

# The Parish of St Laurence Northfield



**St Laurence**  
*Northfield*

## Reports for the Year of 2021

Parish Office, St Laurence Church and Pastoral Centre

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## **Church Wardens' Report**

What a challenging year this has been for all! We were sad to say goodbye to Father David, our associate priest, a greatly thought of member of the team. However, his leaving virtually coincided with our assistant curate, Theresa Morton, being ordained priest. We must give a big thank you to Canon Janet and all our team for working so very hard in keeping us all safe and enabling us to continue with Wednesday and Sunday services, singing hymns again (hooray!) and the after-service coffee (great!)

After a break-in to the vestries, with nothing taken but a dreadful mess left behind, we now keep all the doors locked (after the horse has bolted!) Following a further fall of ceiling plaster in the north aisle, that area is now closed. We pray that one day soon we will have a whole church for our worship once again.

In better news, hopefully our new porch will be completed at last very soon. There have been so many holdups with construction problems, mainly during the pandemic and due to difficulties with building supplies. The new lighting and upgrading of the electrics are due to start in March, and also a new sound system in February.

Sandra and I would like to show our appreciation to Lorraine and Barry, the PCC, and all volunteers for all their invaluable help and assistance in what has been a challenging year for us all - thank you!

*Roy Pouncett and Sandra Reynolds (Church Wardens)*

## **Bell Ringers**

The St Laurence ringers have been slowly but surely returning to ringing over the year. From January until May we continued with our virtual practices using "Ringling Room" software and Zoom. This didn't suit everyone but we kept in touch with virtually everyone by sending out the weekly reminders about the Zoom practices. Then, starting with a thirty-minute slot after the 9:30 service, we returned to ringing on 23 May 2021 and began practices on 25 June. The ringers attended on a rota basis to limit the numbers of ringers and we kept to ringing on the same bell all the way through. This had its challenges but it was good for all of us to ring for the whole session and to raise and lower the bells we rang (good for bell handling and control!). We finally returned to more open ringing in September when it was clear we were not going to be overwhelmed with ringers. We have had some healthy numbers particularly on Sundays when we have often been able to ring 10 bells.

*Learners:* we are all learning and we have spent the last few weeks getting back to the levels of ringing we achieved before the lockdown. From this point onwards, my aim is for everyone to progress. Using the "Learning the Ropes" levels our ringers can work towards their next level (any ringers who are registered with the scheme and any that want to be could receive certificates on achieving the next level). It is good to be thinking of how to organise practices so that everyone can progress with their ringing in some way. Here are some of my thoughts for future practices.

- Develop our rounds and call changes skills including ringing Devon call changes "60 on thirds" and encouraging more people to call the changes.
- Get more of our ringers to ring plain bob double and grandsire doubles on the treble, tenor and inside through teaching, practice and quarter peals.
- Increase the number of doubles methods we can ring such as St Simons, St Martins and Winchendon Place.
- Focus on good quality 6, 8 and 10 bell ringing. This means ringing the methods we can ring really well in terms of striking.

*Teaching:* Graham Lanfear, Carl Jenkins and I all attended an ART course to train to teach ringing back in 2018 and 2019. Unfortunately, all recruitment and teaching was put on hold from March 2020 due to the pandemic. If we recruit new ringers we will be able to continue to develop our teaching skills. The good news is a new learner has just joined us! We will be putting some of the skills we learnt into practice. The BSOBR tutors are at hand to support us if required.

*Commemorations:* During 2021 ringing to mark events was limited to tolling one bell and included bell

ringing Sunday (31 January) to commemorate the life of Andy Carr and to mark 100,000 deaths from Covid-19, the national day of reflection on Tuesday 23 March and the commemoration of the life of Prince Philip in April.

We rang half muffled bells to commemorate remembrance Sunday on 14 November. We rang for a reduced number of the Christmas services due to the high level of Covid-19 cases at the time.

We commemorated the life of Andy Carr on bell-ringing Sunday on Sunday 30 January 2022. Catherine Pinnock did one of the bible readings and I gave a short update on ringing at St Laurence and encouraged anyone interested in learning to ring to come and join us for a demonstration and a try out.

*Peals / school of bell ringing / visitors:* following a general return to ringing our tower contact (Graham) is receiving enquiries from visiting peal bands and ringers and the Birmingham School of Bell Ringers (BSOBR) has also requested the use of the bells on Saturday mornings from November until the first week of March 2022. It seems that St Laurence bells are more suitable for ringing when there is a risk of airborne virus transmission than most other Birmingham towers. Canon Janet is making the decisions and is making sure access to the bells is managed as fairly as possible. Graham is doing a good job of communicating between visiting bands and the church to make sure they are accommodated and double bookings are avoided.

*Neighbouring towers:* we are still welcoming ringers from neighbouring towers to our practices and ringing on Sundays. I hope that our links with other churches will be maintained. Sadly, Kings Norton bells will be out of action for some time. My thanks to Catherine Taylor for building and maintaining our links with local towers.

*HJ dinner:* the next (134<sup>th</sup>) Henry Johnson Dinner is on Saturday 26 February 2022 in the Horton Suite at the Burlington Hotel, Birmingham. Joint Chairmen: Janet and Steve Horton

*Outing:* if conditions allow it would be great to have a Northfield outing to 4 or 5 towers in a not too distant location in the summer of 2022. An outing to the Black Country was previously discussed.

*Cake stall:* the bell ringers successfully ran the cake stall and provided cakes at the church Christmas Fayre on Saturday the 27 November.

*Acknowledgements:* I would like to thank Carl, Graeme and Jeff for their time and efforts as steeple keeper, secretary and treasurer. Thanks to Jeff Carr and Catherine Taylor for their advice and work on the constitution. Thanks to all the ringers (including non-Northfield ringers) for their time and enthusiasm for ringing both real and virtual. Thank you to Canon Janet for all your support and encouragement.

*Sarah Vernon (Tower Captain)*

### **Children's Society**

After another year of restrictions with small coin not readily available, I am pleased to say that through the generosity of our Box Holders the amount contributed through the collection boxes was £286.05, slightly more than the box total of 2020. A gratifying amount indeed! The donations via the Christingle Candle boxes totalled £332.04, again another creditable amount and also more than last year. The new method of recording and totalling the money from the boxes resulted in a couple of recounts and double-checking, however all was well and the grand total of £618.09 was agreed.

The money was banked, despatched, deposited and successfully transferred immediately from the Post Office to the Children's Society account using the new paying slips provided by the Society which eliminate the need for cheques to be issued and subsequently posted, saving time on a job which always involved two people (the treasurer for the cheque and me for posting along with an explanatory letter).

Confirmation of the amount received has been received. So well done to all donors for their contributions. Now an update on Numbers.

- Number of Box Holders: **24**
- Number of boxes held: **25** (one person has 2 boxes)

- Number returned: **16**
- Number outstanding: **8**

*Anne Stock (Children's Society Box Co-ordinator)*

### **Choir**

When we returned to services in church at Easter, congregational singing was still not permitted but we enjoyed listening to hymn music at the appropriate points in the service. Since September we have gradually introduced more singing and have been encouraging members of the choir and others who feel able to help lead the singing to sit in the choir stalls. Lawrence Bacon has continued to be our main organist and on occasion his wife, Jean, has sung at funerals and a wedding. We are very grateful to them both.

At Christmas we put together a simple carol service during which Jean sang a solo and choir members Hilda and Margaret sang a duet. This, together with handbells, a Christmas organ voluntary and a few verses of congregational carols, interspersed with Bible Readings made an enjoyable Carol Service.

We look forward to rebuilding the choir over 2022.

*Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

### **Christian Aid**

Christian Aid continued its work amongst some of the world's poorest countries throughout 2021 with particular emphasis on the effects of climate change.

Our special fundraising week in May went largely online. Bunting went up around the Lych Gate to draw attention to the fundraising campaign, and flyers were added to packs with the information necessary for making online donations. If you donated, thank you! For the second year running we held a very successful plant sale after the Sunday morning service (thanks to Canon Janet for allowing us to use her garden!) Thanks to your generosity we raised a fantastic grand total of £1,373.52. Thank you everyone!

*Gerardine Merrick*

### **Church Cleaning (The Holy Dusters)**

The Holy Dusters started their monthly cleaning from June 2021, after the lifting of many Covid-19 restrictions that were in place. It has been quite difficult due to the ceiling problems in the north aisle and the fitting of the glass porch door.

The band of cleaners usually consists of 6 to 8 people, and they have done a great job through this difficult period. Special thanks must go to Hilda and Roy Pouncett for keeping it all going in my occasional absence.

*Roy Dutton*

### **CTiN (Churches Together in Northfield)**

Churches Together in Northfield is the grouping together of several of the churches in the Northfield village area. During 2021 the churches involved were Northfield Baptist Church, Northfield Methodist Church, St Bartholomew's C. of E., St Brigid's Roman Catholic Church, St David's C. of E., St Laurence C. of E. and the Quakers.

A committee meeting was held in February via Zoom to report on activities during the previous year. There were reports on the finances, the Community Christmas parcel delivery, Pray24Brum and Covid-19 community support. Plans for activities during the coming year were discussed. It was decided that Lent Discussion Groups, combined services on Ash Wednesday, posters to be decorated and displayed as Good Friday witness and combined Zoom prayer meetings could be offered. The various churches reported how they were keeping their congregations together despite Covid-19.

The AGM was held via Zoom in June. There were reports of the financial situation and the activities for Ash Wednesday, Lent Groups, Easter, Ascension Day and the combined prayer meetings. As there had been no volunteers or suggestions for people to take the roles of Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary or Treasurer, it was decided that the activities normally arranged through CTiN, apart from Community Christmas, would not be attempted this year. If any church was organising an event and would like to invite other churches to join them, this would be welcomed. It was decided to organise a meeting with Gary Sambrook (the local MP) to express our views on climate change and COP26. It was also decided that something would be organised for Community Christmas.

On 1 November a meeting was held to organise delivery of parcels as a Community Christmas activity. A very small group of people arranged to invite people who had been on the Community Christmas list, to request and allocate volunteers to deliver the parcels, to buy the items to make up the parcels, to pack the parcels and to deliver them. Parcels were delivered to 25 people.

*Janice Wones*

### **Community Choir**

Sadly, the Community Choir, which was an offshoot of the Community Choir at Hamstead House, West Heath has decided to continue just at West Heath.

*Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

### **Deanery Synod**

During 2021 Kings Norton Deanery merged with Moseley and Shirley Deaneries.

In May a meeting of the combined deanery was held via Zoom. The Revd Catherine Grylls acted as Interim Area Dean. There were reports from Diocesan Synod and General Synod. The Lay Chair and members of the Standing Committee were elected and commissioned. There was a presentation of the current state of the 'People and Places' framework and updates on 'Thy Kingdom Come', 'From Lament to Action' and 'Climate Sunday'.

In July the second meeting of the combined deanery was held via Zoom, chaired by Nick Forknell. There were reports from Diocesan Synod and General Synod. There were presentations about 'Lament to Action', 'People and Places', 'Living in Love and Faith' and Eco-champions. It was announced that the Revd Phelim O'Hare was to be licensed as Area Dean.

In October the third meeting of the combined deanery was held at St Francis, Bournville. The new area dean introduced himself and told a little about his plans for the future. There was a presentation about 'Journeying to Net Zero' and Eco Champions. There was an update on 'People and Places' and Transforming Church Action Plans (TCAP). There were also brief updates on 'From Lament to Action' and 'Living in Love and Faith'. The Deanery Support Officer is Deb Jewison.

*Janice Wones*

### **Fabric Committee**

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Fabric Committee did not meet during 2021. However, fabric matters were included on the agendas of the PCC meetings, where routine maintenance, on-going projects and new works were discussed and acted upon.

The main issues for the church building have concerned:

- The work associated with the internal porch (now nearing completion)
- The engaging of a well-regarded company to install new lighting and upgrade aspects of our electrical distribution. Work is expected to begin in March 2022.
- The exploration of a potential new sound system.
- Repair issues to the ceiling of the North Aisle following two significant plaster falls.

Many other essential maintenance tasks, both in the church and Pastoral Centre have been completed during the year. The work in the Pastoral Centre included replacement of the emergency lighting, new taps in the

gentlemen's toilet and new, more efficient central heating boilers. Contractors continue to keep the churchyard in good order. Our grateful thanks go to all those who have worked tirelessly to maintain our church, churchyard and Pastoral Centre.

*Roy Pouncett (Chair) and Chris Andrew (Minutes Secretary)*

### **Faith Discussion Groups**

*Focus Discussion group (which used to meet at Ann Morrell's home until she moved away):* this group restarted in September. We now meet at Julie Meadow's house on the second Thursday of the month, usually starting at 10:30. In November we started later, to allow people to attend the Remembrance Day Service. In December we had to cancel because Julie was still recovering from Covid-19. *(Janice Wones)*

*Lent discussion group:* we have merged with Churches Together Lent Groups and held 5 online sessions via Zoom. The group was attended by 3 to 5 people including St Laurence's and St David's congregants. The Lent course was based on the book 'At Home in Lent' by Gordon Giles. The book looks at everyday items to help examine our spiritual lives and prayers. Sessions covered the following chapters/objects: a Safe, a Shower, a Vacuum Cleaner, a Clock and a Toilet. The sessions were prepared and co-led by Revd Theresa and Marianna Ponikarovskaya. *(Marianna Ponikarovskaya)*

*Bible Study:* In February, we started a weekly Bible Study via Zoom. A small group gathered to discuss the Bible readings for the upcoming Sunday, facilitated by the minister who would be preaching that week. This led to some fascinating insights into the scripture from a range of perspectives, much good-natured debate, and a few extra ideas for the sermon! It's been a joy to be attentive to how God speaks to each of us in different ways through the same passages. *(Revd Theresa Morton)*

*Faith Discussion Group:* In June/July 2021 the Faith Discussion Group merged with the Bible Study group. Weekly discussions were held via Zoom to meditate and discuss week ahead bible passages, with 7 sessions held overall, each for approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour. Attendance varied from 3 to 6 people. Sessions were led by Canon Janet, Revd Theresa, Fr John, Janice Wones and Marianna Ponikarovskaya. *(Marianna Ponikarovskaya)*

*Exploring Faith:* through November and early December we ran another six-week Exploring Faith course. This was attended primarily by parents of children who attend our Sunday School Services. Learning from last year, we held the sessions in the evenings via Zoom, enabling people to join who would otherwise be reliant on babysitters. We explored various images of Jesus, how the gospel impacts on how we live our daily lives, experiences of the Holy Spirit, and how Jesus' resurrection gives us future hope. *(Revd Theresa Morton)*

### **Flower Guild**

2021 has continued to be a quiet year due to the continued effects of the pandemic. Last year we introduced the use of silk flowers and because circumstances have not yet returned back to normal, we are continuing in that practice, changing them with the seasons and creating special arrangements for celebrated days such as Remembrance Sunday (poppies!).

We would like to thank Linda for her massive contribution to the Emily Rose Collection for weddings and also her continued support with offering her assistance with critical arrangements now that she has semi-retired. We also would like to thank all the people who volunteered their time to help decorate the church for Christmas, it looked very festive, as always.

In 2022 we hope to return to using fresh flowers in church displays and also inviting back the wonderful members of the Flower Guild should they wish to return. All are welcome. We continue to very much look forward to a return to normality depending on the latest Covid-19 news. Thank you for your continued support, sending love and care to you all.

*Barry Gardner*

## **Gridiron**

Our last coffee morning in the Pastoral Centre was in March 2020 before the first lockdown. Since then we have kept in touch via Zoom and whenever the restrictions have been relaxed we have met up outdoors for a coffee and a chat. During 2021 we alternated between Bournville Green, Rowheath Pavilion and latterly the Black Horse Public House. The Black Horse has the advantage of a good outdoor area and a large little-used room for cold or wet days, and unlimited coffee or tea costs just 99p!

Hopefully we will get back to the Pastoral Centre at some point in time. However, some thought will need to be given to the management of the return to a self-help rather than a commercially-provided arrangement. In the meantime, check where we are meeting through the weekly notices. You are most welcome to come along.

*Stuart Andrew*

## **Handbell Ringers**

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the handbell group did not resume meeting until June 2021. Since then, to enable social distancing, we have held our weekly practices in the chancel of the church. Although in many ways this was not ideal (especially during the winter months when the church was particularly chilly), we have managed to keep going. In 2021 the ringers played, in church, on Advent Sunday and also took part in the carol service.

We practise on Thursday afternoons at 2pm, for an hour, and are always on the lookout for new recruits to join us. No experience is required just a willingness to come along regularly and “have a go”.

*Chris Andrew (Handbell organiser)*

## **Larry's**

Larry's is one of the wonderful legacies left to St Laurence by Fr David Pycock. Developed under the national Safe Spaces initiative, Larry's initially opened in April as somewhere for young people of secondary school age to relax and meet friends in a safe environment.

Larry's after school club has been funded by grants from Baron Davenport's Charity, Edward Cadbury Trust and the Grantham Yorke Trust, as well as private donations from church members and generous subsidy by the church. As a welcome gesture of thanks, one of the parents provided much of the food for Larry's Christmas party.

We have around 25 young people who attend each Thursday to play pool, air hockey, table football, table tennis, football, use the computer, play card games, learn new crafts, or simply sit and chat or do their homework. The small tuck shop has been very popular, with free fruit, water and hot chocolate being provided.

Further funding was subsequently sought to be part of Bring it on Brum, the Government's Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) during the summer holidays. As well as providing a nutritious lunch and snacks, a huge variety of activities provided new experiences and the opportunity to learn new practical and team-building skills: constructing and flying kites, designing and sailing soda-powered boats, making windmills, and assembling and decorating recycling bins for use in the Pastoral Centre, to name but a few.

Here's what some of the young people and their families have said about Larry's.

- “It's the best thing in my week.”
- “I was disappointed when I couldn't come to see my friends from another school.”
- Through the activities, “I have learnt never give up.”
- “My daughter loves Thursdays, she has a nice, safe place to meet her friend and has also made new friends.”
- “I feel safe leaving her, knowing she will have fun”
- “This is the first group he's ever settled in. Thank you.”

Further funding is being sought to continue Larry's next year. But it wouldn't be possible without the kindness, commitment and enthusiasm of the Larry's Team; huge thanks to each of them, and of course to Fr David for his vision and determination in making Larry's such a success.

*Revd Theresa Morton*

### **Mothers Union**

2021 was a much better year for us than 2020! Having not met since March 2020 we began the year with Zoom meetings, and I'm very grateful to Fr David and Anne Pycock who managed the IT for us. We had a variety of meetings including the Wave of Prayer, our AGM and Lenten Reflections.



In June we managed to meet as a branch face-to-face for the first time in 15 months, using it as an opportunity to meet each other and share a cup of tea and catch-up on life. We continued to meet for the rest of the year face-to-face while socially distanced. In September we had a presentation on the work of the Princes Trust in the local area, in October we looked at Harvest, in November we looked at Saints and then in December we enjoyed our Christmas buffet lunch with about 30 people attending.

We have been fortunate to maintain our membership during 2021 although Joan Fisher moved to Bristol before Christmas, and Elaine took a pot of bulbs from us when she dropped by to see her in December.

Our biggest success from 2021 must be our Baby Boxes – we donated 8 boxes to Lucy, our local midwife. Each 'Box' contains a selection of clothing for 0-6 months, essential baby toiletries and nappies, sleeping bag, blanket, towel and toys, and a toiletry bag and towel for mum to take into hospital. If required we also provide a Moses basket and bouncy chair. They are so very gratefully received and we get lovely feedback and occasionally baby photos! If you would like to help, knitted blankets and teddy bears would be very welcome, as would towels for mum and baby.

If anyone is interested in joining Mothers' Union, please do contact me.

*Rowena Nicholls*

### **Northfield Revealed**

In January 2020 we received a grant of £65,700 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to be spent by 31 August 2021 on promoting our rich local heritage, with £10,000 to go towards the building of interior porch in the church. Thankfully, the deadline has been extended until the end of March 2022 and we very much hope that the porch will be completed by then (see Fabric Report.)



During the year we held a range of Northfield Revealed activities.

*June:* 'Go wild' in St Laurence Churchyard' in partnership with Birmingham Eco-centre. Photographs of plants in the church yard can be seen on the church web-site.

*August:* we supported the Rea Valley Conservation Group with its Open Day at Coleys Lane Nature Reserve. This included the unveiling of the millstone rescued from the River Rea in 2019. The millstone has now been relocated to the Pastoral Centre Car park (January 2022)

*September:* Several information boards were put up in Northfield drawing attention to significant features. In conjunction with Birmingham Heritage Week we held guided walks linked to the Heritage Trail guides produced in 2021. We brought aspects of them 'to life' by working with Northfield Arts Forum to produce pop-up drama events and included some of them in the Heritage Service which the Bishop of Birmingham attended. We held two open days during Birmingham Heritage week at which Stuart Andrew gave some guided tours of the church and these proved very popular. The tapestry project, 'Home is where the Arch is' was completed and the Arch drew a lot of attention when displayed in Northfield Shopping Centre. The Broomdasher Folk Singers gave a delightful performance in church of Edith Holden's Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady (Edith was born locally).

Throughout the year the 'Mrs History' project continued in school, church and the local community with pupils from Bellfield Juniors and St Laurence Infants. A teachers' pack has been developed and delivered to local schools and is also available on the church website.

We are very grateful to a wide range of people who have worked hard and imaginatively to take the project forward and especially to Mr Chris Rice who is overseeing the whole project. Overall, the project has raised a lot of interest in the area and especially the church; for instance, a local resident was ecstatic to find the re-located millstone and told me how he had joined in with some of the walks and that "everyone in The Great Stone" thought it was a marvellous project.

*Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

### **Occasional Offices (Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals)**

Whilst church was never fully closed in 2021, Covid-19 and the building work restricted services. We prioritised funerals but didn't encourage baptisms until the summer and then held them as 'stand-alone' services, except for the one included in a wedding. Several planned weddings were postponed until 2022. In the light of this it is useful to put the numbers in context.

Year	Baptisms	Weddings	Wedding Blessings	Funerals in church	Funerals in cremes & other places	Burials in churchyard	Burial of ashes in churchyard
2017	31	9	0	17	25	9	16
2018	33	4	1	13	20	8	13
2019	44	9	5	16	9	5	9
2020	7	1	0	12	15	9	14
2021	11	6	0	15	13	10	19

### **Parochial Church Council**

The PCC met 10 times in 2021. From January to July this was via Zoom but the prevailing Covid-19 restrictions enabled us to meet in person (socially-distanced) from August. There was a good attendance at all meetings. The appointments agreed at the first meeting of the new PCC after the APCM in October were:

*Joint Vice-Chairs:* Roy Pouncett and Sandra Reynolds

*Treasurer:* Elaine Clements     *Electoral Roll Officer:* Ruth Clarke

*Secretary:* Emily Corns     *Designated Safeguarding Co-ordinator:* Rowena Nicholls

Each year we are required to set up and monitor 'Transforming Church' goals. The 2020-21 goals were:

- To work towards an Eco-Church Silver Award, including continuing with the interior porch and improving heating and lighting.
- To get St Laurence Safe Spaces underway: an after-school club and safe space for children of secondary school age vulnerable to knife crime.
- To improve our ability to broadcast worship to enable more people in the community to connect with church.

As they were set late in 2020 (due to the delay of the 2020 APCM because of Covid-19) we have continued with them during 2021 with considerable success.

- By the end of 2021 the interior porch was nearing completion and during the year we partnered with Eco-Birmingham and Masefield Community Garden to run or support various events.
- The after-school club (Larry's) started after Easter and has since been running weekly, including during the summer holidays.
- We have gradually become more proficient at broadcasting services via Zoom, YouTube and Conference Call.

In October we received a visit from Abbi Wells of the Transforming Church Action Plan (TCAP) team to start us in the process of our 'Transforming Church' goals, forming a 5-year TCAP.

Safeguarding and Health and Safety are discussed at every meeting. Other significant issues discussed and agreed during the year included:

- Response to Covid-19: keeping on top of changing guidance and especially enabling worship to continue in a variety of ways and the Pastoral Centre to re-open in the spring.
- Monitoring of building work and Health and Safety issues
- Applying for faculties for the updating of the lighting and sound systems and appointing contractors.
- Monitoring of finances, furloughing and hours of paid staff due to Covid-19.
- Monitoring churchyard maintenance including work by contractors.
- Setting of Parochial fees.
- Revision of Safeguarding Policies and receiving regular updates on Safeguarding.
- Pastoral matters: the continuation of the provision of regular packs of spiritual and pastoral support, church news and essential information to all on the ER plus a few more people.
- The establishment of St Laurence Safe Spaces (Larry's).
- 'Northfield Revealed' progress.

Reports were received from the following groups; each has a section in this report, though with the inability to meet in person much of the work was handled by the PCC as the year progressed.

- Fundraising and Social Sub-Committee.
- Fabric (including Health and Safety) Sub-Committee.
- Worship Sub-Committee.
- Churches Together in Northfield.
- Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator.
- Deanery Synod.

*Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

### **Place of Welcome**

From February until the beginning of September the church was open between 10:00 and 11:00 on Saturdays for people who had booked to come in and engage in private prayer. On three Saturdays in September there were Heritage Week events. In October, November and December the church was open on Saturdays from 10:00 until 11:30 for people to visit or pray and for the bell-ringing school to practice.

*Janice Wones*

### **Publicity**

We continue to promote the Church electronically and in print. Each week the following internet sites are updated:

- The Church's own web site – [www.stlaurencenorthfield.org](http://www.stlaurencenorthfield.org) (c1000 page views / month)
- Our presence on A Church Near You – [www.achurchnearyou.com](http://www.achurchnearyou.com) (c2700 page views / month)
- Our Facebook page - [St Laurence Church Northfield - Home | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/St-Laurence-Church-Northfield-Home) (c270 visits / month)
- Our YouTube channel – [St Laurence Northfield - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...) (c250 visits / month)

Mark Reynolds continues to be our 'Twitter' keeper whilst Peter Mitchell has kindly helped out with the loading of videos onto YouTube. Less frequently, we submit material to B31 Voices, Google Business, TripAdvisor, Good Journey and Wikipedia along with press releases to South Birmingham Pages, and the Bromsgrove Standard. Our new noticeboards at the gates to the Church and around the Pastoral Centre are also kept up to date.

If you spot an opportunity to publicise the Church locally or nationally, do let Peter know.

*Peter Chapman (Webmaster)*

### **Rectory**

Work done by Church of England Birmingham in 2021:

- Landlord's gas safety checks;
- Gas heater in study replaced;
- Carbon monoxide check;
- Central heating pump replaced (this has made a big difference).;
- Water tanks etc. checked for Legionella;
- Energy efficiency check – the Rectory proved to be one of the most energy efficient in the Diocese. The gas boiler, although quite old, is still very efficient.

By Rector:

- Nothing of significance this year.

By PCC:

- Annual security alarm maintenance visit. Pin pad replaced

*Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

### **Safeguarding**

Overall, the PCC adopts and follows all the Church of England safeguarding policies and guidelines, and where I refer to 'church' it includes the whole site: church, pastoral centre and churchyard.

I was again appointed as Parish Safeguarding Lead for 2021 and can report the PCC has all the required policies in place:

- Safeguarding Policy;
- Policy Statement on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders;
- Responding to Domestic Abuse;
- Promoting a Safer Church: Parish Policy Statement.

In addition:

- The policies are displayed on the front page of the church website.
- The PCC has adopted a procedure to deal promptly with safeguarding allegations or suspicions of abuse.
- The safeguarding posters are displayed in the pastoral centre and church, signposting any queries to me, Elaine Clements (children) or Janice Wones (domestic violence).
- Job descriptions are continually reviewed.
- DBS checks are all in place for all those who require a check, including all PCC members, Sunday School leaders, Stay and Play Leaders, and Larry's helpers.
- The validity of DBS checks is being reduced from 5 years to 3 years and as a PCC we are required to have a plan in place to ensure we comply with this by 2023. I confirm that some DBS checks are currently being re-done and we will be compliant by the end of 2022.
- Safeguarding training has been completed by the new PCC members and again, everyone in a role that requires them to undertake suitable training has done so.
- The Church of England requires all volunteers to undertake Safeguarding Training – and how this can be implemented will be considered by the PCC.
- Safeguarding statements/policies are obtained for all hirers of the pastoral centre.
- Risk assessments are completed for all church activities, which includes safeguarding.

If you have any concerns or queries on any safeguarding issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

*Rowena Nicholls*

### **St Laurence Church Infant School**

The children at St Laurence Infant School are happy, safe and learning within a Christian environment.

During the pandemic our school has remained open, teaching the children in person or virtually, and an important part of our day is worship. Staff leading worship in school have undertaken continuing professional development to ensure our worship is invitational, inclusive and inspirational, and we have had visitors from the church and wider community. Each classroom has a prayer space and there are also prayer areas in the library and playground. The children visit the church and as part of the Interfaith Project visits to St John's Ladywood, a mosque, and a synagogue have recommenced.

The children in Year 1 have undertaken a historical writing project based on the church's Norman door. Please look at our website [www.stlrci.bham.sch.uk](http://www.stlrci.bham.sch.uk) to learn more of the exciting things our children have been doing.

This has been another difficult year due to the pandemic but the staff, children and parents have all worked hard to ensure we could remain open. I extend my thanks to them all. I would like to commend Mrs Smith the head teacher particularly for guiding us all through the changing restrictions, staff shortages and children's absences due to Covid-19.

*Sarah Brown (Chair of Governors)*

*Canon Janet adds:* A huge thank you to Sarah for all the work she has done for many years as Chair of Governors. She had hoped to retire in September 2021 but the person we hoped would take over moved to a job overseas just before the elections, so Sarah very kindly agreed to stay on until May 2022. She has donated a flag and flag pole to the school as her leaving gift, and I was delighted to be at 'the first raising' of the school flag to pray for the school and give thanks for Sarah's ministry.

### **St Laurence Church Junior School**

The New Year started for schools on January 4th. On January 5th the Government introduced another national 'lockdown' which meant that for many pupils and their families it was back to online learning. Staff from the school were preparing remote lessons for pupils to access from home and ensuring paperwork packs were delivered. School remained open for the most vulnerable and those parents or carers who were identified as key workers. Staff, led by Mrs Mulrain, continued to support the children throughout this time making regular contacts with families, providing support when needed and ensuring that learning was continuing. As governors we cannot thank the staff enough for their hard work during this challenging time.

The Government announced the opening again of schools on 8 March 2021. Safeguarding measures in place continued to ensure the safety of both pupils and staff. Some kind of normality was restored although the mixing of year groups and whole school assemblies were still restricted. Staff provided the pupils with a range of activities to enable them to still feel connected to each other and support them in being back at school. The developing use of technology has meant that virtual assemblies have taken place with both Canon Janet and other guest speakers.

Since the re-opening staff have concentrated on supporting pupils to accelerate their learning and close any gaps they may have due to the lockdowns. Many different opportunities have been provided for pupils to not only support their learning but also their mental health and wellbeing. This included visits to the Aztec Adventure facility at Upton Warren, where pupils enjoyed a range of water-based activities.

In April we were excited to welcome our new headteacher Mr Andrew Murphy. He has a clear vision for St Laurence Church Junior School moving forward over the next few years. I know that parents have been getting to know Mr Murphy either at the start or end of school, parents' meetings and events and with meetings with him. Governors are already delighted by the way Mr Murphy has established himself at school and the new ideas he is developing with us including refreshing the vision for the school.

There are still many challenges in school. Having successfully avoided large numbers of pupils and staff out with Covid-19 in the early part of 2021, at the end of the summer term we unfortunately saw a large increase and the new Omicron variant took its toll later in the autumn term with many staff being ill and the headteacher having to move classes around.

Governors have continued to meet throughout this year either 'socially distanced' in person or remotely. The diocese appointed a new foundation governor to our board in the spring term and we said farewell to our two parent governors in December as their term of office ended. Online training events have taken place along with briefings for governors from the city council and Birmingham diocese.

Governors feel that we have begun a new chapter for St Laurence Church Junior School. There are lots of exciting new developments planned to ensure that children at St Laurence are provided with the best possible educational opportunities and that they are prepared for their next stage of learning when they leave us.

Finally, last year I mentioned the new Church of England Secondary School which was being built in Yardley Wood. I am delighted to say that Christ Church Secondary Academy opened its doors in September 2021 to Year 7 pupils. After several years of planning it is wonderful to see how the pupils and staff have settled into their new school where the Christian distinctiveness is clearly evident.

*Jill Saunders (Chair of Governors)*

### **Scout Group (206<sup>th</sup> St Laurence)**

Thankfully this year has been better than the last in terms of scouting, and we have managed to recover to roughly where we were prior to Covid-19. We are currently made up of 6 sections (2 Beavers, 2 Cubs and 2 Scouts), with 117 young members, 23 Leaders and 2 Young Leaders. We have had 2 new leaders recently join us – Renee Peregrine-Young and Robyn Dainter – and I'd like to welcome them both to scouting.

We have now returned to face-to-face scouting and have resumed a near-normal programme with a few minor changes to meet with distancing rules.

The leadership team continues to provide a fantastic programme within the sections. All our members are working towards the various challenge badges. Some of the activities the young people have enjoyed this year are camping, skating, swimming, sailing and waterpark, night hike, abseiling, rock climbing, trampolining and a glow in the dark inflatable park.

During the year, we awarded 9 Bronze, 8 Silver and 4 Gold Chief Scout Awards to our young people. Congratulations to those Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and the leaders; it's not easy to complete all the criteria required for these top awards.

As always, I would like to thank all the leaders and group executive committee for all their commitment and enthusiasm.

*Carl Jenkins (Group Scout Leader, 206<sup>th</sup> St Laurence Scout Group)*

### **Scouts (Gridiron Explorers)**

The explorer group has now been up and running for 2 years, with long periods of time when we were unable to meet due to lockdown restrictions. Despite the disruption nearly all of the young people came back when we were able to meet in person again. We currently have 33 with several due to start with us in the new year after leaving scouts. We have three leaders – Rachel, Jon and myself – and we are usually all there; it is rare for any of us to miss a week!

In 2021 activities have included a BBQ to welcome them back after lockdown, games nights, a street hunt, games in the local park, silly olympics, paddle-boarding and kayaking, a walk at the Lickey Hills, axe throwing, a light sabre class, making music videos, an evening at an indoor ball park, an escape room, water fights and much more!

The explorers had a one-night survival camp at the Lickey Hills where they had to build shelters to sleep in, make fires to cook on, learnt how to chop wood, did some whittling and had a first aid session using charades! We also went on a weekend camp to Alton Towers and stayed close to the theme park in a house, spending one day at the water park and the other on the rides. Our last camp was a weekend in Beaudesert at Cannock Chase where they went on a hike, did go-karting and went on an assault course.

It has been a very busy year, many activities that we took part in had been cancelled during Covid-19 so we have squeezed a lot into a few months! Thank you again to St Laurence Church for their support and for letting us use the Pastoral Centre. We look forward to the year ahead!

*Debbie Keeves (Gridiron Explorer Leader)*

### **Servers**

It seems strange once again being asked to write a servers' report when, because of the continuing effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on us all, servers are still not required.

We praise Canon Janet and all her great team for their supreme efforts in keeping us safe while we continue with Wednesday and Sunday services. I myself am privileged to clear the altar and do the "washing up" every Sunday, so I still feel very much involved with the services. Thank you, Lord!

*Hilda Pouncett (Head Server)*

### **Social and Fundraising Committee**

Due to the pandemic our Social and Fundraising activities were again curtailed in 2021. We did manage to have three outdoor Bric@Brac sales and, although cold, the weather was kind to us.

In November we managed to have our Christmas Fayre. Despite the early morning snow giving us some stress, it was a huge success, and everyone who helped really enjoyed having the opportunity to be working together again. Over £1500 was raised.

Now that restrictions have been lifted, I sincerely hope the committee will again reform so that we can start to plan some events for 2022. If you would like to help, please do get in touch.

*Rowena Nicholls*

### **Stay & Play**

After a long closure since the start of the pandemic we decided to reopen the stay and play group in September 2021. Unfortunately we had to say goodbye and good luck to Emma Kupsa as she took on new responsibilities in her job. We thank her for all of her help in setting up and running the group alongside Donna. We also said a sad goodbye to Barbara Flight who provided drinks and snacks in the kitchen. We wish them both well.

In September 2021 we reopened our doors with the continued help and support of Julie Meadows, who provides snacks and hot drinks in the kitchen, and we welcomed Donna's daughter Millie Clulee, who is volunteering alongside Julie and Donna in between her college days.

Since reopening we have seen extremely high numbers of families (both new and old) attending our group. It's been a huge success, and it's great that our group is so busy, especially as the number of toddler groups available in the area has dramatically reduced. It's nice to be able to offer this opportunity for families to get out, socialise and mix with other families again; it's so important for the little children (and their families), especially those who were born just before or at the start of the pandemic who won't have socialised with other children before.

The children have enjoyed various crafts and activities from learning how to milk a fake cow, to playing in an indoor igloo. We even had a visit from Father Christmas and a Christmas party on our last day, as we broke up for the Christmas holidays.

However, with the number of Covid-19 cases sadly on the rise again, we have taken the decision to remain closed for a little while longer until things settle down again. We want to keep everyone safe and well. Our Facebook page will be updated soon with our reopening details.

*Donna Clulee (Co-ordinator)*

### **Sunday School**

5 January 2021 saw yet another lockdown put into place so, after one snowy Sunday School being held in the Pastoral Centre on 3 January, we started a weekly 8:30 Sunday School via Zoom on the 10 January. This

was provided by Canon Janet, Reverend Theresa, Rowena and myself and attracted between 3 and 10 families with at times 15 children 'in attendance'. Every week the services were uploaded to YouTube to be available for all to see.

4 April, Easter Sunday, saw our return to the Pastoral Centre. This was all done respecting strict Covid-19 controls, with families being seated at social distances and places being pre-booked via Eventbrite. The first Sunday attracted 20 children and 20 adults, which was lovely to see, and this is how Sunday School has been running ever since with attendance ranging between 5 and 13 families. During this time we have been building up a library of bible stories with visual aids, crafts, materials and songs incorporated which we can now use regularly in the future.

The Sunday School has been run by Rowena, Canon Janet, Peter and myself, with Reverend Theresa 'manning' the Eventbrite bookings for us, but I think the time has come to involve more people to enable a rota to be re-established so that more can become involved in this important role of including children and their carers as part of the St Laurence Church community.

Thank you to everybody who has been involved in Sunday School, especially the children and their parents and carers who have been attending.

*Elaine Clements*

### **The 100 Club**

It was another difficult year for the 100 Club, as collection of subscription money was severely hampered by the pandemic. By 24 January only 60 subscriptions had been received, and I had to give serious consideration to a plan B (and C!). However, by 16 February the level of subscriptions had been turned around and prize draws managed to commence late on 23 February with 101 paid up subscriptions, and two prize draws took place on that day for both January and February to get the prize draw scheduling back on track.

I am very thankful that many subscribers heeded my plea to make payments to the 100 Club by direct bank transfer. The advantages are manifold: it has made my job much easier, it gives the payer a record of payment on their bank statement, and allows payment with perfect social distancing.

As throughout much of 2020, prize draws were conducted via a virtual Zoom meeting in the early months of 2021. However, lockdowns became less severe and were even lifted as we progressed through the year with the help of the vaccination programme. Prize money pay-outs were not too severely affected by the pandemic. Some winners from the early months' draws agreed to wait a while for payment.

In addition to internet banking other technology of immense benefit has been the continued use of the website random.org to pick our winners. I have expanded my use of Dropbox to share updates, prize draw results, lists of members, and even videos and photos of the prize draw itself, some of which were recorded during Zoom meetings where the physical presence of a scrutineer was not possible. Such technology has enabled me to continue operating the 100 Club throughout the pandemic, and generally made my role as administrator much easier.

I hope that the figures on the financial statement speak for themselves and need no further explanation. I will just say that the distributions to The Children's Society £327 and St Laurence PCC £327 (for the Pastoral Centre) were the largest amounts I have achieved while I have been running the 100 Club. My thanks go to all subscribers for their support with extra special thanks to those who donated some or all of their prize money back for the benefit of these charities.

*Jeffrey Carr (100 Club administrator)*

## Income and Expenditure 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021

	2020 £	2021 £
<b>Income</b>		
Subscriptions collected for 2021 during 2021		
57 subscriptions @ £12		684
2 subscriptions @£13		26
Advance subscriptions for the 2022 year		
67 subscriptions @ £12		804
Prize money donated back / ring-fenced for good causes		21
Prize Draw 1 for January		15
Prize draw 12 for December		6
<b>Total income</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>1,535</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Distribution to good causes relating to year 2020		55
Distribution to good causes relating to 2021		599
The Children's Society     £327		
St Laurence P.C.C.           £327		
Total distributions to good causes	570	654
Prize money paid out	585	
10 draws @ 45		450
November draw		70
Christmas draw		90
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>1,155</b>	<b>1,264</b>
<b>Surplus / Deficit</b>	<b>-298</b>	<b>271</b>
Fund balance		
Fund balance as at 31 Dec 2020	852	554
add surplus / less deficit	-298	271
Fund balance as at 31 December 2021	<u>554</u>	<u>825</u>
Cash on hand as at 31 December 2021	0	0
Bank account as at 31 December 2021	554	825
Total funds as at 31 December 2021	<u>554</u>	<u>825</u>

**Worship**

Worship is at the heart of developing our discipleship and our lives as a church community. Both the ministry team and the congregation have continued to embrace the new 'mixed mode' of church services that we developed at the height of the previous year's restrictions, allowing corporate worship to continue despite the ongoing disruptions caused by both Covid-19 and building work.

Throughout the year, our main Eucharistic Service has taken place at 9:30am on Sunday mornings both in church and via Zoom (where people can also dial in on their phones if they do not have internet access). One of the joys of Zoom is that there can be a time of fellowship after the service, which has been greatly missed by those gathering in person. The services have also been recorded and put on YouTube; as well as being viewed by people who have not attended the service, they are regularly watched again by those who

were there in person. When we were using Zoom only we once more encouraged people to send in photographs on a theme which were then compiled into montages accompanied by pre-recorded organ music by one of our organists.

The 08:30am Sunday School Service took place via Zoom (with careful attention given to safeguarding) for the early part of the year then returned to the Pastoral Centre from Easter Sunday onwards.

During the summer, the ministry team led a mini-sermon series which explained the different component parts of the service – The Gathering, The Liturgy of the Word, The Liturgy of the Sacrament and The Dismissal – and how these work together to help us journey into knowing and praising God as the body of Christ. This received excellent feedback as people began to think more deeply about the familiar and how it can lead them into the mystery of God, and bring Him glory.

Canon Janet, assisted by Chris Michael, led some Forest Church Services at Masefield Community Garden aimed at Families with school-aged children on a weekly basis during the school summer holidays. Sadly, two were cancelled due to Covid-19 and no-one attended the last one. However, the other three went well with several families attending, including some we had not seen since they came regularly to qualify for admission to St Laurence Church Infant School.

The Wednesday 10am Holy Communion Service according to the Book of Common Prayer has continued throughout the year; initially via Zoom and the Conference Call phonenumber, but then moving back into church when building work allowed. The option to ring in on Conference Call is vital for those faithful worshippers who are unable to make it into the building due to health or Covid-19 concerns.

Sermons from both services have been uploaded to our 'sermon line' to be listened to on the telephone, and towards the end of the year made into podcasts also.

Morning Prayer has continued to be said in church by the Rector most weekdays, and the ministry team has met as a whole for Evening Prayer via Zoom on three evenings a week throughout the year. There has been an open invitation for anyone to join; this has primarily been the case during Lent and following Bible Study sessions. Compline has continued at 8:30pm on Wednesdays by Conference Call, with a regular group of 7 people joining this service with more in Lent.

It has been a delight to hold Services of Baptism this year, quite a few of which had been delayed from the previous year. These have been standalone services in order to ensure Covid-19 safety, but this has been embraced as an important missional opportunity for the church. Newly-baptised children are usually given a special handmade dove when they attend a Sunday Service following their baptism. The opportunity to present this at the Christmas Eve Crib Service was an additional occasion to speak of baptism to the wider community.

We have continued to mark the seasons and notable occasions with special services, including:

- Lent and Easter:
  - Compline via Conference Call throughout the week.
  - Ash Wednesday service; this was via Zoom, and church members were provided with small bags of ash so they could 'ash' themselves at home.
  - 'Stations of the Cross' churchyard trail, with a booklet so that people could follow the trail independently, as well as join the Good Friday meditative guided trail.
  - Maundy Thursday Holy Communion Service and Vigil via Zoom
  - Family-friendly Good Friday 'Hot Cross Bun Service' via Zoom, where the famous St Laurence Hot Cross Bun Sandwich was resurrected from last year!
  - Good Friday 'Hour at the Cross' service via Zoom, where we considered different images of Christ as a focus for racial injustice.
  - Holy Saturday evening 'Service of Darkness and Light' by Conference Call.
  - We returned to worship in church and the Pastoral Centre on Easter Sunday, and held an additional Holy Communion Service on the afternoon of Easter Day so as to enable as many people as possible to attend church that day.

- Additional St Laurence-developed resources were sent out to church members, the Deanery and Churches Together in Northfield, including a child-friendly booklet for journeying through Holy Week and The Blue and Gold Lent Diary to help pray through the things we find difficult and those that bring hope.
- Racial Justice Sunday.
- Mothering Sunday.
- Mother's Union Sunday.
- Farewell Service for Fr David Pycock on his retirement.
- Remembrance Day Service.
- Rogationtide, Harvest and Carol Services at Masefield Community Garden.
- All Saints' with a special service in church linked to a trail in the churchyard.
- Two All Souls' Services (one of which was also live via Zoom) were particularly appreciated by those who had been unable to hold the funerals they would have liked due to Covid-19 restrictions. It was important that the church remembered and honoured their loved ones before God.
- Advent and Christmas Services, including:
  - Socially distanced Christingle Service.
  - Two very interactive Crib Services.
  - A Carol Service, held in church and via Zoom, with a variety of beautiful music to minimise singing, including recordings made for us last year by a choir from the University of Birmingham.
  - Midnight Mass.
  - Christmas Day Holy Communion Service, which enabled the people at home on Zoom to join in the fun of 'Alleluia Bingo'!

We have continued to use the churchyard to enable worship by installing regular churchyard trails including a Tranquillity Trail, All Saints and the Nativity.

All in-person services throughout the year have taken place following careful risk assessments, not just due to Covid-19 but also because of building and maintenance work in the church. A fall of plaster from the ceiling precluded the use of the north aisle for much of the year, and ongoing construction of the new glass porch meant that at times the seating in the south aisle and the south door were unusable. All worship has continued in a Covid-safe way; we have shown our care for one another by relaxing restrictions very gradually, ensuring the most vulnerable feel safe by maintaining social distancing (including having some pews specifically reserved for social distancing following the removal of national restrictions), continuing to encourage face coverings when no longer mandated, and limiting the amount of movement and singing during the service.

Sadly, services at The Limes Nursing Home and Chatham Place (residential complex) have not yet resumed, nor has Beer and Hymns at The Great Stone.

We look forward to services opening up more and more in person, increasing the amount of singing whilst continuing to enable people to join in our worship via Zoom and Conference Call. We are very grateful to a huge number of people who enable our worship but special thanks must be given to Peter Mitchell and Peter Chapman who devote several hours a week to putting services on phone lines and YouTube.

*Revd Theresa Morton, Janice Wones and Canon Janet Chapman (Ministry Team)*

Last but not least, a huge thank you to all contributors and to Richard Mycroft for his editing this report.