

Community of St Mary the Virgin

Annual News 2021-22
from Wantage and Overseas

Community

Sisters at December 2021 in order of Profession -
the making of their life vows to God:

Jean Frances

Valeria

Phoebe Margaret

Christine Anne (Solitary)

Eileen

Lorna

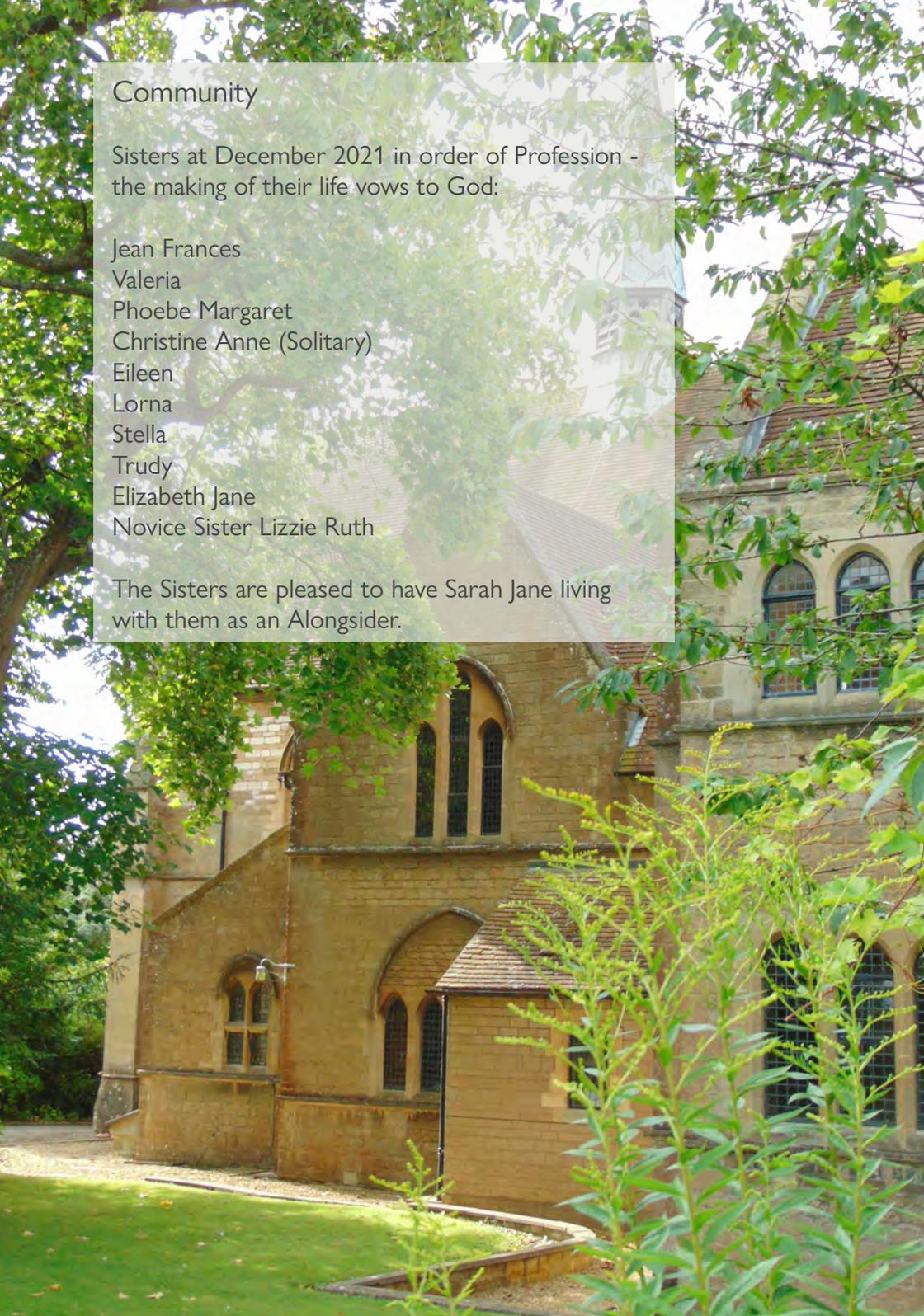
Stella

Trudy

Elizabeth Jane

Novice Sister Lizzie Ruth

The Sisters are pleased to have Sarah Jane living
with them as an Alongsider.



Dear Friends,

The news about the severity of the conditions affecting the future of planet earth is cause for dismay. Will there be sustained international agreements about processes to reduce radically the toxins that are contributing to the imbalance of the earth's climate? A darkness seems to be afflicting the continuity of humanity's life with only a decade to save it.

How are we to respond? Let us reflect on darkness, not on the depressive effects it can induce, but on its capacity to challenge our assumptions. The darkness at night-time can be fearful, but unclouded darkness can enable us to perceive the startling brightness of starlight and to trace its patterns and images.

In the season of Advent the approach to winter emerges with increasingly shortened hours of sunlight. Advent can feel liturgically like a dark time of impending divine judgement and yet it is surely an opportunity, even for those with little time to ponder, to examine inner preoccupations and longings. Do we dare to turn to face the God who has created us, who forms beauty in nature and in our relationships, who is preparing to bring to human life in our imaginations and in our prayer a part of the Godhead: can we be open to the gift of the infant born in a shed amongst the cattle's warmth of body and breath?

Darkness requires courage to perceive the clarity it can reveal – about one's self, perhaps with our deceptions, with our burying of dark experiences, with our evading the potential for fresh ideas and creativity. Can we begin to nurture hope within us, to pursue the small domestic ways of helping to deal with wastage and the poisoning and entanglement of the oceans' living matter through the discipline of re-cycling? Can we trust in a God we cannot see, who is guiding us, perhaps in ways we wouldn't choose, to stir vitality and humour into our immediate environment and relationships?

May all our struggles be blessed with a new vision and with deep peace.

Stella CSMV

Surfing in Heaven

...So ran the title of the Week of Prayer at Exeter Cathedral which Fr George Guiver CR and I had been invited to lead in late September of this year. We had met together with the clergy team on Zoom for several months beforehand, so it was very good to arrive in Exeter and finally meet face to face. From the beginning, we were made so welcome and received such warm and generous hospitality from Dean Jonathan and his wife Pamela - staying in the Deanery which dates back to 1200 and overlooks the Cathedral.

Our brief was to enable people to engage in and explore different ways of prayer, and the programme was well facilitated throughout the week by Canon Chris. Fr George and I complemented one another, as he talked primarily about corporate prayer and the importance of praying together e.g., the Daily Office and Eucharist, whilst I looked at individual prayer including silence, stillness, daily examen. We gave our talks twice each day - at lunch time and in the evening - engaging in prayer exercises and discussion and chanting a simple Office together.

It was very heartening to find those who came so receptive and engaged, and many had made a commitment to be there each day. Those who came appreciated the opportunity to be silent and still as a group. They loved the chanting of the psalms which Fr George taught them – encouraging them with St Augustine’s words: “He who sings prays twice”. We also encouraged them in the use of their bodies in prayer – that we pray with the whole of ourselves e.g., “what’s happened to our knees that we no longer kneel in church?” asked Fr George! He also



likened tradition to a plant which has deep roots and is always growing and evolving - going on to describe how the Eucharistic Prayer which we use today is also found in the Jewish tradition and would have been said by Jesus at the Last Supper.



We touched on prayer as not simply being about ‘what I can get out of it’ and wondered whether our culture of over-stimulation makes it more difficult for people to engage in routine prayer with its inevitable times of boredom. There was also talk of the word Church being a difficult word for people today – because they more easily see the mess we make of it, rather than the greater Mystery which it is. At the end of the week, we were invited to offer reflections and possible ways forward, which prompted lively discussion on the final Saturday morning! We have agreed to be in touch in six months’ time to see how things are evolving.

It was good to see Bishop Robert during the week and to renew connections with a number of people known to CSMV – including our long-time Associates from Botswana days – Howard and Fiona Moffat.

The Cathedral itself is a beautiful building and it was a joy to attend Choral Evensong and to be uplifted by the music. Another treat was to be taken to the Cathedral Library and Archives where we were shown altar/missal books dating back to the 13th/14th centuries – beautiful calligraphy on vellum and still in their original animal hide covers. Fr George spontaneously sang some of the plainsong and we wondered how many hundreds of years ago anyone last sang from that page of the book! We were also privileged to be shown the Exeter Book which dates back to 950 AD and is the largest book of Anglo-Saxon literature in the world.

Exeter is a small city, and I hadn’t realized how close it is to the sea.

On our mid-week rest day, two of the congregation kindly drove me down the Exe estuary to the sea at Exmouth and then through the beautiful Woodbury Common above. In the evening our hosts treated Fr George and me to a fish supper down on the quayside where the fish is caught locally the day before - the restaurant's motto being "Tomorrow's fish are still in the sea"!

All in all, it was a blessed and memorable week - and a lovely way to continue the CR/CSMV link.

Sister Elizabeth Jane CSMV

A Warm Welcome St Mary's Convent Reimagined

After much thought and prayer (and hard work!), the project to find new uses for parts of the Convent in Wantage was successfully completed in 2021. The process of reimagining the Convent arose out of discussions among the Sisters about their future. As they discerned the right way forward, ideas emerged about how the Convent could have an impact in new ways.

The project began with the conversion of two buildings to support education locally. St Mary's Lodge has been turned into six affordable flats aimed at teachers at the start of their careers. The Studio building has become offices for the Vale Academy Trust which runs eight local schools.



The Community then turned to the bigger challenge of updating the main Convent building. The North Wing has been converted into office space, largely for the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust. Between them, the two schools trusts now based at the Convent oversee the education of more than 10,000 children, continuing CSMV's long tradition of support for education.

On the ground floor of the West Wing, the Community has created new spaces for meeting and learning. This area has been named the Maribel Centre, recalling one of the Community's best-known leaders. The Retreat Wing above has been completely refurbished, with access improved by a new lift. Most bedrooms have their own bath or shower room, so no more need for long walks down corridors in the middle of the night!



With more visitors expected in future, the Sisters realised the importance of being able to provide a good welcome. The solution is a beautiful new entrance and reception area. Outside, Mary and the Christ-child offer their own welcome in a striking new sculpture by Nicholas Mynheer.

The Sisters are currently exploring ways in which visiting groups and the local community will be able to make greater use of St Mary's Chapel. New lighting in the Chapel helps to reveal the beauty of this sacred space.

In some ways 2021 marked the end of a long process of reimagining St Mary's Convent – the building work is finished and the new facilities are up and running. But really, the Community is just at the start of the most important part of the re-imagining – welcoming both old friends and newcomers to use the facilities in ways which will continue CSMV's long tradition of witnessing to the Gospel and serving others.



Alastair Hunter

*Previous Page: St Mary's Lodge, Teacher Accommodation
Top Right: Nelson Mandela meeting room, the Maribel Centre and Left: A Retreat Wing bedroom*



What does the Convent mean to you?

As the building works at CSMV draw to a close, quiet and stillness are restored to the Community. And so, we take a moment to reflect on what the Convent means to those who share with us this special place. We asked a few of our friends to share their thoughts with us.

The Bishop of Reading - Spiritual Connection

Bishop Olivia has had a many faceted relationship with St Mary's Convent over the years. As a cousin of Sr Phoebe, she has known of the Community since childhood, but it was in 1998 that Bishop Olivia had her first personal experience of the Convent when she stayed here for her Ordination Retreat guided by Canon Vincent Strudwick.



Since that first significant visit, Bishop Olivia has chosen to visit the Convent on Retreat many times, valuing the quiet space and the opportunity to join with the Sisters in prayer. Her relationship with the Convent was reinforced in 2013 when she moved to Berkshire as Archdeacon and she would often be invited to lead the Eucharist. Bishop Olivia describes being asked to become a trustee of CSMV in 2017 as a great honour. Given her long history with the Convent it seemed a natural choice for the Community to further build on an already strong relationship.

Reflecting on the last few years, Bishop Olivia describes her feelings about the development of the Convent with both delight and admiration.

Firstly delight that the Community made the decision to remain here at St Mary's Convent, and secondly admiration at how the Sisters have taken on with such creativity and energy the development of the site to create a space which further expands their strong tradition of hospitality, welcome and spiritual care.

Bishop Olivia also praises the forethought of the Community at the legacy they have created and she expresses excitement in the future of the Convent as it welcomes visitors to meet in such a special and contemplative space. When asked about what exactly makes being and meeting here at the Convent so unique, Bishop Olivia reflects that it is because whoever has the fortune to be a guest here at the Convent can be sure that the Sisters will be aware of their endeavours and will be upholding them in prayer.

Rt Revd Olivia Graham

In conversation with Catrin Cuzen

The Venerable Dr Joy Tetley - A Revelatory Stimulus

Summing up in a verbal nutshell 'what the Convent means to me' is quite a challenge! As for so many others over the years, it has had a significant impact on my life and pilgrimage.



Since the days of my youth (some years ago now!) the Convent has been a restorative spiritual oasis and (often at the same time) a revelatory stimulus for the ongoing journey. The Individual Guided Retreats I have undertaken there, for example, have been landmark experiences. And the times of quiet personal reflection and prayer have been balm to the soul, profound assurances of God's presence and God's steadfast love. Added to that has been the privilege of sometimes leading the Community's worship and conducting several retreats. Doing so in such a lovely, holy place has ministered in a special way to me, as well as, hopefully, enabling others to touch the mystery.

It is the testimony of many, myself certainly included, that on entering the Convent one is immediately enfolded in a palpable, holy peace. That has always been the case but, in my recent experience, I have felt that the new refurbishment has served to enhance and deepen that sense. It is so sensitively done, so beautiful (and comfortable!) – and, as ever, so welcoming. I would strongly recommend to anyone that they ‘come and see’ (indeed ‘taste and see’ – just as the Convent’s spiritual food is healthy and nourishing, so also is the food it provides for the body!)

Those who inhabit and work in this special place are, of course, key to its character and vocation. Like so many others, I cannot thank the Community enough for all their love and support over the years. That applies also to my beloved husband, who passed into heaven last year. We have so much to be thankful for in relation to both Community and Convent. May all who dwell there be richly blessed, even as they are the ministers of so much blessing.

The Venerable Dr Joy Tetley

Anne Dellar – A Rooted Sense of Christian Vision

In 2019 CSMV invited the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust to base their offices at St Mary’s Convent. However, ODST’s relationship with the Community goes back to 2012 when former CSMV trustee Alastair Hunter first met Anne Dellar after she became the Director of the Diocesan Board of Education.



From there a relationship grew with the Convent as Anne worked with the Sisters to bring together their vision of Anglican education. With ODST working at the sharp end of running a school academy trust, the organisation looked to the Community as a source of support to help sustain their Christian character as well as for the Sisters to uphold the work of ODST in prayer and love.

Anne speaks emphatically of how the Christian character of ODST is central to its purpose and vital to preserve. So while ODST is an outward facing and inclusive organisation, this founding relationship with the Community at Wantage is invaluable in retaining the heritage of its Christian character now and for future generations.

Suffice to say that since ODST have been physically placed within the heart of the Convent their connection has been enhanced. Anne explains how the proximity to the Community here allows for the Sisters to pop in to see the staff and discuss their work, take away those messages and uphold the work of ODST in prayer. With 41 schools spread over several counties and some staff working from home, Anne describes how the holiness of the Convent flows through to all those who encounter ODST. The arrangement can be likened to the days when CSMV had outreach houses in towns and cities beyond Wantage. The central role of the Community is still to provide a grounding place of love and prayer, even if the outreach work undertaken is by different organisations.

Anne enthuses at how her staff and visiting guests are wowed by the Convent. She remarks how the attention to detail, the care, love and reverence that has been so tangible in the renovation of the Convent is so apparent to all that are fortunate enough to spend time here. The opportunity for a Christian organisation to have excellent working facilities within a Christian environment is very significant to Anne.

Describing coming to Wantage as gaining a sense of longevity, Anne hopes that ODST can, in return, go some way to taking on the mantle of the Community's mission of Anglican Education for many generations to come.

Anne Dellar, CEO of Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust

In conversation with Catrin Cuzen

The Bishop of Dorchester - A Resource for the Community and Wider Church

One of the joys in arriving in Oxfordshire as the new Bishop of Dorchester has been to begin to discover the jewel that is the Community of St Mary the Virgin. Not only is this a place of peace, prayer and tranquillity at the heart of the episcopal area, it is also a community who are wonderfully committed to facing outward and providing a resource for the community and wider church, as evidenced by the hosting of the Diocesan Multi Academy Trust, the provision of a space for private prayer and retreat, and the wonderfully refurbished and welcoming buildings, which will increasingly be used for meetings of all shapes and sizes.



I am thrilled that our next Diocesan Senior Management Group residential meeting next January is going to be at the Convent. Being still so new in post, I feel as if I am just beginning in my relationship and partnership with the Convent and this special community, and I look forward to that relationship growing in strength, depth and variety over the years ahead.

Rt Revd Gavin Collins

News from Overseas

CSMV continues to support a number of charities and institutions in India and Southern Africa with which it has historical links.

Epiphany School, Pune, India

Epiphany High School is a low-income private school located in Guruwar Peth, Pune.

Like all other schools across the globe, the pandemic has been extremely detrimental to Epiphany school. Management, teachers, students and their families were all affected by the challenges resultant of the



pandemic. True to the saying, 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going' our school, teachers and staff stood strong and helped the community our students come from, even during the toughest of situations.

The prime challenge faced by our teachers and our school was the poor attendance of the students for online classes and paltry fee collection. The teachers worked online tirelessly to provide our students with excellent education in order to stay academically engaged during the lockdown. Rising above the problems we were facing, we reached out to communities around us and were even able to provide rations to families who were adversely affected by the pandemic because of loss of jobs or salary cuts.



The situation was grim, with teachers and staff getting less than 50% of their salaries for more than 6 months. We reached out to various organisations, corporates and philanthropists to raise funds

which were so critical to sustain operations at Epiphany School. We also resorted to crowd funding and were successful in raising nearly 38 lakhs through these activities (approximately £38,000).

Our top-most priority was to make learning accessible to all our students as the school moved to a virtual platform. With the help of organisations like Teach for India and other generous donors, we were able to provide smart phones to our students to attend online classes using the Zoom platform.

The pandemic gave our students the opportunity to showcase their talent through their own virtual events for celebrating Independence Day, Republic Day and Hindi Divas.

It is a well known fact that the pandemic has adversely affected the mental health of the students. Our teachers took up the gauntlet and started conducting fun online spaces like art classes, playing small games and facilitated dedicated Social Emotional Learning sessions to protect the well-being of our students.

During this time, Teach for India had also provided free Covid vaccinations to the parents of our students, thereby building immunity in the community we are serving.

The 2020 batch of Epiphany High School have received their SSC board results and have all passed with flying colours. Our ex-students are now moving onto new ventures in colleges across Pune.

Epiphany school reiterates its commitment to be a pillar of support to the community in Guruwar Peth, helping and caring for the marginalised throughout these difficult circumstances.

Sangeeta Kadam, Principal of Epiphany School



Irene Homes, South Africa

Irene Homes, like the rest of the world, has found themselves on a strange journey over the last 18 months; a journey where we were trying to find hope in the little things, where we have experienced the brokenness of quarantine, searching for the new normal, have raised ourselves by lifting others, where we have experienced beautiful and sad moments.

When the pandemic forced the world to lockdown and adjust its lifestyle during March 2020, we had to adjust our living and working style at Irene Homes through the implementation of strategies and regulations based on the World Health Organization and our own Government's prescriptions.



We have empowered residents and staff proactively to fight against COVID-19; we did so through daily training and demonstrations in the wearing of face masks, the keeping of social distance and living without the regular contact of parents, family and friends. Despite our resident's limitations, they have done extremely well in following and keeping to the regulations and restrictions. They have assisted each other in a very special way. Parents, guardians and family members have worked hand in hand with us to ensure they assist their child/family member in keeping safe.

Our Covid-19 Coordinator, Sr Carin Dreyer, was a blessing during this difficult time; she kept herself informed about the virus as such, regulations and all other aspects of the pandemic that might have an influence on Irene Homes. We had, over the period since March 2020, 11 residents who tested positive for the virus, but none of them were seriously sick and were treated by our Registered Nurses and our pro-bono medical doctor in our isolation facilities. 19 staff members tested positive for the virus and had to isolate at home. This has put us

in a disadvantage regarding having a complete staff component to deliver our services. Two staff members were treated in hospital for severe effects of the virus. Unfortunately one of our staff members, a Facilitator at one of the Workshops, passed away from Covid-19.



We are experiencing substantial declines in income; our Charity Shop had to close for a period of time during 2020, individual donors and corporate donors are giving less or no more at all, and a percentage of parents/guardians can no longer make their financial contributions towards their child's stay at the Homes.

Staff strive to make life easier for residents and ensure that they have enough joyful moments to remind them that life needs to be balanced and that we need to replace our fear and desperation with peace as Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:8; he reminds us that despair will be replaced with peace when we focus on the right things.



For us at Irene Homes the right things is to spend time building others up, concentrating less on ourselves and share what we have with those less fortunate than us.

Warm greetings from all of us at Irene Homes.

Estelle van Schoor, CEO Irene Homes



Botswana

Botswana, as with the rest of the world, has been hit hard by covid. Everyone, but everyone, here knows several if not many people who've died, or been left bereaved. So the fear level has been, and among many still is, high.

Government moved to protect as many as it felt it could. Ironically one of the casualties to that policy was that the work of the Holy Cross Hospice in Gaborone almost came to a halt. The only service allowed to continue was home visiting by a nurse. How many were isolated at home on their own and sick and without the prepared meals Hospice had been delivering, I don't know, but it must have been dreadful. The Wantage Overseas donation continued throughout, essential for keeping the organisation just ticking over.

Now that many restrictions are being lifted, I wait to see how soon Hospice will be able to get back to day care, meals and activities. Also, one has the feeling that a lot of normal processes have gone into slow motion because of covid, certainly the annual registration with the Registrar of Societies has been held up, it has also affected Hospice's daily running, so hopefully that soon will be sorted out too.

The other institution helped on a regular monthly basis by WO is the Gabane Community Home Based Care daycare centre. This hosts up to 50 children, half of whom are orphans, with a preschool programme, breakfast and a main meal. Covid-fear meant that numbers fell to 15 and are very slowly climbing back. 23 children were attending by the end of the second term in August. It is still 23 though everyone hopes the number will come back to nearer 50 at the beginning of the new school year in January. As the fees paid by non-orphans' families help cover the running costs for all the children, the Wantage Overseas donation has made a huge difference in covering shortfalls.

Then there are always individuals who need help, especially in a period when many have lost work directly because of covid, or other economic woes. Loice, a Zimbabwean lady living locally with a dependent school aged daughter, has kept her job only because the entire workforce

where she works agreed to take half pay. This is due not to covid, but to the international supply chain problems affecting the company. WO helped her last month when she was particularly tight. Shado asked me for help for his mother, an elderly lady dependent on her family who simply couldn't provide all she needed. Another Zimbabwean man, Morris, had to send help to his elderly mother, living alone in rural Zimbabwe. She had been hospitalised and could go home if Morris could help with extra nutrition she needed for her condition. It is so good to be able to help when it is really needed. Elderly women, and women with children do seem to be the ones who find it very hard to manage.

I who administer the funds, and those who benefit by them, continue to be deeply grateful for this blessing of financial help.

God's blessing indeed, and THANKYOU.

Margaret Taylor

Local Projects

BeSpace

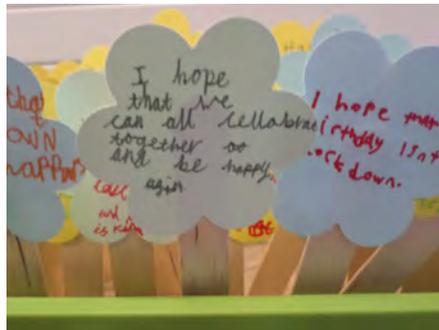
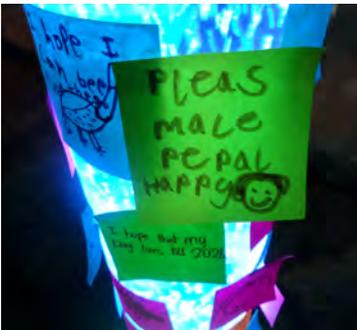
BeSpace is a small Christian Charity, based in Oxfordshire, which equips local churches to run prayer and reflection spaces in schools and other areas of the community.

For over 4 years we have been blessed by financial support from CSMV which has enabled us to reach out to over 150 schools across Oxfordshire and provide over 500 prayer and reflection spaces since 2010. This means that over 42% of schools in Oxfordshire have now had prayer and reflection spaces, meaning that over 100,000 children have experienced a space in their school.

The last 18 months have been a little more challenging due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Having previously been used to running prayer and reflection spaces within the school building, working with local church volunteers, from Easter 2020, access into the schools was stopped.

However, we took this as a challenge to look at how we could continue to respond to our vision 'To see every child, young person and adult take space to pray or reflect in their everyday lives.'

Initially, when many children were being schooled at home, we created a set of 'prayer@home' activities which could be used by children,



young people and their parents to pray and reflect during lockdown. These activities were provided for free via our website and social media pages.

As children and young people started to return into schools, but outside visitors were still not able to come in, we created a number of classroom prayer activities.

The aim of these was to provide creative and interactive prayer activities that could be led by a teacher or teaching assistant within the class or year group bubble.



During the pandemic we were also able to continue to support churches running prayer activities with their church and local communities by providing equipment and ideas.

We are now seeing a gradual return of bookings as schools start to feel more confident in having visitors return into schools. We ran a few spaces in schools during the summer term, however, unfortunately a few were impacted by classes having to isolate due to Covid outbreaks. Going forward, running prayer and reflection spaces will have to be balanced with how confident church volunteers feel about returning to volunteer their time in school post-pandemic.

Our plans for this academic year are two-fold:

- 1) to support those churches and schools that have previously experienced a BeSpace to return to their usual pattern of running prayer and reflection spaces and
- 2) To reach out to 60 new schools over the next 3 years who have yet to experience a BeSpace.

To achieve these aims and recognising the value of local Christians working and building relationships within their local area, we have recruited two part-time area networkers and plan to recruit two more.

It's really exciting to be back out in the schools again, seeing the positive impact that BeSpaces have on the children who experience them. At the end of a BeSpace session we ask the children to share their thoughts and experiences about having been in the prayer and reflection space, and it is always such an encouragement. Here are some of their responses:

"I liked it because it's reflecting on God and steps in life."

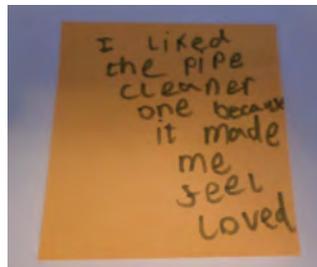
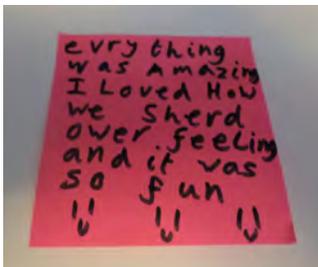
"Prayer space made me talk to God more when I'm stressed so it helped me loads."

"The prayer space made me forget about my everyday life and focus on God and Jesus."

"It made me feel calm because I know God is with me and he listened."

We thank you so much for all your support and we hope that you are as excited as we are about the impact each BeSpace has on the children experiencing it and all the seeds that are being sown. We couldn't have reached, and continue to reach, so many children without your generous support.

Kirsty Morgan, CEO BeSpace



All images are taken from Bespace's school workshops

Discovering Prayer

Helping people to build a joyful and fulfilling relationship with God through prayer

With CSMV's support, Discovering Prayer has been able to help our growing online community to deepen their relationship with God through prayer in the face of the intense challenges of the last year.

A true highlight was the 14-Day Prayer Challenge, which ran for two weeks at the end of June and brought the insight and wisdom of Sister Stella and nuns and monks from four different Christian traditions to a new and very appreciative audience. Designed to help people to adopt a rhythm of prayer that leads to flourishing, the impact of the course has been evaluated by Matthew T Lee, Director of Empirical Research at Harvard University's Human Flourishing Program. We're thrilled that he described the course as 'thoughtful, excellent, and transformative'.

Here's what one participant, Barbara, said,

"Each day, I feel as though I am entering into a holy place, like a chapel where the door has been purposefully left open, for me to enter in. It feels wonderfully personal (just for me) but also like His big open arms welcoming me into a beautiful sense of the community of God. It feels Heaven-sent and connecting with such precious, deep roots of faith is just what I have needed. I have tears in my eyes as I write, as only Jesus knows how very much I have needed this."

The course was widely promoted online, and a significant number of participants were South African. The timing of the Challenge fell during a time of particular violence and unrest in that country, and many people shared how helpful they'd found the encouragement to make time to rest in God's presence and pray during a period of such strain.

This autumn saw the launch of a new *Rhythm of Grace* series, which we hope will help people to become more aware of God's presence as they pray morning, midday and evening prayers with us.

As 2022 begins we'll be launching a new Christ-Centred Mindfulness course designed to help people make time to stop, be still and centre themselves on Christ. The plan is to attract the attention of many who are searching for helpful new practices as the new year starts and introduce them to a mindful focus on God. We're also excited to be making progress towards a long-held dream to record guided prayer times that cover the whole of St John's Gospel. 50 have already been created in this series, and we plan to record a further 40 in the months ahead, as part of a new 'Streams in the Desert' project.

We continue to be tremendously grateful for the support of the community for Discovering Prayer – thank you so very much.

Michelle Eyre, www.discoveringprayer.com

Oblates and Associates

Oblates

From our South African Oblates we learn that their winter has been long and harsh, but that now the spring rains have come and new green shoots can be seen. That seems like a good picture of the Oblate Fellowship in the past year; for most of us it has been difficult and restricting but now there are signs of new growth. This autumn sees two people received into full Oblation and two Novice Oblates admitted to further explore their call, a matter for great rejoicing.

Some Oblates have been able to keep in touch in local groups, on-line and more recently face to face, and there is a hidden network of phone calls and exchange of emails and letters which provides encouragement and connection. People have made annual renewals by phone, by zoom, in their parish churches and that has provided opportunities for gently bringing the good news of CSMV to the wider community.

All of these less visible communications came into a lovely focus on 25th September when we met for the first Oblates' Day since 2019; some people together at the Convent, some joining on-line for all or part of the day from their homes in the UK and abroad. There was inspiring worship, much laughter and LOTS of conversation – our thanks to the Community, the Warden, the support staff and all who made the day possible.

In the past year there have been two retreats, one in the spring online with a creative art theme, and one in October at the Convent with the theme of prayer in the night. There has been cooperation about retreats between Oblates and Associates and we look for that to continue into the future. With both extra mural expressions of CSMV being spread across a wide geographical area there are obvious benefits in improving communication and connectedness.

As the Sisters open up their welcome to retreatants, to those concerned with education, and those seeking silence so we trust and pray that the Oblates will also “widen the cords of our tent” to draw more people of all ages into our fellowship.

Rita Ball

South African Oblates

This has been a whirlwind of a year, considering we have been in lockdown for so long, everybody you speak to will say the same. South African lockdown rules have been very strict. However, they have been worthwhile. Yes, we have lost many to Covid and many have been incapacitated by it too. But overall, we have come through so far.

I am sitting here in my study going through our Oblate diary for the past year. It should have started with a joyous meeting of Oblates far and wide to celebrate Candlemas however this could not be. I pray that in 2022 we will meet once again and enjoy each other’s company. Sadly, each month I go through is blank, except for our Oblates who have renewed their Oblation. A few have managed to renew their Oblation if their Church has reopened. For most of us it has been over the telephone or on zoom. Either way it has been wonderful to hear or see each other at such a special time. I’m thrilled to say that, apart from those who through illness or other unavoidable situations were unable to renew, most have renewed for the coming year.

Our Letters each month have reached each of our Oblates, no thanks, I must add, to our dysfunctional post office. Most are on email or have someone to print out or read to them. A funny thing happened with the posting of the Oblate booklets to me, nothing arrived for ages; in the end Brian went to POSTNET and asked if a parcel for us was there. Yes, they said, we opened it as the address was missing, when we saw what it was, we waited for a nun to walk in to collect. I don’t think Brian quite fits the picture, but we got the parcel.

Irene Homes have also been totally locked down. They have had many

Covid cases, plus a much-loved member of their team passed away due to Covid, forcing the Governing Body to request those who were able to take their daughters home. I am pleased to say that they are now back, and the Homes are open again to the public. Prue and another Oblate in early October managed to attend the Eucharist at Holy Cross Chapel at Irene Homes. Prue and I have been invited to a Thanksgiving Breakfast there in November.

In April, two of us attended an online Retreat with Wantage, which gave us much joy. Then on September 25th three of us attended, again by zoom, the Summer Oblates' Day. So wonderful to say 'hi' to people we know but never get to speak to. That brings us back to the start of Advent again. May I wish you all a meaningful Advent and a Joyous Christmas and of course 2022, may it be a healthy and happy New Year.

Stevie Ancient, with special thanks to Marion Raubenheimer for her contribution to the South African Oblate news

Associates

Strangely we have had a very positive outcome from the pandemic restrictions in place throughout most of this year. For some time we had been acutely conscious of the need to develop our contact with those of our Associates who are no longer able to travel to Wantage. For some this has been by telephone or letters, but the pandemic rules have been the impetus greatly to develop our communications and events on-line, enabling us to reach out, and many Associates have said how much this has meant to them. We are still conscious, though, that quite a few Associates do not use computers and will continue to post mailings and talk to them by phone. They are always in our prayers and we rejoice when they contact us.

Our first Quiet Day online was a beautiful Celtic Style Day led by our Associate, Revd Angela Butler in October 2020, closely followed by an online conducted retreat for 20 attendees, led by poet and priest Malcolm Guite on the theme of Seven Sonnets on the Lord's Prayer.

In March 2021, Revd Mary Harwood led a Quiet Day entitled Jesus: Comfort, Shelter and Refreshment, again with 20 attendees. In June we were overjoyed to be able to hold a Quiet Day in person at CSMV. This was led by Revd Antonia Cretney on Resting and Rejoicing, and 11 of us were delighted to join the first Quiet Day in the beautiful new facilities at the Convent.

In September our joy was completed by being able to hold Associates' Day in person with 20 Associates, using the rooms Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela in the new Maribel Centre. We were very pleased that Father Benji Tyler, Assistant Curate at SS Peter and Paul in Wantage, was our celebrant and preacher at



Associates Day September 2021

the morning Eucharist, and that 6 Associates were able to join us online in the afternoon, to hear Alastair Hunter and Sister Stella talk to us about the developments at the Convent. As last year we had sent the service booklet in advance to Associates, both by email and post, further increasing those who could join us in prayer from their homes. We hope in future to be able to continue to offer such a mix of in person and online events.

Our twice-postponed Pilgrimage Retreat to Lindisfarne has been rearranged to May 2022, led by Rosey Feuall and speakers local to Lindisfarne and Northumbria.

We have also been blessed to welcome new Associates during the year and are continuing to have enquirers, some of whom have attended our Quiet Days and retreats.

To be back at the Community is in itself a great blessing, but it has been made all the more wonderful by the new developments. From the stunning welcoming sculpture as you approach, the exquisite planting and the beautiful reception area, we are greeted with all the warmth, calm and peace that we expect, in exceptionally lovely new surroundings. The Maribel Centre is perfect for groups and the Retreat Wing refurbishment is amazing; the rooms are very comfortable, with a blend of old and new furniture that feels just right, and delightful soft furnishings which avoid a 'hotel' look; the en-suites and other bathroom facilities are most welcome!

We are looking forward very much to our visits, Quiet Days and Retreats and our on-going fellowship in these splendidly planned new facilities, within our familiar spiritual home.

Sue Sowden

A Magical Evening in St Mary's Chapel

Sunday 24th October



We invited the Choir from Wantage Parish Church to sing Choral Evensong supported by Fr Benji Tyler, the Assistant Curate, who is in charge during the Interregnum. In all, over 50 people including the Choir were with us. John Ridgeway, the Organist was the first to arrive to have at least an hour's practice beforehand; he does so love playing our small Spath organ. It was good to have JS Bach played so beautifully beforehand & the Voluntary at the end.

The underlying intention of the event was to have Fr Benji blessing the new lighting installed by Bruce Kirk and his team of workers. The light from the new fittings extends above and below in a way that the old ones did not. We can now see clearly the small angels carved for us in Oberammergau, in Switzerland, about 7 inches in height at the top of the wooden panels behind the stalls. Some are playing instruments, some are singing and gesturing. (I remember when I was physically able climbing up to remove the ones that needed their wings or trumpet secured.) The months of rewiring and clearing of dust has now been transformed into a worshipful area, a sacred space, and we are delighted.

The service began with the procession of the Choir followed by the Director, Phil Johnson, appointed just before Lockdown. Fr Benji and two Sisters stood in the ante Chapel, advanced to the front of the Rood Screen and then proceeded to the top of the sanctuary steps announcing words of praise that were repeated by the congregation. Fr Benji prayed the blessing of the Light of



welcome, the Light of creativity and the Light of Christ and after each short prayer holy water was sprayed over people and the smoke of incense followed. The high altar was ready, the candles alight and Benji with two servers censed the altar very thoroughly. Phil's conducting then gave precision to the Choir's singing and it was interesting to watch his movements and hear the ways the choir responded to his guidance. Participating in the evening worship brought tears to my eyes as I tried to sing and sometimes to keep my mask on, but the tears were of sheer joy.

At the end of the service as clergy and choir processed out, the new lighting dimmed in a most dramatic way; then there was silence. Perhaps we Sisters all felt that the Chapel had been gifted back to us. It was some time before anyone moved.

Sr Lorna

The Lighting of St Mary's Chapel

Late summer 2021 saw the completion of the new lighting system in St Mary's Chapel. Electrical lighting was first installed in St Mary's Chapel in the 1920s, and then overhauled in the 1980s. Bruce Kirk of Light Perceptions managed the project. Bruce has been designing bespoke lighting systems for historic and religious buildings for over twenty years and so was a natural choice for the Community when looking for a sympathetic yet versatile lighting system to update the chapel.

The new lighting system is flexible and versatile, allowing several different light combinations to be used as well as a dimming facility. The existing hanging pendants have been retained and redistributed throughout the Chapel creating a visual 'de-clutter' of the nave. Sand-blasted shades provide an improved distribution of light as well as better highlighting the carvings of the stall canopies above. The central pendant in the ante-chapel has been raised, creating a clear view of the Rood screen from the entrance to the Chapel. Finally, spotlights were introduced for accent lighting of icons, Altars and statues throughout the Chapel and Cloisters.

Engraved Glass Doors by Tracey Sheppard

Earlier this year, artist Tracey Sheppard was commissioned to design a pair of engraved glass doors to create a new entrance to the cloisters at St Mary's Convent. The doors are due to be installed in November 2021.

The scene, designed by Tracey after meeting with Sisters from the Community, depicts a natural landscape at daybreak featuring a roebuck caught in a gaze with a song thrush and robin in full voice, as the words 'Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice' from the Song of Solomon 2:14 flow across both doors.

The doors will welcome guests as they walk from the new reception through the cloisters to St Mary's Chapel.



After the initial design was sketched, Tracey spent several months scaling up the design onto tracing paper ready to lay out on the glass. It is only after the design is fully scaled and positioned that the engraving process can begin. Tracey uses three methods of engraving - sandblasting, acid etching and drill. Tracey shared with us some images from her studio as she prepared the glass for the many stages of engraving.



Top right: Tracy's design Above: These images show the scaled drawing of the top panel in progress. Each step requires another drawing process which helps Tracey work out the engraving stages.



Above left: This image shows the scaled drawing laid out on the top panel along with all the paraphernalia for measuring and fixing. These drawings are then transferred to the tape on the glass by re-drawing them through. Above right: This image shows Tracey working with a scalpel carefully beginning to cut and lift some sections of the sun ready for sandblasting.



Left: The first image shows the transom panel in the sandblast cabinet. The second shows Tracey lifting and blasting the first few sections of the panel.

Right: Once the first lot of sandblast modelling is complete (Shaping apples, leaves over boughs and boughs themselves) the leaves are painted out with embossing black and protected with bees wax and lead foil. Next, the panel is put under acid for the first bite. This tones back the apples and boughs and some of the heavenly bodies.



News from the Trustees

For the first time in a while and with some new faces amongst them, the board of trustees were able to meet face to face in June of this year.

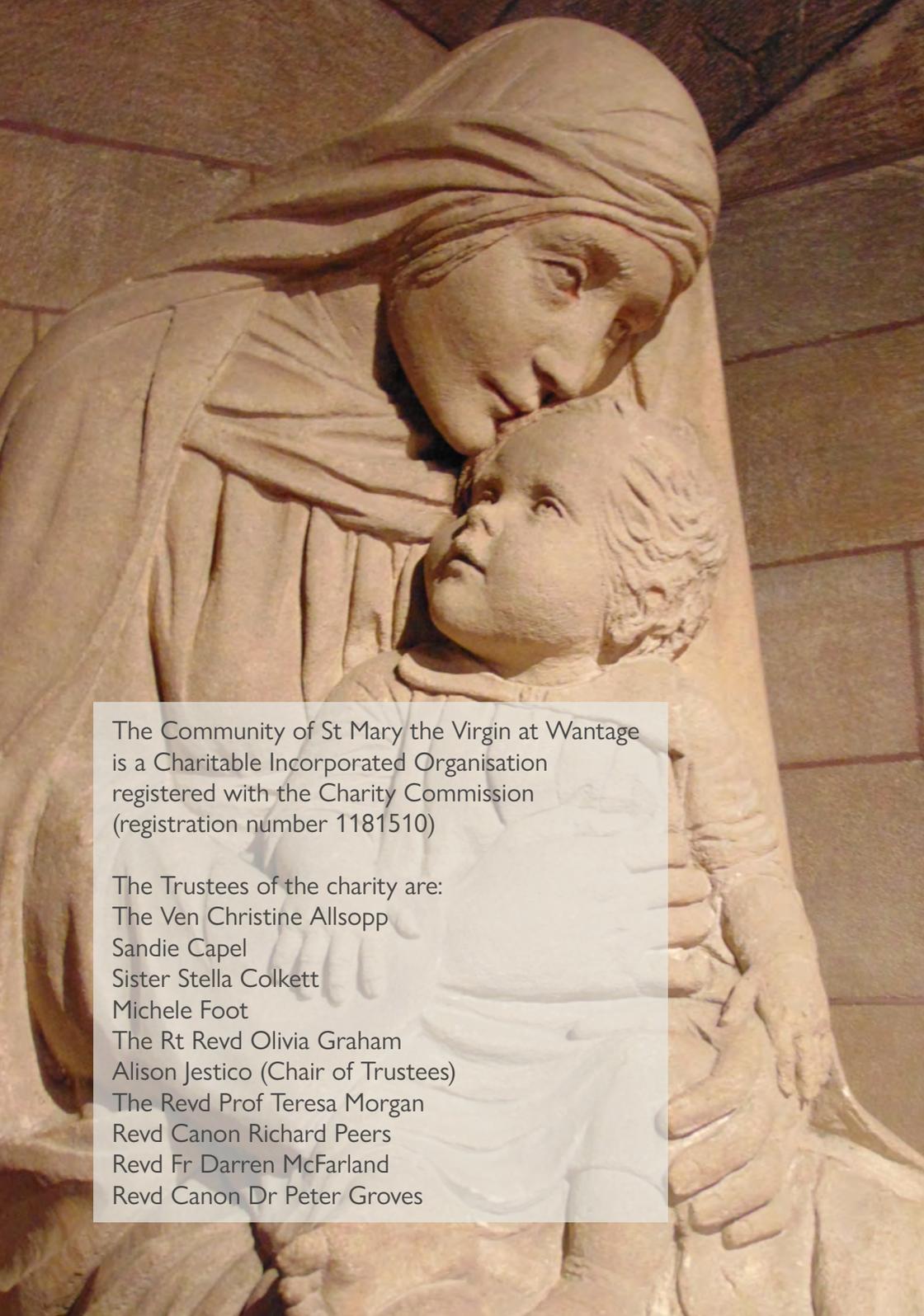
Most notably, Alastair Hunter stepped down as Chair, and is succeeded by Alison Jestico. Having been heavily involved in the renovation works of the Retreat Wing and Maribel Centre, which are now up and running with great success, Alastair has taken this as his cue to step back from the hands-on role of Chair of Trustees. Alison, former Director of Finance at the Diocese of Oxford, has been involved with CSMV since the 1980s when, with her small children, she regularly attended the family services and Sunday school run by the Sisters in the Guildry.

Revd Canon Toby Wright, too retired from the board of trustees this year and takes up the elected role of Warden to the Community. Toby's election was marked by a Blessing from the Rt Revd. Olivia Graham, Bishop of Reading.

CSMV are delighted to welcome three new members to the Board of Trustees in 2021. Revd Canon Dr Peter Groves, priest of St Mary Magdalene's Church Oxford, Revd Fr Darren McFarland, Vicar of St Andrew's Church Headington and Revd Canon Richard Peers, Sub Dean for Christ Church Oxford. The new trustees bring with them a wealth of experience from the world of education as well as the church and a variety of gifts which are quickly being used to support the mission of the Community.

Goodbye to Manna

Manna our former Postulant departed from us after a service of blessing and laying on of hands and with a warm-hearted farewell from Sisters in Reception to return to Japan, her country of origin.



The Community of St Mary the Virgin at Wantage
is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation
registered with the Charity Commission
(registration number 1181510)

The Trustees of the charity are:

The Ven Christine Allsopp

Sandie Capel

Sister Stella Colkett

Michele Foot

The Rt Revd Olivia Graham

Alison Jestico (Chair of Trustees)

The Revd Prof Teresa Morgan

Revd Canon Richard Peers

Revd Fr Darren McFarland

Revd Canon Dr Peter Groves

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