

Annual Report 2023



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Highlights from 2023!

- **A new Vicar!** Welcome Josh, Corrine and Ezekiel!
- Prayer continues to underpin our church life and activities through daily zoom and weekly in person prayer sessions as well as making pastoral prayer available where possible as part of our services.
- We have had contact with over 825 children through our work in schools!
- We have seen a significant increase in the number of children and young families attending church, particularly at the lower end of the age range.
- We have connected with 40 - 50 students and young adults at St Giles and have helped over 300 individual international students through the platform of FISH.
- Our Bereavement Journey course had 18 guests who have no other connection with St Giles!
- The women's ministry piloted a new divorce course (221 Divorce Support) which provided a space for 8 people to prayerfully journey through a difficult time in their lives.
- We have provided over 420 cooked dinners for individuals and families through our weekly 'Open Dining Room' from November to March.
- We have supported a wide range of local mission groups, including the University Foodbank via FISH, Eve and Baby Basics.
- In addition to our regular support of our overseas mission partners, our Lent project with Tearfund raised £4000 to help subsistence farmers in Ethiopia!
- Our musicians and AV Teams have provided music-led worship for all but a handful of the 106 church services throughout the year!
- Our children & young people are getting involved in the 'production' of our services, serving on our Sound and Visual desks.
- Our churchyard now has CCTV coverage to help reduce anti-social behaviour.
- We have eight home groups meeting regularly with demand for more places to be available.
- Our property team have ensured that our building stays safe and light. Power and heat are available when we need them!

Welcome from our Vicar

Welcome to the Annual Report for St Giles Parochial Church Council. I hope you will take some time to read about what has happened over the past year. It has been a privilege and a joy to be appointed as Vicar of St Giles in this last year and to begin my ministry here. But I am thankful that this church is not about any one individual but that everything happens because one big team is involved, and I want to thank every one of you for all that you give and bring to the life, ministry and mission of our church. My prayer is that God would continue to be glorified amongst us and that in the next year more people would come to know the love and grace we find in Jesus. With every blessing.

Josh Thorne

Alpha

Alpha provides a safe and supportive environment for those of faith or no faith to explore what Christianity is all about. Some of our young adults attended Alpha at Broadmead Community Church in the Autumn of last year and at least one of them wishes to be confirmed. We would love to see Alpha run at St Giles this year and are looking for leaders who may be interested in taking part. Please do get in touch with the Church Office if you feel God is leading you to be part of this ministry.

Josh Thorne

Audio Visual & Production

This year we have been looking at how children can get more involved with the production side at St Giles. This has been a fun process, and we are close to having both sound desk and PC run by children, with minimal oversight, on the first Sunday of the month.

We have also had the pleasure of serving in many ways over the year, including for Every Nation Bible School, Northampton Male Voice Choir, weddings, funerals, the carol service, and even a rock concert! I am very thankful for all the members of the AV team as they continue to faithfully serve in this way.

Stephen Hewitson

Bereavement Journey Course

The course was run over a six week period during February and March 2023 in the Church Centre.

We had eighteen guests who signed up, many of whom had no specific connection to St Giles but who had suffered a recent bereavement and had been searching on the internet for a course.

The course consists of video and small group work.

Meeting in person was a great advantage (having run some of the earlier courses online) and helped the three small groups and their facilitators bond well. The ages of the guests ranged from thirties right through to seventies. A reminder that bereavement can affect us at any age.

A course like this needs a team of people to make it work well; facilitators to run the group discussions, an IT team to supervise the video presentations, volunteers to provide refreshments and administrators to organise the sessions and keep everyone informed of the itinerary. A big thanks to everyone in the team.

Judging by the feedback from the guests everyone seemed to find the course very helpful. A reunion supper which took place later in the year was also well attended and appreciated.

Simon and Denise Bridgens

Children and Families

Our children's and families work has seen an increase in 2023.

Toddle In is continuing to meet two days a week, and is now growing again, we had over 100 people attending the Toddle In Christmas Party in December.

Open Dining Room re-started in October and has seen a number of new families coming each week for a hot meal and crafts and games for the children.

We also ran Take-A-Break over the summer Holidays, which saw 40-60 people attending the sessions in church each Wednesday afternoon.

Our Sunday morning groups continue to meet. Unfortunately we are only able to run a pre-school group once a month, but are hoping to be able to do more sessions in the next year.

Beth Whaites

Churchwardens

Firstly, A huge 'thankyou' to The Lord and to all those who helped in bringing Josh, Corrine and Ezekiel to St Giles. It feels to be an exciting time with many new people worshipping with us and also new and existing opportunities for outreach developing.

Thank you also to all those who already give their time, their talents and their financial support. We cannot move forward without this. Please do prayerfully consider how you might continue or perhaps start to contribute to the life and mission of the church in some way.

We are so grateful to our Vicar, our Staff Team, Lay Ministers and Treasurer who together with many volunteers lead or oversee areas of mission; our worship services, manage our buildings, our accounts and administration, all to support the life and outreach of our church fellowship to our community.

Lastly, we are incredibly appreciative of our faithful Deputy Wardens who come to church early and stay late after each Sunday service to unlock and then secure the building, ensuring that everything and everybody is in place to allow our worship to take place.

Do speak to Stephen Hewitson or David Lidbetter if you have any questions or wish to explore any opportunities for getting involved.

David Lidbetter and Stephen Hewitson

Creation Care and Renewal

Our churchyard still remains a sanctuary for wildlife. From the bulbs in spring to the canopy of the trees for the birds and common pipistrelle bats. Decaying tree trunks left standing provide habitat whilst the wildflower strip continues to help pollinators.

Thankfully despite weather extremities in the past few years, the recently planted trees are still alive with grateful thanks to the well-being team for watering them. We are sadly losing another mature tree - can we fundraise to plant a few more trees?

Achievements in 2023:

Installation of five new closed bins. Can we each litter pick before or after our services? Littering is a huge problem!

CCTV was installed in the churchyard as part of the safer street funding scheme to help reduce antisocial issues.

I continue to have meetings with WNC regarding the churchyard and its issues at the Guildhall. I am hoping to engage with the PCC going forward as I believe that we currently have no vision for the churchyard and I am struggling to resolve issues by myself. Ultimately although maintained by the council, we, the church are the landowners and we need a collective ownership to help resolve some of the issues we have. It's such a great resource to be custodians of especially for well-being and mental health.

Rocky Coles

Home Groups

Attending a Home Group provides an opportunity to explore how we can apply the teaching we receive on a Sunday into the rest of our week. Meetings are usually held in someone's home and they provide an opportunity to delve deeper into Bible study, prayer and fellowship in a safe, supportive and encouraging environment.

We currently have 8 home groups at St Giles which accounts for approximately 25% of our church congregation. We would love to see more home groups starting as we know there are people who have expressed an interest to join a group. Please do contact the office if you

would like to lead a group or be part of one (office@stgilesnorthampton.org.uk).

David Lidbetter

House of Prayer

We believe that persistence in intercession day by day and week by week are what the Lord requires of us at this current time. There is a sense that as our church faces this new season, and with the world, UK and UK church facing immense challenges, we need more and more to be on our faces before God.

Corporate zoom prayers continue each weekday morning at 8-8.30am and Thursday evening at 8-9pm. Grateful thanks to the teams who are persistent in praying, leading and supporting. It is much appreciated. Consider joining us if you can, the zoom details are on our weekly news sheet or you can contact the church office.

We also intercede for the ministries at St Giles. Please therefore send through requests and also details of answers to prayer. We love thanking God for these as well as praising Him for who He is.

Although numbers were too small to sustain in-person corporate prayer during the interregnum, we are open to re-starting these. We are also encouraged that many 'pockets' of prayer exist – for example in house groups, or ministry groups. Fantastic! We are happy to visit anyone who might want encouragement to pray.

God is Good!!

Rachel White

Men @ St Giles

2023 has been a year of change for the Men's Ministry team as I've had to bid farewell to Mike Cope but have really benefitted from the wisdom of some of the older heads stepping forward to help with me. Many thanks to Duncan, Tim and Neale for this.

We have tried to put on a variety of events in 2023 including a cookery masterclass, a movie night, hymns and tins night and the always popular men's breakfast. It's been great to see some new and old faces alike coming together, building friendships and creating a space for sharing and prayer.

We also took a group of guys to 'The Gathering for Men' in June, a brilliant festival full of amazing worship, teaching, prayer and some amazing activities including axe throwing and wrestling to name a few!

Look out for more exciting events in 2024, we have a curry night February, a Men's Breakfast in March and we will be looking for revenge against the Women in the annual Men's vs Women's games night in April!

Pete Day

Mission on our Doorstep

MOOD aims to keep local mission needs in the congregation's minds as well as supporting (by prayer and financial gifts) a number of national organisations which we have contact with as a church and who supply us with support and resources.

We seek to encourage the regular collections for the University Foodbank via FISH. We have also had a Harvest collection for Foodbank and collections for Eve (toys and toiletries) and Baby Basics (Supplies for new baby's and their mums) at Mothering Sunday and Christmas which have been much appreciated. We continue to explore practical ways of supporting the local organisations we have contact with.

We hope to encourage more practical service to local organisations we have links with as a church.

Carol Halliday

Music and Worship

Joining together in song is just one way in which we can offer worship to God for all that He is, all that He has done for us and means to us.

I am so grateful to those who give of their time and talents to enable this to happen week-in, week out.

I thought that it might be helpful to show how many people are typically involved in the process:

Before each Sunday service, one of the music group leaders will prayerfully choose the songs to support the teaching theme and then liaise with the service leader to agree. The musicians will meet to rehearse the songs and the sound technician will also attend to provide the set-up that is needed and to ensure that each band member can hear what they need to hear as they play.

Immediately prior to each service, the band will run through the songs again and the music group leader will speak to the AV operator to check that they know the order in which the various parts of the song will be sung, so that the right words will appear at the right time.

Hopefully, all this preparation will enable the band to play and all of us join in offering a joyful 'noise' to our God.

After the service has ended, the AV technicians stay on to 'break down' the microphones, leads and stands and stow them away safely until the next service. All the songs that we sing each week need to be 'logged' by title and composer in-line with our copyright commitments.

If you are interested in joining those who enable our music led worship, please contact Stephen Hewitson or myself.

David Lidbetter

Pastoral Prayer

We are available for prayer ministry during the morning communion services twice a month and at occasional church services which have a focus on healing. We also pray for those who email requests to us via the church office or to Denise Bridgens. We offer ministry in the week for those needing more time for ministry. The team is led by Denise Bridgens assisted by Mike Kingman and Serena Yong. David Cline, our former team leader, sadly passed away in November. Two new members have joined us this year. We continue to meet up as a team every month for worship, fellowship and prayer. We also discuss specific topics related to the healing ministry. It continues to be a privilege to pray for those who ask for confidential prayer.

Denise Bridgens

PCC

The PCC met formally six times during 2023. Jacqueline Wienkamp and Jessica Newlove were succeeded as churchwardens by Stephen Hewitson and David Lidbetter following the APCM in April. In September, we welcomed Josh as our new vicar and thus the new Chair of the PCC, meetings prior to his arrival being chaired by the churchwardens.

Issues discussed and dealt with at this year's meetings included:

- Appointment of two Parish Representatives (Louise Whaites and David Lidbetter) to represent the congregation in the appointment process of a new vicar.
- Support to our Mission Partners
- Fire Prevention and Risk Assessment
- Student's and Young Adults' Ministry
- Finance and Giving (Including the establishment of a Stewardship Committee and roll out of the Parish Giving Scheme)
- Fostering a 'thank you culture'

- 2024 Budget

The PCC also undertook Equality and Diversity Training in March 2023.

The most recent PCC minutes are displayed on the notice board in church.

We give thanks to God for all PCC members who give their time to PCC business.

Helen Hewitson

Property Committee

Works have been confined to maintenance of the buildings with most of this being undertaken 'in-house'. Due to the financial challenges faced by the church some of the less urgent items from the last Quinquennial Survey, planned for 2023 have been deferred.

Our electric supply contract, which was a three-year fixed rate contract, came up for renewal in September and our new agreement has seen a significant increase in cost.

Thanks go to Rob Brown, Janet Crane and Mike Holmes for all that they do to keep our buildings in good order.

Duncan Halliday

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is at the heart of our Christian Faith, it means the action the church takes to promote a safer culture in all our churches - - Justin Welby.

We at St Giles work in line with the Church Of England Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance. As required we as a PCC have due regard to the House of Bishops guidance on Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

Safeguarding is a standing item on our PCC agenda and supplemented by Safeguarding meetings between The Vicar and PSO.

We have a named Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) Louise Whaites.

We have three DBS verifiers and work with Thirtyone:eight to facilitate DBS checks.

The safeguarding policy is reviewed annually by the PCC and any changes agreed at that time.

St Giles uses the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard as a tool for auditing our safeguarding practices. This is a working document that is being updated and adapted throughout the years. The Vicar and PSO monitor and update this in-line with the requirements on the Dashboard. There are a small number of outstanding items requiring completion on the Dashboard.

14 people have undertaken safeguarding training through the CofE learning portal and 8 people have outstanding training. To be compliant with the Church of England guidance all outstanding training must be completed. This training helps us to create a welcoming environment that is safe and supportive for all. Complete training records for all is a target for the coming year.

The Portal provided online access to safeguarding training for volunteers and staff members up to but not including the Leadership training.

Safer recruitment practices with all volunteers is one area for development in the coming year. With the help provided by the Dashboard this is in process.

Ten concerns have been raised with the PSO and appropriate action taken in each case. The Diocesan Safeguarding team have been contacted three times and external agencies twice.

Louise Whaites

Schools

In June I was able to support the Lighthouse trust in running transition workshops and prayer spaces for Year 6 children in a number of primary schools. I went into a number of schools, and plan to increase our provision to schools this year.

I have been doing regular assemblies in Abington Vale and All Saints this year. We have also been contacted by a number of other schools in the last year to arrange a visit to the church. In the last year, we welcomed four different schools into our building, and had contact with over 825 children through our work in schools.

Our Partnership with Lighthouse trust has continued to grow through this year. We have a number of plans to develop our work in schools in 2024. These plans include improved transitions workshops for Year 6, and after-school wellbeing club in partnership with others, and continued school visits, lessons and assemblies. If you would like to be involved in this exciting ministry please talk to Beth

Beth Whaites

Seniors Ministry

Senior Fellowship: Senior Fellowship has continued to meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 2.30pm in the Church Centre. We have visiting speakers on a wide range of subjects. We also have quizzes from time to time. We enjoy sharing tea and cake each week. Around 15 people attend regularly and we would love to see more seniors attending and the group growing. Please do contact Michael and Doreen Mabbutt if you want further information.

Michael and Doreen Mabbutt

Ministry to Care Homes: Monthly services have been held at Spencer House, and Cliftonville Care over the past year. Mostly these are 'Songs of Praise' style, but a communion service has been held every other month at Spencer House, as this is particularly appreciated by residents there. Numbers attending, at both homes, have ranged from seven to twenty-four! So far, we have not been able to establish anything similar at The Angela Grace, but this is a hope for later in 2024, as is a reconnection with the Venton Centre. The team has been made up of five regulars: Nicola Aylett, Ted Harding, Liz Kitwood, Denise Willington and Jill Beattie. Jill had stepped down from the team in January 2024, just one week before she unexpectedly died, and we are very sorry to have lost her. Janet Young has recently joined the team, and we would welcome a few others.

Nicola Aylett

St Columba, Collingtree

St. Columba, Collingtree meets for worship at 10am on a Sunday and we continue to see new faces from time to time. We are grateful for the continued support that we receive from St Giles both in attendance and with help with various projects. Most significantly has been the instillation of the new Audio Visual system and my thanks to Paul Cooper for his oversight of this. I am also grateful to Duncan and Carol Halliday for the drawing up of plans and costings for an extension to the church to include a toilet and a small meeting room; PCC discussions continue..... My thanks to Simon Bridgens and Marian Thomas for their assistance in conducting worship, without such help we would struggle.

Locally the Friends Coffee morning continues to attract many people into the church and provide for a community meeting place. Sadly we lost two stalwart members of our church last year; Michael Marsh and Chris Wright. They were both former secretaries and we miss them greatly. This, together with Joanna Edmond's move to Somerset, has left a gap in the efficient running of the church. I am grateful to those who have stepped up into new roles.

In September Nicola Stutters was appointed as the new Head of School at Collingtree C of E Primary School. Although it is early days it is good to see a growing relationship between school and church. To this end I have offered to be a school governor.

Looking forward we shall be running the Hope Explored course after Easter. It is hoped that both church members and other local people will attend the course. I am very much enjoying working with Josh Thorne and I am delighted that he has taken an active interest in St Columba Church and the partnership with St Giles. We shall shortly be meeting with Archdeacon Richard to discuss how we move things on further.

We are very grateful to St Giles for your prayers and practical help throughout the year.

James Howson

Student and Young Adults Ministry

At St Giles we have been connected with 40 - 50 students and young adults, with some people coming in and some graduating and leaving. During this year we have helped about 329 individual international students thorough the platform of FISH. We also connect with about 10/20 students and staff members per week through handing out free tea and coffee with the Chaplain of the University. We are connected with the university to help provide food through their food bank. Plus we were able to feed 74 households with a food hamper, partnering with Western Favell Food bank for this Christmas. We also have connected with 29 churches and ministries in the Northampton area to work alongside with their student and young adult ministries. Since Sept 2022 we have seen our Student and Young Adult group grow dramatically, with a 250% increase in numbers. We have a monthly rotation of weekly topics that are missions, worship, teaching and guest speaker. It has been great to have some people from the congregation come and share on a Wednesday night. We have seen many Young Adults now lead and preach at the evening services over this last year. What a great encouragement!

Ruth Alexander

Thursday Communion Service and Fellowship

The Thursday Communion service has continued to flourish! There is a real sense of fellowship and community, and a readiness to listen and respond to God's Word. Thanks to those who have led communion services through the year: Rev'ds Ali Wagner, James Howson, Peter Allen, Nicola Aylett and Josh Thorne. Thanks also to Liz Kitwood who has sometimes preached, and to Penny Ballard, who plays the piano most Thursdays; to Serena Yong, who sets up each week, and to Mike Kingman our Verger.

In August, we took a break from the usual communion services and had five "Tea & Toast and Testimony" weeks. These were good times of fellowship and sharing, with various regulars taking a turn to speak.

Lunch Club has continued, once a month, and been much appreciated. Thanks to Val and Mike Holmes for their cooking, to Helen Hayward who assists, and to Rob Brown who clears up! These lunches not only nourish our bodies, but fuel our fellowship, too!

Nicola Aylett

Treasurer

Regular income for 2023 was some £20,000 below that budgeted for and some £10,000 lower than that received in 2022. The overall deficit of expenditure against income is £28,000. We were blessed to receive substantial legacies amounting to £31,000 during the year, but for which the overall deficit would have been substantially greater. Expenditure was maintained at close to that in 2023.

St Giles is blessed with many generous donors, however we face a significant challenge going forward to match regular giving and income to match necessary expenditure to maintain the ministries of St Giles and maintain our reserves at an acceptable level.

The audited accounts will be available to view on the St Giles website as soon as the audit is complete.

Duncan Halliday

Uniformed Organisations - Scouts

Sadly 2nd Northampton (St Giles) Scout troop was suspended at the end of December. There were a number of reasons for this and it followed lengthy discussions by the trustees.

Primarily we were seeing numbers drop to unsustainable levels, longstanding leaders were wanting a well deserved rest, and no new leaders were coming forward, and there were ongoing vacancies on the board of trustees.

As an group of trustees, along with the St Giles staff team, we are looking discern if we have the ability to re open in September, at least in part, but this will rely on new leaders, and an influx of young people.

Craig Macpherson

Uniformed Organisations – 19th Northampton St Giles Guiding

We offer girls from 4 – 18 years a varied programme, all age appropriate through Skill Builder, Unit Meeting Activities and offer them any opportunities we can at unit, division and County events.

Highlights of the year:

All sections had a sleepover at Whipsnade Zoo on the evening of the King's coronation. We got to see the animals after the zoo had closed and then before it opened, then had the day in the zoo. Tents were taken down wet as it had rained during the night but by the time we left we were having ice creams to cool down!!

'A year of Celebrations' camp for all with a Christmas tree in July with presents.

Guides, Rangers and Leaders had an amazing time on the County trip to Adelboden, Switzerland where we have a World Centre. We stay at a hotel for the week and go out and about each day. The open-air swimming pool is always a must. It is a time to meet old friends and make new as we spend time together.

Helen Hayward

Welcome and Hospitality

It's been wonderful to welcome so many newcomers to St. Giles in 2023. It's such a joy to be a part of this ministry and welcome newer and older members every Sunday. Look out for people carrying our 'welcome bags' we give to newcomers on their first visit and be sure to say hello to them, we all have a part to play in being a welcoming church.

We've had a number of new people coming forward to serve on the welcome teams for both the Sunday morning and evening services. It's great to see people of a variety of ages getting involved and serving in this ministry. I recently read that people will usually make their minds up within the first two minutes of visiting a church whether they will be coming back.

Look out for some exciting changes to the way we welcome people to St Giles in 2024 including the introduction of a dedicated welcome area in the church building. We are keen to find ways to connect newcomers into the family of our church.

Pete Day and Alle Dekenah

Wellbeing Cafe

Wellbeing Café is has become an integral part of the weekly calendar of the church. We seek to offer hospitality, a sense of belonging and acceptance to everyone who comes into the space. We run on Monday afternoon between 1 and 4pm where we open up the church centre (sometimes the church), and create a welcoming safe space. Those who come, wish to spend time with others either doing an activity together, talking or sitting quietly alongside the group. It is open to anyone but particularly created for those amongst us who are experiencing emotional upheaval, mental health illness or spiritual struggle. We offer drinks and snacks for those who come and though the atmosphere is quiet and contemplative it is also friendly and warm. Every hour is an optional contemplative prayer and meditation run by one of the members and offered to all who come.

Sine Cookman

Women @ St Giles

The unrivalled highlight of 2023 for the women's ministry was the men vs women games evening in April. It was an evening of extremely competitive silliness which after various closely fought contests of great skill (particularly the human hungry hippos) was ultimately won by the women's team.

At the end of the spectrum, we have enjoyed a day of reflection together in June including prayer walks in and around the Parish boundary.

In the summer, we have supported a new initiative run by Maggie Marr and Jenny Firth (founder of the course) and actively supported by the Archdeacon called 221 Divorce support group. It's a 6 week (small group) course to minister to divorced women within the church. It

was felt to be most timely and welcome with the participants saying ‘how helpful it was, meeting others in the same position and giving them confidence as they realised they were not on their own anymore’.

To this end, our own Wednesday morning ‘support group’ has evolved into ‘tea & toast / knit & natter’ but not necessarily at the same time!

Vikki Beale

World Mission

Another year has seen all our mission partners continuing faithfully with their appointed ministries, seeing fruit in various ways. Peter and Gill visited briefly in May, and preached at both services. Alf, while in Oxford to complete his PhD, which he has passed successfully! preached one Sunday in July. The church which Alf leads in Santiago must identify his successor by 2025. News from Vera in Russia has been infrequent due to the situation there, but confirms continuing ministry. Support has continued for Tearfund’s work in Kitgum diocese of Uganda through their Connected Churches Programme. A speaker from Open Doors preached in March.

Lent project with Tearfund to help subsistence farmers in Ethiopia raised £4k.

Our budget of £33,572 (unchanged from 2022), enabled us to maintain our existing commitments, but unable to offer more than £500 to Graham and Nicola.

WMG met periodically for prayer and planning. Mission in Touch has published articles from our partners or of general interest. We have continued to include Mission Partners in the monthly diary and our prayer gatherings.

Liz Kitwood

Youth Work

Our Youth Work in 2023 has seen a shift in focus, to our Sunday morning groups.

Until the Summer holidays, we ran a Youth group for boys and girls in secondary school, but that group has not re-started in September due to low numbers of young people and too few leaders.

Our Sunday morning youth provision continues for all young people in secondary school and is led by a wonderful team of youth workers. Each week we spend time exploring the Bible and what God’s word means for us.

We would love to be able to grow our youth work with social and trips, and to restart our mid-week groups, but will need more leaders in order to make this happen.

Beth Whaites