



United Parish of
Oakley with Wootton St Lawrence

Annual Report 2024



www.oakleywithwootton.org.uk

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Rector's Report

When I became Rector of our parish in April 2019, the church's parish profile identified several areas in which we discerned the Spirit calling us to develop and grow:

- Recentring our life together in Spirit-led worship
- Regaining our confidence in mission, witness, and sharing our faith
- Reinvigorating our small group discipleship and spiritual growth
- Reimagining our men's ministry
- Renewing our pastoral care
- Rebuilding our ministry with children and youth
- Reaffirming our partnership with our local schools
- Reengaging our local community with the love of Jesus
- Reordering our church buildings

In the early years of my incumbency, I kept this document close to hand. The parish profile not only mapped the church's vision for growth, but it gave me a clear mandate to lead through the changes that would help get us there.

Five years on, the PCC decided the time had come to review those priorities. Where has journey taken us thus far? Where have we seen signs of God at work? What has changed in our context? Where might the Spirit be leading us from here?

Looking Back

What a different place we now find ourselves as a church!

Look around church on a given Sunday, and you'll see that the place is full of people who have been joyfully welcomed as members of our church family. Nothing has brought more vitality and blessing than those whom God has gathered into our fellowship.

Look down the list of all that goes on each week, and you'll see activities, projects, groups, courses, services ... even entire ministries, which simply didn't exist five years ago. It is amazing to see the vibrant and creative work the Spirit is constantly stirring up in our midst.

Look under the surface, and you'll see the Spirit on the move all over the place. *Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Mt 18:20)*. The word 'encounter' has become increasingly significant for me when I think of our church. Whenever we gather, I come *expecting to encounter* the living presence of God. And we do. All the time. Do we not? I see these moments of encounter taking us into greater depth in our faith, raising us to higher places in our worship, challenging us to bolder witness in our everyday lives. There are deep currents of the Spirit flowing in this place.

Look out into our wider community, and you'll see a radically reconfigured spiritual and relational landscape. Who we are and how we are in relation to the neighbourhood has changed in all sorts of life-giving ways. Openness, connection, compassion, partnership, and service have become defining features of our church's presence in our villages.

As we reviewed the last five years, the PCC could only give thanks for how God has been answering our prayers, often in surprising ways we could have never imagined possible.

Looking Around

The PCC also noticed how much progress has been made in each of the strategic areas mapped out in the parish profile. For some of the context has changed. For many the goal has already been realised. Either way, we find ourselves in a new place with new challenges and new opportunities. The PCC felt this required of us a new vision and a fresh way forward.

To keep up with the growth of our church, we have had to restructure how we organise ourselves. This has meant building our staff and ministry teams whilst also scaling up our infrastructure (around finance, HR, comms, safeguarding, and administration). It has also meant being bold to try new things and 'have a go.' As a result, we've seen an explosion of activity, a broadening of participation, and an increasing number of people willing to step up into new forms of leadership.



In my previous Report, I described 2023 as the year ‘when good things began to run wild’ (borrowing a phrase from +Philip). 2024, by contrast, has been the year when we have sought to rediscover our core purpose and begin to consolidate this groundswell of energy and growth into a new way of being church.

For a start, the PCC recognised that all the expressions of mission and ministry in our church were beginning to cluster around seven key ministry areas: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Prayer, Pastoral Care, Community Engagement, and Children & Youth.

As evidenced by the various reports below, we have seen significant developments in each of these areas this year: **Worship** (with the introduction of Café Church and the development of midweek services), **Fellowship** (with Newcomers Welcome and the expansion of groups like Men2Mow, Ladies Who Lunch, and Brief Encounters), **Discipleship** (with Alpha, Going Deeper, Kintsugi Hope, the Prayer Course, the Marriage Course, and the reimagining of ‘Connect Groups’), **Prayer** (with Thy Kingdom Come, the 24/7 Prayer week, and the relaunch of the prayer ministry team), **Pastoral Care** (with projects like Holiday@Home and our work with Oak Lodge Care Home), **Community Engagement** (with the launch of the Oakley Wellbeing Forum), and **Children & Youth** (with CAS Tots, CAS Kids, CAS+, the Big Sunday, Sunday Creche, Who Let the Dad’s Out).

In the coming year, the aim is for each of these ministry areas to have its own leadership structure, its own team(s), a more intentional pattern of pastoral support for leaders and volunteers, a clearer framework for safe recruitment and accountability, an operational budget, etc.

Looking Ahead

It has been very helpful for us to reimagine the structure of church life around these seven ministry areas. However, to discern where we are going, the PCC recognised the need to step back and return to first principles: our vision and our values. Who are we? Why are we here? What is our purpose and our vocation for this new season?



After much prayer and reflection, we believe the ‘vision’ our church is called to embody is this: ***Living the love of Jesus at the heart of our community.***

This simple statement captures so much of the journey undertaken these last few years. Again and again, we have felt the Lord calling us to be present ***‘at heart of our community’***. This is not just about proclaiming something or talking about something, it is about ***living*** in our everyday lives the ***love*** of Jesus. And at the centre of it all is ***Jesus***. Christ is our centre of gravity, and we are a people centred in his name.

We believe that four ‘values’ are forming us into the people God is calling us to be:

- Encounter:*** a place of worship, prayer, openness, and expectancy
– centred in the presence of Jesus.
- Belonging:*** a place of welcome and connection
– where everyone of every age matters and has something to give.
- Depth:*** a place of growing faith, brave conversations, and real relationships
discovering together who we are called to be.
- Compassion:*** a place of care for one another and joyful service of others
– loving those around us with everything we’ve got.

As we look ahead, it is important to reflect on what we are being called to ***do***. But it is perhaps more important still to understand who we are called to ***be***. My prayer is that these four values would fire our imagination and inspire us on that journey. My prayer is this simple unifying vision would give us confidence to live the love of Jesus wherever God has placed us.

A Word of Thanks

With the publication of the Makin Report in November and its current implications for Sue and her ministry, this has also been a challenging year for our church family. We have all sought to navigate our way as best we can through this painful time of uncertainty. I wanted to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to every member of our leadership team, and to all of you who



give so generously of your time and resources to serve and support the mission and ministry of our church. Your steadfast love and encouragement in the good times and the hard times remains an invaluable gift to me.

A special word of thanks goes to our faithful churchwardens, Helen and Mark. These two have committed so much of themselves to the life and flourishing of our parish. This year more than any other, they have gone the extra mile again and again and again. I am immensely grateful for their wisdom, leadership, support, and encouragement. I also want to thank our curates, Ceri and Ed; our ministry team leaders: Katey, Sochi, Chris & Naomi, Marilyn & Rodney, Erika, Jeanne, and Anna; our office team: Penny and Victoria; our treasurer Simon and his finance team; our preschool manager Caroline and her staff; the members of the PCC; our Church For Our Time champions: Mark, Derek, and the Friends of Wootton St Lawrence.

It has been brilliant having Anna Knight as our Evergreen Advocate for Older people. As you'll see from the Evergreen report below, Anna has left an inspiring legacy from her time in this role. We will miss her proactive and passionate presence on the team.

After many years leading and coordinating children's ministry, Helen Miller officially stepped down from that role this summer. Her impact in this area has been immense. Every family in our church – and just about every family in our village – has benefited from ministries that Helen has either led or initiated. I also wanted to acknowledge the faithful, sacrificial, committed team of volunteers who continue to serve our young people: Christine, Helen F, Jeni, Tiff, Melanie, Jenny, and Linda – not to mention the army of volunteers working alongside Sochi with CAS, the GAP, Youth Café and schools ministry.

I want to thank Teresa for her work as our parish safeguarding officer. Teresa has worked tirelessly to help ensure that our church is a safe, welcoming, and inclusive church for all. The level of support she has provided me and the various ministries of our church is above and beyond every expectation. Wherever there have been challenges, Teresa has been there with advice and help. Wherever there has been scrutiny, we have been able to respond with confidence and clarity because of her diligence. We owe her a debt of gratitude.

Finally, I want to thank you, my brothers and sisters, for being such a wonderful church in which to serve. On behalf of the Kautzer family, Jo and I are ever thankful for who you are and all you do. Your love and care for our family is a precious gift. We consider it a privilege and a joy to call this place our home.

As we set our eyes to the horizon with hopeful expectancy, may we be bold to pray over one another and over our community these two life-transforming, mountain-moving prayers of Jesus:

Come, Holy Spirit!

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven!

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.

This year one of the main areas of focus for the PCC was an update to the vision and priorities of the church from that outlined in the 2018 Parish Profile which Ben had been using as a template for his ministry in the Parish. The PCC drew lots to divide itself up into five teams to look at what was going on in areas of ministry identified as priorities, namely Welcome, Prayer, Children's work, Small groups and Discipleship, and Community Engagement. At the PCC Away Day in September the teams reported back their findings as part of a larger discussion of vision and strategy.

An outcome of the Away Day was that the priority areas were confirmed with the addition of younger men's ministry and since then work has been progressing. You will read, or hear, something from Ben concerning how he has synthesised the discussion into a renewed vision.

In July we were joined by Ed Haycock, at the time serving a Curacy in Basingstoke Church, for a short placement with the Parish. In September, Ed transferred to the Parish to complete his Curacy with us. Ed will be with us until some time this summer and in the meantime we are responsible for nurturing his ministry and being blessed by his gifts.

Anna Knight's work as our Evergreen Advocate initiated some good initiatives which you can read about elsewhere in this report. The PCC expects that these will continue to develop now that her tenure has ended.

The PCC made some minor repairs and incremental improvements to the buildings within the Parish. The churchyard at Wootton was subject to some major tree surgery in November and we look forward to seeing how the affected parts of churchyard recover. The Chancel roof at St Leonards has reached the point where it needs repair and there is a project in progress to address this. The St Leonards Church for Our Time project made progress towards obtaining local planning permission and work is in progress on a new faculty application. Plans for the Wootton St Lawrence project continue to take shape as we tackle practical challenges, such as water access, and explore new proposals for improving facilities within the church.

The publication of the Makin report in November has had significant repercussions for the whole Church of England. In our context, it has also impacted Sue Colman and her ministry within the parish. As a PCC, we have worked to support Ben and the leadership team as they help our church navigate through the challenges and uncertainties of this complex situation. This has been an intense and often stressful time, and we recognize the toll these last months have taken on all those involved. We are grateful for the prayer, encouragement, care, and support of our church family. The PCC thanks everyone for their patience and understanding. Above all, we stand in prayer for survivors of abuse – especially for those perpetrated by John Smyth – and also for those for whom this situation has stirred up difficult and painful experiences from the past.

The PCC has continued to prioritize safeguarding within the Parish, and we are extremely fortunate for the commitment of Teresa Bates, our Parish Safeguarding officer. Thanks is also due to all our volunteers for being conscientious in keeping up to date and complying with the latest requirements.

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 2024 consisted of the Rector, Curates, 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 74%

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 31/12/24

Ex Officio PCC members: Incumbent: Rev'd Ben Kautzer; Curate: Rev'd Ceri Deosun; Assistant Curate: Rev'd Ed Haycock

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 Ezeanowi

Elected PCC members:

- Erika Conti (1st term ends 2027), Annie Wilson (1st term ends 2027), Serena Worthington (1st term ends 2027)
- Teresa Bates (2nd term ends 2026), Kate Goucher (2nd term ends 2026), Claire Bowers (1st term ends 2026), Barbara Robson (1st term ends 2026)
- Katey Butler (2nd term ends 2025), Selina Craig (1st term ends 2025), Tom Favell (1st term ends 2025)

PCC Report Approved by the PCC on 17th March 2025

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 Church and Centres together showed a total surplus for the year of £3,306 (2023: £25,580) and the Pre-School a surplus of £19,840 (2023: deficit £465); both are included in Unrestricted Funds. Restricted Funds increased by £11,013.

The most significant income for the Church and Centres at 71% of total income is gifts, primarily from our worshipping community. Following an appeal at the start of the year, giving increased by some £21,000 compared to 2023. This, together with modest increases in income from the hire of our buildings and from interest earned on our cash deposits, covered expenditure and creates a firm funding base going forward.

Whilst covered by total income, Church and Centres expenditure increased significantly over the year primarily due to two factors. Firstly in 2023 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 previous 10 years and so 2024 shows an artificial increase in utility costs by this amount. Second it is expected to incur some £25,000 of costs on roof repairs at St Leonard's Church in 2025 and these were accrued in the 2024 accounts. We met our requested contribution to the Diocese Common Mission Fund in full once again; this is by far our largest outgoing and pays for our local ministers as well as contributing to some central Church of England costs.

St Leonard's Pre-School generated a significant surplus in the year following an increase in weekly hours offered, which resulted in additional children and therefore income whilst expenditure was kept under control well.

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 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 of 31 December 2024 were £162,487 (2023: £140,424), which represents approximately seven 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.

The Diocese provide an online Parish Dashboard that we use to record a review of our safeguarding policies and practices regularly. There is an increasing amount of detail needed to ensure we can prove best practice. It is a continual work in progress, however important in current times for this to be done.

Over the year, some of our valuable long term volunteers may have been surprised to be asked to complete application forms and provide referees to continue in their work. This has been requested as we need to back record the safe recruitment of all volunteers and be able to show evidence of this if required. We appreciate the understanding of you all.

There have been a number of safeguarding concerns raised this year. Thanks are due to our volunteers/leaders who have highlighted and reported these concerns. We have obtained advice from the diocese which has been valuable in assisting us and the leaders who have shown great care in dealing with situations, delivering safe and appropriate support.



Teresa Bates
Parish Safeguarding Officer



Kate Goucher
Assistant Parish Safeguarding Officer



Dave Rundle
Assistant Parish Safeguarding Officer

The Diocese have been complimentary of the way we have handled these situations.

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 complete the required safeguarding training and renew this every 3 years to ensure they stay up to date.

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

Another busy one for us two! A year that has seen growth, change, progress, and great challenges. You will see elsewhere in this report details of all the activities, events and initiatives that have taken place, evidence of a busy, thriving church community. As wardens, much of our work and service takes place behind the scenes, encouraging and supporting all the wonderful work we see around us and enabling Ben's vision for our church to emerge and flourish. The role is varied, and we would certainly struggle to name all the responsibilities and random things we end up doing alongside the above! The year always concludes with checking the inventory and making sure everything in both our churches is present and correct.

For Mark he has again given an incredible amount of time, effort, and hard work to move us on with Church for our time. This involved meetings with Conservation Officers, Ecology Consultants and Heritage Consultants amongst others, and then collaborating with the architects to get the plans and documents prepared for a planning application and a faculty application. However, we are so excited that this has led us to a place that the coming year may be the one. Anyone who has attended services this year, Christmas services, weddings, funerals, and cafe church to name a few will understand our need. It is a wonderful problem to have when you regularly run out of room, so let's do this! Obviously following Autumn and winter last year it will also be nice to be warm, comfortable and be able to hear everything in church.

Another big piece of work for us last year was our HR project. As a growing church our staff numbers have also grown and with that we need to ensure that we are a good employer taking great care of them. We are now working alongside an HR company to ensure that we do just that. As wardens we work closely alongside the leadership team, paid staff and volunteers ensuring positive wellbeing for all. It was amazing last year to welcome Ed to that team.

We have been working alongside many teams within our church this year, including safeguarding, Alpha, the Kintsugi Hope team, prayer ministry team, worship, the office team and youth and children work teams. Mark leads the AV

and Communion team, and I have regularly led and preached in services. Our job is to facilitate, encourage and try to fix problems and challenges before anyone notices.

The most important aspect of our role is to care for our Rector! And one every year that is both a privilege and a challenge. Ben's commitment and dedication to our church family ensures that we have to keep a close eye on him, protecting some family time, a work life balance and care for his mental health and wellbeing. We work together closely, as well as the wider leadership team, the PCC and standing committee. Last year came with perhaps greater challenges than we have faced before and was costly to us both in time and wellbeing. Thank you to all those who have supported and prayed for us. It was greatly appreciated.

It remains the greatest privilege to serve you, our church community and family.

Helen Miller and Mark Peryer



Curates Corner – Ceri Deosun

It has been a busy year in the life of our church and that has definitely been reflected in the life of this particular curate! Of course, we had my priesting last June - thanks to everyone who came down to Winchester Cathedral to support that service, it was such a special time. And following on from that I am now able to preside at communion which has quickly become a favourite part of my ministry.



It was a great joy last August to take my first wedding for a lovely couple from Wootton village, Chris and Sophie. The bride was fashionably late, as is traditional, but otherwise, the day went without a hitch, and it was a wonderful occasion. I am now also taking funerals regularly. This is perhaps the most difficult part of the job for me because I feel the weight of supporting families through their bereavement. I recently had the honour of being asked to take a gentleman's funeral, having taken his wife's funeral in the autumn and to provide pastoral care for that lovely family was incredibly special to me.

I am continuing to work with the village schools, heading up the Prayer Space team, supporting RE lessons and church visits with the Junior School and coordinating assemblies with the Infants. Prayer Space is always a wonderful time, and we are always in need of volunteers to make it happen so please do let me know if you would like to learn more! We recently hosted Year 4 in St Leonard's, and they enjoyed learning a bit more about the history of the church and seeing me robed up!

Another area of my ministry where we are starting to see real flourishing is with Oak Lodge. Anna and I took the Hymns We Love resource in to use with a small group starting in the autumn, and I am now continuing this with the support from volunteers as Hymns of Hope. We regularly have up to a dozen residents joining us to discuss the meaning behind some of their favourite hymns and singing together. We always stay for a cup of tea and a chat too!



One of my main focuses for the coming year is developing our offering of short courses to support discipleship within the church. This began with the Prayer Course last autumn and Galatians at the start of this year, and Sanctuary for Lent. These provide an opportunity for those not currently in Connect groups or those who want a break or to try something different to dig into a topic or Bible book with others but without a long commitment. Watch this space for what is coming up next.

Deniyi and I are grateful for your continued support and friendship. We feel well settled into church and village life, so we are trying not to think too much about the fact that I am nearly halfway through my curacy now.

Ceri Deosun

Curates Corner – Ed Haycock

I was able to join the Church for my final year of curacy training in September 2024, with the intention of experiencing a different context to the Resource Churches which I had trained and been ordained into. My time with the church has been such a blessing in countless ways, from the support when my wife was ill and through the birth of my third daughter to name a few.

I have been able to engage with many different areas of the life of the church with a particular emphasis on:

Who Let the Dads Out

Launched in March 2025, and long awaited by some members of the church who investigated the potential for a similar group many years ago. The aim of the group is to gather dads and their kids together on a Saturday morning, to build community and create a space for dads to come together. We launched with 6 families coming along, and we are exploring different ways to advertise and develop the session.



Mens Group

After identifying the missing engagement of young working men in the life of the church we are launching a mens working lunch, weekly 12 till 1, where men who work from home or locally can gather together at one of their houses, to have lunch, share a short reflection and spend time together. The aim not only being to build community and friendships inside this group but also offer a wellbeing incentive to get away from the desk and take a lunch break together.

Cafe Church (all age worship)

Having previously been involved in planting and running all age congregations I have loved being able to get involved more and more with the direction of cafe church. This has been about learning the journey of cafe church, and getting to understand the resources and setup.

With this learning in mind, I have been able to implement a new shape of service with the hope that in the coming months we can continue to develop this service structure to be relevant and engaging to all ages during cafe church services. I have also been working with Sochi to explore the opportunities for cross pollination of service structure into the Sunday morning kids ministry sessions.

As well as the above areas of focus I have been involved in Oak Lodge, the schools, service leading and preaching, pastoral care, home communion, implementing church suite and sharing my learning from the Resource Church in various areas of church life.

Ed Haycock

St Leonard's Pre-School

Summary

Thank you to everyone who has prayed for the preschool, the staff and our families, it is greatly appreciated. We have been busy with lots of children and an additional member of staff joining us in September due to our increased intake.

One Monday morning in July we had a phone call at 11.20am to say that we would be having our OFSTED inspection the next day. After Pippins several members of staff came down to the Centre to set up the room. The inspector came at 8.20am and left just after 2pm. We were judged to be good in all areas.

We had a busy Sport Day and a very well attended Leaver's Concert in July to end the summer term.

Our autumn term was the busiest we have had since I have been Manager, which resulted in the preschool being full for the year by October. We had a Harvest Celebration and Nativity in the church. Preschool families raised over a £1,000 for new resources in a fundraising sponsor week of Christmas activities in December.

Our parents and grandparents have been very supportive in cooking activities and here is a photo of the jam thumbprints that were made during cooking week this term.



This term we had a week on dinosaurs and here are photos of our dinosaur display.



Caroline Edwards, Manager

Life Events

Christenings

It was a great joy to celebrate the baptism of 10 children in 2024. The aim this year was to be more intentional and creative about how we help these new families connect into the life of the church. In January, the team hosted another fantastic “Christening Journey” breakfast for groups of parents and their children, with home visits by Ben or Ceri for those unable to attend. Our midweek toddler groups – Quackers, New Life, and Pippins – remain popular spaces for building relationship, as have our termly Sunday Fun Days. In September, we held our second annual “Celebration of Christening” all-age service for all the children who had their baptism the previous year. The creation of a regular Sunday creche and the launch of Café Church at the 10:00 has been brilliant for welcoming many new families into our church family. Richard has been championing all our digital communication to promote the many groups and activities on offer across the year.

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

Adult Baptisms and Confirmation

Inspired by the Christenings of their children, two mums made the decision to be baptised themselves this year. On 3 June 2024+David Williams led a beautiful confirmation service for three candidates. +David returned at the end of the summer to lead a second confirmation service on 31 August. Witnessing the transforming work the Spirit of God in people’s lives, these services are a highlight of the year.

Ben Kautzer



Marriage

In 2024, six couples celebrated their wedding at St Leonard and Wootton St Lawrence. We had the opportunity to celebrate the renewal of vows of couples in the church and the wider community as well. It was an absolute delight to mark the 75th anniversary of Ken and Mavis from the 8 o'clock congregation! As mentioned in last year's APCM report, we had a fantastic relaunch of The Marriage Course at St Leonard's with about a dozen couples taking part. From nearly-weds to newly-weds to those about to celebrate their 50th anniversary, whatever age or stage the Marriage Course is a wonderful opportunity to invest in one of the most important relationships in your life.

Ben Kautzer



Bereavement

Last year, the OWW ministry team conducted 37 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 focuses on pastoral care and support to families connected to the wider village community. This year, our curate Ceri began presiding over funeral services at St Leonard's, and has been doing such a wonderful job offering love and support to the families in her care. 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. In September, we offered a newly updated version of The Bereavement Journey – a 7-week course for anyone who has been bereaved at any time and in any way. This was the fifth time the course has taken place within the parish. Through the growth of informal support groups (like Men2Mow and Ladies Who Lunch), the Christmas hamper project, and the wonderful work of the pastoral care team, a strong network of ongoing pastoral support is available through our church.

Ben Kautzer

Pastoral Care

Pastoral Care takes many forms both within the church and community, and we are extremely blessed to have in excess of twenty dedicated and skilled volunteers who regularly give generously of their time and talents. However, pastoral care is something we are all part of, every time we show God's love and compassion to others. When I visit people, often in difficult circumstances, it's amazing to hear how blessed they feel by the cards, messages, prayers and words of hope and encouragement they receive from church members.

It has been another busy year but as a team we have managed to respond sensitively to the many requests received. Providing meals in times of joy, the arrival of a new baby for example, but also in less fortunate circumstances. Praying for people in times of need, visiting and supporting people in hospital, at home and through the Oak Lodge services.

The team make regular pastoral visits and administer home communion to those who find it difficult to access church, for example through lack of mobility, age, or health issues. These visits create the space for meaningful conversations, prayer, and spiritual and emotional support. The visits are as much a blessing to the pastoral visitor as they are to the recipient.

We continue to support the bereaved through pastoral visits, offering The Bereavement Journey, In Loving Memory and Blue Christmas, and signposting to appropriate regular meeting points. For example, Men2Mow and Brief Encounters.

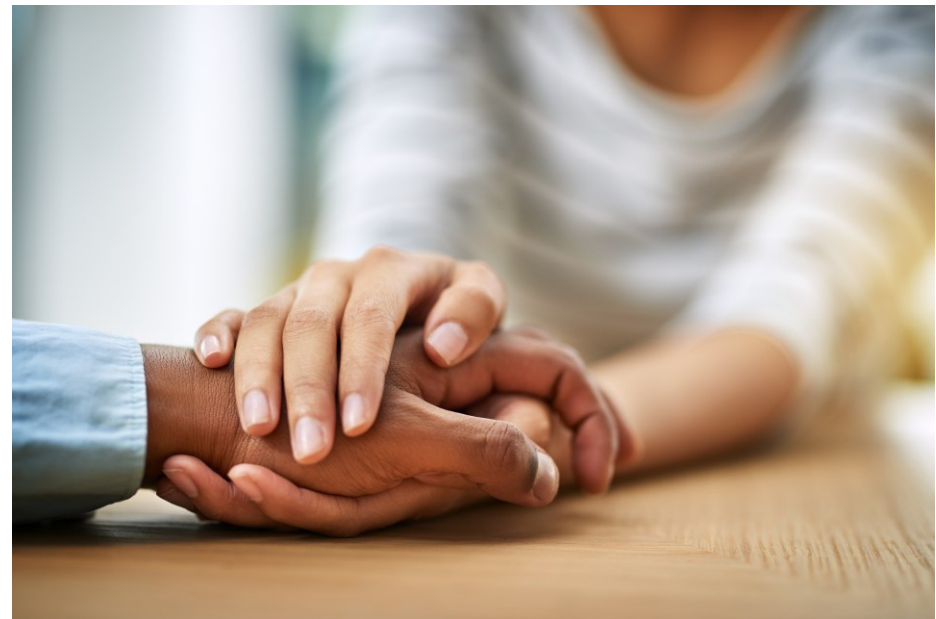
Our work in partnership with the local Social Prescribers is increasing as we provide friendship and pastoral support to some of the more isolated and vulnerable members of our community.

Once again, your generosity and kindness enabled us to bless families from the local schools, church, and parish at Christmas. A big thank you to everyone for supporting this ministry, and a huge thank you to the young people from the Gap who contributed boxes full of chocolate treats.

To support individuals in their ministry, we provided two workshops this year. Boundaries and Confidentiality which was offered to the pastoral care team by an outside provider, and Active Listening which was offered in house to people in roles where listening is key. More workshops are being planned, so watch this space!

Thank you to everyone for your commitment to care for others demonstrating God's love. Your kindness will have made a positive difference to someone's life.

Katey Butler
Pastoral Care Co-ordinator



Worship Team

Naomi and I feel so privileged to be leading the worship team at St Leonard's. It's so encouraging being part of such a caring, humble and supportive group of musicians and singers who love Jesus and each other from the bottom of their hearts. It's a delight to be able to share with you a bit of what we've been up to over the past year!

One major highlight was the "Worship and Prayer" night we held as part of the week of prayer last May. This felt like a springboard into something really special - combining extended, passionate worship with space for prophetic and prayer ministry. We are looking forward to building on this in the coming months with another evening devoted to prayer and worship - so watch this space!

Chris also loved the opportunity to speak on worship as part of our "Elements" series, sharing his heart behind why and how we worship together as a church family.

As a team we have held some intentional, practical workshops which have provided a space to try different musical ideas and new songs - many of which we have introduced into the life of the church. They've also provided an opportunity to simply worship and pray together as well as eat and have fun together. These times have been pivotal in aiding our musical and spiritual growth, as well as building community and deepening relationships. It is therefore very much our intention to keep these going.

The 'Well' has also remained a special, refreshing, unhurried space that I know that many of the team and wider church love—I personally can't think of a better way to start the week than simply spending time in God's presence with other worshippers.

The Carol Service was another highlight. There's something incredibly powerful hearing multiple voices in harmony declaring "Hope has a name, Emmanuel, the Light of the World who broke through the darkness!" over our church family and wider community!

It has also been fantastic in recent months seeing many in the team work on some new homegrown songs too—this year has definitely brought with it a fresh wave of creativity! Naomi and I are particularly keen to see this area of worship in church continue to grow and thrive.

We are always on the lookout for new musicians and singers to join the team, so if you play an instrument or sing and are interested in getting involved, we'd really love to hear from you! You can get hold of us at: worship@oww.church

Chris and Naomi Greenhaugh



Prayer Ministry

We relaunched our prayer ministry this year and it was wonderful to be offering regular prayer again at the end of the services. With planned changes in the leadership of the prayer ministry and a need to encourage others to get involved, we held an evening for all those involved or interested to come along and talk about all things prayer ministry. This was a blessed meeting and wonderful to see fresh faces there. We were able to talk, learn and pray together. It also gave time to look at revised guidelines for prayer ministry and share information about safeguarding within our roles.

We took part in a prayer week last year. A really special time within our church to allow time and resources to do just that. To pray and be present. To call upon the holy spirit. This time included us joining many other churches in the 24/7 prayer movement also. This saw a range of creative initiatives taking place among our church and out into our community. We also ran the prayer course last year which many members of our church attended. Our sermon series too have all had an important emphasis on the importance of prayer. Our Elements series, Perspectives, Gravity and of course Soundcheck all include sermons on our need and call to live lives grounded in prayer.

As a leadership team we recognise the need for our church to be one built on a solid foundation of deep-rooted prayer and we are prioritising all aspects of prayer as we approach this coming year. We are at a time of change and need church members to step forward to lead and be a part of a team looking at ways that we can become prayerful people in all aspects of our church and lives.

Helen Miller



Wootton St Lawrence

Church Services

The church is open daily for private prayer and visitors.

There are services on Sunday, twice a month at 9am, and the attendance has slowly increased through the year.

Special Services

On the 17th November there was a Beekeepers service followed by a tree planting. Canon John Owen attended along with members of the Hampshire Beekeepers Association. To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the association and to commemorate Charles Butler's time as Rector of Wootton a tree was planted on the church meadow.

On Remembrance Sunday, Ceri led a much appreciated service at the Wootton war memorial.

Leading up to Christmas, residents and the Barn Nursery decorated the church with bunting, paper chains and baubles to make the church festive. The Barn Nursery held their Christmas performance in the church for the first time, which was a great encouragement.



The Big Sing took place in the run-up to Christmas. This is a social event with mulled wine, mince pies and children's activities prior to some great performances and audience participation at the Big Sing. This is a lively event, well attended by local residents as well as regular church members.

The much loved Christmas Eve Crib service was attended by over 100 people this year.

Churchyard

For the past few years, the churchyard has been maintained solely by Wootton volunteer working parties with substantial input from Scott Childs. However, this year, we have had the benefit of the Community Payback scheme assisting, which has been of great help and should be ongoing.

The trees in the churchyard had become significantly out of control. Stage one of major tree work has now been completed with further work to be carried out Autumn 2025.

St Lawrence Church for Our Time project

An architect visited in February, and we are awaiting further quotes.

As a temporary solution to our lack of facilities, we now have access to the toilets at the Barn Nursery for key services and events. A plan is in progress for a new path from the West door of the church to the nearby footpath for easier access.

Progress is also being made towards a water supply and tap being brought to the churchyard.

On 3rd August the Wootton Residents Association held a fete and dog show. It was a very successful day, and will be repeated. They kindly donated the profit to the St Lawrence Church for Our Time project.

Serena Worthington & Teresa Bates

Evergreen Advocate

Anna Knight was appointed as our Evergreen Advocate in September 2023. Building on the strong foundations of the 'Oakley Evergreen Fellowship,' the purpose of this role has been to serve the spiritual and pastoral needs of older adults in the parish. This was a busy and fruitful year for our Evergreen ministry with expansion of ministry in the local care home, the launch of several exciting initiatives in the community, and the development of the pastoral team.

Every month the team from St Leonard's leads services of Holy Communion as well as 'messy vintage' craft and conversation services for residents at Oak Lodge Care Home. Over time it became clear that several members of this new congregation were keen to continue the conversation and wanting to grow deeper in their faith. In response, Anna and Ceri launched a fortnightly discipleship discussion group in the care home called 'Hymns of Hope.' In collaboration with Oakley Junior School, a group of students participated in our Christmas service, singing carols, helping with the crafts, sharing hand-made Christmas cards, and having the most precious intergenerational encounters with residents.

During the summer, Anna and her team hosted our first 'Holiday@Home' event at Malshanger. Holiday@Home is an opportunity for older people to experience the fun and fellowship of a change of scenery without having to pack a bag or stay away overnight in a strange place. This popular two-day event was full of activities, good company, fantastic food, and a beautiful setting and the team are already deep into the planning for next summer.

Another major development this year has been the formation and launch of the 'Oakley Wellbeing Forum.' Bringing together the church, Oakley & Deane Parish Council, OCA and Rural West Primary Care Network's Social Prescribers, this collaborative project is all about gathering leaders and volunteers from our community around the table to map the strengths and assets of our community. The aim is help build relationships and encourage local partnerships by raising the profile of the amazing things that are already taking place, discerning gaps in provision, and exploring creative solutions – all in an effort to combat loneliness and promote the flourishing of our village.

In February, Anna concluded her role as Evergreen Advocate. She wrote: *"It has been a privilege to serve in this role and to work alongside such dedicated volunteers. I thank God and I'm so grateful for the time we've shared in ministry and for all the love and care the volunteers bring to the lives of older adults in our community. A huge thank you to the volunteers and clergy who have dedicated their time and energy to Oak Lodge Care Home services/discipleship spaces, Holiday at Home, Oakley Wellbeing Forum, midweek services, and Workshops."*



When Anna first took up her role a year and a half ago, we knew that God was calling our church to expand its ministry within the community, but we did not yet know what that might look like or what shape it might take. Step back and survey the landscape now ... and it is just brilliant to see what is emerging.

In her time as our Evergreen Advocate, Anna has helped nurtured into growth an entirely new ministry amongst older people in our parish. Her passion, commitment, and care have been an inspiration to us all. We are so grateful for all Anna has contributed to our life together.

PCC will be discerning the future shape of this role as we seek to develop the many initiatives Anna helped set in motion and as we look ahead to the new things that are yet to take shape.

Ben Kautzer

Church For Our Time – St Leonards

The objective of the Church For Our Time project is to reorder St Leonards church to bring it up to date with 21st century expectations of heating, lighting and flexibility and to add an extension to house toilets, a vestry, a small kitchen/servery and a small hall.

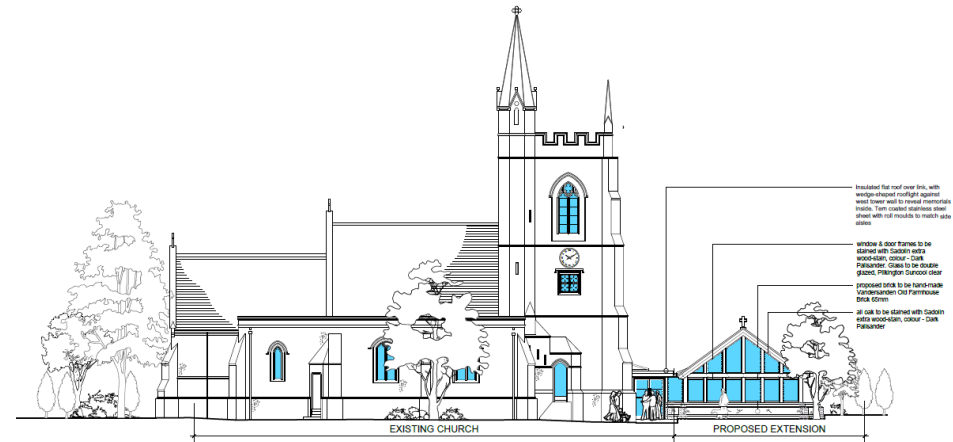
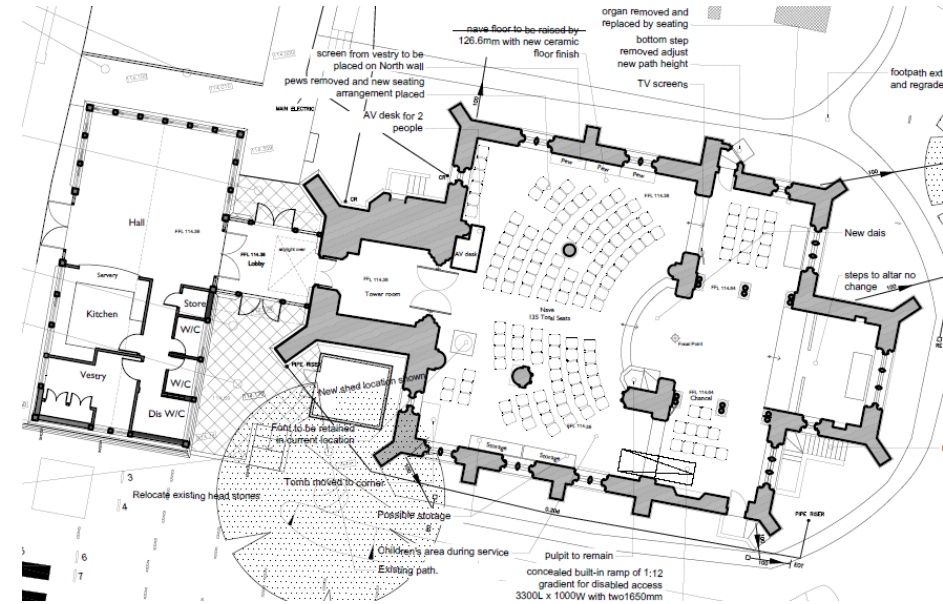
Following an unsuccessful faculty application which was turned down on the basis that planning permission was unlikely for the extension in its proposed form, we have been working with the local planning authorities to revise the extension design. The problem stems largely from the fact that St Leonards is a grade II* listed building in the Church Oakley Conservation area. We started by consulting with the local Conservation Officer who worked with us and Jeremy Bell, our architect, to come up with an extension design that was more sympathetic to the locality taking its cue from the Lytch gate.

In the summer, once that design was finalised, we went through a pre-application process with the local planning authority. The result was positive, with a recommendation that we went to a full planning application.

With the approval and support of the PCC, we have been working with various planning, landscape, ecological and heritage consultants to get the necessary set of documents in place for the planning application. We have also started work on a faculty application that will run in parallel. As part of the process, we have been sharing our plans with the Parish Council, our near neighbours, and have hosted a public exhibition in the church.

We expect to be ready to submit both these applications within the coming months and anticipate a decision by the end of the summer.

Derek Felton, Mark Peryer



Youth and Children

The Come and See (CAS) youth ministry has truly been a blessing in our community, and I am continually inspired by what God is doing among our young people. I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone for their prayers and generosity, which have played a vital role in making our ministry a success.

Each week, CAS youth groups reach over 300 young individuals in Oakley and beyond. The **Youth Café** has experienced remarkable growth, fostering strong relationships among attendees. It has been uplifting to witness the connections formed through this initiative. Our various groups, including **CAS+ Teens Soirée and TRIBE**, cater to youth aged 10-17, and they have been meeting weekly for food, fellowship, and life-changing conversations.

The dedication of our CAS volunteers has been nothing short of incredible. Their commitment to our mission is inspiring, and we are proud to grow and train our volunteers every quarter. Recently, we hosted a thank-you dinner to honor their exceptional support, and it was a wonderful evening of appreciation and fellowship.

The **GAP** youth group continues to flourish, meeting every first Friday and providing a space for young people to connect and support one another. The GAP team has done an outstanding job in nurturing this community.

Our partnerships within the community have strengthened our mission. Collaborations with local businesses and the Oakley Community Association (OCA), have been instrumental in supporting our youth initiatives. Food link Basingstoke has also provided invaluable assistance by supplying food for our CAS events.

Our relationship with **Oakley Church of England Junior School** remains robust, with our presence felt through various activities such as prayer spaces, collective worship, well-being clubs, school trips, and RE support. We appreciate the warm welcome and support from both teaching and non-teaching staff, which enables us to serve the students effectively.





The young adult community, known as **The Bridge**, has been thriving under the leadership of CJ, Dimitri, and Sochi. Their dedication to fostering connection and growth among young adults has been commendable.

In our Kids Ministry, we have reimagined our approach to engaging children and toddlers, launching the **CAS Kids** and **CAS Tots** ministries. We are excited about developing a robust program that nurtures our youngest members.

Furthermore, we have established partnerships with various youth groups across Basingstoke, facilitating collaborative youth sessions that encourage our youths to build relationships beyond our community.

This quarter, we launched **The Big Sunday** outreach project, providing an opportunity for young people to connect with CAS and engage with the Gospel. We partnered with the Life Bus team at St Mary's Andover, and it has been a joy to have over 80 young people attend these events.

Our events calendar has been filled with exciting activities, including weekend trips, camps, outdoor hangouts, parties, and trampoline park visits, all designed to foster fun and fellowship.

CPR - CAS Prayer Room, has become a source of strength and spiritual growth for our group. Meeting monthly to pray for our ministry has allowed us to witness the power of God answering our prayers.

As we look ahead, I encourage everyone to continue praying for the youth of Oakley and to support our ministry in any way possible. Your love and dedication mean the world to us, and we are incredibly grateful for each and every one of you. Together, we are making a difference in the lives of young people in our community.

Sochi Ezeanowai

Discipleship

Adult Discipleship covers almost every aspect of Church Life and what it means to be a Christian. While what falls within the Adult Discipleship remit is still working itself out, we (Penny Brown, Erika Conti, Richard Cripps and latterly myself) have been looking at the changes that have been taking place within the various mid-week Small Groups over the past few years, their structure, aims, are they open to new members and how we can grow and develop. We have also been thinking about 'follow on' groups for those who have been part of other Groups such as Alpha and wish to continue their faith journey.

Penny, Erika and Richard's vision and enthusiasm has driven a re-imagining of how we can '**connect**' within Church and the wider community and it is exciting. I would pay tribute to the Group Leaders who have faithfully continued to provide Group Leadership. New Groups have also come into being during this time. We currently have 10 Groups, giving us different study approaches to discuss and deepen faith, looking at what it means to live a Christian life and support one another. These include the Film Groups, Fellowship Groups, Home Groups, Life Groups and Bible Study Groups.

We have brought them all together under the title of '**Connect Groups**'. Why? Well, with different names and styles of Groups it can be confusing but the common ground is their approach to '**connect**' People, the Church and the Community.

This is a '**Connect Group**' description:

Connect Groups are a great way for sharing life, building friendships and growing in relationships with God, providing an opportunity for members to grow spiritually and deepen their faith as well as provide support when going through difficult times or facing life challenges.

The idea is simple. It takes a group of people and connects them to other members of the congregation where they can create deeper, more meaningful relationships offering each other support and encouragement on their faith journey. It encourages deeper community and accountability within Church and develops leaders that can help grow the Church.

We have met twice with current Group Leaders (or nominated representatives) in September 2024 and February 2025 and (as Penny says) we were chuffed with the response. There will be a further Leaders Lunch in June to continue to share, support and learn from one another.

We will also run 3 **Connect Group** Roadshows in late Spring/early Summer (after the 8 O'clock Service and during Coffee after the 10 o'clock Service) so we can share what a **Connect Group** is and what is available for those looking for a Group as well as generating further ideas.

All continues in the light of the PCC Small Group Feedback (September 2024).

Jeanne Johnson (with thanks to Penny, Erika and Richard)



