



Annual Report

**Central Church Warrington
2023**

Introduction

Our church is just over two years old as we write this report. As we produce the legal report of our activities and accounts as a charity, it's an opportunity for us to look back on the journey so far and how we've seen God's love and work amongst us in the previous year. We'll seek to expand this report in future years but we pray this will be encouraging to us as a church, helpful for anyone new amongst us, and give glory to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have often said that a church is called to "strive together as one for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). In all the hard work and joys of 2023, let's give thanks to God for his fatherly care.

Sundays

Sunday gatherings (Mark Cooper)

Every Sunday we gather together as a whole church, young and old. Central to this meeting is God's word. We seek to hear it and then respond in praise and prayer and faith together. We do that altogether at first before splitting into age-appropriate groups for a time of teaching. We are committed to expository preaching. That means we work through parts of the Bible in sequence. We hope to cover the whole Bible in as balanced a way as possible, and as God has given it to us. Through 2023 we heard sermon series on John 13-16, 1 Timothy, Luke 11, Acts 1-9, and Ruth. Each month we also shared the Lord's Supper together, and in September we had the joy of baptising one of our younger members in a special evening service.

Before and after our formal meetings, there is a chance to spend time together with a drink and biscuit. It's a chance to catch up, welcome guests and visitors, get to know each other, and support each other in the difficulties of life. Our aim is that our whole time together builds us up as believers and reaches out to others with the gospel.

It has been encouraging to see how much we grew in size through the year (from 25 adults and children when we started in 2022, our average at the end of 2023 was 60 attendees). Week-in, week-out, a whole team of volunteers have helped with setting up, hospitality, welcome, tech, music, leading, and teaching - organising all this as a young church in premises that are too small for us. As we've served each other through these challenges it has been a powerful demonstration of God building a people who sacrificially love him and each other, and working through our efforts. It reminds me of the privilege to be a church family and I thank God for you all.

Sunday Club (Rebecca Tomlinson)

It has been so encouraging to see our Sunday Club grow over the last year! We have been able, thanks to extra teachers and helpers, to split the children into two different groups most weeks: the Adventurers and the Covenanters. This means that the teaching has been more age-specific and I think the children have really benefitted from this. So far this year, we have followed the Mustard Seeds teaching material covering: Genesis, Job, Mark, Acts, Parables in Matthew, Ruth and Exodus.

We always start the service together as a whole church family and enjoy worshipping together before the children go to meet in the lounge. Here, we make them feel welcome, take the register, share news and sometimes play a game that introduces the day's true Bible story. Then the Covenanters go to the prayer room to have a Bible-study style lesson and the Adventurers stay in the Lounge for their Bible learning and craft.

Let's thank the Lord for all the teachers and helpers who are committing their time to plan, prepare and deliver gospel-focused teaching to our children. Please continue to pray that we see the fruit of this in the children's lives as they are transformed by God.

We are thankful to the Salvation Army for their generosity in sharing their space (especially as we have spread out further!) However, space is still an issue. It's a lovely problem to have, but the more children we welcome, the more space and helpers we need. Pray on for a building of our own!

Creche (Erica Ng)

As the Bible says, "Start children off on the way they should go" (Proverbs 22:6). The toddler stage is a good start. We aim to provide a safe and loving space for toddlers to pre-school children to get to know God. We also want to support the parents of young children, giving them space to come to God during services with minimum disturbance.

In 2023, the main teaching curriculum used by the crèche was "Beginning with God, Book One" and "The Beginner's Bible." During that year, about eight different young children were served, with mostly one to two children being dealt with by one helper each time.

Give thanks to the Lord that as time goes by and the church grows, the babies from the congregation become toddlers and more young children come. However, a challenge arose that having only one helper each time (for more than two active, exploring toddlers) was not enough to ensure a safe environment for both the children and helpers. It was a difficult decision to make that the crèche service had to be suspended by the end of December 2023. We hope for more helpers or other solutions for the current situation in the future.

Midweek Discipleship

Prayer (Mark Cooper)

We want prayer to be the foundation of our life as disciples. We have a wonderful heavenly Father "who knows what we need before we ask him" (Matthew 6:8).

At the heart of our prayer life is our monthly prayer meeting on the first Wednesday of each month. Through 2023, roughly 20-25 of us joined together at these meetings, some online. After starting with a message from the Bible, we focused on praying for areas of church life, Warrington, and further afield. Through 2023 we also developed a prayer diary aimed at helping us pray for every person in our church and other prayer needs.

That our prayer meeting is established as a core meeting of our church, but we know it will be an ongoing challenge to keep it a priority, particularly as we grow and new people join us.

Teams (Chris Tomlinson)

We have been blessed over the past 12 months to see real growth in our mid-week Bible studies that meet in homes across Warrington. This has seen us looking at Genesis, Luke, and more recently the book of 1 John. The increase in number has meant that two new Teams have started in the far East and the South of the town. Further to this some of the people that completed Christianity explored have been able to feed into these groups. Our brothers and sisters from Hong Kong have benefited from a Cantonese speaking group and, whilst we had Iranians with us, we were able to provide a group that catered for their language needs too.

We can praise God for our growing understanding of His word, our deepening relationship with Him, and with one another. This ties in with our commitment in Teams to “look up, look in and look out”. Let’s continue to pray that the Holy Spirit would change our hearts to become more like Jesus in our families and communities.

It would be good to pray as we look at the next 12 months for us to be sensitive to the different needs of individuals in our Church. Whether that be a daytime Team, a new believers Team or parents/toddlers Team. Let’s pray that we are flexible and open to seeing how we might be able to serve others in different ways within our Teams.

Outreach

Christianity Explored (John Hunt)

At the beginning of 2023, we ran our first Christianity Explored Course. Five people took part, including one person who had seen the course on our website and made contact independently. After an introduction and weekly video, we split into 2 discussion groups in Cantonese and English. At the beginning of the course, the participants were encouraged to offer the questions they had and we worked through these each week.

After the course, the group was keen to meet together weekly and formed our Central Team for a number of months. It was so encouraging to see how God worked through the course. It was particularly significant for three members in committing their life to Jesus, who continue to be part of our church family, regularly worshipping and serving with us. Church members are still in contact with the other two participants.

We're excited about how God will use Christianity Explored in 2024!

Iranian Ministry (Stuart & Jenny Boydell)

In March 2023 we started to get Iranian asylum seekers from local hotels attending church & felt this was an opportunity that God had given us to present the love of Jesus to a people group we knew very little about.

To develop relationships, & give them a chance to eat their much missed traditional food, we invited them to cook their favourite Iranian foods in a home so we could all eat together, this was a great time of sharing our cultural differences. It gave opportunities to learn, on an individual level, the circumstance which had brought them to the UK alongside their present material and spiritual needs. After the meal together, Mark would present the Gospel and an open time of questions in which they were reassured there were no stupid questions, this was frequently done with one of the Iranians translating for the others.

In due time there was sufficient interest for a Persian Bible study which was held in the Salvation Army. This was a specific study using Persian literature/study books aimed at believers from a Muslim background (BMB) clearly presenting the Christian faith. The obvious challenges were language & cultural differences, alongside nurturing/correcting the little Christian teaching some had already received in underground churches - for this we used translator apps both individually and for church services, however, we found the world-wide culture of hospitality spoke loudly to everyone, regardless of their spiritual persuasion.

Some of the stories we have been told of their treatment in their own country, why they fled and what happened when they put themselves in the hands of people traffickers are emotionally challenging. But we stand amazed and rejoice at the way Jesus has miraculously spoken & is continuing to speak to individuals both in their own Islamic nation, since coming to the UK.

Events (Sarah Cooper)

Our Events aim to provide opportunities for us to bring friends and family along to hear the good news about Jesus, as well as to make new connections as a church. Different events are aimed at different people and interest groups.

In 2023, we ran a Pancake Party, Easter Party, Light Party, and Christmas Party for families, building upon the parties we began in 2022. We held our first Wreath Making Event at the end of November, which proved very popular. We also ran a couple of Board Game Evenings, and a Picnic in the Park.

It is encouraging to consider all the different people who heard the Lord Jesus proclaimed at these events, and the relationships that are developing through people coming along. We thank God for the hard work of the church family in enabling them to happen.

Hong Kong Ministry (Sze-Lok and Erica)

In response to reaching Hongkongers in Warrington and wanting to warmly welcome them as a church, a proposal was made and the grant was received in February 2023 from the North West Hong Kong Welcome Hub VCFSE Grant Programme.

We aimed to provide an English conversation course and a Social Support Group with various activities (called "Hong Kong Nights"). To elaborate, it provided resources for Hongkongers to learn more English for daily living

and understand some common but important topics to adapt to a new environment, e.g. health talk, gardening, home safety & DIY, etc. In addition, two festival-related events (Mid-Autumn Festival and Lunar New Year) were held. We aimed that the events would facilitate cultural exchange, and also let the Hongkongers to integrate into the community better. It also gives us a means to share the gospel with them as a church and let them understand and consider how Jesus can be their place of hope.

It was quite a challenge on resources to commit to a year-long programme and consider their needs in planning the topics and content. We were grateful to see how we could serve and help each other as a church every time, especially having bigger events with a meal during the Mid-Autumn Festival and at the Chinese New Year which attracted nearly 200 new guests. Our contact network of Hongkongers was expanded in this connection.

Operations

Members (Mark Cooper)

In a church we are called to love each other as brothers and sisters and work together as one body. Membership is our simple way of expressing that commitment together. It helps us know which adults are part of our church and is a key way we structure ourselves legally and spiritually.

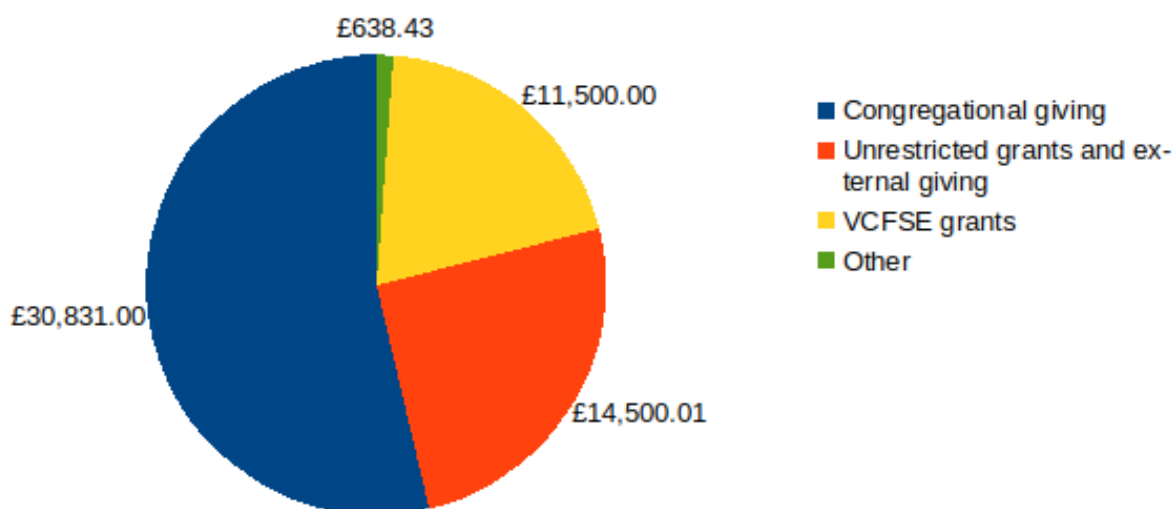
During 2022 we established the process of becoming a member: after a conversation with the pastor, there is a form to sign whereby we agree to the statement of faith, the aims of the church, and the commitment of members. The legal aspect is completed at the subsequent trustees meeting where members are formally approved. We began 2023 with 8 members and finished the year with 27 members.

Finances (Peter Thomas)

We give thanks to God for his financial provision for us. This year we have continued to establish helpful processes for our handling and use of our money, including the adoption of a financial policy. In these initial years of the church's life we want to grow to a place of financial stability where we are not as reliant on external support, and we are positive about our progress towards this through 2023.

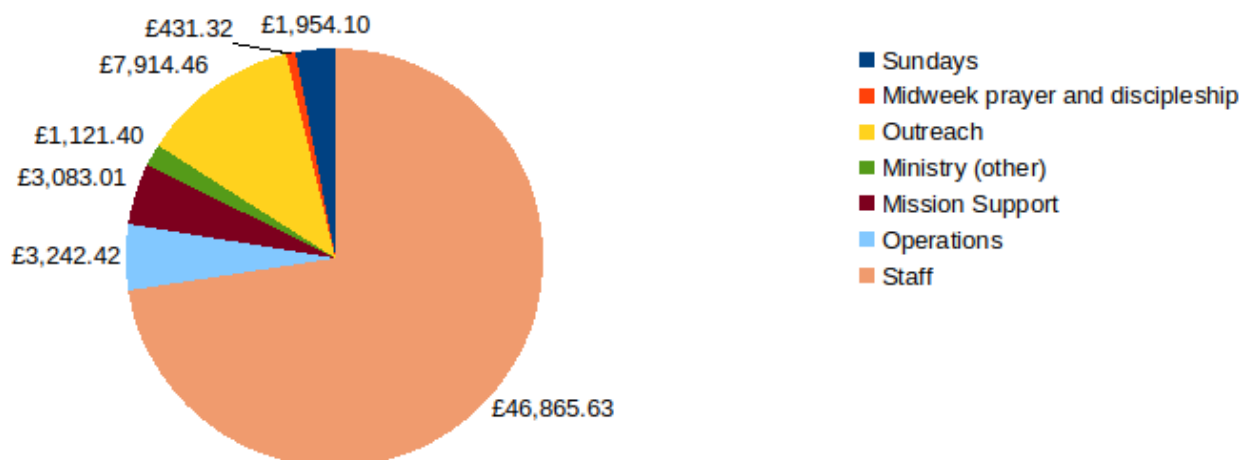
Income by Category

Total Income: £57,469.44



Expenditure by Category

Total Expenditure: £64,612.34



Please note that the figures in the pie charts below will differ slightly from the totals found in the independent examination. This is because the independent examination was undertaken on an accruals basis for 2023, and therefore will not include, for example, payments pertaining to 2023 which were made in 2024.

Safeguarding (Sarah Cooper)

As a church we are committed to our duty of safeguarding, and implement the Church of England's procedures and guidelines. In accordance with this, this year we have developed our safer recruitment procedures. Our designated Church Safeguarding Officer is Sarah Cooper. We thank God for all the ways he has kept us safe through 2023.

Partnerships

The gospel is at work and spreading around the world, and our church is just a small part of Jesus' kingdom. We want to both be a blessing to and be supported by partners in our town, region, and further afield.

We are members of the North West Gospel Partnership and were blessed to join the Annual Conference in Wigan at the beginning of the year. In the Church of England, we're part of ReNew (a network of Anglican evangelicals). Within the Liverpool Diocese there are three ReNew churches and the pastors pray together each month. In Warrington we are so grateful for the support of the Salvation Army, for Bethesda church hosting our baptism service in September, and for Wycliffe hosting our Christmas Eve carols.

We're also very conscious of the generosity of a number of trusts and churches that have supported us financially and in prayer. At the end of 2023 we were in a position where we could start giving to other gospel work ourselves: Warrington Youth for Christ, a Crosslinks mission partner in Nepal, and a future church plant in the North West.

