

United Parish of
Oakley with Wootton St Lawrence

Annual Report 2023



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Rector's Report

This year the Diocese of Winchester welcomed the **Rt Revd Philip Mounstephen** as our new bishop. As he has been travelling around and getting to know his new diocese, +Philip is beginning to articulate a fresh vision for the church. A favourite new phrase of +Philip has stayed with me. It is a quote from G.K. Chesterton: *'The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.'*

Did you catch that? The chief aim of Christian life, community, and daily practice is **to give room for good things to run wild.**

I absolutely love this line and I think it is such a fitting description of what we have been experiencing in the life of our parish over the last year.

If 2019 was a year of new beginnings ...

If 2020 was a year in lockdown ...

If 2021 was a year of rebuilding the walls ...

If 2022 was a year of growth, change, loss, renewal ...

Then 2023 has been year when good things have begun to run wild.

As I reflect back on the year and look around me, there are so many good things bubbling up that it's rather difficult to know where to begin!

This year has given room for welcoming so many new people joining our church family – almost on a weekly basis. Our staff team has grown as we welcomed Ceri as our curate and Anna as our Evergreen advocate for older people. This year has given room for growth in worship, depth in discipleship, and maturing in faith. It has given room for brave conversations in church about good disagreement, being sent to live and work, confronting hard feelings, enduring patient waiting, and the transformative stories of Philemon, Moses, and Jesus. It has given room for church ministries to reach out into the community and seed new projects – projects which are impacting older people, young people, single people, married couples, those journeying through bereavement, those living with mental health challenges, and those striving to safeguard the environmental sustainability of our beautiful yet fragile world.

This year has given room to new ideas, fresh approaches, missional experiments, creative collaborations.

I think often of those prophetic words spoken over our parish years before I got here: that our church would become a people who love and live like Jesus so that lives would be transformed, and hope restored. Is this not what we are experiencing?

Good things are running wild in this place!

What a joy and a delight it has been to witness the amazing things the Spirit is *stirring up* – and the remarkable people the Spirit is *raising up* – signposts of the Kingdom of God.

I have also spent a lot of time thinking about the strategic vision God has placed in our hearts for this parish. That we would be formed more and more into ...

A church for **worship**

A church for **growth**

A church for **belonging**

A church for **depth**

A church for **wellbeing**

A church for **the next generation**

A church for **community**

A church for **our time**

Read through the many reports listed below, and it is so clear that God is unlocking new things in each of these areas.

This April will mark five years since I arrived here. Five years already! Jo and I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for the boundless love, generosity, encouragement, and support which you give to us. What a privilege to call this community our home!



We also wanted to thank you for the incredible ways you love and serve both our church family and the people of our parish. I used to be able to call to mind a list of committed church leaders and volunteers to acknowledge at this time of year. However, the longer I'm here, the more impossible this is becoming. You might think that's a problem with my memory, but the reality is that the list itself has grown and grown. I simply can't keep up with the number of people in our church who are actively leading, serving, and supporting the mission and ministry of this church. There is no way we could manage or sustain any of the good things listed in these reports without you.

I do want to offer a special word of thanks for our amazing staff team who work so hard – my clergy colleagues: Sue and Ceri; our wardens: Mark and Helen; our ministry team leaders: Katey, Sochi, Anna, Chris & Naomi, Marilyn & Rodney, and Erika; our office team: Penny and Victoria; our treasurer: Simon and his finance team; our parish safeguarding officer: Teresa and her team; our preschool manager: Caroline and her dedicated staff; our buildings and maintenance experts: Rowland & Harry; Church for Our Time champions: Mark, Derek, and the Friends of St Lawrence.



As we look ahead to the coming year, this is a good time for our PCC to return to those aims and objectives mapped out the parish profile I received upon my arrival in post. We have come a long way since that time. We have changed. The community has changed. The landscape has changed. This is a good time for the whole church to take stock, regroup, and dream big dreams once again.

Where is God calling us for this next season?
What vision is the Spirit stirring in our hearts?
What things have had their season?
What good things do you long to see run wild?

As we head into this next season, may we have eyes to see what God longs for us to see, ears to hear what God longs to speak to us, and hearts to receive the love God longs to show through us.

Yours in Christ,
Ben

Parochial Church Council Report

Summary

Oakley with Wootton Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. The PCC is also responsible for the operation and maintenance of two Centres: St Leonard's and St John's.

The parish has two churches: St Leonard's in Oakley and St Lawrence in Wootton. The churchyard at St Lawrence's is the only one open for burials, as during the year the PCC was granted a closure order for St John's churchyard.

The PCC year in 2023 started with a change of gear with a revamped APCM meeting aimed at getting the business done but in a more informal and inclusive manner. As the new PCC got to work, several themes started to emerge that will impact the life and mission of the Parish.

The first theme is growth in the staff team, starting with the appointment of Ceri Deosun (nee Webb) as Curate in July. Having a Curate is a new development for Oakley with Wootton and we are keenly interested to see what blessings Ceri's time with us will bring. In September Anna Knight was appointed as the Evergreen Advocate, a paid position aimed at supporting the needs of the elderly in our community. This kind of growth always comes some with challenges, and cause the PCC to look at how it manages staff-based relationships more effectively.

The second theme was the growing realisation that our traditional forms of welcome need to deepen. In July, Erika Conti took on the organisation of the Sunday welcome team and has injected some new thinking into way in which we approach welcoming. Over the year we have experimented with different ways of revamping the welcome process and being more deliberate about signposting. Two major milestones were the "Generous June" series and the inaugural "This is Us" session in February.

Another theme that is emerging from the shadow of the continued success of Sochi's leadership of Youth Work in the parish is how we address the needs of families with younger children in our life together. Last year saw a record number of baptisms and our "Sunday Fun Days" attracted large numbers of families, but there are distinct challenges around transitioning these contacts into more regular connections. How we approach children's work and how we change our culture to engage more effectively with young families is an area of much prayer, thought and discussion.

In September the Diocese issued a Safeguarding directive that safer recruitment had to be applied to all volunteer roles with contact with vulnerable people and where it had not taken place that it should be retrospectively applied. This has added to the workload of the Safeguarding team who have diligently progressed through the backlog that this directive caused. The PCC encourages a supportive culture and strives to ensure that the church is a safe place for all, this foundation should count more than the paperwork but unfortunately as an organisation we do need to have the checks and balances in place.

The PCC oversaw incremental improvements to our centre buildings including some replacement windows in the toilet area of the school room and the start of a program to replace lighting with LED technology. Progress was made on the Church for Our Time projects at both St Leonards and St Lawrence churches.

Structure, governance and management

The procedures for appointing PCC members are set out in the Church Representation Rules. In Oakley with Wootton parish, the membership of the PCC in 2023 consisted of the Rector, Churchwardens, Treasurer, Administrator, Deanery Synod representatives and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the electoral roll of the

church. All those who attend our services are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. New members receive initial training into the workings of the PCC.

The full PCC met 5 times during the year. The average level of attendance was 78%

Given its wide responsibilities, the PCC has a number of committees dealing with different aspects of parish life. The Leadership Team, which includes clergy, church wardens, the church administrator, and the lead for Pastoral Care, meets once a week to support short-term decision making.

Teams responsible for Safeguarding, Finance, Buildings and Maintenance, A Church for Our Time, Centre Management, outward giving (Mission Action Group) report to the PCC as necessary.

Safeguarding

The Church Safeguarding Officer is Teresa Bates. Teresa leads a team that supports all church activities with policy, policy compliance, procedures and advice.

The PCC has complied with the duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure of 2016.

Administrative information

The United Parish of Oakley with Wootton includes two churches (St Leonard's and St Lawrence) and a Garden of Remembrance on the site of the chapel of St John in East Oakley. It is part of the Diocese of Winchester within the Church of England. The correspondence address is:

The Church Office, St Leonard's Centre Rectory Road,
Oakley, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG23 7ED.

The PCC is a corporate body established by the Church of England. (PCC Powers Measure 1956, Church Representation Rules 2006) and is registered as a charity (number 1131064).

Our Independent Examiner is Paul Sherrington, MBA FCCA

PCC members at 31/12/23

Ex Officio PCC members: Incumbent: Rev'd Ben Kautzer; Associate Minister: Rev'd Sue Colman; Curate: Rev'd Ceri Deosun

Treasurer: Simon Constantine; PCC Secretary, Penny Brown

Churchwardens: Helen Miller; Mark Peryer

Deanery Synod PCC members: Rev'd Ben Kautzer, Helen Miller, Mark Peryer, Sochi Ezeanowei

Elected PCC members:

- Teresa Bates (2nd term ends 2026), Kate Goucher (2nd term ends 2026), Andy Thomas (1st term ends 2026), Claire Bowers (1st term ends 2026), Barbara Robson (1st term ends 2026), Tom Favell (1st term ends 2026)
- Abigail Compton-Burnett (2nd term ends 2024), Graeme Wheeler (1st term ends 2024)
- Katey Butler (2nd term ends 2025), Selina Craig (1st term ends 2025)

PCC Report Approved by the PCC on 18th March 2024

Financial Review

The Church Accounts are presented primarily with two categories of Unrestricted and Restricted Funds. Unrestricted funds represent the day-to-day operations of the two churches and centres and include St Leonard's Pre-School, which operates out of St Leonard's Centre. Restricted funds are those designated for specific activities with the youth and older people and for building improvements.

The most significant income for the Church at 70% of total income is gifts, primarily from our worshipping community and whilst this decreased slightly over the previous year, increases in income from the hire of our centres and from interest earned on our cash deposits more than covered this decrease. Expenditure increased only modestly over the year and so was covered well by total income. We met our requested contribution to the Diocese Common Mission Fund in full once again; this is by far our largest outgoing at 43% of total expenditure and pays for our local ministers as well as contributing to some central Church of England costs.

During the year almost £10,000 was received as a one-off exceptional amount from our energy supplier as a rebate of VAT charged at the incorrect rate for the past 10 years. These funds will be used to update the audio visual infrastructure primarily in St Leonard's Church.

The financial systems and controls were reviewed during the year, having been redesigned in 2021. They continue to provide an efficient and effective framework within which both the monthly management and annual statutory accounts are prepared on a timely and accurate basis. The PCC continues to have full visibility of all activities regularly, including Pre-School, Youth, Evergreens and church building projects, where significant funds are involved.

The Church and Centres together showed a total surplus for the year of £26,045 (2022: £8,144) and the Pre-School a deficit of £465 (2022: surplus £5,282); both are included in Unrestricted Funds. Restricted Funds increased by £62,749, primarily due to gifts made to fund potential future building improvements at St Leonard's and St Lawrence Churches.

The full Financial Statements are included in the Annual Report.

Reserves Policy

It is the policy of the PCC to maintain sufficient unrestricted operating reserves (those not relating to property) to cover the normal ministry, management and administration costs of the Church for a minimum of six months. Additional reserves are set aside where, in the view of the PCC, it is prudent to allow for future planned spending.

Unrestricted operating reserves as at 31 December 2023 were £140,424 (2022: £114,442), which represents approximately seven and a half months of normal expenditure.

Simon Constantine, Treasurer



Safeguarding

This parochial church council adopts the Church of England Safeguarding Policies and Practice Guidance. In particular, our church is committed to:

- Promoting a safer environment and culture.
- Safely recruiting and supporting all those with any responsibility related to children, young people, and vulnerable adults within the church.
- Responding promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation.
- Caring pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons.
- Caring pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns or allegations of abuse and other affected persons.
- Responding to those that may pose a present risk to others.

Over the past year, we have continued to recruit helpers for children and youth. Also more volunteers for the Pastoral team, Kintsugi Hope and Prayer ministry.

When the safer recruitment process was instigated around 2017, it was considered that those people already in posts had been recruited safely, though there were not comprehensive written records kept on file.

The CofE and Diocese now are requiring us to back record the safe recruitment of all volunteers. We need to comply with this directive so we can demonstrate/have evidence, that the church does all that it can to ensure it is a safe space for children and vulnerable adults. We are therefore in the process of asking our many long term volunteers to complete application forms and provide referees. We appreciate the understanding of you all, this is a work in progress.

The Diocese has introduced an online Parish Dashboard, ensuring we record a review of our safeguarding policies, practices and risk assessments as a minimum annually.



The OWW Safeguarding Team

Teresa Bates, Kate Goucher, Dave Rundle (Left to right)

A lot of work has also gone in to producing new, clear role descriptions for volunteers and risk assessments for all our activities with groups involving children, youth and vulnerable adults.

As a church family we need to be alert to safeguarding, it is the responsibility of all of us. We must ensure that all taking part in church activities can be confident that they are in a safe protective space led by people willing and able to deal appropriately with any concerns. We stress the importance that all volunteers are up to date with safeguarding training.

I would like to thank all the leaders and helpers of our groups for the work they do. Without their commitment to provide safe spaces, policies and procedures alone would be ineffective.

For information and links to diocesan or CofE advice, go to <https://www.oakleywithwootton.org.uk/safeguarding>

Teresa Bates (PSO)

From The Wardens

It is hard to know where to start with a wardens report, mostly because it is a rather wide, ever changing and often slightly random role! Every week comes with new challenges, questions and requirements all of which ensures a life as a warden is never dull! This year has been busy and eventful with Mark and myself overseeing all aspects of church life.

We have been busy with HR as our church team grows which has been such a privilege to be a part of. Much of our role is to oversee the remarkable team we have and all those serving in different roles within our church. This includes the pastoral, financial, welcome, worship, children and youth, AV, PCC and safeguarding teams.

Mark continues to ensure that our buildings are standing, with everything in place, no leaks and wherever possible with the radiators turned down. The Church for Our Time project continues to demand Mark's attention and energy as we strive to see our church building come to its full potential. This has involved reports, visits, faculties, emails and a little more stress for Mark than perhaps anticipated. However, we pray and push forward in faith knowing God knows and hopefully we will too soon.

We continue to work closely alongside Sochi and the team leading our youth and young peoples' ministry. This year has seen our women's ministry start to form and continued growth within our whole church congregation and our welcome team. I have been able to be a part of starting to look forward and plan in these areas as well as supporting the Kintsugi course and team formed this year.

It has been wonderful to lead and preach within our church services also, with Mark being able to turn the volume down whenever needed from the back.

Perhaps the most important role we undertake is to care for Ben, ensuring his wellbeing and that of his wonderful family. We work closely as a team and meet regularly to support and promote Ben's vision for our church. This includes saying yes to the best ideas and a definite no to any ideas that include live animals, canned fish and having to dress up. Just to mention a few!

We are here to help bring projects in to land, support new initiatives, foresee problems and deal with them quickly. We aim to be an encouragement to all, celebrating the good with you all and trying our hardest to make a positive difference in the tricky bits. Saying all that, please know this, being able to work alongside Ben and trying our best to look after all of you as our congregation remains the greatest privilege and brings the greatest joy.

So continue to ask us any question you have, however random it may be and we will always try to come up with an answer, nothing is out of question for a warden!

We look forward to continuing to be your wardens in service, love and faith.

Helen Miller and Mark Peryer



Evergreen

Our Evergreen Fellowship has enjoyed another year of happy activity, socialising, and togetherness.

During the year welcomed 7 new members, including 3 new gentlemen, but sadly 8 members died and 1 moved away from Oakley.

Our programme this year has included talks about the problems encountered by those suffering with Tinnitus; safety and security aspects in the home presented by a representative from the Bobby Scheme Trust; an illustrative lecture about mint production on the Malshanger Estate by Ian Margetts who brought along samples of the finished mint chocolates products for the Evergreens to enjoy.

One highlight of the year was a return visit in March by 'The Land Girls' who entertained us with a programme of songs from the 50's/60's and beautifully dressed in the dresses of the era. Then came another treat from The Purple Company and Tabletop Gardening, where the answer lies in the soil!

Three times during the year the Evergreens were blessed with a special Evergreen Communion Service in the Centre. Our usual annual visit to the Oakley Junior School in December, where the children practiced their 'waiting' skills and then entertained us with singing and music was well received.

We are so grateful for the faithful commitment of our team of helpers and drivers. Evergreens could not function without them.

Marilyn and Rodney Scott



Mission Action Group

Over the last few months of 2023, the Oakley with Wootton Mission Action Group (MAG) met to discuss and prayerfully consider applications for funds. It was a pleasure to see the variety of fantastic and inspirational charities applying, both locally and globally.

We selected 15 brilliant charities to receive gifts. Please see our "Supported Charities" document which can be found via the link below for a summary of each charity's objectives and how our gifts will support them in the coming year.

<http://www.oakleywithwootton.org.uk/money-matters>

The Oakley with Wootton MAG Team

Evergreen Advocate

The Evergreen Advocate post came into existence last September, with the purpose to serve the spiritual and pastoral needs of older adults in the Parish. The 'Evergreen' title acknowledges the strong foundations that the 'Oakley Evergreen Fellowship' has in place and aims to extend this ministry out into the community. Collaboration with the Oakley & Dean Parish Council, OCA and Rural West Primary Care Network's Social Prescribers has strengthened relationships in the local community to open doorways for referrals and has started the process of creating an Oakley Wellbeing Forum, soon to be launched.

There are now fifteen wonderful volunteers who have come alongside this ministry to offer Holy Communion in parishioner's homes, pastoral care visits, telephone buddying and visits to Oak Lodge Care Home, all providing Christian fellowship with people wherever that may be. A range of training, focusing on the way ministry can be shaped to honour this demographic is in process, which will be made available to those volunteering in this ministry. Thank you to everyone who has dedicated their time and amazing gifts to building God's kingdom in this way.

The mid-week services at St Leonard's Church have offered a more intimate space for Holy Communion, as well as a time for reflection on the words within popular hymns during the 'Hymns We Love' series which launched last December. At the Community Café, which wraps around the mid-week services, music lovers and chorists have shared their enjoyment in being able to study hymn lyrics in this expression of worship. The consistent presence of helpers at these events has created a warm, welcoming place. Thank you to everyone involved with the services and café from set up/pack down, vergering, offering refreshments and baking cakes.

All your prayers are appreciated immensely as plans are being laid to offer a resource to parishioners to overcome the possibility of 'digital exclusion', in addition to intergenerational activities and seasonal one-off events.

If you know of someone who would welcome input from the Evergreen Advocate Ministry, please feel free to provide them with the Church Office or Anna's contact details. Thank you for all your support.

Anna Knight
Pastoral Care Co-ordinator



Youth And Young People

As I sit down to write this annual report, I am overwhelmed with gratitude to God and to each and every one of you for your unwavering support throughout this past year. Your generosity and prayers have not gone unnoticed, and I am truly blessed to have such a strong community standing behind the youth ministry.

Come and See: CAS continues to reach over 200 young people in Oakley on a weekly basis, providing a safe and welcoming space for them to grow in their faith and build meaningful relationships. This past year has been filled with growth and success in all areas of our youth ministry, and I am excited to share some highlights with you.

Youth Cafe: Our Youth Cafe has been a hub of productivity and connection for the young people of Oakley. We recently made the switch from Jolly Olly's Cafe to Oakley Methodist chapel, and the response from the kids has been amazing. We now meet every Tuesday evening, providing a space for fellowship and fun.

TRIBE: Our new youth group, TRIBE, tailored specifically for Year 9 kids, has become a popular and welcoming space for young people to gather every Tuesday night for food and life-changing conversations.

TEENS SOIRÉE: For our Year 10+ young people, TEENS SOIRÉE meets every Wednesday evening for fellowship, food, and spiritual growth.

CAS AM & CAS PM: Our CAS AM and CAS AM groups continue to meet weekly on Sundays for food, worship, and talks. We are currently in the process of remodeling CAS PM to make it a weekly evening youth group for Year 7 and 8 kids.

Volunteers: I am so grateful for our dedicated team of volunteers who pour their hearts into our youth ministry each week. Our host team also deserves recognition for opening their homes to feed and care for our young people. Our volunteers meet quarterly for team meetings and training sessions, and their commitment is truly inspiring.



CPR- CAS Prayer room: Our newly launched prayer ministry, CPR, has been a source of strength and spiritual growth for our youth group. We gather twice a month to pray for the ministry and witness the power of God answering our prayers.

The Bridge: Our young adult ministry, The Bridge, continues to thrive as a network of support and friendship for young adults in our village and church. It is heartwarming to see such strong connections being built within our community.

Community Relationships: We are grateful for the outstanding support we have received from The Barley Mow, The Co-op, The Basingstoke Food Link and various individuals in our community. Our relationships with these organisations have strengthened our mission and outreach efforts.

School: Our relationship with Oakley Church of England Junior School remains robust, with our presence being felt through various activities and initiatives like the prayer space, collective worship, well-being club, school trips, and RE support. We appreciate the warm welcome and support from the school leadership and both teaching and non-teaching staff in enabling us to serve the students.

In remembrance: On a somber note, we tragically lost one of our members in October 2023. We continue to hold his family and loved ones in our prayers and seek strength for them during this difficult time. We are thankful for the support and love shown by the community during this period.

In addition to our weekly meetings, we have organized and participated in various recreational and outdoor events for our young people, including a summer camp and a mental health outreach event called COLOUR. We are planning to organize COLOUR again this year.

Our youth group is actively connecting with other youth groups in Basingstoke through B:United and across our diocese.

As I look ahead to the future, I encourage everyone to continue praying for the youth of Oakley and to keep supporting our ministry in any way you can. Your love and dedication mean the world to us, and we are grateful for each and every one of you.

Sochi Ezanowai



The 8 O'Clockers

To wake up early, travel through quiet streets, enter a warm church and join with 20 to 30 fellow friendly welcoming worshippers around our Lord's table – well, what better way to enter the Sabbath! Our '8 O'clockers' community continues to gently grow in numbers and in depths of friendship and faith.

We follow the liturgy from Common Worship for our twice monthly Communion services and have just started enjoying the use of Bluetooth technology which allows for choirs such as that from Kings College Cambridge to accompany us in our sung worship! We have enjoyed a range of preachers, following the same series as the 10am but have recently begun a separate 'preaching stream' – we will use either the CofE Lectionary or a tailor made series or dip back into the 10am series as seems most appropriate.

One of the highlights of this past year was to witness and celebrate with Ken and Mavis Howes as they recommitted their vows to each other as they entered their 70th year of marriage.

We continue to enjoy breakfast together in the church centre after the service – and the size of table we now sit round, the overlapping tablecloths and the amount of provision needed are a beautiful visual image of the growth of this congregation. Huge thanks as ever to Richard Edwards for making sure that when we arrive the church is warm and welcoming, and to our team of readers and prayers for their contributions to the spiritual life of this service.

Sue Colman



Curate

I joined St Leonard's and St Lawrence's following my ordination on July 2nd, and Deniyi and I are very grateful for the warm welcome we have received. The first six months of my curacy have mainly been focused on getting to know people, seeing how different things in the church are run, and by getting involved in different activities and ministries. There has been a lot to learn and I really appreciate the graciousness of the church community as I make mistakes and try different things.

One of the great joys for me has been beginning to take Christenings - welcoming precious children and their families into the life of our church, celebrating and giving thanks for these young lives and offering a spiritual home to them and their parents. I am excited and a little nervous to move forward with the other occasional offices. I have been shadowing Ben at a couple of funerals and recently supported a family burying the ashes of a loved one. It is a privilege to walk alongside grieving families, and one that I hope to do justice to. I am booked to take my first wedding in August.

I am enjoying getting involved with our lovely schools through assemblies, class talks and Prayer Space - which I am taking over responsibility for from Helen. I have a background in children's and youth work and in teaching so it is great to be able to draw on that experience to engage with our wider community. Prayer Space is such a gift to the children at the junior school but also, I believe, to the team that support it and to the church - so thank you to all the volunteers who make it possible.

I have been involved in launching some new things. Hymns We Love, our new midweek service, with Anna, is a lovely little community and I am looking forward to seeing how it grows. At time of writing we are a couple of weeks into our Tuesday Lent course on marginalised women in the Bible, which has included some stimulating and challenging conversations about difficult biblical texts. I have also been bringing art supplies to the Well for a couple of months now to encourage people to engage in worship in different ways, and I am keen to see how this develops.



Worship Group

It has continued to be a joy and privilege to lead the worship team at St Leonard's over the past year and Naomi and I are so thankful to be part of such a supportive, humble, and loving community of people.

As a team, it has been wonderful spending intentional time together learning new songs, trying out different arrangements of more well-known ones, working on more practical things like vocal layering & band dynamics and simply being in God's presence together - worshipping, praying, and eating!

A key highlight was when we initially ran through the song "I Speak Jesus" - we found ourselves unable to stop singing it over and over again!

We've loved seeing 'The Well' opened out to the wider church family, providing monthly opportunities for a more informal, unhurried worship space and it's been amazing seeing how this has organically developed, with it now also facilitating a creative space for worship through arts and craft as well as us trying a more ambient and festive "Carols @ The Well" in December.

Most recently, we've been extremely blessed with a purchase of a new keyboard and some much-needed AV equipment, and we are looking forward to seeing how this impacts our worship services in the coming months. Whilst we are aware there is still some work to do with the sound system, we are incredibly grateful for the PA team who continue to do a remarkable job!

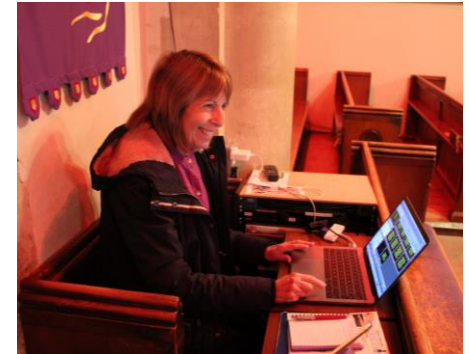
Over the next year, our plan is to hold at least 2 team workshops, introduce some more new songs and in particular grow in our creativity and songwriting. Most importantly, we are keen to see us continue to grow in our love for God and continue to discover what whole-life worship looks like.

We are hugely thankful for the community of worship leaders, musicians and singers who serve so faithfully week in and week out with such unswerving joy and commitment.



We would love to see the team grow in numbers, particularly musicians, so if you are a keyboard, guitar, drum, bass player or singer we'd really love to hear from you! You can get in touch at: worship@oww.church

Chris and Naomi Greenhalgh



St Leonards Pre-School

Thank you to everyone who has prayed for the preschool this year, your support is invaluable. Please pray for all our preschool families, staff and the preschool committee in the year ahead.

In January 2024 we extended the opening hours of the preschool. St Leonard's is now open on a Tuesday afternoon so we can offer four full days of 9-3pm. We are also offering an early start of 8.30am every morning to a small group of children.

Before Christmas we had a sponsored fundraising event in which all the children participated in throwing snowballs into numbered buckets, making reindeer antlers and trotting around our running track 5 times and making and decorating salt dough Christmas tree decorations. A member of staff also made some Christmas decorations which we sold outside the Centre. With the help of gift aid we raised an amazing £902!

We held our Leavers' Concert, Harvest Celebration and Nativity in St Leonard's Church. All of these events were very well attended by our parents and their relatives. In July we had our first Sports Day on our outside play area.

With the government extending funding for the working parents of 2 year olds to 15 hours from April 2024 and 30 hours from September 2025 we are receiving lots of enquiries and visits. Please pray for discernment in planning for the year ahead.

Caroline Edwards – Preschool Manager.



Discipleship and Small Groups

Over the last several years we have sought to cultivate a diverse ‘ecosystem’ of intentional discipleship communities within our parish. These have ended up taking various forms. There are around a dozen small groups that meet regularly to pray, worship, study the Scriptures, and do life together through the good times and the bad. There are two film groups that do much the same but by bringing Scripture and daily life into creative dialogue with modern cinema. In 2023, Barbara Robson and Annie Wilson launched a brand-new type of discipleship group: ‘Fields & Fellowship Walks’. The aim of this gathering is to walk together through the beautiful local footpaths around Oakley and Wootton, enjoying each other’s company, but also intentionally reflecting about creation and the deep things of God. In 2022, Ben launched a new discipleship project called ‘Going Deeper’ – a monthly gathering which aims to be a no-holds-barred-ask-all-your-difficult-questions-space for exploring theology, humanity, and the nature of God. The first ‘season’ of Going Deeper traced the big themes of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. From September, the second ‘season’ has gone for a more organic approach by taking up a different question or theme or Biblical passage each month.

During Lent 2023, St Leonard’s offered the Church of England’s *Living in Love & Faith* course, which explores Christian teaching and learning about identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage. There exists within our local church family a broad range of perspectives on these social, moral, relational, and theological issues. The purpose of running this course was never to compel everyone to arrive at the same point on the map or end up thinking in exactly the same way. Rather, this course was intended to begin an open conversation – one that we pray will continue to enable us to listen well to one another, safely share our experiences and honestly wrestle with our questions, and even learn to disagree in a more generous and loving way. Over 80 people took part in this challenging and illuminating Lent course.

During Advent, Ceri and Ben facilitated a short course on Waiting, which studied the characters of Sarah, Isaiah, and John the Baptist.

During Lent 2024, Ceri launched a new pilot project Lent course, designed in collaboration with her colleagues from the Centre for the Study of the Bible & Violence, called ‘Misjudged’. This five-week daytime course explores the stories of marginalised women in the Bible. In the evenings, Ben led a series of evening Lent gatherings called ‘Encountering God in the Wilderness’. These sessions incorporate music, art installations, video content, live worship, and small group reflection on the Scripture to explore key images and motifs from Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and the Gospels – images like the burning bush, the tabernacle, the pillars of fire and cloud, and the priesthood of all believers. What new insights do these things reveal about the Triune God, the person of Jesus, the agency of the Holy Spirit, and the identity of the people of God?

At our last PCC Away Day, small group discipleship was identified as one of the key things in our church in need of new focus and intentional development. With so many newcomers joining our church family, the need to launch new small groups is becoming increasingly urgent. God is gathering to this place everything we need for us to journey together into new depths. If you’re keen to be part of that small group journey – whether as a helper, a host, a facilitator or a punter, please speak with Ben or Erika Conti or one of the Churchwardens.

Ben Kautzer



Alpha

Our January Alpha meeting last year only attracted a small number of guests split into two groups. The small mix of guests meant that one guest without faith was outnumbered by those that did, and he left early. September 2023 was completely different with two larger groups and Ben being able to join us, and most hungry for more, and an Alpha first - we served wine at the last Alpha meal.

Since 2018 we must have had well on the way to 100 people attending Alpha as guests. Many will have come on the course with a faith, though many have found faith there for the first time, and all have reflected that they have experienced for the first time a unity in the church and a life changing interaction with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Alpha depends upon a sacrificial, loyal and incredibly dedicated team – of around 35 people (who mostly came from the first Alpha in 2018) – who, in addition to those who have attended as guests, have facilitated the hospitality to welcome so many folk. Whether that's to lay up tables so beautifully themed by Laura Thomas, to serve food, to wash up and clear away, all scheduled and organised by Susan and Trevor Stacey, to prepare terrible jokes as Tom does, to co-ordinate prayer, as Selina now does and, probably most importantly, to produce for 10 weeks the best food in Hampshire, now managed by Gill Garner. All of which is orchestrated, guided and hosted on the Alpha Saturday by Jamie.

Having Alpha as a consistent and regular rhythm of church life has been a catalyst for growth and depth in our church and the number of people who have decided to anchor their faith in a public act of commitment because of how God has used Alpha has been humbling.

And it has not only been the central Alpha that has been a feature of this. The Friday mums, Men at Mo, Sochi's bridge group that meets at the Barley Mo, the 8 O'clockers and many life/house groups have also provided informal hospitality centred gatherings where the question 'Is there more to life than this?' has in one way or another been the recurring conversation.

The challenge is in fulfilling Jesus last command – go and make disciples - taking Alpha graduates into effective fellowship through which they can continue their journey, and be emboldened to invite others to start their own.

- Some but not many guests transfer to be helpers in the future.
- There is little or no post Alpha support network in place for those guests that want to carry on their journey within their group.
- A sustainable Alpha would be for a guest to come back with a friend.

Our next evening Alpha is due to start on 24th April and the following day a day time Alpha will commence. Another course will be offered in September.

Tom Favell



Prayer Ministry

The heart of Prayer Ministry is to simply invite the Holy Spirit's presence and activity into someone's life as we pray for them - and in October last year 20 people from OWW went to St Michael's Church Basingstoke to refocus our thoughts and prayers on Prayer Ministry and to receive some refreshing and training from the team there.

Prayer for others has been part of the ministry life of OWW for decades, most recently led by John Eves with his wise and dedicated team. Covid acted as a circuit breaker and as we considered restarting this ministry it seemed good to have a time of reflection. It was noted that there have been different models of prayer ministry embraced by our church and by individuals over the years, the wisdom of which many will carry forward, but there is a real opportunity now, as we have a vision to 'restart' prayer ministry, to come together under a shared understanding and agreement of how we will now exercise this ministry. Also, the CofE have asked that churches ensure that people who offer their gifts in ministering to others are given a role description, are recruited safely and have appropriate levels of Safeguarding training and DBS's where needed. With Teresa Bates' invaluable help Prayer Ministry team members are being duly 'processed' – and we are both so grateful for people's patience and willingness to comply with these guidelines.

We will gather as a team just before Easter to pray for each other and for the church, and to look forward with a unified sense of how we can best make sure that whenever we meet together to worship we can offer a safe space for people to receive prayer in the gentle presence of the Holy Spirit. After Easter, in faith, Prayer Ministry will once again be offered week by week – Praise God!

Sue Colman



Men2Mow

Men 2 Mow is a twice monthly excuse for men of all faiths or none, to meet, to chat and to enjoy a meal together. It meets at the Barley Mow in Oakley on the second Wednesday of each month at lunchtime and on the final Tuesday in the evening.

Numbers attending vary between 8 and 16. Originally intended for men living on their own for whom evenings can be very lonely, this restriction no longer applies.

At least two non church members have attended the church services over Christmas and one has shown interest in attending The Bereavement Course.

If you know of any person who would be interested in the delights of a steak pie or delicious range of similar foods please contact Derek 01256 781006 who looks after the Wednesday lunchtime or Graeme 07870 380226 who books the Tuesday evening. We book the meals in advance to help the Mow's relatively small kitchen, but at least it's our local which has improved massively in recent months.

Derek Hall and Graeme Wheeler

Life Events

Christenings

If 2022 was a bumper year for weddings, 2023 was a bumper year for christenings! 21 children were baptised last year, which reflects an encouraging engagement with local families. We hosted 3 “Christening Journey” breakfasts during the year for groups of parents requesting baptism for their children, with home visits by Ben or Ceri for those unable to attend. These sessions are a good way for local families to meet each other as well as to provide time for discussion with the “Christening Team”. Christine manages the paperwork involved and, as a bonus, already knows many of the parents, which is a great connection. Sometimes families prefer to have their christening service as part of a main church service. Since the pandemic, most christenings typically involve a large number of guests and therefore take place on Sunday afternoons.

We also had our first annual “Celebration of Christening” all-age service in September, which was attended by some of the many families whose children have been baptised since the COVID “hiatus”.

We are keen to affirm our commitment to the families beyond the christening service, and to draw them deeper into the wider church community by responding to their needs in an appropriate and welcoming way. We also want to strengthen the connection with the various children’s groups that meet in the Centre throughout the week. To this end, we keep in regular email contact with the parents to let them know about family friendly services and events at St Leonard’s. For example, it has been encouraging to see some of the families at our termly Sunday Fun Days.

Christening Team – Ben, Ceri, Christine, Margaret and Richard



Adult Baptisms & Confirmation

On 11 June 2023, we had the great joy of gathering by the swimming pool in Malshanger to celebrate the full-immersion baptism / renewal of baptism vows of 3 remarkable members of our church family. On 25 June, we then welcomed +David Williams to preach and preside at a service of confirmation at St Leonard’s. Four candidates were confirmed that day including our own Churchwarden Helen Miller! On 18 February 2024, one of the people who joined that first Alpha in January 2020 was baptised in a wonderful service at Wootton St Lawrence. We now begin every year by booking the Bishop to come for a confirmation service. We don’t start with a list of candidates in hand. We don’t know what God is up to or who might come forward. We just set the date – as a bold act of faith – and pray that the Spirit would come and stir up new depth of faith in the hearts of the people. Every single year, we have become witnesses of God’s faithful work in our midst. As we look to this coming summer, let us risk to pray audacious prayers – that the Spirit of God would come again and continue to ignite new fires of faith, hope and love.

Ben Kautzer

Marriage

In 2023, four couples celebrated their wedding days at St Leonard's Church. In his role as Area Dean, Ben also presided over a wedding at St Andrew's Church in Sherborne St John. This couple began worshipping at St Leonard's in preparation for their wedding day and have remained part of our church family ever since.

Ben Kautzer

From January 2024, Ben and Jo partnered with Sue and Jamie to launch the first Marriage Course to take place at St Leonard's for many years. The Marriage Course is a series of seven sessions, designed to help couples invest in their relationship and build a strong marriage. 11 couples participated in the course (from newlyweds to long-ago-weds), including 3 engaged couples who will be getting married in our parish later this year. The course is designed to feel like a date night for the guests. Each couple enjoyed tasty desserts as they watched the session videos and discussed one-to-one with their partners a range of topics relevant for every couple: connection, communication, conflict, forgiveness, family, good sex, and love in action. Thanks to Penny, we celebrated the end of the course by sharing a delicious meal during the last session. We are so thankful for the fabulous team of volunteers who supported the course, providing the puddings, serving refreshments and ensuring all our guests felt at home. Our intention is to offer The Marriage Course at least once a year going forward. If you would like to be involved in supporting or even leading a future course, please let us know! Having experienced the course afresh for ourselves, we would highly, highly recommend that *every single couple* in our church invest in their marriage by doing this course.

Ben & Jo Kautzer, Sue & Jamie Colman



Bereavement

Last year, the OWW ministry team conducted approximately 30 funerals, thanksgivings, and interment of ashes services. These services took place at St Leonard's, St John's Garden of Remembrance, Wootton St Lawrence, and Basingstoke Crematorium. The majority of our funeral ministry offers pastoral care and support to families connected to our wider village community. With the sad passing of Anne Tavener, Matt Wise, Gordon Kay, Penny Jones and others, this was also another difficult year of painful losses for our church family. We continue to hold in our love, our presence, and our prayers so many others who continue to bear the scars of grief. In Loving Memory, Remembrance Day, and our Blue Christmas bereavement services continue to grow and are highly valued by members of the church and community alike. Through the growth of informal OWW bereavement support groups, the Christmas hamper project, the tireless work of the pastoral care team, and the Bereavement Journey course, a strong network of ongoing pastoral support has emerged in our church.

Ben Kautzer

Bereavement Journey

The Bereavement Journey, in brief, is a 7-week course for anyone who has been bereaved at any time and in any way. OWW has been running this course for a number of years – online during Covid, and since Covid we have run it three times in person, most recently on Wednesday afternoons in Autumn 2023. The course consists of films to watch and facilitated small groups where thoughts and feelings can be safely shared. The materials for this most recent course had been impressively updated and refilmed which enhanced an already well researched and presented offering. Hospitality is also a key element of the afternoon – a personal welcome followed by homemade cakes and hot drinks during a comfort break are indispensable. Huge thanks to Susan Stacey and Richard Cripps for being such a warm presence and for Alwyn and others who baked! Plans for the future include making this course more widely known through relationships with our local funeral director and the social prescribing team. We are in touch with other Basingstoke churches who are beginning to run The Bereavement Journey and the plan is that across Basingstoke it will run in at least one location every term, so people do not have to wait too long to join a course.

Sue Colman & Katey Butler



Welcome Team

We have a welcome team of approximately 35 volunteers, however I would like to see that number increase further. It would be great to have more men involved with welcoming and to encourage the older children and youth to participate too.

We introduced a system called SignUp for the volunteers to independently book the slots they want to help with. We have been using it for nearly 6 months and it has been working well. We also have a WhatsUp group where we post reminders and ask for extra support.

We have hosted two well attended team events to reinforce the message we want to give when we greet people at the door or when we interact with newcomers.

We have redesigned the welcome/connect card that is now found on every pew, given the entrance to the church a good tidy up and we are keeping the entrance notice board regularly updated.

We hosted our first “This Is Us” event at the beginning of February and 15 newcomers joined us. The morning gave us the opportunity to introduce the leadership team and share what we do. We are planning another event for September.

Erika Conti



Kintsugi Hope

In the UK if we break a bowl we throw it away or mend it with superglue, hiding the cracks in order to pretend it was never broken. However, In Japan when a pot gets broken they put a gold powder in the glue, so instead of hiding the cracks, they make a feature of them so that the object becomes more beautiful for being broken. And this art form is called Kintsugi. The belief being that beauty can come out of brokenness. We can discover treasure in life's scars – not something to be ashamed of but part of our story.

Ben spoke about Kintsugi at Church@Home on 20 June 2021 in the series Re-building a Church for Wellbeing and it is now taking shape for our community.

Four Group Leaders have been trained by the Kintsugi Hope team – Lara Goodall, Lou Eley, Janis Taylor and Lynda Cant and from the 4 January we have been running two Kintsugi Hope Courses on a Thursday – one in the morning and one in the evening at St Leonard's Centre. It is a confidential and safe place for up to 12 people to discuss the demands of modern living and finding ways to strengthen resilience, courage and wellbeing.

The Church community are leading the way with hundreds of churches running and planning to run Kintsugi courses throughout the UK. So we are not alone. Churches all over the UK want to take a major role in supporting people in their communities with their mental and emotional well-being. We are receiving heartwarming feedback about the current sessions.

"This group has reminded me how important it is to take care of myself and provided me with a safe space to explore and open up – thank you so much"

"I now feel I belong and can express my true feelings"

"I no longer feel alone and have people who care"



Sochi Ezeanowai is currently being trained to be a Group Leader for the younger people in our community and we are looking for others to be trained so that we can run more courses. Our vision is to reach out to people in all walks of life, to see a world where mental and emotional health is understood and accepted with safe and supportive communities for people to grow and flourish.

Lynda Cant

Womens Ministry

This year a small group have come together to begin women's ministry at St Leonard's. There are many female based activities and groups already meeting and praying together both church and village based. Our aim is to develop on these wonderful offerings by helping to promote them and looking at what else we can add.

In February we held a listening event where over 30 women came together to share experiences, ideas and hopes for the future. We were so grateful to those who gave their time to give feedback so that our ministry can be appropriately focused. Then in March we held our first event, a coffee and craft afternoon. This was supported by the Oakley Stitchers and the hub as well as our own dedicated women from the church community. This was a huge success with further similar events on the horizon. Our next event is to be a Menopause Information afternoon on 27th April, with a specialist speaker followed by time and space for women to connect and share with each other (with cake of course!)

Alongside these events we have some wonderful volunteers developing a directory of events and information for women so that it will be easier to engage in village life and make valuable social connections.

As you can probably see already, our programme for Inspiring Women aims to be rich and varied so that we can reach out to our wider community. We are being led on this exciting new journey by our faith and God's plan for Women's Ministry in Oakley.

Claire Bowers





Wootton St Lawrence

It has been a wonderful year with church and community life at Wootton St Lawrence continuing to strengthen and grow.

St Lawrence's Church is open for private prayer and reflection daily from 10am until 4pm and two services are held each month at 9am. The first Sunday of the month is a Communion service and the third Sunday of the month is a service of the word. Refreshments are offered after each service; this provides a welcome opportunity to get together with friends and a time to receive private prayer.

The aims of Friends of St Lawrence (FoSL) is to raise funds to provide a much-needed water supply and community space to St Lawrence's Church (The St Lawrence Church for Our Time project). To raise awareness of this project and to raise funds several events have been staged through the year.

In April the play "12 Hours" was performed in the church regarding Jane Austin's brief engagement which she received at Manydown House. In July, two choirs performed – Basingstoke Male Voice Choir and Ooh Mama.

FoSL have also created a recipe book and sell local honey and jam. These items are available to buy each day in the church.

The project is moving along. A Statement of Significance was undertaken last year to help guide with the development of the project and architects are being met with to take the project to the next step.

In August the 400th anniversary of the publication of Charles Butler's book "the Feminine Monarchie" was celebrated at The Bee Fayre 400. A former vicar of St Lawrence from 1600-1647 Charles Butler's legacy continues to be relevant and his findings are taught to beekeepers worldwide. This was a magnificent two-day event bringing together local communities, with beekeepers sharing their knowledge along with crafts, stalls, talks and family fun.

A truly memorable thanksgiving service was held by Ben Kautzer. Justin Welby, The Archbishop of Canterbury, shared a video message of thanks and praise and the choir Stile Antico sang the Bee Madrigal written by Charles Butler. It

was a joyous weekend enjoyed by hundreds of people.

The Harvest Festival took place in September. A service of thanksgiving and the church was decorated with greenery from the hedgerows and local produce.

A simple outdoor Service of Remembrance, led by Sue Colman, was held on Remembrance Sunday. The service is much appreciated and well attended. This year the names of those on the War Memorial from the First and Second World War were read out.

The weekend before Christmas was the return of the Christmas Tree Festival and the Big Sing. Christmas trees were decorated on Saturday by members of the local community. On Sunday afternoon those attending the Big Sing were able to vote for their favourite trees whilst enjoying a mince pie and a glass of mulled wine. It was a fun filled event including poetry, reading, musical performances and a Christmas sing along.

More than 100 people attended the Candlelit Crib Service on Christmas Eve. It is always wonderful to see the delight on the children's faces as they follow the star down the aisle and a special moment when the congregation gather in a circle holding their candles to sing Away in a Manger.

Maintaining the churchyard is an ongoing concern. A group clear up is held in the spring and autumn and a kind volunteer mows areas of the churchyard. However, we always need more volunteers to assist us on those days or at any time during the year. If you are interested, please do let the church office know and we would be extremely grateful to welcome you.

Should you wish to become a member of FOSL and be kept informed of its developments please email friends@oww.church

Serena Worthington



