

ST JAMES' CHURCH

Brownhills



---

*Following Jesus*

---

APCM  
REPORTS  
2024

# CONTENTS

## Reports relating to St James' Ministry & Mission:

1.	Discipleship/Life Groups/Alpha.....	3
2.	Worship.....	6
3.	Social Events Team.....	6
4.	Pastoral Care.....	7
5.	Our Place of Welcome.....	8
6.	Sunday Club & Tribe.....	9
7.	Puppets' Ministry.....	9
8.	The Lamp Foodbank.....	10
9.	Charities & Missions that St James' supports.....	11
	<b>Deanery Synod Report.....</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>Treasurer's Report.....</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>Electoral Roll Officer's Report.....</b>	<b>13</b>
	<b>Safeguarding Report.....</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>Community &amp; Children's Worker's Report .....</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>Church Wardens' Report .....</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>Cards.....</b>	<b>21</b>
	<b>Vicar's Report.....</b>	<b>21</b>

# Reports relating to St James' Ministry & Mission

## 1. Discipleship/Life Groups

We have started an extra Life Group recently, so we now have 6 mid-week discipleship/Life Groups, meeting fortnightly (one at Tuesday tea-time, one on a Wednesday morning, one on a Wednesday evening and three on a Thursday evening).

The Tuesday Life Group is facilitated by Gayle and has 6 members who are each wholeheartedly grateful for the opportunity to discover more about the Lord and following Him through coming together. Having eaten tea together we go into prayer to start our reflection and discussions. We express our views and learn well from one another, and always conclude with each member having the opportunity to pray aloud. Gayle says: 'it's a real joy and privilege to see each member of the group's love for the Lord and their active desire to grow more into being Jesus Shaped People with each fortnight, going forward'.

Ann Lapworth, with support from Liz Corbett, facilitates a Wednesday morning group, which consists of ladies only. Ann says: 'The group has 7 members (having increased by one member) and as a whole been unified and truly blessed individually and corporately throughout the course work and also with social events, with birthday celebration lunches, again as a group as individuals and a group there has been a growth and bonding in friendships, relationships, and in supporting one another in prayer, help and support as required. This alongside a hunger and thirst for more of Jesus and the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives daily'.

The Wednesday' evening Life Group is facilitated by Pete and Sarah Biggs. During this past year they've had a change of members and still average 5 people per meeting. They've enjoyed the Jesus Shaped People programme and are looking forward to seeing what the 12 Spiritual Disciplines will teach them in the coming year.

The Thursday evening Life Group (8 members) that Liz facilitates has met fortnightly in each other's homes to study the Bible, pray together and enjoy each other's company. They too have followed the Jesus Shaped people programme and more recently the Celebration of Discipline studies, learning more about Jesus and hopefully growing closer to God.

As regards the other long-standing Thursday evening Life Group (7 members) , that's met with Gayle facilitating them for the last 3.5 years, they have recently undertaken a big change. Since Easter Joy P and Angela C have been alternating facilitating their fortnightly meetings. Joy and Angela have been growing as a result of this experience and their key goal going forward is to consistently encourage that passion and fervour for the Lord and for His Kingdom within the hearts of every member as they meet (through continued building one another up in conversation and through praying for one another, with an outlook of lifting high the Lord as they meet).

Last but by no means least of course, we have a new Thursday evening Life Group that has started at Easter time. Gayle has been meeting with 3 ladies aged 25 – 38 since just before Easter. We're following the same material as the other Life Groups, about the Spiritual Tools, and aiming to apply their truths to our lives with God 24-7. We are looking forward to getting to know one another more as we carry on meeting and also take the

opportunity to enjoy each other's company socially, placing God at the centre always. If you would like to know more about our discipleship/Life Groups, please talk to any of us who are facilitating.

*Liz Corbett, Ann Lapworth, Pete Biggs, Sarah Biggs, Joy Powell, Angela Cooper & Gayle Greenway*

## **The Alpha Course**

I'm so thankful, as I know everyone is who has travelled through Alpha since I arrived here in July 2020, for the servant-heartedness of Roger Corbett. Roger faithfully assisted me and co-led by helping practically with Alpha – setting out tables, chairs and plates for the meals, and chairs for the discussion time. He also shared so freely and yet so gently about his faith journey with inquirers on the course every time, being so patient and humble whilst sharing his real experiences. Roger completed 6 Alphas with me, with his last one finishing before Christmas just gone.

This year, for the Spring Term, Andy Stokes and Rachael Doyle have alternated assisting and co-leading the Alpha course with me. This time around we had only one person on the course. This gave Andy and Rachael the chance to explore their gift of being able to nurture others in a less pressured way. Throughout the course they demonstrated sensitivity and humility, and a true reliance on the Spirit to guide them in how to listen and how to respond. This way of being continued when it came to the Holy Spirit Day, when more members of church came to join in. I'm extremely encouraged by Andy and Rachael's growth and want to encourage all of our prayers for their continued service of the Lord in this area of discipleship.

*Gayle Greenway*

## **2. Worship**

“Praise the Lord, all nations! Praise him, all peoples! His love for us is strong, and his faithfulness is eternal. Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 117).

Worship is of immeasurable importance, for God is worthy of all our praise and adoration. Psalm 117 proclaims that each and every one of us is called to praise Him, yet how does this relate in real terms within the sphere of sung worship at St James?

The worship is varied and wide ranging and it aims to praise and worship God to the utmost and to enable a diverse congregation to do this. This is directed by the worship leader and additional musicians. Heart of Worship (HoW) offer an invaluable lead at a variety of services and is constant in number yet could do with more members, so if it's something you would be interested in, please see Pete. The musician rehearsal on Mondays still meet and is brilliantly led by Gareth. These musicians are utilised in ameliorating the current musical provision by adding colour, texture and emphasis to worship times. My prayer for this coming year is that the sung worship will usher people into a real sense of meeting with God, guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us praise, magnify and worship our great and awesome God!

*Pete Biggs, St James' Worship Co-ordinator*

## **3. Social Events Team**

Our Fundraising Committee has been buzzing with activity over the past year, all in support of raising money for the church roof. From a Quiz and Pud night to an evening with two of the best-known referees in football, a Beetle drive, a Car Wash, and Boot Sales, our community has rallied together, raising a substantial sum for the much-needed church roof (getting on for £12,000). We greatly appreciate all the work put in by Dennis P, Ann W, Brenda T, Linda G, and Michael G to organise these events.

But our efforts don't stop there. As we transition into the newly formed Social Events Team and back towards raising funds to support the Lamp Food Bank and Place of Welcome, exciting events are on the horizon, including a church family BBQ, the first of the two-yearly men's and women's socials happening in the coming weeks, and a day trip to Llandudno, plus many more events planned in the church calendar. These gatherings serve more than just entertainment; they embody our core aims as a group: 1 = To support everyone in getting to know each other in the church family and wider local community better. 2 = To share Jesus in an easy-going way (not forced) in conversation when we are with people who haven't received Him for themselves yet. 3 = To raise people's self-esteem by showing them they are all noticed, called by name, and loved (an important part of our mission statement): 'Called by name & empowered by the Holy Spirit to share God's love with words and actions.

. *Andy Stokes, Vic Whitehouse and Natalie Trawally.*

#### **4. Pastoral Care**

Over the past year we've changed from meeting on Saturday mornings in church on a bi-monthly basis to meeting on Monday evenings bi-monthly at the Vicarage. We take time to eat first, before going through the church directory to notice anyone who we need to re-connect with, or reach out to, offering them a pastoral visit or a listening ear on the phone. We also share about anyone we are already in regular contact with, through visits and phone calls. After that Gayle always shares something with us to support our pastoral care knowledge – either something from an important topic like mental health or ageing, or something that is high profile in church news and links in with pastoral care.

On a weekly basis we also catch up with anyone who may need a phone call/visit. Notice sheets, magazines etc are still delivered regularly to those unable to attend long-term and who do not have internet access. Home communion is offered by Gayle and other members of the Pastoral Team when necessary. The Pastoral Team WhatsApp Group is essential, too, for keeping us all up to date with people's prayer and practical needs. We're here primarily for those who aren't linked in with a Life Group, to help ensure that people all know that they belong within the church family.

*Joy Powell & Gayle Greenway*

## **5. Our Place of Welcome**

Meets every Tuesday from 10am. Our visitors turn up very regularly and receive a warm welcome, hot drink, plenty of opportunities to chat and put the world to rights or spend quiet time in church. Our small team usually welcome fifteen plus people a week. The knitting and crotchet group goes from strength to strength making items for premature babies and other charities and they also raised a considerable amount of money for the roof by selling blankets and other knitted items. We always have a special morning on pancake day with pancakes available for all and aim to have other special mornings throughout the year. It would be good if we could increase the volunteer team membership: even if you can make once a month it would be really helpful. Let us know if you'd like to join us in volunteering.

*Joy & Den Powell*



## **6. Sunday Club & Tribe**

Sunday Club (for Primary school children) and Tribe (for Secondary school children) groups continue to meet on Sundays but, as far as is able, they meet as separate groups now as the number of children and young people attending has increased. The children and young people have been given their own personal prayer books to write in their prayer requests and the LORD's answers. The resources used for each group continue to be in line with the general services' resources. At present the spiritual disciplines or 'tools' are being taught.

The Childrens and Youth Ministry team are continuing to look for volunteers who would be willing to be a part of the ministry either working alongside leaders or becoming leaders themselves. The team, at present, is very short of volunteers. Together with the ministry on Sundays, a range of other holiday activities continue to be offered throughout the year. These include: a week at a camping conference, an alternative to Halloween event (Light Party), Cookies with Santa, Pancake party, Easter party, Fun Days, Food and Film nights, Lunch and Games at Chase Water.

We continue to take the care of each child and young person very seriously and endeavour to develop good practise within our ministry.

*Carol Glass and Mel Pearce*

## **7. Puppets' Ministry**

The All 4 Jesus Puppet Group continues to meet on a Monday in the Church hall until September when it will transfer back to meeting on a Wednesday. The team at present consists of Carol, Gareth, Mel, Lily,

Mariama and Alfie. Once again, the puppet team have participated in four to five All Age Worship Services on the first Sunday of the month together with the Christmas Eve Service. The young people's skills within our team have grown substantially in the last few months incorporating the use of musical instruments. Well done everyone!

Gareth and I received some sad news, however, recently. Our puppet ministry has grown over the years with the help and advice from OneWayUK - a major puppet and creative ministry organisation. Two members of the organisation attended St James in 2022 to perform an Eddie The Donkey show which was enjoyed by all who attended. David Jones was one of them. He was the driving force and the main person behind OneWayUK and a lovely gentleman. Sadly, we were informed of his sudden death on Wednesday, 24th April and our thoughts and prayers are with his parents, family and the organisation itself. Thank you David for all your huge contribution to the world of puppetry and to spreading the message of Christ through them.

*Carol Glass*

## **8. The Lamp Foodbank**

We've recently moved to our very own permanent premises. We have been praying for this. God went above and beyond. It's perfect for us. Each week the Foodbank helps our local community, not only with food and toiletries but also with advice/support. Our aim is to create a safe environment for people to come and ask for help. We couldn't run the Lamp Foodbank without our amazing volunteers giving up their time and energy. It doesn't go unnoticed and is very appreciated. Helping one person might not change the world, but it could change the world for one person.

*Mel Pearce*

## 9. Charities & Missions that St James' supports

Following 2022's APCM, the PCC decided that this area needed to be reviewed and updated. Gayle had put forward the idea of forming charity partnerships, so that over time we could get more involved and aware of the work of the charities and their potential interaction with God's vision for us at St James' and for Brownhills and Clayhanger.

With this in mind Gayle suggested that we reduce the recipients in order to make a more significant donation and also to concentrate on three areas: local, national and international.

There were a number of discussions around this and which charities to partner with, and the decision was finally made for the following charities to receive our financial donations: -

Local – Love Black Country and Love Walsall

National – Christians Against Poverty

International – To be confirmed as our PCC meets on 20<sup>th</sup> May.

These 3 charities will receive £1200.00 each a year, as 2 out of the 3 have this past year. The next steps for our charity partnerships are for us to establish an International Charity Partnership, and see how we can build on all 3 of these partnerships in respect of our practical involvement with them in the coming year.

*Ann Wilkins*

---

## Deanery Synod Report

The Synod has completed the first year of its triennial. There have been four meetings of the Synod since the last APCM. The first was in June 2023. The main item was a presentation by Ms. Helen Robertson the Head of St Michael's CofE Primary School in Lichfield. She spoke on

upholding the religious nature of schools. The second was in September 2023. Rev'd Dr Abbie Walsh posed two questions on behalf of the Archdeacon. First; what is the vocation of the church? Secondly, is your church flourishing. The third was a zoom meeting in November 2023. It was entitled "Getting to know Bishop Jonathan Clark". The fourth meeting was in February 2024. The main item was an interview with the new Diocesan Chancellor Anthony Verduyn. He outlined his biography, and he answered some questions

The Secretary of the Synod has prepared a quite detailed report of the meetings of the Synod; copies are available on request. The next Synod will be on 20 June 2024 at St Chad's Church at 7:30pm. All Synods are open meetings. The main item will be a presentation by Rev'd Simon Foster from the Diocesan Mission Department.

*Roger Corbett*

### **Treasurer's Report**

Accounts have been circulated and are also available as a hard copy at the back of the church. Looking at the current account on the income side, you will see that giving by cash and envelope are down as you would expect but worryingly giving by Standing Order is also down. Donations of course are up mostly this would be accounted for by money given towards the roof repair. Fees and investment interest remain about the same. Under expenditure, the Parish Share remains the same but is due to go up again next year. The upkeep and utilities costs have risen by £6000 this was particularly noted by the auditors.

The Restricted account is much higher than last year. Apart from the roof donations we also received into this account individual donations for the Need fund and Outreach.

Barnetts Lane One expenses are up on maintenance and charges from Walsall MBC for rubbish removal. Barnetts Lane Two account, Lichfield Road and CCLA show little movement.

As agreed by the Auditors our accounts are in a reasonably healthy position. I would make two observations: a) We need to increase our regular giving and b) We need to cut back on wasteful expenditure in particular with reference to using gas and electricity unnecessarily.

As you will see our finance year end is 31st December but I cannot let this report go without mention of the money for the roof replacement. When the Church Council first saw the quotation for the roof last August we thought we had a mountain to climb but in only seven months we have raised the money required, through good stewardship we have juggled accounts, sold our share of a property and raised a significant amount by our fundraising events. The grant from Enover of £26,000 was an added bonus as we do not now need to use quite so much of our own money for the re-roofing. God is so obviously with us in the work we are doing in the Brownhills community! We need to continue to be good stewards of all that he has provided. I will always be happy to answer any questions you may have.

*Joy Powell, Treasurer to St James' PCC*

## **Electoral Roll Officer's Report**

During this revision, we have had no additions and 1 deletion.

This means that the total on the Electoral Roll for 2024 will fall from 92 to 91. 66% of those on the Electoral Roll live inside the Parish and 34% live outside the Parish. At the next PCC meeting, on 20<sup>th</sup> May, there will be 3 additions to the roll to be made.

*Sarah Biggs, St James' Electoral Role Officer*

## **Safeguarding Report**

There have been no reportable issues in the past 12 months. Very discreet advice/ guidance/support is provided to those in need of it by Gayle and others within the Church Leadership. This is available not just to members of the church family but also to others who have passing contact with the Church family

The safeguarding administrative obligations on members of the church family and those who participate in associated work including the Food Bank and Open the Book are very effectively monitored by Carol Glass. This includes ensuring that the necessary training is undertaken, and where necessary DBS clearance is obtained.

*Roger Corbett*

## **Community & Children's Worker's Report**

When I look back at the past year, I smile! God is so good! I feel very blessed to have a job I love! I feel honoured to be part of his plan...

Open the book- we have an awesome team who go into our local schools for 'open the book'. The aim is to equip people to share Bible stories with children in an accessible and enjoyable way, for those of all faiths and none. To tell the Bible stories in ways that enable children to engage and understand. I don't know who enjoys it more the children or the team.

Young people events - we have been blessed to be able to hold lots of fun events in church to share the good news. In all the events we run, our aim is to speak life into our young people. We have held Easter, pancake party, movie nights, cookies with

Santa, light party. The children were engaged and had lots of fun while learning more about faith.

Schools - as a church we are very blessed to have such a good working relationship with our local schools. Through the year I have been in to the schools to do craft club and reading club with the children. We have been looking and learning about Bible stories. I have the honour to carry on being a Governor in Brownhills West School.

Glimmer of Hope - this is our fourth year of providing glimmer of hope hampers and the number of families has increased year on year. There were 60 families nominated this year with a combined total of 98 adults and 167 children. In each hamper consisted of the following items.. bottle of shloer, fox's biscuits, mince pies, sponge pudding, drinking chocolate, marshmallows, diary milk or bag of heroes, selection box's and a wrapped gift for each child at the value of £10. Glimmer of hope is to share hope in a difficult time, to bless our local families and to lessen the financial burden on families and to ensure that children have atleast something to open on Christmas morning:

Limitless - we took some of our families to experience Limitless festival. It was 5 days of doing life together, experiencing community, connection and change. Through the 5 days we did sports activities, seminars, workshops, worshiped our amazing god. It was so nice to spend time with some of our church family! I pray that our young people and families faith will grow and strengthen.

Sunday club and tribe - what a year! We are growing by numbers, praise God. We were all struggling to fit into the Tribe room, so we thought it was the perfect opportunity to separate back into Sunday Club and Tribe groups. This will benefit all our young people as friendship can strengthen, teachings can be catered for, for accurate age-appropriate Bible teaching. We also do the same subjects as our main congregation; this is so families can go home and discuss what they have learnt and it to be a great way to start discussions. We have a regular leaders' meeting with Gayle. I am so grateful to lead with amazing leaders who serve our young people so well.

*Mel Pearce*

## **Churchwardens' Report**

**The house our PCC own (50 Lichfield Road):** The letting agents Paul Carr Lettings have been taken over by John Shepherd, a large organisation with offices all over the Country but with an office in Mere Green in Sutton Coldfield. We were not consulted by either Paul Carr or John Shepherd, which we should have been. Even though both we and our tenant did not become aware of the takeover until after it had taken place it was decided not to appoint another agency. That position is under constant review. This will not be an inexpensive process. The tenant who has been in occupation for around 15 years is up to date with the rent. Under the procedures of John Shepherd, the rent will be increased automatically every January. There have been a few repair and maintenance issues which have been dealt with. The tenant is aware that in the future few years, when we will require the house for training a Curate, that he will need to find a new home.



**Barnetts Lane Cemetery:** We no longer have the support of the “volunteer team” This was due to circumstances outside our control. This means that the cemetery gates are not locked, and the cemetery is not as tidy as it was when the volunteers were involved. There are several issues which will have to be addressed over the next few years

The driveway has an increasing number of potholes. Some are already large and are deep enough to cause damage to vehicles using the driveway. The PCC is liable under the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 for damage caused to vehicles and/or visitors. There have been several complaints by neighbours who allege that their properties have been damaged by the trees in the cemetery either by storm damaged trees falling or by trees overhanging their boundaries. There is indeed some damage caused by storm damaged trees and/or overhanging trees

A quote has been obtained from Penkridge Arboriculture to undertake the appropriate remedial work. This will be considered by the PCC at its meeting on 21 May. There has been some cutting back of trees about which the Church knows nothing. The brown bins which were obtained for the Church by the volunteers have not been emptied for some time. As a result, there are substantial amounts of dumped cemetery items which must be removed. These are too heavy to be removed into the skip. It is highly likely that comparable items will need to be removed in the future. In the short term the dumped items will need to be removed in a one off hired skip (or two skips). There are two or three plots on one row in the cemetery where there appears to be no formal memorials. One has one flat concrete slab and the one next to it has two concrete slabs. Both are below the level of the surrounding areas and so are dangerous. The third (if there is a “third) has nothing on it but it has sunk. Discussions are underway with the Diocese on how the risk can be reduced

**Cremated Remains Area:** This is now full. There is one memorial adjacent to the Cremated Remains Area which has the potential to be dangerous. It is falling apart. It has security tape around it. It is about 150 years old. The memorial is box shaped. The memorial is weather beaten and so it is not possible to identify who is buried there and so work out how many people are buried therein. Formal permission will be required from the Chancellor to undertake the necessary remedial work. This may be removing the memorial or repairing it. Advice has been sought from the Registry. The Registrar personally made contact by telephone. His unequivocal advice was that the memorial should be taped off until there is more damage. Before a final decision can be made by the Chancellor, he will need to know how many bodies there are in the tomb, and he will need to know whether they are buried underground or simply laid on the surface. It may be that we will have to repair the tomb rather than remove it. If the bodies were buried, removal may be possible. If they were merely laid on the surface, then it is possible that there may have to be at least one exhumation application. The grass area around the Cremated Remains plots is regularly cut

**Great Charles Street Cemetery:** This cemetery is legally closed. The management of the site has been transferred to Walsall Council. Some of the trees have been cut back. The PCC remains responsible for the management of the plots.

**The area for the proposed “school garden”:** Enquiries have been made of the Diocesan Archivist to see if this area has been legally closed by Order in Council. The Diocesan Archivist has checked all the relevant records; the area has not been legally closed. It remains “consecrated churchyard land”. As it remains “consecrated churchyard land” the advice of the Diocesan Advisory Committee is being obtained. Because

the site is a cemetery great care must be taken to ensure that there is no disturbance of any graves.

**The future:** There are some matters which will need attention in the coming months/years. It may be useful formally to appoint a sub-committee which can manage matters in relation to Barnetts Lane and to the supervision of the cemetery in Great Charles Street and the Cremated Remains Area.

The Church Hall: In general terms the Hall is in good condition. There is a need for some repairs to the ceiling. The heating system is serviced annually by Ross Darby. His latest report confirms that there are no defects in the system. There is one heater in the hall which is broken and has been for a few years. The cost of repairing or replacing it is very high. As the two other heaters are more than adequate, there is no need to repair/replace the broken heater. Mr. Darby repeated his advice that a smoke alarm should be installed. The alarm itself is very inexpensive. The cost of the installation is very high because of the height of the ceiling. If repairs to the ceiling are carried out, then an alarm can be installed. The hall has far too much stored in it. The need is for a vigorous decluttering which is underway and a skip is being ordered for early June. The bin outside the Hall which is for the Church and the Hall is locked. This is to deter our Neighbours from dumping in it their rubbish which cannot be put into a domestic bin. The proposal to use the side of the Hall as an allotment is an excellent use of the land to the side of the Hall. Details of access to the allotment are yet to be agreed.

**Quinquennial Inspection:** The last inspection was carried out on 19 September 2019 by Andrew Capper of Wood Goldstraw Yorath LLP. Mr. Capper has left WGS. His place has been taken by Simon Smith of the same firm. We have had some dealings with him

The 2019 Inspection Report contained a small number of recommendations for repairs which have been carried out.

**Archdeacon's visitation:** The visitation for the Lichfield Deanery has been fixed for Thursday 13 June 2024 at St Michael's Church in Lichfield

**Fabric Report:** At some point we can expect to have our assets "audited" by or on behalf of the Archdeacon. This has not happened for some years. There has been a long-standing silence over who owns what in Holy Trinity. At one stage the PCC claimed ownership of the chairs in the school hall, the hymn books, the furniture in the hall. It is essential that the ownership of these items be clarified. The major item has been the work on the church roof. It is almost one year since a piece of roof slate fell and struck a lady walking by. Immediately thereafter work started to make the site safe. On 11 October 2023, the Deputy Chancellor granted a Faculty to permit the replacement of the roof. The Faculty has conditions inter alia. The work must be completed within 12 months of 11 October 2023 although this may be extended. The contractors must have appropriate public liability insurance. The materials to be used must be of an approved quality. Fitting of the materials must be undertaken in accordance with the prescribed conditions. The pathway to the north side of the church building is not a "public footpath" and so it has not been necessary to obtain formal permission to close the footpath. The barriers erected by the church have been ignored more than they have been respected. The barriers will have to be reinforced before the work starts. A contract has been entered into with Mercia Design and Build Ltd of Castle Vale Birmingham. The work will start on 3 June 2024 with the contractors moving on site and on 10 June the work itself will start. Weather permitting the work should be completed within four months.

The work being undertaken will not impinge on the use of the church building. The funds to cover the cost of the works are in place, for which to the Lord and all His workers here we are extremely grateful.

*Roger Corbett & Margaret Powell*

## **Cards**

I am the Birthdays Administrator and to date, 81 birthdays have been marked on my calendar. It is a tremendous privilege to help our church family to realise that their birthday is known and remembered and to be able to see them blessed by receiving a beautiful card made by Margaret Powell. I am passionate about every person knowing that they have not been forgotten in the hustle and bustle of life. If anyone in church has a birthday which is not marked on my calendar and they want to be remembered, please let me know.

*Angela Cooper*

Margaret adds: 'we are sending more birthday cards out at St James', it's a true blessing because we are getting more people at Church. Also, people still appreciate the memorial cards, which lets them know we are there for prayer and support at the special service for their loved ones.

Angela Cooper and Margaret Powell

## **Vicar's Report**

Dear church family,

In 2 Corinthians 3: 17 it says: 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom'. Since starting to serve you as Vicar in July 2020 this has been a verse that has been key within my prayers for us all. I've prayed that

as we've set our hearts on loving God and loving others, and on reaching out to share His message of forgiveness, love and freedom, that we'd each become freer in Jesus' Name. As I reflect on the past year, I rejoice that our freedom in the Lord has increased again, with the result that we've seen new people come to a living relationship with the Lord again and some of our members taking risks to have a go at things that they hadn't done before.

Celebrating our **worshipping life together**, I'm so thankful for the sense of expectation to meet with the Lord that's been evident in our Sunday and one-off midweek services. Led by Pete, our Worship Co-ordinator and Gareth, it has been wonderful to see more musicians starting to play a part in enhancing our worship services. Moreover, there have been wonderful true-life stories of faith and testimony shared in church, including some from people who've started a relationship with God through Jesus over the past year and have committed through Baptism or Renewal of Baptism in immersion.

My prayer for this coming year around our gathered worship times is that we'll see our existing members more so nurtured and empowered, as well as new people who the Lord would draw to Himself through us go forward into a living relationship with Him. What a joy it will be to celebrate their commitments, too, whether through Baptism or Confirmation. In addition, I pray that even more of us will take the risk of sharing words that we sense are from the Lord as we come together, and to pray aloud when space and time is given over to this during our services, as the Spirit leads. The truth really is that God has given us all a voice to praise Him and express ourselves to Him, and we can't overestimate the influence that this can have to encourage others, too, as we gather.

Reflecting on our ***discipleship and learning together***, it's been a real privilege to travel through *Jesus Shaped People*, focussing on Jesus' main priorities of teaching, having compassion for people, sharing prophetic words, building teams well, and of prayer. Our January vision and evaluation day was evidence of how well the programme reached all-ages through Sundays and our mid-week Life Groups, as we had representation of all-ages on the day, who shared brilliant ideas for going forward. Included in these ideas were having a 'Youth Council' and 'Youth Worship Band', which we look forward to exploring in the coming year.

Additionally, and also out of JSP, has come my inspiration for us to travel through the programme of learning called 'The Spiritual Tools/Disciplines'. We identified through JSP that prayer and the prophetic were key areas for us to invest time and effort in, and as we grow in the spiritual tools/disciplines, I am confident in God that we'll become increasingly free to pray and to hear the Lord's words back to us for ourselves and for one another.

Next, we have loads to celebrate about how we've seen ***all-ages coming together*** as well! From Sundays to our day out at Himley Hall last July with *Love Black Country*, and *Limitless* in August there has been so much that has brought us together in Jesus' Name. It's been great to see some of our newer members and their families getting to know some of the more mature Christians within our fellowship and enjoy being nurtured by them. As we look towards a new church year, with our newly formed social team, in Andy, Vic and Natalie, I know we have servant-hearted leaders who will do their best to serve in making sure regular events happen to give us space to get to know each other more deeply whilst having fun and keeping God front and centre.

Week in and week out our children's leaders too – Mel, Sue, Gareth and Carol – have planned fun and learning opportunities at the church hall, with support on occasions from Sam and Alan S. I know we're all extremely grateful for their commitment. Joy P recently concluded her time serving as a youth leader, having been involved with child and youth ministry since she was in her teens herself. We pray for her as she's open to what the Lord has next for her in service of Him among us. Hence a real need we have as a church is for more children's and youth leaders at St James'. Please can I ask that we all commit to praying each week that God would send us people who, having come to know Him for themselves, will receive a sense of call to serve children and young people as leaders?

Last, we can look back over the past year with deep gratitude in our hearts when we think of the various ways in which we have ***reached out to touch our wider local communities of Brownhills and Clayhanger***. Last May, our Coronation Community Fun Day showed lots of people our heart to provide free, good quality events to bless and enrich their lives. After that we set our minds as a PCC to addressing the need to get the church roof fully replaced, in response to the accident that happened around that time involving a falling tile. I'm so thankful that our PCC worked together efficiently, along with the Fundraising Committee led by Dennis P, so that we could obtain permission for the roof replacement and be able to gather the funds together. The wider local community's response to the brilliant fundraising ideas has been extremely encouraging, too, for which we are truly grateful.

Now, as we return to free/non-profit community events, we do so with a range of opportunities to interact with our wider context. From our



Community Fun Days to our Wreath-Making event, our Film Nights to Beer and Carols at the Pub, there will be something for everyone, and within it all our goal is to share the Lord Jesus and the amazing difference He makes. So, for example, when someone tells us about their struggles with anxiety or depression at an event, we can offer to pray with them, there and then, or ask one of our leaders to come over and talk and pray with them. May we be a church family that always seizes the given opportunities to help people realise that they are known, seen and loved by God.

Reflecting on outreach, I also want to acknowledge the Life Exhibition. This event that happened last month and over 5 days saw over 600 children, young people and adults learning about Jesus. I want to ask us all to keep in our prayer times the impact of the multimedia exhibition, and to especially be praying for the Lord's blessings to continue to be poured out on each person, from the youngest to the eldest who engaged during the week.

As we look towards this new church year of 2024-2025, let's remember that in Jesus we have EVERYTHING that we need to address the above aims. Let's remember the important principle as well, that what matters MOST is OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD and our RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH ONE ANOTHER AND ANYONE NEW WHO GOD WOULD DRAW TO US. It isn't about getting lost in doing loads of tasks, but instead it's about dwelling in Him and how what we do together is building something that will last far into the future.

With love, prayers and every blessing in Jesus,

Rev'd Gayle