

CHURCH SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 2017

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ and the Father are One and that He is also the only begotten Son of God. These passages are an indication that God regards Jesus as a family member. As Christians we too are members of this family and our home is here at London Street. A fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, a spiritual family encompassing a number of very caring and friendly people - a comment made to me on many an occasion on Sunday mornings from visitors.

While Jesus Christ is referred to as the only begotten Son of God, believers are referred to as children born into God's family who need to grow and mature in our faith. Looking back over 2017, central to our spiritual growth has been our minister, Revd Kay Blackwell. I'm therefore starting my report by expressing on behalf of everyone here at London Street a big thank you for all that you do Kay. The majority of what we do as a family is primarily down to Kay together with the leadership and support of the elders. Kay works extremely hard and it is not uncommon for her to work long hours even on a Monday which is supposed to be her day off. If you can picture for a moment a caring parent of a large family, that is exactly what Kay is in bringing leadership, guidance, compassion and love to all here at London Street and to Christ's family in Basingstoke. It's only right that I also thank Andrew, Kay's husband, for the support he gives to Kay in her work.

In every family there is a mix of generations. There are 5 groups in which we can find the younger members of our family – Little Angels, Junior Church, Messy Church, the Youth Café and the 8th Basingstoke Scouts Group.

Despite a dip in numbers at the recommencement of Little Angels in September, Anne Davey in her report states that numbers grew again in the Autumn. Over 2017 the children have enjoyed art work and enthusiastic singing sessions led by Kay, as well as celebrating Easter and Christmas with services in the sanctuary. Thanks go to the leaders Anne and Kay, and helpers Leng and Chris Ayland, Louise Waller, Alison Jamieson, Sara and Jo.

The Top of Town Messy Church, which is run ecumenically with All Saints, sees many of those from Little Angels coming along. Ian McCloy in his report on Messy Church states that each session has a biblical theme, with craft activities aimed at different levels and age groups. Parents, grandparents and carers are encouraged to join in the craft activities with the children. Each activity is linked to the biblical theme and aims to stimulate discussion of the theme and help children to understand it. After the crafts, everyone goes into church for story time, singing and prayers, again linked with the theme. The session closes with the children, adults and leaders sharing in a meal together, and where possible the menu is again linked to the theme. The numbers attending remain high with new families coming along in response to the banner placed outside the church. As with many of the activities we run at church, additional volunteers are always welcome.

Although we don't have many families with youngsters at London Street attending service on a Sunday morning, Carol Scott reports that Junior Church has continued to flourish over 2017. Embracing the children as part of Christ's family, Kay spoke to the

children about the Last Supper and the service of Holy Communion and as a consequence they now return to the service to celebrate communion with the remainder of the church family. As well as Carol, thanks go to Jenny McCloy, Anne Davey, Joyce Cook, Tony Patterson, Margaret Carrick Smith, Leng Ayland, Alison Jamieson, Chris Holt, and David and Julie Bath, for all the help given on a Sunday morning with the children. Again additional helpers and leaders are always welcome.

Over 2017 Penny Dilley reports that well over 500 young people attended the Youth Café, many of whom are regular attenders. In July they said goodbye to what has been their most regular group of year 11's as they moved onto sixth form college, but since September they have welcomed a growing group of year 8's and a large group of college aged youngsters. We are grateful to Penny and John Eves for their leadership of the Youth Café.

The 8th Basingstoke Scouts Group continue to meet regularly on a Tuesday evening and we are grateful to Gill Craft for her leadership.

A focus group of representatives from London Street, Carol Scott, Jenny McCloy, Anne Davey, Joyce Cook, Bram Corn and Kay meet to ensure that the children's groups are happy and we are meeting their needs. One important aspect of the group is to ensure that the Safeguarding Policy of London Street is current and relevant. The policy is reviewed annually by the elders and special thanks must go to Margaret Carrick Smith for her expertise in making the requisite changes each year.

Friendship Hour started as a Club for young mums during the time of Revd David Welbrock on a Thursday afternoon as it was half day closing in Basingstoke. Less frantic in their activities than the scout group, Friendship Hour have matured over the years, becoming a group for the senior members of our family. Joyce Cook as chair reports that during the summer the group celebrated their 50th birthday. But with a decline in numbers as more became housebound or moved into a nursing home, coupled with the deaths of Pam their Treasurer and Michael the tea boy, the decision was made just recently in 2018 to close the group. Thanks go to Eileen Poulter who has been such a valiant helper with most of the roles of Friendship Hour since she joined over 20 years ago, and to Joyce as chair.

Staying with our older generation, Joan Mussellwhite reports that the 3C's continue to enjoy meeting on the third Wednesday of each month in Oasis for Coffee, Company and a Chat, and all are welcome.

Isobel Martin reports that the craft club continued to grow over 2017. Meeting on a weekly basis throughout the year with family members from the local community joining as well as those from the congregation. In August Alison Jamieson made a lovely window display of the items made by members of the craft club including, blankets, pictures, cards and a variety of other knitted and crocheted items. Grateful thanks to the craft club for donating £200 to church funds as well as supplying the Christingles for the Christmas Eve service.

The Memory Tree, for those with dementia and their carers, continues to flourish. In September 2017 they celebrated their 3rd birthday. In her report, Jenny McCloy expresses thanks to the faithful team of volunteers from London Street who come

every week, Kay, Isobel Martin, Joyce Cook, Sandra Marut, Claire Macro and Ian McCloy and Jenny of course; then we have friends of Claire who come along from the Alzheimer's Society. The volunteers are supported by a team of ladies who regularly bake cakes; Alison Jamieson, Margaret Carrick Smith, Julia Burrows, Louise Waller, Jenny McCloy and Joan Mussellwhite. If anybody would like to join this rota of bakers please have a word with Jenny.

It's heartening to hear that the family of Memory Tree extend beyond the current clientele with dementia, as they welcome a number of people who have been full time carers in the past but whose partners have either died or who are now in permanent residential care. These friends enjoy the company shared within the group and the support they gain from people in similar circumstances to their own.

In August everyone enjoyed another outing on the Watercress Line, starting with a coach ride to Alresford followed by a ride to Alton on the steam train during which lunch was served. The day finished with a quick visit to The Avenue Garden Centre in Lasham on the way home.

To celebrate their 3rd birthday, Memory Tree welcomed small animals (and their handler) from the charity '*Animal Touch*' which is based at Miller's Ark in Up Nateley. Guests enjoyed this morning, especially one lady with dementia who really misses having an animal of her own. Memory Tree bought an imitation cat which actually 'breathes/purrs' so she can stroke it all morning. During August, Memory Tree welcomed Revd Clare Downing, our Synod Moderator, to the group. She was interested to see how the group works. As a result of this visit, a few of the volunteers and a carer, were invited to run a workshop at the October Wessex Synod at Camberley. About 30 people attended this workshop and Kay, Joyce, Jenny and Mary (one of the carers) described how Memory Tree was run. Many of those listening were keen to start their own versions in their churches, recognising how great is the need for this kind of support. A family born at London Street and now extending out into the Wessex Synod.

If you are interested in seeing what happens in Memory Tree, Jenny invites all to come along on any Wednesday morning and experience and enjoy the warm, fun filled atmosphere in the group, not forgetting of course that all important slice of cake and cup of tea. As one of the carers says frequently: '*I don't know what I would do if I couldn't come here on a Wednesday*'.

The Community Café at London Street comprises both Oasis and the Youth Café. We have heard from Penny through her report about the Youth Café, let us now turn our attention to Oasis. As with the Youth Café, Oasis is run by an ecumenical team under the administration of London Street, as such it is underwritten by this church. There are 9 different churches represented by volunteers across both cafes. Six members from a staff team of 21 are from London Street.

The Oasis café is struggling as the top of town becomes less populated and viable due to the closure of key businesses. Penny and her team though maintained their usual rhythm of offers throughout 2017, including the Soup Festival and Christmas lunches.

In addition to providing 25 to 30 evening meals every Thursday and Friday evenings during January and February and again in December 2017 for the Night Shelter, the cafe served 130 Christmas lunches which were enjoyed by various different groups, including the macular degenerative group, Memory Tree, and Hillstead Court, as well as local families and individuals.

During 2017 Oasis had two work experience students. One of them, Miss M, came for 3 months and benefited greatly. She developed from a shy young lady not in employment or education, into a college student who is now doing well.

Our Oasis family extends well into the community. Penny reports that they now collect food from Marks and Spencer four days a week and redistribute it through toddler groups and six families weekly, as well as Camrose and the Night Shelter.

Finally in her report, Penny makes mention of two additional items. Firstly the commissioning services led by Kay Blackwell and John Eves at the beginning of each school term held here at London Street. Open to the public, these services provide the opportunity to reflect on the work of the cafés and give thanks to God for all He has done and to pray for the coming terms work and the staff. Secondly the ever presence of the Holy Spirit as several members of the café team become more integrated into church life and consequently growing spiritually.

Our support of the wider family extends beyond Oasis. Jean Holton our archivist reports that among the flurry of queries received during 2017 there was one from a gentlemen in Australia whose ancestors had connections with London Street. The surname in question was Caston and Jean was able to tell him that the booklet issued at the time of London Street's 200th anniversary referred to the purchase of the site in 1800 from Hugh Jones builder; and Moses Caston gentleman; and that various historical documents containing the name Caston, including Thomas and George who were ironmongers and also trustees of this church. The name Caston is still carried on in Basingstoke today by Caston's car park and Caston's alley, although Castons Road disappeared in the 1960's redevelopment of the town.

Towards the end of 2017 I was asked by the Synod to complete a questionnaire for a project being undertaken by the URC's representative on the Board of Trustees of the Churches Visitors' and Tourism Association (CVTA) established by the Church of England some years ago. Passing it to Jean she was able to provide information about London Street and that can now be found on the National Churches Trust website at www.nationalchurchestrust.org/explore-churches/london-street-united-reformed-church

Thank you Jean for all the work that you do.

Purchasing goods through Traidcraft is of course an excellent way of financially supporting our bigger family overseas. It makes a huge difference to suppliers who are able, with access to training and a wider market, to work themselves out of poverty. John and Margaret Carrick Smith run the Traidcraft stall here at London Street and they report that in 2017 they sold nearly £1,500 worth of items from the stall and orders from church folk. They are grateful to everyone who make buying fair trade goods part

of their lives and to Tony and Gillian Patterson who have willingly run the stall when John and Margaret are away.

The sales from the stall are only a part of the total turnover as London Street, Oasis and Old Meeting buy through us and with other sales made outside those mentioned, the total reached just over £2,400. This is a good figure although 12.5% down on 2016.

Thank you John and Margaret.

Staying with our family further afield, Alison Jamieson in her report for the World Mission Group reports that 2017 has run a familiar course where various groups have brought us up to date with their work enabling London Street to focus our thoughts, giving and prayers but there have also been some highlights and additions. The year started in February with the Fairtrade Fortnight when there was a display of products in the window and we had a manned Traidcraft stall in the Oasis Café, for three days which provided a number of sales and an opportunity to talk to people about fair trade. In March, Trevor Roff from Open Doors, the group that works to support the persecuted church around the world, came and spoke to us about the 'One Million Voices of Hope' petition which promotes the involvement of the local Christian community in Syria and Iraq to have a significant role in reconciling and rebuilding their communities and promoting equal legal rights and dignified living conditions for all.

In mid-May John Ledger, from the Mission Aviation Fellowship spoke at a morning service about the wonderfully supportive work of that organisation making it possible to get aid, medical treatment and the gospel to many inaccessible and remote parts of the world.

Christian Aid Week was as usual promoted; despite the rain some did the door to door collecting, others took envelopes and filled them. The main event was the concert initiated and organised by Owen and given in aid of Christian Aid by the Male Voice Choir, Berkshire Brass and our very own Peter Dixon on the organ. It was a very enjoyable event and raised over £1,500. The total raised that week was over £2,200; more than double on the previous year. A big thank you to all. I would like to add my own thanks to Maggie Morgans who contributed to the musical pieces chosen and the selling of the tickets for the concert, and to the members of London Street for contributing fruit juice and biscuits as refreshments for the interval, and on the day of the concert the stewards who welcomed people.

We had a couple of retiring collections in response to crisis appeals; in March for East Africa, where conflict has compounded the effects of drought; in September a joint one for Bangladesh, coping with increased monsoon flooding and the influx of refugees from Myanmar and the hurricane hit islands of the Caribbean.

Our giving through the monthly Communion Sunday retiring collection for Commitment to Life and the Town Centre Chaplains has raised over £1,000 for each charity. In July Kay led a service with the theme *Go blue for loo day*, highlighting the issues of many in desperate poverty to have access to a proper latrine, clean water and the information they need to be healthy. With £240 raised we were able to twin with a toilet block in Guatemala.

Our last event of 2017 in September was to welcome back Mark Warner of the Sailors Society who brought us up to speed on their very valuable work.

Thank you to Alison and the World Mission Group for your invaluable work in raising awareness of those less fortunate than ourselves.

All families have good times and bad times. As a family we were saddened by the passing of many dear friends: Donna Stewart, Marion Willie, Marian Kenward; Helen Rolton and Pam Ralph. I must also record the passing of Morris Baker who died in November 2016, news of which I received too late to include in my report for 2016. It was also a sad occasion when we said farewell to Sonja Knoll and her children Max and Johanna as they moved to Durham. It was a time of joy though when we celebrated the wedding of David Waller and Louise Holmes in the summer followed in the autumn with the wedding of Lee Grant and Alison Honeyball.

Families try to support each other through difficult times and at London Street we do that in many ways. The sending of flowers, and our thanks go to Liz Lindsay for organising the flower rota, visits by Kay and the elders, but most importantly through prayer. We continue throughout the week with a focus on our rhythm of daily prayer using the prayers and cycle of psalm readings from Ffald-y-Brenin as our framework. Those not able to engage in prayer here at London Street being encouraged to use the Ffald-y-Brenin prayer leaflets at home. As part of our commitment to grow spiritually and prayerfully; the prayer group has met every Wednesday lunchtime throughout the year and on the first Sunday of each month we have a prayer breakfast. We also supported those at Christmas by hosting a meal on Christmas Day for those who would have otherwise been on their own, and our thanks go to Joy Williams for taking a key role in organising that.

It can be difficult to keep in touch with our own families at times but we all recognise the importance of keeping each other informed. Reading Focus our church magazine each month is one way and we are grateful to Christine Robertson the editor and to Joan Beattie who each month will forward copies to our friends now living away from Basingstoke. Another way is through reading the magazine of the URC, Reform, and thanks to John and Elaine Coakes for ordering and distributing copies each month.

Church meeting not only provides information but deals with the business matters of London Street for which members are responsible. During 2017 we had 6 meetings with the primary topics of discussion being the Night Shelter and the Who Cares? Mission, two very important projects we were involved in. Other items discussed included plans to repave London Street outside the church, knitting fruit and vegetables for the Greenbelt festival, Eco Church, the introduction of a Facebook page, our garden party held at the home of Jeffrey and Maggie Morgans, an art exhibition connected to biblical themes which ran for two weeks in September, a series of talks led by Roland Pletts on the prophetic works connected with the Jewish Festivals, and various policies including the acceptance of delegated authority from the URC Wessex Trust to casually hire and let our premises.

Being a member of a family brings responsibilities and being a member of London Street is no different. We have the Finance Committee chaired by Alex Macro and as

a committee they will report to the Trustees, that is the serving eldership, with both bringing recommendations to church meeting. Thank you to Alex, Karen our Treasurer and members of the committee, Joy Williams, Ian Scott, Julia Burrows, Julie Bath as well as myself and Kay.

Led by Joy Williams we have the Buildings and Fabric Group. The main occupation of the Buildings Focus Group, has been the Church drains. We have had to deal with a number of blockages on the first floor and several at the point where our sewer flows into the main sewer in May Place - the main cause being paper hand towels being flushed down the toilets. Some blockages we have been able to clear ourselves thanks to Rob Williams and Bram Corn but others have required professional expertise and equipment which has been a drain financially. The decision has been taken to use towels to be changed daily until we can afford electric hand dryers. Some small necessary repairs have been done at the Manse but the bathroom ceiling still needs re-boarding following the leak of several years ago. The only major work in 2017 was the fitting of new cabinets under the hatch in the ground floor kitchen – the cost shared between the café and the church.

A vital source of income, particularly at present, is the lettings. Once again our premises are used constantly throughout the year. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Peter Bentall who has been our lettings secretary for over 10 years. Thank you Peter for all you have done. A big thank you to our cleaners Graham, Roy and Sharon. Sharon was recruited in December to replace Graham who retired because of ill-health. Our thanks to Ian Scott, line manager for the cleaners. When it comes to our shop window and decorating the church, thank you to Alison Jamieson, and for the contribution made by Ian McCloy and Chris Ayland.

Probably the group with the greatest responsibility is the eldership. At the beginning of 2017 we had 11 serving elders: Leng Ayland, Margaret Carrick Smith, Joyce Cook, Anne Davey, May Honeyball, Alison Jamieson, Liz Lindsay, Ian McCloy, Jenny McCloy, Ian Scott, and Rob Williams. In addition we had 4 non-serving elders with a pastoral group each: Chris Ayland, Isobel Martin, Gill Craft and Maggie Morgans. During 2017 there have been 11 elders' meetings and 2 extra-ordinary meetings. Every member of the congregation has been remembered by the elders in prayer in our devotionals. Items for discussion have been many and include those previously mentioned earlier in this report when I covered church meeting.

Morning worship on a Sunday is the key to our Church family. We are richly blessed to have Kay preaching on most Sundays and we are grateful also to our visiting preachers and thanks must go to Mark Best for organising the preaching rota. Thank you also to our musicians throughout 2017 – Mark Best, Peter Dixon, Ian Rees, Maggie Morgans, Alex Macro and David Shaw, with occasional input from Joyce Cook and the digital hymnal, and of course Kay and Andrew. Sunday worship though is more than just the ministry of word and sacrament. There are many who work before and after the service and I'd like to thank all of them. There is Rob Williams who ensures that the heating is on if we need it, and Carol Scott as performing and copyright co-ordinator. So what was the most recorded and consequently popular hymn for 2017? It was number 620 – *For the healing of the nations*. We also have

the drivers who give lifts to those who need one, the greeters at the door organised by Jean Holton, the stewards organised by Joyce Cook and Dick Davey, the sound system organised by Alex Macro, the bible readers organised by Joy Williams, the flowers organised by Liz Lindsay and her team, the provision of teas and coffees organised by Ian and Jenny McCloy, the Traidcraft stall run by John and Margaret Carrick Smith, the ladies who wash and return the communion glasses, the counting of the offertory organised by the Finance Committee, the distribution of taped services by Alison Jamieson, our Junior Church staff and helpers, myself in co-ordinating and printing the diary and order of service and finally the duty elders.

As a church family we don't just meet on a Sunday for worship. I've already mentioned the daily rhythm of prayer, but in addition to that Kay organised and led groups to enhance our spiritual growth. We had the Lent House groups using study material based on the film *Chocolat* and in December we looked at the *Wisdom House* highlighting our personal strengths and the power of friendship.

As children of God, what do we inherit? According to the Gospel of Matthew, nothing less than the kingdom of God. The letter of Paul to the Ephesians tells us that believers are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. These spiritual blessings are infinite, eternal, and reside in Christ, and by God's grace we are given these blessings as His children.

Last year has seen the family of London Street inherit many less fortunate than ourselves. Through the leadership of Kay we have taken a proactive role in the Who Cares? Mission and the Night Shelter. The Night Shelter for 2016/17 was a pilot scheme which proved to be very successful. Engaging with 30 homeless people over a period of 3 months, half of those were rehoused. A civic reception was held on 2nd March 2017 to thank all involved in the project. We opened our doors once again for the winter of 2017/18 with Kay this time as one of the leaders of the project and Carol Scott as co-ordinator at London Street. On the very point of caring for those less fortunate than ourselves I want to draw your attention to one person of interest that visited London Street in August - the Mystery Worshipper. Quoting Kay now in her View from the Manse in the October Focus, *The mystery worshipper at London Street commented on the 'wonderful welcome given by the lady on the door' as being the part of the service that was most like being in heaven. She also described London Street as 'a church with a great presence in the community that is clearly making a difference, particularly to the lives of vulnerable people'.*

As earthly children we eventually inherit what our parents or relatives leave behind for us after their death. That's not quite so straight forward in God's case. We are experiencing financial difficulties at London Street and we do have to be careful how we spend our money which isn't easy at times, but in God's case as a family of believers we are already reaping the rewards of our inheritance by having peace with Him through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. With the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which empowers us to live for Him in the present, we can through collective prayer, such as the Day of Prayer on 2nd December organised for us by Joy and Kay, come through this difficult period we are experiencing.

Being a part of the family of God is the greatest blessing bestowed upon believers and one that should drive us to our knees in humble adoration. There is no need to go to the extreme I witnessed once when I saw Kay on her knees, surrounded by towels trying to stem a water leak we had on the 1st floor. But seriously we can never do anything to deserve that greatest blessing for it is His gift of love, mercy, and grace to us, yet, we are called to become sons and daughters of the Living God. May we all respond in faith to His invitation!

That concludes my report for 2017. Thank you.