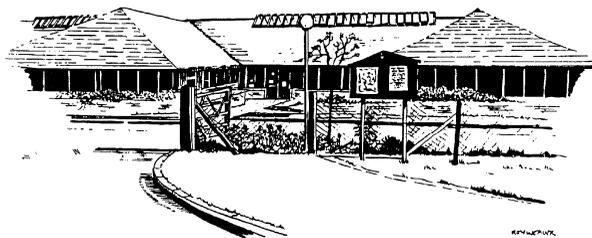




Westlea Church

Annual Report 2022



West Swindon and Lydiard Tregoze Church Partnership
Baptist • Church of England • Methodist • United Reformed Church
Registered Charity: 1141341



Objectives

Our vision: A community of people worshipping in Westlea who believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Bible, and who accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Our mission: To take the Good News about Jesus to every person in Westlea and encourage them to receive Him as their Lord and Saviour. Care for and teach every Christian believer so that they can become mature disciples of Jesus.

Organisation

Westlea Church is one of four churches in the West Swindon and Lydiard Tregoze Church Partnership. Governance of Westlea Church is by the Members and three of these members represent Westlea on the Partnership Council (PC).

Members are followers of Jesus Christ who wish to commit themselves to the life of the local church in Westlea. An application form is signed before a new member is formally welcomed during a Sunday Service.

The members of Westlea Church have the responsibility of cooperating with the wider Partnership in promoting the work of the church in the areas of Westlea and Eastleaze. Drawn from our members is a team of elected Leaders, the Secretary (vacancy since March 2022) and Treasurer.

Covid-19

The ongoing prevalence of Covid-19 at the beginning of the year meant Westlea Church meeting for our Sunday services via Zoom conference calls, but then returning to the Westlea School hall for in-person worship in the Spring.

We are pleased that, despite the continuing impact effects of the Covid pandemic, we were able to hold our regular worship sessions on every occasion when we would normally have done so, using these different formats, continuing to take care that these remained as accessible as possible to all of our members and adherents either via 'phone or internet-enabled device.

Review of Aims for 2022

Last year we said we would

- As we head into 2022 and re-establish worshipping together in person (taking into account our differing concerns regarding the ongoing risks associated with COVID-19) we need to consider and agree how - as a fellowship - we develop and grow Westlea Church.

We have resumed meeting together, but seen fewer people attending in person than on Zoom. This is an issue for 2023.

- As part of this ensure that all of the roles required in order for Westlea Church to run smoothly are covered. This may involve changing the ways these roles are fulfilled

The reduction in numbers has meant several regular roles have been unfilled. The liaison with visiting service leaders has been ably managed. A small number of people have covered other gaps.

- Now that our litter picking outreach has been able to restart we will also be looking to ensure this is sustainable and for other possibilities for outreach, particularly with Westlea School following the positive engagement which occurred with the community carols

Litter picking has continued to attract community interest with limited church involvement, and has become more self sufficient. Towards the end of the year we helped the school to convene a community carol sing, and re-established contact with Westlea School about Open the Book sessions.

Members & Meetings

At the end of 2022 there were 29 members of Westlea Church.

The leadership team consists of Peter Gilder, Chris Scarisbrick, Richard Williams and Wilson Javaid (Treasurer)

Of the members, 25 are joint members of all the four denominations (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and United Reformed) and 4 are Baptist members.

The Leadership Team meets to discuss church business and make “small scale” decisions. They discuss major issues before presenting them to the Members at the Members’ Meeting.

During 2022 the Members met four times in person including the Annual General Meeting in March. The Leadership Team met 8 times virtually by Zoom` in the same period.

The Christian Community

Due to the spike in Covid at the beginning of 2022, Westlea Church met for weekly worship via Zoom calls until 6th March. Thereafter we recommenced physical meetings in Westlea School hall. Our average attendance across the year at the Sunday services has sadly reduced: for varied reasons, several members have felt unable to return to meeting in person and 2 transferred membership to other Partnership churches. It should be noted that, with a relatively small congregation, numbers on a week-by-week basis can be erratic.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Adult attendance	22	20	20	26	25	17
Child attendance	5	4	3	3	0	1

On our contact list there are currently 24 families with 6 young people aged 16 and under. There were no baptisms or funerals for members of Westlea Church during the year although one regular attender passed away shortly before Christmas.

Regular attendees at Westlea Church have a wide range of ages and originate from many different countries.

An area that has continued to suffer with the size of our congregation has been our Sunday children’s work as the number of under 16s who attend Westlea Church has reduced. Unfortunately, no youth housegroup met during 2022.

Whilst our housegroup has not restarted, some members attend Partnership events including Lent courses and Zoom based Homegroups.

We have continued to hold a monthly Communion Service normally on the third Sunday of each month.

Our worship themes during the year covered:

- Forgotten doctrine? The Second Coming
- Lent; Some Diminutive Prophets
- What It Means to Turn the World Upside Down (some more holy habit signs of discipleship)
- Shh- It's Elisha not Elijah
- Earth, Wind, Fire and Water
- The Holy Spirit
- Advent: Christmas Miracles

We were able to see a return to a degree of normality with well-attended 'Carols by Candlelight' along with Easter and Harvest services. We were pleased also to be able to join with the school and local community for a Community Carols event held in the hall (for which we were able to assist with the PA and stewarding). Westlea hosted Partnership services on Good Friday and Pentecost/HM The Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

As a congregation we renewed our commitment to our safeguarding policies (Safe to Grow and Vulnerable Adults) at our AGM.

We continued to hold a monthly pre-service prayer meeting (led by both our leadership team and other members of the fellowship) and to devote 5th Sundays to more prayer-focussed services. During the former we continue to pray for God's guidance and help; locally, nationally and internationally. We also seek guidance on our Christian service and how to best reach our community. Prayer continues to be an important aspect of all our meetings. We are also trialling alternative service types in the hope of appealing to different groups.

During 2022 65% of our services and almost all of our other activities were convened by lay people. We are grateful to those who have made themselves available and sought to develop their own gifts and skills for the benefit of the church family.

Following the resumption of in person Sunday services an electronic Notice Sheet / Order of Service has been circulated in advance.

We will continue to ensure all people who work with us have a clear understanding of their roles and regular review opportunities. We continue to benefit from the sharing of knowledge and resources from our friends across the Partnership to help with this.

Outreach

Focus on the “Open the Book” Bible reading initiative has continued as a Partnership outreach activity in local primary schools with which several of our members remain involved.

Despite the difficult circumstances we have continued to offer the staff at Westlea School occasional gifts and offers of prayer support which have been well received.

The litter picking group resumed meeting again once Covid restrictions were lifted. Through the year we had 25 volunteers contributing 128 hours of voluntary work. Most meetings start with a prayer and regular invitations to church events with some litter pickers attending the Carols. We give thanks to God for the life of Moya Pinson, in particular, in relation to this outreach.

As in previous years, we delivered cards to households in Westlea and Eastleaze, inviting people to our Christmas services.

We encourage our members and regular attendees to speak to their friends and neighbours about Jesus and what He offers them for their lives. Through this personal witness by our members and in the church groups and activities we hope that God will continue to use us to reach out to the people with whom we come in contact, and nurture lasting Christian friendship with them.

Whilst we were unable to meet in Westlea School, we made donations equivalent to the rent we would usually have paid to the school to The Filling Station, and to Swindon Food Collective.

From our harvest service we made a gift of £355 each to the Barnabas Fund and Farming Community Network and at the end of the year we made a gift of £67 to Open Doors from collections made at the Christmas Services.

Christian Service

The church is blessed by the range and number of skills and gifts offered by its (comparatively small) membership. When meeting in Westlea School hall the church equipment has to be set out and taken down each week. Many members contribute to this task, as well as being on duty, welcoming people, reading lessons, leading prayers, providing refreshments, and clearing up again afterwards. The need to provide technical support for the services has placed an additional burden on a few of our tech-savvy members who have been instrumental in enabling us to continue to worship with worship and audio visual interaction.

We have continued to be supported by Rev. Cpt. Clive Deverell and members of the wider Partnership ministry team. We are grateful to receive pastoral support from Rev Trevor Day

In the wider community we rely on our members to be “salt and light” in their workplaces and dealings with friends. Many members are involved with supporting local organisations on a voluntary basis and support neighbours during times of ill health or distress. Our members are also involved in school governance and we have a significant presence in local schools via both paid and unpaid work.

Our practical support for the Filling Station (a local charity) continued during 2022 helping to feed the homeless around Swindon.

One of our members is actively involved with another local charity, the Harbour Project, assisting asylum seekers with maths skills.

We remain dependent on the time and gifts that the members voluntarily give to the running of Westlea Church and its profile in the community.

Material Resources

Our income totalled £17270.61 which is 11% less than last year. (this includes a tax claim of £3,321 (15% more than 2021)). However, as the Gift Aid claim is made for the previous year's income in reality the drop in regular giving is 17%. This is possibly reflective of the initial loss of face to face fellowship during the early part of the year and the continuing pressures and uncertainties around personal finances. We hope to recover approximately £3,159 for 2022/23 through Gift Aid tax claims, included in this is the final claim for the year which is awaiting payment.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Regular Gift Aid donors	16	16	18	17	19	13
Av. Gift Aid £/week/donor	£17.08	£17.78	£19.83	£17.12	£16.37	£17.88
Regular non-Gift Aid donors	6	6	4	5	6	3

We continue to rely on a minority of members for the majority of our income, and our cash flow can therefore be easily influenced by changes in the circumstances of individual members.

10% of our income is given away to the 'fixed' charities we support – these are currently Christian Aid, Swindon Sands and Threshold Housing Link. We will review these at our AGM in 2024.

During the year Westlea School kindly made a cupboard within the school available to us for storage of our property and equipment some of which has now been transferred from temporary storage in Holy Trinity Church Shaw.

Our belongings are insured with Ecclesiastical Insurance for approximately £11,098.

We have Public and Products Liability insurance for £10,000,000 and Employer's liability for £10,000,000.

Looking Forward to 2023

Similarly to 2022,

- We need to discern as fellowship what God's will is for the future shape of Westlea Church.
- As part of this ensure that all of the roles required in order for Westlea Church to run smoothly are covered. This may involve changing the ways these roles are fulfilled.
- Look for other opportunities for local outreach, particularly with Westlea School following the positive engagement which occurred with the community carols.

Summary

Westlea Church continues to serve the community and to reflect the multi-ethnic character of the area. Our membership has reduced in 2022 but we have continued to look to offer support and encouragement to members and others in times of need.

This reduction in numbers means we need to seriously consider how we need to continue as a Church and meet the needs of our local community.

During 2022 we continued to be encouraged by the number of our members and wider church family who continued to 'step up' to take on additional responsibilities, particularly in leading prayer and worship regularly. We have also continued to play our part in the wider Partnership through involvement on Partnership Council and other activities such as Messy Church, the worship planning group and schools work.

We endeavour to foster and encourage personal relationship with God and we believe passionately that prayer is a vital part of this. We have continued our increased focus on the sharing of prayer needs and answers during Sunday worship, and have been encouraged by the responses.

This report has been produced by the Leadership Team of Westlea Church, on behalf of the Members. We believe it gives a clear picture of the life of Westlea Church, the way in which our members have sought to fulfil our stated objectives and our aims for the next year.

Peter Gilder, Pam Ray, Chris Scarisbrick, Wilson Javid, Richard Williams and Andy Vernon,

On behalf of Westlea Church, March 2023