

ST MARY'S NORTHCHURCH

REGISTERED CHARITY 1130418



TRUSTEE REPORT 2024/2025

**THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PARISH
OF ST MARY'S NORTHCHURCH**

Registered Charity Number 1130418

**ANNUAL TRUSTEE REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR
THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024**

Incumbent: Reverend Canon Jonathan Gordon

Curate: Reverend Michael Eggleton

Churchwardens: Evelyn Hodgson
Brian Baldwin

Hon Treasurer: Emma McCann

Office Address: Parish Office
Rectory Lane
Northchurch
Berkhamsted
Hertfordshire
HP4 3QN

Independent Examiner Andrew Daffern FCCA
12 Oakwood
Berkhamsted
HP4 3NQ

Bankers: NatWest Bank
9 Bank Court
Hemel Hempstead
HP1 1BS

TRUSTEES

The Trustees who have served during the period from 21st April 2024 until the date of this Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) on 27th April 2025

Incumbent: Reverend Canon Jonathan Gordon

Churchwardens: Evelyn Hodgson
Brian Baldwin

Other PCC Members: Neil Adcock
Heidi Baker
Karen Baldwin
Giles Batchelor
Margit Dobbie
Brian Hodgson
Melissa Kershaw (PCC Secretary)
Doreen Knapp (ex officio)
Emma McCann (Hon Treasurer)
Rosemary North (Parish Secretary)
Clare Sayers
David Sayers
Peggy Sear (ex officio)
Emma Upstone
David White (ex officio)

Deanery Synod: Karen Baldwin
Rosemary North
Emma Upstone

REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES

Introduction

It is a great privilege to be Rector of St Mary's Northchurch and St Bartholomew's Wigginton. At St Mary's we seek to be a church that is welcoming and nurturing, where together we can grow in faith and discipleship. The following reports give an insight into the life and mission of the church. Inevitably each year brings its own challenges and a tree collapsing on the side of the church just before Christmas provided an additional hurdle to overcome at a busy time. In all that we face I am very grateful to the churchwardens and supporting team who help us find a way through whatever we have to face. At a national level the Church of England has had to absorb and respond to critical investigations of safeguarding issues. We strive to prayerfully build a church community in which everyone can feel valued and supported. I hope you enjoy reading the reports and please always contact me to share your thoughts and perspectives on how we move forward.

Reverend Canon Jonathan Gordon

Governance

The Trustees constitute the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and is a body corporate governed by the PCC Powers Measure 1956 and Church Representation Rules 2022 and is registered as UK charity number 1130418.

The PCC is a Public Benefit Entity within the meaning of Financial Reporting Standard 102, and it has regard for the Charity for the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit, and in particular the specific guidance on the advancement of religion.

Members of the PCC for the year ending 31st December 2024 are listed above together with specific roles and responsibilities where applicable. Elected members are appointed by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) for three years. The PCC has no corporate trustees, and no trustees hold title to any PCC properties.

The PCC seeks to implement recognised and appropriate best practice to comply with relevant legislation, regulation, and standards.

The principle aims of the PCC are to serve the local community by:

- Providing a full programme of public Christian worship
- Teaching the Christian faith
- Encouraging and enabling the local community to worship at the church and become members of the church community.
- Providing appropriate pastoral care within the local community.

- Promoting whole pastoral, evangelistic, ecumenical and social missions of the Church of England.

The PCC is also responsible for the maintenance of the church, the parish rooms and 98 High Street and met four times in the past twelve months.

Safeguarding

The PCC attaches a high priority to Safeguarding matters and has made good progress this year in creating an action plan to deal with the expanding requirements in this area

The PCC has adopted and promoted safeguarding policies in line with Church of England requirements and regularly reviews these at PCC meetings and ensures those working with vulnerable children or adults are fully aware of them.

Clergy and Trustees of The PCC attend relevant safeguarding courses run by the Diocese of St Albans appropriate to their roles.

David Sayers has been appointed as Safeguarding Officer with Jonathan Gordon as Deputy.

Contact details for the PSO and Diocesan Safeguarding officer are clearly displayed in the Church and Parish room as well as on the Parish Website.

During the year there were 5 baptisms, 4 people confirmed, 1 wedding, 5 funerals, 10 burials of ashes and 5 memorial services.

A new Electoral Roll came into force on 31st March 2025 and contains 106 names.

Churchwardens report on behalf of the Trustees

St Mary's Northchurch is one of the oldest churches in Hertfordshire and is situated on the A4251. The church has the use of the adjacent playground of St Mary's Northchurch Primary School for car parking, access to which is off New Road. There are excellent links with the school through assemblies, both in the school and in the church, led by the Rector. It is an all-inclusive church welcoming everyone to join services weekly on Sundays at 08:00 most weeks, 10:00 weekly and on the first Sunday of the month at 18:00 for a quieter evening service. A Christingle service replaced the usual nativity play this year as part of the Christmas worship. St Mary's is linked with St Bartholomew's Church in Wigginton to form a United Benefice.

Review of the year

The following activities took place – more detailed reports from the church groups are included separately.

Social Events

The weekly puzzlers' social afternoon continues every Wednesday afternoon in the parish room.

April saw the usual Easter egg hunt in the rectory garden and a few members of the congregation made the pilgrimage to St Albans on Easter Monday. During May a very successful soup lunch was held in aid of Christian Aid. Also in May there was also a very moving adult baptism held in the chalk stream river in the school grounds which was attended by most of the Sunday 10 am congregation.

A meeting was held with St Mary's Primary School head teacher to discuss how the school could use the school grounds and church as a teaching resource. Aspects of local history as well as environmental studies were just a couple of the suggestions discussed.

The church fete in July was a huge success, despite the pouring rain all morning and the flooded school playground.

There were also music concerts in July 2024 and February 2025 in aid of Ukrainian charities.

The *Bike and Hike* fundraiser for the Beds and Herts Historic churches Trust once again raised over £2,000 to be divided between the Church and the Trust.

In October we held a quiz and fish and chip supper to support the Bishop's Harvest Appeal and our missionary Claire Hodgson visited the church to update us on her work in the Dominican Republic.

During November a lunch and sale of Christmas goods was held in aid of *Crisis at Christmas* which raised over £900, enabling approximately 30 homeless people to be cared for over the holiday period.

Gift vouchers were supplied to various needy local individuals and families in time for Christmas.

Maintenance

In September the churchwardens undertook a review of the inventory of the silver plate and made some interesting discoveries, some of which will require some further investigation.

Various grounds tidying work has been undertaken throughout the year whilst always trying to preserve the wildflowers as much as possible to encourage biodiversity.

The stained-glass window at the west end of the church, which had been vandalised in December, was removed in May to be repaired and was returned in August, having undergone a complete restoration. It had been reported to the police as a heritage crime because so many people had been distressed by it, but they were unable to prosecute the perpetrator.

During June the scouts volunteered to do some of their gardening badges in the church grounds, enabling them to earn two badges.

In July the broken flagpole was replaced. This was made possible by the generosity of a donor who met all of the costs. Another very generous anonymous donor made it possible to have the church clock repaired in September.

Just before Christmas a large cypress tree crashed down onto the vestry roof during a storm, causing damage to some of the vestry roof tiles and stone coping.

Looking forward, Rectory Drive is in need of repair at the top as well as outside the Parish Rooms doorway. There will also need to be some fundraising events to raise the money to repair the church footpaths this year as the total needed will be in the region of £18,000.

The churchwardens and PCC would like to thank the clergy team for their hard work. We greatly appreciate their input to village, church, and community life. We would also like to thank the AV team who continue to provide streamed services every week and for occasional extra services and the many other volunteers who give up their time and effort to maintain the spiritual life and fabric of the church.

Working towards a sustainable heating system and potential reordering of the interior of the church

The Church of England has declared the aim of all of its churches and buildings achieving fully sustainable, net zero carbon operations by 2030 ("Net Zero 2030"). This is a big ask for most churches as many were established in the medieval period and are Listed Buildings, which imposes restrictions on what changes can be made. St Mary's is heated by a gas boiler and piped radiator system which is coming to the end of its life in the next few years and so it is an opportune time for us to look at how the church and Parish Room should be heated in the future. The type of heating specified will partly depend on the future use of the church and thinking about this has raised the question of how the interior of the church could be reordered to make it more welcoming, comfortable and "user friendly" in the future. This is a long- term project which will take a number of years and will require the input of many skills, talents and professional services (and money!).

A small group has been researching possible reordering alternatives and heating systems, in the church and a number of possibilities are under consideration. There will be future meetings of the group and views on the future reordering are invited from all church users.

Evelyn Hodgson and Brian Baldwin, Churchwardens

Commentary on 2024 accounts:

Income:

The accounts show that the total income figure was up slightly on the 2023 total, although if we discount the insurance claim monies there would be a significant fall. This is due, in the main, to St. Mary's having seen a reduction in the income received from services held. For example, I note that in 2023 there was revenue from seven weddings but, in 2024 just two were held.

Planned income has increased as parishioners continue to review and often increase their standing order donations, for which we are grateful. Weekly collections have taken a downturn but, as a society we tend to carry less cash so this is not overly surprising. Please note that the cash collections figure does include card payments taken at services.

Overall income was also bolstered by donations for the works undertaken on the flagpole and the clock. Amongst these there were two, very significant sums given and whilst the donors wish to remain anonymous, I am sure we are all incredibly grateful for their generosity. The summer fete was once again a success and, considering the inclement weather the overall sum raised was incredibly healthy. Let us hope that 12th July this year is a much brighter day. Parish room bookings and social activities also, brought in more revenue than the previous year.

The church finances have continued to benefit from higher interest rates, although these are now going down. Our investment funds have also performed well with investment income up almost £8k on the previous year.

Expenditure:

Our overall expenditure for the year was down by £5600 on 2023 although there were projects undertaken resulting in some £16k being spent on building maintenance. The most significant spends were on the repairs to the stained-glass window, the clock and the flagpole. These projects were fully funded through insurance and donations.

As in previous years our major expenditure in 2024 was the Parish share at £56994. This was, once again, paid in full and on time. We continued to make charitable donations to both UK and overseas charities, the most significant of these being:

- ☐ Wiggington PCC - £8400
- ☐ Go Mad - £1143
- ☐ Crisis - £774
- ☐ Saltmine Trust - £500

It is pleasing to see a reduction in church running costs of over £8k, this is due to reduced energy bills. Whilst they remain our biggest expense after the parish share this fall is encouraging and as fixed rate tariffs have once again become available, we have been able to take advantage of these and fix our rates until 2027. We also now have smart meters in both the church and the parish rooms which allow for greater monitoring of our usage.

Summary:

Whilst the accounts show a deficit of £16393 for the year, we have still to complete the gift aid claim for 2024 and, also for part of 2023. This will significantly boost the 2025 income figure and, as we are not expecting any significant necessary spending in 2025, we can anticipate a surplus for the coming year.

**Independent examiner's report to the Parochial Church Council of the St Mary's Church,
Northchurch**

I report on the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2024 which are set out on the following pages.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the '2011 Act') and that an independent examination is required.

It is my responsibility:

To examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act;

To follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145 (5(b)) of the 2011 Act; and

To state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from the Trustees concerning such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no audit opinion is given and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- 1) Which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

To keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act; and
To prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act

Have not been met; or

- 2) To which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Except that, the accounts are not exactly in the prescribed format as per the guidance produced by the Business Committee of the General Synod – PCC Accountability 5th Edition and attention to the Statement of Assets and Liabilities (Balance Sheet) split between Unrestricted, Restricted and the Endowment Funds and accompanying notes needs to be considered for future accounts.

Andrew Daffern, BSc (Econ), FCCA
12 Oakwood
Berkhamsted
HP4 3NQ

Northchurch Parochial Church Council
Year ended 31st December 2024

	2024			2023	Variance
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total		
Receipts	£	£	£	£	£
Voluntary Income:					
Planned Income	52,001	-	52,001	49,400	2,601
Cash Collections	3,043	-	3,043	4,173	- 1,130
Income Tax Recovered	-	-	-	2,761	- 2,761
	<u>55,044</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>55,044</u>	<u>56,334</u>	<u>- 3,290</u>
Other Voluntary Income:					
Donations/Legacies (inc HRH Duke of Cornwall)	5,231	5,387	10,618	5,806	4,812
Special Collections/ Donations	-	417	417	716	- 299
Rector's fees	3,346	-	3,346	5,033	- 1,687
PCC fees	4,528	-	4,528	7,207	- 2,679
Organist's fees	507	-	507	1,048	- 541
Beltingers' fees	360	-	360	970	- 610
Verger's fees	205	-	205	435	- 230
	<u>14,177</u>	<u>5,804</u>	<u>19,981</u>	<u>21,216</u>	<u>- 1,235</u>
Events and Activities					
Summer Fete	-	4,876	4,876	5,394	- 518
Parish Room Hire	2,728	-	2,728	2,299	429
Church Lunches	-	-	-	156	- 156
Historic Churches Cycle Ride	-	993	993	857	136
Social Activities	681	548	1,229	830	399
	<u>3,409</u>	<u>6,416</u>	<u>9,825</u>	<u>9,536</u>	<u>289</u>
Other Income					
Bank Interest	574	-	574	640	- 66
Dividends	333	-	333	329	5
C.B.F Interest	1,114	-	1,114	681	433
Donald Lockhart Memorial Fund	6,256	-	6,256	6,160	96
Northchurch Development Fund	1,089	-	1,089	637	452
Miscellaneous Income	-	-	-	-	-
Rent for 98 High Street	14,618	-	14,618	15,479	- 861
Insurance Claim	4,148	-	4,148	-	4,148
Building Fund Income	-	-	-	880	- 880
Choir / Music	-	10	10	55	- 45
	<u>28,132</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>28,142</u>	<u>24,861</u>	<u>3,281</u>
Total Receipts	<u>188,762</u>	<u>12,238</u>	<u>112,993</u>	<u>111,947</u>	<u>1,045</u>

Northchurch Parochial Church Council
Year ended 31st December 2024

	2024		2023	Variance
	£		£	£
Payments				
Grants				
Overseas Missions and Relief Agencies	2,890		1,952	938
UK Missions and Relief Agencies	10,661		11,547	- 886
	<u>13,551</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>13,499</u>	<u>52</u>
Relating to the Work of the Church				
Diocesan Quota	56,994		57,340	- 346
Rector's fees paid to Diocese	3,346		5,033	- 1,687
Church Running Expenses	20,892		29,386	- 8,494
Clergy Expenses	3,276		3,248	28
Service & License Costs	1,727		2,825	- 1,097
Honoraria	1,380		1,635	- 255
Organist	-		-	-
Churchyard	587		807	- 220
Printing	168		186	- 18
Organ Maintenance	168		306	- 138
Verger Fees	2,360		2,724	- 364
Beltingers' Fees	360		900	- 540
Other Expenditure	805		192	613
Fundraising Costs (incl Fete & Social Activities)	1,445		2,189	- 744
Youth Work Expenses	256		101	155
C.B.F Interest Reinvested	2,203		1,318	885
Book-Keeping Costs	80		14	66
	<u>96,047</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>108,203</u>	<u>- 12,157</u>
Maintenance Costs				
Major Capital Expenditure	-		6,820	- 6,820
98 High Street	1,110		1,084	27
Buildings Maintenance	16,270		5,097	11,174
Parish Room	2,407		288	2,123
	<u>19,788</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>13,289</u>	<u>6,504</u>
Total Payments	<u>129,386</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>134,986</u>	<u>- 5,600</u>
Deficit for Year	<u>-16,393</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-23,039</u>	<u>27,065</u>

Charity/Fund Title	Account No.	No. Shares	Value per Share	Dividend/ Interest	Value of Fund at 31/12/24
<u>National Westminster Bank</u>					£36,610.02
<u>With St Albans Diocesan Board of Finance</u>					
Northchurch Development Fund	CB3014629			£1,089.23 reinvested	£21,610.51
Donald Lockhart Memorial Fund	CB3014668			£6,255.72	£230,516.67
<u>With Central Board of Finance of the Church of England</u>					
Fixed Interest Securities Fund	CB3033151			£127.69 reinvested	£5,171.96
Deposit Fund	CB3033150			£986.36 reinvested	£19,569.53
<u>COIF Charity Funds</u>					
Bailey Charity	CO3056456	18	£20.29	£9.94	£365.28
Ridley for Church Fabric Fund	CO3056457	56	£20.29	£30.94	£1,136.42
Ridley for Churchyard Fund	CO3056459	56	£20.29	£30.94	£1,136.42
Michael Memorial fabric Fund	CO3056458	58	£20.29	£32.03	£1,177.01
Gwynedd Charity	CO3056460	89	£20.29	£49.16	£1,806.10
Thetwall Trust for Churchyard Upkeep	CO3056461	89	£20.29	£49.16	£1,806.10
A Ashley	CO3056462	32	£20.29	£17.67	£649.39
C B Kings Children for Churchyard	CO3056463	15	£20.29	£8.29	£304.40
Randall Memorial Foreign Mission	CO3056144	62	£20.29	£34.24	£1,258.18
Browne Charity	CO3057541	128	£20.29	£70.69	£2,597.54
					£12,236.86
					<u>£325,715.55</u>

PCC of St Mary's Church Northchurch

As at 31 December 2024

Balance Sheet (Statement of Assets and Liabilities)

	2024	2023
	£	£
Cash at bank	36,610	54,250
Investments	289,106	281,325
	<u>325,716</u>	<u>335,575</u>
Accruals	- 3,978	- 5,225
	<u>321,737</u>	<u>330,350</u>
Represented by:		
Funds brought forward	330,350	331,427
Deficit/Surplus of income over expenditure	- 16,394	- 23,039
Gain/Loss on investments	7,781	21,962
	<u>321,737</u>	<u>330,350</u>

Signed as accepted on behalf of St. Mary's Northchurch PCC by Reverend Jonathan Gordon

Signature: Jonathan Gordon Date: 13-4-25

Choir and Organ

The choir has continued to meet on Fridays 6pm-7pm to prepare the hymns and any other special choir items for the Sunday 10am service. Also, of course, we prepare for the special services of Good Friday, Easter, Harvest, All Souls evening memorial service, Remembrance, Advent Carol Service and the Christmas Carol Service. Our numbers are quite low now, so we would particularly welcome new members, even if only for short periods.

This past year alongside many classic anthems such as S.S. Wesley's *Lead me Lord* and Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*, we have also sung some recently composed work - a new version of *The First Nowell* by Bob Chilcott, and Joanna Forbes L'Estrange's 2023 version of *Drop, drop, slow tears*, in addition to compositions by our resident composer, Gareth Pritchard. Since stepping down from directing the choir himself, Gareth continues to support it both as a singer and occasional organist, giving us the opportunity to appreciate his delightful improvisations.

Clare Wille

St Mary's Church Music Group

Our church music group plays for our monthly all age services which are usually on the second Sunday of the month. The group is open to anyone who plays a musical instrument and is not a big time commitment. Music is distributed a week or so before the service and then we rehearse for 40 minutes before the service, starting at 9.15am. We have acquired a very good electric piano this year and a set of smart solid black music stands, have been donated to us. We were sorry to say goodbye to Isabelle Osmond and David Berry who went to university in the autumn. We are always grateful when young people can spare the time to play in the group and special thanks are also due to James and Sarah Foskett for their time, talent and commitment to the group. New members are always welcome.

Rachel Gordon

Sunday Clubs

We are really fortunate to have at St Mary's a team of volunteers who, in term time, provide activities and Bible insights to the children. Becky, Helen, Susan, Coral, Kirsty, Chamila, Rachel, Penny and Peach all provide fun activities that allow the children to share in the themes of the Sunday readings in the lectionary. It has also provided a link to the monthly All Age Services that in the last year have included Harvest and the Christingle. We have also started a film and pizza evening for the young people that will hopefully continue to meet once a month on a Sunday evening. The mission to children and young people in the church is of vital importance. The involvement of the young people provides encouragement and joy to everyone in the church. We have also had a number of younger children who have been able to enjoy the children's area at the back of church.

Jonathan Gordon

Night Prayer

A little group of us end the day by following Night Prayer from St Mary's on Facebook. It is easy listening, with subtitles for the hard of hearing. Some familiar words, a psalm, a verse from the Bible, and prayers, written by members of the group, about anything that matters to us. Night Prayer has come up on the St Mary's Facebook page at 22.00 every night for the last 5 years; it stays there until the next day, so you can listen when it suits. Lasting less than

ten minutes, there is something special about rounding off the day, knowing that other friends from St Mary's are praying too.

David White

Quiet Mornings in Advent and Lent

When you enter the church for one of these mornings, you will find many different spaces with prayer activities, in no particular order, for you to go at your own pace and to think, be quiet and reflect on moments for which we give thanks for or for which we have concerns. A quiet morning in Advent gives us a focus of preparation for the coming event of Jesus' birth. In Lent we focus on the Stations of the Cross and the Easter story. Both give time for just you and God.

Peggy Sear

House Groups

Monday morning group

A second breakfast, friendship, reading and lively discussion: that is what keeps us going on Monday mornings. As well as familiar books of the Bible, we have read most of the Apocrypha, some surprising extra-biblical writings that give us familiar Christmas traditions, poems, essays and interesting snippets. The purpose? To dig deeper into our faith and to enjoy being together. The biggest challenge is to stop in time for lunch. To join us contact Peggy Sear or David White.

David White

The Monday Evening House Group

A group of us ranging in age from 25-65 meet at the Rectory is held at 8pm. We started reading through Mark and have now moved on to John. We usually read a few chapters, discuss the philosophical and historical context and symbolism. Our discussions include learning what the literal meaning of the words may mean in the time it was written, and also the metaphorical aspects which really open up room for in-depth discussion.

Gemma Gordon

Online House Group

Following Covid four or five of us decided to continue to meet weekly on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday evening at 8 pm via Teams, which allows us to alter the day according to work or meeting commitments. We use a study guide to help our discussions on a book or a theme from the Bible. We would be pleased to welcome new participants.

Rosemary North

Northchurch Bell Ringers

The bell ringers of Northchurch continue to ring for the Sunday 10 o'clock service each week, but sometimes numbers are low and we can only ring 4 of our 8 bells. The ringers also ring for weddings and special occasions like the passing of the Queen, the Coronation of the King and for events like "Ring Out for Peace" on the 80th Anniversary of D-Day last year. Our Monday practice night is generally well attended with a regular group of 9 ringers, which can increase up to 12 ringers in the ringing chamber on the odd occasion, all of varying experience. The number of regular bell ringers has unfortunately declined over recent years, which is also the case for several other towers. There is good support between the ringers of Northchurch and the ringers of Aldbury, helping each other out at their practice nights and for special occasions when there are insufficient ringers available locally.

Once a year the local district ringing society holds a striking competition and last year a Northchurch band entered and came second in the 'call change' category. If anyone would like to learn to ring, or may be a lapsed ringer returning to ringing, then please do get in touch as we are always looking for new recruits.

Michael Robinson, Tower Captain

Deanery Synod

Father Stuart Owen of St Peter's Church Berkhamsted took over the post of Rural Dean from Rev Jonathan Gordon last year. The Lay Leader of the Synod is Emma Upstone, who along with Karen Baldwin and me are the representatives for St Mary's Church. Rev Stuart held the first meeting in June 2024, which was an opportunity for him to meet the synod members in the Berkhamsted Deanery. In February this year we met at Sunnyside Church and learned about proposals to renew the church hall there, which would include improving the thermal efficiency of the hall. A company of local services consultants had been employed to produce a feasibility study. A representative from Little Gaddesden talked about the need for getting outline designs to improve the thermal efficiency of the St Peter and Paul Church. He also reported on their efforts to cultivate a more biodiverse churchyard. A teacher from Bishop Wood School in Tring reported on their achievement of becoming an ecoschool, which involved reporting on progress each year.

Rosemary North

Bike and Hike

Saturday 14th September 2024 was Brian's and my twentieth ride out for the Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust, for me both as church organiser and as participant. St Mary's congregation and friends contributed to raise a truly wonderful £2,367.50 half of which, less any gift aid, will come to St Mary's and the remainder went to the Trust, which raised a total of just over £100,000 and which will go towards grants for churches and chapels which need remedial work. Our thanks go to the many people who sponsor the riders and who man our church to provide such a warm welcome to the people who visit from other churches. Look out for the award ceremony this year when we launch the 2025 Bike and Hike campaign and join us on Saturday September 13th for a really good day out meeting new people and seeing the insides of churches that you have only walked or driven past.

Evelyn Hodgson

Wednesday puzzlers

Wednesday puzzlers meet every Wednesday afternoon in the Parish Rooms. We tend to put the world to rights over tea and cake whilst playing games such as dominoes, scrabble or doing knitting or handicraft. We are pleased to welcome a couple of our Northchurch neighbours and usually total about a dozen of us. A couple of children join in the fun after school. If you would like to join us at about 14:00 we would be pleased to welcome you.

Evelyn Hodgson

St Mary's Church Summer Fete

Our annual church fete is held in early July every year and raises money for two charities (one local and one international) and our own church funds. It takes a lot of organizing and we are very grateful to Margit Dobbie for heading this up. Many people give willingly of their time and effort and despite unkind weather in the past couple of years, we have raised a good

amount of money and had a good day. Plans are already afoot for 12th July this year. We have the usual attractions such as the Hemel Hempstead Brass Band; refreshments in the rectory garden and Parish Room; entertainment in the church; visits to the bell tower; activities for children in the rectory garden and on the school field and all the usual stalls in the playground. The afternoon will culminate in the annual Duck Race in the river.

We are very grateful to Woods Garden Centre for their scheme whereby every £100 of receipts are turned into a £25 voucher to spend there, so please continue to put your receipts in the box at the back of the church. Regardless of the weather, it is an excellent way to reach out to the local community.

Rachel Gordon

Christian Aid

Since the pandemic our Christian Aid Week has been a different process for our volunteers in one major way. We no longer have to collect the envelopes we dutifully put through every door on designated roads. We can ask for the envelopes to be delivered back to our door which makes the difficult onus of repeatedly knocking on doors without annoying our neighbours now unnecessary.

For this reason I ask that as many people possible step forward to join in as there are always more roads we could deliver to. Our donations received for 2024 were £1,025 which is tremendous, but half what we used to gather pre-2020. Any ideas you have to support Christian Aid will be very welcome.

Nick Laing

Flower Guild

The Flower Guild has organised floral and candle arrangements in church throughout the year and for the major festivals – Easter, Harvest and Christmas. Arrangements for weddings and funerals have also been provided when requested, and also posies for Mothering Sunday. “Flower mugs” were made and sold on our stall at the Summer Fête which proved popular once again.

Donations from parishioners and the PCC are much appreciated as are contributions of greenery for our decorations for the major festivals. Whilst the Flower Guild has a rota to organise flowers throughout the year, there are others who help with the major festivals to ensure the church looks beautiful and this is much appreciated. We are considering reducing our use of “Oasis” floral base and look to provide arrangements in water through the year with more formal arrangements just at the major festivals. This should bring both financial and environmental benefits.

Denise Rouse

St Mary's Playgroup

The Playgroup meets on a Tuesday morning 09.30 – 11.30 term time in the Parish Rooms and it is open to all. We offer tea, coffee & biscuits for a small fee per family, along with a craft each week and toys aplenty! We often use the school holidays to meet and clean our resources, recycling where we can and ensuring all are safe. The Playgroup is run as a non-profit making group, where we invest the monies taken back into the weekly craft and

refreshments for those attending. Any surplus money has been donated annually towards Church needs.

We like to mark the end of each school term with a very special mini church service that Jonathan leads, and we always have a couple of hymns in the church. The group is well attended and we have lots of regular visitors and some that come occasionally. It is an inclusive group, so do mention it to anybody you think may wish to come along.

Heidi Baker

Time Out

A group of c. 10 -12 church ladies have met monthly, usually on the second Tuesday at 2 p.m., for friendship and companionship. If the weather is poor, then we meet in one of our houses for tea and cake, but in the good weather we have enjoyed walks around Ashridge Park and Gardens, College Lake and Ascott House. Over the last year we have also visited local churches at Aston Clinton and Great Gaddesden where we were warmly welcomed by members of the local congregation. In December we had our Christmas Lunch at Tring Garden Centre, and then more recently in February we went for a splendid lunch at the Greyhound in Wigginton. On the occasions when food is involved, our numbers are usually swollen by the attendance of partners. In November we helped to host a soup lunch in aid of *Crisis for Christmas*, which raised over £900. This sum would have enabled c. 30 homeless people to be cared for during the holiday period. We and welcome other ladies (and partners) to join us.

Karen Baldwin

Prayer Breakfasts

These meetings of breakfast and prayer take place from 8 – 9 am every third Saturday in the month throughout the year and are hosted in rotation by every church in town. They are times of sharing with fellow Christians in the town and are open to everyone.

Peggy Sear

World Day of Prayer

This year's World Day of Prayer was held on March 7th and was compiled by the Christian women of the Cook Islands on the theme 'I Made You Wonderful'. Our local service was hosted by Berkhamsted Baptist Church, and about 40 people attended. We enjoyed a colourful, joyous service based on Psalm 139 and listened to stories from 3 Cook Island ladies. We sang hymns, both familiar and new, and after the service enjoyed tea and cake provided by the Baptist Church.

Collections taken from the services go towards grants for Christian charities in the UK and worldwide. Eg Grants in 2023 included charities for orphanages, schools and bereavement projects in Uganda, Marylebone, Kenya and Bethlehem to name but a few. The services are put together about 5 years in advance, so we know that the 2026 service will be compiled by the women of Nigeria on the theme 'I Will Give You Rest, Come'. Preparation for that service will begin in Berkhamsted in January 2026. If you would like to be involved in the preparation then please contact Peggy Sear, our local organiser.

Karen Baldwin

1st Northchurch Rainbows

Rainbows use the parish rooms as our regular meeting place for a number of different activities, including craft, various games and understanding the world around us. We currently have a full group with a waiting list.

Julie Joseph

5th Berkhamsted Brownies

We meet in the parish rooms on a Wednesday evening. The Brownies take part in a variety of activities including arts and crafts, care for the environment, cooking and badge work. We also take the Brownies out and about enjoying our local environment. Every term we try to have some meetings away from the hall, visiting a variety of venues, giving the Brownies a wide range of experiences. We follow the Girlguiding Brownie programme. By being a Brownie, the girls will make new friends and learn new skills. We also take part in events arranged by Girlguiding Berkhamsted District, such as our annual Guide Christmas Market, Thinking Day events and we help at the church summer fete. We thank the church for allowing us to meet in the parish rooms.

Brown Owl and Snowy Owl.

2nd Northchurch Brownies

2nd Northchurch Brownies will celebrate their 60th Birthday in the summer. When we returned to normal meetings after having a period of time meeting outside during Covid, we updated our six names. The girls had a choice of which names they would like to be. So instead of Imps, Pixes, Gnomes and Elves, we have Rabbits, Foxes, Squirrels and Hedgehogs. Later this year Girlguiding will be introducing 72 new interest badges. We have been busy having lots of fun.

In December a few of us went to Aylesbury Theatre to see the Christmas Pantomime. It was a great evening even though we did get wet. Brown Owl has booked us in for this year already! This term we are doing lots of activities around the theme Be Well and St Johns Ambulance will be coming to teach us some First Aid.

At the end of February half-term we joined other members from Girlguiding in Berkhamsted District in our annual Thinking Day celebrations. We spent the afternoon learning some Yoga, Football skills, Street dancing and Taekwondo. It was fun to spend the afternoon with other members of Girlguiding. We currently have 22 Brownies and a short waiting list. If you want to know more about what we do, please email Susan at northchurchbrownies@yahoo.co.uk

Susan Anderson