



**KEEP
CALM
AND
CARRY
ON**

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St John's Linlithgow
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Registered Charity SC050351



Introduction

This has been a difficult and humbling year. In the midst of this time God has still been speaking. Since the start of 2020 God has told us that he's doing a new thing among us and we believe he is taking us on an exodus as a church family out of what we have been familiar with and towards something new. However, as we talked about at our AGM in March 2020, where we looked back at the history of St John's, the core of who we are will remain unchanged: We're about the Kingdom, we're about Nurture, we're about Jesus.

This report will give an honest reflection of the highs and lows of the year 2020. We want to communicate how the church has responded well to the pandemic but also how it has demonstrated our frailties. The tone of this document is not to sound triumphant but to give an honest assessment of how St. John's kept calm and carried on.

Kingdom

We believe that the Kingdom should be an inclusive extending force within our communities. We want new people to find hope in God's Kingdom and we want to tell people about Jesus.

Nurture


We believe we should care for one another as family and love each other as Jesus loves us. We want to spiritually nurture and care for the people within our groups and church family.

Jesus

We believe in the person of Jesus Christ and want to allow people to worship Him and deepen their relationship with Him.

Kingdom

"Through our connect group, when 1 person had an idea to collect toiletries for hospital patients in COVID wards, we all helped in some practical way. Within our connect group we shared our hearts and encouraged each other to 'pay it forward' and bless people, our neighbours and communities with acts of kindness."



"I've tried to keep in contact with people by phone or video calls and have tried to seek out people I haven't seen in a while. I also made over 200 face masks which I gave to family and friends."

"I've made a point of smiling and saying hello to all those I meet, especially elderly people as I am very conscious that I might be the only person who interacts with them that day."

"As individuals many of us were involved with the foodbank reverse advent calendar drive (organising, donating, delivering), in pastoral care (e.g. cooking meals for others), community cafe, Linlithgow Coronavirus support group. As a group we have prayed for these initiatives and encouraged each other around our involvement."

Community Cafe

This year the cafe has adapted and evolved, serving our community in new ways. In August we were able to open as a takeaway making connections by offering free drinks to passers-by and local businesses. In October the cafe closed again, however we introduced "Pay with a Post-it" in conjunction with local cafes to support local business as well as people in our community. Several cafes ended up supporting us by not accepting money when we returned to pay, and some customers gave donations or paid for coffee for others.

This year has been a challenge keeping the café operating, however it also presented us with new and exciting opportunities that we would not have explored otherwise. Taking the café out onto the street pushed us out of our comfort zone and into conversing more with those who pass by our doors.

We're about the Kingdom: We believe that the Kingdom should be an inclusive extending force within our communities. We want new people to find hope in God's Kingdom and we want to tell people about Jesus.

Springfield

A group of people from several churches who live in and around Springfield began meeting weekly on Sundays during the summer - one week at lunchtime for a picnic in the park and the other week to pray outside as a group and then in pairs to walk and pray. Before Christmas we took part in Doorstep Carols joining with neighbours to sing and to chat afterwards.

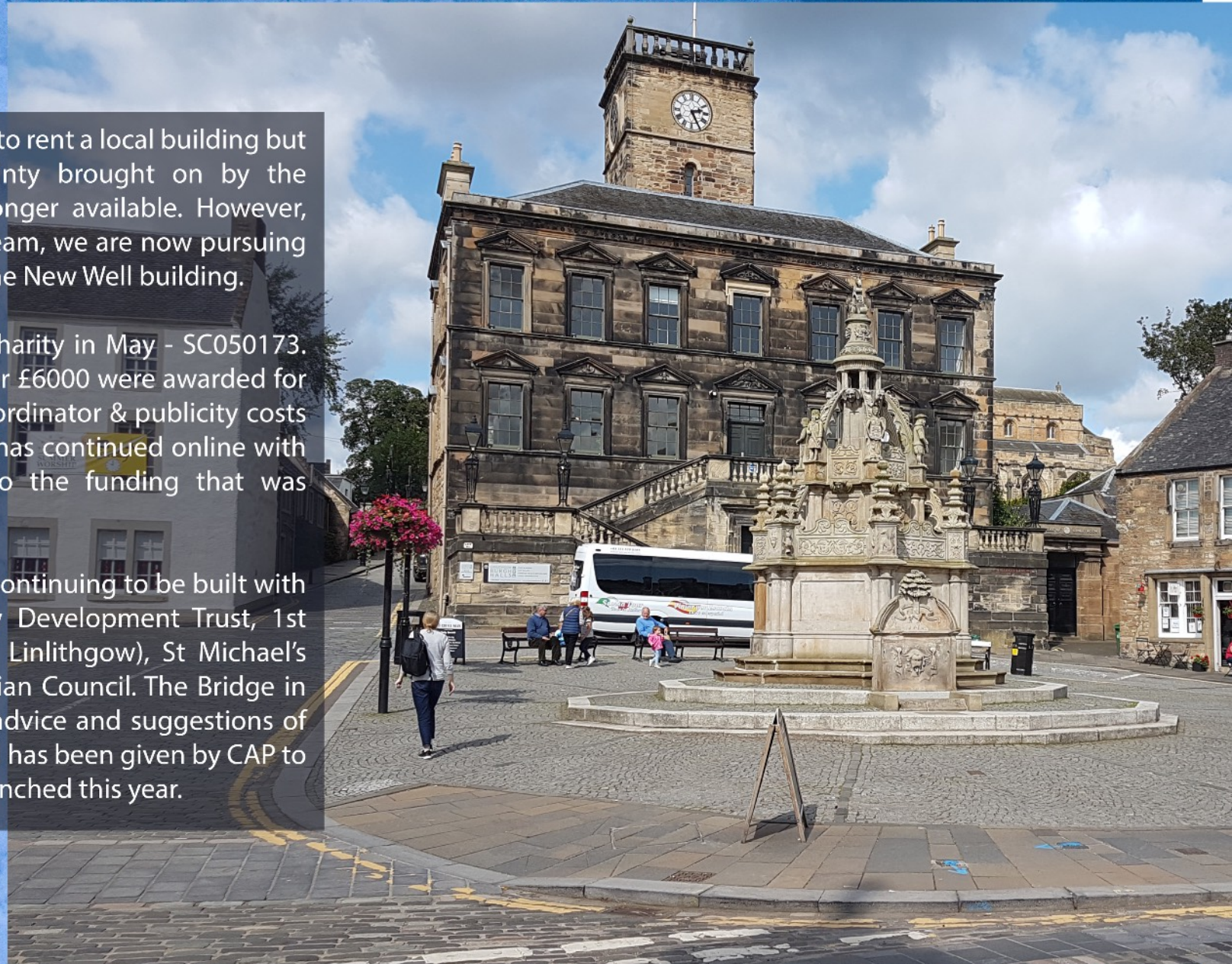
Part of Lorraine Orr's new role as pioneer and outreach worker is based in the community and we are excited to be working in partnership with St. Michael's as we look to serve the neighbourhood.

The New Well

At the beginning of 2020 we hoped to rent a local building but because of the financial uncertainty brought on by the pandemic, the building was no longer available. However, along with the St John's property team, we are now pursuing the possibility of a shared church/The New Well building.

The New Well officially became a charity in May - SC050173. During the year grants totalling over £6000 were awarded for subsidised counselling sessions, coordinator & publicity costs and for the Oasis café. Counselling has continued online with additional sessions offered due to the funding that was secured.

Relationships and connections are continuing to be built with organisations including Linlithgow Development Trust, 1st step (Addiction recovery group in Linlithgow), St Michael's Parish Church, LYPP, and West Lothian Council. The Bridge in Livingston continues to help with advice and suggestions of grant awarding bodies and approval has been given by CAP to provide a Job Club which will be launched this year.



Spotlight

Possilpark

As a church we started 2020 very hopeful. After 4 years of planning, the Bardowie building project looked like it was finally going to be happening, we were however still £100,000 short. By March the building work was well established but we still needed about £50,000. We appreciated the support from St John's, not just on a financial level but also supporting us with prayer and encouragement when many others were telling us we had made a careless decision to go ahead.

The result by autumn 2020 was that we had a fully renovated building that was now safe and compliant to use and we were able to hold Youth Café meetings in person again. We were also able to hold a Christmas café where over 60 people from the local community visited, many of whom have felt isolated at this time.

Going into 2021 we are looking forward to re-opening the café once restrictions allow and providing barista training & qualifications for the young people and others in the community. We are excited about the ground next door being developed into a community garden space in partnership with a local housing association and we are looking forward to welcoming others from the community into our new home.

Emma Macintosh



Nurture



"This year we have supported group members through bereavement by cooking meals etc. We have also been praying for each other. In a practical sense, reaching with small gifts and cards to all in the group to ensure they feel loved and part of the group, even if they are unable to attend the zoom" meetings regularly

"Throughout the past year, myself and other members of the youth have consistently checked up on each-other and made it known that prayer and support was always an option."

"My connect group members have been fantastic at setting up zoom sessions. Sometimes I've not had the energy to engage in these and my absence has been noticed. I've been so blessed by messages, a card, a plant and offers of meeting for a walk. These have always come just at the right time and when I've not been in a place to say I needed it."

When I had a hard week at work, someone made dinner and 2 other members have popped round with gifts. I have felt very cared for. I have also tried to help practically some of the other house group members. Has meant a lot to me.

We're about Nurture: We believe we should care for one another as family and love each other as Jesus loves us. We want to spiritually nurture and care for the people within our groups and church family.

Youth

Like almost everything else, youth work has had to change this year. A Dunkirk spirit ensued as we reworked and reimagined our programme. In the initial lockdown in March all our clubs moved to zoom. In Chewin the Chat we studied the book of Nehemiah because when it all goes wrong you don't read parts of the bible where things went well, you go to the prophets and the texts about exile. We also spent a lot of time just having fun and hanging out together.

The pandemic disrupted our summer plans but, together with the young people from Possilpark, we organised the 'big 500 miles', a sponsored socially distanced walk, run, cycle in aid of renovating a church building in Possilpark. Over 45 young people and families took part. During the weekend the young people met together each day on Zoom to spend time together and to look at the Exodus story. We surpassed our 500 mile target, collectively travelling 1150 miles and raising over £6,000.

Two sessional workers have helped lead the weekly clubs since September. Having extra help has enabled the young people to better participate and co-create the clubs. They have also been invaluable in supporting the young people through this difficult time by providing additional one to one support.

Children & Families

This has been a unique year for the Children & Families' ministry and during the pandemic we have connected with families on a more individual basis, including visiting people in their gardens and delivering gifts of sunflower seeds and craft packs. We've been able to build on relationships by going for walks or making phone calls and have had several opportunities to pray for people, which has often led to deepening and more intimate conversations. Group chats have been set up within our parent and toddler community and a 'bring and take' of children's clothing and toys has been available. It's been a privilege to provide love and support to families that have found themselves in very difficult circumstances.

Connect Groups

Our Connect Groups are the primary place in the life of St. John's where our church family is nurtured and disciplined in the ways of Jesus. It's been encouraging to hear of all the ways that the church family has supported each other through this difficult time and how they have reached out to their local communities. We now have a member of the connect group leadership team linked to each group leader which has helped to facilitate community between different groups.

We've expanded Connect Groups to include ministry teams and missional communities and are hoping to provide more coaching and mentoring for the connect group leaders this year to support them in reaching out to their communities.



Spotlight Property

For some time the leadership have felt that the Academy has not been fit for purpose. It doesn't provide sufficient availability or suitable room either for worship or for a community space. This past year the elders discerned that we should look for a permanent home in Linlithgow and we agreed to start to think about our future property needs. We think the building should reflect the vision of St John's and have agreed that the principle purpose of it should be for service to the community, while also meeting the needs of the church. The space should be multi-use, supporting our vision for engaging with our community, training, providing a hub which resources smaller church plants, and also a home for the Linlithgow congregation.

There are some options which are available to explore and it is important that we get the right property for this long term commitment. We are at a very early stage, and the next phase is to look further at the feasibility of these options. This will initially focus on one potentially suitable property which may be available and also revisiting the possibility of redeveloping Union Road. This will include holding discussions with other parties and looking at financing prior to making a decision on next steps.




Jesus

"I have mostly been clinging on to Jesus for dear life myself and have no idea if that has helped anyone else get closer to Jesus. Just survive somehow has been my main motto and hope that Jesus catches me when things get too rough."

"I feel my relationship with Jesus has gotten worse this year. Being apart from community at church and especially communal worship has been very hard for me as these normally boost and bolder my faith."

"My journey this year has been in developing my own relationship with Jesus so that I have something authentic to share with others."

A photograph of a desk setup. In the foreground, a laptop screen displays a video of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark shirt, sitting on a couch and holding a smartphone. To the right of the laptop is a clear glass vase containing several white tulips with green leaves. In the background, a book with a red cover is visible on the desk. The overall scene is lit with soft, indoor lighting.

"We have learnt a lot more about Jesus through individual members taking part in learning streams and BIOY, as well as through our group studies - it has been great to share our learning in the group and bring these different insights into discussion. We have experienced Jesus through the constant fellowship and corporate prayer, praying for each other and with each other has been so important."

We're about Jesus: We believe in the person of Jesus Christ and want our ministries to allow people to worship Him and deepen their relationship with Him.

Prophecy Team

The group was set up to help us understand what God is saying and to help St. John's grow in our relationship with Jesus. Our team is becoming an important place of equipping and enabling us all to hear from God for ourselves and for our church family. We have focused on practical training to be able to understand when he speaks, as well as bringing some prophetic input into different areas of church life. We have spent time listening to each other and encouraging our journeys in this area. Our group is growing into something that fulfils the role of the prophetic in the future of our church despite the challenges of this past year.

Learning Streams

In the Home series we made a commitment to shift the main way that we learn from long sermons to shorter preaching and Learning Streams. We ran Learning Streams twice in 2020, the first season featured 'The Prayer Course' and 'Deeper into Daniel' and the second 'Me & God', "Theology 101, and "Christian." These 5 courses were attended by over 125 people who sought to deepen their faith and build community in a classroom environment. All our courses in 2020 were on zoom which enabled people to grow and connect despite the lockdown. It also allowed other expert voices from outside the congregation to be introduced.

We don't want to tell people what to think, we want to create an environment that encourages people to think for themselves and explore different ways that the church has understood different issues. In 2021 we are planning eight courses over two seasons. As well as evening classes we will be offering some courses during the day.

Encounter Freedom

The goal of Encounter Freedom ministry is to go deeper in our relationship with Jesus. In his name people have been set free. Through Zoom we've ministered to people locally, as well as a few nationally and internationally.

Although we've found that sessions can work remotely, for most people there are deeply personal stories to share and so they want the reassurance of an in-person experience. This has really impacted our plans for the past year and at times it's been disappointing and even disheartening, however we believe there will be an increased need for this ministry as we exit lockdown.

We have reached out to others who want to develop this kind of ministry, offering to support them in their outreach by volunteering our prayer teams and also joining in prayer support.



Spotlight

Church@theBarony

Our vision is to nurture and grow the church family in Bo'ness, teaching who Jesus is and allowing him to make an impact on people's lives and find their place in his kingdom. We moved our services online in March and found ways to be creative and engage the community. Meeting up on Zoom after the services and virtual prayer meetings were helpful to keep people connected as well as supporting each other through our What's App group.

Opportunities for outreach were limited but we found other ways to impact the community including supporting the local relief initiatives as a result of the pandemic, being involved in the Storehouse, delivering Christmas cards to our neighbours and posting twice weekly vlogs on social media which were viewed extensively. A highlight was the creation and installation of a nativity scene that was seen across Bo'ness and Linlithgow by over 17,000 people on social media.

Towards the end of the summer we started to meet fortnightly in our local park and we began services again at the Barony in September, this time at 11am. Our numbers were higher than before lockdown and we're hoping and praying this growth will continue this year.



HOME' RECAP

1. WE WILL CONTINUE WITH THE SHORTER MORE FOCUSED SERMONS TO HELP US BE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO YOUNGER PEOPLE AND PEOPLE WHO ARE ON A JOURNEY OF FAITH:

Throughout all our online services our talks have been shorter to help people engage. Behind the scenes sermon series are now created with small teams of people being tasked to write sermons together, decide learning outcomes and to give listeners one thing to think on.

2. ONE DAY WE'LL LEAVE THE ACADEMY AND WE'VE APPOINTED A TEAM WHO ARE NOW STARTING TO LOOK FOR A PERMANENT HOME IN LINLITHGOW:

In June 2019 the elders met to pray into the future spiritual direction of the Church. As a result they discerned that St John's should leave Linlithgow Academy. This does not automatically mean that when we are allowed to gather a significant number of people together again we will not go back to the Academy, but it means that we are actively looking for other places to call home.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?: A small property team, comprising Elders & Congregation members, has begun to meet to look for a permanent home in Linlithgow and make a recommendation to the church family.

3. WE WILL INVEST IN A GREATER ONLINE PRESENCE AND USE THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY THIS NEW MEDIUM:

The online services have given us an opportunity to gather as Church in a new way and interact with new mediums such as streaming services and creating shareable content. Before the pandemic our online presence was minimal but moving forward we realise that we must make it easy for people to come to church online. As part of that Andy Clark is now overseeing our online efforts as well as his youth work job.

SINCE THE START OF THE YEAR GOD HAS TOLD US THAT HE'S DOING A NEW THING AMONG US AND WE BELIEVE THAT HE IS TAKING US ON AN EXODUS AS A CHURCH FAMILY OUT OF WHAT WE'VE BEEN FAMILIAR WITH TOWARDS SOMETHING NEW. AS WITH THE STORY OF THE EXODUS WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHERE OUR JOURNEY WILL END BUT OUR DESIRE FOR THE HOME SERIES WAS TO COMMUNICATE OUR TRAJECTORY SO HERE'S A REMINDER OF WHAT WE SAID WITH AN UPDATE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW.

4. WE WILL BEGIN TO PREACH INTO AND ENGAGE WITH THE CURRENT BIG ISSUES IN SOCIETY:

We believe we must begin to talk about the current big issues in our society e.g. faith, sexuality, gender identity, racism, discrimination, mental health, politics and ecology. We will begin to look at these topics from a biblical perspective and will journey together to address these issues. We as a church want to begin to explore what we believe and create space for dialogue and discussion.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?: In Autumn 2021, we will be looking as a Church family at the topic "What is the Bible?" as well as running a Learning Stream on sexuality and gender.





5. CHURCH@THEBARONY WILL MOVE TO 11AM ON A SUNDAY AS IT SEEKS TO ESTABLISH ITS PRESENCE IN THE TOWN:

Church@theBarony that began 2 years ago has always met at 5pm, however it will begin to meet at 11am as the natural next step for the church. There will also be a greater connection between Church@theBarony and St John's Linlithgow, sharing news, resources and working more closely together with communications.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?: In Autumn 2020, Church@theBarony successfully moved its service to 11am as restrictions eased and saw an increase in the number of people gathering in person at the new time. Services have continued at 11am on zoom while the current restrictions are in place.

6. WE WILL PLANT MORE CHURCHES: We don't want to create one big church in Linlithgow for people to travel to from across West Lothian and surrounding areas but we want to see Christians gathering together in their locality to do church where they live.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?: Alongside Bo'ness, a group has started prayer walking with other Christians in Springfield to reimagine how they can serve their local community.

7. WE WILL CONTINUE THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING STREAMS AS A MEDIUM WHERE PEOPLE CAN GROW DEEPER IN THEIR FAITH:

Learning Streams have offered an opportunity to learn in different spaces and engage more deeply with scripture and issues of life and faith. In October 2019 we piloted our first Learning Stream in Costa, Linlithgow. As a significant amount of our teaching moves to the middle of the week this creates space for new opportunities on a Sunday to rethink our services while also making them more engaging and accessible to people not yet of faith.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?: In 2020 we moved online and ran 5 courses which were attended by over 125 people. We want to encourage more people to join in on the learning experience. In 2021 we are planning a further 8 courses to run over Spring and Autumn. These courses will include a closer look at Paul, Christian Theology, Parenting, Prayer and Sexuality & Gender issues.

8. WE WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE NEW WELL IN ITS DEVELOPMENT:

The New Well is looking to find a home to allow it to continue the work of helping people in our community with their mental health and financial needs. Before the pandemic, The New Well was in the process of looking into developing and renting a property just off Linlithgow High Street but this building project has been put on permanent hold by the partner organisation.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?: The New Well are involved in the discussions with the property team as they look for a building that will accommodate both The New Well and a permanent home for St John's.



Highs & Lows

Some things this past year went well despite the restrictions, however at times we felt overwhelmed by the challenges brought on by the pandemic. Here are reflections from some of our leaders on their highs and lows of 2020.

David Todd

High: A highlight for me was being part of the growth of the Church@theBarony, both numerically and spiritually despite the restrictions. It was wonderful to be back worshipping in person for a time but it has also been exciting to take advantage of the opportunities to communicate through social media with our content reaching a wide range of people across Bo'ness. This has enabled us to reach new people with the message of Jesus. Our online presence has done a great deal to establish Church@theBarony in our community.

Low: I found it difficult to cope with the lack of personal connection with people and it's affected my ability to minister to them. I feel regret that we have not been able to support people who have been left isolated by the pandemic in ways that we normally would. Some of the lowest points for me have been the inability to comfort people who have experienced the death of a loved one. It's difficult to serve others when you've been struggling yourself.

Stuart Aitken

High: Helping Clay Community Church's Bardowie Street Hall project was a highlight for me. It encouraged me in my journey of faith in God's provision when we raised £18,000 in our Spring giving week and then another £6,000 as a part of The Big 500 Miles campaign. I was grateful that our income remained stable and allowed us to utilise our resources, including our staff, in meeting the challenges of the pandemic.

Low: I missed the mark when I communicated in connect group meetings that we were looking to meet in missional groups of 50 as lockdown eased in September 2020. I was excited about the possibility of us taking advantage of missional opportunities in Springfield, Linlithgow Bridge and Union Road in a similar way to what has happened in Bo'ness. On reflection, even though these 50 people group limits were imposed on us it was insensitive to how people were feeling at the time.

Heather Begarnie

High: After lots of form filling and policy writing, The New Well received charity status in May which allowed us to secure funding for counselling. We were able to offer free and subsidised sessions for people in our community. It was a privilege to be part of the Linlithgow Coronavirus Support group. We were able to arrange collections of urgent prescriptions and shopping which brought relief to people. It was an honour for us to get to know the team of volunteers and the people who were stuck at home grateful for our help and a chat on the phone.

Low: I wish we'd launched the Family Facebook page at an earlier date as it has become a good way to share news and keep in touch with our church family. The lowest moments for me were the deaths of Jean Mabon and Naomi Costello. Jean's funeral was the last event I attended prior to lock down. It was a privilege to be one of the few people at Naomi's funeral but it was still hard to be there under the restrictions. It kept us isolated and deepened the sense of loss and emptiness. I'll miss them both.

19

Andy Clark

High: The highlight of the year for me was "The Big 500 Miles" where young people from Linlithgow & Possilpark came together to walk, run or cycle 500 miles collectively in aid of the building project in Possilpark. So much of our summer plans had been put on hold but it was a great feeling to do something innovative. We had a group chat and met together on Zoom each night to pray together and go through the Exodus story. By the end of our weekend we travelled 1,150 miles and raised over £6,000.

Low: Understanding that every word and phrase we say online really matters was a steep learning curve for me. I said the immortal line "now if we kill the preach" in the HOME series in the context of making a commitment to have shorter sermons on a Sunday morning. A line that I thought was hyperbolic was in fact inflammatory to lots of people because it made it appear I was flippant about something that was precious to people and to me and for that, I am sorry.

The truth is I believe that a combination of shorter preaching and Learning Streams is more an effective way for us to communicate ideas and learn together than long sermons.

Finance

We have a huge amount to be thankful to God for. When we initially budgeted for 2020 we had no inkling that we would be hit by a global pandemic and the day to day work of the church would be impacted so significantly. That said, we finished 2020 with a healthy surplus of £34,106, having anticipated a small deficit of £6,496. This was largely because income far exceeded expectations and costs were kept well within budgeted levels overall.



income

£358,337

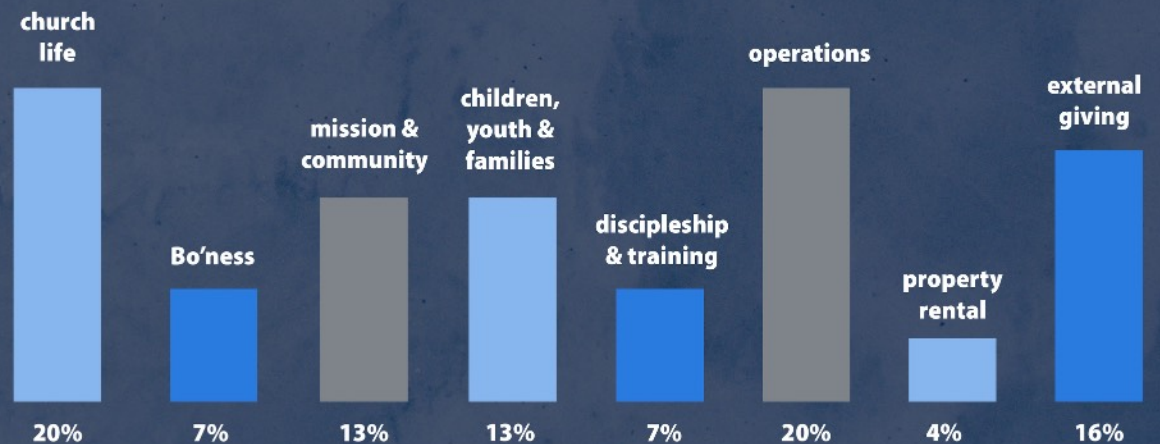
expenditure

£324,321

surplus

£34,106

expenditure breakdown



The Final Word

As I reflect over the last 5 years there has been a change in atmosphere in our church family. I've noticed an increase in grace, particularly in response to mistakes we have made as a leadership team. It brings me joy to see the church gathering around a vision for Church Planting, the New Well and Training. The establishment of the New Well as a charity has been a highlight for me. Church@the Barony is a community who are committed to bringing the Kingdom of God to Bo'ness and God is now leading us to serve the Springfield community alongside our friends from St. Michaels'. It's exciting to see God grant us favour as we look towards St. John's finding a permanent home that will be a base for us to serve our community, support our church plants and give us capacity to develop a training centre.

We've spent significant time on restructuring the work of the various leadership teams and they are now functioning well together. When I started at St. John's, I was heartened by the fact that the elders were united in vision and values and I'm encouraged that this unity is now apparent within the church family as well. I've watched how our church family has welcomed and assimilated new people into the heart of our family and how these new people have enriched us as a church.

Finally I want to say thanks to you, the St. John's family for your commitment and dedication to our collective vision. From the moment I became a Christian it's been a God given passion to see many more people become followers of Jesus and disciples in such a way as to see genuine community transformation. This is becoming a reality and it's been a joy to serve you all and to be part of a vibrant, growing community of faith.

Keith Short

