



CHURCH *of the* GOOD SHEPHERD

Sandhills, Leighton Buzzard

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DIOCESE OF ST. ALBANS CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD LEIGHTON BUZZARD **APCM REPORT 2023**

AIM & PURPOSES

The purpose of The Church of the Good Shepherd, Sandhills is the promotion of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. The PCC co-operates with the minister, Rev Steve Marsh, in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. In particular we will

- be at the heart of the local community and enable, create and build the wider community.
- be a welcoming, informal, family friendly space where people know they will be accepted and valued.
- encourage each other to lead a God centred life, celebrating our spiritual journey together and equipping each other for everyday life.
- share life and all that it throws at us, together for support, friendship and laughter.

OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

The objectives and activities of the church are guided by the Mission Action Plan. The objectives were reviewed and updated by the PCC on 15th June 2024 to ensure they remain relevant to our current context and plans for 2024 and beyond.

1) Community Engagement

Objective - We are a missional community to the new estates of south Leighton Buzzard. We will engage and listen to the community and understand their needs, and then aim to fulfil those needs. We will continue to host community events, and ensure that church itself is a community event, and that all are welcome. We aim to build a church community who represent the social situation in the local area, who are open and honest, and who feel a responsibility to the whole community for being present and contributing whenever they can.

CGS continues to build a Christian presence as Astral Park Sports and Community Centre meeting every Sunday for worship, community outreach and on Wednesday mornings for our open drop-in. The pop-up café continues to serve the community during the Sunday morning service offering free hot and cold drinks, and pastries. New for this year was the introduction of hot bacon butties which was a much requested item and has certainly been a hit with those we serve across the footballing community.

Whilst we continue to operate the pop-up café every Sunday during the football season, we welcomed a local resident who set up right beside CGS on Sunday mornings in his Cafe2U coffee franchise mobile van. We have got to know Mike who runs Cafe2U with his daughter and is now a regular fixture. This has impacted the café and reduced our interactions with footballing families on a Sunday morning. But it

has also been somewhat of a blessing with church members now being more present throughout the service and not drawn away from worship to run the café.

Throughout the year CGS has held various community events including the annual Christmas *Beer & Carols* event, as well as a highly successful carol service held at Greenfields assisted living residence. The carol service was a real highlight of the year for many involved, and was very well received and enjoyed by the residents. Carol singing on the new Clipstone estate on a cold November evening also allowed the opportunity for us to reach further outside of Sandhills & Billington and welcome new residents to Leighton Buzzard and spread some Christmas cheer. We also participated in the annual Christmas Tree Festival at All Saints, had a successful Christmas wreath craft event, hosted a Christingle family service, as well as a number of quiz nights throughout the year.

The Wednesday morning drop-in session at Astral Park continues to grow and thrive with the simple aim to provide a space to gather, have a drink and a listening ear. We have continued to partner with NHS Leighton-Linslade Health Connections, and hosted some family focused events during the school holidays, including *Lego, Hot Chocolate and crafts* which are well attended by local families. We expanded this throughout the summer holidays too. A new addition on Wednesdays is *Music, Movement and Rhyme* for 0 to 4s which has proved very popular and meets one of our long-term objectives to provide a midweek activity specifically focused at this age group for parents/carers. We have a regular group of adults and children who now attend on a Wednesday.

We have continued our presence on Facebook and Instagram, posting about activities in the church and our community events. We currently have 185 followers on Facebook, and 131 followers on Instagram. Facebook posts reach over 2,000 people through our posts on other local Facebook groups. Our reach and impressions through Instagram is limited but it's still worthwhile if only to share the gospel and what we are up to. This, alongside our church WhatsApp group, continues to enable our communication both within and outside the church. 71 people receive the weekly PitStop email.

We are still in the process of recruiting for a Families Outreach Worker with vision and energy, to grow our outreach to the developing communities on the new housing estates in Leighton Buzzard. A longer-term aspiration of the project is to develop hubs within the estates for the new communities to meet and experience a vibrant and attractive Christian presence. This role will be based at the Church of the Good Shepherd but will seek to develop strong links with other community led organisations in our town. A lot was learnt in the initial appointment of this role in 2022, and we have reworked the role with a greater focus on young families where we feel there is so much untapped potential across the communities and estates we are here to serve.

As part of CGS 'role in the wider church community across the world, we continue to practically, prayerfully and financially support several organisations and charities. We donated to the following charities in 2023: Christians Against Poverty, Leighton-Linslade Homeless Service, Sorted Counselling

Bedfordshire. Ukraine Emergency Appeal, Turkey-Syria Earthquake, and CHUMS. More information is available in the Treasurer's Report.

CGS continues to further develop our working relationships with churches within the Ouzel Valley team as well as other churches across Leighton Buzzard and Linslade.

2) Worship and Prayer

Objective - We will aim to continue to grow and build our worshipping community in spiritual maturity who are increasingly open and responsive to God. We aim to develop our prayer ministries to grow the depth of prayer in the church; both for our church and as we pray for the wider world. We will aim to share and record our journey of faith together.

We are extremely blessed with an array of skilled and worshipful musicians at CGS who have added depth and breadth to our Sunday morning worship. Several new CGS members have joined the "band" this year and we have been greatly encouraged by this and the musical variety that every worship service brings. It's a real strength of our community and one we are so proud of and blessed to be a part of.

The church WhatsApp group continues to be active and used to share prayer requests. Additional prayer support for the congregation is offered in a number of places; prayer is offered at the end of every Sunday service, members of the PCC as well as the vicar are available by phone during the week, the house group prays for each other each week. We enjoy a variety of different prayer styles during led intercessions from church members which is lovely each with a unique and personal perspective. We would encourage other members of our church to listen to God and if they feel prompted to lead prayer and to know that they can do so in a safe and encouraging space.

3) Sunday Service

Objective - We aim for our Sunday services to be informal, relaxed and welcoming, creating a space for hearing from God, and giving time for reflection, contemplation, friendship and prayer. We will continue to explore new ways to attract young families and new people into CGS especially through our informal café style church gatherings on a 2nd and 4th Sunday. We will continue to ensure God is at the heart of all we do, providing a transformative space for existing church members and the wider community. We will further explore how we can develop and communicate the discipleship journey to church members in a way which is meaningful and practical and helps strengthen and grow our relationship with God and one another.

A similar rhythm of Sunday services continued in 2023 which has been very well supported by many members of the CGS community. This included those that either led a service for the very first time, preached at the informal cafe style fourth Sunday service for the first time, or led a time of "Reflection"

in the chapel on a second Sunday. For a small Church the variety and number of people that continue to be actively involved every Sunday, and flourish in what they do, is what makes CGS such a special community to be a part of.

This was never more needed when our vicar Rev Steve Marsh took a very well earned 3-month sabbatical between March – June 2024. CGS stepped up and coped extremely well. In fact, we didn't just cope, but we thrived as the community came together to support each other and ensure there was always enough help every Sunday to deliver the service, lead worship, serve coffees, run Alpha Youth, pray together, and commune. This was largely in part to our two lay readers - Katharine and Frank Reedy, and Rev Steve Davies who took on a huge amount of extra work, and ensured the whole community continued to meet and worship. We are of course delighted to welcome Rev Steve Marsh back, and look forward as a PCC and wider church to both provide feedback back on the last 3 months, and also to hear from Steve about his sabbatical. One thing is certain is that we are never short of ideas and we are excited about the future as we look forward.

The café church concept as originally conceived in our Mission Action Plan has evolved over the year. We need to stay true to the original premise that we are here to serve our community through God, meet their needs and to make real and meaningful connections with the community. We were doing this through the pop-up café however as time has progressed the relationship with touchline parents has become a little more transactional with many now getting their “coffee fix” from our neighbour Cafe2U. We must therefore continue to discern what direction we should take to evolve our presence in this space and continue to make connections with the local community.

We have had some success with making the link between our school holiday drop-in and our gatherings on the 2nd Sunday. For example, our Christingle service and Mothering Sunday crafts drew in a few families who we had previously connected with through the holiday drop-in.

4) Throughout the Week

Objective – As a missional community we will continuously look for opportunities to share life together and serve throughout the week. We will use the Young Families Outreach project to increase the visibility of our church in the community and continue to develop and nurture mid-week groups to ensure contact is available throughout the week.

Our Wednesday morning community drop-in started over 18 months ago now and like a mustard seed has continued to grow in size and strength to provide a Christian presence in the local community during the week. Those who attend either during term time or for the half-term holiday events have all spoken very positively about the Wednesday drop-ins. They are attended and supported by a healthy number of church members too who are committed to serving their community and really live and breathe the CGS mission. We have noticed that the Wednesday drop-ins during school holidays attract

a significant number of people from Eastern European backgrounds, for whom English is not their first language.

Attendance numbers vary week to week both in term time and for the holiday events. Around half a dozen adults regularly attend the drop-in during term-time, plus several childminders, grandparents and parents who come along to the new *Music, Movement and Rhyme* for 0 to 4s session with the children in their care. The session is led by a church member who only joined CGS in 2023 and is gifted with young children. NHS colleagues have also taken a lead when required. God really has provided for our needs and sent the people we have prayed for to come help and serve our community.

The weekly housegroup has continued to meet in-person and online which makes it fully accessible to everyone. We have continued to make good use of short 6-8 week video based courses. This included “*The Romans Course*,” an excellent course that really brought Paul’s letter to the Romans alive with an impressive production and script that was very engaging and thought-provoking. Housegroup continues to follow a general pattern of 6 weeks of meetings, one week prayer meeting and a social gathering. We have recently started to establish a tradition of meeting for a meal at the end of term, which for some is preferable to a pub meet-up.

5) Youth & Children’s Ministry

Objective - We will aim to develop a youth ministry that responds to the needs of the young families, children and youth that walk through the doors of CGS so that they come to know God and grow in their faith and relationship with Jesus. We will support our youth leaders in developing this ministry whilst allowing our leaders to maintain a balance of being ‘present’ in all aspects of the Sunday service and worship.

The Alpha Youth course restarted after a short break and has really engaged our young people. We are delighted to see this small group of young people grow in their faith and friendships and show a willingness to engage, learn and share their ideas and views on faith with their peers. Of the 7 young people on the course, four are interested in being baptised at the end of the course. This is very exciting and encouraging for the whole church community. The Alpha Youth leaders are looking at a short baptism course in the lead up to the baptism so those being baptised are aware of the commitment they are taking.

What has really helped the youth leaders to support our young people this year is the closer age range which has allowed us to combine the two groups into one. In previous years we needed to cater for under 10’s, plus the older youth. This only happened as one family moved on from CGS who had younger children. Yet we are now more aware than ever before that CGS is lacking any young families with under 11s children. This is a big gap in the church and does change the dynamic of our community and naturally seems to lead us attracting new members that mirror those already part of our

community. There is no easy solution but we will continue to pray for the Families Outreach Worker which has a pivotal role in welcoming and attracting younger families. Where new young families have attended CGS on a Sunday, we want to focus on how we can continue to build a relationship with them.

ACHIEVEMENTS & PERFORMANCE

Average attendance at Sunday services were as follows:

The average number of adults joining services since the last APCM is 30, and the average number of children is 6. Adult numbers have increased whilst children have decreased. We have been greatly encouraged to see a handful of new very willing and talented people join our Sunday services, many of whom are already contributing their gifts on a Sunday.

Up to 15 people regularly attend the house group each week, from about 25 who consider themselves part of the group.

Interactions on the Sunday Café have dropped during the year for the reason explained elsewhere in this report. During the football season these interactions averaged around 30 per week.

Attendance at Christmas *Beer & Carols* and the quiz night was approximately 80 people per event. This was a drop on the previous year.

Attendance at our Wednesday morning community drop-in has averaged 12 people plus around 7 adults with up to 15 children attending the Music Movement and Rhyme session. We are prayerful that this will grow through our continued partnership with NHS Leighton-Linslade Health Connections and new referrals.

Our holiday drop-in events have been very successful with between 50-80 people (children and adults) attending the February half term, Easter and Summer events.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS' REPORT TO THE PCC OF THE CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

This report on the accounts of the PCC for the year ended 31 December 2023 which are set out on pages 2 to 4, is in respect of an examination carried out in accordance with the Church Accounting Regulations 2006 (the Regulations) and Section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 (the Act).

Respective Responsibilities of Trustees and Examiner

As members of the PCC you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts: you consider that the audit requirement of the Regulations and Section 144 (2) of the Act do not apply. It is our responsibility to issue this report on those accounts in accordance with the terms of Regulations.

Basis of Independent Examiners' Report

Our examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission under Section 145(5)(b) of the Act and to be found in the Church guidance. That examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the PCC and a comparison of the accounts with those records. It also includes considering any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently we do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the accounts.

Independent Examiner's Statement

In connection with our examination, no matter has come to our attention:

(1) which gives us reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements

- to keep accounting records in accordance with Section 130 of the Act; and
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and to comply with the requirements of the Act and the Regulations

have not been met ; or

(2) to which, in our opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

**Stephen J Wilson FCCA
Upton Wilson Ltd**

27th February 2024

Chartered Certified Accountants

3 West Street
Leighton Buzzard
Bedfordshire
LU7 1DA

The Church of the Good Shepherd, Sandhills, Leighton Buzzard

Receipts and Payments Account

For the Year Ended 31 December 2023

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total 2023	Total 2022
	£	£	£	£	£
RECEIPTS					
Voluntary Receipts					
				26,84	
Planned Giving	26,844	0		4	23,829
Collections at Services	1,959	0		1,959	687
All other giving / voluntary receipts	3,243	0		3,243	5,350
Gift Aid recovered	4,823	0		4,823	3,409
				36,86	
	36,869	0	0	9	33,275
Activities for Generating Funds					
	225	529		754	537
Grants Received	0	750		750	21,862
Other Income	181	0		181	0
				38,55	
TOTAL RECEIPTS	37,275	1,279	0	4	55,674
PAYMENTS					
Cost of Generating Funds	80	150		230	0
Church Activities					
				21,00	
Net Parish Share Paid	21,000	0		0	20,426
Team Expenses Contribution	2,400	0		2,400	2,400
Rent	3,016	2,570		5,586	4,844
Church running expenses	4,440	0		4,440	3,264
Café running costs	1,034	0		1,034	1,462
Insurance	422	0		422	467
Flowers	0	280		280	140
Outreach events and activities	1,273	0		1,273	2,612
Missioner Bus recruitment & employment	0	7,946		7,946	10,918
Missioner Bus Project other expenditure	0	407		407	914
Mission giving and donations	3,547	0		3,547	4,379
				48,56	
	37,212	11,353	0	5	51,826
Other Costs					
Bank charges	113			113	92
Independent Examination	120			120	120
				48,79	
TOTAL PAYMENTS	37,445	11,353	0	8	52,038
				-	
				10,24	
Excess of Receipts over Payments	-170	-10,074	0	4	3,636

Transfer between Unrestricted and Restricted Funds	-1,221	1,221	0	0	0
				56,00	
Cash at Bank and in hand at 1 January	39,554	16,451	0	5	52,369
				45,76	
Cash at Bank and in hand on 31 December	38,163	7,598	0	1	56,005

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Endowment Funds	Total 2023	Total 2022
	£	£	£	£	£
Cash at Bank	38,163	7,598		45,760	55,974
Cash in Hand	11	0		11	30
Tax Recoverable on Gift Aid due	2,526			2,526	2,320
Gifts Receivable from CAF				0	823
Tax and NI Payable				0	-1,829
Independent Examiners Fees	-120			-120	-120
Sunday Café	-55			-55	0
Vicar's Expenses	-119			-119	
Rent due to Town Council	-403	-219		-622	-554
Total	40,003	7,379	0	47,381	56,644

Unrestricted Funds	General	Mission	Total 2023	Total 2022
	£	£	£	£
Opening Balance	17,732	21,822	39,554	44,768
Receipts	37,019	256	37,275	34,700
Payments	36,171	1,273	37,444	39,914
Excess of Receipts over Payments	848	-1,017	-170	-5,214
Transfer to Restricted funds		-1,221	-1,221	0
Closing Balance	18,580	19,584	38,164	39,554

Restricted Funds	Mission Bus	Warm Spaces	Flower	Total 2023	Total 2022
	£	£	£	£	£
Opening Balance	15,524	599	328	16,451	7,601
Receipts	0	750	529	1,279	20,973
Payments	8,353	2,570	430	11,353	12,123
Excess of Receipts over Payments	-8,353	-1,820	99	-10,074	8,850
Transfer from Unrestricted Funds		1,221		1,221	0
Closing Balance	7,171	0	427	7,598	16,451

TREASURERS REPORT

General Fund

At the end of 2023, we had a General Fund balance of £18,580. Day to day running expenses are paid from this fund.

Donation income increased by about £3,600 for the year. Planned giving increased by about £3,000. Cash donations were substantially higher, as well as an increase in Gift Aid recoverable. However, other giving has reduced. Some donations are received via CAF where the Gift Aid had already been recovered.

In 2021 we received a Pastoral Aid Grant from the Diocese of £21,373. This enabled us to pay our full Parish Share of £34,774. This was not repeated in 2022 or 2023 and in 2023 we only paid £21,000, an underpayment of £14,617. The amount being requested for our Parish Share in 2024 is £36,334 for which we are budgeting to only pay £21,000. Our expectation is that giving will reduce slightly in 2024 due to changes in giving patterns already observed.

There was a surplus of receipts over payments for the year of £848, compared with a surplus of £3,524 in 2022. The PCC wishes to thank members of the church for their generosity in what must be difficult times for some.

Mission Fund

The PCC agreed in 2017 to set up a Mission Fund and allocate the grants received in previous years from the Diocese into a separate fund for mission work. Only a small amount of income was received in this fund in 2023. This fund is used to pay for one off missional events and activities, such as Beer and Carols and any costs on the Warm Spaces fund not covered by restricted income to that fund.

To date expenditure has been limited but 2022 saw the launch of the Missioner Bus Project. Although that has been on pause for most of 2023, the project will require significant support from this fund. The aim is to keep these funds ring fenced for mission work. To that end, a new bank account set up at the end of 2023 will receive the balance of this fund and the restricted Missioner Bus Fund below.

Missioner Bus Fund

The Missioner Bus Project was separated out into a Restricted Fund in 2020. The first year of three years' Church Commissioners funding was received in 2022. A Pioneer Missioner started in August 2022 but left in March 2023. His costs were almost entirely covered by the Church Commissioners funding. Once the new Families Support Worker is appointed, further money will be drawn from the Church Commissioners funding.

Warm Spaces Fund

This fund was created in 2022. Grants of £500 from Leighton-Linslade Town Council and £250 from St Albans Diocese were received in 2023 to support the church with the costs of its Wednesday morning drop-in sessions.

Flower Fund

The purpose of this restricted fund is to buy flowers or an appropriate gift to members of the church family and wider community at a time of illness or other need etc. Thanks go to Julie Tierney who came up with the proposal and who looks out for opportunities to use it.

During the year commencing May 2023 to May 2024, 7 baskets of flowers were delivered, 2 bouquets of flowers and a Christmas gift.

On Mother's day an activity was funded, flowers were purchased to make flower cards, also small bunches of flowers in cellophane and coloured tissue.

August Bank holiday weekend we put in a display on behalf of Church of the Good Shepherd at St Nicholas Church. A few plants were purchased for this event.

Income

- In June we received a £80 donation.
- On the 24th June a cake sale was held at Pages Alms houses, £104.00 was raised.
- A Christmas arrangement evening was held at Astral Park, £190.00 was raised.
- Profits from the next quiz night raffle will be going to the flower fund.
- Any donations for the raffle appreciated.

If you wish to nominate someone for flowers please contact Julie on 07903535470.

Charitable Donations

The PCC agreed to donate £1,600 to a missionary couple working in a closed country, £800 to Christians Against Poverty, £500 to Leighton-Linslade Homeless Service and £300 to Sorted Counselling Bedfordshire. It also agreed to donate some Sunday Café donations in 2023 to the following appeals: Ukraine Emergency Appeal, £10, Turkey-Syria Earthquake £222. £115 was raised at the Beer and Carols raffle of which £100 was sent to CHUMS and £15 was given to the charitable payment site Enthuse who administer card giving on behalf of CHUMS.

Employees

The PCC employed a Full-Time Pioneer Missioner from 15 August 2022 until 12 March 2023.

	2023	2022
Wages and Salaries	£5,470	£10,423
Employer National Insurance	£441	£960
Employer Pension Contribution	£117	£250

There were no employees whose annual remuneration was £60,000 or more.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

- We will continue to build on the community events at Astral Park and build our relationship with the local community including through promotion of weekly services, events and Wednesday drop-in via social media.
- We will employ a Young Families Outreach worker by September 2024 to the new housing estates to develop relationships with the community; especially young families, to listen to, and understand their needs and aspirations and identify where CGS can support our community.
- We will continue to develop a worshipping community that is open and responsive to God's direction alongside a regular and growing prayer ministry.
- We will continue to develop provision for youth and young children and respond accordingly to the needs of everyone that attends our services, community events and drop-ins.
- We will develop a 7th Objective in our Mission Action Plan (MAP) around sustainability for resources, finances and people to address the financial challenges CGS faces, trusting in God to provide for us as we do his work, and explore and develop entrepreneurial missional approaches to make our community activities financially sustainable.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC has gross income under £100,000 and is not a registered charity. The PCC is excepted by order from registering with the Charity Commission.

The appointment of PCC members is governed by and set out in the Church Representation Rules. New members of the PCC are encouraged to read the Trustee Training Oct 2018 and associated documents available on the Diocese of St Albans website.

The PCC currently consists of 7 people including the vicar, two churchwardens, two readers and treasurer. We also have the support of a Secretary. The PCC ordinarily meets once a month. It also holds two 'away days' a year giving more time to discuss the strategic plans. Standing items on the monthly meeting include the minister's report, finances and safeguarding. The minutes are provided via a link in the CGS weekly pitstop email.

During the year the PCC considered the current legal status as a Conventional District and whether this still served the purposes of the church. The PCC gave careful consideration as to whether moving to a Bishops Mission Order would be more appropriate for CGS, and concluded that the current status as a Conventional District better serves the church.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Church of the Good Shepherd, Sandhills, Leighton Buzzard does not have a church building. We meet at Astral Park Sports and Community Centre, Johnson Drive, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 4AY.

The vicar and PCC can be contacted at the following addresses

4 Warneford Way
Leighton Buzzard
LU7 4PX

Website: <http://goodshepherdsandhills.org.uk/>

Email: info@goodshepherdsandhills.org.uk

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/goodshepherdsandhills/>

Instagram: church_good_shepherd

The PPC comprises:

Rev Steve Marsh (incumbent)

Frank Reedy (Treasurer, Reader)

Philip Nichols

Sharon Soanes (Secretary)

Katharine Reedy (Churchwarden, Reader)

Stuart Blofeld (Churchwarden)

Clare Nichols

Bank account: Santander, 1 Hockliffe Street, Leighton Buzzard, Beds, LU7 1HG

Auditor : Hill & Burgess, 20 Bridge Street, Leighton Buzzard, Beds, LU7 1AL

Approved by the PCC on 24 June 2024