

First Church of Christ, Scientist, Reading

Annual Reports 2019/2020

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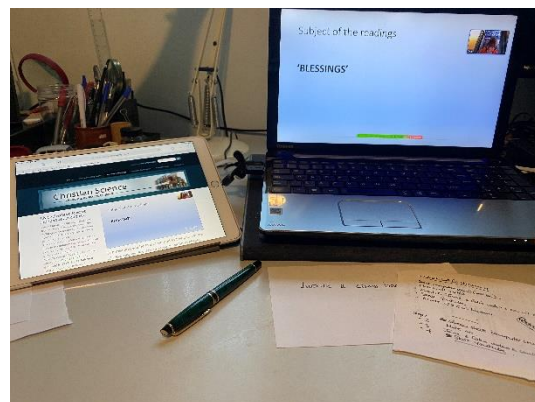
Executive Board (Jan–Dec 2019)

When the board takes office on 1st January each year their first task is to send out invites to all members asking them if they'd serve in a particular capacity. The board were very grateful that the appointments were concluded quite speedily during the first couple of months so that all positions were filled before the church year began on 1st April.

GDPR has been ongoing throughout the year, with particular reference to the Sunday School and the finalised SS Privacy Policy has been posted on our website. We are very grateful to Catherine Wanless for all the hard work she does with regards to GDPR.

Early in the year the board decided not to reappoint a metaphysical committee, however this decision was subsequently reversed later in the year.

At the beginning of the year John Lardge kindly purchased a new desk top computer for the Reading Room. Unfortunately the email and internet still remains a little flakey but this is currently being looked at and rectified. The board and members very much appreciate what John has done for the church regarding our IT requirements. So that John has forward support and assistance, the board asked Catherine Wanless and Peter Aylward to join him in forming an IT committee so thank you Catherine, Peter and John.



At our March members meeting:-

- (1) The members voted to reduce the number of Board members from 5 to 4.
- (2) They also voted to sell the flat in Maidenhead once it became vacant in order to invest the money in our other ethical investments. This will only happen as and when the present tenant has served notice to vacate.
- (3) The members voted for a proposition that increased the church budget for the Reading Room from £22,000 to £26,000 as the budget was near to being exceeded due to it being 12 years since that initial proposition. As the RR managers hadn't had a pay increase for a number of years the Board increased their salaries by 4% from beginning of June.
- (4) We received a legacy from Alan Peterken's estate of £31,000.

Due to our central heating boiler developing problems after 12 years of service it was replaced in the summer time. A fire survey was also carried out on the building and the intruder and fire alarm systems were serviced.

Around Easter time the church sponsored Catherine Wanless so that she could attend Easter Camp.

The lecture committee organized a lecture which was given by Leida Lessa on 18th May in the Reading Room. The title was 'Making the right decisions'.

June members meeting:-

- (1) The members voted to donate £2,400 pa to the UK Joint Reading Room over a three year period.
- (2) The members agreed to continue our practice of holding the first two Testimony Meetings in the month in the Reading Room at 1 pm.

During the summer our church donated £400 to help support Jonty de la Harpe so that he could attend the Boston Summit in October.

In July one of our regular 'listeners-in' said they would make regular donations to our church in gratitude for the broadcasts.

On September 25th members and regular attenders were invited to a BBQ hosted by Anthony and Anne Wilder and members and friends enjoyed a lovely afternoon at their home near Wallingford. Like the previous year, the weather was rather inclement so everyone had to eat indoors. The event was enjoyed by all and our thanks go to Anthony and Anne for their hospitality.



In November we were very pleased to welcome Michael Gabriel into membership. Also in November the Metaphysical committee hosted a Metaphysical meeting held on 5th November which was very inspirational and a followup Metaphysical meeting was held on 14th January. It was agreed that these meetings are very valuable and that they should be held at regular intervals.

Our Christmas Concert was held on 8th December and was enjoyed by all. Our thanks go to Jackie for organising this.

During December the Reading Room was without power for an extended period due to a short circuit in the BT wall socket in the office and the external hanging sign photo cell also tripping out the RR circuit. Both have since been rectified. During

the interim, and to allow the RR to function, John Palmer set up temporary power cables from the entrance lobby.

At the end of last year we were very sad to report the passing of two much-loved members, Sue Lardge in December and Julia Barry in January. Both had contributed a huge amount to our church and will be greatly missed but we know that they are both the beloved daughters of God continuing their spiritual lives in the kingdom of heaven.

The following collections from members' meetings during the year were for The Aid Fund (March), Lauchpad (June), Visiting Nurse Service (November).

John Palmer – *for the Board*

Sunday School

The last year has been a difficult one for the Sunday School. For much of the time we have not had any pupils. This is a sad and serious decline which has been happening over several years.

As a membership we should be so grateful to Anne Cheadle and Carolyn de la Harpe for being willing to teach as and when the need arose. In the same vein, how can we forget the wonderful contribution that Julia made over the years. What teaching happened last year was largely due to Julia conscientiously collecting and bringing Derry and Kyron to Sunday School and being willing to teach one or both of them.

Since Julia's passing we have not been able to collect either of these youngsters. It would be lovely to be able to do so again.

I was not able to make much of a contribution to Sunday School last year as you will all understand.

So, does our Sunday School have a future? How do we carry it forward? What should we do next? These are questions for all of us.

We are not alone in facing the challenge of an empty nest.

We know where the answer lies – in prayer, dedicated, determined, enthusiastic and united prayer.

It occurs to me that this prayer may lead us in new directions.

Perhaps we should start offering classes on Zoom. Perhaps we could include Sunday School material (eg Bible stories) on our web site. Perhaps we could arrange Sunday School at a different time, especially if online?

The world says that young people are not interested in religion. Are we just offering religion? Perhaps they are interested in peace, comfort, joy, freedom, health, well being. If so, where can these be found more completely than in the teaching and

practise of Christian Science.

We may need to see more clearly than ever before that the church is not just at the heart of the community – it embraces the community. Everyone is included in the true expression of church and we can acknowledge that they know it.

The following quote from *Miscellaneous Writings* is directed by Mary Baker Eddy to each of us:

“Never was there a more solemn and imperious call than God makes to us all, right here, for fervent devotion and an absolute consecration to the greatest and holiest of all causes. What will you do about it? Will you be equally in earnest for the truth? Will you doff your lavender-kid zeal, and become real and consecrated warriors? Will you give yourselves wholly and irrevocably to the great work of establishing the truth, the gospel, and the Science which are necessary to the salvation of the world from error, sin, disease, and death? Answer at once and practically, and answer aright!

(*Miscellaneous Writings 1883–1896*, Mary Baker Eddy, p. 177:1–4 (to 1st .), 13)

John Lardge – *Superintendent*

Reading Room

Thank you to Provie and Natalia for continuing to open the Reading Room, and all their hard work in keeping it open most days, even during a rail strike and other problems. They also managed to cope with lack of heating for a few weeks.

The windows always look fresh and interesting, and the managers are always ready to offer print-outs of articles that may help visitors.

We now have a new desk-top computer in the Reading Room, thanks to John Lardge, so the managers should be able to work more efficiently.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Broadband, which continues to be unreliable.

The Reading Room benefits from the prayers circulated by the Prayer Group, who always manage to find something to inspire everyone's prayers.

Thoughts for the Day are still popular, especially now that we have found some new quotes to use - a visitor remarked that he had picked up the same quote three days running!

Thanks to the volunteers who come in to help regularly, Heather, John, Anthony and Shirley. We look forward to re-opening the Reading Room as soon as possible, so we can continue to serve the local community.

Jackie Kennedy – *Librarian*

Music Committee

Thank you to the Music committee for providing a solo each Sunday, and to Sally, Josie, Catherine and Anthony for singing so beautifully. Thanks also to the organists for music on Sunday and Wednesday.

Sadly, we lost Julia, who was a valued member of the committee, this year. Catherine has kindly agreed to join the committee, and is learning how to choose solos.

On 22 December we held a Carol Concert, which was very well received by members and their families.

Since the middle of March this year we have been unable to hold services in the church building, due to the Lockdown, but we hope to re-open as soon as it is allowed, with music at least as good as, if not better than, before!

Jackie Kennedy – *Chairman*

Welcomers' Committee

The Welcomers' Committee have again been very busy, due to the fact that we are still short of helpers.

I have appreciated the positive attitude of the team and their willingness to 'go the extra mile' when necessary, and I thank them all for that. We all know that it is Divine Love that takes care of all our services, and every welcoming duty has been covered adequately. We hope to have two new welcomers in the near future, and we look forward to that.

Shirley Edge – *Chairman*

Lecture Committee

A specific treatment for church and community

On Sunday 8 March 2020 our church hosted a free talk in response to the current, and then-growing, fear of pandemic.

The talk, entitled '*Finding your immunity from disease*', and subtitled: '*Prayer that reduces fear brings out mankind's natural immunity to disease*', was given by Michelle Nanouche CSB in our church auditorium. It began at 12 noon, lasted 12 minutes, and was then followed by a Q&A session. The full session was live-streamed on the Internet, and viewed in real time from 529 devices.

After the event, the video was edited and two versions were released: a 12-minute



version of the talk only, and a fuller 27-minute version including most of the Q&A. These were available to view on our church website, the UK online Christian Science Reading Room and the worldwide Christian Science website until the end of May, in line with TMC policies.

By 16th March, the 12-minute version of the talk had been viewed 8,500 times (this includes Facebook figures, meaning it was not necessarily watched all the way through by every viewer). The full 27-minute version including the Q&A session had a viewer figure of 912.

In total, the talks (both versions) had over 25,000 views, broken down as follows:

- UK Online CSRR YouTube channel – 1,891
- UK Online CSRR Facebook – 9,900
- [ChristianScience.com](https://www.christianscience.com) Facebook channel – 7,065
- Websites (ours, UKORR and others that embedded it) – 135 views (and over 1,000 hits on the lecture page)
- Michelle Nanouche’s media channels – 5,189

The idea was given the full support of the Board of Lectureship, and since the event several other CS churches around the world have hosted their own viewings of the talk.

The fruitage has been wonderful and is ongoing.

The Unfolding

“Right motives give pinions to thought, and strength and freedom to speech and action.” (S&H 454:19)

This year’s lecture has felt like a journey of great discovery, navigating uncharted territory and finding, at every new turn, doors opening to reveal the next seamless steps.

The lecture committee was looking to explore a new way forward in the light of the changing nature of our church community, especially over the past few years. We now have attenders joining our services by phone and online from around the country and even abroad.

Our hope was for a lecture that could be attended by all in real time (in person and by live-streaming), as well as at a later stage, at the viewer’s time of choosing.

It also seemed sensible that, if it was to be available online, it should be short, because a short talk – like the topical, ten-minute (TED) talks that have become so popular – is more likely to be watched by a wider public. They are also more likely



to be watched on phones and tablets as well as computers.

When fears of an epidemic were increasing rapidly, there was a sudden and very clear need – both community- and world-wide – for the healing message of Christian Science. We approached The Mother Church (TMC) as well as the head of the Board of Lectureship with the idea of holding a ten-minute talk (in place of our usual one-hour lecture) addressing these fears – a talk that could be pulled together quickly, and viewed by many, time and time again, and through as many channels as possible.

Within 24 hours, the idea had the blessing of TMC, and a willing lecturer, Michelle Nanouche, had come forward to take up the challenge: to prepare and deliver, ASAP, a ten-minute lecture addressing contagion related to an epidemic.

It was quickly agreed that the lecture, as yet unwritten, was to take place a week later, and the following day the topic was settled: ‘Finding your immunity from disease’.

Initially the talk was to be screened at our church from Michelle’s Paris office, but matters unfolded in such a way that she was able to come out in person to deliver the talk, enabling us to host a live, in-person lecture for our regular attenders, albeit a short one and at very short notice.

At that point John Large kindly joined us on the committee with his much-needed technical skills, and it was agreed that Edwin de Leon would take care of the filming, editing and uploading of the talk.

A lecture preparatory meeting was held online on the Thursday evening before the talk and chaired by John.

On Sunday 8th March at 12 noon, Michelle Nanouche CSB, gave a wonderful, clear, concise, uplifting and healing talk – a talk that is ongoing and the fruitage of which is still coming in.

A great many people came together at the last minute to make this talk possible, and the success it was, and we are grateful to you all. In particular, we would like to thank our wonderful lecturer Michelle Nanouche, her assistant Shirley Larsen,



Tom McElroy of the Board of Lectureship, Edwin de Leon for his fantastic filming and editing, and Amanda Prince for her help with catering and transport.

The Lecture Committee 2019/20

Carolyn de la Harpe, John Lardge, Anne Cheadle and Peter Aylward

Technology Committee

During the last church year most of our technology ticked over reasonably well. There were a few problems, most of which were sorted pretty quickly.

By the end of the year the country had moved into lockdown and the need was to carry forward our regular services entirely on-line. Fortunately, the experience of the last few years with streaming and dial-in provided a sound base on which to build.

Because of care commitments I did not have the opportunity to involve other members who have expressed an interest in supporting our technology as we go forward.

The main areas of technology that I have been involved with are:

- Computers and internet access for the Reading Room and streaming
- Streaming and dial-in for church services including ad hoc arrangements for Wednesday meetings held in the Reading Room
- Web site and other services

During the year I was able to negotiate a substantial increase in bandwidth available for the above activities with EE. Because conventional internet is restricted in our area we have been using the 4G mobile network. As a result of the agreement with EE the 4G data cap was raised from just over 20GB per month to 100GB per month for the same price.

On the whole the internet has proved reliable.

We have a continuing problem with church emails which we are endeavouring to solve.

Unfortunately, David Dewey who has been a great help over the years is pulling back from small projects like ours to concentrate on more profitable work. This has made it difficult to get him to focus on our email problem.

He has made some suggestions and hopefully we can resolve the issues soon.

I had asked him on several occasions to start thinking about an upgrade of our website. We have now agreed that this will be taken on elsewhere, probably by the Joint CS Reading Room.

Streaming and dial-in continued working and I did try to make a number of improvements.

Prior to the lockdown we only used Zoom for the dial-in. Now we are using it as the main vehicle for services online. The services are also streamed to YouTube and our web page from Zoom, as well as Facebook.

I think we can safely say that the use of Zoom has been a great success. Despite an explosion in the usage of the service at this time, it has held up pretty well.

The challenge now is to decide how best to operate streaming when we return to the building.

While no-one would have chosen the problems society is facing currently, it is interesting that they have produced some blessings. Most of our members and friends can now access our services and recent attendances have been higher than they have been for many years.

We all know that technology is a means not an end but it does offer some really exciting possibilities to our church and our movement which will be interesting to explore in the months ahead.

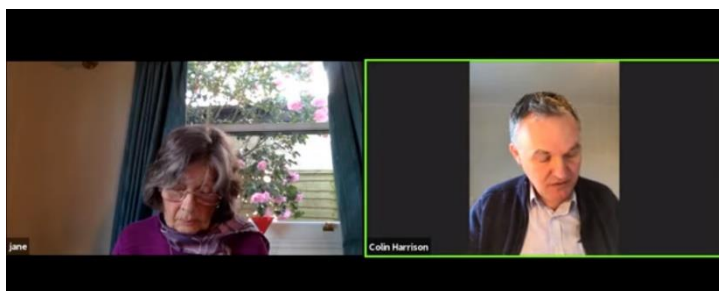
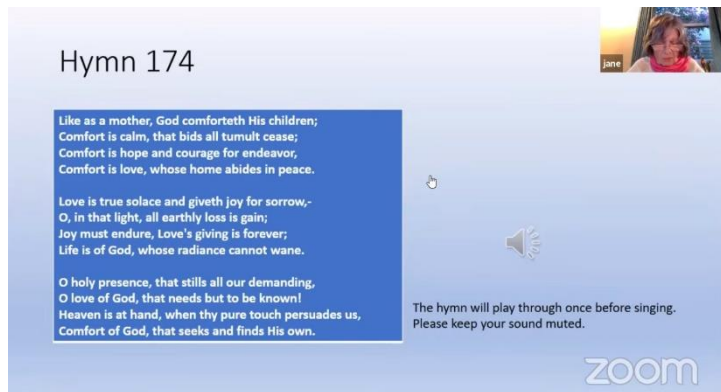
John Lardge – *Chairman*

ACOM

‘Trials are proofs of God’s care’ Mrs Eddy tells us on page 66 line 6 of Science and Health and this certainly sums up the ACOM work this year which has turned out to be by far the busiest I can remember! She goes on to comfort us with the thought that ‘Love propagates anew the higher joys of Spirit which have no taint of earth’, so we have been able to meet all these challenges head on.

Questions of confidentiality mean that it would not be right for me go into detail about some of the things which have come our way but I will try to put on record the broad picture in relation to three of them.

- It is a matter of experience for us that prayer in Christian Science is an effective remedy for, and response to, disease even though we have a lot to learn before we can demonstrate it as consistently as Christ Jesus did. However the world and specifically the law, does not always share this view and it is important that nothing is done that would inadvertently bring Christian Science into disrepute. A



serious challenge arose along these lines but with deep prayer by a number of members and goodwill on the part of all parties the situation was resolved.

- Another responsibility of the ACOM work is to be alert to anything placed in the public domain that would misrepresent Christian Science to the public. A book came to our attention which was a very thoughtful personal account of a spiritual journey and we were grateful that the many references to Christian Science and Mary Baker Eddy turned out to be extremely positive.
- Where people have been facing severe challenges, family members who are not Christian Scientists have been supportive in circumstances where they might not have been, and I am particularly grateful for the deep prayer which I know will have contributed to this. As the Queen said in a recent broadcast, we will ‘meet again’.

Interfaith activities have for some time been an important part of ACOM work in Reading. I attended a very successful event on the theme of ‘Overcoming Hate with Love’ which was hosted by the Pakistan Community Centre on Wednesday 19th June 2019. I had been invited to make a four minute contribution on this theme along with speakers from the Islamic, and Jewish communities and Christians from the Anglican and Methodist traditions. Our Wednesday Testimony Meeting that night was focused on the same theme, at the same time and this solidarity was particularly appreciated by those present. I gave a fuller report to members and to Jenny Pearson at the time.

On 8th March 2020 Jenny Pearson and Heather attended another interfaith event organised by the Reading Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association. The theme of this event, which was for ladies only, was ‘The Impact of Women in Religion’. This proved to be a very harmonious occasion and there was plenty of opportunity for one-to-one conversation and the sharing of ideas. As at similar previous events the Christian Science viewpoint was welcomed.

In March 2020 an account of the alleged serious decline of Christian Science surfaced in a blog discussion between two academics who completely misunderstood what Christian Science is about. Much prayer went into supporting the London Office as they wrote corrective pieces and engaged with the people concerned.

All this activity meant that we were well prepared prayerfully when the Corona Virus came along. We were able to ‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ - to obey the law while not forgetting to ‘render unto God the things that are God’s’ We have done our best to make sure that the needs of members and friends are met. All our services and other activities have moved online where they have proved to be hugely successful, showing that we can’t suffer for doing ‘the right thing’.

All of the paragraph from Science and Health which I quoted at the beginning of this report is very relevant and it ends 'Each successive stage of experience unfolds new views of divine goodness and love' This has certainly proved true for us here in Reading, and I'm sure we will be able to build on this in the year to come.

Anthony Wilder – *ACOM*

