

Church Council Report

March 2020 - 2021

Leadership

Leadership Team have continued to meet bi-monthly - remotely - over the last 12 months.

We have welcomed Nick Garrett onto Leadership Team, as Sue Whalley has stepped down. We are deeply thankful for Sue's ministry on LT and we know that Nick will also have a lot of great ideas to offer.

Key topics of discussion have included:

Lockdown Church: LT has discussed and reflected through the multiple transitional periods of how GS continues to be a church community through the pandemic. These discussions include the offering of digital services, the distribution of paper handout services and the reopening of the building for physical, socially-distanced services, as well as different ministerial initiatives. There has also been discussions around developing missional online content that can be pushed out to the wider Knaresborough community. In addition, there have been discussions around numerous initiatives to keep us connected, such as Calls at 11am; connexion on Facebook, home groups continuing to meet virtually etc. Special activities were prepared for times such as Advent & Christmas: eg Carols by Candlelight online and Christmas Day drop-in. Whilst we are sure that there are things we could have done better, we feel that GS has responded well to this time of challenge, with online music and videos being a particular new skillset that has been developed: we have a lot of gifted folk at GS! If anything, lockdown appears to have brought many people on the fringes of our church closer in; it's been a time when we have all felt a real yearning to be part of a community.

Resurrected Bites: LT agreed in the early stages of lockdown to allow Resurrected Bites to use The Castle Room, from which it continues to operate. Again, this has been a fantastic local community service, as well as a great witness for GS during this time. We have a strong relationship with the Resurrected Bites team. As we transition out of lockdown, the longer term location of RB will need to be agreed; we are currently considering a community store.

Community Development Worker: At the time of the initial lockdown, discussions were well underway towards the possible appointment of a Community Development Worker. These have been put on hold for now; however, we will need as a church to consider what The Bridge and the GS building more broadly will look like and be used for in our "new normal" future.

Children & Young People: These groups have been very much on our hearts and minds over the last 12 months. Initiatives to assist with home learning were developed; Messy Church ran for a time whilst allowed within the Tier rules; Youth Group ran online for a time; and videos have been produced for online Who Let the Dads Out activities. Again, the challenge of how we engage children and young people in the future is very much an open question.

Our "New Normal" Future: The future remains uncertain - how quickly will we return to "normal"? Will there be further periods of lockdown? What will be different in the future? Is this a time to re-imagine our church? What is it time to let go of, or hold on to, or develop afresh? To what extent do we wish to continue to be an online connexion? These are all questions which LT will continue to consider.

Story Board: LT have had conversation around a GS Storyboard that will offer a narrative to guide us through the transition and beyond.

David Rochester & Gordon Hay

Service & Evangelism

Noah's Ark Pre-school

What a year! As with schools, we closed on Friday 20th March 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Other than the occasional "snow day", we have operated consistently since 1993 so it came as a shock to suddenly be without our children. We offered originally to stay open for the children of critical workers, but parents managed to look after their children at home.

So, what to do? We seized the opportunity to embark upon "The Curiosity Approach" Accreditation, a 12-month programme to improve what we provide for our children in terms of environment and learning opportunities. Like everyone else it seems, we met on Zoom, we shared ideas on WhatsApp, became closer as a team and generally got giddy and excited about reopening a new and improved Noah's Ark.

We were bombarded with an endless stream of guidance from the government and were finally able to re-open on 1st June to limited numbers of children and a pared back setting. Suddenly the term "bubbles" entered our vocabulary along with "PPE" and "quarantine" as we scrubbed and disinfected between our two groups of children. There was no trip or party this year, but we managed to say goodbye to our school leavers in the garden, with parents socially distanced of course.

In the summer holidays the staff finally managed to get together with a "Bargain Hunt" £20 challenge at a car boot sale to pick up new, curious resources. Then the great clear out began; out went the plastic toys and bright coloured carpets, the tables & chairs were stored away, and we introduced more recycled and natural materials.

The Autumn term saw us reopening to all our children and deciding to have just one "bubble". We were worried how the children's transitions would be as parents were not allowed in the building and we had not had the usual home visits to build relationships with them. Actually, it was better than usual, many of them literally skipping in! We are amazed at how resilient some of our little people are.

The staff continued to scrub and disinfect their way through till Christmas, only closing once for everyone to self-isolate due to a positive case of the virus. We couldn't have our usual Under 5's Crib Service that is so popular with parents, but the children dressed up and reenacted the Christmas story in their own way in our outdoor stable. Children say the funniest things, and we were able to share our version of events with parents as a PowerPoint, though I doubt if the Wise Men really brought Baby Jesus a coffee machine!

Since January, when schools closed to most children, we have had to stay open but have reduced our opening hours. We have still accommodated all the children whose parents wanted them to attend during Lockdown 3 and the staff have had more chance to scrub and disinfect and to rest.

With almost 25% of our children having additional needs, several with English as their second language and a very young cohort, we have had a challenging year, but with a strong,

experienced, and mature team of early years professionals, we feel that we are all the better for it.

As March rolls around again, we are back to our normal hours, booking places for September, taking enquiries from prospective parents, and looking forward to a brighter future.

Vickie Wrigglesworth

Resurrected Bites

Resurrected Bites was originally set up in January 2018 to raise awareness of food waste by intercepting food, still good quality, from supermarkets, shops and cafes that otherwise would have gone to waste.

Initially food was served in “pay as you feel able” cafes and community shops at St Marks and Gracious Street allowing all access to healthy meals and fresh produce.

When the pandemic arrived in March 2020 the cafes had to close and the work was transitioned into a home delivery service for people in food poverty.

For several months Gracious Street has been the centre for storage of food and basic supplies, preparing home cooked meals and food distribution.

Food was initially obtained from local shops, supermarkets, cafe and also FareShare a national network which sources surplus food from the food industry.

During last year with the effects of lock down there was a marked increase in the number of people in food poverty, an appeal for donations of food and other basic supplies was made to people in our communities and Churches, local people have been very generous with lots of donations and there are now local drop off points where food and other goods can be donated.

People needing help from Res Bites complete an order form allowing us to supply (where possible) not just food, including home cooked meals, but also all essential for daily living plus “extras” like fresh flowers if we have them.

On the form there is also a question asking if people would like to be connected with people in their local church for regular telephone calls or prayer.

If people are in need of clothes we can also provide these from the Harrogate Clouting bank.

At Christmas members of Gracious Street Church contributed by donating food and presents through the “reverse Advent Calendar” and these allowed presents to be delivered to many people. A nice gesture to parents was to provide them with wrapping to allow them to “wrap their own children’s presents”.

Res Bites has also indirectly helped other organisations eg providing food and water to Inspire Youth for their outreach work, giving excess food to Pudsey Foodbank, and taking surplus flowers to local nursing homes.

These are a few figures up to February 22nd

Approx 2.5 tonnes of food going to waste intercepted per week

4321 orders processed helping the “equivalent” of 6842 adults and 5281 children

term equivalent used as many people get help weekly, biweekly or monthly so the same person is counted as many times as they have ordered.

currently 85 volunteers

I have been privileged to be part of the Res Bites team, through this time I have seen God's love at work in so many ways.....

helping people who are in need
people praying with and befriending people feeling lonely and lost
response of local communities to share and give what they can
supermarket workers not only giving goods but wanting to know more about Res Bites
support from people praying for the work of ResBites
people within the team supporting each other
Res Bites logo is "loaves and fishes" and during this pandemic we have seen this miracle happen here in our community thanks be to God

Anne Thickett

Knareborough Connectors

In the last 12 months over 130 residents including many from churches have shown love and compassion for their neighbours by helping out. Connectors are finding ways to ensure the 480 people who have had to ask for help are connected to opportunities to express their God-given talents for the benefit of the town. It's a hard challenge but one that we are called to as we are equal under God.

Project Bob

I am sure we are all aware of the impact of the pandemic upon the emotional well being of our society. This was reflected within Project Bob' people who were still struggling with existing challenges found their lives further intensified by the pandemic. However, this community continues to be an immensely inclusive community that supports an eclectic mix of people with their mental well being. Project Bob is essentially a support group that actively listens to one another stories. It is the telling of one another stories that offers encouragement, strength and wisdom. Project Bob is a community that is rooted with Christianity and often ends with the serenity prayer. While people continue to experience many struggles there has also been real transformation in people's health and for some a journey towards faith. Project Bob has continued to meet throughout the last year; sometimes in person but at other times on Zoom.

Gordon Hay

Playbox

When Playbox sessions stopped in March last year, we thought it would be for a few weeks and agreed to keep in touch through WhatsApp, and we already had a Facebook page so we could support each other and arrange dates to meet up again, but as we know it didn't quite work like that.

We met informally at the Castle grounds during July August and September, each family bringing their own blanket and snacks, and we made a flag, so everyone knew we were a toddler group and not just friends breaking the rules. But by October it was getting too cold, so Jeanette helped Sheila and Vicki write a risk assessment and Gordon supported us with the practical changes and we were able to meet for 3 weeks in December as a group. We met in the church, with chairs 2 metres apart, we only used a limited number of the easily wiped toys, we danced to a cd rather than singing and had a cleaning stations for equipment and children dotted around the room. It was different, but it was lovely to see the children playing together and the parents chatting again. Several families felt they were unable to come and we have kept in touch with them. As well as using social media, Sheila and Vicki have delivered letters to our families, Christmas cards and presents and a knitted dove of hope from Wesley Chapel.

Vicki Taylor

Who Let The Dads Out

Until March 2020, WLTD0 met monthly on a Saturday morning, a dynamic and growing group of Dads with pre-school children. They met for play, snacks and chat; a place to nurture family bonds and develop relationships. Like everything else, last year this had to move online. Mostly, this was on the WLTD0 Facebook page.

I posted regular videos, firstly of Bible stories, retold using toy props and then later a series of 10 five-minute 'Boredom Buster' videos, full of craft and play ideas. The focus was on helping families enjoy time together and using things available around the home.

In addition, during the summer holidays and with the support of Knaresborough Connectors, we organised a town number trail. Vicky Taylor, June Graham and I put up a number trail with over 100 knitted lamppost scares, number pictures and bunting. (Many thanks to all the church members who helped with the knitting!) The aim of this was to encourage counting, number recognition and conversation amongst families in readiness for the return to school.

The benefit of being online has been the ability to reach large numbers; some of the videos have been watched by over 1000 people. There's been positive feedback about how beneficial families have found both the videos and the number trail. However, developing relationships with the families has been much harder; this has been limited to sending emails to our 'regulars' (many of the dads only came occasionally and didn't leave contact details) and bumping into people around the town.

As it's a group for those with pre-school children, we'll be needing to advertise and welcome in new families when we eventually meet again physically. However, this last year has shown us all the importance of meeting together and the value of supportive chat. I'm sure that WLTD0 will be hugely appreciated when it is able to return.

Liz Rochester

Film

Through the approval of the Leadership Team a small group has been developed to create missional media content to push out to the wider Knaresborough community. This group includes Chris Rawson Peter Whitaker and Gordon Hay. This group also contains people from the local community who reflect our target audience. The first content produced was films over the Christmas period. These were films that retold the nativity story with reflections from ministers and children. We also created a number of videos that told our stories of how we are a light. We are now looking at developing some documentaries around social issues, such as food poverty.

Gordon Hay

Back to School

In July, Gordon and Nick brought together a group of people in church who work with children to try and support the local schools, who were worried about the younger children about to start school and those in the early years. We discussed treasure hunts and using signs with QR codes but decided to keep it simple as when you are out walking with young children it is often tricky to remember or use other equipment. In the end we used lamp posts as they are all numbered on every street and Liz, Vicki and June Graham tied knitted squares, scarves, or signs to them with the matching number. With permission from the borough council, the county council, and several helpful people (including the schools and allotment owners), we were able to put them up on roads where people walked into town. Several people in our

church and St John's helped with the knitting and I like to think they brightened up the town for a few weeks and hopefully helped a few children feel more confident about maths before returning to school.

Vicki Taylor

Easter Club & Easter Hunt

Last year we were planning for another amazing Easter club and then lockdown happened. We quickly adjusted plan, largely due to Hannah Ferguson (to whom we give our thanks), and did make an online Easter Club. At the same time Miranda Rawson created an incredible Easter hunt at home where people used QR codes to watch videos that retold the Easter story around our homes. This year we are planning for another Easter Club; it will once more be online.

Home learning

It quickly became apparent that home learning was going to be a challenge to a number of families in Knaresborough. This was initially driven by Miranda Rawson but many people within Gracious Street came on board to develop a Home Learning initiative. We advertised throughout Knaresborough that families could get in touch with Gracious Street and someone from the community will support the family through online communications to assist primary children with maths and English work. While there was a positive response, with people's appreciation, very few people took up the offer. Though we advertised the initiative in a positive way we began to wonder whether personal stigma and technological challenges were prohibitors to people taking up the offer.

Gordon Hay

GS Youth Club

Before the lockdown GS Youth Club began to get established with a small group of young people. We then began, at the beginning of the pandemic, to transition the youth club on Zoom but struggled to get the group established online. For a while we have also struggled to have sufficient leaders for the youth club and we feel at present unable to provide a youth club. While this is a cause of concern, Gracious Street is looking into a more intergenerational approach where families with young people can belong.

All We Can

During the past year we have continued to support the vital work of All We Can as a Partner Church. The focus for the Partner Church scheme has been "Change Begins with a Bicycle" where in Butagaya, Uganda the community faces long distances to reach education, healthcare and marketplaces.

We have been fortunate over the last year to have both Tim Baker and Peter Blanch from All We Can take part in our online services. We look forward to the time when they can take part in worship in our church building.

All We Can produces some excellent resources and we used some of them in our online Harvest service. Currently some of our congregation are following their "Changes Begins" booklet as part of their personal Lent devotions.

At Christmas we were invited to buy "Extraordinary Gifts" and we raised £1,457.00, including Gift Aid by making donations to All We Can instead of giving cards to friends we regularly see at church. We were able to buy 3 x wheelchairs for children in Ethiopia, 4 x bikes for children in Uganda and 5 x goats for families in Zimbabwe. We also helped 6 families to set up bee keeping businesses in Ethiopia, 3 families in India to start climate change resistant farming practices and 3 women in Uganda to start sewing businesses.

In the period September 2019 to August 2020 we gave £3,971.40 to All We Can and received a certificate and letter from their Chief Executive thanking Gracious Street Methodist Church for our support.

Sharon Wright

Memory Café

During the Pandemic Memory Café have been unable to meet but that hasn't stopped us being in touch with everyone. The volunteers have been in touch with all the members by monthly telephone calls and the members have called the volunteers which has been gratefully received by all recipients. We have sent out newsletters with stories, quizzes, lots of information about groups and societies our members can get in touch with if they need help in any way, these have been gratefully received. Throughout this last year we have sent birthday cards, get well cards, chocolates and Christmas hampers. We don't envisage that we will return to meeting before the autumn and this depends on the virus and everyone getting their second vaccine injection and that they feel it is safe to do so, but the volunteers will still keep up their devoted time to keep in contact with all the members.

Dot Rodham

Alpha

Our Alpha course began on Monday 10th February 2020 and we quickly settled into a group with 3 team and 8 guests. We shared a tasty cooked meal together before watching a DVD and sharing a time of discussion and questions – sometimes very deep indeed!!

We met for 6 weeks and were thoroughly enjoying our time together when sadly it all came to an end quite abruptly because of the pandemic.

It does feel like 'unfinished business' and we look to God who is ever faithful and guides us on our next steps. Nothing is planned as yet for the future but we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Thank you to all who supported us in so many ways, providing meals and praying each week.
Sue Whalley, Alan Middleton, Sue Lightfoot.

Learning & Caring

Thought for the day/week

When we first went into "lockdown" on the 23rd March last year little did we know that we would still be here almost 12 months on! At the time I was acting superintendent of the Tadcaster Circuit and I committed myself to writing a 'thought for the day' as an encouragement to the Circuit Leadership team who were doing such amazing work to change the way we did things and keep everyone safe but connected - I thought it might be a month! Whilst I was working in Tadcaster Ben Clowes invited me to join the Nidd Valley staff team meetings for some added support which it was - an absolute lifeline! At one meeting I told them what I was doing and they asked to join the circulation list and Gordon Hay asked if he could post in on the Gracious Street Facebook page. I have to say that when I finished in Tadcaster and I'd written a thought for the day on each of the 120 days (as they were then) I was beginning to wonder if I had any more thoughts in my head! But, in conversation with Gordon, I realised that, whilst not wanting to commit to EVERY day again, I was missing writing and we decided that I'd write one a week. Many people in Tadcaster Circuit (including Revd Ann Fox who took over from me a super) asked if they could remain on the circulation list and so, as well as now appearing on the Gracious Street page, it is emailed to approx 50 people, some of whom send it on to others! I try and use one of the lectionary bible readings for the Sunday of that week as a starting point and am always happy to have conversations with people about the content. If you know of anyone

not on facebook but who would like to receive it by email then please let me know. Once again, thanks to Gordon for the opportunity to write!

Ruth Parry

Creative Writers

For the CCW writers at Gracious Street, the pandemic was a trigger which set off much creativity within and beyond the group. Writing became our prayer, our voice of defiance, frustration, lament and encouragement. Individuals expressed all of this and more with a humility born out of lack – lack of contact, physical touch, lack of fellowship, and lack of connection.

We learned we cannot 'fix' things; that we can and should depend on each other more, and that writing itself is a powerful vehicle of hope, unity and prophecy. Whilst we might have thought we've been 'deprived', our minds have been rightly disturbed at the true poverty in our world, at our apathy and greed and perhaps accelerated our response to environmental and equality issues. Whilst not being afraid of expressing doubt or uncertainty at times, haven't we learned (a little) through this pandemic what it truly means to walk in God's way? Considering how we should lean on Him has been part of the adventure, as faith has been both challenged and inspired. This has been a positive aspect of living a new life and thriving as a church community.

As Spring unfolded with the pandemic, we appreciated Nature more than ever and expressed this in our meetings and in our work. We knew we wanted to meet more often, so we've gathered on Zoom monthly (and in the Summer ONCE at Sue's home - which was so special!). Zoom enables us to see and hear each other on the 'gallery' view and share ideas, questions, works in progress and try out different prompts and styles.

From the start, (when 'Covid 19' wasn't a word we knew, just a 'nasty virus'), through the ugly truth of desperation, separation, death, depression and restriction and on to signs of a more hopeful future, the writers produced a wealth of poems, prayers, reflections and memoirs which have stirred and comforted a wide audience. Confidence has grown; healing has happened; personal and corporate faith has been assured and mental health boosted.

Our writing has been used in the Gracious Street online services, on our church Facebook page and shared widely around the district, the county, even across the world!

In September we produced a book, 'LOVE, FEAR & FAITH IN A TIME OF COVID'*, which follows not just our experience, but wider corporate and community journeys in this unprecedented of times. Compiling and creating the book was a compelling and fulfilling task and made us realise that for some at least, we had never been so productive! It felt we were contributing to the general functioning of emotional and behavioural adjustment in uncertain times!

We'd like to thank not only those who have bought the book, but all who have commented on it, encouraged us and found the material helpful, hopeful, challenging and spiritually refreshing. Thanks too to Gordon, Ann Fox and all who have actively engaged with our writing and stimulated us to keep going. We are open to suggestions, commissions and welcome comments and ideas.

*Copies of the book are still available from Jeanette or Hilary for the price of £4.00, £2.00 of which will go to church funds.

Hilary (on behalf of CCW: Sue Whalley, Sue Walkington, Elizabeth Ali, Jeanette Mowat, Sally Arkinstall, Karin Jones, Naomi Bennet, Aileen Hay.)

House groups

Most of us have faced challenges of various types this past year, and many changes have had to be made, including the meeting together of our Home Groups.

Baker's Dozen has met fortnightly at Christine Baker's since its inception in November 2013. At times leaderless, sometimes floundering, but always there for each other in a pastoral sense.

Then came COVID. And God spoke to Gordon S, enabling him to set up Zoom.

All of us really DID flounder then at the very thought, let alone the technical bit. But here we are, a group who are 'finding each other', sharing every fortnight, welcoming one of our members to the Zoom meeting as she was unable to attend previously, praying together and thanking God for binding Baker's Dozen together in a new way.

Christine Baker

Pastoral

Last March, Rachel Watson became the Pastoral Secretary, replacing Diane Hicks when she, and Ron, went to Driffield to be acting Superintendents for a year.

A Core Pastoral Team has been formed – Gordon Hay, Rachel Watson, Dot Rodham and Vicki Taylor. As a team we come together from different areas of the church, which helps us to understand the needs of different people. Rachel oversees pastoral visitors, Dot has a focus on the senior members of the church and the housebound and Vicki oversees families. This group still needs further development, to include house groups and others areas of church life.

The fortnightly meetings are a time to come together and support each other and seek where God is leading us and needing us to be, as a group, as a whole pastoral team and as a church. We also have a WhatsApp group to raise any urgent concerns that need to be investigated. As a pastoral team we have grown together as a group over the months and we support each other in developing and carrying out this important work.

We meet together via zoom once a fortnight to discuss the pastoral care of the church family of Gracious Street. We are particularly keen to ensure that these groups feel valued, connected and supported at this particular time. During this time we have been through the pastoral lists and updated them and ensured that most of the people are now with a home group or pastoral leader, there are still a small number to be allocated.

At the moment this group is looking at the "transition period" between the present and a time when we will be able to meet together again as a church family. We have also spoken with Sue Oliver, MHA, lead for MHA Communities in Harrogate. They have only been going for a year and offer befriending, digital training and virtual coffee mornings.

Pastoral visitors continue to keep in contact with people in their groups. Some Home Groups have also continued to meet either virtually or, occasionally, face-to-face. We also established Coffee@11am. All this contact, virtual or face-to-face, has been so important in keeping people connected.

We did explore the idea of a generational ministry where families and the more senior members of our community could write letters to one another. This had some logistical complications and there was not sufficient take up of the idea. So we'd decided to put it on hold.

The Flower Team has been unable to deliver any flowers since 16th March 2020. However, we send cards out to people who have been ill, bereaved, are celebrating. This is not quite the same as a doorstep delivery of flowers but does show that the church is still thinking of them and praying for them. Joyce Hoare keeps the prayer chain up to date, but if you do hear of anyone who you think would benefit from a card, please let Rachel know (866323).

On Mothering Sunday, last year, we quickly adapted to the new circumstances and were able to organise the delivery of flowers to all women in our community. This was greatly appreciated and was start of the development of card initiative This is a new concept trying to keep people connected. So far 4 different cards have been produced and distributed, with an Easter card and a summer card waiting. About 200 cards are delivered each time of production. This means the complete church family receives a card every time one is produced. A big "Thank You" to all those involved in every step of this project.

Rachel Watson, Dot Rodham & Vicki Taylor

GS Families

During the first few weeks after lockdown started Gordon and Vicki rang every family with children in the church to check how they were, to offer help and support and to ask if they would like to join a WhatsApp group to help us all stay in touch. There are 22 people in the group, and it has been a lovely way to share ideas and activities of things to do (including new walks people have found). The group has enabled families to find out what is going on in church, it has been a source of support with people letting others know they are thinking of them, somewhere to ask for help and a link with other people in the same boat when we are feeling cut off and isolated at home.

Vicki Taylor

Worship

Worshipping life of Gracious Street

Throughout the last year we have continued to be a worshipping church. Online services have been on Facebook and Vimeo at 6.30 each Sunday evening. These have evolved as time has gone on and now last 20-25 minutes. In January this year new formats were introduced with fortnightly pre-recorded Sunday service at 6.30pm. Other services now start at 8pm, Sunday Night Live is an interactive service where guests reflect on scripture and how it affects our everyday life. Singing the Faith Live is a live and interactive time of story and song, looking at favourite hymns and songs and what they mean to us. The fourth Sunday is a Taize service, on Zoom, a time of peace and reflection.

Throughout October and November 2020 services were held in our Church building, with a maximum attendance of 44 plus stewards, preachers, musicians and screen operators. A booking service was in operation with capacity left for those who might just drop in on a Sunday morning. We are thankful to Gordon Smith who organised the booking system. This system worked well with maximum numbers to start with and then dropping to about 28, with a core group of people coming every week. These services had music as people came in and left, and one or two hymns on screen, but no singing allowed. We were able to say the Lord's Prayer

together and have responsive prayers. Although very different these services were appreciated and well received by those attending.

During 2020 Sue Walkington, Sharon Wright and Sue Whalley all met the required criteria for part one of the Worship Leaders and Preachers Training course. Sue Whalley continued with her studies going on to meet the criteria for part two of the course to enable her to become a Local Preacher. Sue now needs to do a final trial service and be interviewed again at a future Circuit Leaders of Worship and Local Preachers meeting.

Sue Walkington

Service Sheets

From March 2020 there has been 7 members of the church being acting as postal personnel and delivering the weekly service sheets including DVD's showing evening services together events such as Open Gardens and Christmas Tree trail, also the weekly notice sheets from Gracious Street and the Circuit along with lots of other information to 40 of our members who have been locked down or do not have the facility of watching the services on the internet. Along with this information they have received chocolates and the advent journey done by Ruth Parry. This service has been gratefully received and has helped these people to feel connected to the church and I don't think it will cease for the foreseeable future. So it is a big thank you to Lynn Blanch, Barbara Bland, Joyce Hoare, Liz Rochester, Bill Butler & Peter Whittaker.

Dot Rodham

Music

We are greatly blessed to have so many creative people in our community. As the first lockdown took hold and we were prevented from meeting together in our church buildings, we realised that one of the few options open to us was to go online with our worship services. From the musical point of view we were fortunate that Jenny Cook had experience in using the Acappella app which enabled us to record the various voices and instruments in our homes and then combine them into a glorious whole! This meant we were able to pre-record songs to be used in services over many weeks. Using this app wasn't without its problems and after a few months we decided to pre-record without using this particular software. We are fortunate that Gordon has considerable IT skills and he has been blending the various voices and instruments instead. It is gratifying that we were able to use these methods to compile a 'Lockdown' version of Carols by Candlelight which was appreciated.

I think I can speak for all of us when I say that each one who has contributed to this process has enjoyed it, especially when hearing the finished result. It has also been a challenge, with a number of frustrating moments! Usually the songs have needed arranging for the 'forces' available – thank you Rachel, Sarah and Brian for your help with this. Also someone has had to take responsibility for the oversight of each song, especially balancing the various 'voices' in the recording. For the individuals singing and playing it has been rare for someone to manage on one 'take', so thanks for your perseverance. My thanks also go to Jenny Cook, Jenny Velez-Colby, Rachael Brock, Louisa, Morag, Alice, Becky, the Taylors, the Pringles, the Capsticks, the Rochesters, Sarah, Hilary, the Hoares, Nick, Chris, Anne, Peter W, Peter L, Steve, (and anyone I may have missed out).

One of the main benefits from this project has been the banter on the GS Music WhatsApp group which has often been amusing but also compassionate and encouraging. I feel that many of us have been drawn into a greater sense of fellowship than if lockdown hadn't happened. We have

also been inspired and motivated by many people's positive comments and reactions in this shared ministry.

Mike Hughes

Advent@Home

The idea of an Advent project that could engage many of the Gracious Street Family came out of a conversation about building community during lockdown. As with many of these things it snowballed a bit and became larger than it was first intended to be but I hope that became a strength! Many years ago now, whilst on sabbatical, I made a study of 'Sacred Space' - what makes a space 'sacred' and what do we do with it when we have identified it as such. I visited many holy places from Jerusalem to Lindisfarne, The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul to Iona, Labyrinths, stone circles and many places beyond. I came to realise that sacred space can be anywhere. Although some places have a 'holy feel' about them because of association, I became very aware that anywhere can be sacred but we are not always good at carving out that space for ourselves, especially in our homes. Over the past 12 months we have been dislocated from our traditional sacred spaces and so we thought Advent was a good starting place to introduce the idea that we can, very simply, make sacred space in our homes and, at the same time with everyone from the church family doing the same thing, build community as well. The messages I have received have shown that for some this certainly worked. In fact - it felt to work well enough for us to be producing a similar pack for Holy Week as, sadly, we will be spending a second Easter unable to meet as a complete church family. However, having said all that, I don't think this was just a lockdown project. I'm very aware that several members of our church family who have been unable to join everyone for worship for some time (pre covid 19) were able to join in and feel connected so I hope that this might become a Gracious Street tradition! Thank you for those who joined in, thank you to those who have expressed thanks and Thanks to Gordon for the opportunity.

Ruth Parry

Family Service/Messy Church

In October and early November we were very pleased to be able to hold 3 Family Services on Sunday afternoons. Each family sat round their own table with their own box of craft equipment and a small snack! Each session lasted about 40 minutes and included craft and other activities, a Bible story, prayer and a song (no singing but plenty of actions!) Within Covid guidelines we were able to accommodate a maximum of 10 families and on average there were 6 or 7. After a break during the November/December lockdown we were able to hold a Christmas session. This time we called it Messy Church as this seemed a better description. Nine families came along and it was wonderful to be able to celebrate Christmas together.

Libby Cook

Prayer Chain

There are about 100 people on the Gracious Street Prayer Chain — Alan Middleton contacts 9 by telephone and I send emails to around 90.

Year on year we have had a reasonable flow of prayer requests with a limited number of updates. However, over the last year, since the first lockdown in March 2020 to the present, the Prayer Chain has become noticeably busier with both initial requests and subsequent updates. We've been pleased to receive messages of thanks from folk who not only feel supported by our prayers but also feel more connected to the Church family through the Prayer Chain.

During the last year we have received over 80 prayer requests for different individuals, families and situations. About 20 of these have then been updated at least once or twice and about 10

have been updated four times or more — making some of these our long term prayer concerns. Altogether that's over 200 messages. It's always good to hear how God is answering our prayers as that encourages us to keep on praying.

Alan Middleton and I are happy to continue contacting folk by telephone and email but Marion King, having been involved with the Prayer Chain for many years, is no longer able to help.

We therefore need another email person particularly for times when I might not be able to forward prayer requests perhaps because of illness, technology failure at home or lack of internet connection when away. At present I forward email requests, if at all possible, from wherever I happen to be.

It's always a privilege to support others in prayer but never more so than during this year when we are unable to be together physically. So please keep sending us prayer requests for yourselves or others (with their permission) and also please keep us updated. However received, all requests are passed on to everyone. We would also be very glad to add new people to the email or telephone Prayer Chain.

Thanks to you all for being part of the Prayer Chain and we share this verse to encourage everyone as we continue to pray. Ephesians 6:18 '...and pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.'

Joyce Hoare (joycehoare@sky.com) and Alan Middleton (01423 863780)

Task Force

The Re-opening taskforce was formed in July 2020. Our objective was to prepare Gracious Street so that we could reopen in a Covid-secure way.

Over the past seven months the group has invested a significant amount of time and effort in various activities:-

Assessing Government, Methodist Church, District and Circuit advice (initial and on-going).

Reviewing and tailoring the Methodist church building reopening checklist.
Creating an over-arching Gracious Street Risk assessment.

Making the building Covid-secure – installation of hand sanitiser and hand towel dispensers, processes for cleaning the building, building layout.

Access to the building - one-way system, sign-ins (test and trace form, NHS Covid app).
Sunday Services – limited attendance, booking process, worship area layout.

Return of internal and external groups – risk assessments for each group, policies for users of the building.

As we move out of the (hopefully) final lock-down the group are concentrating on
Establishing which groups are planning to return, including reviewing risk assessments.
Work out how we can safely reintroduce music (instruments and vocals).
Investigate Bridge re-opening, including the serving of food and drink.

Steve Ainsley

Management

The work of the management team has continued throughout the lockdown with the team meeting virtually on a regular basis. Our property continues to need to be maintained with regular servicing and continuation of various maintenance contracts. I am grateful to Eleanor Borkett for the work she does overseeing the property and responding to needs as they have arisen.

The premises have been inspected weekly and the water system flushed when the building was not being used to comply regulations regarding legionella.

I am grateful to the Covid 19 task force, chaired by Steve Ainsley, for the brilliant work they did in preparing the premises for a return to worship in the Autumn. Alongside members of the Management Team, they moved, chairs set up the worship area, installed hand sanitisers, supported "track & trace" both virtually and hard copies, produced risk assessments for returning activities and reviewed those from external groups who were able to return briefly. This is not an exhaustive list but gives a flavour of the work of the task force & management team during this past year.

I would also like to thank Sue Whalley who has stepped down from Management Team after a number of years leading the Bridge team. We will miss you Sue, but we know you are concentrating on other things within the life of the Church.

We would like to broaden the Management Team as we look forward to addressing new challenges that will inevitably come our way as we emerge from the pandemic. If you are interested in joining the team please do have a word with me or Gordon

Bill Rodham

Finance

The Church accounts for 2019/20 were approved by leadership team, acting on behalf of Church Council, in January following independent examination by Bulmer and Co. Overall across all funds we made a surplus of approximately £ 26,700 on the year, which was a much better outcome than seemed likely in the immediate aftermath of lockdown 1. The overall surplus was made up of a surplus of approximately £28,000 on our unrestricted funds and a small deficit of £1,300 on our restricted funds.

However, the surplus was due to 4 main exceptional items, namely a refund from our photocopying supplier from previous over charges of £12,000, donations from members of £10,400 and a reduction in our assessment of £10,000, paid in the 2019/20 financial year. The fourth element was income of just over £4,000 from Resurrected Bites.

Moving on to the current financial year, we have continued to see donations and additional offerings from members with a further £4,700 being received since 1st September making a total of £15,1700. This is a tremendous effort by members and I am extremely grateful for the generosity of all who have contributed, particularly where household budgets are under great pressure for many. I am also grateful for continued regular offerings with people getting their envelope giving to me, but also seeing a rise in the number of people paying directly into the Church's bank account by standing order. Paying in this way makes financial planning so much more straightforward when I have a much more predictable income. It also reduces cash

handling which is welcome at any time, but particularly so in reducing the risk of spreading infection.

We have also benefitted from income from resurrected bites use of the Castle room with further income of £7,000. The income from Resurrected Bites was largely as a result of grants that they were able to secure and pass on to us for the rental of the room, unfortunately these grants have dried up and therefore from February our income from Resurrected Bites will reduce to £700 per month which is still very welcome income which we would otherwise not have.

We continue to benefit from a reduction in our circuit assessment of a further £10,000, but of from February it has returned to more normal levels. Our rental income is still going to be significantly reduced, so I am forecasting that we will make a deficit of £13,000 this year. We therefore need to avoid becoming complacent with our finances and maintain our regular giving. A summary of our funds held is given in the table below.

The restrictions of the past year have pushed us to thinking of new ways of giving which include donating by text from your mobile phone, making donations online via the website or by clicking the link <http://graciousstreetmethodist.mydona.com/>. We have installed a contactless “Collection Plate” and we have signed up to easyfundraising <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/> which makes a donation to Church funds when you shop on-line from many of the major online stores.

Church Council - Fund Balances as at 28th February 2021

Central Finance Board (CFB)	83,876
Schofield Foundation	10,400
Yorkshire Bank	3,815
Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (TMCP)	883
Total Funds	98,973

Bill Rodham

Final Remarks

This report illustrates that Gracious Street has remained active and this is due to you. So I would like to express my THANKS for your continued ministry that enriches Gracious Street and the wider Knaresborough community. I know there are areas for improvement and I sincerely apologise for my mistakes. Yet I am deeply proud of Gracious Street and immensely grateful for each one of you. Thank You!