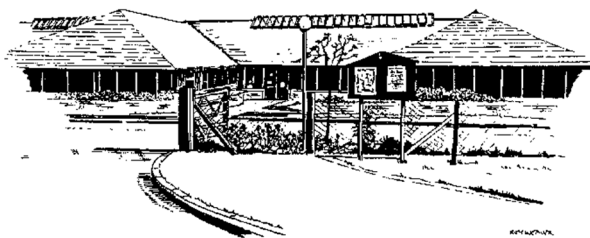




Westlea Church

Annual Report 2023



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 two 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.

West Swindon and Lydiard Tregoze Partnership future.

In June 2023 we were advised that the West Swindon and Lydiard Tregoze Church Partnership would be disbanded within the following two years. This has meant that much of the focus of the leadership team over the second half of the year has been on working with the Partnership and the members of Westlea Church on working through the plans for the future.

Following discussions among the membership during the Autumn of 2023 it was agreed that

“Westlea Church will not remain as a single Church. The desire would be to merge with another Church probably outside the current Partnership who shares a desire with Westlea Church in looking to maintain a presence in Westlea. This though will require receiving leadership, attendance and worship leading resource from the merging church, and supporting activities for the community. For example, Litter Picking, Open The Book, Christmas Carols”

Review of Aims for 2023

Last year we said we would

- We need to discern as a fellowship what God's will is for the future shape of Westlea Church.

This aim became even more salient during the year as the Church looked at its future shape, and work to plan for the future of Westlea Church is underway.

- 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.

We have continued to struggle to fulfill all roles within the Church, by being creative about how Sunday services run has allowed for a greater involvement. And all Church activities have continued to be covered.

- Look for other opportunities for local outreach, particularly with Westlea School following the positive engagement which occurred with the community carols.

Open The Book has continued to go into the school and been greatly appreciated. The Community Carols and Carols by Candlelight were attended by several who are not regular attendees at Westlea Church.

Members & Meetings

At the end of 2023 there were (27) members of Westlea Church
The members fulfil church roles such as:

Worship coordinator and school bookings liaison
Child Advocate
Community Advocate
CC License return
Pastoral Advocate
Partnership Safe to Grow Co-ordinator
Church Safe to Grow Co-ordinator

23 of us wish to be known as members of all four denominations (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and United Reformed) and 4 are solely Baptist members.

The leadership team consists of

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Peter Gilder | Leader until AGM 2024, PC representative |
| Wilson Javaid | Treasurer |
| Chris Scarisbrick | Leader until AGM 2024, PC representative, Partnership Safe to Grow Co-ordinator, Partnership Secretary |
| Richard Williams | Leader until AGM 2024 |

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 2023 the Members met five times in person including the Annual General Meeting in March. The Leadership Team met 8 times virtually by Zoom` in the same period.

The role of Gift Aid Secretary has been continued by a person who transferred membership to another church within the Partnership

The Christian Community

Westlea Church has met regularly for weekly worship in Westlea School hall. Our average attendance having dropped off dramatically in 2022 has continued to decline: for varied reasons, several members have moved to other churches in the Partnership and beyond while others have only attended on an irregular basis. It should be noted that, with a relatively small congregation, numbers on a week-by-week basis can be erratic.

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Adult attendance | 20 | 20 | 26 | 25 | 17 | 13 |
| Child attendance | 4 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

On our contact list there are currently 21 families represented. There were no baptisms but one funeral for one of the members who died just before Christmas 2022.

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. There was no youth housegroup during 2023.

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:

- Lesser known, almost obscure parables
- Lent; Jesus in the Psalms
- Easter – post resurrection appearances of Jesus
- Kings of the Bible
- James
- Stranger in a Strange Land
- Money

We continued to have a well-attended 'Carols by Candlelight' along with Easter and Harvest services. And we also were able to join with the school and local community for a Community Carols event held in the school's car park (which we were able to assist with by providing PA and stewarding). Westlea hosted a Partnership service at the end of October.

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

We continue to aim to hold a monthly pre-service prayer meeting (led by both our leadership team and other members of the fellowship) and look to use the 5th Sundays for more prayer-focussed services. In addition some Sundays are in a Bible study format. During the prayer meetings 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.

During 2023 67% of [RW1] 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.

We have had several guest speakers during the year including from Swindon Food Collective (who organise one of the local food banks) and the Bible Society [RW2].

A electronic Notice Sheet / Order of Service is circulated in advance and use of computers and other electronic devices is used to display the Order of Service and play the music for the songs and hymns.

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. Westlea School appreciates the input that the “Open the Book” team have provided to them.

This year, the litter picking group has continued to meet and through the year we had 38 volunteers contributing 114 hours of voluntary work. Most meetings start with a prayer and regular invitations to church events-

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.

From our harvest service we made a gift of 61.4kg to Swindon Food Collective and earlier in the year made a special collection of £130 to Christian Aid. From collections made at the Christmas Services we made a gift of £15 to Katakama School in Uganda which the Partnership has links to.

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 2023 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 £16083.03 which is 8% less than last year. (this includes a tax claim of £3,008 (16% less than 2022). However, as the Gift Aid claim is made for the previous year's income in reality the drop in regular giving is 45[RW3]%. This is probably due to the reduction in numbers regularly attending and the continuing pressures and uncertainties around personal finances.

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Regular Gift Aid donors | 16 | 18 | 17 | 19 | 13 | 11 |
| Av. Gift Aid £/week/donor | £17.78 | £19.83 | £17.12 | £16.37 | £17.88 | £21.03 |
| Regular non-Gift Aid donors | 6 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 |

It is noticeable that as the number of donors reduce, we rely more and more on a few 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 £12,185.

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

Looking Forward to 2024

Following on from 2023 and with the ending of the Local Ecumenical Partnership goals for 2024 are:

- Implement the membership's agreed plan for the future whether it is merger with another Church or closure.
- Ensure that all members find a spiritual home.
- Look to maintain links with Westlea School.

Summary

Westlea Church continues to serve the community and to reflect the multi-ethnic character of the area. Our membership has reduced in 2023 but we have continued to look to offer support and encouragement to members and others in times of need.

The ending of the Partnership means we need to consider how we continue as a Church and meet the needs of our local community.

During 2023 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 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, Chris Scarisbrick, Wilson Javaid, Richard Williams

On behalf of Westlea Church, March 2024