

ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

ANNUAL REPORTS 2023

VICAR'S REPORT

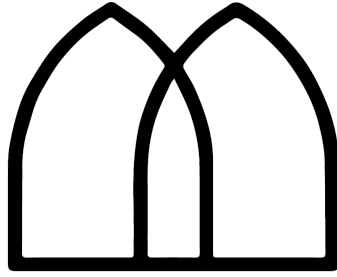
Revd Ben Baker

2023 has been a special year for St Mary's. Can you believe that we are now coming to my third APCM? Time flies when you're having fun! 2023 has been a busy year but definitely a fun one – you will probably notice that for the most part I really enjoy my role here!

2023 has seen the revitalisation project in full swing with the new service pattern finding its feet, new activities and groups starting and an ever-evolving community growing as new faces attend and find their home at St Mary's Bearwood. The children's groups on the Sunday morning have re-structured as attendance has grown and the PCC upon reviewing our services noted that even if one does not find one of the services to their preference or comfort, the pattern is clearly hitting the spot and there is a wonderful buzz around the place on a Sunday morning.

But of course, so much of what we do, is more than Sundays. It may feel like it's been longer than this, but 2023 saw the launch of Storyteller Toddlers and The Watering Can. These are two brilliant initiatives with wonderful teams that embody the spirit of what we're about at St Mary's, communicating through the community and kindness a touch of God's love and that this is a place you can belong. When it was suggested that Watering Can open Christmas Day for lunch, I swelled with pride at the thought this is exactly who we want to be as a church community who seeks to be good news for our Bearwood locality.

The transformation has not just been in the congregation and in our activity but also in our building as we finally managed to get all the approvals necessary to replace the majority of our fixed pews with flexible seating to enable a more diverse and practical use of our beautiful building. Already the reordering has helped facilitate a church lunch, a crazy golf course for our community fun day, a church quiz, better space for the families light party and St Nic's Christmas Fayre. So many of these events are about enabling people who wouldn't normally come to church to cross the threshold and find something that might lead them to re-think whether Jesus could be for them too. The Alpha course too, enabled searching conversations about faith, doubt, and the meaning of life with a whole range of participants.



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

It has been a joy to see the staff team grow with Sarah joining as curate in June and Yasmin as administrator in October, who with Roz and Ruth do so much to make the life of the church keep moving. But when I often say we have a great sense of team at St Mary's that is speaking about so much more than the staff, it is talking about the many of you who give so much of yourself in time, energy and hard work to see St Mary's thrive in many ways that are often unseen. We literally couldn't do what we do without you, thank you for being part of the team that is seeking the Kingdom of God in our church and our part of the world we call Bearwood.

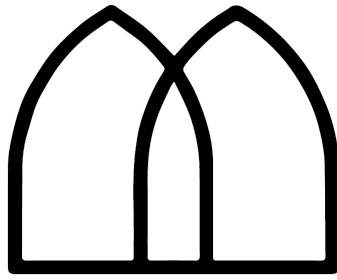
As we look to 2024, when the strategic funding for the revitalisation runs out, we look forward with faith that God's provision and equipping will give us all that we need, hope for all God will continue to do in and through us as a blessing to others, and with love for Jesus in whom we find unity across our diverse community knowing that if we remain in him, there we will find the fruit of God's kingdom.

WARDEN'S REPORT

Frank Herbert

If 2022 was a year of navigating significant change and some upheaval for St Mary's, then 2023 was a year in which the journey felt a little less turbulent. Changes introduced the previous year have settled into more established patterns, with the two services on Sunday morning the most obvious difference in the rhythm of life in the St Mary's community. There is clearly still a need for both styles of service as regular attendance at both has increased over the year, a clear sign of God's hand at work in our community. It is worth reflecting that newcomers arriving during the past year will probably have been less aware (or even unaware!) of the notion of a 'revitalisation' and have been attracted to St Mary's because they find it welcoming and vibrant. This blend of different traditions and diversity of backgrounds will enable St Mary's to reach further into the Bearwood community and continue to grow.

The most obvious physical change to take place last year was the removal of most of the remaining pews to create a very flexible, welcoming and light-filled space in the church. For some, especially those with a long association with St Mary's, this was tinged with a little sadness, though also general acknowledgement that it was a necessary step to enable the church to be used for a greater variety of social and missional events where we would like to attract larger numbers than can be accommodated elsewhere in the building. The quiz held in November and St Nic's Fayre in December were fantastic examples of how the newly-ordered space can be



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

used for such events. The decision to retain some pews in the south aisle was the right one as a number of people still prefer to sit there!

One of the priorities for St Mary's is to find new ways of reaching into the Bearwood community and among other events, the Monday morning Watering Can cafe is now firmly established as a warm and welcoming space. This is run by a group of dedicated volunteers who are committed to showing a practical demonstration of the love of Jesus for Bearwood.

The Archdeacon's Visitation took place in November, conducted by Area Dean Revd Mike Sermon. No significant issues were raised at this though there is some work for the Wardens to update the Church Inventory.

FABRIC REPORT

Ben Prentice

Overview

In addition to routine maintenance and inspections, over the course of the last year a number of other works have been undertaken. The major work has been the reordering of the nave, works in the side garden and continuing to deal with issues raised in the Quinquennial Report and the fixed wiring.

Reordering of the nave

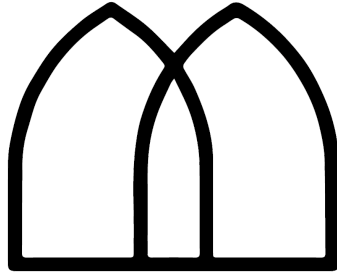
The pews have now been removed and the new chairs are in place. The parquet flooring has been cleaned and repaired. The Mary statue has been relocated, as has the votive candle stand. There has also been a general clearing out of accumulated 'bits and pieces', so the nave feels less cluttered. Work to clean, repair and burnish the tiles flooring is currently underway.

Heating and Electricity

All heating equipment has received an annual inspection. For the main boilers, which heat the church itself, whilst aging are in good condition and are unlikely to fail in the near future. However, given their age, we are finding higher levels and costs of maintenance.

All the remedial works identified in the fixed wiring inspection have now completed. PAT testing of other equipment has been completed for the current year.

Other



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

The church was listed in 2023. This has an impact on the fabric from the point of view of future works or repairs must be in keeping with the listing. For example, some tiles have gone missing from the roof of the north aisle. This doesn't pose a leakage problem, but we have to replace with the correct tiles, in type and colour. This poses issues of sourcing, so adding to the time such work takes.

The side garden has been cleared and resurfaced with new slabs. The work was carried out under Sandwell Council's scheme, where contractors have to carry out works for community benefit, at no cost to the recipient.

DEANERY SYNOD

Ian Thorley

St Mary's Bearwood is part of the C of E Deanery of Warley & Edgbaston. The Deanery Synod has two main purposes:

1. Acting as a conduit for information and directives throughout the whole church from bottom to top, top to bottom and laterally.
2. Forming the electorate for Diocesan and General Synods.

During the last year, Synod received and discussed developments on oversight areas and environmental policy. There was contemplation on General Synod's decision to allow blessings for same sex couples. The serious financial position of the diocese was also discussed.

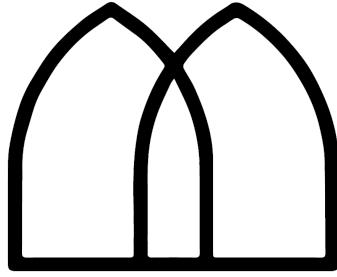
Talks has also been presented by the Archdeacon, Director of ministry and Director of Mission Support.

SAFEGUARDING REPORT

Alison Carter

Safeguarding workload at St Mary's continues to increase due to the ongoing growth in the congregation and further new activities at St Mary's such as the Watering Can. People helping with refreshments, visuals and worship are also required to have a basic safeguarding qualification.

Most of the training is done online although face to face is available occasionally for those without IT access.



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

During the last year I have verified a further 8 DBS's, 24 Basic Safeguarding certificates, 12 Foundation safeguarding certificates and 12 Domestic Abuse certificates. The Safer Recruitment and People Management module has been completed by 7 people. All this information is recorded on the Diocesan dashboard enabling them to have up to date records and show that we are conforming to Diocesan standards. We now stand at 99% on the Dashboard.

The safeguarding team of 3 has changed during the year as Caroline Fereday has stepped down to concentrate on Church Accessibility whilst Rebecca Dawkins has become the assistant PSCO (Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator).

We have good safeguarding practices in place, but as stated at the Safeguarding Sunday services, safeguarding is everyone's responsibility not just the team's.

ELECTORAL ROLL REPORT

Christine Oakley-Jones

At the last APCM the number recorded on our Electoral Roll was 90. Sadly, Paul Duncan, died unexpectedly in January, aged 61. Paul had sometime been a member of PCC, was on the readers rota, and assisted with the chalice at 11.30am service. His presence will be missed at St Mary's.

This year the roll has increased with the addition of 3 names. At least one person, is waiting for the six months attendance time to be up before going on the Roll. I am pleased to report our Electoral Roll now stands at a healthy 92.

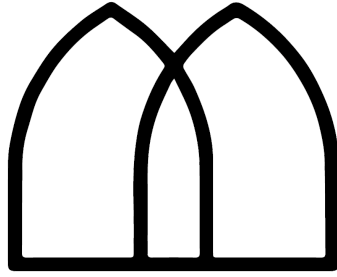
Next year, in line with Diocesan rules, we will be required to undertake a total revision of the roll, and we will all be required to sign up again.

BUILDINGS DEVELOPMENT GROUP REPORT

Ruth Downing

The Group (consisting of myself, Rev Ben Baker, Ben Prentice, Ian Thorley, Ben de Waal and Hazel Herbert) have met regularly throughout the year to discuss and progress how best to develop and refurbish the site to meet our growing mission needs.

In consultation with Gould Singleton Architects a Briefing Document has been produced which gives an overview of our needs and a number of options for



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

developing the site. This highlighted a need for more detailed information about the condition of the Hall. A full structural survey was carried out and an agent was appointed to market the hall for sale or lease. This produced a small amount of interest but no acceptable offers.

As part of the consultation process, we have met with the Diocese Net Zero Carbon Project Manager and a number of case workers from the DAC are due to visit in late March.

The group have now started to work on a Feasibility Study which involves refining our needs and putting more detail to room sizes and capacities as well as considering how to create a visible and welcoming building. This will lead to a couple of schemes being produced which can be developed in more detail.

MISSION GIVING GROUP REPORT

Alison Carter

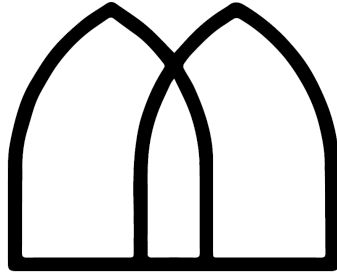
At the PCC meeting of 15th May 2023 it was agreed that St Mary's "would like to tithe up to 10% of its regular giving to enable charitable organisations to support causes and projects that we are not delivering ourselves at present".

A sub group of Frank Herbert, Dan Tang, Ben Tucker and myself, and called Mission Giving Group (MGG) - was formed to set up and administer criteria upon which small grants to organisations could be made. Initially for 1 year, but subject to review, up to a further 2 years.

As delegated by the PCC the MGG agreed that St Mary's would tithe 10% of its annual regular giving to be shared amongst the successful applicants. The number of grants made would be dependent upon the number of applications and the funding available.

After starting with a couple of brain-storming sessions, including help from John Reynolds who has some experience in this, the group sat down to produce a MGG policy, an application form and a process for the way forward. These were approved by the PCC in September 23 and announced to the congregation on 1st October with an application deadline of 29th October.

We received 13 application forms and after much deliberation awarded 6 grants of various amounts totalling £13,000 to 1 regional, 1 international and 4 local



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

organisations. These organisations will be invited to report to the group later this year to evidence the delivery of outputs the funding is providing. Subsequently this review will determine which groups will be funded for a further 2 years.

The group met in January 24 to review the whole process of the MGG to determine what went well and what needed adjusting and will submit any amendments to the PCC.

Finally, each member of the group would like to convey how rewarding and fulfilling the role had been and are honoured to be part of the MGG.

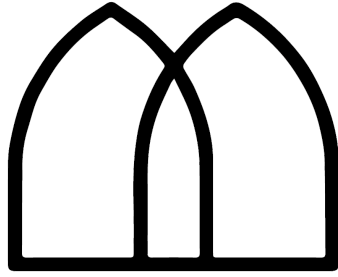
CHILDREN & FAMILIES REPORT

Roz Tang

We had a great start to the year in 2023! It started with a 'Parenting for Faith' course where several of us met to chat through how we support children in building their own relationship with Jesus. We followed Rachel Turner's online course and this gave so much opportunity for great conversation and impacted the way we support our children's faith. Thank you to Malobi for helping out with this and being part of the group. We hope to launch this again soon. In February Alison and Ben ran a Pancake party for families in the community. This was very well attended and lots of pancakes were eaten.

In March Johanna and I launched 'Story Teller Toddlers' – a toddler group that is centred around stories and has a main story theme each week. We read a bible story, play with the Jesus puppet and sing lots of songs. This has been a great success and has brought many parents and grandparents from the community into church. This could not be possible without the amazing team that turn up each week to set up, serve tea and coffee, make the snack and chat to all the people that come. Thank you to Judith and John Halsall, Alison Carter, Avril Williams, Craig Docherty, Julia Flaherty, Maureen Eaglesfield and Bev Reynolds, Sarah Down and Ben Baker.

During the Easter holidays, myself and Alison ran a Good Friday event for families in the community. This was full of crafts, worship, food and lots more. Many thanks to all those that supported this by volunteering to help. This was a great opportunity to share the love of Jesus with the Bearwood community and the parents and children were able to hear the true message of Easter and what it means.



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

In September, we launched the new names of the children's groups on a Sunday morning. We now have Tree Climbers, Mountain Climbers and Orbit (youth). The numbers of children in the groups continue to grow and the children are enjoying the content of the session. We are using an online platform called 'Raise up Faith' to access a range of curriculums to help support the sessions. A big thank you to all on the children's team who help in this ministry – Vicky Fasham, Caroline Fereday, Malobi Ogboli, Craig Docherty, Avril Williams, Gemma Bamford, Grace Downing and Alison Carter. A special extra thank you for Caroline Fereday who plans and runs the Tree Climbers group for us.

October saw another great Light Party which saw over 65 children and families coming into the church to hear the message that Jesus is the light in the darkness. Thank you to all who helped and supported with this.

In December, we ran a Christingle service with an instant nativity for the children to join in. We also joined with several other local churches to do a 'walking nativity' through the streets of Bearwood.

We have lots of great things coming up in 2024 including a children's holiday club during the summer and offering Alpha to our toddler group parents and carers. We are also keen to grow and strengthen the children's ministry team this year.

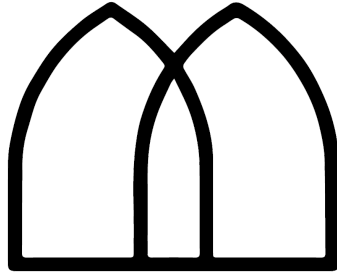
THE WATERING CAN REPORT

Ginny Cornish

St Mary's place of 'welcome, refreshment and hospitality' opened its doors in June 2023. Our aim is to be open almost every Monday morning from 10.30-12.30. And apart from New Year's Day and a couple of Bank Holidays we have succeeded. A special team led by Ben Prentice even opened on Christmas Day, serving soup, hot sandwiches and mince pies.

A small enthusiastic team transforms the ARP room every Monday with jugs of sunflowers, pretty table-covers, mood music and aroma of fresh coffee. Those who follow the colourful signs or Social Media posts find a warm and friendly welcome. Serving tea, coffee and toasted teacakes free of charge, we keep things simple so we can chat and welcome the guests.

Every week we welcome around 15-20 guests. We have welcomed guests of all ages from the local area, and from as far away as Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Columbia. We



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

love to sit and talk with the guests, although some like to enjoy a bit of peaceful solitude and there are some super jigsaws to have a go at. Some of the guests meet and chat with each other.

We offer to pray with guests if conversations seems to point that way. The Prayer Tree is a great way to offer prayer in a simple way. Several guests have been glad of some one to one prayer-blessing in the Church. As we have tried to listen to the Shepherd's voice we have seen His living water like a refreshing mountain stream flowing through our minds' eyes to provide Kingdom restoration and refreshment. We pray for the presence of Jesus to be with us and with every guest as we each journey through life.

Practical support and Signposting is an important aspect of our hospitality at St Mary's and we have been able to provide clothes and trainers on occasions for a dripping wet homeless guest and also for a young family who had a particular need. We have been able to provide simple advice and a safe environment for folks needing to make difficult calls to Council helplines. Signposting is an aspect we would like to develop further in future. Some guests have complex needs and vulnerabilities but still benefit from a safe space and a listening ear. We have noted the importance of the continuity of being open every Monday morning. Guests can grow in confidence and ask deeper questions about life as they talk to trusted team members.

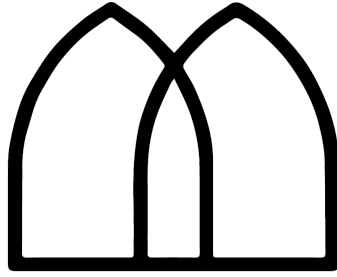
The Watering Can is open to anyone from the Church family and anyone walking by. Many thanks to all our volunteers and we look forward to sharing even more next year.

GARDENING GROUP REPORT

Sue de Waal & Christine Midgely

The Church gardening group has continued with a small number of enthusiastic people. We hope to begin gardening again from mid March and meet on alternate Mondays as well as Saturdays to coincide with the Coffee Mornings. Dates will be identified on the Church website and are subject to the weather.

Over the past year we have taken over the North-facing garden. The area has been repaved and we plan to have plants in raised beds to soften the effect. Story Time group are also hoping to plant a couple of raised beds and have some outside space



ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

for the children to play. The area will also have tables and chairs for people to enjoy the outside space.

When gardening on Mondays we frequently have people coming to talk to us and we can invite them into the Watering Can, as well as enjoying their refreshments ourselves!

We didn't quite manage to host BBC Gardeners Question Time but it was recorded at Warley Woods and Sue had her question answered. The gardening team gave some helpful advice regarding what we should plant in the East facing garden, which is seen by passers-by in the shopping area.

Thank you to all who have given time and put hard work into the gardens, and to the many at Church and passing who comment on how lovely the garden is looking.

YOUTH GROUP ORBIT REPORT

Johanna Baker

We have had an exciting year in our youth work at St Mary's. Over the past year, we have seen growth in size of our youth group, as new families have joined St Mary's and others have moved up from the children's work, and this has had a really positive impact on the group. Our youth team has also expanded, and we are very grateful for the team who have committed to serving our young people on a Sunday morning and beyond.

We have also started running a youth social roughly once every half term, which has been a great opportunity to have fun, get to know one another better in a different context than a Sunday morning, and to invite friends along too. We have played games, eaten pizza and pancakes, and enjoyed the sunshine with a barbecue and water fight!

We are also really excited that some of our youth group have chosen to be baptised or confirmed this year too!