



THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

ST PAUL'S

CHURCH SPENNYMOOR



Photo: Keith Taylor

Annual Report for 2023

ST PAUL'S PARISH CHURCH SPENNYMOOR
ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS 28th APRIL 2024

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ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING 28th APRIL
2024

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Minutes of Annual Meeting of Parishioners at St Paul's Church, held 24th April, 2023, commencing 7:30pm in Church.

1. The meeting opened in prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and recorded.

3. Election of churchwardens

There were two vacancies for the role of churchwarden. There being one nomination, Christopher Luke was elected as churchwarden for the ensuing year.

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting of St Paul's Church, held 24TH APRIL 2023, commencing 7.30pm in Church.

1. Appointment of Secretary for the meeting

Emma Blagburn was appointed.

2. Minutes of APCM held

The Minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Elections

A. Synod representatives.

Emma Blagburn, Deborah Humphreys, and Kate Tarling were elected as the Auckland Deanery representatives. Kate Tarling will not be present at PCC meetings.

B. PCC Members

Lesley Parratt, Andy Carr and Samuel Thumaty duly elected.

5. Appointments: Independent Examiner (Accounts)

The Independent Examiner was approved by the PCC and is happy to review the Church accounts.

6. Report of Electoral Roll

The electoral roll is currently at 113 as reported by John Castling Electoral Roll Officer.

7. and 8. Reports from PCC and Church Organisations
Received.

9. Question Time

Christopher Luke gave thanks to Revd. Matt Tarling, Revd. Anthony Smith, and Revd. Ali Williams for their ministry.

10. Closing prayer

Matt led us in prayer, and we all joined in the Grace.

Emma Blagburn

Vicar's Report on 2022

Believing the Good News, worshiping Jesus, sharing his love

In 2022, when I returned from my sabbatical, the PCCs started a process of thinking about a vision for our churches and our role as PCCs. We thought about the point of the church and read:

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'

³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' (Matthew 22:34-40)

Our loves are driven by a sense that God is good news to us – his character and his actions which demonstrate his character. And so we love him – we worship him. But we don't stop there because his love

for us, demonstrated supremely in the self-giving of his Son, motivates us to love our neighbours.

As a church we express that in a couple of ways: 1. We live life together as a loving community. 2. We love our neighbours who aren't yet a part of our church. We do those things by sharing good news and serving.

So our vision is to be much more deliberate about this. It's already our identity because it's God's purpose for his church. But we easily forget that and focus on looking after a building or maintaining services and we forget that it's about worship and sharing his love.

That's why we have a statement like this – it'll go on the website and be available to us when we're having PCC meetings so that we remember that that's what we're about. Of course, a thing on a piece of paper is meaningless unless it reflects what's going on.

I hope you have enjoyed reading the report booklet for 2022. I think it's been an encouraging year. I missed some of it of course! But when you look at the establishing of newer ministries like Creche and the Environment Group and the continued growth and energy in our children and youth work generally and things like homegroups and mothers' union, and the

development of music ministry under Meghan's leadership, you'll agree that under God, it has been a good year.

I have commented that it has taken until the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023 to feel like we're positively growing and developing since the pandemic. I think I'm about willing to say we're no longer in the post-pandemic stage. All that said, some of you have had Covid recently so it hasn't gone away, but neither has the flu.

I want to make a couple of comments about the future with vision.

It's my job to keep that vision in our eyeline as PCCs and churches. I promise to do that. It will imply some change. We're already working towards broadening our expression of worship together with the introduction of the All Together service on the first Sunday of the Month. There will be opportunities for us to explore further in the future. Not leaving behind our traditional ways but growing the breadth beyond those ways. One of the things we need to realise and develop is our sense of partnership with Whitworth church. The two churches and parishes are not

identical but historically we have treated them so. So the services are basically the same style, activities are similar and so on. Yet we rarely work together on things and when we have joint services or events at either church it can be hard to feel like it's well supported.

So why not make the most of our difference and our partnership? Why not recognise that sometimes Whitworth is better for a traditional type of service while St Paul's has the flexibility and the mass of people needed to do other types of things. At its best that means that we can offer between us a variety of expressions of worship, a range of entry points for new people, a number of different spaces indoors and outdoors. Plus, working together is fun and good for our faith.

The second thing I want to mention is the need to develop and grow what we do with better support and training and increased involvement. We are growing. Our Sunday and Wednesday mornings have included new people over 2022 and into this year. People bringing a range of skills, temperaments, experience, ages, nationalities, and cultures. It's great. We are back to our average numbers every week now for the

first time since 2020 and our children and youth work are growing as part of that. Plus with a deliberate plan to run children and family targeted events each month we have seen great local engagement so far. Don't forget that we've had some people not really return since the lockdowns and some are needing to attend online. I want to challenge you that we can go further than that by doing evangelism – inviting others to come and hear the good news and welcoming them to our loving community. This is something we can all do.

We will not be terribly fruitful, however, if we continue as if things were the same now as they were even just 5 years ago. On return from sabbatical I decided to invest more of my time in overseeing and supporting other leaders in the church. So I meet homegroup leaders and children and youth leaders on a regular basis. I hope to add to that some local training for anyone wanting to learn how to read and teach the bible to others soon. Furthermore, we are holding a taster event for pastoral carers next month (15th) which I hope will lead to the re-establishment of a pastoral team. Each of those ministries can then support and encourage the growth in faith of our congregation and enable us to welcome others in. But

it does expect a level of engagement from those involved in leading groups and ministries – and their engagement is significantly helped by others offering their own time and skills in support. In other words, church is something we're all a part of!

You might say, where will you get the time? Good question. But I believe that that is more my job than some of the other things I do are! So involving more people in pastoral care and leading will ease some of my other commitments. We need to consider a paid administrator and perhaps in the long run our ministries will need other staffing. Having two churchwardens would help.

Sounds grand? Yes. But we are at a key moment. Our church has hovered at a 60-70 on Sunday and 110ish on the electoral roll for a few years, but we can surpass that. How, by

Believing the Good News, worshiping Jesus, sharing his love

Our shared vision.

Revd. Matt Tarling

REPORTS FROM THE PCC FOR 2023

Treasurer's Report and Presentation of Accounts 2023

We serve a generous God who has graciously given us all things in Jesus Christ. In response he calls us to live generous lives - giving of our time, our talents, and our money. It is wonderful to see St Paul's as a church live that out in so many ways, including in our finances. In 2023 income was lower than the previous year, but that is due to two large one-off receipts in 2022.

Discounting those, income was slightly higher in 2023, at over £82,000. Half of this came from the planned giving of our regular congregation, and a further £8,000 from other giving at services and £15,000 from Gift Aid (reclaimed tax). This year we joined the Parish Giving Scheme: people can give to church through PGS, and they recover tax before paying it on to us; they also offer givers the option to increase their giving by the rate of inflation each year. This helps sustain the value of regular giving over time, and reduces our admin and liability for Gift Aid, so we would encourage those currently giving by envelope or standing order to consider switching to PGS.

In terms of expenditure, the major costs are our Parish Share which goes towards the cost of our vicar's stipend and housing, running costs for the church building (insurance, energy, water, broadband, office

costs, repairs, and supplies). We also pay our music director and, on some Sundays during her maternity leave, external musicians to lead us in sung worship. Our Mission Fund enables us to give towards the spread of the gospel around the world, with payments made to mission agencies OMF and CMS to support our mission partners. It is also encouraging to see regular claims made for materials for children's and youth ministry.

Income was higher than expenditure over the year and our reserves are healthy, which enabled us to designate £25,000 for development of our building and facilities. I am hugely grateful to all those who have served alongside me - especially to Christina Potts as bookkeeper and Gift Aid secretary, and to the rest of the Finance Group (Lynne Carrick, Julie Simpson, Matt Tarling, John Tindale). Due to a new job, I have stepped down as treasurer sooner than I would have planned to, but it has been good to serve in this way and I am glad to pass the role on into the very competent and safe hands of Matt Killen.

Nick Moore

PCC Secretary's Annual Report

Our vision, *Believing the Good News, worshiping Jesus, sharing his love* becomes more established and as a PCC we need to embrace this!

The PCC and Standing Committee continue to meet regularly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Moore's for hosting many of our PCC meetings during 2023.

In all our PCC meetings, we receive, read, and discuss reports such as safeguarding, finance and Deanery Synod as well as worship together. We discuss any actions that need to be taken, are encouraged by God's provision, and can ensure that we are doing all we can to keep our church family safe.

1 Corinthians 12:1 talks all about gifting and the body and says, in part, that we "are the body of Christ and individually members of it" Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 talk about how we are each gifted with different gifts to bless and minister to the body of Christ. We are trustees of St. Paul's church and have a duty of care to serve and protect.

We continue in discussion on how to spend some of the capital in the church account. We are keen to improve the building so that it can be used even more to serve our community and enable more people to come and worship with us, but we need to do this with a clear strategy.

We now have our screens fitted and improvements to our audio equipment and have sent a survey to established key building improvement possibilities. Ideas have included more storage a possible new main inner door and porch renovations, new chairs, and improvements to the back room, meeting space, creche facilities and possible kitchen installation.

In July 2023 we gave thanks to our curates Revd Anthony Smith and Revd Ali Williams for their ministry and wished them well in their new ventures as Priests in Charge, Anthony in Darlington, and Ali in Werrington.

We give thanks to Nick Moore as Treasurer, the finance group and Christina Potts for carefully attending to our finances. Christopher Luke in his role as Church Warden and so much more, supported by Deputy Wardens Deborah Humphreys and Paul Simpson.

2023 has seen growth in many ways, reaching out to the community through family events, the All together service, prayer for growth and the development of our small groups. All of this would not be possible without our faithful, loyal volunteers who make up the heart of St. Paul's and to who we are all grateful in serving God and our church family.

And it goes without saying our thanks to Revd Canon Matt Tarling for his prayerful ministry, support, and guidance!

We have Liz Lewerne, Andy Carr and Andrew Fletcher and Emma Blagburn all currently First Aid trained. Emma Blagburn also has her MHFA and First Aid courses have been made available for others.

2023 membership of the PCC following the APCM:

Margaret Binns, Emma Blagburn, Andrew Carr, John Castling, Averre Cleary, Deborah Humphreys, Betty Johns, Matt Killen, Christopher Luke, Lesley Parratt, John Tindale, Kate Tarling, Samuel Thumaty and Revd. Canon Matt Tarling.

Parish Statistics:

Baptisms: 31

Weddings: 2

Funerals: 39 (in Church)

15 (Straight to Crematorium)

Weekly attendance: 191 (across all services)

In person online (live and 'catch up', estimated) 10

Emma Blagburn PCC Secretary

PCC's Annual Report on Safeguarding

All necessary Dbs. checks - both new posts and 3-year renewals have continued to be completed.

All those with new posts have been given the newest Church of England confidential declaration to complete. These are now kept in the safe.

Most of the adults who need to update their safeguarding training have done so and all those with new posts have completed the relevant training.

The "dashboard system "is set up and running.

Matt and I have completed the necessary “safeguarding hubs” training and intend to implement this in the near future.

Lesley Riddle, Parish Safeguarding Officer

Churchwardens’ Report

The church building remained in good order, along with the church plate in 2023 and routine maintenance, repairs and services continued throughout the year.

Works highlighted in the 2022 quinquennial inspection have not started, but these will be looked at and prioritised accordingly. Some ingresses of water were identified in 2023 and these were reported and fixed accordingly including the clearing of gutters and drains.

Due to significant amounts of rainfall throughout the year, the churchyard was excessively waterlogged in places, including the footpath leading from the church across to the St Paul’s Centre. Whilst we are unable to control the weather, it may be worth considering the planting of established trees in the churchyard to see whether this can mitigate the volumes of lying water at times throughout the year.

Where possible, can drivers using the path to access church please not drive onto the grassed areas to turn their vehicles. Wet weather means vehicles driving on to the grass is churning up mud and causing damage to the churchyard.

The most significant change to the fabric of the building was the installation of fixed screens following the approval of a faculty application at the end of 2023 and although this work took place in early 2024, the chandeliers were raised to provide unobstructed views of the screens during worship.

I extend my thanks to deputy wardens Deborah Humphreys and Paul Simpson for their work over the past year; Averre Cleary for her continued support at the Wednesday communion services, the Play Church team on Fridays; Jill Menzies for her work updating the logbook; and to Eve, Christabelle and Joyce who has been assisting me as junior churchwardens and are a great help on Sunday mornings.

Christopher Luke

Deanery Synod

2023 was a year of triennial election to the Deanery Synod along with merging with Stanhope Deanery so this has injected a range of new members to our Deanery in which we celebrated and the role of our Deanery in serving the parishes.

During 2023 we have continued to discuss the four strategic stands of the diocesan plan.

- Care of creation.
- Challenging Poverty.
- Energising Growth.
- Engaging with Children, Youth and Young Adults.

We have welcomed guest speakers to talk from Shildon Alive on their community project, Andy Harris on Children and Youth Work and have others planned for 2024.

Auckland Deanery also have their own Facebook group and are establishing a newsletter, SYNOD news to be shared with the parishes.

Many Deanery mission grants have also been awarded of which St. Paul's was one and received £250 to go

towards establishing SPY+ and the money went towards their journalling Bibles used church.

Emma Blagburn

Churches Together

Churches together continue to meet regularly throughout the year. All (approx. 25 members) members working together in Prayer and sharing of ideas towards joining Spennymoor churches together and crossing bridges.

This has included Lent services shared in different churches, Carol singing (Both in Asda and Wetherspoons - honestly, we don't sound too bad when we get together and did raise approx. £100 towards this year's chosen charity.) A walk of witness on Good Friday from St John's Kirkmerrington to St Bartholomew's Sunderland Bridge, picking up witnesses at St Paul's and St Andrew's on the journey.

Churches together also had their annual quiz in the summer, always a good event to bring the churches together, and a bit of good fun too with a bring and share supper.

Next year will see our coming together of churches continue.

Lesley Parratt

REPORTS FROM CHURCH ORGANISATIONS FOR 2023

Trekkers

Our numbers have gone down this year since SPY+ started and older ones have gone on to do that with Emma. In January we started with Luke's gospel taking meals with Jesus. We continue to use the Beginners Bible for both Creche and Trekkers in our planning. We had Messy Easter which was very successful with lots of children and in June, Muddy Church which was blessed with fine weather to make bug hotels. In October we held a light party with children from creche, trekkers and the community, these events welcoming record numbers of families alongside the Christingle which had both a 4pm and 6pm service for the first time. The 6pm took the form of more a scratch nativity which was different but still successful. It was tiring doing both but worked well.

Finally it goes without saying a big thank you to all involved in Trekkers, Kate, Jean, and Lesley for all the work they do!

Norma Downs

Creche

Creche meets during the Sunday morning service alongside Trekkers and does not meet during the All Together services. The grownups and children have a wonderful time as we sing, play, and get to know each other and God better.

Creche is for babies and children before they head to Trekkers. We have a wonderful, committed group of leaders.

We have been learning from the same Bible story as Trekkers and use the Beginning with God Bible. We have age-appropriate questions, take away sentence and craft.

We always love showing the Church family what we have been up to!

It has been a delight to see the children so happy and settled, enabling their parents to engage in the service. We had loved welcoming new babies and are excited that some of our children will soon head to Trekkers!

Bekah Moore

Play Church

Play church has been running on Friday mornings in term times for over ten years now. At the moment we have a regular number of children, parents, and grandparents plus those who come now and again. The younger children tend to play, where older children do crafts relating to a bible story. We also have the bible story then snacks then at the end we have songs and a prayer.

Deborah Humphreys

Mothers' Union

We have currently 21 members of St. Paul's Mothers' Union which is quite remarkable as many Mothers' Unions are folding due to lack of Leaders.

When St. Andrew's MU folded, we acquired 4 of their members. We are also fortunate to have different Speakers for our meetings giving us a wide variety of topics. This year they cover Nature Reserves, Mental Health and St. Cuthbert's Hospice as well as Trustees of Durham MU. We not only have fully paid-up members

but 4 Atlas members who pay a small amount to support the MU.

We attend Durham Cathedral twice a year for the Indoor Members Prayer Circle (of which we have 1 member) and for the Festival Service where the MU Banners are processed in from all over the County. We even have one now from Low Newton Prison which is now a Branch of MU. These members are given their Badges and Certificates when they leave prison and take part in monthly meetings with some of our Trustees.

We would welcome more members and it doesn't matter anymore if you are married, single or not even a mother. Please come along to one of our meetings which are held on the second Monday of the month at 2pm in the Green room of St. Paul's Centre.

June Wilson – MU Branch Chair

Music at St Paul's

Music is growing at St. Paul's with the formation of a band as well as the loyal choir giving diversity to form of music played.

Meghan Killen has been on maternity leave for most of the year, but the music has kept going with enthusiasm and the choir are very grateful to Steve Osman who has given up his Thursday mornings in order to lead the choir with choir practices. A huge thank you to all the pianists and organists who stepped in on a Sunday morning. All in all I think we have survived well.

Thank you for the continued range of music in which we can show our appreciation and worship.

Gillian Clayton

Flower Arrangers

It hasn't been a busy year, not many weddings. We had our usual Easter, Harvest and Christmas flowers.

Flowers are maintained weekly, and we have done our best, however unfortunately the team is less, and we

would greatly welcome anyone who would like to join the team, no experience needed.

I thank the team for all their help throughout the year and all the people who gave donations as without them church flowers would not exist.

Norma Downs

After 8

After 8 is a small group that meet on the 2nd Wednesday of the month (tried a Friday but some were cancelled due to small numbers so back to Wednesday). We meet at 8pm at St Paul's Centre for cuppa, cake, and chat.

Every year we do a Spring clean in church this year we concentrated on cleaning windows and porch. For crafts we have tried cross stitch, card decorating and made autumn themed wreaths. At Christmas we did foliage wreaths which included a talk from Stephanie Price and Secret Santa. Where we can we support community causes and this year we helped at Trinity Church with donations for presents at Christmas as part of their food bank and spent an evening wrapping gifts. We also supported Trinity's Night of Lights by

doing window displays for our homes and one for St Pauls church.

We have a Facebook group to keep up to date with what's happening in group but also to support each other.

Kim Wanless

Church Cleaners

Cleaning teams have continued in 2023 on a three-weekly cycle. We are unable to attract volunteers to join a cleaning team, and it becomes more difficult for our more mature members to continue with the same energy as they have done in the last x number of years – the mind is willing but the body lacks behind a bit!

I have suggested hiring paid cleaners to either take over on certain weeks or to supplement those cleaners who wish to continue on the Rota.

I urge the PCC to listen to what we are saying and to realise that our faithful cleaners do not necessarily want to step back, but painful bones stop them from doing the job as easily as they have done in the past.

We all have to face changes in our various walks of life, and this is what we need to face with church cleaning. Perhaps this year (2024) some positive suggestions will be made.

May I thank all of our current cleaners for their continued dedicated service to St. Paul's church.

Pauline Storey

Servers

Servers continue to provide support during the Sunday Holy Communion services throughout the year and their role is to lead the choir and clergy procession as crucifier. I'm thankful to the team for their service over the past twelve months. If anyone is interested in joining the team, please speak to myself, Deborah Humphreys, Paul Simpson, Sandra Clayton or Andrew Fletcher.

Christopher Luke

Press and Communications

The parish newsletter Crossways continued to be produced monthly. Print copies are less than 200, but the newsletter remains a vital link to those locally who don't have access to our digital outreach. My thanks as ever to Pauline Storey, Brenda Crooks and the distributors who print, sort, and deliver the publication.

Our digital ministry continued across X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and Facebook with live-streamed Sunday, Holy Week and Christmas services available via the latter. Whilst analysis of those joining services remotely is difficult to quantify, there remains a regular online worshipping community.

The Christmas postcard was delivered to homes across the parish, and it was good to discover that some people came to our Christmas services after hearing about what was taking place through receiving a card. My thanks to Matt Killen for coordinating the distribution and to the volunteers who delivered the cards.

The tech desk operates with a small team on a Rota basis, and I thank Zoe Tarling, Andrew Fletcher, Andy Carr and Samuel Thumaty for all their work during the year. If anyone is interested in joining the team, please

get in touch for more information about what is involved.

Christopher Luke

SPY and SPY+

To Jesus, children are as important as adults and equally worthy of love (Mark 9:36-37; 10:16) To such belongs the kingdom of God. Children do not belong automatically to the kingdom but must come to Jesus and receive him the same as adults.

We are blessed at St. Paul's to have such a diverse intergenerational church family of all ages and backgrounds. Our children are growing and toward the end of 2022 we discussed how could be more inclusive in welcoming them into our church services. The formation of SPY+ began for children aged 10+ where we spend 2 weeks in church listening to the word, partaking in the service, following the liturgy, and serving. A week over in the St. Paul's center to ask those "big questions" about faith and enjoy snacks and hot chocolate and a week in the "All Together service".

Through money gained from a Deanery mission grant, journalling bibles were purchased to support the planned activities whilst in the church service and encourage the following of the sermon. SPY+ also have their own “cool row” to sit and really feel part of the church family.

SPY – St. Paul’s Youth for secondary school age children continue to meet monthly. We have a regular group of about 6 attending. During 2023 we enjoyed trips to bowling and the beach, a BBQ in the summer to welcome new members, Christmas party and regular attendance to the Pulse at the Cathedral. We have been looking at the CY series, exploring a bit deeper into Christian faith.

Samuel Thumaty joined the team in the summer, and Nick Moore sadly had to cut back due to his new job. We give thanks to all the youth leaders who support our young people.

The young people really are an inspiration to us, and although we hope to be nurturing and growing live long Christians in them, they feed us!

Emma Blagburn

Homegroups

Homegroups are a vital part of the ministry and life of our church. They help us as 'members of the household of God...being joined together, grow into a holy temple in the Lord' (Ephesians 2:19 & 21) at a closer and more personal level than our bigger gathering together in services can. In fact, God's people met with him and each other in tents long before there was a temple, and the church was alive and growing in houses long before there were purpose-built church buildings (e.g. Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 1:2)! Our homegroups are places where we can explore God's love and glory more deeply through bible study, we can draw closer to his Spirit in prayer, and open our hearts and lives to be encouraged and supported by one another in the fellowship of Christ's body (the church). They're one of the key places where the St Paul's vision to 'believe the good news, worship Jesus and share his love' can be earthed in our day-to-day lives.

In the past year we have looked at a variety of topics and parts of the bible - Jesus' teaching to his disciples on the calling, cost and reward of following Christ in Matthew 10; a Durham diocese resource that, as its name suggests, 'Called [us] to Fruitfulness' in God; a London Institute of Contemporary Christianity series of studies that helped us consider how we might live our 'Whole Life for Christ'; and most recently we've

followed Jesus through the gospel of Mark - which has been a powerful reminder that Easter is the climax of the greatest rescue mission ever launched - one to save us!

These studies, and the communities that have built up around studying God's word and sharing the things we need God's help in, have been extremely encouraging (and sometimes challenging in a profoundly positive way) for those of us in homegroups. We've continued to have three groups this year, one during the day on Thursday and another on Friday, and one on Thursday evenings - each with around ten people in. As well as bible study, fellowship, and community the groups often share food together. And, really excitingly, we are in the process of launching two additional groups - a daytime Tuesday and an evening Tuesday group.

Homegroups aren't possible for every person in every season of life, but if you aren't in a group and you possibly can be, it's a great thing to make it a priority to join one! I know Matt would love to talk to you about joining one (as would I - can you tell that I think they're brilliant?!?). We have seen time and time again people find homegroups are places they can ask questions and deepen their knowledge of and relationship with God, be supported and feel loved by their church family. In short, places they can begin or continue to thrive spiritually. Please join us in praising God for our

homegroups as groups where more people meet more deeply with God and his people and pray for them to grow and to serve the continued building of God's kingdom in Spennymoor.

John Castling

Grow at St Paul's

The group met in April 2023 to discuss possible dates for the year ahead. Tables for use with wreath making and other activities have been purchased from Grow at St. Paul's funds and are stored behind the organ in church.

An activity morning was held on 29th April – a sociable time enjoyed by those who came. Shirely Taphouse and her boys cleared, planted, and looked after the raised beds and for this we record our thanks. The garden project would be much poorer without their help.

Wreath making sessions with Howard in late Autumn/Winter were well attended and very popular and also generate funds for things we may wish to buy

for the garden. Hopefully, the small group involved will be able to organise some events in 2024.

Pauline Storey

Environmental Group

One of the Diocesan priorities for 2021-2026 is 'Caring for God's creation'. On the back of all this, an Environment Group was set up to consider what our churches can do.

The group continue to meet every few months and are ready to now submit the Eco Church Questionnaire for both churches to hopefully gain at least a bronze award for both.

The group has led 2 church services now and hope to again nearing harvest time.

Look out for regular articles in crossways for environmental tips and the groups efforts in the parish and community.

Both churches are also now making more of a conscious effort to think about the environment, not just creation, but sustainability, waste, fair trade and

eco-friendly products, car sharing and recycling and this isn't just for church but home too!

Watch out for the wild meadow garden at St. Paul's a beautiful addition added in 2023.

Emma Blagburn

Prayer for Growth

'Prayer for Growth' began in July 2023 and happens every month on the fourth Sunday at 4.30pm. These gathering aims to allow time and resource to pray for growth in our churches. By growth we mean: Growth in the depth of our love and knowledge of Jesus; Growth in the impact of our faith in our daily lives and so in our communities; Growth in number of people coming to faith in our churches. These prayer times are an hour long during which we sing hymns and songs and listen to readings from the bible and a short talk to inspire prayer. Of course, we also pray! We tend to pray in groups where some people will pray out loud, others pray in the quiet of their own hearts and minds. There is no pressure to pray in a particular way. We have had consistent attendances through the first

6 months of this venture, and it is continuing into 2024. Each Prayer for Growth focuses on a different theme so anyone can join at any time.

Revd. Canon Matt Tarling

All Together

All Age became All Together. So what does that mean? The 1st Sunday of the month has traditionally always been, “all age” or the “family service” but we are a diverse and intergenerational church family, that comes in all forms and backgrounds and this needs to be recognised and accommodated.

The bible teaches us how Jesus loves us all equally for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is the Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.

All together is an opportunity for us to come together as a church family and embrace all forms of worship in unity. Children, parents, carers, grandparents all in one.

Permission from the Bishop was granted to remove communion from this service, although it is still available at Whitworth on the 1st Sunday of the month, and for the service to develop a new format. We introduced refreshments both before and after to gather people together.

The service takes the format of 3 parts, exploring, responding, and reflecting together. Activities during the service are for all to take part and led by a lay team.

We initially looked at a “God is...” series, each service with a defined theme relevant to being a Christian in today’s society, welcoming our baptism families and growing our community.

We have seen attendances at this service grow gradually through the year and anticipate further growth in 2024 as it becomes more widely known.

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Family Events

At the end of 2022 a team of us got together to plan a more intentional programme of events for children and families throughout 2023. We wanted to ensure events were well organised (taking it in turns to be responsible); well-advertised; and enabling us to reach out to children and families in our community with the good news about Jesus.

We had some really successful events that were all fully booked: Messy Easter with crafts and activities explaining the Easter story; A prayer activity at the King's Coronation in May; Muddy Church in June celebrating creation; a Light Party in October pointing to Jesus the Light of the World: A Relaxed Carol service for those that find a busy Christingle a bit overwhelming. The team have worked so hard to make these events come together, and it has been wonderful to see the church full of families eager to participate and engage. Please pray that we would do a good job of building relationships with these families and that God would be working in them to draw them closer to him.

Kate Tarling