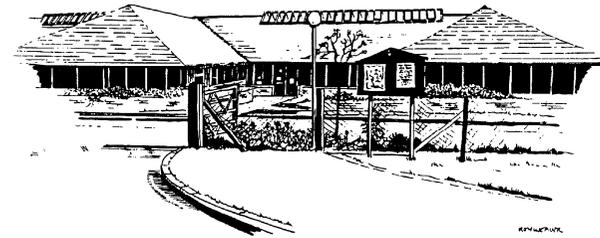




Westlea Church Annual Report 2021



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 remained stable in 2021 and we have been able to offer support and encouragement to members and others in times of need.

During 2021 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, Julie Scarisbrick, Andy Vernon, Richard Williams and Sarah Wilmott,

On behalf of Westlea Church, March 2022

Looking Forward to 2022

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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 2021 the day-to-day activities of Westlea Church continued to be greatly affected by the restrictions imposed to control the spread of Coronavirus and effects of Covid-19.

With the changing restrictions applying our Sunday services varied during the year. For the most part we continued to meet via Zoom conference calls but we also returned to the Westlea School hall for in-person worship which, for the most-part was also broadcast live and interactively via Zoom - enabling those more cautious about meeting together to remain involved.

As in 2020, we are pleased that, despite the restrictions, 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 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 2021

Last year we said we would

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

(The above were based on 1Tim4: 9-15)

During 2021 we continued to meet and support each other, albeit for the most part virtually, and encouraged our members to participate in our worship and prayer life, despite the restrictions. Our worship themes helped us to explore Biblical aspects of the above aims and how we can apply them to our lives – not just on a Sunday.

Members & Meetings

At the end of 2021 there were 32 members of Westlea Church. 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 2021 the Members met once physically in October and three times virtually by ‘Zoom’ including the Annual General Meeting in March. The Leadership Team met 8 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. 2021 began as 2020 had ended with all of our regular 10.00am morning services being held via ‘Zoom’ calls. We were pleased during the year to be able to recommence physical meetings in Westlea School hall. Despite the ongoing uncertainties and restrictions our average attendance across the year at the Sunday services has been largely stable 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.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Adult attendance	21	22	20	20	26	25
Child attendance	5	5	4	3	3	0

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

Material Resources

Our income totalled £19,359, an increase from last year (16%) despite the continued 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.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Regular Gift Aid donors	16	16	16	18	17	19
Av. Gift Aid £/week/donor	£14.88	£17.08	£17.78	£19.83	£17.12	16.37
Regular non-Gift Aid donors	5	6	6	4	5	6

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.

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 £9,676. 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. The need to provide technical support for Zoom and 'hybrid' live/Zoom services has placed an additional burden on a few of our tech-savvy members who have (as in 2020) been instrumental in enabling us to continue to meet for worship.

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), was able to restart during 2021 helping to feed the homeless around Swindon.

Our group litter picking initiative in the local area remained paused during most of 2021 but was able to recommence during the autumn. 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.

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

Unfortunately, neither our youth housegroup or the Zoom youth meeting organised by Holy Trinity Shaw were able to continue during 2021.

An area that has continued to suffer with the restrictions during 2021 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 as Covid-19 restrictions are eased.

Despite restrictions due to Coronavirus we have continued to hold a Communion Service on the third Sunday of each month though it did not prove feasible to hold any joint services with the rest of the Partnership during 2021.

Our worship themes during the year covered;

- Discipleship in Timothy
- Salvation in the Old Testament
- Jesus: The Early Years
- A Time to Rebuild-Nehemiah
- Villains of the Bible
- Responses to Jesus in Mark
- Memorials
- Crisis? What Crisis?

With the eased restrictions we were able to hold a well-attended outdoors 'Carols with Candlelight' which was also broadcast via Zoom and we were pleased also to be able to join with the school and local community in a carol singing event in the school car park (for which we were able to assist with the PA and stewarding).

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

Our home group remained suspended through 2021 but we look forward to hopefully being able to restart during 2022.

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.

During 2021 77% 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. Despite restrictions we continue to

benefit from the sharing of knowledge and resources from our friends across the Partnership to help with this.

Outreach

Unfortunately the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions contributed to the Partnership being unable to continue the Emerge youth groups for young people and the programme has had to end. We do however give thanks for all of the young people we have been able to reach over the years.

By way of contrast there has been a renewed focus on the "Open the Book" Bible reading initiative run 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 gifts and offers of prayer support which have been well received.

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.

As in 2020, 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 Harbour Project, Threshold Housing Link, Toybox, The Filling Station, Swindon Food Collective and the MS Therapy Centre. We also gave a donation of food to Swindon Food Collective.

At the end of the year we also made a gift to the Partnership's Katikamu School Project 1000 appeal at the carols.