

Paignton Baptist Church

Summary of the year 2024/5

Our scripture for the year was: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Colossians 3 v 16.

Our minister: The year was overshadowed by the illness and subsequent death of our beloved pastor, Rev Stephen Coles. He died on 29 December 2024 and the love and esteem in which he was held was demonstrated by the attendance at a service to celebrate his life which took place at the church on 25 January 2025. The church was full, and the Cross Link Centre (hall) was used as an overflow to accommodate all those who wished to pay their respects to Stephen. We will miss him terribly and he will be very difficult to replace.

Rev Geoff Andrews has been appointed as our Moderator; his principal duties are to: a) Chair the Deacons' and Church Members' Meetings b) Facilitate the process of identifying the church's wishes regarding a new minister. Rev Andrews has summarised his task of one of walking with the church during this interim period.

Pioneer Minister Debbie Onslow completed her three -year contract with the church as Pioneer Minister (Mental Health and Well-being) in August 2024. This coincided with completion of her Ministerial Formation Training and Academic Study (Theology, Ministry and Mission) as a student at Bristol Baptist College. Debbie's ministry has been offered to, and accepted by, the region as a resource to ICE (Initiatives in Christian Education) Torbay, a charity which provides a service to primary schools across Torbay, involving religious education lessons and lunch clubs.

Services: Services were held at 10.30 each Sunday morning, with Holy Communion being celebrated on the first Sunday of each month. More informal evening services were also held monthly during part of the year. The church is fortunate in having a number of experienced individuals, including three retired ministers, who can lead services and provide addresses, or both.

Membership and baptisms Church membership increased slightly from 61 to 63.

Activities for adults: Prayer meetings were held throughout the year on Tuesday evenings and Thursday mornings and were open to all.

Wednesday worship: This was held monthly, for much of the year, usually the fourth Wednesday in the month, and was an informal time to seek the Lord, enjoy his presence and worship him in spirit and in truth.

Life groups Four such groups were established during Summer 2024, with a leader (or leaders) and a host in each case. All groups commenced with a 10 week discipleship course and progressed through this at different speeds. Although the way forward for one of the groups has yet to be determined, the other groups have moved on, or will do so, to address other spiritual topics according to the wishes of its members. Mead Close Life group has met fortnightly throughout the year. Most recently, the group has been studying 1 and 2 Peter and Jude, along with a study called “Listening to God”, which takes a look at different Old and New Testament figures from Genesis to Revelation, to see what can be learnt and how to apply these lessons to everyday life.

Outreach to residential homes The Mead Close group visited the Roundham Court Residential Home to take a short monthly service of worship there. Other similar visits have been made to the Pendennis Care Home and Primley Court Nursing Home.

Renew Ministry This was led by Debbie Onslow, Pioneer Minister, until her contract ended in August 2024. Leadership then passed to Joan Young, one of the deacon/trustees. The Renew Ministry, which was set up to facilitate people's mental health and well-being, met on Mondays. The morning session consisted of tending the Psalm 23 Garden, which is situated at the rear of the church. The garden has become established and is doing well. The Monday afternoon hobby group had fewer members attending but was much valued by those who did attend. As it was felt that, in large measure, Renew had fulfilled its purposes, the decision was taken to bring it to a conclusion, and the final day the group met was Monday 7 April 2025.

Coffee mornings These were held throughout the year on Friday mornings. These were attended by members of the congregation and others, including some who have no other connection with the church. The hope is that, for some of these, coffee mornings will prove a gateway into the life of the church as a whole.

Activities for children and families: Sunday Children's sessions At the request of the minister, the number of sessions per month was increased in order to allow for greater continuity and to promote attendance; accordingly, during the second half of the year, there was either a session for the children in an upstairs room or an all age service in the church sanctuary.

Children joined the congregation in the sanctuary for the first part of the Sunday service and, at the completion of their own session, returned to the sanctuary to show the congregation what they had produced. This led to increased confidence for the children when they took part in all-age services. Following a request from the deacons/trustees to reduce the number of all-age services, a new structure and approach to Sunday sessions was implemented from the beginning of 2025, using resources for Sunday schools linked to a book or topic over a 12 week period.

Messy Church This was a monthly event, held on Saturday mornings, aimed at children from four to 11 years of age and their families. Breakfast was served at 9.30 am, followed by various crafts linked to a Bible theme. At around 10.40 am, there was a short service, with songs, "The Big Question, a story, and a memory verse. Attendance was up to 34 children and 17 families.

Toddler Cafe This met during term-time on Wednesday mornings and the church has welcomed a good number of children, their parents, grandparents, and carers throughout the year. Some came most weeks, some for just a few, but all have been blessed by the warm welcome and sense of God's peace. Some families have gone to join in other church activities, such as Messy Church. The prayer is always that God will speak to those who attend – of whatever age – and He does.

Boys' Brigade This was a mixed year of blessings and challenges. The boys who came were very enthusiastic and enjoyed attending on a regular basis; parents and relatives of the boys were also most supportive. The prayer is that the boys will experience life to the full (John 10 v 10) through coming to know Jesus for themselves. The resources provided by Boys' Brigade HQ have been a great help. The number of boys is currently very small and, accordingly, potential new members would be most welcome.

Girls' Brigade The 2023-24 session ended with the Annual Awards Evening. The following weekend saw seven girls and four leaders experiencing a sleepover in the church building. In September, the

brigade welcomed six new girls, bringing the total number to 18. October saw the three older girls at a District film evening. A week later, 12 more girls attended the District Olympic Fun Day in our own church. Devotions were based on the story of Eric Liddell and his refusal to run on a Sunday because of his Christian faith.

Website During early 2025, the church migrated to an upgraded website. This provided ready access to all the information that is needed, as well as presenting a clear and friendly “digital face” to the wider community, and those seeking a church to belong to. As part of this change, the church also moved to a more secure way of managing church email and communications.

Premises Paignton Baptist Church has an impressive suite of premises but this inevitably means that there is always work to be done. Essential repairs and maintenance works were carried out throughout the year, one significant one being the complete replacement of the flat roof on the LiNX Christian Youth Trust building, with no reports of further water ingress. There were many other works and repairs of a more minor nature. All yearly checks were undertaken on the three gas boilers; the lift was serviced, fire alarms were checked, along with fire extinguishers and emergency lighting checks; the intruder alarm was checked and serviced.

BMS World Mission The church has supported BMS World Mission for many years; it supports the work financially and is linked to particular mission workers overseas, receiving regular prayer letters from abroad, and endeavouring to keep in close touch with them. In 2024, our long-standing missionaries, Andy and Jutta Cowie, departed BMS after Jutta sensed a call to regular ministry back in the UK. The church is in the process of building similar connections with its two new partnerships: 1. Ingrid and Roger Hamlet, with their two young sons, set off to Chad in 2024 to work at the Guinebor II Hospital. 2. Ardi Wiriadinata, his wife Lily and two daughters, live in Indonesia.

Future Plans In one sense, the priorities for 2025 remain much as they have been in previous years:

- to be a welcoming church
- a church that wishes to build up its members as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ
- a church that reaches out to the local community.

However, there also some key priorities for the coming year:

1. In the absence of a full-time minister, to maintain continuity by using all the gifts and graces of our worshipping community
2. Assisted by our moderator, Geoff Andrews, to undertake the process of appointing a new minister for the church
3. To carry out an audit of all church policies, updating and amending these as necessary, and producing new policies where gaps in provision are identified
4. To supervise the development of the new life groups Finally, as the church continues to mourn the death of our much-loved Pastor Stephen Coles, it wishes to honour his legacy by:
 - Being considerate to each other as we seek to support everyone in whatever way we can
 - Continuing to be worshippers in spirit and in truth
 - Being those who “hold out the word of life” to all
 - Holding to the authority of scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit
 - Continuing to use the gifts of all church members.

David Borrows

(with thanks to Peter Bottrill who wrote this summary of our work at PBC)