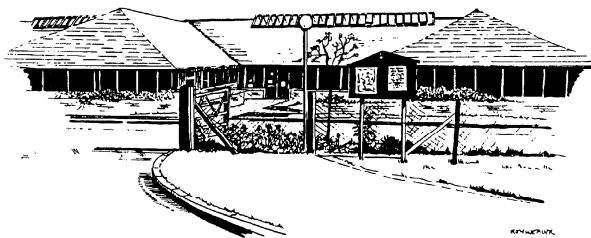




Westlea Church

Annual Report 2011



The Partnership of West Swindon and the Lydiards

Baptist • Church of England • Methodist • United Reformed Church



Objectives

Our vision: A community of people worshipping in Westlea who believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Bible, and who accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Our mission: Take the Good News about Jesus to every person in Westlea and encourage them to receive Him as their Lord and Saviour. Care for and teach every Christian believer so that they can become mature disciples of Jesus.

Organisation

Westlea Church is one of five churches in the West Swindon and the Lydiards Church Partnership. The trustees of Westlea Church are the Members and three of these members represent Westlea on the Partnership Council (PC).

Members are followers of Jesus Christ who wish to commit themselves to the life of the local church in Westlea. They sign an application form, before being formally welcomed at a Sunday Service.

The members of Westlea Church have the responsibility of cooperating with the Partnership Staff Team in promoting the work of the church in the areas of Westlea and Eastleaze. Drawn from the members of Westlea Church is a leadership group of four elected leaders, the secretary and treasurer along with representatives of the staff team.

Meetings

The leadership group meets to discuss church business and make “small scale” decisions. They discuss major issues before presenting them to the members at the Members Meeting.

During 2011 the Members met four times including the Annual General Meeting (March). The leadership group met four times in the same period.

At the end of 2010 there were 26 members of Westlea Church and of these members 21 are joint members of all the four denominations (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and United Reformed), 4 are Baptist members, and 1 is an Anglican member.

Their roles within the Church and Partnership community included:

- Leadership Team, Treasurer, Secretary, Child Advocates, Sunday School Superintendent; Gift Aid Secretary, PC Representatives, PC chair, PC treasurer and Partnership Safe to Grow Co-ordinator.

The Christian Community

Westlea Church meets to worship week by week in Westlea School, which we hire for the purpose. There is a morning service held at 10:00am. Year on year the average attendance at Sunday services in 2011 is constant although can be erratic on a weekly basis.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Adult attendance	21	20	22	22	22	22	23
Child attendance	14	12	11	11	12	11	11

On our Contact list there are currently 27 families with 16 young people 16 and under. No births were celebrated with Thanksgiving Services or Baptisms.

Our youth work on Sunday mornings has continued to be a priority; 19 young people attend regularly and are split equally between Sunday Club (primary school) and Godzone (secondary school). We meet on the first and third Sundays of the month. On the fourth Sunday we have our monthly swop over service where the children have the opportunity for a more active session in the hall while the adults meet in a classroom. This year's Nativity service was written by one of the younger members of the church. As a congregation we renewed our commitment to our "Safe to Grow" policy.

As the numbers at "First Steps" has steadily declined over the last few years; this year, it was agreed that we would end the group at the end of the 2010/2011 academic year. First Steps was a group for pre-school children and their carers meeting once a week for an hour and a quarter of singing, stories and craft on a Christian theme. Over this year it had on average 7 adults and 3 children. Four members of the church and the Partnership ran it and made coffee.

We have a home group meeting every two weeks during the evening providing fellowship, Bible study and pastoral care for our members and friends. Each session is led by different members of the fellowship and is normally preceded by a meal. Over the year we have followed the following themes:

- URC's Vision for Life studies on Evangelism
- The Partnership's Lenten studies based on "A Rich Inheritance"
- A study of Hebrews

We hold regular monthly prayer meetings, at which we pray for God's guidance and help; locally, nationally and internationally. We also seek guidance on our Christian service and how to best reach our community. Although these prayer meetings are not particularly well attended, they have a number who regularly attend. Prayer though is an important aspect of all our meetings.

During 2011 we carried out the "Healthy Church Check" facilitated by three members of the URC synod. This activity which was spread over two sessions helped the church identify its strengths and weaknesses and involved both the adults and younger people of the church. From this an action plan has been produced which will be used by the church over the next few years.

Outreach

We support the Emerge youth groups run at a Partnership level including support for REMIX which meets weekly on Tuesday evenings. This is well attended by a variety of young people, most of whom have no church links. Several of our members help run these sessions and members are also involved in the running of the Emerge project. No younger members of our church attend this at the moment.

Our Men's Might group meets occasionally, when we meet together with some on the fringes of the church for social activities. We see this as a way to reach out to those with whom we already have connections. Activities Men's Might have been involved in include garden clearance work, repair of our shed and other practical and social activities around the church family.

As in previous years, we have delivered literature to every household in Westlea and Eastleaze, inviting people to our special activities at Christmas. We were pleased with the feedback from the Christmas cards and the subsequent attendance, at many of our Christmas services. We also encourage those who are not in regular church attendance to come and join us at our Christmas events.

We have seen an increase in requests for prayer through the church's web site and use our many personal contacts with neighbours to encourage requests for prayer from the neighbourhood.

We encourage our members and regular attendees to speak to their friends and neighbours about Jesus and what he offers them for their lives. Through this personal witness by our members and in the church groups and activities, and we hope that God will continue to use us to reach out to the people with whom we come in contact, and nurture lasting Christian friendship with them.

Some of our outreach activities have included opportunities to meet together to eat including barbecues and walks that have involved several friends who do not usually attend church. Although this year we have not managed to undertake as many walks as in previous years, we had a successful walk amongst the Bluebells of West Woods along with a successful visit to the scarecrow festival at Urchfont (near Devizes).

Through our charitable giving, we have supported the Emerge project and Tear Fund, the evangelical relief and aid organisation which aims to help poor and oppressed people in many countries around the world providing for both physical and spiritual needs and we have also supported the Swindon Foodbank both with financial and food gifts. The Foodbank provides food for those who are in need throughout Swindon.

Christian Service

The church is blessed with the range and number of skills and gifts offered by its (comparatively small) membership. As we meet in a school hall the church equipment has to be set out and taken down each week. Many members contribute to this task, as well as being on duty, playing music, welcoming people, reading lessons, leading prayers, providing refreshments, and clearing up again afterwards.

We have been greatly blessed by the help and assistance of our shared staff team. We have 2 staff members both of whom are non-stipendiary, and contribute both to worship and service in Westlea, the Partnership and further afield. This includes going into Westlea School on a regular basis to take assemblies.

A number of our members are actively involved in work with young people, both within our church, teaching in Sunday Club, and in the wider youth community by helping with Emerge as well as serving on the steering and management committees of the Partnership Emerge Project.

During the year, one of our members served as Chair of the Partnership Council and we have members involved with maintaining the Partnership

web site. Two of our members are also the Partnership Safe to Grow co-ordinators.

Three of our members have assisted, and others have helped from time to time with the Partnership organised Messy Church during the year.

In the wider community we rely on our members to be “salt and light” in their workplaces and dealings with friends. Several members assist with such organisations as the National Autistic Society Swindon and District parent support group, Girlguiding UK, a committee member of “The Harbour” an asylum seekers support group, NCT, Lower Shaw Farm Children’s Project and many who help in school classrooms and clubs. Our members are also involved in School Governance and Parent Teacher associations.

In the wider church we have members involved at Synod and national committee level in the URC.

We continue to support the Toybox Charity which works with street children in Central America. The money we donate goes to a specific project represented by a Child Ambassador; during 2011 our Child Ambassador represented the Rescate project in Miramonte, El Salvador. The mission of the project is to provide much needed support for children in the community, who face challenges such as gang involvement, crime and family breakdown. They are currently supporting 35 children. We again used small jars, particularly during Lent to collect for Toybox. We will look again in 2012 as to the best way to support this charity.

We have continued our support for the Filling Station, a local charity helping the homeless around Swindon, through preparing sandwiches and providing provisions and clothing, which are then distributed. We also contributed to Operation Christmas Child donating presents in shoe boxes for children in Eastern Europe.

As in previous years we supported Christian Aid Week by undertaking a collection in our local area.

Material Resources

As with many others, our financial position during 2011 has deteriorated with income comparatively reducing compared to our expenditure.

The total value of planned giving has decreased. Our income totalled £19,370.34 a decrease of about £600 on last year. This represents an

average of £13.70 per member per week. We hope to recover approx. £3,300 through gift aid tax claims, included in this is the final claim for the year that is awaiting payment.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Regular Gift Aid agreements	15.5	14.5	14	12	12
Av. Gift Aid £/week	£16.62	£16.83	£17.20	£22.18	£21.42

We still rely on a minority of members for the majority of our income, and our cash flow can therefore be easily influenced by changes in the circumstances of individual members

10% of our income is given away to the charities we support. Once our commitment to Toybox is covered, of the remainder, 40% is given to both Emerge and Tear Fund with the remaining 20% to a charity nominated on an annual basis. The charity in 2011 was Swindon Foodbank.

All our property is housed in our only building, a shed, situated in the school grounds. It is insured for approximately £4,089, although it has no resale value. Our property contents are insured to the value of £7,663. We have Public Liability insurance for £5,000,000.

Targets for 2012

Our targets for 2012 are as follows:

- Healthy Church Check – We will work through the items highlighted on our action plan, in particular we are planning a prayer 24 hours during March 2012.
- Youth and Children's Work - We will work towards the Youth Work Charter and achieving the Child Friendly Church award.
- Mission - We will work to reach out to those connected with, but not yet a part of our church community. This will include continuing "Men's Might" on an irregular basis with a predominantly social and inclusive agenda. As well as the membership acting as "Salt and Light" to our community.

Summary

Westlea Church continues to serve the community and to reflect the multi-ethnic character of the area. Our membership has remained largely stable in 2011 and we have been able to offer support and encouragement to members and others in times of need.

The Healthy Church Check that was carried out in May gave us an opportunity to reflect on what we are doing well at the moment, what needs changing, and also what more could be done to develop our ministry. We now feel that we have a clear plan that can be used as a framework over the coming years. During the coming year we will also consider how the church will grow and change with the planned departure of Dick Gray in September 2013.

We are a church that believes passionately in prayer being the core of our individual and corporate relationship with God, and we endeavour to foster and encourage personal relationship with God through sharing of prayer needs and answers to prayers received in both Sunday worship and house group. Our house group has been a place where we have actively engaged with the Bible and current issues.

We have continued to see good numbers of young people and are blessed with the way they involve themselves in the many activities of the church, especially those who have grown up within the family of Westlea Church and are now relating that to the adult world.

This report has been produced by the leadership group of Westlea Church, on behalf of the members, in line with the terms of the Charities Act 1993 and its updated recommendations (SORP 2005). We hope it gives a clear picture of the life of Westlea Church, the way in which our members have sought to fulfil our stated objectives and our aims for the next year.

Westlea Leadership Team

On behalf of Westlea Church. February 2012