



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT 2011-2012



Aston Walk of Witness



Cherry picker in Aston Parish Church



Nechells Fun Day at St Matthew's School

PARISH OF ASTON AND NEHELLS
Ss. Peter & Paul (Aston Parish Church), St James, and St Matthew
Revd Andy Jolley - Vicar and Area Dean of Aston
Revd Beverly Watson - Curate

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PARISH REPORTS

Vicar's Report on 2011

The pictures illustrate a few of the events and initiatives that many of us got involved with in 2011

Easter is always an exciting time in Aston and Nechells, and 2011 was particularly so. As usual, we had the walks of witness with the other local churches – but 2011 saw the biggest turnout yet for these walks.

We were also able to combine the car wash with an Easter Pageant to tell the story of Easter to thousands of people on their way to Villa Park. It was wonderful to see some great acting talents coming to the fore. Finally, it was then great to celebrate Easter Sunday with baptising new people (Rani and Micah) into God's family.

Fun Days at Manor Park School at the end of April and St Matthew's School in July – these events once again provided an excellent way for the local churches to come together to bless local people at these two schools. The Manor Park event will also be remembered though for the arson attack on a house on the night before the fun day. We thank God that all the people in the house got out alive. We are having to be increasingly imaginative in how we fund these events, which we hope will be continuing in both Aston and Nechells in 2012.

The Aston & Nechells Foodbank and CAN DO 4:13 – One of the most satisfying aspects of 2011 was the formation and growth of our charitable company CAN DO 4:13 (linking with Philippians 4:13). In the early part of the year, the impact of funding cuts on the Advice Centre at St James meant a huge amount of work for me and others in finding a way to continue to serve the poorest people in our parish. From a frustratingly slow beginning, persuading the Charity Commission to register our name, CAN DO 4:13 was set up and has had a fantastic first year. It has enabled the resurrection of the St James Advice Centre (appropriately after the old Advice Centre closed just before Easter) and is also the parent charity to the Aston & Nechells Foodbank. Working with the Trussell Trust, the Foodbank has drawn many of you into practical support of some of the neediest people in our parish. I am most grateful to my fellow Directors of CAN DO 4:13, Nigel Cripps and Geoff Miller, for their creative and patient work in building what we hope will prove to be a great platform for more work for the benefit of the Communities of Aston & Nechells.

The most recent preaching series focused on our Parish Values, which we also considered in some depth in preparing the Parish Profile for the appointment of our next Associate Vicar. So, how are we doing?

G is for Generosity – The fun days, and the free Easter car wash are good examples of this. We were a bit behind with our mission and charitable giving at the end of 2011, especially at Aston Parish Church, but have made good progress in the last couple of months to catch up. Our relationships with our brothers and sisters from the other churches who use St Matthew's and St James sometimes provide us with challenging opportunities to be generous.

F is for Sharing Food – It is good to see the First Sunday shared lunch at Aston Parish Church developing into more of a three-church lunch, and also that the party at the New Wine summer conference has people from each church. Eating together at these and other occasions is providing a great way to deepen our relationships with each other. **The Parish Weekend (15-17 June)** is another fantastic opportunity to celebrate our three churches coming together. We will be very well fed by the staff at Hothorpe Hall, and we look forward to welcoming Bishop David with some spiritual food as well.

E is for Encountering God - Our services and triangle groups aim to offer space to meet with God, to sing His praise, to tell stories of what He has been doing, to hear from Him and to be resourced to serve Him. At least, that's why I hope we come to worship on Sundays and during the week! I am delighted that people from each of our three churches come to worship together at MORE on Sunday evenings, where there is an opportunity for more extended worship, more time to listen to God together, more interactive teaching and more time for prayer ministry than is available at the Sunday morning services. It's also great that Messy Church is offering families the opportunity to encounter God together after school.

D is for Doing Evangelism – I am really encouraged that we have run an Alpha course in each of our three churches over the past year. Much credit must go to Beverly Watson and the teams of leaders and helpers that she continues to motivate. Healing on the Streets is an established feature of how we seek to

enable people to meet with God outside the church, to experience his presence and his healing, and it is good too to take our Sunday evening services out on the streets during the summer months. The Lord also keeps bringing new people to our churches so they can hear the good news about Jesus there as well.

C is for Creating Community – Our congregations are comprised of a wonderful and deepening rich mix of cultures, and it has been good to celebrate some of those this year. I still long to see us do more of this, and so demonstrate to the wider community the wonder of our unity in Jesus Christ. Our attempts to foster community cohesion in the parish must emerge from this loving community that we have amongst ourselves (which in turn flows from our being invited into the loving community of the Trinity) – which takes us back to the “F” value ...

B is for Becoming Disciples – Much of our work with the Diocesan Transforming Church initiative has been contributing to our growing as disciples. We have focused particularly on developing a culture of growing and becoming as followers of Jesus, engaged in his mission. During 2011 we reviewed and revised our agreed goals and continued working towards their implementation.

- a) **To continue welcoming newcomers to our churches and helping them to feel they belong to our congregations.** We spent some considerable time using the *Everybody Welcome* course to look at this on Sundays and in our Triangle Groups, but had to adapt the material considerably. A Newcomers Development Group has now been established and is helping implement some important new developments.
- b) **To increase the numbers and capacity of leaders of all ages in our churches.** The first *Growing Leaders* courses finished, with both again showing the need to severely adapt material to our setting. A second adults course has begun.
- c) **To grow gifts in music within the congregations which will enhance worship for all.** Bands have been established at Aston Parish Church for two Sundays a month and musicians are now being “loaned” to St Matthew’s from Aston Parish Church.
- d) **Develop our capacity for youth and children’s ministry** and to make children, and families with children, more welcome and more involved in our services. There has been mixed progress on this, with joy at the development of Messy Church, but sadness at not being able to continue with Children’s ministry at St James for the moment.
- e) **To work towards every new Christian having 1:1 mentoring** weekly for at least 3 months (after Alpha for those doing that course). Some good progress is being made and we are also developing our mentoring abilities and capacity with the *Growing Leaders* courses.
- f) **To increase the number of people involved in ministry in our churches.** This keeps growing, but we are still working towards the “All” part of “All Involved”, and long for more to find their role.
- g) **To grow in loving and serving the neediest in our parish,** with more congregation members being involved in serving the needy and more needy people being served. The development of CAN DO 4:13 and the Foodbank are great examples of how we are trying to realise this goal.

A is for All Involved - As our Transforming Church goals specify, we keep trying to help people find ways to get more involved in serving. Thank you to everyone who serves in any way in or through our churches. Following Jesus is about being a participant, not a spectator. The reports in this booklet show just some of the ways that people are involved in and through our churches week by week. Do find out more and get involved. There must also though be many more ways as yet unimagined. Do try to find them!

A few words of thanks and other thoughts about our churches

St Matthew’s –Great thanks go to Bill Perry and Dave Babb serving as church wardens for the past year, and also to Joan, Hilary, Geoff and Marcia, who enable so much mission and ministry in Nechells. It has been most encouraging to see some really positive developments in the use of St Matthew’s this year, with the start of Messy Church there once a month, Aston Way Parent and Toddler group moving there and most recently the Foodbank being based there. These are great steps towards my hope of St Matthew’s being “a church of the community, in the community, for the community”.

St James - Thanks go to Cephas and Ruel for serving as church wardens for the past year. Thanks too to Jackie, our Church Centre Co-ordinator, who has done a fantastic job in looking after the many different groups of regular users of the church premises. I must also make special mention of David Fletcher, who has borne an enormous load over the past year with the various developments over the Advice Centre. I hope he is now enjoying things being on a much more stable footing. It has been a sad few months for St

James with the deaths of some much loved key people. This highlights the need for us to draw new people into positions of responsibility in the church and to foster effective ministry with children and young people.

Aston Parish Church (Ss Peter & Paul) - Thank you once again to the church wardens, Gloria and Joe, and to the many other people who help in so many different ways with the church's ministry. Special thanks are also due to Stephanie, who has picked up a considerable extra load with the church and parish finances in the past few months since Colin Howells' most untimely death. Keeping the old church building in good order and accessible to the public remains a priority. There have been some positive developments in the past year, but the next contract for work on the church tower is still not signed. Nigel Cripps continues to seek the remaining necessary funds to add to English Heritage's grant, but the government's latest ideas on VAT and churches will present another obstacle to overcome. Nigel has, however, had more success with gaining grants for some important works to the Church Centre and they should start shortly.

Staff - It is a great privilege to lead our talented and dedicated staff team, and I am also really grateful for the fantastic support we receive from our office staff. We have been truly blessed in the gifts and abilities of the people we employ here. Over the past year, Ivor has demonstrated that his gifts are flexible as well as extensive, switching seamlessly from youth to children's ministry and further developing his schools ministry. Beverly is a great encourager and has overseen some really positive developments with music and children's ministry, particularly in the growth of midweek children's ministry in Nechells. When the time comes for her curacy to end, she will be most sadly missed. Jenny is already being greatly missed! I was delighted with her appointment as Rector of Quinton, and feel very privileged to have shared the past 9 years in ministry with her in Aston and Nechells, and to have seen her growth over that time. Her departure has left quite a hole in our staff team –only part of the story of her excellent work in Aston and Nechells was told on 8th January at her "leaving do". However, our loss is truly Quinton's gain. It has been rather frustrating that we have not yet been able to find someone to join us as her successor, and I do hope it will not be too much longer. We do, however, look forward to Mike Harmon, together with his wife Lynne, joining us in July as a new curate.

Some final thoughts – I am grateful beyond words for the love and support of Ricky, Beth and Matty, as well as the staff and so many of you. The Lord is always good (that is His nature!) and I'm sure is as delighted as I am with your prayers and support for myself and the other staff. With His help and strength we continue to rejoice in all that the Lord is doing and will do in us, among us and through us.

For me, the past year has felt hugely challenging, but ultimately rewarding. As well as the usual delight in seeing people come to faith and grow in discipleship and leadership, I have taken particular satisfaction in our being able to overcome a potentially disastrous situation with the Advice Centre at St James. I have also been privileged to be asked by the Bishop to develop and lead the new Mission Apprentice Scheme in the Diocese, largely funded by the Church Commissioners and aimed at promoting spiritual and numerical growth in some of the most deprived areas of Birmingham (Paul Lacey's new post with us is an immediate local fruit of that). Raising the funds and appointing the first Apprentices has been a considerable achievement. I could not have taken that on without the inspiration and friendship of other inner city church leaders from the New Wine Network, as well as Rhiannon Jones, the Diocese's Transforming Church Co-ordinator, and I believe we owe them a considerable debt.

In the latter part of 2011 and these first months of 2012, we have been challenged by loss. We have lost Jenny, with all that means in terms of extra work for many of us while we are without an Associate Vicar. We have also been confronted with the tragic death of several dear friends, and for my family also the death of my sister, Ruth, who many of you knew. Zelda Hilleard, Ron Morris, Jag Bains, Colin Howells and Beryl Elliott from Aston Parish church and Elsie Watson, Vi Huggins and P Abel from St James were well-loved and appreciated members of their churches. Many of them were key people in the up-front ministry of their churches and touched many lives. They will be very sadly missed. Ruth, Colin and Jag particularly were taken from us at relatively young ages and there has been shock that people with so much to live for should be taken from us.

However, in the midst of such terrible pain and sadness, we continue to confront sickness and death with the power of the kingdom. We have celebrated Easter together. Our Easter celebrations remind us that the resurrection changes everything. The resurrection reminds us that, no matter what happens, we do

not abandon ourselves to despair. As Pope John Paul II once said, 'We are always an Easter people and hallelujah is our song!' The truth is that the resurrection is an event in history that changes everything. Our worth is established, our past is forgiven, and Jesus Christ's resurrection has defeated the power of death, sin and despair all in one move. Hallelujah!

Curate's report - Rev Beverly Watson

2011 has been a good year for me, both personally and in terms of ministry in our parish. From a personal point of view, Andrew and I celebrated our 25th Wedding anniversary with a party for family and friends at home. We also celebrated Andrew's 50th birthday, and our older daughter Hannah's 21st birthday; so it has been a special year. Andrew and I were also privileged to go together to Malawi, to celebrate 150 years of the Church in that country. It was a moving and wonderful experience to be at Magamero, where many thousands of people gathered to remember the coming of the first missionaries back in 1861.

My time in the parish has also been very rewarding throughout 2011. A high point has been overseeing work among children in each of our churches, and seeing the Lord begin to bless us in new ways. Our appointment of Jane Williams as a part time Children's Worker has been of great benefit, and the opening of 'Messy Church' in September at St. Matthew's has been a particular high point for me. 'Messy Church' regularly attracts 40 or so people from the local community, parents and children together, along with a strong team of leaders from each of our 3 churches and beyond. I have also been able to work with Jane as we've re-located our 'Stay and Play' group to St. Matthew's, with the ongoing hard work and ministry of June Huzzey and Zena Beard. This group has attracted a dozen or so new families into St. Matthew's Community Hall on a regular basis, and is building a strong sense of community among local people. Our work among children on Sundays is starting to grow too, and it has been good to see the start of a 'Scramblers' group, for children aged 5-7 at Aston Parish Church on the second Sunday of each month.

I've also enjoyed continuing to oversee Music across the parish, and have been encouraged by new developments there. It has been great to see a second worship band become established, under the able leadership of Stephanie Fletcher. It has also been good to share our musical gifts and talents across the parish, with musicians from both APC and St. James' helping out with the worship at St. Matthew's. I hope this sharing of resources will continue and develop as time goes by.

Alpha continues to develop, and a highlight this year has been the bilingual Punjabi/English course which ran in the spring. It was great to work with Giyanow Kaur and Asian Fellowship, and we were encouraged by the people who came, and those who were baptised and confirmed. This Alpha course also highlighted the advantages of running Alpha in an established group in the church, and so we decided to ask Triangle Groups to take a turn at running the course. Jackie Burton and James Hicks were the first group to take this on, and ran a successful course at St. James' in the autumn.

A new area of ministry for me has been co-leading, with Andy Jolley, the CPAS 'Growing Leaders' course. 2011 saw the completion of the first course, and the beginning of a second. Our Transforming Church programme highlighted the need for leadership development across the parish, and it has been good to see 20+ people engaging with this course in a very positive way. And I've also developed my own understanding of leadership through as a result.

I was sad to say goodbye to Jenny Arnold, who has been my Training Incumbent for the past 3 years, but delighted to see her installed as the new Rector of Christ Church Quinton. I've particularly valued Jenny's continued support and guidance over the past year, and also the encouragement and fellowship of many people across our 3 churches who I've been privileged to work with in 2011. It has been a good and rich year for me, and I now look ahead to the future as my curacy in Aston and Nechells ends, and I seek the Lord's guidance for the next stage of ministry in 2012.

Diocesan Synod Report – Revd Andy Jolley

The Diocesan Synod met three times in 2011. National and international church business was the main focus of the year, with us debating and voting on motions handed down to us from General Synod. The March Synod was at St Peter's Harborne and focused on women bishops. After a good debate, the Synod overwhelmingly approved the proposals sent to us from the national church about how (not whether!) women can become bishops. We also agreed the annual "Malawi motion", asking parishes to provide prayer and financial support to our link Dioceses in Malawi.

The July meeting was held at St Alban's Academy in Highgate. As usual, this Synod was about receiving the annual reports for 2010 and agreeing the budget for 2012. The approved budget would increase clergy stipends by 2.3% from 1 April 2012 and increase Common Fund by only 0.8%. There was also a presentation on the future of religious education in Birmingham schools, which made the setting in St Alban's most appropriate.

We hosted the November Synod at St Matthew's Nechells. The main business was the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant, an attempt to provide a way forward through the strained relationships in the international Anglican Church resulting from the North American's actions in ordaining practicing gay bishops and blessing same-sex unions, and then the responses of some African Anglicans in establishing churches in North America. The quality of the debate showed Birmingham Diocesan Synod at its best, though the motion was narrowly lost – as it has been in most other Diocese, leaving the Church of England outside of the Covenant process. There was also a short debate about the implications of the plan to move the Diocesan Offices from Harborne to the city centre next to the cathedral.

Deanery Synod report - Mr Geoff Miller

Meetings were held on 1st February, 25th June and 5th October 2011. Subjects covered were :

Women in the Episcopate – presentation by Rev. Jenny Arnold. Principal matters raised included CofE to continue its tradition of being all inclusive and a Code of Practice to help those unable to accept women bishops.

Introduction to the Anglican Covenant – Rachel Jepson. Highlighting the challenges about how we can resolve our differences.

Presentation from Rev Walter Barrientos (Diocese of Bolivia) - Church started with 5 people in a strong RC area but have grown rapidly. People are looking for a Church that will teach the word of God but with a less Pentecostal emphasis and a liturgical framework.

Transforming Church – a presentation by Rhiannon Jones, the Transforming Church Co-ordinator. It's an initiative developed by Bishop Andrew, which is part of Bishop David's dream of doubling the size of the Church in Birmingham.

Bishop's Youth Council – updates from Beth Jolley our Deanery Rep

Deanery Pioneer Ministry Post – this post was made redundant in 2011 due to financial constraints. Our prayers go with Michele and Andy Taylor and family as they move on in their ministry.

PCC report - Mr Nigel Cripps

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) met on 5 occasions and the standing committee met once. The principal business transacted was:

Supporting the Poorest in this area - CAN DO 4:13 is a not for profit company (registered on 27th January 2011 Co No 07508388) and as a charity number 1141676 on 27th April 2011. The membership of the company is two nominees by the PCC (Geoff Miller who is finance director and Nigel Cripps director and company secretary) and Andy Jolley who by virtue of his position as Vicar is company chair.

The company wishes to recruit two 'community' directors who must be skilled in communications – public relations and fund raising.

This charitable company has secured funds to reopen the St James Advice Centre (this is taking over the service provided by volunteers following the closure of the previously independent organisation), opened an Aston Nechells Food Bank and appointed on a 3 month fixed term basis two Near Neighbours ambassadors; an initiative financed by the Church Urban fund.

Transforming Church - A significant proportion of PCC time has been focused upon the Transforming Church initiative. At the beginning of the year we reviewed achievements and sharpened up the way that we measure our performance. These processes were helpful and identified that we needed to focus more upon youth work and welcoming. During the year progress has been made by

- Securing funds and appointing a ¼ time children's worker through The Grace Trust
- Messy church at St Matthews once per month
- Established a newcomers parish welcome team
- Supported a second Growing Leaders course

- Appointed a part time Mission Apprentice

Clergy changes - We have said farewell to our Associate Vicar Revd Jenny Arnold who is now the Rector of Quinton. In preparation for the appointment of the next Associate Vicar the PCC has written and approved a Parish profile, job description and person specification.

In July we are looking forward to welcoming the Revd Mike Harman when he joins us as our curate. Mike and his wife Lynn have opted to live in the Aston Parish Church Centre flat not the curate's house in Manor Road.

Finance - The 2011 annual church meeting delegated to the PCC the task of appointing a person to undertake the independent review of the annual financial statement. Mrs Marjorie Featherstone has been appointed and has been very helpful in aiding in the understanding of the Parish finances.

Finance has had a much higher profile this year or to be accurate during the second part of the year. The untimely and unexpected death of the PCC treasurer Colin Howells and the appointment of a new independent examiner have led to two reviews of how we manage our money and some significant changes made. We are grateful to Geoff Miller and Nigel Cripps who filled the 2 month gap (including year end) before Stephanie Fletcher was appointed treasurer.

Legacies - The PCC has adopted a legacy policy. This should give benefactors the confidence to know that their legacy will not be lost in general funds but will be used to do something we could not have done without the legacy and that executors will be consulted.

Membership changes - During the year there were an unusually high number of changes to the membership of the PCC. Two founding and high profile members of the PCC died, Colin Howells who was treasurer and a member at Aston Parish and Purtell Abel, known as 'P' a member of St James. We send our sympathy and prayers to their widows.

During the year 3 members were co-opted, Beth Jolley (Aston Deanery member of the Bishops Youth Council), the late Colin Howells (PCC treasurer) and Stephanie Fletcher (PCC Treasurer).

Prayer dial - Mr Cliff Giffin

If you have a prayer need, you ring the following number: 0121 240 7853 (Margaret and Cliff). The request goes around to the 28 people currently on the Dial in a very short time. To ask for prayer or to be come part of the prayer dial, call us.

Electoral Roll reports - Miss Stephanie Fletcher, Mrs Jackie Burton and Mr Bill Perry

Aston Parish Church (SF): The Electoral Roll for 2010/11 was 135. Due to a massive overhaul of the electoral that takes place every six years, and the deaths of some members of the congregation, the figure for 2011/12 currently stand at 123 people.

St James (JB): The Electoral Roll for 2011/12 is 77. The number on the newly prepared Electoral Roll at St. James is 56. There is one new addition, but sadly, some have died since last year. Also, due to preparing a completely new Roll this year we have lost some of the names that were only here for a while. If someone would please volunteer to be the Electoral Roll Officer I would be happy to show them what to do.

St Matthew's (BP): The Electoral Roll for last year 2011/2012 stood at thirty eight (38). Fifteen of those on the roll have not worshipped here in the last six years, since the last major revision, and/or have moved away from Nechells and have therefore been removed. However, we have four new members and so the roll for 2012/13 stands at twenty seven (27).

Worship in the Parish - Rev Beverly Watson

The musical life of our churches has continued to develop throughout 2011. A highlight at Aston Parish Church has been the launch of a new band on second Sundays of the month, overseen by Stephanie Fletcher and with support from members of the group. This has allowed us to give more opportunities for our growing numbers of singers and instrumentalists to take part, and we've been delighted to welcome new people into this area of ministry. Our weekend away at Hothorpe Hall proved a good time for spotting new musical talent among our 3 congregations.

As resources have grown we've been able to share our gifts and talents across the parish, with Stephanie and Lesley now playing at St. Matthew's on a regular basis, and Juliet Fletcher now playing there occasionally. Rosemary Cripps and Margaret Griffin continue to lead on a regular basis at APC, with Geoff Miller the mainstay at St. Matthew's; Mike Baker and Brian Perry continue to serve at St. James'.

Thanks go to the rather more hidden, but vital ministry of our PA and VPS team, who serve week in week out – Nigel Cripps, Ally and Bill Perry in particular.

And a big thank you to everyone who has given time, energy and commitment to this ministry during 2011.

Alpha report - Rev Beverly Watson

Two Alpha courses have run across the parish in 2011, one at Aston Parish Church, and the other at St. James'. And once again there has been a high level of commitment and enthusiasm amongst both leaders and members.

The bilingual Punjabi/English has been a particular high light of 2011. This group was ably led by Giyanow Kaur, with the support of others from Asian Fellowship, and met on Saturday mornings in the Higgins Lounge. The course included a day away at my house in Sutton Coldfield, and speakers included Revd Jaisher Chaudhary and Bishop Andrew Watson. This Alpha course played a part in preparing members of Asian Fellowship for baptism and confirmation.

The bilingual Alpha course drew attention to the benefits of running Alpha in an established group in the parish, rather than as a group on its own. The decision was taken to ask the existing Triangle Groups to take turns at running Alpha within their groups, in the coming months. Jackie Burton and James Hick's Wednesday Triangle Group at St. James' were the first group to take this on, and ably led a new course in the autumn. This marked a new stage of development in the life of the parish, with Alpha being led by lay leaders, rather than clergy. It reflects both the growing capacity and capability of lay leadership in our churches, which was one of our 'Transforming Church' goals.

Bill and Joan Perry offered to host and lead the next Alpha group, beginning at St. Matthew's Church in 2012.

A big thank you to all who have served in this area in 2011.

Growing Leaders - Rev Beverly Watson

2011 saw the completion of our first CPAS 'Growing Leaders' course in the parish, and the beginning of a second course. The first course was attended by 14 or so people from each of our 3 churches, under the co-leadership of Andy Jolley and Beverly Watson; and the second group started out with 11 new members.

Group members meet on a Thursday evening, once a month at St. James', and also undertake 2 days away as part of the training. The days away have been to Berkswell and Alcester, and have been an integral part of the course. Each member also has mentor who they meet with on a monthly basis, to talk through issues raised by the course, and to apply the material to their lives in a practical way.

As a result of the first course, members have taken on new responsibility in our churches, in areas such as Children's Work, Welcoming, Worship, and as a Mission Apprentice. Others have grown in confidence in the work place, the community and at home. We see this as an ongoing ministry in the parish, and one which will continue to enable many people to develop their gifts and abilities as disciples of Jesus, and leaders in the church and in the world.

A particular thanks to the 20 or so people who have served as mentors to members of the course, and to members for your enthusiasm and willingness to learn and grow over the past year.

Triangle Groups – Revd Andy Jolley

Triangle groups are a key part of our approach to how we grow disciples in Aston and Nechells, so thank you to all those who lead groups and serve in this way. It is in small groups that we grow in our understanding and worship of God (up), receive support and prayer (in) and discover and use our gifts to

witness to our colleagues, neighbours, families and friends (out). So it's been very encouraging to see how our triangle groups have been expressing these three aspects over the past year. This has particularly been the case in the way in which each of the groups led an open air service over the summer months. Some of the groups have also started to help us offer the Alpha course in the parish. The group led by Jackie Burton and James Hicks hosted the autumn course at St James. Bill and Joan Perry's group then led the course at St Matthew's this spring, and the Witton group will be offering the next course at Aston Parish Church. It is pleasing that some groups have members from more than one church as this helps to draw our 3 churches together. The groups currently meeting, and their leaders are;-

Monday afternoon, **Nechells**, led by Bill and Joan Perry

Tuesday evening, **Women's group** led by Ricky Jolley and Glenys Veitch

Tuesday evening, **Nechells**, led by Geoff Miller and Ken Costley

Tuesday evening, **St. James**, led by Maureen France

Wednesday evening, **Witton**, led by Ivor and Gail Lewis with Paul Lacey

Wednesday evening, **Youth Cell at Salvation Army**, led by Andi Thomas & Olly Thorpe

Wednesday evening, **Post Alpha**, led by Jackie Burton and James Hicks

Thursday evening, **North Birmingham**, led by Rosemary and Nigel Cripps

Friday evening, **Post Alpha**, led by Hilary Miller and Paul Gale

Jenny Arnold has co-ordinated the Triangle Groups for the past few years, and I am grateful for the support and leadership she has provided in this area. It would be great to see a much greater proportion of our congregations involved in a Triangle Group. Do speak to myself or one of the triangle group leaders if you'd like to join a group.

Parish Treasurer's report - Miss Stephanie Fletcher

In December I was promoted from being Assistant Treasurer to Treasurer for the Parish, following the death of Colin. Although he had left things in good order, it was still rather a case of being thrown in the deep end, and I am indebted to Nigel Cripps and Geoff Miller for the time that they have spent organising the various accounts in order to redirect them into one main account (making my job easier) and changing signatures on the accounts. Particular thanks must also go to Marjorie Featherstone, who has been invaluable in supporting me in my new role.

Community Fun Days - Mr David Fletcher

As has become the pattern, last year we hosted two community fun days, one in Aston and one in Nechells.

I cannot write about the first one, at Manor Park School on 30 April, without acknowledging the huge answer to prayer that it went ahead at all. Given that at 8.30 am we had all the electrical equipment locked inside a van, with Ally and the rest of his household in hospital, cancellation was looking distinctly possible. However, by God's grace Ally was able to discharge himself because of relatively minor injuries, everyone pitched in to help set up, and by the scheduled start time we were completely ready to go.

The day went smoothly and was much appreciated by all who came. Ivor did an excellent job as "master of ceremonies" and roving reporter, interviewing many different people and allowing a good number of people to sing! We had about 700 visitors, the weather was favourable, and there was plenty of room for all the activities. The only slight disappointment was that we had the capacity to welcome more guests - a reminder of the importance of efficiently publicising the fun day in advance.

The other fun day of the summer was at Nechells on 9 July. This was a wonderful event, blessed by warm sunshine, and the crowds kept coming - about 1,400 in total! Everything went really well, including a mass Zumba session towards the end of the afternoon, and at least 300 folk stayed on for the worship time at the end of the day. It is a privilege to share such occasions with those living nearby, and to have a chance to explain why we are blessing them in this way.

These fun days could not have taken place without the help of a large number of volunteers from many of the local churches, at least a hundred for the two events. We thank God for their commitment, and look forward to having at least as many this year - on Monday 7 May in Aston and on Saturday 7 July in

Nechells. In addition, we have a "Big Lunch" in Aston Park on Sunday 3 June, to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee: another opportunity to mix with our neighbours and to be "salt and light" in this area.

Healing on the Streets – Revd Andy Jolley

During the football season the Healing on the Streets team have offered prayer before 17 of Aston Villa's weekend home matches outside Aston Parish Church. In total we prayed 138 different times for people or situations (though some were repeat "customers"). Many people continue to walk past us, although often with friendly banter, and it is frustrating seeing many with obvious physical conditions decline the offer of prayer. Very often we pray for friends or relatives of the fans. It is also common to pray for people's worries, grief, or problems with family breakdown or redundancy. Others ask for healing from physical conditions, and a few have been healed as they have sat in our chairs.

With many people being regular visitors to Villa Park, we see many of them again. During 2011, we have regularly been encouraged by people coming back to tell us about healing or of situations improving after a prayer, and for some we have seen God working in a marvellous way in them and their families.

The team were also at the community fun days at Manor Park School and St Matthew's school. At these events we prayed for 20 people.

It has been encouraging too to share with others who are involved in healing on the streets. Some of our team join with the Healing on the Streets teams from other churches to offer prayer outside St Martin's in the Bullring on the afternoon of the first Saturday of each month.

It is another challenging environment with other faith groups also seeking to engage the shoppers. However, it is much easier to encourage people to sit down on a chair and receive prayer when they are not rushing to Villa Park with their friends, and it is rare that none of the six chairs is not in use. On most of these days, at least one person decides to commit or recommit their lives to Jesus having sat down in one of the chairs.

Often before we start offering prayer we ask God for clues about the people he specifically wants us to pray for, such as names, conditions and characteristics (eg pink clothing). Finding one of these people is especially encouraging.

I would like to thank the regular team members, who are drawn from each of our three churches: David Fletcher, Bill Perry, Joan Perry, Hilary Miller, Geoff Miller, Herma Lewis, Ricky Jolley, Gloria Powell, and myself. We would welcome others who would like to join us in this exciting ministry. Thanks too to Joe Lewis, who kept us supplied with hot drinks during the cold weather of the football season, and also been available to welcome the considerable number of people who take advantage of Aston Parish Church being open to have a look inside.

Schools and Assemblies - Mr Ivor Lewis

The Aston Churches Together team developed Christmas and Easter assemblies to take into our schools in Aston and Nechells. Over the last year our team has been drawn from the Parish of Aston & Nechells, South Aston URC, the Lee Abbey and the MSC Cordate Communities respectively.

Our Easter assembly focussed on characters who were heavily involved in Jesus arrest, trial and crucifixion and on the impact of his resurrection. The Christmas assembly concentrated on the reaction of the angels to the events around the birth of Jesus. Both assemblies were well received in the schools.

During the last year our ACT assemblies took us into Aston Tower, Deykin Avenue, Manor Park, Mansfield Green, Prince Albert's J/I, St Clements' and St Matthew's Schools.

New Wine 2011 - Rev Andy Jolley

Between 30th July and 6th August, 68 of us from Aston and Nechells went to Newark for our second year at the New Wine North. It was great that there were people from all three of our churches camping together and enjoying each others' company as well as the worship, teaching and ministry, especially at the Impact

Venue designed for people from our kind of area. The children and young people also made the most of their groups. We played our part in helping the event to happen with a few people working on various of the teams.

We shared a couple of communal barbeques and welcomed some old friends (including the Bishop of Birkenhead and his family) to eat with us. For most of the week we had great weather, and so we were able to make good use of the "village green" area on our campsite for cricket and other sport. The day off, however, brought a tornado to the campsite and the spectacular sight of a paddling pool flying off into the sky!

Website - Miss Stephanie Fletcher

Over the past year, there have been a number of changes to the church website. One of the main changes was the addition of a sister site, set up by Ally from which sermons from most of the services from Aston Parish Church that took place across the year can be listened to by the congregation as and when they wanted to. This includes Christmas services and other events like the Bible in one Hour event that took place in July last year. It is a great resource that I hope people will make use of.

Also on this website is a list of the music that has been done across the year, which I aim to keep as up-to-date as possible, ensuring that the amount of times a song is sung in church is easier to work out. This will help both with CCLI permission and also in ensuring that the same song is not sung too many times in a row.

Another change that has happened is that the main website itself has had a bit of a makeover. It now has a homepage with links to pages that someone browsing might want to look at (information on who we are, questions about life events [marriages, baptisms etc] and prices for booking the church) as well as a colourful collage. The tabs around the website have also been altered, with new tabs for booking the facilities in various churches, and information about the parish's new charity CAN DO 4:13.

Thanks to all those who have inputted into these changes over the past year, the help and suggestions are greatly appreciated and I can only hope to be even more happy with the website next year.

ASTON PARISH REPORTS

Churchwardens' report - Mr Joe Lewis and Mrs Gloria Powell

Well, what a year we have had at Aston and Nechells Parish, but despite the year, we must thank God for his love and his mercy, which has got us through some sad times.

We have lost some valuable members of our congregation, and others not from this congregation, but still dear to our hearts, and to top it all, we have lost Jenny Arnold to Quinton Parish, how sad for us, but joyful for them. We will continue to pray for those who have lost loved ones, and for Jenny, Andy and family and we send them off with our blessing. We are sure that our Heavenly Father will equip her with all the tools she needs to do the job, that the Lord has called her to do. We will continue to pray for her replacement and trust that God has got the right person in mind. It surreal, that we have gone from 4 Vicars to 2, but God appoints all leaders and I am confident that we have good one in Andy Jolly and it will not be too long before we will be a full team again. Please continue to pray for Aston and Nechells Parish and the Community.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who came to clean the Church, when the Cherry Picker came to repaired the windows, and brought down a 1000 years of dust, which was not easy, so thank you all (you can all dust yourself down). At this time we would just like to welcome Paul Lacey to the Team, where he has taken up the position of a Mission Apprentice. Please find time to speak to him about his new role, as he welcomes encouragement and prayers. We would just like to thank everyone who attended and helped out on all of our Fun and Community days, a special thanks also goes out Ally and his crew for all they do.

We the wardens, would like to take this opportunity to thank Andy and Beverley, for all their hard work, support and ministry. We know that it has not been easy for them, so please continue to pray for them and we ask God to send help when needed.

Thank you all for making our roles as Warden, such an enjoyable one. God Bless you all.

Asian Fellowship report - Ms Giyanow Kaur

This year the Asian fellowship has been blessed and rewarded by seeing new people including 4 young children coming to the services. So seeing 2 baptisms and confirmation of some members. We did the Alpha course bi-lingually, a first in the UK for HTB, not for the AF, HTB were interested and wanted to meet and learn from us. A big thank you to "Alpha India" and family friends who helped to get the course material for and to us.

Also as I was away on placement from September to December, the AF was helped by Dilip Kumar from Good News Church, Handsworth Standing in as the interpreter for the leader and preachers. A big thank to Vanico for continually being there in my absence, even if it is only by doing cheese and tomatoes baps for the light lunch, and by opening, cleaning and locking up after the service. The end-of-service lunch was also reintroduced, mostly due to the children's arrival and the length of the service, again showing the importance of Values A B C and F, as we do C D and E in the process.

This has gone further afield as Resham and Anant have continued to oversee the work of the Prayer hall in the Punjab, India, with Channu doing his annual Christmas visit to Khotran, Punjab. The Khotran church has also seen growth with many being baptised and even a wedding being held in the building. I feel we are greatly blessed at APC and AF, by God's grace and out pouring of the Holy Spirit in all that is being done in Birmingham, in the Punjab and other parts of the world. As we seek to encounter serve and follow Him.

First Sunday report - Mr Ivor Lewis

Over the last 12 months we have moved from developing our own programme to following the parish preaching rota. This has included teaching on 2nd Corinthians; Being welcoming and on our parish values. We have experimented in our worship with varying degrees of success; using music from youtube and acoustic guitar. I would like to thank co-workers Andi Thomas and Paul Lacey for all their hard work over the last year.

Youthworker's report - Mr Ivor Lewis

My work over the last 12 months has been divided up into two key areas:

- a) To continue to build new forms of church among the young people of Aston which will enable them to make connections with God in their own contexts;
- b) To undertake youth and community development work in the neglected Witton area of Aston and re-establish the Witton Community Centre as a community resource.

This year's report looks at progress over the last 12 months.

OUR WORK IN ASTON

Last April I became a part of the Children's Church leadership team, helping to lead the Explorers (8-11's)

The Groups

The Crèche - For some time last year there was a real concern about whether the Crèche was sustainable due to the difficulty of recruiting helpers. Glenys had been covering several weeks each month. However in the Autumn she was able to recruit a number of helpers and there is also cover for 5th Sundays.

At the beginning of the year we also began to explore the possibility of a setting up Scramblers Group (5-7's...). Our Hope Worker, Jane Williams has been offering a taster session on the second Sunday of each month.

The Explorers (8-11's) - Last summer Lilian stepped down from leading the group. Having explored a number of ways of sustaining this group and its leaders, the best solution seemed to be that I would move across to help lead the Explorers group. Gail has now joined us on 3rd Sundays so that we can continue to have two leaders covering each regular monthly session.

Whilst I still have a concern about numbers in the Explorers group with attendance fluctuating between 2 and 7 children each week, I am encouraged by God's provision of leaders and believe we can build on this. I therefore would like to express my deep thanks to James Hicks, Lilian Marshall and Gail Lewis for their faithful and gifted service over the last year.

Messy Easter - On Easter Saturday, we ran a 'Messy Church' event in the APC Centre. It was attended by both church and local families. There was a good buzz and people seemed to be up for doing something like this again in the near future. It may also be the start of something which could help to grow our children's work.

Youth Ministry (11+) - Around 18 months ago I made the decision to split the young peoples group up into two distinctive groups 11-16yrs and 14+ (with some overlap between the two). The main reason behind it was to develop provision specifically suited to the needs of each group. The younger group continued to meet in the meeting room and the older group met on Wednesday evenings at the Salvation Army.

I asked Andi Thomas and Paul Lacey to write a couple of paragraphs about our youth ministry with 11+ on Sunday Mornings, Wednesday evenings and 'The Lounge...' as they have been involved in much of the face to face work over the last year.

Hope Unleashed... (11-16yrs group) [Paul Lacey] - "On Sunday mornings, with the youth group, we have been working our way through the Gospel of Luke, using a short passage each week. We have a core group of about five or six, but also about four or five young people who come every few weeks. We run a normal session on both second and fourth Sundays. There is a plan to hold a group meal after church on a third Sunday, as this is the shortest service and many of our group are involved in the band, meaning we have only a very short meeting time on this Sunday. The group is running well at the moment, it is led by me (Paul) and Andi & Briony Thomas."

Wednesday Evenings [Andi Thomas] - "On Wednesday evenings, we engage with a number of young people from a variety of backgrounds, particularly those that would not attend mainstream church as a first point of contact. We cover topics from a faith perspective starting with the bible and drawing on resources which highlight social, ethical, cultural and relational concerns.

The group has changed somewhat over the past 6 months with many of the older members trying to juggle employment and fulltime further education/training. However, a steady group of 8-10 young people turn up on a regular basis (the group attracting the younger age group of young people from within our existing youth clubs and the wider community). The evenings enable the group to think about what it is like to live as a disciple of Jesus in Aston with all the issues attached of growing up here..."

The Lounge - 'The Lounge' is our bi-monthly event for young people aged 11+ The young people are asked to bring something based on the theme to each session. So on Good Friday the young people were asked to bring something which symbolises life and death.

(Paul also wrote about 'The Lounge..'. "...We also recently held a lounge event (Myself and Ivor), Good Friday, which was attended by the core group from Sundays. This went well, we were thinking about life and death in relation to the Cross and the Resurrection...'The Lounge' continues with events at the beginning of lent and on Good Friday. We will be running one around Halloween/All Saints and Christmas as usual..."

Other Worship Events

Catalyst - Some of the young people attended the Birmingham Diocese Youth Worship events last Summer at the Cathedral. Beth Jolley is a member of the Bishop's Youth Council, the group which organises these events.

Growing Leaders Youth Edition - We completed the course last year and in the autumn had a final weekend at St Swithan's.

There are a number of sessions we would like to go back to. A key issue during the course assumed a level of education and experience that some of the young people don't have and therefore some of the sessions even when adapted didn't quite hit the mark. We still feel that the course has been valuable in investing into the young people. Some of them have been helping out at the youth and kids work at the Salvation Army and the Summer Activities Scheme.

I would like to say a huge thank you to Paul Lacey and Andi and Briony Thomas and the team at the Salvation Army for their work with young people from the Parish. .

Schools work

I am still helping out at Deykin Avenue for two dinnertime sessions a week supporting the supervisors with the older aged juniors and doing a weekly classroom assembly with Year 5 children. This has enabled me to continue to have more contact with the school and with members of the local community. In January, I also joined the assembly rota for St Matthew's and St Clement's Schools.

I took up an invitation to go into Broadway Secondary School to do an advent assembly with the year 10's out of which partnership has grown with 'The Feast' (Scripture Union Inter-faith Project). We are looking at ways to support those young people who see themselves as Christians in the school.

OUR WORK IN WITTON

We believe that the Lord wants to revitalise Witton spiritually, socially and economically. This includes being involved in developing Triangle Groups in the area and also working to re-establish the Witton Community Centre and the Witton Community Association as focal points for local community activity.

Witton Triangle Group

Over the last year, our group numbers have remained fairly consistent. As a group we are aware of our strengths and weaknesses in the 'Up', 'In' and 'Out' in that we are good at worshipping and looking after each other but need more work on the collectively blessing others so we will be running the Alpha Course over the summer term. Over the next 12 months, I hope we will be able to focus on 'little outs' in the Witton area and looking at ways to develop mission in the Pod.

Witton Community Association

Over the last 12 months our focus has been three-fold.:

- 1) Re-establishing ourselves as a stakeholder in the Community Centre under the new tenants.
- 2) Establishing the Pod as a community resource.
- 3) Raising our profile within the Witton Area.

1) The Witton Community Centre - The Community Centre has new tenants!! Great Healthcare in the Community (GHC) who have signed an initial 5 year lease in the autumn and have been looking to bring in partners such as Trident Housing, Aquarius, Brook as well as develop services with organisations such as Learn Direct. WCA is working with the community centre to develop activities for local people.

Witton Women's Keep Fit group - For much the last year the group was inactive whilst we were waiting for the tenant issue at the centre to become clearer and then for the new tenants to settle in. At the start of March 2012 WCA started a weekly Zumba class and are already talking about moving to a larger venue to ensure that we do not have turn anyone away.

2) The Witton Community Pod (Formally 'the Perry Barr Youth Pod') The Pod is based in the grounds of Shiloh church. The steering group made up of Shiloh Pentecostal Church; Witton Community Association; the West Midlands Police; the Fire Service; the Housing Department; Midland Heart Housing Association and the Perry Barr Ward Support Officer has been overseeing it and we have working on establishing a programme of events, drop-ins and activities to deliver from it including:

*After-school/homework clubs *Councillor's Surgeries *Youth and kids clubs *Holiday Schemes
*Housing/Tenant Participation Groups Meetings *Parents Groups *Police Surgeries *Fire-safety Sessions

Looking back over the last year it has very much been a stop/start process of getting the Pod up and running. The Pod is currently hosting Police Advice sessions and informal youth drop-in's and it will soon host our local Councillors Surgeries but it's overall usage was until recently limited to daytime use only. However thanks to a series of successful funding bids to the Perry Barr Housing Liaison Board we were able to install lighting and security last month and the remaining work is scheduled for the completion by the end of April.

3) WCA Newsletter

In September we had a visioning session out of which the 'Witton News' newsletter emerged. With much thanks to Nicola Lacey, we were able to produce and deliver it to every house in the area. Our next edition will be out in June.

Our work with Children and Young People.

Aston & Witton Summer Scheme 2011

Between the Monday 25th – Friday 29th July (8-11yrs) and Monday 8th – Friday 12th August (12-16yrs), the WCA in partnership with The Salvation Army (Aston) ran a programme of activities to over 80 children and young people (aged 8 – 16yrs) from Aston and Witton. The project was based at the Salvation Army building in Gladstone St, Aston. There was around 80 kids on the scheme (46 kids from the Witton area).

Our programme consisted of a number of workshops and challenging activities. The Workshops offered were drama; a newspaper media project; art & crafts; sports coaching and a healthy eating project.

The children and young people also went on trips out. We took the juniors to the Cinema and Ten-Pin Bowling at Star City and to the Woodlands Adventure Centre where they went on the zip wire; canoeing; archery and an obstacle course. The older group went to Waterworld near Stoke-on-Trent and they also took part in Paintballing (A-Ball Arena) at the National Paintballs Fields near Bassett's Pole.

Witton Youth Project

WCA was successful in applying for funding from the Perry Barr Community Chest. We are proposing to develop a pilot youth project working across both sides of Witton. On the north side it will run a youth session from the Witton Community Centre. On the south side where the Pod is situated we are looking to develop some detached youth work sessions which we expect will develop into a regular drop-in session at the Pod.

We are hoping to have Worth Unlimited (a West Midlands Charity set up to work with young people) as partners in this project, which will initially run over 20 weeks. We are talking to them about offering a Development Worker role which will build the project from a standing start and look specifically into gathering evidence to develop a much larger and stronger bid. They will also focus on its longer term sustainability. And built into the bid is the role of a sessional youth worker who will lead a small team of local volunteers in the face to face youth work.

In Conclusion...

In terms of our youth and children's work, I am really encouraged by God's provision of leaders/helpers over the last year especially in the Crèche and Explorers groups. I am conscious of the need to work at growing the numbers of kids who are regularly coming. Our work with young people has been fine but we have identified the need to grow young people who are becoming disciples so that it is not necessarily about what we provide (important as it is) but on helping the young people to deepen their commitment to following Jesus.

I have been more involved in schools work this year and recognise that this may be a door opening to a wider work with children and young people who may not necessarily end up at our parish churches but it is still important in being and bringing good news to as many people as possible. This is also at the heart of our work in Witton where I am encouraged by the momentum which is slowly building.

Again I would like to express our deep gratitude to everyone who has played a part or prayed for and encouraged us over the last 12 months.

Children's Church report - Mr James Hicks

Childrens Church for age 7-11 now meets each week except first Sunday. An important part of each session is to find out what the children have been up to and pray for them. We then use Scripture Union 'xstream' material to help us learn from the bible - activities vary but may include an improvised drama, making a poster, and creative worship, not forgetting some fun games and sometimes a snack. As well as teaching about Jesus' life and ministry we have dug into the Old Testament a bit to see what relevance the Kings and prophets have for our lives.

Special events have included a weekend visit last May from a mid-week youth club from a church in Manchester where James' brother worships. About 25 kids most of whom are not regular church goers came, and received a fantastic welcome. We did some joint activities with Aston church children on the Saturday and it was great to be able to include them in part of the church service. Also, every couple of months we take a group of children to Xsite in the centre of Birmingham which is a regular event for 7-11's with bible teaching, worship, lots of fun and games – this has been really helpful for our kids to see they're part of a bigger Christian family.

In the summer, Lillian stepped down and we would like to thank her for her dedication to the children's ministry. The regular leaders are James and Ivor with assistance from Gail. Apart from an occasional

baptism when we may get 15 kids in the group the average is 4 or 5 kids, it's great to see them disciplined but we are praying for more children and we're looking to get new leaders involved. At the moment we have a separate group for 5-7's once a month and we hope to see this grow.

Crèche - Mrs Glenys Veitch

Many thanks to those who turn up, and not only to look after but to teach the children. Come and join us any time to see and hear what's going on, we do have some fun times. Its great to have some new faces in crèche - Lesley Lacey and Lesley B, Mehdi, Pat Gale and Margaret Middleton - and a thankyou to Lecia who helps at the times she is able to. There is always room for more who would be welcome to join us, even if it was just for one Sunday a month. Your love and prayers are always needed and welcomed.

Worship report - Mrs Rosemary Cripps

This year has been notable for the further development and consolidation of the band, led on second Sunday by Stephanie Fletcher and on third Sunday by Beverly Watson. We have continued to encourage younger members to support the singing on first, second and third Sundays. In addition we have welcomed Pauline Turnbull and Rajwinder Kaur in joining helping lead the singing for fourth and fifth Sundays.

The special 3 churches combined services have been another highlight particularly on Christmas Eve but also on several fifth Sundays. Having a brass ensemble for "Carols by Candlelight" added something extra special to the atmosphere for one of the best attended services of the year.

We thank Margaret Griffin and Brian Perry for their loyal support in playing organ and piano for services including open air services through the summer, at weddings and funerals. Several of the latter have been to support other church fellowships where they have hired the Parish Church to accommodate in excess of 300 mourners.

The range of music, power point, video and film in regular use has continued as in previous years with very flexible use in the evening "More" sessions and with continued introduction of new congregational singing material interspersed with more traditional hymns and use of the organ for the morning services.

During the year the Ally has continue to upgrade the PowerPoint system and we can now add a camera when needed for large services to provide pictures via auxiliary projectors in the south aisle and the meeting room. The PowerPoint element is also more reliable.

The major improvement with the church PA system was achieved by moving the PA control desk to the back of the church. For the first time the operator can hear what is going on. A good question was why was the box in the middle of the church for so many years, the answer we understand is very logical, when the system was installed 30 years ago the cable was too short to reach the back of the church.

The main church PA system is now being more fully utilised with most channels in use on Band Sundays. This has brought with it set up and set down requirements and we are working with band members to encourage them to deal with their own cables and microphones.

In the Hall for first Sunday there have been a number of trials using imported speakers but in the end it was decided that the benefits were insufficient to justify the effort required. For the present we are using the PA system as installed in the hall with all its short comings.

The PA Team has held steady in numbers in particular thanks to the continued leadership from Ally with support from others driving the PowerPoint when needed. In the church to be honest we are stretched when Ally or Nigel are not available. This is an opportunity for some one who would like to know more to join the team. All new members receive full training.

Our vision is to encourage more people of all ages and backgrounds to join us and that we shall continue to grow in helping lead the services while having the joy of singing and making music together.

Church Committee report - Mrs Margaret Griffin

There have been four meetings this year. We have discussed "Transforming Church", involving a Welcoming Focus Group, the employment of Jane Williams for children's work, 'Can Do 4:13', and the

Foodbank. A new Growing Leaders course began in September.

We have heard from the church-centre management committee and had reports on the Alpha courses, the use of the band in services, and the youthwork. Plans have been made for Back to Church Sunday and the weekend at Hothorpe, as well as other events throughout the year.

Work has been done on the Meeting Room, the high-level windows and the sound system. Financial reports and decisions on the church's charitable giving have been received.

We are grateful to the council members, who have such a care for the Lord's work in our church.

Church Centre Management Committee - Mr John Huzzey

Letting of facilities was still giving cause for concern. We have only three regular user groups; Boys Brigade, Guides and Brownies. Parent and toddlers moved to St Matthews in September 2011.

Very few occasional bookings, but on the plus side the flat has been let at a commercial rent since May 2011. But this tenancy will cease in April, because we need a time to check over the flat before the new curate moves in, in June. This tenancy will be for three years initially, with the rent being paid by the parish, subsidised by the income from the Manor Road house, which is owned by the parish. Lettings are being handled by Hollier-Brown estate agents, who are already handling the Manor Road house.

We are currently trying to get funding to refurbish the centre (Higgins lounge and corridor, suspending ceilings) the whole of the lounge, hall and corridor walls need re-decorating, and we do have quotes for these jobs. Also light fittings in the main hall (with protective covers to prevent damage to the tubes)

Nigel is actively pursuing various avenues of funding and we already have the matching funding in place.

Thanks to everyone for their help with the day to day running of the centre, particularly Stephanie (Centre bookings) and Liana our treasurer.

Project officer's report – Mr Nigel Cripps

The last 12 months have been very busy but there have been difficulties that have slowed progress with various improvement works.

Funding has been a big problem in the last 12 months with the closure of many public sector grant programmes. The major impact has been our inability to find the matching funds for the repairs to the church roof and tower. Some grants have been received and the debt has been cleared for the architects work to move the project to the point where we can award a contract to a building firm. The outstanding sum is £40,000 to £50,000 and time is running out. Changes to the VAT refund arrangements have been unhelpful to us.

On a more positive note I have assisted St Matthews resolve heating problems and we have dealt with a number of maintenance issues at Aston Parish Church. We had a 'picker' inside the church in November (see cover) and sealed up the clearstory windows, including replacing a number that were broken. This should reduce heat loss and prevent birds flying into the building.

The City has been reviewing its planning strategy for Aston and I have invested time to appear at the public enquiry into the Aston Area Action Plan. The inspector's report is due but we have already succeeded in changing some elements including adding the church and churchyard to the list of recipients of 106 funding associated with the Serpentine Ground being included in the East Aston Regional Investment site.

The saga with the Serpentine Ground continues. With the demise of Advantage West Midlands (the Regional Development Agency) the site is owned by the Housing and Communities Agency (HCA). Their brief from Government is to sell the land and they have appointed agents for this purpose. Discussions continue with the planners, HCA and the tenants of the Aston Arena.

A £1000 bequest from Major Dodd (he used to lead the parade on Somme Sunday) has been used open a fund for the replacement of the floor and heating system at Aston Parish Church. The fund now stands at £2,200.

The church recorders of Birmingham Decorative and Fine Arts Society, a member of NADFAS as completed its inventory of the 55 monuments in the church. The report is a wealth of information that will become a source of reference for future generations. The Webmaster is investigating the best way to digitise the record to provide easy access for historians and provide a facility for the public to add historic data.

After last year's hiatus of public sector cut backs it is encouraging that limited funding is becoming available and priority is being given to (1) obtaining matching funds for the tower- roof repair work, (2) replacing the ceiling in the church centre and associated environmental improvements and (3) upgrading the audio visuals systems at St James and Aston Parish Churches.

Treasurer's report - Miss Stephanie Fletcher

This year has had its challenges. We continue to struggle to find the resources and meet the cost of our Youth Worker, and due to miscommunications following Colin Howell's death we missed making grant payments to charity and mission partners, which were agreed in 2010. These grants have now been paid.

On an encouraging note, most (eighty-eight per cent) of Aston Parish Church's income comes from congregational giving, for which we are very grateful. However, it would be great if as many people as possible could be giving, in order for the work that is carried out to continue.

Thanks again must go to Marjorie Featherstone, who has been invaluable in terms of looking over the accounts.

ACTS (Aston Church Trading Services) - Mr Nigel Cripps and Mr Cliff Griffin

During 2011 there was a 32% increase in activity however the stall made a small financial loss. This was attributable to problems of a slow turnover with some food items resulting in them being sold at reduced price or given away.

During the autumn Nigel and Pauline attended the national launch of the Traidcraft Christmas catalogue and much helpful information was received about Traidcraft future plans and how it is coping with many of the staple products being offered; in competition through supermarkets.

During the year book sales increased but as with the Traidcraft we have problems with slow moving stock.

Balance sheet

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Bank (Opening)	737.83	Bank (Closing)	796.16
Cash (Opening)	106.12	Cash (Closing)	89.63
Stock (Opening)	333.63	Stock (Closing)	400.70
Sales		Purchases	
Books	497.14	Books	497.14
T Craft	2094.30	T Craft	2094.65
From reserve	129.26		
Total	3898.28	Total	3898.28

Future activity - It is important to be realistic. Books used to be the only means of providing information but no longer, so we have to have fewer books and more concise information materials. With Traidcraft we must work harder to demonstrate that the premium price is worth paying because money is going to help the poor. Good examples are to promote the olive oil produced in Palestine and the real Easter egg.

In future we have to be more proactive with publicising what is available and expanding the regular user base within church members. It is not possible to purchase the weekly shopping basket 100% from fairly traded items but always purchasing tea, or pasta or wine that is fairly traded makes a huge difference.

Finally. Thank you to our families who have to deal with boxes stored at home, to Pauline for help running the stalls and most importantly thank you for supporting ACTS.

Boys' Brigade report - Mrs Jenny Martin

It's been another busy year in the Company ! We try to give the boys as many opportunities as possible to do things they may not otherwise have chance to do. In May 2011 we took the 11 - 18 yr olds away for a weekend. We kindly given the use of a cottage in the Brown Clee Hills, owned by the 11th Birmingham Company. We visited Blist Hill and took the boys swimming, they also got the chance to run round the hills with laser guns, something which is a favourite of theirs. We went again to the cottage in June with the 8 - 11 yr olds, again visiting Blist Hill and playing with the laser guns but also visiting Acton Scott Working Farm. Both weekends were brilliant, it is great to take the boys away, even if only for a couple of days, you really do get to know them better.

In July 2011, after the success of the Centenary Party, we held a skittles afternoon for past and present members and members of the church to get together. It was again a success. From September 2011 onwards the boys have entered competitions in football, pool and table tennis. They did really well in the pool and table tennis. We have also had the Annual Divisional Parade, held at the 29th's HQ. The boys who go to this important church service, we hold once a year to remember our founder are given a trip later in the session as a thank you.

The boys in the older sections went to play on a 150 foot scalextric track, with other boys from the division. It was a fun afternoon and our company got the top four places in the final race. The boys in the younger section went to Coventry Motor Museum, again another fun afternoon, with the added excitement of going by train. We are now preparing for this years long weekend camp, in May. We are going to be camping in Harlech and taking all sections at the same time!

The company has seen growth since September, we now have 15 boys on the books, which is fantastic, we would now like to see a growth in leaders, if at all possible, it would mean that we wouldn't be so restricted to what we can do with the boys. We also have 4 boys going for their Presidents Badge, the second highest award in 'The Boys Boys' Brigade and not one that many achieve. It involves a lot of hard work and dedication from the boys and these 4 are doing really well.

We are now looking forward to the 2012 / 2013 Session and all the things that God has planned for the Company. I would like to also take this opportunity, on behalf of the Company, to thank the church for their continued support, it really does mean a great deal to us all.

For six months last year, we had a former member of the Company come down to teach some of the boys to play the drums. They were rewarded for their hardwork when they were asked to play at the Church Christmas Fayre. The boys marched along the streets, playing alongside Father Christmas and did an amazing job.

Sadly during the last few months, two former members of the 1st have passed away, Ron Morris who is a former Captain and John Denney who was an officer. Many of us will have fond memories of these two wonderful men and neither will be forgotten by us.

4th B'ham, 1st Aston Manor Guides' report - Mrs Margaret Griffin

Our numbers this year have stayed below a dozen, but the girls are delightful and the programme has been well received.

In **January** we began the Teamwork Go-for-it, which was led partly by Vicky Smale, our trainee leader. The girls made Thinking Day cards for the Scouts in Nechells.

February brought two outings- one to Tamworth Snowdome for tobogganing, and one to the Division Thinking Day service at Stockland Green, when we demonstrated the Maori Stick Game.

March was a busy month. We began the Team Player badge, and the B.P. Guides worked on the World Guiding badge. We made pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and held a Promise themed evening. Paulette Reid, our Unit Helper, took a few girls to the football taster session, and we finished the month with Mothering Sunday cards.

Easter fell in **April**, and we made surprise boxes for our families. We began working on the Football challenge badge, tried balancing a block of chocolate on top of a tower of paper spills, practised our First aid, and had a fun evening run by District Guiders Gill and Yvonne.

Cooking was the main feature of **May**.

We had a lovely time in **June**, soundly thrashing the Brownies at a football match in Aston Park, and holding a camp evening at which we pitched a tent (in a high wind) and used natural materials for craftwork.

The Guides were part of the parade on Somme Sunday, in **July**. Vicky moved to Dorset, but Amy joined us. Lemara made her promise as a Young Leader. We held the annual water race and water fight, and then joined the rest of the District for a trip to Acker's Trust.

In **September** we began with a set of challenges (including to sew on a button, use the Deaf Alphabet and learn a campfire song) to win the ingredients needed to make sweets. The next week, we toasted marshmallows over a campfire. We practised marching and took part in the Remembrance Sunday parade. We decided to earn the "Deaf Awareness" badge.

As well as continuing that Badge work, we added the "I will survive" Go-for-it in **October**, as well as the "Traditions of Guiding" badge. Aisha continued her work for the B.P. Trefoil. At Half Term, we went to the Indian Dancing at Trefoil House and to a skate and bowl session.

November brought sparklers for Bonfire Night, and the start of weekly scientific experiments organised by Amy. We helped at the Church's Christmas Fair, and we made beaded coat-hangers as Christmas presents. The "I will survive" Go-for-it led to making shelters in the church-yard, in the dark, out of polythene.

In **December** we made and sent calendars to former Guiding members in Aston Link, and made edible mangers.

My personal highlight of the year was receiving the award for an outstanding contribution to local Guiding, at the Midland Region ceremony.

2012 has got off to a good start, too, because the Deputy Lord Mayor and his wife visited us to present the "Deaf Awareness" badge.

Bell Ringers report – Don Finnemore

We had two new members join up this year but are still in desperate need of people to come and learn how to bell ring. We currently only have a very small number of bell-ringers and so would really like to encourage new members to come and join. Please contact me (Don) if you are interested or know of someone who is. Margaret attended a bellringing teachers' course earlier this year. We welcomed Stephanie and Lesley, who have begun learning to ring. John, a regular Thursday ringer, wants to ring a Quarterpeal to celebrate his 80th birthday, so we have been learning how to ring Reverse Canterbury Pleasure Bob Doubles!

Bread & Butter Gang report - Mrs June Huzzey

We have started a coffee and chat morning, but after six weeks it was quite apparent it was not going to work, there was only three faithful friends come to support us, so we finished.

We did hot cross buns & drinks for the car wash.

Refreshments also for funerals of Steve's mum, Maisie Dawson, Zelda and Ron Morris, for service for the bereaved. and for King Edwards' Carol service, Community Carol service and Carols by candlelight

We had a wonderful evening with 'Kate's Party'. I believe it was probably the best one we have had so far. We raised £214, with the help of the raffle. We have given £100 towards the refurbishing of the centre, which we hope will start very soon.

Another £100 will go to the fund for the flooring in church.

The remaining £14 will go into Play & Stay.

ST JAMES' REPORTS

Churchwarden Report - Mr Cephas France

I'm pleased to report that 2011 has been an uneventful year, as far as damage or vandalism is concerned. There have been a few minor repairs needed but nothing too difficult or costly.

We purchased two new electric heaters for the Meeting Room, which was too cold for the Playgroup during the winter months. We also fitted a security gate to the side door (Advice Centre entrance).

Annual checks were done on Fire Extinguishers and the CCTV system, with Electric PAT test and Gas Boiler Service being done a little later. A new gas meter was fitted in April 2011 and also since then the electric meter has been changed over to a *smart meter* – which means the electricity readings are accurate and up to date.

I would like to thank those who help keep the building clean and in good shape, also those who help cut the grass and keep the outside areas in good order. In general the building is in good repair.

Church Committee Secretary's report - Ms Sharon McDonald

St. James is situated in Aston, Birmingham and is one of the three churches which form the Parish of Aston and Nechells, which is a vibrant multi-cultural community.

It continues to hold regular courses and groups: *Growing Leaders* for those wishing to play a more active role in the church, and the *Alpha Course* for those wanting to know more about the Christian faith. Triangle Groups help build us up as a family, as well as welcoming newcomers into the congregation.

The church thrives on keeping itself at the heart of the local community by offering an Advice Centre, which gives advice on benefits and debt. Also this year a Food Bank has been started for the benefit of those less fortunate. A new charitable organisation 'Can Do 4:13' has been established which now runs the Advice Centre and the Foodbank.

St. James truly believes in playing an active role in the community, not only in its continuation to rent space in the church to organisations in and around Birmingham but also organising events in the community such as fun-days and coach trips. The Annual Caribbean Evening gave St. James the opportunity to invite people, including members of our link parish of Colwall to an eventful evening of entertainment, a raffle and great food.

Through the grace of God St. James will continue to grow and flourish with help from the Worshippers, and those who donate regularly of their time and money, and those who serve faithfully on the Church Committee and Parochial Church Council.

Advice Centre Report - Mr David Fletcher

Given that this is the Easter season, there is a very suitable theme to my report on 2011: death and resurrection.

In January, due to the decision by Birmingham City Council to stop our funding, we had to take the difficult step of closing the old Advice Centre and making all our paid staff redundant. The only reason why the Centre remained open after that was that for the next three months most staff members were prepared to keep working, on a voluntary basis, while we waited to see what would happen. I wish to pay tribute to my colleagues - Nasreen Begum, Samina Kauser, Parveen Akhter, and Lynne Lines - who made this all-important commitment, without which this report might have been very different.

At the beginning of April, the City Council were compelled to restore funding to our Centre for four months (later extended to five and a half)! This was due to a judicial review case taken out by clients of three advice agencies - including ours - on the grounds that the Council had not consulted advice organisations in the correct way before taking their decision.

During those three months, CAN DO 4:13 had come into existence, so we re-opened under new governance, and with a new name, on 9 May 2011, with three paid advisors and myself.

We had understandably lost a number of clients in the meantime, particularly as we had had to change our telephone number; however, we were soon back to normal, or a reasonable imitation of it. We have in recent months sought to diversify by branching out into debt advice, as we regard this as more important, and more likely to attract new funding, than the immigration advice which has been one of our mainstays in the past.

In June 2011, we applied for a new City Council contract, which would have guaranteed money for the next three years, but we were informed in September that we had been unsuccessful in this. However, thanks to two grants, from the government's Transition Fund and from the Church Urban Fund, we were

able to keep going, and at the end of 2011 we reckoned that we had enough in the bank to stay open until at least the end of June 2012.

That, in brief, is what happened in 2011, which could justifiably be described as the most difficult year in the Advice Centre's history. I would like to update you briefly on the current situation. Unexpectedly, we have just received a generous grant from the government's Advice Services Fund which will pay for all our expenses for at least 12 months! That is a great encouragement, and indeed we are appointing extra staff on the strength of it. Please pray that the Advice Centre will continue its aim of serving the needy people of Aston and surrounding areas in the best possible way.

It is worth reporting that despite all the disruption, we dealt with a total of 1,538 cases during the calendar year, involving 499 different clients. Of these, 263 (52.7%) were men and 236 (47.3%) women. 49.5% of clients were Pakistani in origin, and 42.3% Bangladeshi.

Junior Church - Mrs Juliet Fletcher

We greatly value the young people who come to our church.

Jane Williams, our parish Children's Worker, joined us to lead a monthly Junior Church session from October to December, 2011. At a Wednesday evening beforehand we planned the event and valued the input of Sharon MacDonald and Janet Campbell-Robinson on these occasions. Our Back to Church Sunday for children in October was well attended with a number of visiting children adding to our numbers. Jane's expertise and enthusiasm was a great inspiration and encouragement. Since January, Jane has been focussing the attention of her monthly Sunday commitment on Aston Parish Church. With the attendance of children at St James being rather sporadic it has been difficult to build a sense of a group and a team.

The monthly All Age Service and a resources' table at the back of the church on most other Sundays offers activities suitable for children.

Every two months a group of volunteer drivers take children aged 8-11 from the parish to X-Ste. This event organised by Scripture Union and held at Birmingham Christian Centre is attended by around 100 children. It includes lively singing, games, teaching, puppets, craft activities and prayer on a Bible theme aimed at nurturing children in their faith. This is a wonderful opportunity for children to be together with their peers, to have fun and be encouraged in their faith. We are grateful for the volunteers who make this possible. Please encourage any 8-11 year olds you know to come along.

Please continue to pray for the future of our work with young people. Pray that we would have creative ideas that would help us build up this work again.

Treasurer's report - Mrs Jackie Burton

When we set the budget for 2011 I was worried that the target for the year from rents alone was set at £25,000. I doubted if we would reach this. But, praise God! Our many and varied tenants brought in £24,306. In fact, if all the invoices had been cleared by 31st December, we would have exceeded the budgeted amount. It is a pleasure to host groups like the Harry Watton Drop in (Thursdays), the Aston Pre-School and Playgroup (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) and not forgetting our own Advice Centre, which didn't start of the year too well, but has been blessed since then with some funding. Although we lost the Cardio Rehab group during the year, we still have the Pulmonary Rehab group here two days a week (Monday and Wednesday). We also have had a couple of one-off bookings and a 24-week series of Zumba and Aerobics.

I must also mention our brothers and sisters in Christ from the Ebenezer Evangelical Church, and the small but faithful Church of God who rent our building for worship. Our user-friendly building is a blessing to us, both financially and by the fact that as Christians we can meet and show hospitality to people from all faiths, all cultures and all walks of life - as it is written in Scripture; "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Giving by Pledge members, and those who give on the collection plate has brought in a generous £15,800. Thank you all very much indeed! So once again our income (£47,705) has exceeded our overheads (£41,000) and we thank God for another year at St. James Church, Aston.

Men's Club report - Mr Cephas France

The Men's Club has been running for about four years now, and a few faithful members continue to meet in the Meeting Room at St. James on alternate Tuesday mornings (11.00am to 2.00pm) and Thursday evenings (7.30pm to 10.00pm).

We start our meeting with a prayer or Bible reading, and then enjoy a few games of dominoes. We would like more men to join us, so if anyone would like to come along please do so.

Socials / Trips report - Mrs Maureen France

During 2011 we were blessed by our trips and socials.

On July 24th we travelled to our link parish of St. James, Colwall. The weather was very good to us, and we had a good St. James Day service, followed by an excellent lunch together with our brothers and sisters at Colwall.

After lunch we were taken to visit a local vineyard, where many of us made some refreshing purchases! Before returning to the little church of All Saints Coddington for evensong.

Our link with Colwall is one we all value very much.

Our annual seaside trip was to Southend – Two coaches were filled, and once again the weather was nice, and everyone had a really good day out.

On Saturday September 17th was the Caribbean Evening – the compere we expected did not arrive, but Jackie stepped in and introduced the acts throughout the evening. We were entertained by some wonderful guests including Birchfield Gospel Hall choir, Chris from Christchurch Baptist, Mr. O'Conner, and our star guest Spicy Fingers who treated us to some of his poems and some drumming. We also had a display of Zumba! After all this excitement we had an excellent meal, and went home well happy!

ST MATTHEW'S REPORTS

Churchwarden's Report - Mr Bill Perry

We have had a year of ups and downs for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the Leasing Agreement that we have been negotiating over the past two years, has finally been agreed to everyone's satisfaction..

Secondly, although the foyer has been re-plastered, re-wired, and re-decorated, we still had a problem with the ingress of water at the four corners of the roof. This has now been dealt with and the foyer now looks much more presentable. Additionally, you will have noticed that further work has been carried out in the churchyard to clear away and open up the area, and along with CCTV cameras, additional lighting and repairs, this has helped to make the area safer. Aquarius, the alcohol abuse centre, closed there operation at the Matthews Centre but were closely followed by Birmingham & Solihull NHS Trust who started moving in just before Christmas and who now seem to be fully established. For those who may not be aware, St. Matthew's Church does not receive any income from this letting – it all belongs to the Diocese.

The Intruder Alarm system seems to be doing it's job although we have had a couple of break-in's during the year which resulted in the office computer being stolen. This has now been replaced and is a considerable improvement on the one that was stolen

We now have three other churches meeting at St. Matthew's each Sunday. The Regeneration Centre meet in the Community Hall at 10.30am whilst Without Walls Fellowship meet after we have finished, until 4pm and at 4.30pm another church, the Christian Fellowship, meet until 8pm.

Of course we are also missing Rev'd Jenny Arnold. Jenny has moved to The Quinton and this has left Andy and Beverly with a substantially increased workload. We have so far not been able to appoint another Associate Vicar and so the vicarage now stands empty.

At present, the cleaning is done on an ad hoc basis by four or five of us, although it is mostly done by Hilary and Debbie, to whom we are extremely grateful.

Treasurer's report - Mr Geoff Miller

It has been a year of mixed blessings. Income from giving and rent was down by over £800 and there were some additional large expenses, including just under £3000 for Church property insurance and over £1000 for the replacement of the Community Hall water pump.

However, by the end of the year the improvements to the Community Hall heating had helped in retaining a regular booking. Plus the Stay & Play group and the Aston and Nechells Food Bank had started to use the premises one morning a week. Also we have now attracted another Church which meets regularly on Sunday late afternoon/evening.

We have also increased the Church and Community Hall hire charges, to what we consider to be a more realistic level considering the current financial climate.

Childrens' Church report - Mrs Hilary Miller

The numbers in our specific group continue to vary. Recently we have welcomed two teenagers who have chosen to join the group plus the younger sister of one. This is partially as a result of them attending the monthly Messy Church. The children who form this group are very enthusiastic and a joy to work with. Recommendation for anyone considering a calling to assist with this work!

Joan and others have been diligent in encouraging the children to contribute to the music by being part of an 'upfront singing group.' They have responded positively to this and one young person in particular assists with various tasks after the service.

This year we welcomed two new communicants and the preparation time was a blessing to leader and children alike.

There are a growing number of pre school children who use of resource table at the back of church. We are grateful to the Mothers' Union for their gift of bags containing biblical based books and small toys to hand out to children as they arrive. Our excellent door welcomer is diligent with this.

Leadership is something of an on-going challenge and though there is someone who has agreed to help, her work commitments do not lend themselves to this at present.

Please pray for more children and more leaders. May we be able to encourage and incorporate the teenagers in a way that is meaningful to them and moves them on in faith.

Stay & Play report - Mrs June Huzzey

Last September it was decided that play group at Aston had run its course and was time to finish. We have now located to St Matthews, Nechells. We started with one child who followed us from Aston, but William then moved on to nursery. Slowly but surely we have grown to between 7, 9 and 11 children.

We have watched as these moms have got to mix together, having come from three different countries. We can see them getting closer and making new friends. This has been very good to watch.

Jane has been excellent with them, we hope she will be able to be with us next year. Please pray that it will continue to grown in strength and numbers.

Children and families - Rev Beverly Watson

Our work among children and their families has been greatly enhanced this year by the arrival of Jane Williams as a part time Children's Worker. Jane started work in September 2011, and has been with us every Wednesday and one Sunday a month since then.

Jane's presence with us has enabled us to launch 'Messy Church' at St. Matthew's. This group meets after school on the second Wednesday of each month, and is open to children aged between 5 and 11, and their families (though younger siblings are welcome too). Most of the families who come are from St. Matthew's school, and we regularly have about 40 people attending, along with a strong team of 10 or so people from across the parish.

The afternoon is made up of craft activities, a worship time altogether, and then a hot meal for everyone. It's been great to see children and their families enjoying being in church together – some of whom have no other experience of being part of the Christian family. It has been good to welcome families from Aston Parish Church too, and to have share this experience with children from our own churches.

Jane has also helped us re-locate the 'Stay and Play' group from Aston Parish Church, to St. Matthew's community hall. June Huzzey and Zena Beard have worked with Jane to draw in a dozen or so new families into this group, from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and of different faiths. The group regularly welcomes 8/10 families on a Wednesday morning, supports local families in a practical way, and is building a strong sense of community for those who come.

Jane's work with us on Sundays has enabled us to launch a new 'Scramblers Group' for children aged between 5 and 7, on a monthly basis at Aston Parish Church. Jane's work with Ivor Lewis, James Hicks and others has enabled us to provide children's work on a weekly basis at APC. Glenys' sterling work among crèche age children continues, and this group has seen significant growth in numbers of leaders over the past year.

Well done to everyone who has worked hard with our children and their families over the past year.