

MEETING OF PARISHIONERS and reports for the
ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING, Sunday 19 May 2024,
11.45am
Including the
ANNUAL REPORT and FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE PAROCHIAL
CHURCH COUNCIL
For the year ended 31 December 2023

Vicar's Report 2023

I must start with giving my thanks for your support, friendship and welcome during my first half year with you.

I started in July 2023, and in many ways that now seems ages ago, we seem to have covered a lot of things since then! Many different services as well as our usual Sunday ones, sharing our worship with church family and visitors alike. As I have adjusted to and understood services that are quite Higham Ferrers specific, to this beautiful but different church building, you have adjusted to me and my way of worship, different hymns, and the inflatable world at the Christingle. I have been heartened by your willingness to let me try out different things, like Blue Christmas and to put back things like reading the Gospel from the centre of the church.

2023 was also marked by social events, concerts and my first introduction to Higham Sparkle with the amazing Angel Festival. For the connections that we started to renew and remake around the town with our schools and uniformed youth groups.

2023 also had a significant phase of the building works that was funded by the 600 Appeal, but one that caused some pain when the works required that I close the Bede House for more months that we would have liked. The responsibility we all have for our three Grade 1 listed buildings is immense, but there is also a feeling of love and care for them which has supported the huge amount of fundraising required in recent years. The challenge will be to start to work out how we best use them, for ourselves

as St Mary's church but also how they can be a part of our parish community, our town.

However, the pool of people that "do things" is small relative to our congregation size and to our town. The load has at time been unfairly borne and cannot continue and we need to plan for a wider involvement. Roles and responsibilities can be shared or undertaken jointly, and we need to think anew about our church structures and processes.

St Mary's weathered a long vacancy and thanks must go to Canon Lesley, Fr Paul, Rev Linda, and our Reader Brenda for ensuring services and occasional offices happened, pastoral care was given, and more. Together with the wardens and members of the PCC, the ministry patterns were maintained over that long time. Taking on building projects, major fundraising and more shows the strengths that are in the PCC, one that is small with several spaces on it unfilled. I wonder what we can achieve together if we fill those vacant spaces?

We have challenges, of course, we are still a small church, and we need to grow across all ages but especially around young families. We need to find new and different ways to share our faith and allow all to worship our Lord in ways that work for us. We have a real issue around our finances, we have not paid our Parish Share in full for many years, and the current financial squeeze on us all, increasing utilities etc adds complexity to any plans.

But however gloomy that may seem, there are green shoots over and above any slight bounce that can occur as a vacancy ends. Occasional offices are increasing, numbers attending major festivals are higher, more people are visiting this church site during the day. Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in how we respond in this new year.

A strength of the joint benefice is its inclusivity, we number amongst our congregations those who may not always feel welcomed elsewhere but are here. I would therefore like to build

upon this by considering membership of Inclusive Church, giving a definite statement to anyone looking at us or joining us that all are welcome here. It would be a statement of our putting our faith into action, and loving, welcoming and caring for the friend and the stranger.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this report, and for all of you who do so much in many ways to support St Mary's. It is a privilege and a joy to be with you here.

With every blessing,

Mother Louise

Electoral Roll report on 2023

During 2023, five members of the congregation died decreasing the number on the roll from 114 to 109. Seventeen people have been added to the roll during the revision period bringing the roll number up to 126, of which 61% are resident within the Parish of Higham Ferrers.

Mthr Louise, *for the Electoral Roll Officer*

PCC Membership

The clergy, licenced lay reader, church wardens, and lay representatives on the Deanery Synod are members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) ex officio. In addition, up to 12 lay members are elected at our Annual Parochial Church Meeting in accordance with the Church Representation Rules.

During the year the following served as members of the PCC

Vicar	Louise Bishop	Appointed 5 July
2023		
Licenced Lay Reader	Brenda Elldred	

Church Warden	Sandy Coleman
Church Warden	Dave Stuttle
Lay representatives of Deanery Synods	Lyn Boxall
	Sue Clarke
	Peter Swindley
Elected Members	Sue Dennis
	Karen Holmes
	Jane Jackson
	Ria Jefferies Resigned 22 November 2023
	Graham Newell
	Darren Robinson
	Mark Smith
	Stewart Wiles

The PCC performs a vital function within a church, providing oversight and governance, representing the wider church, and helping steer our church life.

It is hoped that the PCC for 2024 will have 12 elected Lay members in place.

Churchwardens Report

We would like to start by thanking the Holy Handymen, Cleaning team and all other volunteers who assist in taking care of our amazing three grade 1 listed buildings. We are grateful to the Friends of St Marys for the work they do in the church yard with the flower beds, bulb planting and the re-wilding project, and also thank Peter Swindley for the work he does when we need to inter ashes in the flower beds.

Our thanks go to the people who open and lock the church on a daily basis. This enables us to keep the church open for private prayer and for visitors who require peace and quiet or just to enjoy the lovely building. We have seen an increase in the number of visitors over the last twelve months and there have been some very positive comments in the visitors' book.

We are grateful that the re-roofing of the Bede House has been completed and that it will be good for another 200 years! We would like to thank all involved in the project, in particular builder Steve Todd, architect Henry Sanders and project manager for St Mary's, Stewart Wiles. This wouldn't have been possible without the sterling efforts of the 600 Appeal group with special thanks going to Sue Dennis for leading this. Within 2023, we have also had some stonework repairs made to the church, again by Steve Todd.

Lighting within the church is improving with the installation of LED bulbs to the chandeliers as the older types of bulbs are no longer available. LED bulbs are also cheaper to run.

After a long period of interregnum, it was a pleasure to welcome Mthr Louise to the Benefice in July 2023 and we are pleased that she and her family are settling in well and are making Higham Ferrers their home. With her arrival there have been some changes made to our services and liturgical offering and we feel that these have had a positive impact on our worship. We would like to thank especially Karen Holmes and Lyn Boxall who work tirelessly for the benefit of the church.

Finally, as Church Wardens, we would like to thank the PCC and all those who volunteer in whatever capacity at our church, without the hard work and support of whom we would not be able to undertake our roles.

Sandy Coleman and Dave Stuttle, Church Wardens.

Benefice Safeguarding report

Safeguarding is part of our Christian duty of care and in the Benefice, Safeguarding is a regular agenda point on all PCC meetings. In both churches there are copies of the most recent safeguarding policies on noticeboards and a folder with the handbook plus relevant information on how to report and where to get help. All leaders of Parish groups undergo Safeguarding

training every 3 years and a record is kept by the Benefice Safeguarding Officer and Vicar.

The Safeguarding Policy along with Helpline numbers can also be found on the website link

<https://www.stmaryhighamferrers.org/safeguarding>

In the front of the Handbook is a Policy Statement from the Church of England that states that:

The Church of England is called to share the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. The life of our communities and institutions is integral to how we address this task. The good news speaks as welcome for all, with a particular regard for those who are most vulnerable, into a community where the value and dignity of every human being is affirmed and those in positions of authority are truly trustworthy. Being faithful to our call to share the Gospel therefore compels us to take with the utmost seriousness the challenge of preventing abuse from happening and responding well where it has.

Overall, the past year has been quiet with no issues to report.

Our Parish Dashboard score has remained in the 75-90% in both churches and I am grateful to all who have continued to undertake the training they need for the responsibilities they are covering so that this good score continues. The Dashboard acts as an audit to the Diocese, keeping them informed of our progress.

As a Benefice we have managed to keep on top of most of the DBS requirements and are working with the diocese on the grey areas where we use sessional staff to help support areas such as organ playing and Bell ringing without it becoming overly cumbersome.

We have seen changes of personnel in the Diocese. The Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor post was vacant and was replaced by Carole Fitzsimons who then left Jan 2024 and the

post is currently being covered by a Temporary DSA Beth Miller, Safeguarding training is supported by Amie Freeman.

This year I will be handing over the Benefice Safeguarding role to Lyn Boxall who has kindly agreed to take it on. There will be a period of handover so that we can ensure Lyn has all the information she needs.

Please do continue to report any concerns, no matter how small they may seem, they all matter and could prevent someone suffering alone and unnecessarily.

Thank you to every for your support over the last 4 ½ years. Please do continue to support Lyn as she takes over.

Brenda Eldred, Benefice Safeguarding Officer.

Higham Deanery Synod report

March in Rushden; a special event by the Gen2 team, providing an interactive opportunity for those present to explore the role played by young people and opportunities for helping them to grow in faith.

June in Chelveston; Haydon Spenceley, Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Director of Vocation and Formation spoke his role overseeing training for the Diocese. Deanery Mission Youth Enabler Lizzie Mouesbauer shared good news youth work stories from around the Deanery. This was Chris Youngman's last Synod before retiring, he was thanked for his hard work and leadership during his time as the Rural Dean. Carolyn Wignall was elected Deanery Lay Chair.

October in Rushden; Chris Dalliston, Dean of Peterborough, spoke on various news and topics at Peterborough Cathedral. Reminding us that we are not alone, and are part of the larger, worldwide church. He noted that Bishop Debbie Sellin would be good for the entire diocese and especially for children and young people.

Other news

- Sue Clarke led three Deanery litter picks during Lent 2023.
- We held a Deanery Prayer event in May, as part of Canon Steve Benoy's Thy Kingdom Come walk around the Diocese.
- Our annual Beer & Hymns evening at Newton Bromswold held in July.

Andrew Presland, Deanery Standing Committee

Other Reports in the Life of the Church follow:

Family Worship

The year started with us still in vacancy but with the help of Father Paul we continued to provide our monthly All age service at 10.30 on the first Sunday of the month. In July we welcomed Mother Louise and our All Age continues to grow and flourish.

Other family services offer a variety of ways to worship and are all Lay led by our Children's ministry team. Apart from All Age we offer three very different ways for engaging families and children over the month.

The second Sunday is Breakfast Church at 9am in the Bede House with everyone contributing hot and cold food to be shared around a large table. We do this in the way Jesus often shared meals with his disciples. We begin with a sung Grace, we have a reading which we discuss and share thoughts about, we have prayers and usually a good rousing sing at the end. There are usually between 15-25 people of all ages.

Kickstart began towards the end of the year and is a teaching session for the children at the 10.30 service on the third Sunday. At the beginning of the service the children go to the Bede House, where they have a reading, a prayer, a song and do activities linked with the reading. They return to church for the Eucharistic Prayer and Communion. At the end of the service,

they present their activities/pictures to Mother Louise and the congregation.

Morning Worship is on the fourth Sunday at 9am in the Bede House. This year this has been less well attended and so we are looking again at the format and timing, however, we feel it is still important to offer for those who need it. We are reminded that Jesus said “where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them.”

Brenda, Mother Louise and the Children’s Ministry Team

Children’s Ministry Report

The children’s ministry team have continued over the year to support family events for our community, and we were delighted when Mother Louise joined us in July.

The events this past year were as follows; -

- A pre Mothering Sunday craft day, held in the Bede House, where the children make gifts and cards for their mums and the uniformed organisations help us to put together bunches of daffodils for the Sunday Service.
- The Good Friday Easter Experience where we act out the story of Holy Week in the church and churchyard and then finish in the Bede House with Easter crafts, Hot Cross buns and an Easter egg and story book to take home. This is an opportunity to spread the real story of Easter to the wider community.
- The Light Party - an alternative to Halloween was also a success.
- Making feathers for an Angel for Sparkle weekend was great fun and involved some of the schools.
- Christingle Service - we made 150 Christingles, and all were used. The service was very popular again with the wider community; it supports the work of the Children’s Society and is an opportunity to explain Jesus as the light of the world giving hope to those in need.
- Crib Service on Christmas Eve. Once again this was a popular service with the church being filled with families and all generations, a wonderful way to start Christmass.

- Thank you to all the team for the amazing support and to all who come and make the events successful.

Louise, Brenda and team

First Friday Club

The First Friday Club is our Evening Club for young people aged 10+ meeting in the Bede House on the first Friday of each month from September to July 5.30-7pm.

We have 58 young people on our register and average between 25-30 attending per session.

The Club is a real opportunity for our local young people to visit our church in a relaxed and friendly session and feel the welcome of our ministry team and volunteers, building relationships with the young people and their families.

We offer a wide range of activities in the Bede House, Churchyard and in the Church. This ranges from table tennis, ball games and board games to film nights, to the more active pancake racing, easter egg hunts and 'sports day'. We have held Taskmaster Challenge events and Egg Hunts in the Church, so if you have found a paper airplane or a foam Easter Egg, you have found evidence of our fun! Food is always involved. Our last session in July will be a celebratory BBQ in the churchyard.

The Club is self-funding. We ask for a £2 donation per child towards the costs of the sessions.

As a volunteering team, we all thoroughly enjoy the sessions too – we all have an enhanced DBS check and have completed our safeguarding training, to keep our young people safe. We would welcome new volunteers...so if you like what you hear, please ask about joining us.

Leona Mantle

The altar party report

The altar party serve every Sunday, at weekday services and on feast days. We are a team of long serving members with many years' experience.

Each Sunday we prepare the altar coverings and robes based on the colours of the liturgical calendar. We ensure the smooth running of the service with support and help to Mthr Louise or visiting priest. It is the responsibility of people in the group to clear away after each service. Supplies of communion wine, wafers, candles and clean linen looked after by individuals in the group.

This year we have served not only at St. Mary's but also at St. John's at special services. The servers and chalice rota is compiled three monthly and distributed via email and printed copies for those who require it.

The year 2023 was important because in July we had the induction of Mother Louise, a service streamed to all and with the Bishop of Brixworth present plus many more people attending showing their support and friendship to Mthr Louise.

Karen Holmes & Lyn Boxall

Readers and Intercessors

– Sunday by Sunday and Feast by Feast, the readings and prayers are brought to you by our team of readers and intercessors, in the hope that different voices and different perspectives will help you in your own worship and your prayers. It is one way in which we show that lay people also have an important ministry, and a role to play in the liturgy of the church.

Currently we have eight readers and eight intercessors, but we are always on the look-out for more of the congregation to join in this work. Training is provided, and if you are interested in taking on this role, have a word with Richard Oberman. We shall be very pleased to see you.

Richard Oberman

Sidespeople

I would like to thank the sidespeople for the service they provide for the church each Sunday with greeting parishioners and visitors, taking the collection and tidying the books away afterwards etc. I would also like to thank them for supporting additional services, including Midnight Mass.

We started 2023 with a team of sixteen. We now have twelve people with people no longer able to participate because of other commitments and ill health. If anyone knows of someone who could do this role, please let me know.

Sandy Coleman

St Mary's Choir

As we do not currently have a Director of Music, Revd Linda has continued to choose the anthems, take choir practices, and arrange the rota for the organists on Sundays and other special services.

The repertoire is limited due to the small number in the choir at present, but if an anthem is known to the choir it can be sung well, which is better than singing a more difficult piece badly. If a number of singers are away on a particular Sunday we sing a hymn instead of an anthem.

During 2023 the choir sang on most Sundays, on feast days, at Revd Louise's installation, at the Town Carol service, and at some funerals. For some special occasions we are grateful that we have had additional singers (including some former choir members).

Sadly Susan Fincham is no longer singing with us due to health reasons, but we are very pleased that Vivian Buckby joined us this January. We would welcome new singers, preferably with

some experience in singing in a church choir. Anyone interested should speak to Revd Linda.

Organists

Unfortunately John Wearmouth no longer plays here, and Matthew Foster, our organ scholar, has moved to Chelmsford Cathedral to gain more experience in organ playing. However, we are pleased that Rosemary Nayaar now plays here once a month so we have 3 regular organists, and we thank them.

David Richardson

Baptism Group

Several baptisms have been celebrated throughout this year and several more have already been arranged for next few months and the coming year. Baptisms usually take place during the Sunday service, however, if a smaller service is preferred this can be arranged for after a Sunday service or at another time, with consultation with Mother Louise.

At present the team is made up of a small group of ladies who, on the day of the baptism will welcome families and their guests to the church and support them throughout the service.

We try to keep in touch with families as often as we can by sending baptism anniversary cards and event reminders if the family have indicated their interest. Many thanks to Joy York who has written and delivered many cards over the years.

We are happy to welcome new members, both male and female, to the team. If you interested please contact Sue Thompson.

Sue Thompson

Pastoral team

The Pastoral team is a small group which meets once or twice a year to review the pastoral needs of the congregation and the wider community.

All members have DBS safeguarding training and keep aware of the needs within the congregation and the community.

Every six weeks members of the team review and update the prayer list and ascertain where there is acute or long term need for visiting. Many of the congregation also undertake visiting which is much appreciated by those who are unwell or unable to get out as much as they would like.

We are hoping to set up a group to support those who have been bereaved and could, perhaps, offer comfort and friendship to the recently bereaved.

There is a lot to do. If you would like to join our group please speak to Sue Thompson or Brenda Eldred.

Sue Thompson

Social and Fundraising Comittee

The first event for 2023 was the Saturday Coffee Morning raising £353.02 followed by a very successful Quiz Night with food in May which attracted people from all over the place and raised an amazing £1008.90.

In July we had Brass in the Church rather than Brass on the Grass due to windy weather conditions and at that event we raised £244.40.

Harvest Lunch was held on Sunday 1st October where we had over 30 people attend and we raised £298.47. It was a tasty lunch and good for the parish family to meet up together for a social event.

Christmas Sparkle this year was organized by the 600 Appeal Committee. This event raised an amazing sum of money with some people from the Social and Fundraising Committee helping out over the weekend.

Our next event was on Saturday December 2nd the Wreath Making Workshop which was attended by 45 people and raised a fantastic £655.

On Sunday 17th December we offered mulled wine and mince pies to those attending a Service of Lessons and Carols in the church.

Karen Holmes

The 600 Appeal

In 2023 our focus turned from St Marys Church to the exterior work on the Bede House. Funds were raised from personal donations, the Higham Hot Hundred, Coffee Mornings, Open Garden, a second Fynnius Fogg concert and NPAT concert, Football Tournament, and at the end of the year our hugely successful Angel Festival. A total of £28,330 was raised towards the cost of Bede House repairs.

The Higham Hot Hundred continues to be a steady source of income with £3,000 per annum guaranteed and, because we have such generous supporters who often choose to donate all, or part of their winnings back to the 600 Appeal, the total amount raised in 2023 was a wonderful £3,850.

Our Angel Festival aimed to raise £10,000 (a 20% increase on the last one in 2014) but was so well supported in so many different ways that it actually raised a magnificent £15,500. Our fundraising group is reducing for a number of different reasons and the appeal may have to draw to a close in 2024 but it has achieved a huge amount since its inception in October 2020 and we are grateful to all of the parish family for their help, support and enthusiasm to raise such huge sums of money to keep our beautiful buildings in good repair.

Sue Dennis, chair

Mothers Union

The branch met regularly throughout the year in various locations including the Bede House, church, and Ruth's home.

Speakers included Douglas Hall talking about his volunteering trip to Ukraine, and members of the clergy team.

We celebrated Candlemas at Ruth's home, joined our Methodist friends for the World Day of Prayer service and attended the induction of Rev'd Louise as our new vicar.

Social events included our annual lunch at Rushden Golf Club, lunch with our former Branch Leader Dora, a celebration tea to mark the coronation of King Charles, and a supper meeting of MU & Friends in August at the Water Mill in Ringstead. Our Coffee morning in June raised £200 for the MU Summer of Hope Appeal.

At the AGM we agreed to continue as a committee-led branch with Ruth Bond as Branch Treasurer, Jane Smeathers as Branch Secretary and Margaret Britchford, Diane Buckby, Angela Tobin and Linda Vickers as committee members. Currently we have nine members, plus two who pay direct to Mary Sumner House. We were represented at Deanery Committee meetings and the Diocesan Forum and enjoyed the Deanery Advent Carol Service at St Mary's Finedon.

In December we heard the sad news that one of our former members, Mary Jackson, had passed away. We are thankful for her long association with Mothers' Union.

Jane Smeathers, Secretary

Bellringers' Report 2023

Shortly after the last APCM, the Coronation of King Charles took place. Our ringers marked the day by half-an-hour's ringing in the afternoon, with an excellent peal of Grandsire Caters on the Sunday afternoon, much enjoyed by all at the Market Square street party, although apparently not by those at the Green Dragon's jazz concert!

Our successful coffee morning for February's Farmers' Market raised a goodly sum, adding to previous contributions to buy crockery and kitchen equipment for the Bede House, with part

going towards the 600 Appeal. Further support to the 600 Appeal by donations from visiting peal bands, often gift-aided.

On the ringing front, we have managed to ring for all Sunday morning services except for two when illness and holidays left us short. We were delighted to find that our new vicar's son Alex is a ringer, and we also have one excellent learner, William Andrews, but as our band ages we are desperately in need of some younger blood. I approach my ninth decade soon and am acutely aware of the need for succession planning, but my deputy is only slightly younger than me.

It is urgent we find more learners if our beautiful ring of bells is to ring on in future decades.

Bob Dennis, Tower Captain

St. Mary's Handymen's Report

Firstly, let us thank Richard Hall, Nick Lee, Fred Frost, Stephen Tuffnail and Graham Newell with subsidiary help from Alan Bishop and Brian Behagg for all their efforts over the year and for keeping the Bede House drains clear and roding out blocked toilets.

Regularly, manholes were lifted and flushed out in the Vicarage garden and drive, ivy was removed from the walls around the churchyard, and the surface drains leading up the drive to the Church cleared, setting of heating schedules in both buildings, and giving support to emergency issues arising.

Within the Bede House we have repaired heater guards several times, fixed plumbing issues in the varied sinks, and changed bulbs and sorted out recalcitrant lighting. Within the kitchen issues arose with CO2 monitors and safety switches, all tracked and dealt with. Graham and myself kept the Bede House sound system up and running.

Richard and Nick managed to get a wired Wi-fi link from the benefice office to the Church, and a link to the church heating allowing remote control. Seasonal moving and building of

Christmas and Easter items, and minor repairs of furniture in church continued and are much appreciated. More team members are always welcome!

Chris Hales

The Cleaning Team

We are fortunate that two new members have joined our team recently, Malcolm who will care for our wondowsils, and Alex who mops the floors for us.

Having different areas for each volunteer to clean is working well, and the church being open each day allows more flexibility as to when volunteers are available.

The church gets hoovered and dusted every week to keep on top of the day to day cleaning. The extra boost of cleaning days such as a Spring Cleaning Day helps tackle areas that we can't always get to with our small team, and we hope to add in another day in the Autumn before the Christmas season.

Many thanks go to all who volunteer giving up their time to keep the church looking nice and welcoming to visitors.

Sue Clarke

Higham Ferrers Girlguiding, two Rainbow Units, two Brownie Units and one Guide Unit.

2nd Higham Ferrers Rainbows currently have 14 members, aged from four upwards. The girls have enjoyed taking part in badge work and completing the Skills Builder badges, taking part in the annual sponsored event raising money towards the census. At Christmas, entering the Mayor's Christmas Card competition, one of our girls winning first prize. The Rainbows looked around Higham in the 'Find the Shop Window' competition. A day trip to Willow Farm enjoyed by all despite the wind, having fun on the play equipment and cuddling the pets.

3rd Higham Ferrers Brownies currently number 12 and have been working on various skills builders and other badges. We had a one-night sleep over in MacQueen House before the summer holidays. This was the first time away for most of the girls and a good time was had by all. We moved elsewhere temporarily during work on the Bede House, returning recently. We have, unfortunately, had the death of Jonathan Ilott, the husband of our main leader, Kate. We have had support from leaders of other units during this difficult time, please keep Kate and the Ilott family in your prayers.

2nd Higham Ferrers Guides have had a very productive year with one girl earning her Gold Award. Prior to attending the Wellies and Wristbands festival, we had two sessions at the Frontier Centre enabling activities that are not possible here. Learning how to put up a tent and make a stretcher with what they had to hand, i.e. poles and tape, lighting fires and cooking. They also had a couple of one-night sleepovers at MacQueen House, one in January, very cold! At sleepovers, they had to cook their own food and clear up with supervision from leaders. Trips to Rock Up, and Cadbury World on the train being an example to Girl guiding with their smart turnout and impeccable behaviour. Finishing the Autumn term with a pyjama party and organising a well-supported Farmers Market coffee morning in the Bede House. We currently have 24 guides and cannot take any more without an additional adult volunteer.

Sandy Coleman

Elizabeth Groome Music Charity

We are pleased to be able to continue our support for the St. Mary's Organ Scholar. Matthew is taking a year out from University to gain experience playing different organs and is currently organ scholar at Chelmsford Cathedral. It is anticipated that he will be returning to University at the beginning of the next academic year in September.

In the past year we have made grants to individual students totalling £3545 most of whom reside in Rushden and Higham Ferrers and attend our local schools. We made a grant of £900 to Ferrers School to enable all new year 7 students to experience music education for the first year at the school.

For the third year running we have been involved in the Rushden and Higham Rotary Young Musician Competition and are pleased to have been able to award the prizes to all the winners. These are cash prizes which are paid to the school at which they receive their music education and are used by the school specifically for the individual student.

Dave Stuttle, chair

The Friends of St Mary

The Friends of St Mary are an independent secular charity whose purpose is to support the maintenance of the exterior of Church, Bede House and Chantry Chapel, and enhance the natural environment of the churchyard. A range of events are organised to raise funds. The money raised helps the identified projects succeed and provides members of the public with a range of entertaining events to attend. As an unexpected outcome of the projects undertaken the FoSM have also won awards from national bodies.

Fund raising events undertaken in 2023.

- o H E Bates afternoon lecture
- o Gilbert and Sullivan extravaganza evening
- o Spring and Autumn coffee mornings

Education outreach

- o Four assemblies delivered to Higham Ferrers Junior school focussing on the heritage of Higham Ferrers.
- o Participation in Rushden Lakes Heritage Day
- o SERVE afternoon tea

Environmental work

- o Planting pollinator friendly plants
- o Providing water baths for wildlife

- o Removal of couch grass in the meadow area
- o Planting bulbs and a cutting garden
- o Saving a tree in the churchyard from removal after being erroneously identified as having rot in the trunk.

Awards

- o Winner of the Northamptonshire Heritage award for Best Society Project for the Midland Road gate.

Funds raised.

- o £1800 towards the Bede House roof.

Brenda Lofthouse, chair

Church Finances 2023

What an interesting and changeable year 2023 has been.

We have welcomed new people to our parish, and sadly lost friends, and felt the pressures of the global financial crisis. However, one shining light to support us (and provide financial guidance) we are pleased to have Mother Louise, an ex-employee of HMRC, amongst many other roles in her career before finding ministry, and Higham Ferrers.

Whilst still in vacancy, the start of the year continued to be difficult with increased energy bills, and just like us all at home we saw four-fold increases due to the increase of standing charges, and all before we even switched on the new system installed in church a year earlier. This seems out of control, but as wholesale prices have decreased, we need to manage our energy contracts and should see costs reducing.

Year on Year increases: Electricity costs £5,798 + 106%, and Gas £13,976 +194%

Our other major expense is Parish Share. In 2023 we agreed to pay what we could each month and hopefully be able to make a top-up at the end of the year. The PCC agreed to make payments of £2,500 per month, but to aid cashflow, we only made payments for 10 months, totalling £25,000 for the year,

significantly down on what we should be paying. As a benefice the amount this year is £81,283, with a low-income reduction of £6,000, this brings us to £75,283, with St Mary's share being £58,344 meaning we now need to look at doubling our monthly payments. The diocese is fully aware of our challenges, the changes needed, and will therefore allow us approx. 3-5 years to get up to paying a full share. Thankfully, there is no debt carried forward, and we are required to pay a lesser amount compared to other parts of the country.

We need to look at our own financial gifts to St Mary's, but more importantly how we can also encourage more of the town with its increasing population to both join with us and to financially contribute to its church and buildings. We need to engage with local businesses, groups and people to make more use of our site overall. We raised £150,000 for the church heating, and significant sums for the Church spire and roof, and the Bede House in financially stretched times, money is around, the challenge is to find and release it.

The 'Cost of Living crisis,' did and still does have a major impact on our funds. People are more likely to give at an event and when they clearly know where the money is going. Therefore, I thank the 600 Appeal team for their which has resulted in the Bede House roof finally being watertight. Whilst our buildings look good, we need to be more open, honest, and transparent about our financial needs and share our situation, the costs involved in caring for our building on top of those needed to be the church in this place.

Most people are not aware of what else needs to be paid for, before we open the church doors and run services, sometimes several services, offering a complex mixture of services and events to so many living in our lovely market town. Many assume that we receive national funding to keep our buildings open and to be the church. We don't!

Those other costs include an increase of £1,100 to £10,000 for insurance, the cost of organists, cleaning, administration, and other not so obvious costs. Even printing our service sheets has

seen increased costs and so our total expenditure year on year has almost doubled to £252,804, but this does include £157,257 towards building works.

So how do we pay for all that we have to look after and wish to provide?

We had more weddings and funerals doubling our income, year on year, to £10,450. Bede House lettings were on a par with 2022 despite it being closed for an extended period whilst scaffolding was in place around the Bede House. Website donations are down as we moved away from the extra online services we implemented during the pandemic. Collection plate, envelopes, parish giving monies and resulting gift aid are all on a downward slope, whilst there are some green shoots with electronic payments. Year on Year income is down. In 2022 we benefited from two legacies to the value of £90,640, but legacy income is rare and cannot be expected or predicted.

My hope is with the arrival of Mother Louise, less building works, the easing of energy bills, and the Bede House becoming the venue of choice for hire, that better times are ahead for us to continue improvement in our cathedral square both inside and outside. After taking a pause it will allow us to build on our vision and mission especially with our young families and school children.

With restricted funds and an opening balance carried forward at the start of year, financial pressures, more building work, and a vicar for only half the year we achieved an amazing result. For the future? Things can only get better, but prayer, determination and a close eye on the pennies will be required.

Darren Robinson, Treasurer

St Mary's Church, Higham Ferrers

End of Year Financial Statements

Year ending 31/12/2023

Statement of Financial Activities

	Unrestricted funds	Designated funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total funds	Prior year total funds
Income and endowments from:						
Donations and legacies	51,310.69	0.00	23,328.51	0.00	74,639.20	160,997.09
Income from charitable activities	10,487.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	10,487.97	5,938.50
Other trading activities	12,369.01	0.00	29,999.40	0.00	42,368.41	57,130.68
Investments	1,168.15	934.31	4,741.03	0.00	6,843.49	3,542.10
Other income	396.67	0.00	6,547.80	0.00	6,944.47	21,800.37
Total income	75,732.49	934.31	64,616.74	0.00	141,283.54	249,408.74
Expenditure on:						
Raising funds	155.17	0.00	4,413.71	0.00	4,568.88	3,361.16
Expenditure on charitable activities	86,438.69	680.00	160,396.82	0.00	247,515.51	123,077.88
Total expenditure	86,593.86	680.00	164,810.53	0.00	252,084.39	126,439.04
Net income / (expenditure) resources before transfer	(10,861.37)	254.31	(100,193.79)	0.00	(110,800.85)	122,969.70
Transfers						
Gross transfers between funds - in	0.00	0.00	1,832.40	0.00	1,832.40	91,460.80
Gross transfers between funds - out	0.00	0.00	(1,832.40)	0.00	(1,832.40)	(91,460.80)
Other recognised gains / losses						
Net movement in funds	(10,861.37)	254.31	(100,193.79)	0.00	(110,800.85)	122,969.70
Total funds brought forward	9,399.77	31,410.69	228,964.39	0.00	269,774.85	146,805.15
Total funds carried forward	(1,461.60)	31,665.00	128,770.60	0.00	158,974.00	269,774.85
Represented by						
Unrestricted						
General fund	(1,461.60)	0.00	0.00	0.00	(1,461.60)	9,399.77
Designated						
Grace Milgate & Peggy Horsfield Young People Fund	0.00	31,665.00	0.00	0.00	31,665.00	31,410.69
Restricted						
Bede House	0.00	0.00	5,192.79	0.00	5,192.79	5,116.79
Bell Appeal	0.00	0.00	6,364.46	0.00	6,364.46	6,180.31
Choir	0.00	0.00	310.14	0.00	310.14	400.23
Elizabeth Groome Organ Scholarship	0.00	0.00	1,547.98	0.00	1,547.98	1,910.00

J Crew (Fabric)	0.00	0.00	3,195.04	0.00	3,195.04	2,922.04
Restoration Fund	0.00	0.00	54,766.72	0.00	54,766.72	196,742.67
St Marys 600 Appeal	0.00	0.00	57,393.47	0.00	57,393.47	15,692.35

Balance sheet

Class	Description	This year	Last year
Current assets			
	Lloyds TSB current account	15,575.12	39,380.33
	Lloyds TSB 600 Appeal account	20,269.35	22,064.07
	Lloyds TSB Restoration account	0.00	0.00
	CCLA (CBF) General fund 1D	1,945.70	1,885.27
	CCLA (CBF) Restoration fund 3D	81,778.65	179,704.66
	CCLA (CBF) Bell Appeal 4D	6,145.53	4,461.38
	J Crew Investment account	3,195.04	2,922.04
	CCLA Grace Milgate	31,379.66	21,445.35
	CCLA (CBF) Father Warnes	0.00	0.00
	Cash in hand	25.56	25.56
	Accounts Receivable	0.00	0.00
	Total Current assets	160,314.61	271,888.66
Liabilities			
	Loans received	0.00	0.00
	Agency collections	1,340.61	2,113.81
	Accounts Payable	0.00	0.00
	Total Liabilities	1,340.61	2,113.81
	Net Asset surplus(deficit)	158,974.00	269,774.85
Reserves			
	Excess / (deficit) to date	(110,800.85)	122,969.70
	Starting balances	269,774.85	146,805.15
	Total Reserves	158,974.00	269,774.85
	Represented by funds		
	Unrestricted	(1,461.60)	9,399.77
	Designated	31,665.00	31,410.69
	Restricted	128,770.60	228,964.39
	Endowment	0.00	0.00
	Total	158,974.00	269,774.85

Analysis of income and expenditure

					Total	
	Unrestricted	Designated	Restricted	Endowment	This year	Last year
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS						
<i>Donations and legacies</i>						
Gift Aid - Bank	34,118.36	0.00	0.00	0.00	34,118.36	38,109.68
Gift Aid - Envelopes	1,523.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,523.55	1,666.04
Donations -Gift Aid	820.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	820.00	350.00
Loose plate collections	5,479.21	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,479.21	4,344.53
Envelopes - Non Gift Aid	956.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	956.25	1,359.00
SumUp Payments	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	155.95
Web Site donations	218.48	0.00	0.00	0.00	218.48	1,076.16
Donations appeals etc	529.00	0.00	76.00	0.00	605.00	1,415.00
Tax recoverable on Gift Aid	7,487.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	7,487.97	15,931.28
Legacies	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10,000.00
Legacy - Restricted	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	80,640.00
Elizabeth Groome Organ Scholarship	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	(90.00)
Non-recurring one-off grants	0.00	0.00	23,252.51	0.00	23,252.51	5,085.00
Wall Safes-Candles	102.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	102.17	188.90
Wall Safe - Church Expences	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	85.55
Church Flowers	25.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	25.70	0.00
Misc	50.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	50.00	680.00
Total	51,310.69	0.00	23,328.51	0.00	74,639.20	160,997.09
<i>Income from charitable activities</i>						
Fees for weddings and funerals	10,450.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	10,450.20	5,920.20
Bookstall sales to promote objectives	37.77	0.00	0.00	0.00	37.77	18.30
Total	10,487.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	10,487.97	5,938.50
<i>Other trading activities</i>						
Fund Raising	4,404.73	0.00	0.00	0.00	4,404.73	8,184.32
St Marys 600 Appeal	0.00	0.00	29,999.40	0.00	29,999.40	39,290.34
Heating & Lighting	495.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	495.00	665.00
Bookstall sales - fund raising	52.83	0.00	0.00	0.00	52.83	0.00
Bede House - Lettings	7,416.45	0.00	0.00	0.00	7,416.45	8,986.67
Parish magazine sales	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.35
Total	12,369.01	0.00	29,999.40	0.00	42,368.41	57,130.68
<i>Investments</i>						
Dividends	43.88	0.00	0.00	0.00	43.88	87.38
Increase in share value	0.00	0.00	273.00	0.00	273.00	(57.19)
Bank and building society interest	104.27	934.31	4,468.03	0.00	5,506.61	2,611.91

Rent from lands or buildings	1,020.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,020.00	900.00
Total	1,168.15	934.31	4,741.03	0.00	6,843.49	3,542.10
<i>Other income</i>						
VAT Reclaimed	0.00	0.00	6,547.80	0.00	6,547.80	21,558.38
Insurance claims	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	241.99
Special Collections	396.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	396.67	0.00
Total	396.67	0.00	6,547.80	0.00	6,944.47	21,800.37
INCOME TOTAL	75,732.49	934.31	64,616.74	0.00	141,283.54	249,408.74

EXPENDITURE

Raising funds

Costs of fetes & other events	155.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	155.17	1,394.41
St Marys 600	0.00	0.00	4,413.71	0.00	4,413.71	1,966.75
Total	155.17	0.00	4,413.71	0.00	4,568.88	3,361.16

Expenditure on charitable activities

Giving - relief and development agencies	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,000.00
Secular charities	500.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	500.00	1,000.00
Special Collections	430.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	430.00	0.00
Parish Share payments	25,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	25,000.00	30,000.00
Assistant staff costs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	53.95
Salary of parish administrator	2,325.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,325.00	2,142.25
Working expenses of incumbent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	428.82
Parish training and mission	250.00	680.00	0.00	0.00	930.00	0.00
Church running - insurance	9,959.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	9,959.52	8,790.49
Miscellaneous	149.06	0.00	90.09	0.00	239.15	1,372.00
Church office - telephone	908.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	908.07	539.68
Organ / Organist costs	3,622.00	0.00	362.02	0.00	3,984.02	5,021.00
Choir	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	735.87
Church maintenance	3,497.66	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,497.66	3,572.82
Cleaning	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,041.35
Upkeep of services	2,490.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,490.02	580.32
Upkeep of churchyard	12.99	0.00	0.00	0.00	12.99	74.99
Administration	572.63	0.00	0.00	0.00	572.63	951.18
Photo Copier/Printing	1,796.19	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,796.19	2,471.24
Visiting speakers / locums	660.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	660.00	133.60
Church running - electric	1,950.93	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,950.93	816.11
Chantry Chapel - Electricity	1,692.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	1,692.03	1,066.65
Church running - gas	9,027.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	9,027.67	2,811.49
Church running - water	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	53.62
Church running - heating and lighting	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	(755.00)
Grace Milgate	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	34.66
Fees re Weddings/Funerals-Disbursements	4,199.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	4,199.60	2,692.00
Bede House - electricity	2,156.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	2,156.18	925.30
Bede House - gas	4,949.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	4,949.52	1,931.03
Bede House - Water Rates	572.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	572.60	538.34
Bede House - General Expenditure	4,544.92	0.00	0.00	0.00	4,544.92	1,146.41
Bede House - Cleaning	5,172.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,172.10	3,850.00
Church major repairs - structure	0.00	0.00	157,257.91	0.00	157,257.91	9,893.00
Church major repairs - installation	0.00	0.00	2,686.80	0.00	2,686.80	38,164.71
Total	86,438.69	680.00	160,396.82	0.00	247,515.51	123,077.88
EXPENDITURE TOTAL	86,593.86	680.00	164,810.53	0.00	252,084.39	126,439.04
GRAND TOTAL	(10,861.37)	254.31	(100,193.79)	0.00	(110,800.85)	122,969.70

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of St Mary's Church, Higham Ferrers.

I report on the accounts of the church for the year ended 31/12/2023.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The church's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The church'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 needed.

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 presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' 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.



Paul Adams
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Northants
NN10 9JP

10/5/2024