more blood, sweat and tears – with no guarantee of success. It will absolutely require us to invest more of ourselves in each other – to notice, to help, to become friends. It will need more prayer, firm hope and greater resilience. It's the difference between being a church which enjoys the Lord's blessing and a church which reveals the Lord's glory. It radiates love, joy and vitality, but – because values like hunger and vision are hard won – it comes at a cost.

And here's the rub: I can't make that choice for you – or, you could say, on your behalf. It's not that I don't want to! But the reality of my role being part-time at two different churches, and with a suite of extra responsibilities in a parish of (now) more than 40,000 people, means that I can back you, resource you, encourage you, pray for you, celebrate your successes, weep as you weep and navigate crises when needed; but the sense of who we are, and what we're about, *must* ultimately come from within us, as a whole community – that is, the body of Christ here in this place.

So, it has to be your decision – as many of you as possible! By God's grace, I will continue to pastor you to the best of my ability, according to your choice – but it's over to you...

With love in Christ, Matt / March 2024

P.S. We don't have to rush into anything! The process itself will be valuable, not just for us as a community, but for each person. It may be that what we need to do first is work out how to make this kind of decision. It may help to try and see our church from different perspectives. It's natural for us to think of church from 'my' perspective. But what about others in the church? Or your neighbours? Or God? How does God see All Saints? What does he celebrate and what does he long for?

One caveat, though – not to decide is effectively to take the easy fork. But if that is the ultimate outcome, may it be the fruit of a choice, made prayerfully and faithfully before the Lord, and not by default. And may the Lord bless us and keep us, make his face shine upon us, be gracious to us, and grant us peace. Amen.

2. All Saints Church, Milton Keynes Village - Churchwardens Report 2023- 2024

Over the year we have been encouraged by the growth and diversity in church attendance and are responding with increased sharing of ministry skills to enable more opportunities for time to grow our faith and love of God.

The Coronation of King Charles III on Saturday 6th May 2023 was marked with a special Commemoration Service in Church the following day 7th May and cream teas at Wavendon Rectory in the afternoon.

During the year births, deaths and marriages have been marked by appropriate life services and have included the funerals of church member Cynthia Kelly in July and more recently former churchwarden Kathy Peters who passed away on 1st January 2024.

We have continued to provide holy communion by means of individual plates and cups. Whilst this creates additional work in preparing and clearing away, feedback from the congregation suggests this method is preferable to a return to sharing a common cup.

Sharing Churchwarden duties between Barny and Pat strongly supported by Sylvia and other church members enables the weekly pattern of services and other meetings to run smoothly. This report predominantly covers the main areas of maintenance and practical developments in the church building and churchyard for the year and challenges for future projects. As last year managing the most cost effective and efficient use of the heating in church perhaps remains one of our most immediate financial challenges. A careful blend of use of storage heaters and high-level radiant heaters to ensure the building is as warm as possible for services and other occasions is the main focus requiring planning and timing combined with weather predictions.

Projects underway last year now successfully accomplished.

- **Step free access through the south porch 2023**



The contractor Mick Bunning of Totternhoe Stone Restoration Ltd started work 21st September and completed the works to the entrance porch and floor levels on 10th October, removing porch flooring and reducing depth to give level access to church nave. Electrics were neatly laid under floor level and internal flooring re tiled. The porch floor has been laid with sawn York stone to the outer threshold with an Aco channel installed to the outside of the porch threshold and connected to the existing rainwater drainage. A new oak bottom rail the same width as the door was fixed to the base of the existing door and stained to match. A brush seal was added to the inner face. The porch gates have been re hung. The work was completed carefully and with precision, good communication throughout and in a timely manner. The church remained open for Sunday services with access to church via the side gate and cloakroom door on the north of the church, the area being carefully supervised

for access. Overall, this is an excellent outcome to the project, improving access to church and gratefully received by the congregation and visitors.

- **Yew tree maintenance on church main access path, application granted and work carried out**

Following a series of communications with MK Council permission was granted to cut back the yew trees on the church main path in line with the edge of the path. This was successfully completed 1st May 2023 and the shape of the trees will be maintained by annual trimming. The cut edge adjacent to the path is slowly greening over and the space recovered is a great improvement for access to the church.



- **Second Garden of Rest, NE corner of churchyard, in use and bench sited.**



The base for the bench was laid in May 2023 and the bench once treated fixed in position shortly afterwards. It is now ready for additional maintenance work to protect the finish.

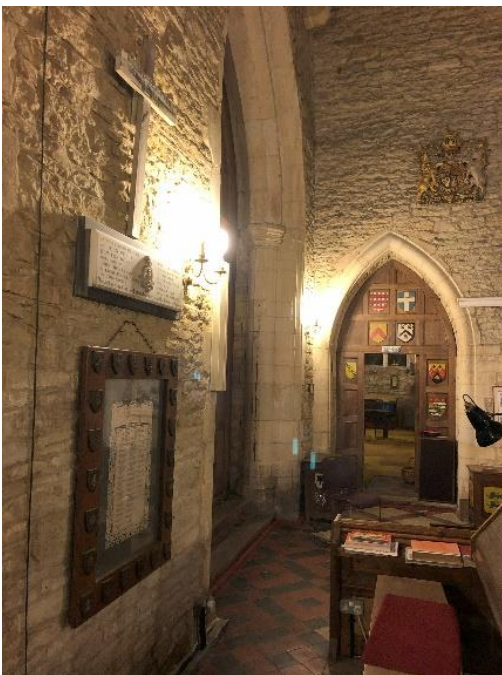


- **Maintenance of gutters, downpipes and drains.**

In February 2023 the gutters and gulleys were thoroughly cleared, cleaned and downpipes checked. As determined previously all were flowing well with the exception of the one to the West of the main porch, which continued to flood. As part of the work to lower the porch floor and ensure adequate drainage the drain west of the porch was further investigated. The drain running to the soakaway was entirely blocked with tree roots from the yew tree by the west churchyard wall. **A new soakaway** has now been installed with fresh pipework from the drain adjacent to the church porch and is working well. Missing and broken Porch roof tiles were also replaced repairing the areas that had failed.



- **Church sound system**

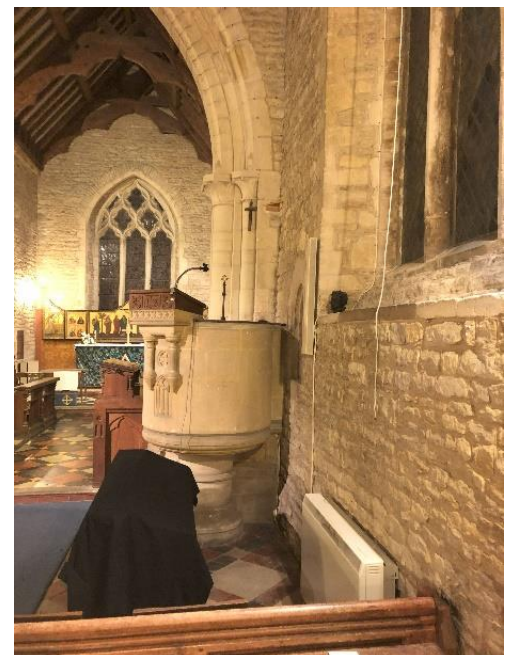


The church audio system is around 25 years old and has deteriorated over its life. We are receiving more requests for recorded music, particularly at weddings and funerals and occasionally need to provide recorded accompaniment on Sundays when none of our team of dedicated and talented musicians is available. The original system was not designed for this purpose. Due to the cost of a full replacement, the upgrade will be undertaken in phases.

In February 2024, we completed the first phase, to replace the speakers, which have suffered from the cold and damp. Two unobtrusive speakers at the front of the church have replaced four units that were in the window recesses. Advances in audio technology mean that the new “line-array” speakers can cover the whole church from just these two positions.

Feedback from multiple members of the congregation shows that the upgrade has noticeably improved the sound quality. We are grateful to Broughton Trust for matching the contribution from church funds and covering half of the cost.

Two further phases costing around £4,000 each will be required to replace the mixer and the wireless microphones and will be undertaken as funds allow. In the event of a complete failure of the system, we would have to bring this forward.



Other works:

- **Routine maintenance and improvements**

We have replaced the spotlights in the chancel with low energy versions which provide a more pleasant and even light over this beautiful part of our church.

- **New stand for advent candles from upcycled lectern**



For many years, our advent wreath has been supported on a thin candle stand. It was inherently unstable and was a safety concern, particularly when we welcome members of our children's church to light the candles. The candles themselves did not fit properly in the sconces and frequently fell out and broke.



Using the base of the former lectern, we have made a new advent candle and wreath holder, which as well as being much more stable, has new, wider brass sconces which support thicker candles which last longer and are less prone to dripping.

- **Maintenance inside and outside the church**

Maintenance has continued with the dedicated work of stewards and mowing team to ensure the building and churchyard are in good order. Thanks to Wayne, Paul and Barny for their work with the maintenance of the church building including a team for high level cleaning 17th August. Brian has effectively continued to coordinate the churchyard mowing rota. We extend thanks to John Fry as he takes a break from mowing due to health reasons and **encourage new volunteers to join the team this year**. Thanks also to David Monk for his help with the weekly refuse arrangements of wheelie bin collections now enhanced by the new refuse and recycling bins from MK Council. The Saturday Churchyard working group in September 2023 and additional time from folk on weekdays has focussed on essential clearing of ivy, weeds and overgrown graves ensuring the churchyard is an inviting area for rest and reflection. Maintaining a weed free accessible 1.5metre wide church path requires labour intensive attention! **The path edges need redefining and the gravel replenishing. A project for the Spring.**

- **Welcoming and supporting**

Welcoming NHS walking groups for refreshments mid-week is a regular part of supporting our community. A team of volunteers in church supply hot drinks, cake and biscuits to 40-60 walking visitors as they end their exercise session. The donations received are a valuable assistance to church running costs and improvements contributing over £1000 in the last two years.



Our Dorcas group continues to meet fortnightly knitting blankets for the Ukrainian appeal and victims of conflicts in the middle east. New participants always welcome.

Huge thanks to Sylvia for all her support with welcoming before services, arranging refreshments after services and at other times and for co-ordinating Dorcas.

- **We are looking to improve the facilities for the provision of refreshments in church.**

A simple servery at the back of the church providing heating for water, washing up facilities and storage will make the preparation, serving and clearing of refreshments much safer, more accessible, simpler and easier to manage. Costings to be further assessed.

- **Concrete Calves Wind Band**

Concrete Calves meet each week in church as a not-for-profit community group. They are a place for beginner woodwind players to come together and share in the joy of making music as part of a group. Their rehearsals culminate in concerts throughout Milton Keynes to raise funds for selected charities. Summer and Christmas concerts have successfully performed this year in Church and are a welcome part of our community involvement.

- **Annual health and safety requirements** have been addressed through the year:

Lightning conductor inspection and test completed November 2023; NB annual test date varies to enable testing in varying climatic conditions as seasons affect readings. Annual fire equipment check and portable appliance testing completed February 2024. The 5-year fixed wire electrical inspection certificate January 2020 is valid until 2025.

For reassurance and legislative compliance there is confirmation of the maintenance of the formal areas required recorded in the documents below:

- the terrier – a list of land belonging to the church
- the inventory – a list of all the items belonging to the church, a recent survey focussing on a few items to be published this year.
- the logbook – a detailed record of all the alterations, additions and repairs carried out in relation to the church, its land and its contents.

These have all been maintained to ensure the day to day functioning of the Church and are available as hard copies in the church.

We continue to pray for guidance and energy to build on the new life in and around church and to extend our pastoral work. We give thanks for the leadership from Matt and our expanding church team in this ever-growing parish.

Patricia Sawyer

Barny Daley

Churchwardens

March 2024

3. All Saints' Church, Milton Keynes Village – Annual Church Meeting 2024

Electoral Roll report

Church membership stands at 68 adults and 22 children of members – this compares to 71 and 22 in 2023, and 68/21 in 2022. Total membership had been expected to grow last year, however only some of the new attendees have settled with us, which is a pattern we have observed over at least ten years.

The 68 adults identify as 38 Anglican and 26 non-Anglican (with 4 'not stated'). The proportion of non-Anglicans continues to increase, as it has done over the last ten years.

Our reported Electoral Roll is 43 (vs 47 in 2023 and 44 in 2022) – this is calculated in a fairly esoteric but consistent way, to avoid double counting church members with our parent denominations.

Anglican	38
Methodist	5
URC	4
Baptist	2
Roman Catholic	10
Other: Salv Army/Pentecostal/FIEC/Orthodox	5
<i>Non-Anglican</i>	<i>26</i>
Not stated	4
Total	68

MJT, March 2024

4. Deanery Report

The major focus of the Deanery this year has been the renewal of our community life following the departure of the previous Area Dean, Tim Norwood, in March 2023. Four of the local clergy – known as the MK4! – have taken on elements of the AD's role and are working very well (and collaboratively) together. The Deanery also has a new secretary and treasurer and new representatives on its key committees. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Jonathan Bailey and Carolyn Sanderson, two of our three Deanery reps who continue to make a significant contribution to the life of MK Deanery, and who both serve on key committees. Special thanks, too, to Anthony Tull, our third and longest-serving rep.

Alongside the reorganisation of the Deanery's corporate life necessitated by Tim's departure, important work has started regarding our vision for the Deanery for the next decade. We are currently working on a Mission Action Plan, with a view to finalising this vision later this year. There is talk of major diocesan investment in MK, via a bid submitted to the Church of England's Strategic Development Unit in 2025. It remains to be seen whether and how this develops. Previous experience of such bids has been mixed, and there are real concerns as to any form of investment whose targets – both numerical and financial – are unrealistic and unsustainable. Watch this space....

Churches Together in Milton Keynes (CTMK) continues to embed itself in the church life of MK. Walton Churches Partnership supports CTMK financially, having re-allocated what we used to give to the Mission Partnership to CTMK. However, we have decided not to formally join the organisation yet, preferring to wait and see how it develops. Our thanks to Ann Harris, who gives so much to the shared church life of MK.

Here in Walton itself, our Partnership life remains strong. We remain committed to being an ecumenical team and there is much to celebrate across our Partnership. Our structures are light-touch but resilient, and staffed by very capable people, including a strong and united Council. We are financially secure for the medium-term, which is particularly significant given the changes in our staff team happening this year – more on this at the AGM. We have put our registration as a CIO on hold for the time being, until we can harmonise our financial processes. There is no rush, and the benefits of the structural change are marginal.

MJT, March 2024