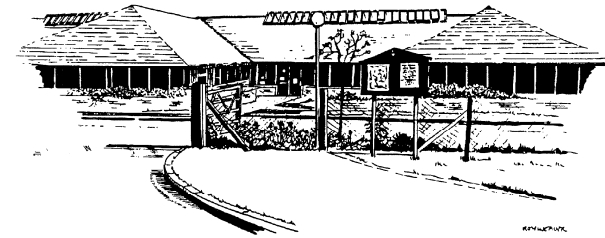




Westlea Church Annual Report 2020



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

Summary

Westlea Church continues to serve the community and to reflect the multi-ethnic character of the area. Our membership has remained stable in 2020 and we have been able to offer support and encouragement to members and others in times of need.

During 2020 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, schools work and the Emerge Project.

We endeavour to foster and encourage personal relationship with God and we believe passionately that prayer is a vital part of this. We have increased our focus on sharing of prayer needs and answers in both Sunday worship and housegroup, and have been encouraged by the responses. The housegroups have continued to be places where we have actively engaged with the Bible and current issues.

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, Julie Scarisbrick, Andy Vernon, Richard Williams and Sarah Wilmott,

On behalf of Westlea Church, March 2021

Looking Forward to 2021

As we head into 2021, we will be looking to:

- Put our hope in the living Lord
- Set the right example
- Not neglect our diverse gifts
- Watch our lives and doctrine closely

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 and Treasurer.

Covid-19

As with so many aspects of life during 2020 the day to day activities of Westlea Church were greatly affected by the restrictions imposed to control the spread of Coronavirus and effects of Covid-19.

Practically this meant that after our Sunday service on 22nd March, all subsequent services and social interactions had to take place by 'phone or 'Zoom' conference call. We are pleased that, despite the restrictions, we were able to hold our regular worship sessions on every occasion when we would otherwise have physically met together and took particular care to ensure that these were accessible to all of our members and adherents either via 'phone or internet-enabled device. Several of our members were also able to provide practical care and assistance to some of those finding themselves less mobile or isolating during lockdown by offering assistance with shopping, transport and the like.

Review of Aims for 2020

Last year we said we would

- Continue to build our 'Holy Habits', looking for spiritual growth.
During 2020 we completed our study of the 'Holy Habits' and, whilst not able to physically interact as normal it was noticeable that our caring, sharing and prayer life as a fellowship flourished with more people sharing actively in our services.
- Looking for further opportunities to develop our community outreach.
Our opportunities for physical community outreach were almost non-existent during 2020 however some of our members were able to engage with the local community in fundraising for a new skatepark in Westlea.

Members & Meetings

At the end of 2020 the (32) members of Westlea Church were:

Micon A	Supervisor for Partnership youth and schools workers
Marjay A	
J A	
Sophie A	
Chris B	
Marion C	
Mick D	
Rahel D	
Mike D	
Joan F	
Katherine G	
Peter G	Leader until AGM 2022, PC representative
Edward G	Child Advocate, Community Advocate
Stephanie G	Community Advocate
Sajida J	
Wilson J	
Norris K	
Ruth K	
Themba M	
Steve P	
Nick P	
Moya P	
Ruth P	CC License return
Pam R	Leader until AGM 2022, Pastoral Advocate, PC representative
Christine R	Gift Aid Secretary
Chris S	Leader until AGM 2021, PC representative, Partnership Safe to Grow Co-ordinator, Partnership Secretary
Julie S	Treasurer, Child Advocate, Partnership Safe to Grow Co-ordinator

Material Resources

Our income totalled £16,833, a decrease from last year (9%) but reflective of the loss of face to face fellowship and the pressures and uncertainties around personal finances in the current situation. We hope to recover approximately £2,900 through Gift Aid tax claims, included in this is the final claim for the year which is awaiting payment.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Regular Gift Aid donors	14.5	16	16	16	18	17
Av. Gift Aid £/week/donor	£18.86	£14.88	£17.08	£17.78	£19.83	£17.12
Regular non-Gift Aid donors		5	6	6	4	5

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 charities we support. Once our commitment to Toybox is covered, the remainder is divided between The Harbour Project and Christian Aid.

During the year it was necessary to vacate our shed in the school grounds and our property has been moved into a room at Holy Trinity Church Shaw. Our belongings are insured with Ecclesiastical Insurance for approximately £9,250. When we are able to resume meeting together the School have advised that they will make alternative space available and we await further details of what form this might take in due course.

We have Public and Products Liability insurance for £5,000,000 and Employer's liability for £10,000,000.

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, playing music, welcoming people, reading lessons, leading prayers, providing refreshments, and clearing up again afterwards.

With the restrictions in place during the year we have had to develop new skills and many members have stepped up to meet new the challenges of meeting in a 'virtual world'.

We have continued to be supported by Rev. Cpt. Clive Deverell and members of the wider Partnership ministry team.

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 helping the homeless around Swindon, was paused during the year due to Covid restrictions curtailing their activities. It is our intention to resume our support when circumstances allow.

Our litter picking initiative in the local area has necessarily been forced to pause during 2020 however litter picking equipment has been obtained and is held by one of our members for use by individuals where possible. As lockdown restrictions are eased, we will resume looking for other ways to serve our local community.

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.

Andy V Leader until AGM 2021, Leadership Team Chair, Church Safe to Grow Co-ordinator. Youth Housegroup

Sue V
Loraine W Rota
Richard W Leader until AGM 2022
Sarah W Secretary, Secretary to the Worship Planning Group, Notice Sheet.

Of these members 28 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 2020 the Members met twice physically including the Annual General Meeting in March and twice virtually by 'Zoom'. The Leadership Team met physically twice and 24 times virtually by 'phone or Zoom' in the same period.

The Christian Community

Until 22nd March 2020, Westlea Church met for weekly worship in Westlea School, which we hire for the purpose. Since the first national lockdown all of our regular 10.00am morning services have had to be held by 'phone or online 'Zoom' calls. Despite this our average attendance across the year at the Sunday services has increased with new friends joining us virtually from a distance. It should be noted that, with a relatively small congregation, numbers on a week by week basis can be erratic.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Adult attendance	22	21	22	20	20	26
Child attendance	10	5	5	4	3	3

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

An area that has unavoidably suffered with the restrictions during 2020 has been our Sunday children's work with the virtual service format not being conducive to maintaining their attention. This is an area we will need to renew focus on when we are able to meet again.

Our youth housegroup continued to meet roughly fortnightly prior to the national lockdown in March with an average attendance of 4 young people, including from other Partnership churches. Following lockdown a virtual 'Zoom' youth meeting was

instigated by a member at Holy Trinity Shaw and two of our housegroup members regularly attended these meetings.

Despite restrictions due to Coronavirus we have continued to hold a Communion Service on the third Sunday of each month however since January 2020 it has not been possible to hold any joint services with the rest of the Partnership.

Following a change of theme during the summer, we completed the Partnership's Holy Habits discipleship programme. This has guided most of our Sunday themes, and housegroup study. The congregation are encouraged to practise the Holy Habits and journal their experiences.

With us not being able to meet physically we produced a virtual 'Carols with Candlelight' service involving many of our church family which was uploaded to YouTube and then used in edited format for a live (but virtual) service which was again well attended by both church members and visitors.

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

Our home group was temporarily suspended with the start of lockdown but resumed using 'Zoom' in late spring meeting fortnightly on Tuesday evenings to provide fellowship, Bible study and pastoral care for our members and friends. Each session is led by different members of the fellowship. During 2020 we studied the following, linked to our Sunday teaching:

- Holy Habits Service
- Holy Habits Fellowship
- Holy Habits Making Disciples
- Daring, Caring, Sharing, Praying Church (Philippians)
- 'Coronavirus Parables'
- Unsung Heroes of the Bible
- Holy Habits Discipleship

We continued to hold a monthly pre-service prayer meeting and to devote 5th Sundays to prayer. The former has seen an increase in the number of those attending. We 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 2020 78% 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.

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

Outreach

We continued to support the Emerge youth groups run by the Partnership, aimed primarily at young people with no church links.

Several of our members continued to support the Partnership's primary schools' work including "Open the Book" Bible reading initiative, albeit during 2020 this had to be adapted to produce video presentations and other virtual resources for local schools to use.

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

As in previous years, we have 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.

Through our charitable giving we have supported the Harbour Project, Toybox and Christian Aid. We also gave a donation of food to Swindon Food Collective.

Additionally, whilst unable to meet in Westlea School, we made donations equivalent to the rent we would usually have paid to the school to The Harbour Project, Threshold Housing Link, Methodist Homes Association, The Filling Station, Swindon Food Collective and Swindon Christmas Care.