

TWENTY TWENTY TWO

*A year in the life of Goffs Oak
Methodist Church*

What a year it has been!

After twenty four barren months living with Covid and Lockdown, it was difficult to predict how our church would get back to some sort of normality. We all found that well-established routines and habits gradually slipped out of our lives, as events where people got together were curtailed. As far as we were concerned this meant no church services, prayer meetings, coffee mornings, quiz nights, house visits and, crucially, no lettings, which hit us hard in the pocket.



WhatsApp and Zoom

Through wonderful fortune we alighted on a device which not only kept us all in touch, but in some areas increased activity. This was, of course, our WhatsApp group! It can never be under-estimated how this simple means of contact through mobile phone or iPad managed to actually increase our communication with each other. Not only could we have conversations at any time in the day, but we also discovered how to organise 'virtual' gatherings together using Zoom. This revolutionary 'app' enabled prayer meetings and quiz nights to flourish, with many more 'attendees' than in pre-lockdown days. True, we had to settle for seeing and hearing each other on screens in our own houses as opposed to 'in the flesh', but it kept us functioning as a church group and enabled us to hit the post-lockdown era with momentum. This, then, was the scene when we began the year in January.

Like a sprinter out of the blocks we started 2022 with a well-attended Covenant service on 2nd January. We were in the middle of a particularly bad wave of Covid, following a cold winter, but we continued showing vigilance in Church with alcohol cleaner dispensers in place, mass mask wearing and extra space between chairs and rows.

Coffee and Chat

Another of our innovations gathered pace at the beginning of the year - Coffee and Chat every Wednesday. Continuing from the pre-Covid Tuesday coffee mornings, 2022 was the year that the weekly coffee event established itself as a wonderful servant to our community, bringing an increasing number of people from the local community (as well as our church members) together for friendship over a warm drink. Our thanks go to those who help make Coffee and Chat happen, by serving on a rota basis in setting up and running each Wednesday morning session. If you are interested in coming on Wednesdays (or even if you are not) read this message from Sheila and Ron:-

"If you want to meet up with friends a good place to go is to the Coffee and Chat on a Wednesday morning in the Church. Everyone is very friendly and you are

made very welcome. If you wish you can bring an activity to do, like knitting or just pass the time of day, share your thoughts and worries and enjoy the company of others. Sometimes there are up to 30 folk enjoying the morning, at other times under 20. You can be sure to enjoy coffee or tea with biscuits and maybe cake, with plenty of conversation."

Charitable Donations out of nowhere

Janet has observed that from the Wednesday coffee mornings has arisen a knitting session. Coffee and Chat supporters produce woollen items for various organisations. The chief beneficiary has been The Mission To Seafarers. Woolly hats have been knitted and Sheila and Ron have been sending them to The Seafarers Centre for the sailors on ships. Many sailors who have been stranded on board cargo ships have welcomed the hats (see picture).



Janet has also taken an article from a church magazine about collecting empty medicine blister packs which could be recycled and a donation made to a cancer charity. Consequently we have undertaken to collect the empty blister packs from prescriptions plus over the counter packets. So many church users have supported this initiative by bringing in their empty blister packs. Nine and half bags (one is pictured), so far, have been taken and kindly forwarded by Superdrug Pharmacy to their final destination.

Quiz Nights

We continued the Zoom format for the year's first Quiz Night on 12th February. Our target for the financial year was to raise £5000 in order to pay off last of the loans we had incurred to complete the replacement of the hall roof. Although we suggested £5 per quiz entrant, the overall take was considerably higher at £400. Thanks as always to Jacqui, Phil and Alison for setting up and administering the evening. Three more were to follow, including our first one back in the church hall.

World Day of Prayer

Another significant event was the World Day of Prayer on Friday 4th March, featuring the theme of the church in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, unlike previous years it was not particularly well supported, but it was streamed on YouTube, enabling it to be seen in peoples' homes. Thanks go to Lesley and others who worked so hard to make it all happen.

YouTube

Thanks to David's expertise, enterprise and technical expertise in general, our YouTube channel has been used to show GOMC services throughout the year live on people's televisions and then saved on YouTube and Face book so they

can be watched at any time - an example of evangelism through the air waves (or underground cables!).

Prayers for Ukraine

As the situation in Ukraine worsened and lives and communities shattered, we were able to show solidarity with that war-torn country by being part of a circuit initiative. Goffs Oak was one of four Circuit churches to open its doors to the community for two sessions on Friday 25th March. Volunteers from the church were present to welcome visitors to come in and pray or just talk.

Pentecost

Another landmark in the year was the Pentecost service on Sunday, 5th June, Papa led us in the first 'normal' communion service for more than two years. It was marked by a significant change - using wafers, rather than bread.



Above and below - the Platinum Jubilee lunch in full swing

Platinum Jubilee

On the Pentecost afternoon we had a wonderful lunch in celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. This was another great team effort as a superb spread was conjured up in the church hall. It was originally planned for outdoors, but because of inclement weather everything was moved inside. The hall was beautifully decorated with bunting, and Barbara created the official 'Jubilee Pudding'!



A potential lifesaver

Our Guides and Brownies have been fundraising and have raised an amazing £1500 towards a defibrillator for our church. We all say a big 'thank you' to our wonderful uniformed organisations.

Welcome to our new circuit superintendent and farewell to his predecessor

The new Connexional Year started on 1st September, and we began that new year with a new Circuit Superintendent, Rev'd Paul Weary. He made his debut in our church at the lectern on Sunday, 16th October. We wish him a happy and fulfilling time as our superintendent and many joyful visits to Goffs Oak.

In saying goodbye to Dan Haylett, we also wish him well at his new superintendent post in Devon. Dan has been a great friend to Goffs Oak and if he does as well in Devon as he has in the Enfield Circuit, they are in for a treat.

Prayer Meetings

As alluded to earlier, another change brought about by lockdown has been in our prayer meetings. Formerly monthly, they are now held every Tuesday morn-

ing on Zoom (*see right*). This is more convenient for our outlying members and indeed many closer to the church building. Instead of travelling to the church, all we need to do now is log on to Zoom. Barbara is our lynch pin for these virtual meetings and she administers and leads the focused prayer sessions to great effect. Thank you, Barbara.



Who's zooming who?

Work on our Building

Looking after the church building and grounds is, as Nigel says, like painting the Forth Bridge – as soon as you finish, the bit you started needs re-painting! At GOMC the floors need polishing every quarter and carpets continually need cleaning. We have, however, had a pleasant problem this year. Because of David's excellent work in getting groups back in to use the hall, there are fewer times when maintenance can be done. For example, painting might only take a couple of hours to do, but can take the rest of the day to dry - and the hall is in use every day now!

Nevertheless, a variety of walls have been painted, holes in walls have been filled and many repainted. We have also begun the process of replacing the main hall heater covers. This is a programme that will be done over a year as it requires a day to complete one and a second day for painting.

Other minor maintenance items outside have been completed as follows: Safety and car parking lines have been repainted; the back wall of the church (Wesley Close) has been filled and repainted; moss has been removed from the car park and private parking signs have been re-fixed several times due to users driving over them. Nigel has ably organised the building work with much appreciate assistance from Peter, David and Phil. Our thanks go to them all.

Holiday Club

Wonder Zone was our five-day Bible-based children's holiday club in August. During the week, 34 children learned about Solomon and his desire to be wise. They also explored three psalms and what they tell us about God. They saw Jesus bringing sight to a blind man and light to the world. And they heard the story of the lost son who is welcomed back by his father.

The children used creative ideas on how to explore and discover some of the wonders of the universe and the wonders of God. One of many highlights was the visit of Barbara's niece, an assistant vet who



Fun and learning at the Holiday club inside and out



brought in tortoises and a dog to help us understand the vital presence of animals in God's kingdom. There were also opportunities for experiments, construction, craft, games, drama, creative prayer and worship. *Wonder Zone* had a mixture of upfront presentation and small-group activities allowing children and leaders to build meaningful relationships with each other and with God. All in all, a truly wonderful *Wonder Zone* week!

Sunday Club

Whilst we sow seeds of our faith during Holiday Club week, we do not get too many children attending Sunday Club. Without Paul and Jean's family and Alison and Brian's grandchildren, we would rarely have a functioning Sunday Club session at all. Hopefully, the new housing developments in the village will be a fruitful source of future members.

Remembrance Sunday

Sunday 11th November was the day of a very well-attended Remembrance Service including our uniformed groups, Guides, Brownies and Rainbows. Rev'd Papa led the first part of the service in the church before he and the congregation moved to the War Memorial for part two (see pictures). Papa shared a memorable open air service with an estimated 400 in attendance with Rev Tom Lilley of St James Church. Afterwards, large numbers returned to the church hall for tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits.

Music in our church services

Many of our congregation will remember the days when music played an integral part of our worship. From the initiative of many talented choir leaders there sprung many lovely choirs over the years. We also had a succession of small groups providing hymn accompaniment. We may not have the numbers for a weekly choir these days, but the small group project is back. Joanne, Paul D and Phil have filled that space with panache and they are looking to be around for a long time. Joanne has made the following observation about music in our services.....

"Music is important in worship and has been part of Christian worship in various forms since New Testament times. Many of us grew up with organ and/or piano



Papa leading the outdoor War Memorial service with Tom of St James Church



Brian presents the GOMC wreath.



The 400 strong congregation

accompanying hymn-singing, but nowadays, a whole range of instruments and styles can accompany worship. People have different preferences, here at Goffs Oak, we have used the talents available to us to enrich our services – organ, piano, backing tracks and worship band.

Since getting back to making music in 2015, I have had opportunities to use clarinet during worship, often during special services alongside Michele Combes while Alan was with us. More recently, a trio have formed a new worship band, Paul Dakin on guitar, Phil on accordion and me on clarinet. It's great fun to play together and it's good to have live music in church. My big shiny saxophone has also made an occasional appearance. Whatever the combination, some work goes on behind the scenes to adapt the music to allow each instrument to play in appropriate key.

These days our worship uses a real mixture of music, including traditional hymns, modern hymns and worship songs. So much of Methodist theology is expressed in our music. So often, a hymn can express what is on our heart in challenging times when all other attempts to find words have failed. The value of our hymns was never better expressed than during the Summer Praise service back in July. Each hymn meant something to the person who nominated it – it was such a wonderful service!

Sometimes God reaches out to us through the words of a hymn writer – I remember the impact when the words of a hymn were used by God to affirm my call to the ministry of a local preacher. It was humbling, and it was overwhelming.

If you have a musical talent, don't keep it a secret. God can use you to enhance worship here in this place. An instrument cannot come to life until the musician breathes life into it, we're a bit like that too. We cannot fulfil God's purpose for our lives until the Holy Spirit breathes new life into us too."

The message, then, is clear. If you play a musical instrument why not consider linking up with our trio and make it a quartet or a quintet?

Gift Service

At one of our most enlightening services of the year, we were privileged to be visited by Barbara's daughter-in-law, Dell, who works for SPACE Hertfordshire, which is based in Stanstead Abbots. They support families of children and young people who are autistic, have ADHD or other neurodiverse conditions. Following Dell's fascinating talk about the practical work of the group, a £300 donation was made to SPACE from the Gift Service congregation.

Children's Christmas Party and Carol Service

Sandwiched between the morning service and the Christmas Carol Service, we held our annual Children's Christmas Party on December 11.



The table (above) awaits the children at their Christmas party, while Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John (below) awaits the signal to start the Carol Service.



About 14 children attended and had great fun doing craft, playing games and eating. But the highlight was the visit of Father Christmas (right) who made his annual visit bearing gifts for the children. Soon after Santa boarded his sleigh to make further visits. Meanwhile the children got dressed into nativity costumes ready for the well-attended Carol Service, led by Deacon Jacqueline, with the help of several happy children.



Carols by Torchlight

With weather and lockdown disrupting our most recent 'Carols by Torchlight' gatherings, it was wonderful to get back to business on the Tuesday before Christmas. At least 80 people from the local community and the two churches appeared that evening to take part in an uplifting outdoor service at the village Christmas tree, conducted by Joanne and Rev'd Tom, featuring the inspiring sound of the Potters Bar Town Band. After a stop-off to sing a few carols outside the Goffs Oak pub, the company moved to our church hall for more music from the band and, of course, mince pies, coffee and tea. Donations from the public and the church are to be forwarded to Action for Children.



Christmas morning service

One of the final church events of a very challenging year, was on Christmas Day itself. This presented problems on that morning as sickness left us without a preacher. As so often in the past, our members pulled together superbly and, with the help of Anne's programme for the service, managed to deliver the service on the day.



Next year and the future

As we have seen in the last year or two, Goffs Oak is changing with hundreds of new properties being built. It is getting bigger very quickly. Our task is to find ways of reaching out to those who are new to the locality and letting them know that we are here and are ready and able to welcome them into our church community.

Above - scenes from 'Carols by Torchlight', while below Lesley and David (below) keep an eye on the sound quality

This is our challenge for 2023 and beyond and we must aim to find ways of meeting it.

Bryan King 01-01-2023

