



St. Mary's  
Highley  
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Severn Valley  
Benefice

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2022**

### **OFFICERS AND GROUP LEADERS' REPORTS**



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**ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING**  
**THURSDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2023**  
**AT 7.00 PM**



ST. MARY’S CHURCH, HIGHLEY

**ANNUAL REPORT**

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# MINISTRY TEAM REPORT

Our report for 2021 ended with those well-known words from the prophet Isaiah:

‘Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up, do you not see it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.’

Those verses were very clearly God’s word to us throughout lockdown. As we emerged, we counted our blessings that even amid the restrictions we’d experienced, God had been faithful, and many had grown closer to Him.

Throughout 2022 we became more used to a new pattern of services and there has been some ‘cross-fertilisation’ across the parishes this year, supporting each other on Sunday mornings. This increased fluidity helps to remind us that Christ’s church is made up of people who are all part of God’s family, wherever we worship.

There are three priests licensed to work in Highley, Val Smith and David Poyner, both Associate Ministers and Canon Rose Lawley, a retired priest with PTO (Permission To Officiate). We also have Keith Smith, a licensed Reader with PTO and Mark and Amy Williams, who lead lay-led services. All are volunteers and have given generously of their time and talents, over and above their working agreements.

Sunday services at Highley have continued as previously, with a 10am Holy Communion following Common Worship on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month, an all-age Informal Service at 11am on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the month and all-age Informal Service on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month. We have continued to serve the village by taking home communion to those unable to attend church and have ‘shared the load’ of baptisms, weddings and funerals between the Ministry Team.

The 10am service typically has an attendance of around 20-25, mostly aged 60 or older. A number of these people have attended the 10am services held at other churches in the benefice. Numbers at the bi-monthly All-age service with Sunday School are similar, with approximately 25-30 attending. Here the age-range is slightly wider, with a few families attending, as well as some older members of the congregation who enjoy informal worship. As the united Church of Christ we should all remember that we come together primarily to worship Almighty God, the Creator of All Things. Our preferences for worship styles, be they traditional or more contemporary, should not outweigh our desire to come together each week in love, for mutual encouragement and edification.

Outside of the normal pattern of Sunday services, a number of special events have been marked, including services on the occasion of the Death of HM Queen Elizabeth 2, our annual Memorial Service (this year at St Peter’s, Chelmarsh), Remembrance Sunday and Christmas services. The Service of Remembrance was held in the churchyard, next to the war memorial and was supported by Highley Band and numerous organisations within the village. The names of the fallen were read by pupils from Highley School. Prayers were also said at the switching on the Christmas lights at

the Severn Centre. Highley School also invited us in for Festival Assemblies and children from various classes have visited the church as part of their curriculum on two occasions during the year. Open the Book will be starting again after Easter 2023. We are thankful for the positive relationship which exists between St Mary's Church and Highley School, along with other groups such as Allsorts and the Pop-In Club, bringing together church and community.

In addition to maintaining services within the Benefice, the Ministry Team have also helped out other parishes, who have found themselves in vacancy. Again, this is a witness to there being no geographical or institutional boundaries in Christ's kingdom and help is sent where help is needed.

Our thanks go to everyone who has helped to maintain and strengthen the ministries and work within the Parishes. Pastoral work, in particular, has continued quietly and unobtrusively. The Pastoral Team and Pastoral Visitors have been keeping an eye out and an ear cocked to make sure that we are aware of those who need help or encouragement. In addition, friendship groups have been there for each other, individuals have kept contact with those they know well and the confidential WhatsApp prayer group is constantly praying for those who are struggling.

Our prayers for a new incumbent were answered in the autumn and we look forward to welcoming the Reverend Kina Robertshaw at her licensing service on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023. There is a very positive air of anticipation across the Benefice and we look forward to a new phase in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ in Highley and the rest of the Benefice. We had to wait a little longer for this than we expected, but God's timing is always perfect in His plan. So we thank God for what has been and we rejoice for what is to come.

'I the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and make you a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place and new things I declare; before they spring into being, I declare them to you.' *(Isaiah 42:6-9)*

Rev'd Val Smith   Rev'd David Poyner;   Rev'd Canon Rose Lawley   Keith Smith (Reader)

## **WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY EVENING ZOOM GROUPS**

David Poyner leads a study group on Wednesday evenings over Zoom, attended by around 5 people. Topics range from studies of individual books of the Bible to the creeds. The group also examined the church report on human sexuality and relationships, "Living in Love and Faith". David and one other church member regularly say compline over Zoom on Friday evenings.

# CHURCH WARDEN'S REPORT

The year 2022 started (& ended) with the benefice being in interregnum. Mike Harris officially retired September 2021 but remained in the Rectory until his new home was ready in February 2022. Attempts to let the Rectory for 6 months failed to find a suitable tenant within the tight timescale and the Rectory remained unoccupied for a total of 18 months.

Sunday services (& funerals) continued throughout the interregnum thanks to extra duties performed by such volunteers as Val & Keith Smith, David Poyner, Rose Lawley, Angie Forster, Amy & Mark Williams. The tower repairs have resulted in a safe environment to enable the bells to be rung on a number of occasions and a local group of enthusiastic campanologists performed 5040 changes surprise minor peel for the Queens 70<sup>th</sup> Platinum Jubilee. They have also been in demand for weddings.

The enormous increase in energy prices have brought into focus the limits of our heating system in church. We have a domestic system in a cavernous room with insulation only under the floorboards. The warm air disappears into the ceiling space. The PCC are looking into insulating the Tudor ceiling. In the churchyard, a large, dangerous sycamore tree near the war memorial had to be chopped down due to a rotting trunk. The CWG (Commonwealth War Graves) supplied a plaque to indicate the 5 war graves in the old part of the churchyard. We finally started physical moves to address the diminishing spaces of burial plots. Perhaps only about 5 years spaces remain before the churchyard will need to be closed for burials with our villagers having to be buried elsewhere in Shropshire. An area of the churchyard which, due to its waterlogging nature, had been left to overgrow for 30 years was cleared and pilot holes dug. At first, due to a dry autumn, the water table gave optimism, however, heavy winter rain dampened our hopes and we are looking to get experienced advice in 2023. Adjacent to the above area (alongside Church House) there is an area now designated for cremated remains. A much-valued member of our Church family for many years left a sizeable gift for such a use. A Garden of Remembrance in honour of Delphine Brown will be landscaped but this needs to be constructed at the same time as the burial area (if indeed that proves feasible). We need to avoid damage to historic headstones as heavy construction vehicles will need access. We are awaiting Severn Trent to commence construction of an outgoing pipeline from Church House. The overflowing septic tank causes a stench which is evident close to the 2 sheds.

In 1923 Ms Du Pre (descendant of the Vicar of St Mary's from 1843-1876) bequeathed an area of land at Woodhill (we call the Triangle) to our church. This has never been registered with the Land Registry but we have now located the original deeds and this has enabled us to move forward towards registration. The PCC has not discussed what we may recommend for the future use of this land. It has a covenant and can only be used for a place of worship as it stands.

Roy Adlington  
Church Warden

## **PCC SECRETARY'S REPORT**

My role as PCC Secretary began with the first meeting of 2023 in January after being asked in November 2022 if I would take over from Rose Lawley, the then Secretary.

I would like to thank Rose in particular and other PCC members for their help and support in getting to grips with tasks which were put my way. There is still much to learn and I envisage that the next twelve months will continue to be a somewhat steep learning curve.

Margaret Ritchie  
PCC Secretary

## **ELECTORAL ROLL REPORT**

The Electoral Roll now stands at 70, reduced by one from last year.

There have been two deaths (George Poyner and Alan Honeybourne) and one new name added (Margaret Ritchie).

Gillian Law, Electoral Roll Officer.

## **PARISH HALL REPORT**

The year 2022 saw most of the parish hall refurbished. The following tasks were completed:

The main hall has been painted and new flooring fitted; double glazing was completed and vertical blinds fitted throughout. Larger radiators were fitted in the refreshment area; missing tiles have been replaced on the roof.

Hopefully this year we will see the road-side wall rendered and the refreshment area painted. We have decided to replace 30 of the old tatty chairs with smart new ones.

Carina Tess is our new cleaner. We still need more people to get involved in the up keep of the hall and garden.

Many thanks for support received.

Pat Whitefoot



# TREASURER'S REPORT

This report covers the full year ended 31st December 2022.

The accounts are presented in the usual format, with General, Designated and Restricted funds. The money in the General fund can be used for any purpose. Designated funds are those which have been set aside by the PCC for a particular purpose e.g. the Parish Hall. Restricted funds must only be used for the purpose for which the money was given.

We have had another prosperous year financially and from many individuals kindly giving their time to make the necessary improvements to the Parish Hall.

The receipts from planned giving increased and the loose plate collections were up by £672. The services are still on a rotation basis, so the increase is really positive for us.

The Summer Fete and the Christmas Light switch on were both attended by the Church and the shop, things seem to be getting back to "normal".

The Shop appears to be going from strength to strength, they had a fund raiser for Ukraine and £1,500 was raised. The shop donated just over £10,000 in total over the year, this being to local, national and overseas charities.

We have regular bookings for the Parish Hall from Pilates (Jane McNaughton), Highley Companions and the new Highley Seniors group. Showing a marked increase from last year's amount of £750 to this year's amount of £2,060. The Parish Hall has been fantastically upgraded with new flooring, decoration, blinds, windows, and doors, it is looking much brighter and more welcoming.

Advertisers for the Parish Magazine recognised an amount of £1,640 and sales were £1,559. The total expenditure was £2,543 so we have an excess of just over £600.

The magazine is a very good part of outreach to the wider community.

Our Parish Share to the Diocese this year was £31,500 and this has been paid in full. The PCC also gave financial help totalling £1,800 to the following international and local missions, Simon and Sarah Cawdell £600, UCB £150, Lifewords £150, Operation Christmas Child £150, Crisis at Christmas £150, The Bridge Youth Centre £150, Bridgnorth Food Bank £150, we have £150 put aside for the Warm Space, I am still waiting for a response from Peter Vinall at the Parish Council as to where and how he wants this amount of £150.

We have a few groups meeting face to face and the Wednesday home group is still running over Zoom.

We continued employing RJM Contracts for the churchyard maintenance. We received half of the funding from the Parish Council in the sum of £3,650.

This is my second year as treasurer and I have completed the year end without assistance from Mary Rayner, we are still in contact occasionally when I have anomalies arise but, on the whole, I feel I am getting to grips with everything, although it may not be as in depth I feel I can answer the majority of questions I have been asked.

I would like to thank you all for your continued support and the blessing we have bestowed upon us with the volunteers keeping everything running over this interregnum.

I'm sure we are all looking forward to new beginnings and holding God's continued blessings close. We are called to be good stewards of what we have been given and as we move forward, we must continue to be led by God's Spirit and not entirely by our budget.

Mandy Homer  
Treasurer for 2022

## CHARITY SHOP REPORT

Our shop is now well established again and we have donated to many organisations over the past twelve months, including the following:

January and February	£464.00	Garden Village Friendship Group
	£464.00	Chelmarsh Toddler Group
March	£1,600.00	Ukraine appeal
April	£323.66	Highley Companions
	£323.66	Bowling Club
May	£598.74	Parish Hall
June	£300.00	Women's Refuge
	£300.00	Parish Hall
July	£453.00	First Responders
August	£372.00	Guide and Scouts
September	£350.00	Food Bank
October	£389.10	Friday Event

November	£150.00	Highley Ventures
	£1,454.00	Parish Hall
November	£200.00	Christmas Meals
December and January	£362.00	Kinlet Family Playgroup
December and January	£362.00	Highley School
December and January	£250.00	Royal British Legion
December and January	£978.00	Parish Hall
	£350.00	Turkey/Syria appeal
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	£10,044.16	
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This is slightly less than in previous years to the original shop, but still very good.

As there was no-one to run our annual hot cross buns in the High Street, we ran it by the shop along with tea and coffee. In addition to our usual opening sessions, we have held stalls at the Village Fete and Christmas Lights switch-on. We also put some good quality items on Vinted and have raised approximately £250 through this, for which we thank Carol, one of our volunteers. We have allocated donations up to July 2023.

We are getting very short of volunteers and although appealing within the church membership, we are going to have to look wider, which is a pity. What is needed are people to transport the recycling and be present when it's collected, usually early morning. Also to clean and tidy the shop and dispose of unwanted items and books.

Space continues to be a problem and we try moving things around in the hope that the walls may expand!

We are very grateful to our existing volunteers and must especially thank Thelma and Roy for all their help and Mandy for sorting our finances out.

Gay Lilley

## DEANERY SYNOD REPORT

No report this year as we do not have a Synod representative.

## **WEDNESDAY MORNING STUDY AND DISCUSSION GROUP REPORT**

As a home group we are open to anyone who would like to join us on a Wednesday morning from 11am to 1pm. We rotate around 4 or 5 homes as venues for our meetings, which are a combination of fellowship, mutual prayer and support and Bible Study. We have all been enriched by digging deeper into the Bible and discussing its interpretation within our contemporary culture. We talk a lot (!), laugh a lot and uphold each other in prayer.

Over the past year we have covered the Letters to the Churches in the book of Revelation; God's word to us through the Psalms and an Advent study by the well-known evangelist J. John – *God with Us*. At present we are reading through the letters from the apostle John to the scattered churches – 1 John; 2 John; 3 John.

If you are free on a Wednesday morning and would like to join us, please let me know.

Val Smith

## **HIGHLEY SENIOR CITIZENS POP-IN CLUB REPORT**

The Pop-in Club is run by Janis Rowe, Dale and Claire Schnelting. We started our first meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022 with 18 members. As of now, we have 29 members, male and female.

We provide tea or coffee and biscuits for everyone. Each week we do a raffle and mostly every week we play bingo. We also have a book swap scheme for the club. Members can also play cards and dominoes.

We have held a bring and buy sale to raise funds for the group.

The objective of the group is to provide a place where they, the senior citizens, can go to socialise, meet friends and in some cases make new friends, in a bid to combat loneliness and isolation.

Janis Rowe  
Chairperson

## **SAFEGUARDING REPORT**

This has been prepared as a separate document including the church Safeguarding Action Plan and a Sample Policy on the Recruitment of Ex-offenders.

## **AMY AND MARK WILLIAMS**

This year feels very similar to last year for us. We continue to be responsible for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday's Informal Service in Highley and liaise with the children's leaders as much as possible about the theme. We also help with worship music and sound technology as much as possible for the 2<sup>nd</sup> service and send messages on social media to those who were regularly attending our Zoom services throughout Lockdown in order to encourage them to come along on a Sunday.

It has been wonderful for us to have been able to invite some visiting worship leaders such as John Prockter and Roger Littleover to the services so that Amy has been free to preach instead of leading the sung worship.

We are looking forward to being able to collaborate more with other musicians and build a band again.

We have trialed two afternoons of worship music, prayer and testimony throughout the year and those who attended found them to be a real blessing. Amy would love to do this more in the coming year as she has missed the freedom in worship music that we had developed at the Severn Centre services.

We have been pleased to encourage the young people and children to sit near the front and they are enthusiastic about sharing their learning when they come back into the building.

We trialed an online Home Group called 'Practicing the Way' and this felt very positive at first but then seemed to lose momentum as people seemed to be doing more face-to-face meetings.

We have tried to liaise with children's and youth leaders throughout this year in order to keep some structure and make tentative plans. The children's and youth leaders are now in a routine of knowing when it is 'their' week and have kept things 'ticking along' during the Interregnum. Communication between us is good and we look forward to developing this further.

Amy and Mark Williams

## **ANGIE FORSTER ORDINAND REPORT**

Sitting here writing this report has made me really reflect on the highs and lows over the past year of my life. I still love the learning at CGH and the experiences I am having through my training. I have met some amazing people who have touched my life in many different ways, through shared experiences of worship, the struggles of assignment writing, the joys of seeing those from other training pathways at our residential weekends or by just being there to listen and learn together.

However, after Easter School (5 day residential at Ripon College, down in Cuddesdon) last year, our two grandchildren came to live with us full time. This has turned our lives upside down and has really added a lot of pressure to my already busy schedule, as I now have to fit in school runs, meetings and the general “being there” of bringing up a 6 and 5 year old. Nevertheless, I feel this is such a privilege to be a huge part of their lives, though it is totally exhausting (It was a lot easy in my 20s and 30s!) Having said that, college have been amazing and so supportive, allowing me to “Zoom” into lectures when I could not get childcare and giving me extensions on assignments when needed.

I am looking forward to starting my ministerial placement in the next month or so, picking up where I left off before lockdown. I am sure I will learn so much from Matthew who is the team vicar there, as I did the first time round, experiencing for the very first time, the wonders of sung evensong and Candlemas.

I still cannot quite believe I am in my second year of training, but talking to my fellow ordinands and even those who have gone onto their curacies, “imposter syndrome” is a common feeling and nothing to feel guilty about.

I am so thankful for all the support and prayers I have received so far and look forward to what the future holds.

Angela Forster - year 2 of my ordination training

## **MESSY CHURCH REPORT**

Messy Church had a mini event at Christmas in the Parish Hall. We had an intimate gathering of families which enabled some really good conversations. There was a lovely Christmas atmosphere with Mark Williams sharing a short message on the good news of Jesus.

We have recently had an event in the Severn Centre, where we had a really good turnout for the first open invitation.

Over thirty people including children and adults. Whole families came, which was lovely to see. There was a lovely atmosphere with parents and children enjoying the craft activities. And a short message of hope from Canev. Food was provided, generously donated by church members, at the end of the session. Arranged and served by Bev Bevan and Thelma. Families were very positive on their feedback and high praise was received. With comments on how they had missed Messy Church especially during Covid.

A very strong and committed team means that we are able to put two more dates in the diary for summer and Christmas events. Canev Clayton is now the enabler of Messy Church for Highley, in name.

This is such an invaluable outreach to families and the community. Providing a bridge between and opportunity to develop good relationships with the families. Thank you to all who have been supportive. Thank you in particular to the PCC and the Charity Shop for the donation to pay for the hiring of the Severn Centre.

Watch this space ...

Canev

## **ALL SORTS REPORT**

Things are starting to get back to normal at long last after all the COVID restrictions. Our numbers are slowly increasing we have over fifty-five ladies joining us on occasions, fortunately they are very laid back and easy to please and like nothing better than a social chit chat and something to eat.

Over the last twelve months or so we have had a variety of guest speakers, including Hazel French, who spoke about her involvement with assistance dogs and her experience training her own assistant dog.

We had a very interesting talk all about The Enigma machine, and how the staff at Bletchley Park deciphered the German secret code during the second World War.

One of our members Chris Corfield shared her experience travelling on the Orient Express.

In December we enjoyed a social evening and then shared our Christmas Dinner together in February this year in the Severn Centre.

To give us some new ideas on how to move forward with regards to the kind of speakers and activities they would like, we distributed some questionnaires and the feedback seemed to indicate that they were happy with what we have been doing up to the present.

Linda Evans, All Sorts Team

## **THE FRIDAY EVENT REPORT**

We have had a very challenging year at the Friday Event. We have averaged around 30 young people a week. Some weeks having up to 40! This is amazing as it shows we are running a needed service in the village.

We have encountered quite a lot of behaviour challenges within the last 12 months. This has been particularly hard on our amazing volunteers. We have a very small but dedicated team who help us

each term. It goes without saying that we would really welcome more help to keep the club running.

### **Activities**

This year the young people have enjoyed a couple of lovely trips – one to the outdoor centre in Stotterston and a kids play centre near Wolverhampton (which we were able to hire exclusively).

Each week we have the usual pool, table tennis and games console. We have also brought a range of new games and most weeks do a craft/cooking of some description.

### **Finances**

God has blessed us greatly with our finances. With the money we have coming in we are able to afford to buy new equipment and provide heavily subsidised trips. We are very grateful to the Charity Shop for being so generous in gifting money to us again this year.

Thank you to all on the committee, the volunteers, St. Mary's shop, PCC and the young people for all your support this year.

Rachel Williams  
Friday Event Chair

*End*