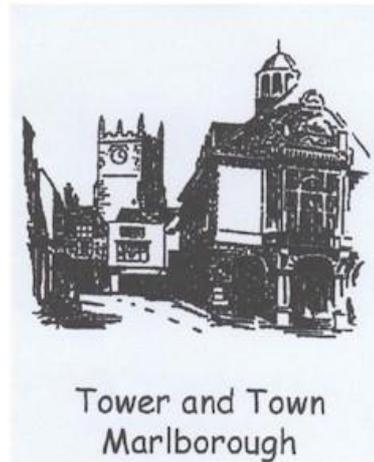


Marlborough Churches Together



devotion
youth project

Annual Report 2022

Chairman's Report 2021

2021 was a challenging year for MCT as the pandemic dominated. The year began with the hopes of the vaccine rollout yet still ended with an Omicron surge. As religious groups our fellowship, communion, finances and outreach were all diminished. Who knew how much we would miss such simple things as after service coffee and being able to sing? In 2020 there seemed to be some excitement about lockdowns but this evaporated in 2021. While lives were saved the cost began to become clearer: increased loneliness, drinking, and gambling. Missed treatments, exams and holidays. And great frustration at plans being continually blown of course. For the country that hoped to take back control we now seemed completely out of control.

On the plus side MCT members made magnificent efforts to keep the faith show rolling. In Lent we organised a course looking at Faith in the Arts, which was attended by more than 100 people. Love Marlborough Kids Meals continued to deliver hot, nutritious food to the town's most needy families. The ministers became zoom Jedi and much worship occurred online. We learnt to stream and now breezily talk of mixed media worship. Who would have imagined all this in 2019? All the little gatherings online of 10 or 20 people did much to keep us going through dark times.

According to Christianity Today 38% of ministers considered quitting in 2021. The pressures have been intense. How can groups be led when some think Covid is a cold, yet others have run for the hills? Very little appreciation has gone to ministers as key workers - yet they visited people on covid wards and took funerals all through the pandemic. While technology is a great blessing it has been exhausting to use and so little feedback comes through the computer. Congregations have been cranky because they have been locked up again, but ministers are often the punchbag for their frustration. The fraternal has been a great source of support for ministers but they do need our love, prayers and support. Be a blessing to your minister!

One person who sadly left us in 2021 was Laura Willis. She served as the Administrator of the Marlborough Anglican Team for 14 years. Her role was very much behind the scenes but only in leaving did we all find out how much she did for churches across the town. We pray for a blessed retirement for her and Paul.

As we look to 2022 may God give us the end of the pandemic. The Bishop of London has said she feels after the pandemic ends it will take the churches two years to recover. May God keep us safe and help us through this process. And may somehow much good fruit be borne from a difficult time.

Rev Chris Smith, January 2022

Treasurer's report **Calendar Year 2021**

Over the period 1st January 2021 – 31st December 2021 there have been no transactions on the account. A current bank statement is attached. As of today, the MCT has a cash balance of **£2,788.48** in its account.

Dr Martin Hamer
MCT Treasurer

Mustard Seed 2021

As for us all, 2021 started in lockdown and we were able to open around Easter. In order to be sustainable staff wise, we chose to open Monday – Friday 10-3pm (we did open for 6 Saturdays before Christmas). An added challenge was that our coffeeshop manager was off for 6 months having medical treatment: staff and volunteers have been great at helping wherever possible. We have always been encouraged by the appreciation we get from so many of our customers; clearly Mustard Seed is a place where people find rest, restoration and refuge.

We have hosted two zoom author events which were appreciated; the Mustard Seed book group has reconvened and met several times – the earlier time of 4-5pm has suited most. We ran a bookstall for Pewsey Deanery who had an evening launching **Reflections for Daily Prayer** as Colin Heber-Percy is a contributor. We provided Bibles to 6 local primary schools and continue to supply our local churches.

Mustard Seed is seen as a Christian presence in the Town where particularly the lonely, those at one of the vulnerable stages in life, find something of the presence of God. That is our purpose and we appreciate the help we are given in practical ways and by prayer.

Rachel Maurice

Marlborough Area Poverty Action Group 2021

The charities objects are to The Prevention and Relief if poverty for the public benefit in our area. To be achieved by providing information, raising awareness and provision of funds for services such as holiday activities and anything else at the discretion of the Trustees. We continue to work with this in mind.

This year has not been easy due to Covid restrictions and a reduction on activities available for the families we link with, particularly Activate.

However we have continues to be active by holding zoom meetings with our Trustees, and Open Meetings for a larger group who have found the contacts made useful in networking, in particular, Kids Meals, Community Fridge, and the Foodbank.

Our Facebook page has been kept active which has enabled us to support struggling families and individual requests for help.

We organised a successful summer outing to Marwell Zoo with 38 adults and children.

Again we had a good response for the Christmas Hamper appeal and with the help of Waitrose were able to supply 43 hampers to families identified by Kids Meals, St. Mary's Marlborough Primary, Preshute, and the Foodbank. They were hugely appreciated.

We were particularly grateful to Bill Colson for organising a funding event in Hilliers Yard just before Christmas.

Rachel Rosedale

Tower and Town Annual Report

Circulation

Circulation is shifting steadily towards online reading, although there is still a big majority reading the paper copy. Payment of subscriptions is following a similar path.

Finances

Peter Astle, the Treasurer, reports that finances are in a healthy state, with more than a year's costs as a buffer. Advertising for 2022 continues very healthy with a slight increase on 2021, thanks to advertising manager Chris Rogers.

Staff

For 2022 we are looking forward to editions focused on Marlborough Open Studios in July, ARK in October and St Mary's Marlborough Primary School in December.

Debby Guest and Gabriella Venus from The White Horse Bookshop continue to contribute a monthly column each. Robin Nelson's Nature Notes has attracted the attention of the Purton magazine where it is being republished by permission of Tower and Town.

General

The decision was taken at the start of the pandemic to continue with production as normal. Our splendid band of distributors declared stoutly that they would continue covering their rounds and as a result we haven't missed a beat. All credit to Sue Tulloh and her team.

Many thanks also to the Clergy team, who continue their faithful support and contributions.

Hugh de Saram

Chairman

Marlborough Food Bank Distribution Point 2021

We have continued this year with a delivery service only as restrictions due to Covid have meant that this was the safest and most efficient way of helping our clients. Assessing the need for more Food boxes, advice and referral on to other Agencies are often done on the doorstep or maybe discussed by phone. Citizens Advice are particularly helpful although, due to high demand, can at times be frustratingly difficult to access.

Referrals continue to come mainly through the Devizes Foodbank but others have come directly from Care co-ordinators attached to surgeries and some via Kids Meals.

Numbers fluctuated over the summer months but as in previous years the demand has increased in the Autumn with the period around Christmas being particularly busy with 9 referrals a week. There is no doubt that the loss of the extra £20 a week to those on Universal Credit that had been given during the height of the Covid epidemic has been sorely missed. Low income, loss of jobs and debt are the main reason for referral.

We have been well supported by volunteers who help with collecting boxes from the Foodstore in Devizes and delivering of Food boxes locally and to villages as far afield as Shalbourne, Baydon and Alton Barnes.

Christchurch continue to be very helpful for their church to be used for storage of boxes.

This time last year I had hoped that by the Autumn we would have returned to a more personalised service by having a collection point at Christchurch on a Friday morning. It is however inadvisable while the Omicron variant is so easily transmissible but other factors too such as the cost of fuel and public transport from the villages needs to be considered.

Ann Yates

Co- Ordinator

Communications Group (Comms) 2021

This small group which has representatives of the faith groups of this town has met informally, but regularly, for many years now. Our main role is to put together the copy for "News from the Churches" pages for Tower & Town magazine and then send it to the compiler. It involves keeping in touch with a range of things going on, secular ecclesiastical and religious and trying to maintain an ecumenical perspective on them.

Following lockdown like everyone else, we are weary and after 15 years of compiling, the group needs some new input. The information mainly comes now from the various church administrators who all have their own web sites/newsletters so there is duplication going on, and the information can seem very biased towards the Anglicans & Emmanuel. It is difficult to get dates, in the time scale needed for publication, to be relevant.

The group has met in the day time up to now – but maybe we need to consider meeting in an evening to encourage members from the other denominations/faith groups. Otherwise this group may fold and the News from the Churches page will be an administrative exercise.

Alison Selby

St Non's Retreat 2021

The latest and possibly the last retreat at this lovely cliff-top centre near St David's in Pembrokeshire was beautifully led by Lynn Busfield when we considered the spiritual input of the senses. We had good weather for fine walks along the cliffs, a slow meditation walk and communion on the last day, and a wonderful sung evensong in St David's Cathedral. I think it was enjoyed and appreciated by all who went and we thank Lynne for her gentle and assured leadership.

Since then we learnt that the centre is not taking bookings in 2022, and later that the three nuns who have run it for many years and have become good friends are to leave soon to join other communities. The building is owned by a Catholic monastic group, and their plans for it have not been made public. It may be that we will not be able to go to this ideal place again.

Since 2001, some 19 ecumenical retreats have given much spiritual refreshment to many Marlborough folk, and it will be sadly missed by many. I hope it will be possible to find an alternative source for this valuable experience.

Barney Rosedale

Love Marlborough Kids Meals 2021

Throughout the lockdowns and afterwards in 2020-21, we delivered around 60 hot family meals each week to families and children who were struggling.

We still continue to feed around 12 families each week. We now provide a roast dinner on Fridays and also send eggs, bread and a bag of store cupboard ingredients and recipe suggestion for another meal during the week. We tell new families that we will provide this for 3 months.

The Rotary Club kindly donated funds for us to provide each family with a slow cooker and a budget-friendly recipe book at Christmas. We will now provide something similar to new families if needed, as this is a fuel-friendly approach to preparing meals.

We had a store cupboard collection at Tesco at Christmas, which was very helpful. The Waitrose hampers were also gratefully received. Both stores have been generous and supportive over the last year in various ways.

A small number of our families have experienced positive changes to their circumstances and have no longer needed our support. Other families have experienced additional crises and have re-joined our list. Examples include parental health difficulties and strain on a family budget when using petrol to visit a terminally ill relative.

We have provided longer term support for a small number of families who are marginalised for various reasons, for example: living off-grid where facilities and funds are very limited for the children; being cultural "outliers" where a single parent is re-training for her job, which demands time and organisational resources.

We anticipate that the change to universal credit and fuel prices will inevitably have an impact on those who already have challenges to their budget, or who unexpectedly experience health challenges. Referrals come from the Children's Centre and local Social Support Services and individuals through Facebook.

We continue to use Sue Brady Catering to cook our meals. We have one regular cook, Lynne Coplestone, and a team of helpers. We have a team of 9 delivery volunteers on a rota, with 3 delivery routes each week. In addition, there are 3 coordinators (Sian Ineson, Caroline Philps and myself) for liaising with families, volunteers and managing the project. We are provided with Treasurer support from Debbie Ryman through Love Marlborough and have IT support from Olwynne Goodrich at Easy Peasy Digital.

2022 Plans and needs:

We need another cook to help cover for holiday/ illness/ regular breaks.

We will need a top-up of our store cupboard soon and another collection morning at Tesco will be requested. We are to sign up for Fair Share with Tesco to add to our weekly food bags.

We would be supportive of a local voluntary service that provides a check-in for families relating to their benefits, fuel support and other social resources.

We are in a financial position to continue for 2022 with our regular and occasional donors, but will need to fundraise again in around 6 months' time, or sooner if numbers increase significantly.

Catherine Williams

Coordinator, Love Marlborough Kids Meals

deliveries@lovemarlboroughkidsmeals.org

Devotion 2021

In the last year Devotion has made significant progress with their latest project since setting up as an independent charity in 2020. Devotion has teamed up with Wiltshire Youth for Christ to offer a full time youth worker position in Marlborough, funded for up to 3 years. There were a couple of recruitment rounds in 2021 and an interview of a potential candidate happening any day/week now, however we are still very much interested in hearing from anyone who might be a good fit for the role – please get in touch. Devotion's pilot project involves re-establishing a regular youth club presence in the town, with a view to offering some specific provision for mental health support in time, including hopefully working with the other active youth organisations in the town and St Johns.

Contact details for Devotion:

Susie Price (Trustee) – devotionyouthproject@hotmail.co.uk

Keith Fryer (Trustee – Chair) – keith@fort-m.com