***St Nicholas Church***

***Ministry Reports May 2022***



**APCM Ministry Reports – April 2022**

**Vicars Report Arun Arora**

It seems appropriate to be writing this report on Holy Saturday – that day in between Good Friday and Easter Day when the disciples and all those who had followed Jesus found themselves in a place of wondering.

Having seen Jesus crucified they were in hiding and in sorrow, not yet able to fully grasp God’s redemption of the world through the cross and Christ’s victory in the resurrection. In the days and weeks that were to follow they would become witnesses to the resurrection, meet with the risen Christ and receive the power of the Holy Spirit before being sent out to make disciples of all nations.

As I look over the past year it is with a sense of deep thankfulness for all that God has done to accompany us in the midst of ongoing lament and suffering not only from the ongoing legacy of coronavirus but also from the grandparents, parents, children, friends and relatives who have died over the past year with the weight of bereavement experienced by many members of our church family. Over the past 5 years that I have served at St Nics these 12 months seems to have been the ones which has felt the heaviest in terms of bereavement.

Yet as followers of Christ we know that our story does not end in the tomb and that death does not have the final word. As Psalm 30 reminds us: “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

And there has been joy in our life together over the past 12 months and alongside it much for which we can give thanks, not least the ability to worship together without masks, to see one another’s faces again and to sing praise together. All of this has been joyous as has the aspects of normality that have returned including meeting together again in one another’s homes and the ability to welcome once again our young people and children into the full life of the church.

There has been cause too for giving thanks for the faithfulness of our congregations with the numbers gradually returning to those pre pandemic which have included new individuals, couples and families who have joined us, especially since September of last year. There has also been the fruit of generosity and faithful discipleship from those whose home has been at Nics for decades. We ended the past year with a balanced budget - an incredible state of affairs given the impact of COVID more generally on finances when we have been unable to take up physical collections for most of the past year.

Our journey, which I wrote about last year, of stepping into God’s promises for us as a church has been a joy to witness as God has added to our number not only in those who worship but also those who serve. And the depth and extent of that service is apparent in all of the reports that follow. Please do take time to read them and be inspired by all that God is doing in and through His people here at St Nics in building His kingdom in this place.

Earlier this week, on Maundy Thursday, I introduced the part of our communion service which included foot washing with these words from the liturgy:

*Fellow servants of our Lord Jesus Christ*

*On the night before his death, Jesus set an example for his disciples by washing their feet, an act of humble service.*

*He taught that strength and growth in the life of the Kingdom of God come not by power, authority, or even miracle, but by service.*

*We all need to remember his example, but none stand more in need of this reminder than those whom the Lord has called to the ordained ministry.*

The reports that follow demonstrate that in so many areas of our common life together, strength and growth in the life of the Kingdom of God has come from countless acts of service only a fraction of which are recorded here.

The reports also highlight how much of this is undertaken on a daily basis not by the ordained but by all of God’s people of whom the clergy are but a minority.

Over the past year I have been greatly blessed at Nics to serve alongside Claire, Maeve and Richard together with our retired priests whose service continues to be a rich blessing to our church. I am deeply thankful to them all for their wisdom, co-leadership and support and also for being my principal prayer partners in our common call to live out our call as priests.

Yet overwhelmingly the names of those who have submitted reports on ministry areas where they lead are lay people whose service to this community is the foundation for our life together.

Chief amongst those has been Alan and Mary Anne who as our churchwardens have worked tirelessly not only to co-navigate our way out of COVID but also to meet the new challenges which have come. Alan’s property report mentions that “this is the hardest year I have ever had” which gives an idea of the amount of work that property matters alone have demanded over the past year. Mary Anne’s continuing oversight of pastoral and interim student work reflects but a fraction of the work that both she and Alan have done through countless hours of staff meetings, operations meetings, standing committees and PCCs in supporting, guiding and nurturing the work of the church. I am deeply grateful to them for their counsel, leadership and support over the past year.

Our church wardens have been joined in much of this work by Ann Lipscombe whose service as PCC secretary, safeguarding officer and health & safety lead has been invaluable as we negotiated our way out of COVID. Elaine Duddy’s work in her first full year as our treasure in balancing budgets and keeping our financial show on the road in deeply challenging circumstances has been a collective blessing to us all. As vice chair of the PCC Phil Dawson has used his gifts of leadership to benefit our governance whilst both Naomi Stevens and Phil Alsop generously agreed to act as deputy church wardens in order to the extensive governance burdens brought by COVID as well as enabling us to maintain our missional verve. In a year where decisions were demanded from the PCC on a range of issues from spending decisions through to the regulation of worship under COVID restrictions I am deeply grateful to each member of the PCC who has given of themselves in serving Nics in its governance.

Alongside those who govern are those who deliver those decisions. The staff team at St Nics have continued to serve the church indefatigably over the past twelve months. As our number has grown, so has the thanksgiving for each of those whom God has called to the team. Richard Briggs, Michael McGuigan and Hannah Wilkinson all took up their full time roles last summer and were joined in the Autumn by Lydia Francis Holmes and Elisa Korner as our Ministry Experience Volunteers. Kate Dawson continued in her outstanding service leading our church operations, ably supported by Janet Dawson’s essential work behind the scenes and Logan Williams who has led our superb tech team who have continued to stream our services way beyond the lifting of restrictions. As her report demonstrates in detail, Kate Swann continued to develop and build upon her inspiring work with our children and families with renewed vision and energy. For most of the year we were also joined by James Cochran served extraordinarily first filling in as our youth missioner and then as our student worker whilst we sought to recruit to these posts. Most of our physical weekly staff meetings begin with worship led by Sam Rankin. Whether in his masterfual co-ordination of Easter & Christmas mash-ups or in his weekly leading of our Sunday worship Sam has blessed us during his time with us in enabling us to sing to the Lord. As he prepares to leave us as Jenny completes her training, he does so with our rejoicing for them in the birth of Keziah, together with our thanks and blessings for all that God has in store for them as a family.

The reports that follow contain many examples of the service that is offered regularly by so many at St Nics. Some of the fruit of that service is more immediately recognisable, such as the weekly blessing of our musicians, flower team and bell ringers. Added to this are also hours of service offered on a weekly basis which are often unseen but essentially undergird our life together whether that be safeguarding, maintenance, administration, finance, property, tech or a myriad of other roles and functions. Taken together all of this service should be the basis for a collective rejoicing as we recognise and acknowledge God’s people responding to His call upon their lives through this rich offering of themselves and their gifts through the body of the Church.

Both the reports the follow and the summation of the past year provided in the members’ report of our annual accounts provide an opportunity to thank by name many of those who have offered their service over the past year. But those lists are far from exhaustive. They do not record everyone who has given sacrificially to financing the work of the church as part of their regular discipleship. Nor do they list the members of the teams who have served alongside ministry leads working with our young people, students, children and families or internationals. Nor do they mention by name the leaders of our small groups and members who have provided pastoral support to one another over the past year.

In at least one sermon (if not more) I have told the oft-repeated story of President John F. Kennedy’s first visit to NASA in 1962. During his tour of the facility, he met a janitor who was carrying a broom down the hallway. The President then casually asked the janitor what he did for NASA, and the janitor replied, “I’m helping put a man on the moon.”

I give thanks to God for all who have served, in whatever capacity, over the past year and years in the common cause of the Gospel and in building the Kingdom in this place to which we have all been called to serve as a body.

Having started this report in Holy Week I complete it in Easter week having tested positive for COVID and having missed our Easter Day celebrations at Nics. My upset at not being able to celebrate the risen Christ in person with God’s family was tempered by the knowledge that those celebrations would continue fully and that the voices of joy of God’s people will resound with thanksgiving at all He has done and will do in the lives of his people. He is Risen. Alleluia!

**The Warden’s Report Mary Anne Freer/Alan Smith**

Looking back over the last year, we are just so thankful to God for his goodness and grace in giving us some amazing opportunities to serve and leading us through some challenges. It’s hard to believe that this time last year we were waiting for the 17th May when many restrictions would be lifted, leaving us to work out how to be church in person once again and how we can serve those in need and reach out to those who have yet to encounter Jesus and be transformed by Him.

Without the restriction of tickets, it has been wonderful to welcome everyone back as they felt ready to come to church in person and it has also been a pleasure to welcome new individuals, couples and families, who maybe joined us online as an initial first step in finding out more about St Nic’s.  We remain very thankful to all those at St Nic’s, both amazing groups of volunteers and the brilliant staff team who continue to work tirelessly to develop and sustain our church life. In our services it is so wonderful to see contributions from our very youngest children through to our Youth as well as our adult congregation as we worship together on Sundays. We are currently looking to open our doors every day of the week and are looking for a few more volunteers to help with this.

After much praying and waiting it has been an absolute joy to welcome Hannah Wilkinson, our Youth Missioner and Michael McGuigan our Social Justice Hub Enabler to the team. It has been amazing to see how their ministries are already growing and developing, alongside the strong and flourishing Children and Families ministry and the Student ministry. Please continue to pray for a permanent student worker.

As Churchwardens, we are so grateful for Arun, for his strong leadership and clear vision, that continues to inspire both the congregation and staff team. He has been ably supported by Richard, Maeve and Claire, as well as the retired clergy, lay-readers and the staff team.

As you will see from Alan’s property report, a lot of work needs to be done to our church building. Hopefully, very soon we will have a completely new lighting system in the Nave, the Chapel and Gateway. The roof will be repaired, as will the five high level windows. This has been at a time when labour and materials have been difficult to find, and spiralling costs mean hard decisions have had to be made. We are very grateful to the PCC for their support and wisdom. We are keeping a very close eye on the finances for these necessary areas of work and in turn will keep the PCC and you informed.

**Property Report Alan Smith**

Looking back over the last year, as a whole, it has been one of the busiest and hardest I have ever had as Churchwarden. This has been not only just because of Covid, but mainly due to the many property issues which we have had to deal with and some of which are still ongoing!

After a considerable amount of time and effort, on 3 March 2022, we obtained a Faculty to install the new lights in Church, the Chapel and Gateway (including carrying out the remedial work identified in the Electrical Installation Condition Report.) The work is due to start on 19 April and will last for two to three weeks.

In July 2021, an inspection of the five high level windows and the high level exterior of the south elevation of the Church was made by our Church Architect. This revealed that the respective Cruciform Finials at the eastern end of the nave and at the eastern end of the chapel both showed signs of movement.

The Architect recommended as a matter of urgency that the necessary work be carried out, which it has. We did not know that this work was required, but we had no alternative but to do it.

Regrettably, at a later date, after the scaffolding which had been erected on the eastern gable had been removed, it was found that the holes in the masonry which had been made in order to fasten the scaffolding, had not been repaired properly and further minor work will now have to be carried out, but at no expense to us, to make good the damage caused.

The five high level windows have been taken away to be repaired and the space where the windows were boarded up.

The scaffolding erected in the Chapel will remain until the repaired windows are reinstalled. At the same time, repair work to the roof will be carried out.

The Quinquennial Report was received last year and identifies four categories of work, two of which are:-

urgent work which we have to do immediately, the vast majority of which has already been done, or is in hand, work which has to be done during the next 12 months, some of which I am already in the process of obtaining quotes for.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed on behalf of the Orthodox Church of St Cuthbert and St Bede, Durham (the OC) and the PCC, whereby the OC has agreed to use its best endeavours to carry out certain works and to make the building safe for use as a Chapel by 1 June 2022.

The Pastoral Scheme referred to in my previous reports will shortly be made which will have the effect of transferring to the OC the Chapel, which will then enable further funding to be obtained to complete the outstanding work.

Once the Pastoral Scheme has become operative, an application will be made by the PCC for an order closing the residue of the land remaining in the Churchyard, so as to make it a closed one.

Various maintenance issues relating to the Churchyard continue to arise, mainly relating to the condition of some of the trees, which require urgent and costly work. We are seeking funding from Durham County Council and others to maintain the Churchyard and to make it into a green community space in the heart of the city.

Once an order closing the Churchyard has been made, then we can ask the Parish Council to take over the maintenance of it, although the Parish Council can if it so wishes, ask the County Council to take over the maintenance, but neither Council can be required to do so, unless it has been properly maintained, which is why we need the funding to do this. We are hoping to work in partnership with the Parish Council, the County Council and the local residents.

I am very thankful to Arun, Mary Anne, the rest of the Standing Committee, to Kate, our Operations Manager, to the PCC, Phil Alsop and Sam Chapman for their help and support and to Neil Duddy for maintaining and testing the fire extinguishers in the Youth Centre and in Church. I am also thankful to Tim Biddlecombe for his work in maintaining the Youth Centre grounds.

**MEV Report Richard Briggs**

This has been our fourth year of running a Ministry Experience Volunteer programme at St Nics, following on from previous years with other versions of comparable (e.g. intern) programmes. The main changes to our delivery of the MEV programme have been:

* switching the taught study component from Cranmer Hall to Lindisfarne College of Theology (LCT), for a range of practical reasons, and increasing it from 40 credits to 60 credits, which means it is half of a full-time accredited year of University/College study. Our MEVs take LCT courses in (1) Introduction to the Bible, (2) Introducing Theological Reflection, (3) Introduction to Aspects of Pastoral Care, and (4) Spirituality & Discipleship. This arrangement has worked out well.
* developing the idea of having internal ‘placements’ attaching MEVs to specific ministries within St Nics, which has been enabled by our various new staff posts
* adjusting our internal course, sometimes called a ‘home brewed’ course, and repurposing it as a ‘Christian Life and Ministry’ course, delivered by our range of in-house experts on topics such as preaching, worship, Bible study, Islam, economics and justice, and prayer
* bringing the oversight of the MEV course under the role of the Prior of the Community of St Cuthbert, and putting each MEV in a Spiritual Growth Group in that community

We began the 2021-22 year with 3 MEVs, living in our MEV house in Durham. One of our recruits was not able to continue with the programme, resulting in a cohort of 2 MEVs:

Elisa, joining us from Canada, has served faithfully in a range of ministries, developing a particular passion for preaching and evangelism, through speaking at student night, Wednesday communion, and helping to lead an Alpha course. She has also offered wonderful service in a range of children’s, young people’s and student contexts, as well as in services through intercessions, reading, being part of the tech rota and other practical help in services. She is planning to go on to college in Canada next year

Lydia, already a part of our congregation, has also been committed to a range of ministries, including regular co-working with Hannah, our Youth Missioner, and in particular working alongside Michael, our Social Justice enabler, as she has participated in several of the justice initiatives, including helping to take a lead with our Acts 435 drop-in, and being part of the cafe development team. She has also developed a calling to preaching, delivering sermons at student night and the Wednesday communion service, and leading intercessions, reading, and being part of the tech rota for services. She plans to go on to university next year.

It has been a delight to have Elisa and Lydia with us, in particular as they have joined us at morning prayer most days, often taking care of streaming it online. They have been a valuable part of our church life and ministry, and continuing evidence of the value of the MEV scheme both for its participants and the life of St Nics as a church.

**MEV Report Lydia Francis-Holmes**

I joined the MEV programme in September, and it has been an absolute delight. I have been involved in planning and leading youth sessions, designing communications outreach, interceding at Sunday services, regularly operating technology for services and events, attending and leading morning prayer, leading student night and reading in services. I have also undertaken modules at Lindisfarne College which has furthered my interests in Theology. The two key areas of ministry which I have found a particular passion and calling towards are preaching and social justice. The opportunity to preach at various services has helped me to discover a distinct calling towards this area of ministry. My participation in social justice has deepened my passion for meeting the needs of communities, for example through being involved in the launch of a social justice hub.

It has been both a pleasure and privilege to explore a range of ways to serve at St Nic’s this year. Next year I plan to take up my place at the University of Exeter to study Theology and Philosophy.

**MEV Report Elisa Korner**

I am enjoying the MEV programme and feel like it has been a great opportunity for me to deepen my faith and to experience what it’s like to work in a church. I’m from Vancouver, BC in Canada, so I have been enjoying living in England for the first time and am very thankful for how supportive everyone at St. Nics has been. I have spent a lot of my time as a Ministry Experience Volunteer working with different ministries, helping wherever needed. I lead Illuminate, (the years 1-6 children’s group) twice a month and help with children’s work whenever else needed. I have worked with Hannah in helping with the youth on Thursdays and Sunday evenings. I help put service orders onto ProPresenter, and prior to the new format, I put together the weekly notice sheet. I do tech for Wednesday Communions and Steward Private Prayer on Wednesdays and Saturdays. I sometimes lead and speak at student nights, which I have loved and am enjoying exploring and furthering my experience in. I have also deeply enjoyed learning morning prayer and have loved getting to lead it. I have also felt called to work with evangelistic outreaches: I have been involved in running Alpha and in outreach events like the chapel mural for Lumiere and the Holy Week events. I have also enjoyed the training aspects of the MEV program, where I have gotten to study at Lindisfarne College of Theology. Next year I am going to the University of King’s College in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

**Student Ministry Report James Cochran and Mary Anne Freer**

This has been a time of flourishing and nurturing amongst the Durham university students who have made St Nics their spiritual home this year. We are so grateful to the very committed and enthusiastic assistant student workers who have really set a very Christ-like tone and developed a very special relaxed environment that is really welcoming, friendly, fun and a safe place to ask difficult questions and pursue answers. We have been blessed by James Cochran’s wonderful leadership heading up the ministry until February this year and his ongoing involvement despite the work pressures on him in the final months of his PhD.

During Freshers' week we had a strong online presence on a variety of platforms, which gave us very good reach. We also had a gazebo in Market Square, which enabled some good conversations but was less useful than hoped.

We are pleased to say that we have returned in person for our weekly Student Nights for the whole of this year. We meet on Thursday evenings at church and always begin with a meal. This was challenging for the team back in the Autumn term when some restrictions were still in place. On average throughout the year so far we have had roughly15- 20 people each week. Food has been organised and cooked by students and has been vegetarian. In our talks and bible study, we spent the first half of the Autumn term going through the rhythms of grace. The second half of the term featured a series of talks based on things the speakers wished they'd known as a young adult. During the Spring term we have based our studies on the Acts of the Apostles. Again these have generally, been led by students, with group discussion questions at the end of the talk.

Following on from the talks and discussions we have a time of Worship. This year for the first time we have a student worship coordinator (Edmund Milwain) who has organised sung worship at student night and supported people in leading worship for the first time. We've had several students start leading worship on Thursdays, and some have now joined a worship group on a Sunday.

As well as Thursday evenings we also have Socials. We have been bowling in Newcastle, Extreme trampolining in Dragonville, made and eaten pizzas and gone on a college bar crawl. We also have a weekly student breakfast where we meet up in various cafes in the city and eat together at the beginning of the day. The days vary so no one is left out.

We currently have 5 student spiritual growth groups with about 30 people spread among them. These are all student led and co-ordinated by Fran Wakefield. Spiritual support groups are a key part of our student ministry. They are a great way of getting to know a few people really well, who will pray with you and for you and offer spiritual support and encouragement.

Our day away was pushed back from December to early January and took place on the first weekend of the term. We went all the way to the Youth Centre, which worked well. We looked closely at the book of Haggai, and also did some painting together. As well as this we have had a weekend away in Wooller on our final weekend of term, where we had a great time with Richard Briggs who led us through some of Daniel and had wonderful times of worship led by Rosie Robinson ( our ordinand from Cranmer). As well as this we walked, talked, made bread with Sam Chapman, played games and relaxed together at the end of a busy term.

Next term, we will be looking at Spiritual Disciplines inspired by the classic book ‘Celebration of Discipline” by Richard Foster at Student Nights. As it’s a term when many will have exams, we hope to be able to pray, support and encourage each other along the way. We will still also have our weekly breakfasts and we are looking forward to post exam celebrations as people finish, as well as a BBQ and hopefully a day trip.

It is really great to see students engaged in the life of the wider church. This year it has been good to see students heavily involved in volunteering with the Youth and the children’s ministries and in various worship groups. Alongside this, students have been on the tech team and involved in Sunday worship. It was brilliant to have so many students volunteering by welcoming and serving during Lumiere at St Nics. Often when we sense Gods prompting to serve in some way by using the skills and gifts He has given us then our faith is strengthened as we work alongside others. There will be new opportunities coming up as the St Nics café opens its doors soon.

**International ministry report Mark Peach**

For those unfamiliar with Amigos, it is a program to provide support for people new to the country or Durham. The program has been operating within the church for around 25 years with a lot of support from the congregation. Whilst the group is open to anyone, historically most attendees have been students.

As the COVID restrictions lifted last year Amigos has reopened the face-to-face meetings. With the departure of Zoe, the team was initially led by James Cochran with Andrew, Catriona, Emily, Dan and Mark supporting.

The team developed the mission statement which is “To provide a welcoming cultural bridge for international people coming to the UK and Durham in particular, an open, respectful and caring social environment of trust where visitors feel safe to express themselves and where Christian support is available”

We have run a number of events including Games nights, Pumpkin Carving, Pizza Making, Ceilidh, Karaoke night, Remembrance Day, Love languages, Pancake making, quiz night and Sherlock Holmes.

Most of the attendees this year have been Chinese students although we have also had Thai, Indian, Japanese, Colombian, Norwegian and Indian attendees.

The evenings have been a success, although since Christmas numbers have varied from 4 to 30. With the wide variation in numbers the challenge is building the relationships which allow more opportunity to discuss faith.

**Youth Report Hannah Wilkinson**

**Sunday 11am Younger Youth**

Youth in school years aged Y7-Y9 meet for Bible study during the 11am service. We average about ten youth in these sessions. Since January, we stopped following the lectionary and instead began a new bible study: “The Big Story of Scripture.” All of our young people were given their very own journal Bible, in which they can jot down notes or drawings and underline the text. Beginning in Genesis, we are going right through to Revelation which should take us to Christmas of 2022. This decision was informed by Dr Melody Briggs’ research which has shown the importance of narrative to young people’s understanding of Scripture. Furthermore, we have moved away from a model of learning/Sunday School sessions that propose one learning objective. Instead, we begin each session with a creative engagement with the Bible story (i.e. either acting it out/ re-telling the story from memory etc), then we read the Scripture together. After reading the Scripture, we discuss what was different from how we remembered the story and the youth write down one on a post-it note either a key point from the story or one thing they think the writer of the story wants us to know about who God is. We then proceed to the best part: the young people’s questions! They take as many post-it notes as they want and write down any and all of their questions. They each read out their questions and we talk about some of them. Some questions I answer, some I suggest we’ll come back to later in the story and some of them I leave unanswered. Our young people, with no prompting, are asking really profound theological questions and it’s so exciting to hear what has puzzled them or sparked their curiosity.

**Sunday 5pm Older Youth**

Youth in Year 9-13 meet for Bible study and pizza on Sunday evenings. We meet prior to the evening service before walking up together and sitting on sofas at the front of the church during the evening service. Many of our young people have read as part of the evening service and they have helped run interactive prayer stations during the praise evenings. A couple of our older youth are also serving on the tech desk. Our Bible study is focused on same passage as the 6:30pm service. As such, we are currently in 1 Corinthians and had three weeks focused on issues of sex and sexuality. Again, we average about 9-10 students at the evening sessions.

**Thursday Youth**

On Thursday evenings, we meet for social time and fellowship in the youth centre. We tend to get around 5-6 youth for a combination of movie nights, game nights and craft nights. We do one session a month on zoom and tend to have higher numbers for this session (10 or more).

**Older Youth Socials with Deeper (St Johns & Kings)**

Along with Kings and St Johns Neville’s Cross, we have run three Older Youth Socials. These evenings of pizza and games have been for youth in year 10+. Initially, we began these to test out whether we could form some sort of “Older Youth” Bible Study shared across the three churches; the idea being that none of our churches had huge numbers in this age bracket and therefore maybe joining forces was worthwhile. However, these have not been very well attended by Nics Youth and our numbers have grown on a Sunday evening to a good group size on our own. For now, we will continue to do the occasional Older Youth social, but I think it’s unlikely this will develop beyond sporadic social get-togethers.

**Youth Vision Day**

In January, we had a youth vision day for all the youth leaders. Five of us gathered in the youth centre to pray for each of our young people, to plan for the year ahead and to reflect on the mission of the youth ministry. It is my hope to run two of these a year (September and January).

**The Pulse**

The Diocese termly Youth Event “The Pulse” is back in person. In October, we took twelve young people and four adults to the cathedral for this event which focused on climate justice. At the beginning of April, we took a group of seventeen young people and four adults. The Pulse in April focused on Open Doors and the persecuted church. For the October and April Pulse event, St. Nics brought the largest contingent of young people.

**Youth Prayer Meeting**

I meet every month with five to six parents and members of the congregation to pray for all our young people and the youth ministry. This group was set up by James and Catriona and has been such a blessing! It’s really exciting that we have members of the congregation who commit to praying for all our young people every month.

**Cornerstone**

In September, we re-branded the drop in that James and Catriona started as “Cornerstone Coffee and Co-Working Space.” For about two months, we had a group of ten year twelve students coming to hang out, eat their lunch and make cups of tea. Unfortunately, after being short staffed one week, we had to close, and we never regained the students after that. We ran Cornerstone until the end of January, and as we hadn’t seen any young people through the doors for over 2 months, we decided to stop Cornerstone to reassess how we can use our space to serve the sixth form in a different way.

**Big Questions & Youth Alpha**

Every Monday, Lydia and I go into the sixth form to run a “Big Questions of Life” after school club. We have debated topics from ethics to sociology to philosophy to whether returning the shopping trolley post-shop is a marker of morality. We have a group of about 8-10 students who are very keen and excited. We have run a couple of special guest sessions including two “Grill a Vicar” sessions, where students had the opportunity to ask Arun and Richard questions about faith, life and ministry. In addition, we hosted a Science and Religion session where we brought in David Wilkinson, an astrophysicist and Methodist Minister.

One of the students who occasionally comes to Big Questions has been attending the Wednesday Communion Service at Church. He has also occasionally brought a friend or two. Claire, Elisa and I are hoping to run a lunchtime Alpha for sixth form students from the Big Questions group beginning on Wednesday 27th April.

**Mentorship Scheme**

At the beginning of 2022, we launched our mentorship program. We currently have six mentors from the Church who are paired up with students providing 1-1 mentoring every week.

Alongside this, I have 3 students who I mentor in English, History and Philosophy. I have also taught a six week after school history skills course. Since October, I have done this course, or a variation of it, with 6 different groups of students.

**Sixth Form Outreach: What’s so good about Good Friday?**

The week before Holy Week, we will be putting out posters and artwork in front of the church exploring the theme of suffering and salvation. We will also have an interactive “Rage Weave” where we will invite people to write down and weave their laments into the cross. This is mainly aimed at sixth formers, and we will be present in the marketplace during the sixth form lunchtime hour.

**Children and families Kate Swann**

I feel that this report maybe a report of 2 parts – the ‘pre going back in person’ part and the ‘We are back in the building – Yay’ part!

It has been a busy and exciting year and I am thankful for the way in which God has been constant and faithful when life has seemed anything but and the way in which time and time again, he has sustained us, blessed us and moved within the lives of our children and families. The children have taught me so much in the past 12 months about being a child of God, they are all awesome and I look forward to seeing how God will continue to grow them and use them within our church family.

Sunday Mornings

At the last APCM the children were still not back in the building. We continued to meet online every Sunday morning for Pyjama Church and even though zoom fatigue was setting in, we managed to keep going and it continued to be my favourite part of the week. I am incredibly grateful to all the families and children who faithfully attended each week and contributed to making Pyjama church a success. I am especially grateful to the Taylor family who sorted the tech each week.

September arrived, a new school year and the children arrived back in the building – yay! I had to remind myself how to make rotas, book rooms, make resources and buy the ‘all important’ cow biscuits and squash! I also needed volunteers to help lead the children’s groups each week and I am extremely grateful to all of those who had previous helped and were happy to come back as well as the new people that have come forward– you are all amazing. Every Sunday they are easily spotted as they now wear bright orange T-shirts, please do thank them for everything they do. I would also like to thank all of those who stepped down from helping at this point, we are all very grateful to all of you for your faithful service.

I was determined to not go back in person and continue to do what we had always done. There were lots that Pyjama church had taught me about what the children like and how best to support them in their faith. One of the changes that has come about has been to merge the groups so that we now only have 2 groups, Glow tots and Illuminate.

Glow tots (0-5 Years of age)

This group meets in the upper room during the 11am service. We currently have 19 children on the register for this age group. We have a section of the room designated for babies and toddlers and the rest of the room is set up for preschool and Reception children. They enjoy looking at Bible stories, praying, making a craft and taking part in focus play activities. Since January we have moved away from using the lectionary and with Melody Briggs’s help we have begun to look at Luke’s gospel in chronological order. The children have enjoyed adding to the Luke’s gospel timeline each week and creating an object to help them to remember the story of the week. This object is added to their Luke’s gospel box which will go home with when we have finished this gospel. All the children feel happy and settled in the space and they have definitely enjoyed the boxes!

Illuminate (5 – 11 Year olds)

This group meets in the Lantern room in the town hall. We currently have 24 on our register for this age group. One of the benefits of Pyjama church was the mix of ages all being together to learn about Jesus. So we have split illuminate into mixed age growth groups, with the older children becoming Team Captains. The children go straight to their growth groups when the session begins and have an opening activity whilst the captains sort out drinks and biscuits. Illuminates are also currently following Luke’s gospel in chronological order and have a timeline which they add to each week. Melody has also helped these children to look at the passage and to share what their thoughts and wonderings about the passage and to ask questions about it. This has been very profound for the children and has generated some fantastic questions.

It is important to note that all the work we are doing in our children’s groups is very much a work in progress and the whole kids church team would value your ongoing prayers for wisdom and creative inspiration as we seek to disciple our children in order that they may deepen their faith and share this with their friends.

Family Service

The other exciting monthly occurrence which has returned since the children have been back in the building, is our regular family service. This happens on the first Sunday of the month during the 11am service and is an intergenerational dynamic service where the whole church engages in fellowship, worship, prayer and teaching. We have introduced ‘An attitude of Gratitude’ which was a regular feature of PJ church and we have also resurrected Big Chair, Little Chair (with a new jingle!) We are hoping that very soon we will be able to start having a shared meal after this service too.

Weekly activities

R+R

This is a group for families with very young children. We have about 5 families who attend this group on a regular basis. We began to meet in the person in the Youth Centre last summer but in the Autumn we felt that local coffee shops were a more appropriate space to meet in for the season that our young families were in. We are all now very clued up on which coffee shops are suitable for buggies!! However, the babies have grown and are moving so we are now meeting in the upper room, every Tuesday between 9:45 – 11am. Sara Jackson leads this group, and I am very grateful for all her hard work and the pastoral support she provides for these families.

Tiddlywinks

Last May we reopened tiddlywinks in person, meeting in the Youth Centre Garden. During the pandemic many of our Tiddlywinks families had moved away or their children had moved onto school but we really pleased to see some of them return to us and were very shocked to see how much the children had grown, especially those that had only been weeks old when we had gone into lockdown. We also had a small group of new parents join us. We closed for the summer holidays and in September we reopened and moved back inside the youth centre. This was a tricky time as all of the original volunteers had naturally moved onto other projects or moved away, so we needed to start again with a new team. I am very grateful to Elisa, Sara and Rachel for stepping up to help with this ministry and I am also grateful to those who have stepped down, you have been such a blessing to so many families in the city. We also found the location of the youth centre and the parking issues were becoming problematic in encouraging new families to come, as well as uncertainty and uneasiness around Covid. After prayer and careful consideration, I felt that God was saying that it was time to pause this ministry. So, In January we closed Tiddlywinks and I have pointed our regulars to a local church toddler group that also meet on a Wednesday morning as well as informing them about the new St Nics Café, opening after Easter.

Please pray for wisdom and discernment for what happens next with this. I believe that toddler groups are important for a church, but I also believe that this may be the time for a new vision and focus.

Key Events from the past 12 months

PJ church Holy week. Last Easter we met online every morning and walked through the events of Holy week. This was a very special time and one of my highlights from lockdown.

* Thy Kingdom Come – We had great fun (online again!) using lots of the TKC resources and we are all now very keen on the Cheeky Panda’s. I am debating how much of my budget I can spend of Cheeky Panda merch (that’s youth speak for merchandise!) claiming that it is for the children!
* The light party – IN PERSON - whoop, whoop! We joined with All Saints and Emmanuel church to hold a light party as an alternative to Halloween. It was a great success with over 40 children attending and it was a very successful inter denominational event. We are considering doing this again this year.
* Toy collection for the Salvation Army. In December we held our annual toy service. We had two lovely leaders from the Local Salvation come and share with us the vision behind the Salvation Army toy Appeal and explain how the toys would be distributed. They were overwhelmed by the generosity of our church and were looking forward to distributing them to families who could not afford to buy presents for their children at Christmas time.
* The crib service on Christmas Eve. Due to covid numbers I took the decision to move this service online. It was lovely to spend a small amount of time on Christmas eve focusing on the anticipation of Christmas day, but we really hope that this can be in person this year!
* Holiday Club. February half term. We were all ready to go with our Spy Academy Holiday Club but with 2 weeks to go, Covid hit our household (again!) and due to a couple of other bumps, it was decided that we would postpone this until next year. This was very sad, but all is not lost, and we look forward to resurrecting the Spy Academy holiday club next February Half term! (20th – 22nd February 2023)

It has been a huge Joy and blessing to have Elisa working alongside me this year. She has helped with all the Sunday Morning groups as well as the midweek activities. The children have loved getting to know her and she will be greatly missed by us all and I want to thank her for all her help and support.

Also thank you so much for your prayers, support and kind words of encouragement. I have really appreciated it especially during the past couple years. If you would like to be part of the exciting work going on amongst the children at St Nics or if you would like more information about anything I have mentioned above, please feel free to email me at children@stnics org.uk.

**Social Justice Michael McGuigan**

Following the appointment of the Social Justice Enabler position last July our immediate focus was on creating and developing social justice activities, providing a gateway to service based from our new café space. Having reviewed the extensive research carried out which identified the current support provided by local organisations to the people of County Durham and where the gaps were based on people’s needs, a social justice hub operating model has been created. The model comprises of 5 key workstreams / service offers which include Faith, financial inclusion, climate change and creation care, job club and mental health and well-being. Each of these workstreams are broken down further to enable us to support the needs of the people within County Durham. For example, financial inclusion includes, managing debt, Acts 435 financial education and a section on benefits.

In addition, we have been establishing key contacts across the county so we can complement existing service offers and work collaboratively without duplicating effort, developing strong working relationships and sharing best practice. Understanding where we can introduce elements of the operating model into our day-to-day activities.

Over the summer months we have visited church cafes and social enterprises across the North-East and slightly further afield with a visit to Fountains Church in Bradford. Exploring and looking at how different local cafes meet the needs of their community. Learning and listening to others in this way has been invaluable and has helped us begin to shape the way we can provide an inviting friendly café in our existing lower hall.

Creation Care /Climate Justice is an increasing part of our work in the area of social justice. During October last year we had taken an active role to be involved with and working collaboratively with the Youth Christian Climate Network 2021 Relay, over 2 days on Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd October. As we welcomed the pilgrims we had guest speakers, music prayer and reflection during a service we hosted on the Friday afternoon. We also had an art exhibition on display in church of paintings created by local children. Saturday, we provided breakfast and refreshments for the pilgrims waving them on their way as they headed off on the next leg of their journey North.

During a weekday Private Prayer in November a gentleman walked into church who came in to get warm. Following a good chat over coffee we established he had been sleeping rough for 3 days. We contacted Durham County Council and managed to get him temporary accommodation. Subsequently, he has received support in applying for benefits and has secured permanent accommodation. His life has turned around completely since his first steps into church. I’m thankful that on occasion over the last few months he has come back to Nic’s to let us know how he is getting on. His latest visit was a week ago to thank us for helping him turn his life around when he was at his very lowest.

During January Lydia (MEV) joined to spend a term working on our justice initiatives and has taken the lead with our Acts 435 drop in. I’m thankful and proud of the commitment Lydia has shown in particular her approach when talking with people and identifying people’s needs. It’s with great joy we launched our first weekly drop-in service in January to support those who are in financial hardship or financial crisis. This potential support is made possible through a new partnership with Acts 435, a national online charity that gives donors the opportunity to connect with people who are in need of help. Acts 435 enables St Nics, and other participating churches and local charities, to post requests for specific needs onto their website. Individuals can then go online and donate any amount to purchase the specific items that will help people in difficult circumstances and help to bridge the gap of financial crisis. Since the launch we have helped 3 people via this service. We have raised £150 for one parishioner in need, and we have two others who currently have live requests via the Acts 435 website.

Over the coming weeks and months, we will be launching more regular weekly drop-ins around specific topics such as housing, bereavement etc…from the new café.

Further activities centred around social justice have also taken place with Streetlights now operating from St Nics Lower Hall at a weekend. In addition, over the last few months we have been working even more closely with Durham County Council.

Working collaboratively with Streetlights and Durham County Council (DCC) who have been running pilot project from St Nics Lower Hall. Safe Women at Night (SWaN) is designed to look after vulnerable women between the hours for 8pm and 3am. DCC have been hiring out the Lower Hall space three evenings per week since February. The team are made up of Durham County Council employees, Police Officers and City Medics whilst sharing the space with Streetlights. Collectively they have handled some challenging situations ranging from pulling a man from the River Wear who had jumped off Framwellgate Bridge to treating minor injuries and getting people home safely. The project has already demonstrated it’s impact in supporting those who are out in Durham of an evening who are most vulnerable.

Throughout the last 7 months there has been a focus on designing and planning our new café. This has involved working collaboratively with third parties such as tradespeople and key stakeholders as we develop the café from concept and idea into reality to serve the people of County Durham. From selecting the colour scheme to sourcing the furniture that would complement the space and make for a welcoming, inviting and relaxing environment for all. January saw us begin to book in trades to commence the transformation from Lower Hall to St Nics Café and Justice Hub.

The decorators were in during February together with ordering the café equipment such as filter coffee machine, commercial dishwasher etc…

We have conducted a robust café costings exercise to ensure we remain in budget, as well as a detailed business plan. We have built a strong working relationship with the new Tesco supermarket manager which opened on Claypath in December exploring how we can work together for example around fundraising, how Tesco can sponsor events held here at St Nics and how we could work more closely together to reduce food waste, involving us being registered to receive their surplus food. The aim at the start of the new year is to finalise the plans and work with our local community to begin to transform the space into our new café allowing us to provide hospitality and act as a gateway to service for our social justice activities.

To help keep everyone informed and to ask for prayers I’ve began attending Spiritual Growth Groups to share and walk through the café plans and social justice activities. All have been really encouraging and so supportive.

I’m humbled and thankful for all the prayer, encouragement and support from everyone over the last 7 months.

The coming months will see us open our café doors 6 days a week providing hospitality and that gateway to service for the people of Durham.

**Safeguarding Report Ann Lipscombe**

Coming out of Covid restrictions has meant a flurry of activity in safeguarding following a quiet few months. Firstly, all staff involved in recruitment have successfully undertaken the Church of England’s Safer Recruitment and People Management training; this involves recruitment for both paid employees and volunteers. All recruitment systems have been reviewed in light of the guidelines and a representative from PCC has volunteered to oversee the ongoing processes. Additionally, staff are now undertaking further training as we begin to formulate a response to the Church of England’s commitments to combatting Domestic Violence.

Sadly, volunteer numbers have fallen during the pandemic from the high of 68 to around 45 – so a plea for more people to become involved in the church’s varied ministries please! Many thanks to those who have continued to volunteer and have dutifully undertaken a renewal of their DBS certificates. Your assistance and consideration in this important area of church life is very helpful. The renewals have come early as, in January, the Diocese changed their policy from a 5-year to a 3-year renewal period.

For many roles, safeguarding simply entails completing “Basic Awareness” online training (designed to raise awareness of safeguarding issues and what to do with any concerns). More complex roles & those involving children/ vulnerable adults require further levels of training (“Foundation”) and DBS checks. Training needs to be refreshed every 3 years and, when this is due, a reminder email will be sent so please keep your email addresses up to date with the church office.

The PCC includes safeguarding as an agenda item at every meeting. We have once again adopted the latest Diocesan Safeguarding Policy detailing our commitment to diocese standards. A copy of this document can be found on the church website and a paper copy is available on request at the church office. In accordance with national church requirements, our church website contains a dedicated safeguarding section as, additionally, does the St. Nic’s Facebook page.

As church has reopened, staff and volunteers have worked hard to produce risk assessments for the various ministries and groups at St. Nic’s as restrictions lessened. From Wednesday Drop-In to Sixth Form Mentoring to the Student Weekend Away (to name but a few), the commitment demonstrated, and the care taken in these preparations has been admirable.

Over the coming year, it is my intention to:

* Continue to respond to any safeguarding concerns as they arise
* Continue to keep a detailed training record and provide a reminder system
* Keep safeguarding prominent at PCC meetings
* Continue to update key safeguarding and health and safety policies for approval by PCC

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you ever have any questions or concerns regarding safeguarding. Ann Lipscombe, Parish Safeguarding Officer [safeguarding@stnics.org.uk](file:///C:\Users\JanetDawson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\X07DKFFP\safeguarding@stnics.org.uk)

*The PCC has complied this year with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016, that is, the duty to have due regard to the House of Bishops’ guidance on safeguarding children and young adults.*

**Eco Group Report Richard Lilly**

The group has met monthly over the year on Zoom which has worked well with good attendance and enthusiasm. Membership of the group has remained steady with slight increase at now ten people. The last meeting was in person, and we hope this to continue.

Reflecting on our priorities set last year we have achieved some , missed a few and made several which we hadn’t seen.

Achievements:

*Climate Justice and Creation Care* is the new name for our group in order to more fully represent how we see its work in the life of the church.

Our Webpage of the St Nics church website under ‘about us’; now with a resource page and expansion of the testimonial page. Please do read these and contribute if you feel able to.

Prayers for Creation are being used more frequently in the church

An ‘**acknowledgement of the climate emergency’** has been passed by the PCC. This is on our webpage. We have lodged this with the CoE backed ‘Climate Emergency Toolkit’, an organisation that is backed by the CoE and Tearfund. We are following their plan to try to increase our impact through the congregation members. Again this has its own website. [Climate Emergency Toolkit | Church Resources on climate change](https://www.climateemergencytoolkit.com/?msclkid=820795aab0e911ecac4c2cfa9a89e8bb)

Divestment of fossil fuels. The Diocese has accepted our proposal, which the vicar had suggested, to divest from fossil fuels. This is a significant move from the diocese, and we were thanked for this work and for proposing the motion. A summary of this is on our webpage.

The YCCN pilgrimage which arrived in Durham in September on its route from Cornwall to Glasgow for the COP26 conference. This was a very successful event with a service in the church on the Friday and a hosting of the ‘boat’ in the church for the Friday night before taking it to Newcastle for its next leg of the journey on the Sunday. There was a creation themed service on the Sunday.

International day of action for COP 26. The church was host to a ‘climate fair’ on Sat 6th November as part of the gathering in the marketplace and debates in the town hall supporting the event. This again was a very successful event with upwards of 600 people attending over the day. This was organised in conjunction with Climate Action Durham

Ongoing Projects and work:

Working with the Social Justice enabler – Michael McGuigan – to incorporate climate justice as part of the Justice vision of the church.

Working with children’s groups within the church to help them develop and think about all aspects of climate justice and creation care, particularly regarding the eco anxiety and grief that they can feel, and to help them and their parents/carers manage this with hope for the future.

Redeveloping the churchyard. In association with the parish council we are working towards making this into a green space for reflection, leisure and recreation. This will be a long term project and currently funding is being applied for from the council.

The CoE Net Zero research project that we have been undertaking on behalf of the church in conjunction with the University and St John’s Neville Cross, St Brandon’s Brancepeth and the Cathedral is ongoing with several temperature monitors in the church all year. A report should come out of this within the next few months. Linked with this was a:

Two week intensive energy audit of St. Nic’s and the Youth Centre by a team of Doctoral students from Durham University Energy Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) project.

We now have a report including tabulated energy usage (gas and electricity) for both sites extending back to 2018 on monthly to quarterly timescale. Recommendations to improve energy efficiency were grouped into Simple/Cheap and Complex/Expensive options.

Networking with other environmental groups outside the church and working with them to forward the climate Justice agenda in Durham. These include Climate Action Durham, Grandparents for Climate Action and Extinction Rebellion.

Arocha Silver Award. Work towards this has been put on hold largely due to the issues with the churchyard, which in its current form would prevent us from achieving this.

The group has as its aims:

1. to work to embed the ethos of Climate Justice and Creation Care within all members of the church and all groups and missions, and for this to then impact on their contacts outside the church.
2. to work outside the church, often in conjunction with other organisations, on events and projects which have a visible environmental, sustainable or informative impact that can both have positive value in their own right, and also help to demonstrate the commitment of St Nics as an eco-church.

**Lumiere Report Claire Elwood**

Lumiere 2019 gave us all a taste of ‘What can be” when we open our doors to the general public during the Lumiere festival and on the success and lessons learned of 2019 we decided that we could venture forth once more. Despite Covid concerns and restrictions our contribution to the city’s festival took the form of a pop up café, the warm welcome of a dry space and the invitation to contribute to the Jesus is the Light of the World artwork on the glass doors of the chapel.

Whilst we missed the fun of an acoustic café from the previous time, we still had plenty of visitors in glad of a sit down. Many conversations were had, invitations to Alpha and services handed out, even a Bible or two given away. This activity builds our discipleship as we engage visitors with something of God and step out of our comfort zones a little. It is a means of blessing our city as we contribute to and enhance this event. And it is a way to sow the seeds of the Gospel as we give people a glimpse into what it is like to be part of a church community who are prepared to be open and welcoming.

Our café gave us the opportunity to establish links with Tesco, the Home for Good charity and increase our relationship with the Northern Echo as each made contributions to our event in some way.

My enormous thanks to Mary Anne in the planning and to so many who helped with the event and prayed throughout.

**Gateway World Shop Report Hazel Dobson and Phil Holmes**

The staff and directors of Gateway are firmly committed to the vision of St Nic’s and believe we are playing an integral part in meeting that vision. In particular we aim to contribute to St Nic’s being “part of a national and global family who seek to bless and transform communities through loving Jesus, loving our neighbour and loving one another”. We believe we achieve this through our support of Fair Trade suppliers, artisans and producers, thereby blessing and contributing to global communities suffering from poverty and helping to foster independence. In terms of St Nic’s four-fold vision, we believe our greatest contribution is towards the work for Justice, thus helping to meet the St Nic’s aim of bringing “the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ which transforms our culture and our society”. When the church is fully open we act as a gateway into St Nic’s in Service to the people of Durham and, we believe, help with the Discipleship and Evangelism pillars of the four-fold vision by very often being the first face of welcome for anyone entering the building.

Many of our congregation may not know much about the shop and we are often asked by new members to explain about Fair Trade and what we do, and most are really surprised at just how long we have been doing it. Started in 1979 as **The Saturday Shop**, it became **Gateway Crafts Ltd**, and then later adopted the trading name **Gateway World Shop** and the strapline – trading for justice. The location of the shop, with doors into the church but also outside to the Market Place, fits with the vision of St Nic’s as a place that is open to the world.

We are a shop with a difference, as we don’t buy our products from an open market, and we care deeply about the people who actually produce our crafts and food products.

The majority of our suppliers are members, along with us, of **BAFTS** (British Association for Fair Trade Shops and Suppliers) which is the Fair-Trade Network UK for **WFTO** (World Fair Trade Organisation). It was a member of Gateway who started BAFTS way back in 1995 and other staff and directors have played an active part in its continuation. Our manager was a board member for 6 years until May 2019 and has attended many meetings and Fair-Trade conferences, encouraging others to become members and enjoy the benefits of being a national community of likeminded people.

The trading relationship between these Fair-Trade suppliers and the producers of the crafts and foods they import can make a huge difference to the daily lives of many of the poorest people in the world. By paying fairly for the products, and working with them on such things as design, these people can then work their own way out of poverty and build thriving families and communities. So the annual turnover of Gateway is the most important part of our work, buying from these suppliers and therefore creating a sustainable chain of trade where it is most needed.

There are also some fair traders who, in no small way, also actively support anti-trafficking and anti-slavery projects, raising funds and giving from their profits.

Through the products we choose we do seek to ensure that our work is fully consistent with the statement that “St Nic’s is proud to have the issues of Climate change and Sustainability as important, central themes; seeing one of its key roles as caring for God’s Earth.”

Many of our craft products have excellent ECO credentials, for example through the use of recycled metals and natural and sustainable materials such as jute and bamboo. Fair Trade crafts in general are handmade and shipped not flown, and the producers follow the 10 Principles of Fair Trade, including looking after the environment in which they live and work and from which they get their raw materials.

Gateway is also a member of **CCSA** (Cathedral and Church Shops Association) so we may buy some of our products for Easter and Christmas from ethical Christian companies such as The Leprosy Mission.

Locally we are a member of Durham BID, networking within our city community and taking part where appropriate. We have been Independent Shop of the Year and 3 times Durham in Bloom Best Dressed Window (Using Your Own Products). It does take a bit of extra effort, but it allows us to showcase our Christian perspective of trade justice.

Gateway’s enthusiastic staff and dedicated directors would like to offer thanks for the support the government gave during 2021 and because of it we have every hope of a secure future. We are all looking forward to once again being fully operational, supporting our producers and welcoming everyone through our doors.

**Gateway Development Trust Ltd**

In 1992 the Charities Commission decided that charities and trading companies should be separated, so Gateway split into the two organizations that exist today – **Gateway Crafts Ltd** and **Gateway Development Trust Ltd**. So the Trust owns the shares in the trading company, and the trading company donates to the Trust when it can. The Trust then uses this money to grant aid charitable organizations in the developing world, the majority of which will have a direct link with the shop through a supplier, such as Tradecraft. Over the years we have supported many projects which we know have made a huge difference to the lives of our brothers and sisters across the world who, without the Fair Trade movement, would not survive.….act justly….love mercy Micah Ch.6 v.8

**Durham Deanery Synod report Angus Goudie**

St Nic’s can have four elected lay representatives on Synod as well as being represented by our clergy. Jamie Harrison and Angus Goudie are there, ex-officio, in virtue of being on General Synod.

We haven’t currently used our full allocation so there are opportunities for further members to be voted on at this APCM. It would be good to be well represented.

Since our last APCM in May we have met three times on Zoom and once in person. We discussed

* Our parish churches post Covid, lessons learnt and vision for the recovery period. Most churches had learnt the benefits of on-line services and expected some ongoing on-line presence.
* Vision for the Church of England - tag line Bolder, Simpler and Humbler, the importance of our interface with the world, the use of a mixed economy of traditional and newer forms of worshipping community, and lay discipleship.
* A presentation on the Romany, Gypsy, traveller communities from Nicky Chater, the diocesan chaplain to the communities. There are opportunities to support temporary stopovers, and be more aware of their needs, and opportunities for service.
* Alan Bartlett lead and open session on Living in Love and Faith. This is being discussed more widely before the end of the feedback on 30th April.
* The new deanery arrangement with 7 full time paid clergy has moved forward with plans for groups of parishes being formalised. There remains concern that the guided pledge, especially with falling income secondary to Covid, has fallen short for our deanery, as for the diocese as a whole is insufficient in the longer term to support the current numbers of clergy. A matter for prayer and action.

The four task groups will be relaunched in the year ahead, Growth, Poverty, Children and Care of creation (Climate change has been added in the last year and the Church of England has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030, a substantial challenge.)

If you are keen to be involved in any of the Task groups or the diocesan task groups on these workstreams do enquire from present deanery reps or make yourself known to the PCC after the elections as members of the task groups can be from non-Deanery Synod members.

**Prayer Ministry Report Claire Elwood**

Our return to more usual services since last summer has brought with it the challenge of adapting again to a different way of worshipping. With great rejoicing, we held a Praise Evening in July. Whilst that meant singing behind masks, this was a joyful time of praising God. This Sunday evening service had a time of prayer ministry incorporated into it and that was appreciated greatly by those who accessed it. Encouraged by this beginning, we have begun providing Prayer Ministry at our 6.30pm service increasingly until now we offer this at every evening service.

Prayer Ministry was a normal part of our 11am and 6.30pm services and we hope that we will have returned to that normality by this time next year. With that in mind, basic training will be making a return after Easter so if this is an area of ministry in which you would like to serve then do please come along to be equipped through the training.

I hope people who used to serve in this way will seize this opportunity to refresh their memories if needed and get stuck in once more even if only to act as mentors for a short period whilst we train new people up.

This ministry remains an enormous privilege and I look forward to praying with many of you in this way over the coming months.

**International Mission Report Marc Ghosh**

Supporting the spread of the Gospel around the world has long been an important part of our ministry at St. Nicholas Church. We offer support in prayer and ﬁnancially. The PCC makes regular donations to the mission agencies supported by St. Nics, details of which are in the Annual Financial Report.

A prayer meeting for our mission projects is held each month when anyone interested is invited to join us in praying for our mission partners. Occasionally members of St Nics take part in short term mission projects abroad. Anyone doing so is invited to inform IMC so that we can pray for them at the monthly prayer meeting.

These are the projects and mission agencies we support at St Nics:-

**LATVIA BIBLICAL CENTRE**

Founded on February 6th, 1992, as Riga International Bible Institute; Latvia Biblical Centre (LBC) is led by Victor and Esther Petrenko who belonged to St Nics between 1996 and 2006 while each was studying for a PhD at Durham University. LBC exists to train Latvian Christian leaders, both lay and ordained. During the Soviet era Christianity was strongly opposed by the authorities and no training was available for Christian leaders. After the fall of communism freedom of religion was established but the church was very weak, and the leaders had little knowledge of the Bible. LBC has contributed significantly to Biblical teaching in Latvia for the last 25 years.

LBC is now spreading beyond Riga, with courses held in poorer parts of Latvia enabling those who cannot afford to travel to Riga to take part in training in their own town. LBC has also established links with theological colleges in South Africa and Norway.

A few years ago a derelict building was given to LBC and by God’s provision over one million Euros was provided in answer to prayer in order to renovate the building. Named after the nineteenth century Latvian evangelist William Fetler, the building is now complete and serving as a Christian centre containing LBC and offices for other Christian organisations.

**CMS – Church Mission Society**

*A community of people in mission who want the world to know Jesus.*

LATIN AMERICA

St Nics supports Bible translation in two South American languages. This is about giving people the best resource for knowing God in a language that speaks to their minds and hearts. Michael Browne, in Argentina, is translating the Bible into the Toba language and Tim Curtis, in Paraguay, has translated the Bible into Enxet and is now building the church in the Chaco region.

The Toba New Testament is already available in Argentina and Michael is now working, with a team of translators, on the Old Testament. Finding the right Toba word which describes accurately what the Bible is saying is often very difficult and Michael is constantly checking texts. Michael visited St Nics in January 2019.

Over thirty years Tim Curtis in Paraguay has overseen the translation of the whole Bible into Enxet. The Bibles have now been printed. However, it does not stop there, and Tim is now engaged in discipleship building. Many of the Enxet people are illiterate so Tim is organising the distribution of “proclaimers”, each proclaimer holds a recording of the Bible and is capable of playing the recording at high volume to a large number of people.Tim has also started to translate Bible study notes into Enxet to help those who can read come closer to Christ.

UGANDA

The Bungokho Rural Development Centre (BRDC) centre, which is led by Davis Mananna, is a Church Army Africa project within the Diocese of Mbale in the east of Uganda. BRDC combines training in practical job- related skills with Christian growth and evangelism. The centre serves some of the poorest people in Uganda.

**THE BIBLE SOCIETY**

*The Bible is more than a book; it is full of human stories — of love, greed, joy, loss and passion. It’s vital to our culture. It’s part of the answer to the world’s needs. It’s cherished by billions of people around the world. It’s more than a book.*

The work of The Bible Society extends beyond distributing the Bible as a book. They have an extensive multi-media department producing films, Scripture portions and magazines all portraying Bible stories. The Bible Society presents the Bible in formats suitable for all, including those with physical and learning disabilities. In recent years The Bible Society has launched the “Open the Book” project which operates throughout the World. Volunteers go into primary schools to introduce children to The Bible using drama and other creative means to bring the Bible to life. Prior to the pandemic some members of St Nics were involved in “Open the Book”, however, the project is now suspended due to Covid-19.

**MISSION AVIATION FELLOWSHIP**

Fiona Stevenson was a member of St Nics for five years before the Lord called her to join Mission Aviation Fellowship as a Finance Manager. In 2018 Fiona became the Finance Manager in Papua New Guinea, a mountainous country where there are many isolated tribal communities. MAF is a lifeline both spiritually and physically for people living in remote areas. Doctors, Teachers and Missionaries are flown in to assist people who live in poverty and in fear of witchcraft. In Papua New Guinea MAF conducts around 500 medical evacuations a year, distributes 4,000 Bibles, and carries 1.5 million tonnes of freight (building material, food, and school supplies).

In late 2020 a vacancy arose in South Sudan for a Finance Manager. Fiona sought The Lord’s guidance and was led to apply for the post. In 2022 Fiona will transfer to South Sudan and two accountants have been appointed to Papua New Guinea to replace her.

**THE STAMP BOX**

There is a box for used stamps near the chapel. These are donated to Leprosy Mission who sell the stamps to raise funds.

**MANASSEH TUYIZERE**

Manasseh Tuyizere was previously Diocesan Administrator for the Diocese of Kigale in Rwanda. He played a significant part in expanding the youth ministry and improving the condition of church buildings. Manasseh is married to Catrin whom he met at All Nations College. Catrin is from Germany and was previously a missionary in Zambia. In June 2020 their second child Eliana was born with a serious heart condition. With the blessing of the Diocese of Kigale, Manasseh and Catrin left Rwanda for Germany where Eliana could receive the medical attention she requires. Manasseh is now a pastor at a church in Germany and also working with a Christian organisation that assists refugees. IMC propose to continue supporting Manasseh and Catrin until they are fully settled in Germany.

**Alpha Report Claire Elwood**

We have continued to run online Alphas managing three in the past year. They continue to be both challenging and exciting as we welcome guests and take them through the videos and discussions. It is always a pleasure and a privilege to travel this journey with friends and strangers alike. It has been a huge delight to be able to run a couple of Holy Spirit days in person in the Youth Centre and my thanks to those who have helped with hospitality, worship and prayer.

My heartfelt thanks to the team that continues to grow in number, enabling us to be flexible, and to all those who have come online and shared some of their faith story. All of this activity helps us grow in our discipleship as we become more comfortable listening to those who have no or little faith and become more practised at sharing our own faith stories.

God has been so faithful during this difficult time, encouraging us to try Alpha in new ways. I look forward to seeing what he will do next as we try something new after Easter in the form of an in-person Alpha on a Wednesday afternoon for both Uni and Sixth Form College students. D keep us in your prayers.

**Pastoral Work at St Nic’s Mary Anne Freer/Claire Elwood**

As lockdowns finished and a more usual way of being church together resumed so has the majority of pastoral care rightly returned to the Spiritual Growth Groups. This is the appropriate place in which we learn together, serve and grow in our accountability to one another. It is a great credit to our church that so many are part of these groups and able to offer loving care and support in this way.

Our hope is that as the church continues to grow in discipleship, we will have the happy problem of a church growing in number in such a way that everyone is cared for.

Holy Communion at home is offered to those unable to attend church for a prolonged period of time.

Our thanks to the Pastoral team who have continued to give of their time and listening ears to those who have needed a little extra support during the past year, often due to severe illness or bereavement.

If you think you would like to join this small team because you have time and empathy to give then do please be in touch with Mary Anne.

With grateful thanks for all we have seen the Lord do.

**Spiritual Growth Group Report Richard Briggs**

SGGs are the core groups at the heart of our *Community of St Cuthbert*. (CSC)

For 2022 we have adopted a ‘rhythm of life’ statement that clarifies our commitments as groups, developed in a process of consultation with the whole PCC (on a PCC away day), church staff (on a staff development day), and individual group leaders who I have been visiting. (This has been a slow process, but I have now visited most SGG leaders). The statement is a commitment for 2022, and thus open to revision in the light of our experience of it, and ongoing consultation. It is available on the CSC page of the church website and was distributed to all group members via group leaders in Jan 2022.

Groups are thus committed to keeping in step with the 7 key rhythms of God’s grace:

* prayer and Bible study – on a daily and personal level
* worship and hospitality – as groups and as part of the wider church
* service and justice – in our missional witness to the world
* rest – as we seek to live lives in balance with the capacity that God gives us

To develop our lives together towards these regular rhythms, we have adopted a pattern of monthly meeting that is like this:

* 1st week – focus on Bible study
* 2nd week – focus on worship and prayer
* 3rd week – focus on Bible study
* 4th week – focus on acts of service, outward looking
* (5th week – social occasions)

Monthly study notes for this rhythm of meetings are distributed by email to all group leaders and posted on the CSC page of the church website. In Lent 2022 we replaced SGG meetings with the church-wide Lent Course on *Living in Love and Faith*, which also formed part of our discipleship in the CSC.

All group leaders are asked to keep the prior abreast of changing membership in their groups, and on our last attempt to review numbers, in Jan 2022, we had:

* 17 resident SGGs, or which about 14 meet mainly or entirely on zoom
* 5 student SGGs
* (also 8 other small groups, not SGGs, – not directly under the Prior’s remit)

In all we had about 130-140 names on SGG lists, and if other small groups are included then the totals are: 30 small groups, with 200 names.

Further developments for 2022 and beyond will include continued group leader meetings, developing study resources and the CSC website (do take a look at our new welcome video), and occasional CSC Study and Refreshment Days, where we will be looking at the rhythms of grace in conjunction with some biblical teaching.

**Women’s Groups Report Caroline Boardman**

The Women’s Groups continue to thrive despite the challenges of the past few years. As restrictions eased in May 2021, and as the weather warmed up, members of the groups were able to meet in person in gardens and on The Sands. Since the autumn groups have been able to meet most weeks as normal in the homes of group members on Thursday mornings.

Members of the Women’s Groups are mainly, but not exclusively, members of St Nic’s. We number about 25 women spread over three groups. Each group tends to follow its own programme in terms of study and reflection. However, all groups continue to pray for each other, our families, friends and neighbours, and the wider needs of the world. When certain members are unable to attend regularly, due to shielding, illness and recovery or work commitments, contact is maintained through phone calls and emails or messaging.

**Music and Worship Report Sam Rankin**

Sadly, this is my final ministry report as a member of staff at St Nic’s, written while my family prepares to leave Durham in early June for Hull where Jenny will begin her curacy. Happily, in the meantime, I can report the good health of the music & worship ministry!   
  
I have been so encouraged by the number and calibre of musicians who have volunteered since the disruptions of the pandemic. After a long time of solitary/remotely recorded worship, followed by a period of small-sized in-person music groups, this academic year has seen a great growth in the number of people who appear regularly on the rota.   
  
I am grateful to the worship leaders at the 9am service, a group who play regularly and faithfully in collaboration with service leaders (with very little need for my input!).   
  
The 11am service worship rota is running ideally, with four different bands each leading once per month. Each band is made up of largely different personnel, as is my preference, meaning a greater number of people are given the opportunity to serve whilst limiting the demands on any one volunteer. This is my preferred model for worship ministry, and one which I’d have looked to replicate at the 6.30pm service. Practice time has been tight on occasion before the 11am, as the bands currently rehearse directly before the service instead of a midweek rehearsal. This is a deliberate choice on my part, but one which worship leaders may wish to revaluate in future.

The 6.30pm worship rota has been overseen by Brittany Hurlbert on a volunteer basis for a number of months, at the suggestion of service leader Claire Elwood. Brittany is looking to step back from this responsibility after Easter; I am very grateful for her work and have had constructive discussions with Claire about ideas/key volunteers moving forwards. The hope is to move towards a regular four-week rota system such as that of the 11am service. Musically, the 6.30pm service continues to offer a more reflective, gently experimental space using a more contemporary repertoire.

In terms of the challenges faced by the music & worship ministry going forwards, I would say that there is a shortage of obvious worship ‘leaders’ - those with experience of leading rehearsals and congregational singing - despite the abundance of able, faithful musicians we have in our church family. This poses a problem for my departure, as I currently do a lot of leading. I would encourage the church to be keeping an eye out for potential new worship leaders, particularly in the new academic year, and I will be making plans with those currently in bands.   
  
I have many ministry highlights from the last year, such as our contemporary Christmas carols service and our hosting of the Racial Justice service broadcast by the BBC. However, the thing that gives me the most joy and satisfaction is the increasing number of young people serving in our worship bands, particularly in our all-age band on the first of each month. I believe that church music ought to be ‘family music’, and it’s wonderful to see this come to life through the talents of our young people and the readiness to mentor in our more experienced musicians. I hope that St Nic’s will continue to offer opportunities for musicians (young and old) to offer their musical ‘loaves and fishes’ to God’s glory.   
  
I would like to make a brief personal note to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed my time leading the music & worship ministry at St Nic’s. Before each service, I pray with my band that we would be able to lead with joy and lead our church family into encounter with God; I know that I have grown personally in my relationship with God and His church during this time, and I hope that my work has served to glorify Him and edify others. I have felt very well supported and appreciated by Arun and the rest of the staff team during my time in the role.  
  
Finally, I’d like to thank all of the tech volunteers who have done so much to make my time serving at St Nic’s such a complete joy. They are so diligent, friendly and faithful in their work, and should continue to be highly valued by all in our church.

**9am Music Group Chris Wagstaffe**

It has been a relief to be able to lead sung worship again in the church building. Now that the congregation can sing without masks, we can once more “make a joyful noise to the Lord”! The group has also led sung worship at the 11am service once a month. It has been a blessing to be involved in a great variety of musical styles, including traditional hymns, Taizé chants and contemporary songs.

During lockdown, the group met online on Friday evenings at the time we would normally have practised. This was very useful for sharing news and supporting individual members in prayer. We are continuing with these virtual meetings on an occasional basis, since they are a good way for members both past and present to keep in touch.

**Flower Team Report Rosemary Day/Judy Lowther**

We’re delighted to be able to report that the Flower Team is up and running again! We had some fears that the team would have dissipated during the enforced restrictions and be difficult to get together again, but to our joy, in spite of losing one or two members, others have joined, and we are nearly back to normal, and are now able to use fresh flowers again. However, because space for arrangements is now more limited and the cost of flowers has increased, we cannot do the usual larger displays to celebrate the festivals of Easter and Christmas as we used to.

We have recently been privileged to provide floral arrangements to celebrate our organist Simon Fleming’s wedding.

Just before Christmas, due to unforeseen circumstances, we had to cancel a planned Team lunch, but we hope to put this right after Easter when we can meet together in a more leisurely and informal way.

We are very grateful for an enthusiastic, willing team. It has been a huge privilege to serve God in this way.

**Treasurer's Report                                                                                    Elaine Duddy**

The biggest challenge for 2021 was to budget for the year with a high level of uncertainty as to whether restrictions relating to Covid would ease and whether life in the church and its associated ministries would be able to return to some kind of normality. Largely due to the success of an appeal over lent for one off gifts (“Gift Day”) we managed to achieve a surplus of £1,764. Gift Day raised funds of £33,227 and associated gift aid of £5,406. The challenge of meeting maintenance costs for the building in 2022 continues; particularly for work to the windows and the lights, but we continue to be blessed by all those who generously give their time, talents and financial gifts to ensure we can continue the amazing work that St Nics does. For a detailed financial review, please see the Financial Review section of the Trustees Annual Report for 2021. For details of how to give, please see the Giving Section on our website or hit the DONATE button on our website.

**Bells Report Rachel Sanderson**

The bell ringers at St Nicholas are a mixed group of church members and non-church goers, young and old, keeping the 300+ year old bells ringing and calling people to worship. After having an enforced break due to the global pandemic, since September 2021 regular ringing has restarted with a strong band. We are regularly able to ring all 6 bells before the Sunday morning service, occasional evening services, and our weekly Wednesday practice from 7.30 till 9 pm. We are particularly grateful for the help from ringers from other towers in Durham and beyond. Following an extra unplanned year of service due to the pandemic, Jess stepped down from her position as Master at our AGM in January, so Rachel Wells and Rachael Sanderson have taken over the role. We are very grateful for Jess's efforts over the last few years!  As ever, any group or individual would be more then welcome to visit us by arrangement, to find out more about what we do and why and have a go. Equally anyone who has rung in the past would be very welcome to give it another go! Please contact [nicsbells@gmail.com](mailto:nicsbells@gmail.com).