

SOUTHAM & BISHOP'S ITCHINGTON CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
FOR PRESENTATION TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON TUESDAY
18TH FEBRUARY 2025

Minister's Report

I was recently invited to take a school assembly. The theme was on perseverance. A difficult subject, but I didn't give up!

It's always a good idea to take a visual aid with you, so the children have something to focus on. So I took a Rubik's Cube. I've never solved a Rubik's Cube. Have you? They are fiendishly hard.

Created in 1974 by Erno Rubik, a Professor of Architecture, they became the big Christmas Present of 1980. I never had one. Friends at school did, and they were very good at solving them. Very good. But not me. I could get one side of colour right – and the top row of the other colours all right, but nothing more. As soon as I tried to get another side of colour the completed side would be destroyed.

Apparently – so the publicity tells us – on one Rubik's Cube there 3 billion combinations but only one solution. Currently, I've tried 2,603,236,876 of the combinations and not hit the jackpot yet.

In my message for the Annual Reports 2024 I would like to commend the perseverance shown by every member of our Church Fellowship. We are pleased to report that attendance is up at our Church Services, our Church Membership has increased and our financial giving has remained strong. Three ways of measuring the relative strength of our Church life all give positive news.

And there are other ways of witnessing to that perseverance and strength, and I think that can be read through these reports. They share excitement and enthusiasm for the work we do, with a cautiously optimistic outlook for the next 12 months. But we also know of the challenges we face. If we see and celebrate our strengths we are also very aware of our weaknesses and we must make sure that we take time to address them.

I must admit that the Rubik's Cube I bought to take into school was a very cheap imitation of the original, and when I handed it to one of the children to solve it broke apart into 20 pieces! It reminded me that the hard work we do is glued together by the Holy Spirit.

Let these words of Paul be inspiration to you:

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT

May I thank each one of you for all you do for the life of our Church, in service of our Saviour. I also thank all those who have written these reports and I wholeheartedly commend them to you.

Your friend and minister,

Neil Chappell

Secretary's Report

In the past I have used words like 'quiet' or 'uneventful' to describe the last year in the life of our church. This is all very well and we should be thankful that nothing particularly bad has occurred. We also hope, of course, that some good things have happened, but these may have been 'below the surface' as it were. However I do think as I look back on last year that I can use a different word to

describe it, and I would use the word 'exciting', albeit in a rather restrained Congregational way! Why so, you ask?

Well, for a start we have received three people into church membership, Rachel Jones, Helen Rowlatt and Pam Dewar. Pam returns to Southam after a long sojourn 'down South'; Helen and Rachel have been worshipping with us for quite a long time. We welcome all of them and are very grateful for their contribution to the worship of our Church and their willingness to help with the mundane tasks each week. I feel, however, that I should mention Helen's very artistic contributions to the flower arranging alongside the other talented 'flower ladies', - how about some 'flower men'?

There are also a number of people who come to worship with us (fairly) regularly, and, of course, we welcome them and hope that, in time, they might feel called to become church members.

Our 'Warm Space' each Wednesday is well supported by volunteers and visitors; we extend our thanks to the Lions, St. Wulfstan surgery and the District Council for their financial support as we seek to help people in this way. Do call in, you will always be made welcome and offered soup, crumpets or toasted teacakes!

As we will all be aware the general trend is for a decline in levels of attendance at church, but it does seem to me that we are at least holding steady or even increasing. I was particularly struck by the number of people in church on Christmas Day and especially at the Candlelight Carol Service, (one family in particular – they know who I mean)!

Another new thing for our church was our participation in the WOSSAT event in June/July, organised by 'Warwickshire Open Studios'. We opened our church to visiting artists to exhibit and/or sell their work. As it turned out the number of artists who exhibited here was rather less than planned but it was still an interesting and fruitful time for them. They were very appreciative of our welcome and hospitality. Also there were quite a number of exhibits from our own 'craft people', particular note being made of the memorable paintings by one of our own artists, whose name I know she would not want me to publish. We are greatly blessed to have a good number of children and young people at church, in PaintPot and Jackpot; we seek to nurture them and they encourage us oldies. I think it is therefore exciting that we have obtained a grant from the Congregational Federation for a share (as it were) in a young people's worker to assist and expand the youth work of our church. We express our thanks to the Federation for making this grant available.

In the Lounge there is a 'Jackpot' notice board with the names of the helpers and youngsters on 'Stars' - which they are! There is also a drawing which says 'New Year – Same God'. This really spoke to me, as it were. Yes, it is a New Year, but our God remains the same as always and we are for ever secure in the love of Jesus.

David Hudson

Church Family

Perhaps, on the whole, I could use the word 'quiet' to describe our church family life during the past year, although there certainly have been some notable exceptions to that generalisation.

The most notable exception, I think, was when Zachary was christened. We can say that our church has not seen anything like it for a long time. It was packed out and Verity had obviously put a lot of effort into preparing for the occasion. There were 'goody bags' full of personal gifts for people and a 'memory book' for people to sign and put in a message for Zachary to read in a few years time. It was a very special occasion and it seemed that the young man, his mother and his grandmother enjoyed every moment of it!! I think we can also say that about everyone who was there.

Another notable event of last year was when Evie got her amazing A-level grades and was able to take

up a deserved place at Cambridge to study English literature. We were, and are, very proud of her and wish her well in her studies and pray for God's blessing on her time there.

We recently heard that Maggie has become a great grandmother for the second time and that Iain and Debbie will become grandparents for the second time when Rachael has her baby in June, a sibling for Isla.

As is to be expected in a rather elderly group of people such as our congregation there are a number of our church family who have various medical 'issues'. We are, of course, immensely thankful for the NHS and the wonderful staff who work so hard to look after their patients, and also thankful for the care and support we receive from church and from the God who cares for us, as 1 Peter 5:7 tells us.

David Hudson

Coffee Pot Report

Well, health and age did permit the 4 teams to continue serving at Coffee Pot each Tuesday morning during the year. However, watch this space!

The table scenario is the same as last year: two full tables of regulars and one where 2-3 people sometimes come.

Comments from team members:

- * We jog along as normal and enjoy helping
- * People enjoy it as a meeting place
- * We cater for the regulars who enjoy it and sometimes for visitors

At our 'Coffee 'n Carols' morning, Janet kindly provided accompaniment as carols were chosen from the Bethlehem Carol Sheets.

We did experiment using the lounge instead of the church (less heating and easier to serve) but the consensus was it didn't work because of acoustics.

So, we continue, God willing, into 2025.

Sue Hudson

Safeguarding Report

Safeguarding makes sure that everyone who visits our Church or takes part in an activity linked to the Church feels welcomed and safe. Should there be a concern, situation or an allegation, having policies and procedures in place will provide a guide as to what to do.

In order to remain affiliated to the Congregational Federation, we are required to hold an up-to-date Safeguarding Certificate. Following a Safeguarding visit from Joy Howell (Area Worker) to Church in January 2023, various recommendations were actioned and our certificate was renewed in May 2023 and will expire in 2027.

Our Safeguarding Policy was revised and updated using a template provided by the Congregational Federation and was agreed by the Diaconate and their decision accepted at Church Meeting on 4th April 2024. Cathryn Clarke was also accepted by Church meeting as DPS (Designated Person for Safeguarding). A copy of this policy is available for all to read on the notice board in the Church lounge. This should be reviewed annually.

Over the past 12 months the following has been implemented:

Health and Safety measures:

- Signage for doors
- Safety chains for stacked tables
- New smoke alarms
- Signage for safe stacking of chairs (following the acquisition of new chairs upstairs).
- Reminding the congregation periodically of Fire Evacuation drill.
- An annual 'Spring clean' of Church to clear 'clutter' and carry out general maintenance.

Recommended from original audit: specific Risk Assessments for different activities within Church. We have a generic Risk assessment that covers all geographic areas of the Church.

Safeguarding:

- DBS applications completed (or underway) for new volunteers involved in Children's and young people's group.

Recommended: volunteers sign Code of Conduct (prepared by the Congregational Federation) if they have not already done so.

Periodically, I will bring to the Deacons and Church meeting any policy and guidance updates relating to Safeguarding that we all need to be aware of. I am grateful for any Health and Safety related matters that members of our Church community may raise so that they can be discussed and action taken.

Safeguarding is ongoing as it not only involves a safe building but ensures that all who enter our premises are and can feel safe from harm in the wider sense of the word. Safeguarding is the responsibility of us all and as we are an 'open' church welcoming all to worship and other activities we need to be a 'safe church' in every way.

'Speak out on behalf of the voiceless and for the rights of all who are vulnerable' - Proverbs 31:8

Should you have any questions or queries please do ask Neil or myself.

Many thanks for your support.

Cathryn Clarke

Children's Church Report

Over the past year, Children's Church has followed a similar pattern to 2023 by being held on the first Sunday of the month. It comprises of two groups, a young people's group which meets downstairs in the lounge, predominantly led by Terri and a group for primary aged children and creche upstairs. This has been led by Sally and Cathryn. We are most grateful for those in Church who have taken up the request for help month by month to assist with the groups.

Sessions have been varied, fun and creative consisting of a game, bible-based discussion/activity, prayer and a choice of craft. This year we have explored many of Jesus's parables and applied his teaching to our own lives. The aim is to have fun whilst learning and exploring more about Jesus.

There have been opportunities to run an additional Children's Church for Christenings when we know that additional families and their children will be coming along. A memorable and joyful occasion for all was the Christening of Zachary in November. We had many families with children visiting and were able to provide activities for all ages. On these occasions we operate a choice of different activities based on an overall theme. In the case of Zachary's Christening, we explored different parts of Psalm 121 – a song of Ascents. It's an encouraging and uplifting read!

Numbers do fluctuate for Children's Church. In general, children who also attend Jackpot come along

and occasionally others who have had connections with our Church for some time. PaintPot families also have older children who have come along from time to time.

During Advent we agreed at Church Meeting that it would be lovely to run Children's Church every Sunday to provide more opportunities for children to attend. Our thanks go to Neil for sending invites out to many families connected to our Church and for sourcing the focus book and resources we used with the younger children, 'Herod's Secret policeman.' Each week, the children explored a particular element of the Nativity, beginning with the Star that led the wise men and shepherds to Bethlehem. As well as a game, discussion and short video the children and young people got creative, making woollen stars, angels and cardboard tube shepherds! Neil's 'Loyalty card' which was stamped each week for attendance was very popular with everyone! Overall, there was continuity in the children who did attend each week. Provided there is sufficient help, it is worth considering this again for Advent 2025?

We are so grateful for the support we receive from volunteers who come out month by month to help with our Children's Church activities as well as those who provide resources for the various activities. Should you wish to volunteer in any way, please speak to Terri or myself. No experience needed but in accordance with our Safeguarding Policy a DBS certificate for our Church is required if you wish to help out with sessions.

Everyone in our Church family has a role to play in supporting and encouraging our children and young people. Please do pray for our children and young people and their families that they may feel accepted and welcomed by our Church and most importantly know the love and peace that Jesus can bring to their lives.

Cathryn Clarke

Jackpot

I can't believe that we are now into our third year of Jackpot which continues to be a great encouragement to all who are involved.

We have a regular monthly cohort of attendees ranging in age from 6 to 16. We have families who come from most of the churches in Southam and families who don't attend church but have links with us in other ways whether it be PaintPot or Warm Space etc. A lot of the children invite their friends to come along which is a great encouragement.

We have a fantastic team of volunteer helpers in Sally, Janet, Chris, Rosalie, Naomi, Neil, Verity and Jacqueline and have been so pleased this year to welcome Debby and Matt along too. We couldn't run without this merry band who between them organise crafts, games, tuck shop and refreshments.

We ask that you would uphold all the children and young people in your prayers. Each month we close with a short talk from Neil and we pray that these words would encourage them to learn and grow in faith.

Terri du Bois

PaintPot

On an occasional Monday morning can you hear the sound of drums, bells and tambourines ringing out through Southam? If so, then we must show our appreciation to Napton Music Festival for a very generous grant to buy some new musical instruments. Our children love selecting their musical instruments and playing away to their hearts content. It's the same with the songs and nursery rhymes they sing, showing off their toys, listening to the story, completing the craft and, most especially, enjoying snack time.

We've had new members during the year – Hello Zachary! – and said our goodbyes to some who've grown up with us and now gone off to school. We've visited Tithe Place in the summer and Galanos House a couple of times to the delight of the residents at both places.

PaintPot is a wonderfully warm and welcoming group which is greatly appreciated by the parents and carers who bring their children. Sally, Janet, Chris and Neil make a great team and they deserve a long and sustained round of applause!

The Team

Church Flowers

We have continued to enjoy a wonderful range of flowers this year, and I should like to thank everyone who has made a contribution in any way towards this popular part of our church life.

We have a small team who happily arrange flowers on several dates during the year, and I am particularly grateful to them for the way they happily step in to cover when there are gaps in the rota.

Our thanks go to Helen who once again designed and arranged the Christmas flowers for us in such spectacular style.

We are always happy to welcome new people to our rota, and if you would like to be included, either in providing or arranging flowers, we can always find you a slot. I know people appreciate the flowers, and I am sure this will continue through the coming year.

Janet Whitehead

Fair trade/Traidcraft

The church has continued to support Fair Trade goods. Wherever possible, all our coffee, tea, sugar, toilet and kitchen rolls, hand sanitisers, washing up liquid and cleaning products are from fair trade and/or ethical sources.

We bought fair trade “Real Advent calendars” from the Meaningful Chocolate Company as part of our support for families that use the Fosse Foodbank (see also Missions report). We also ran a stall selling Traidcraft Christmas cards as part of the Christmas card sale and this proved very popular.

Last year, I was able to share the news that Traidcraft is continuing to grow the range of products following its relaunch in 2023. As with Christmas cards, it has now reintroduced tea and toilet rolls amongst a limited range of items. We will continue to support Traidcraft, Café Direct and other fair trade products wherever we can.

Traidcraft's charitable arm (previously called “Traidcraft Exchange” but now known as “Transform Trade”) continues to operate. We supported “Transform Trade” as part of our harvest offering (see Missions report).

Can I take this opportunity to thank everybody who has continued to support fair trade this year.

Philip Clarke

Missions Annual Report

As a church we have continued to support mission work both at home and abroad. In our own community, we have continued to support initiatives such as Coffee Pot, Jackpot, Paintpot, Tuesday Club and Warm Space. These will be covered in other reports within this Annual Report.

Christian Aid

Christian Aid Week took place in May as usual. The theme this year was on the effects of climate change

on rural communities in Africa, with a focus on Malawi. Christian Aid produced a “seven-day devotional guide” which we distributed to everyone in the church. We also organised a collection within church and raised a total of **£679** plus Gift Aid.

Harvest

For our harvest appeals we support two good causes; one at home and the other overseas. These were the **Transform Trade** (formerly Traidcraft Exchange) and the **Farm Safety Foundation**, also known as Yellow Wellies. We were able to donate **£538** in total, **£269** to each of these charities.

Fosse Foodbank

The church continues to support the Fosse Foodbank, whose work has never been more important during the current cost of living crisis. As well as our support through the harvest appeal, we provided “**Real Advent Calendars**” to the Foodbank. Eighteen were bought and donated to families with children benefitting from the Foodbank.

Christmas appeals

At the time of writing last year’s Annual report (February 2024), we were not able to report the total raised for the 2023 Christmas appeals. We raised a total of **£1,320** which was divided equally between three charities, **Len’s Light**, the **Teenage Cancer Trust**, and the **Christian Aid Middle East Crisis Appeal**.

For Christmas 2024, we agreed that the church would support two appeals over Christmas. These are **Zoe’s Place baby hospice** and **Christian Aid’s Christmas appeal** which is supporting families displaced because of the conflict in South Sudan.

At the time of writing this report, the current totals from Christmas Post, Carols at Coffee Pot, Carols by Candlelight, Nativity and Christmas Day stands at **£845.90** (including Gift Aid). This includes £55 from the Christmas post and £36 from Coffee & Carols. I will publish the final figure in Storyboard once we know it.

Many thanks to everyone who has supported all of our mission work.

Philip Clarke

Graham Adams Centre Update

This is the 27th year of serving the people of Southam. Over that time many people and activities have passed through the centre, and we want to thank everyone who has been part of that journey. We are pleased to be home to a wide range of community groups as well as local businesses to run their activities. The centre is also booked periodically for Mother and Baby Yoga and Baby Massage courses and meetings of Warwickshire Youth Justice Service or Warwickshire Children and Families Teams when they require a venue in Southam. Many other community groups, for example Southam Lions and Southam Christmas Lights Association, hire the hall for fundraising or other events and the hall is also regularly used at the weekend for children’s parties.

As a centre we are also providing:

- Table Tennis group for young people
- Support for pupils excluded from Southam College
- ‘Stretchy Monkeys’ - a physical play-based toddler group
- CALM Youth Group (for Children with Autism, Learning disabilities and Mental Health difficulties)
- A creative dance and wellbeing group for home educated girls (funded by Think Active!)
- SEND Parent Support Group

We also provide the venue and administrative support to Southam Book Festival.

There will soon be a change to the lease structure and our relationship with the Church and the Congregational Federation, I would appreciate prayerful support as we negotiate with CF on the future of the centre.

The challenges for the centre remain the same: fundraising to ensure the centre's sustainability (including with maintaining the building) and recruiting volunteers to be part of the Board of Directors (Trustees). We welcome any interest from those in our community to volunteer to help with our activities or to join the board – please contact me or, if you know someone who might be interested, let me know!

Iain Wilson - Chair of Trustees

Treasurers Report 2024

The budget for 2024 was set for a deficit of £(5,000.) Draft accounts for 2024 show an overspend of £(723.) The improved position is due to additional income, with new regular lettings adding almost £1,000 to our incomes, £300 coming from higher investment income and £350 transferred from Warm Space towards our utility costs.

In addition our stipend costs were reduced by around £1,500 as our employer's national insurance costs were off-set by a government employment allowance grant. There were further savings totalling approximately £1,100 on manse rates and water costs, pulpit supply and cleaner wages.

As always we are indebted to everyone who supports the church financially, whether through standing order, envelope giving, freewill offerings or donations for the various activities we hold.

The budget for 2025 was presented to, and approved by, the November 2024 Church Meeting. For 2025 we are predicting a £(3,000) deficit, based on current incomes, and known and assumed increases in our committed expenditures.

The following proposals were approved:

1. 2025 Budget was approved as presented, with the £3,000 shortfall to be met from general reserves
2. All missions funded by the church such as Harvest and Christmas will be from 'retiring' collections with no top-up from general funds
3. Gifts/flowers to be funded by donations
4. All buildings maintenance and reactive repairs to come from the restricted Buildings Fund. Fund raising and further grants to be obtained to increase funds available.
5. A separate Fund for the replacement of main church flooring is established and separate fundraising and grant funding will be needed.
6. Church meeting noted that depending on the levels of maintenance and repairs needed, Buildings Fund will probably run out in 3-4 years time.
7. Updated Reserves Policy as presented was approved

Final accounts can't be completed until I receive the 31 Dec 2024 valuation of our investments held by the Congregational Federation, so final audited accounts for 2024 will hopefully be presented at the March 2024 Church Meeting.

Debbie Wilson - Treasurer

Tuesday Club report

Tuesday Club continues to meet every other Tuesday during term time and I continue to be grateful to Maggie, Helen, Wendy, Miriam and Trevor for their help and support.

Nowadays the programme is arranged on a rather ad hoc basis, if there are not many people we have a tea and chat, which they always enjoy anyway. The determination of our members to get there is an inspiration. Unfortunately one of our ladies had to go into Greenways, so we miss her. She was well into her nineties and looked as if she would blow away in the slightest breeze but her determination to get to Th'e tClub was amazing.

A prospective member, Lynda, visits us when her busy round of social engagements allows! Of course visitors will always be welcome, just bring your best smile.

We were shocked, and saddened to hear of the sudden death of Linda Doyle at Christmas. Linda was an old friend of Tuesday Club and had done many interesting and amusing talks for us on various aspects of old Southam. Her most recent talk was only a few weeks ago in November, when she told us about 'Edwardian Costume' and brought along a lovely long coat, of which the waist was incredibly tiny. The fox stole with it was not to everyone's taste, it has to be said!! She will be sorely missed.

For details of Tuesday Club meetings see The Storyboard or give me a ring on 812695.

David Hudson

Southam & Bishop's Itchington Congregational Church Minutes of Church Annual General Meeting 20th February 2024

Chairman: Neil Chappell

Attendance: 13 members, 1 adherent.

Apologies: received from 5 members

Devotions: Neil led devotions on the 1 Peter 3:8-16 'Share the Good News Message.'

Minutes of the previous meeting: 21st February 2023. These were accepted and signed as a correct record.

Annual Reports: These were available last Sunday for people to read in advance of the AGM. Neil thanked all those who have contributed and recognised the work that goes into each report. Thanks were expressed for all those who contribute to the life of our church. Neil apologised that there were no reports for Warm Space or Junior Church.

The reports were positively received and are evidence of how many people are working behind the scenes.

Caroline Johnson proposed and Cathryn Clarke seconded that the reports were accepted. All agreed.

Finance: The final accounts cannot be completed until the Congregational Federation provide the 31 Dec 2023 valuation of our investment funds. This is due by 8 March so the accounts will be presented to the March Church Meeting.

Appointments: These have been displayed on the noticeboard in the Lounge for the previous 3 Sundays. There was one vacancy for Cradle Roll which Verity Almond agreed to take on.

All appointments were voted for en bloc. Proposed Iain Wilson, seconded Jacqueline Almond. All approved.

Officers and Deacons:

- There are currently 4 deacons (Philip Clarke, Chris King, Caroline Johnson and David Hudson) who were all elected for a three-year term in 2022.
- There were no further nominations for deacons,
- Secretary: Nomination David Hudson. Proposed Sue Hudson, seconded Jacqueline Almond. Elected unanimously by show of hands.
- Treasurer: Nomination Debbie Wilson. Proposed Sue Hudson, seconded Philip Clarke. Elected unanimously by show of hands.

Everyone who served in all roles in 2023 were thanked for their work and faithfulness, ensuring that the church and its activities continue to run.

Membership:

- Our current membership is 41.
- Neil has reprinted a church membership leaflet that can be given to anyone who may be interested.
- Church records have not been updated recently. Neil has produced a contact card for new people to complete so that we can ensure they are kept informed of church activities.

Church Family News: We shared news of several church members and friends.

Dates of Next Annual General Meeting: Tuesday 18th February 2025 7.45 pm

The meeting was closed at 8.20 pm by sharing The Grace together.

Southam & Bishop's Itchington Congregational Church**Church Annual General Meeting 2025****7.45pm Tuesday 18th February 2025****Agenda**

1. Devotions
2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting - 20.02.2024
3. Annual Reports
4. Finance Report
5. Election of Officers & Deacons
6. Other Appointments
7. Membership
8. Church Family News
9. Date of Next Meeting - 17.02.2026