

# PARISH OF BENGEO

## Annual Report for 2023

### General Information

This report covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2023.

Bengeo is in the Diocese of St Albans and is situated mainly within the town of Hertford, but the parish also includes the rural areas of Chapmore End and Tonwell. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of maintaining two churches in the parish, Holy Trinity Church and St Leonard's Church. Holy Trinity Church, a Grade II listed building, is the main parish church and is situated in New Road, Bengeo. St Leonard's Church is a Grade I listed building dating from approximately 1120 and is situated in St Leonard's Road, Bengeo.

The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure and appointments are made under the Church Representation Rules.

During the past year the following served as members of the PCC:

<i>Team Vicar:</i>	The Reverend Robert Thompson
<i>Associate Priest:</i>	The Reverend David Pepper
<i>Lay Readers:</i>	Mr Bob Kelly & Mrs Anne Sentance
<i>Churchwardens:</i>	Mrs Diana Howarth and Mr Graham Squires

*Representatives on the Deanery Synod:* Vacant

*Elected members:*

Until APCM 2024	Mrs Pam Thain Mr John Howson Mr James Dutton
Until APCM 2025	Mrs Joanne King Mr David Greely Mr Peter Shillito
Until APCM 2026	Mr David Cramphorn Mrs Bridget Hersant Mrs Anne Sentance

## **Regular Worship**

The arrangement of 9am and 10am Sunday modern language services with service booklets for each season continues to be well received. The 10am services continue to provide a range of musical offerings including regular appearances by the choir, services led by the worship band, as well as wonderful support by the two church organists.

Services of Holy Communion in the traditional language from the Book of Common Prayer also provide a valued alternative weekly worship offering.

Quiet Time, the weekly prayer group, continued to provide a space for reflection and meditation, thanks to the dedication and stewardship of David Cramphorn and Moira Flindall. The Advent Bible discussion course was again well received again this year.

To support and encourage youth worship at Holy Trinity new activity bags have been introduced and prepared resources made available upstairs for children for use when supervised by their parents.

The bell ringing team at Holy Trinity has now operated for two years and is well established – welcoming the local community to worship every Sunday morning.

In 2024 Holy Trinity will be introducing an initiative whereby a lay team will take a non-Eucharist 10am service from time to time – taking advantage of the wealth of lay people we have at Holy Trinity and the gifts they have to offer.

The average attendance each Sunday during October 2023 was 52 - compared with an average attendance of 50 for each Sunday in October 2022.

## **2023 Electoral Roll & changes to the Roll**

There were 94 people on the 2023 Electoral Roll. In 2024 there were 95 people on the Electoral Roll prepared by Stella Saggars. This has been published for fourteen days continuously in advance of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

## **Community Activities**

Holy Trinity church continues to play an active role in the local community delivering a rich and varied programme of mission activity in 2023. This included:

- Coffee Pot community project – providing a weekly opportunity for people to get together with others over tea and refreshments with all profits going to charity
- Bereavement Café initiative – providing fortnightly in person sessions with trained volunteers in a safe and welcoming environment – as well as an on-line community group
- Bean River View initiative – Robert visiting this closed dementia unit every fortnight to deliver a session involving a story, discussion, bible passage, poem and hymns. Very positively received
- ‘Open the Book’ initiative taking the gospel into local primary schools every month and bringing it to life with fun and engaging interactive sessions
- The Friends of St Leonard’s welcomed nearly one thousand visitors to St Leonard’s in 2023 - for afternoon tea, for concerts, one-off events like the Children’s Art Day and just for a look around. Hosted the Harvest Songs of Praise service in September
- The Annual Pet Blessing Service - took place at the beginning of July at St Leonard’s church and was well attended
- Holy Trinity church celebrated the coronation of King Charles III with a special Coronation Service on Sunday 7 May followed by the Parish Tea in the church hall
- Music plays an important part in church and local community life at Holy Trinity. The Worship Band and Choir continue to provide a range of quality church music at our regular services. Regular, high-quality concerts at the church also continue to draw in crowds of local people as well as music lovers from further afield
- Book Club – continues to meet once a month in what has developed into a strong friendship group
- Craft Club – continues to meet once a month in the Church Hall to enable local people to get together and develop their craft skills in a warm and friendly environment

### **Church Buildings and Environs (the churchwardens annual fabric report)**

All urgent items detailed in the Quinquennial Report relating to Holy Trinity were addressed in January – with the remaining repairs carried out in May.

Plans to erect railings in S Leonard's churchyard to safeguard against a trip hazard are progressing with the Friends of St Leonard's agreeing funding. This work is subject to approvals being obtained.

Similarly, the Friends of St Leonard's are also fully supportive of the initiative to erect an outbuilding at St Leonard's for storage and practical purposes. Final plans and approvals are in the process of being obtained.

The Ros Squires memorial lectern was unveiled in Spring.

The lighting in the church hall was upgraded to LEDs in Summer.

New bell ropes were installed at Holy Trinity in Autumn.

The proposals for the restoration and cleaning of the Reredos (and the cleaning of the Font) – made possible by the generous contribution of Peter and Libby Shillito - were approved by the DAC in October – with the work scheduled to be undertaken in early 2024.

The redecoration of the outer doors of Holy Trinity church has been scheduled for Spring 2024.

## **Safeguarding**

The Parish is committed to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and to supporting those who have been victims of abuse, as well as those who may present a risk to others. The PCC has complied with the duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). The PCC have adopted all the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policies and Practice Guidance, as well as "Promoting a Safer Church" (child protection and vulnerable adults' policy) and the Domestic Abuse statement, at their meeting on 16 April 2023.

Anne Sentance has now been appointed as the Parish Safeguarding Officer with Bob Kelly becoming her deputy after many years of dedicated service in leading our Safeguarding activity. Those who work with vulnerable groups in the Parish are subject to the Practice Guidance Safer Recruitment July 2021. DBS checks are renewed every three years for these individuals as well as all members of the PCC. All appropriate safeguarding training has also been undertaken within the last 3 years.

If you wish to obtain advice or raise concerns, please do contact Anne or any member of the PCC. There were no issues of safeguarding concern reported during 2023.

## Deanery Synod

Deanery Synod met three times during 2023:

- March – to receive reports on Environmental Action from each parish  
There were reports from 15 parishes detailing projects and activities being undertaken in their parishes to protect and maintain the environment. Much of the focus was related to heating, lighting and maintaining church buildings and encouraging wildlife in churchyards. There was a useful exchange of good ideas and helpful contacts, and much discussion on how to take ideas and best practices and turn them into positive action.
- July – Racial Justice Action Group  
There was a presentation from Revd Jonathan Gordon, who recounted his own personal journey and explained the aims and objectives of the group. The group has developed a three-year action plan including listening, education, reading, acknowledging privilege and speaking out to challenge racism. He took Synod through some of the changing language, helping people to be inclusive and non-offensive. Parishes were encouraged to take and use the handouts and to participate in the “Listening Experience” to discuss what individual congregations might do to encourage diversity.
- November - Growing Younger and More Diverse  
Revd Dan Drew’s presentation explored the problems of the diminishing number of young adults and children participating in church activities and shared the findings of the Diocesan report from 2020 which observed that if the current trajectory continued, we would have no younger people or children in parishes by 2030. The three ages where church attendance drops off are 11, 15 and 18 years old. How do we stop this? The Diocese is training 100 people to expand the involvement of children and young people with a pilot scheme started with funding from the Church Commissioners. The aim is to train leaders spiritually as well as practically so they have longevity. Synod members were challenged to consider what they could do. It was recommended that parishes start with small steps and set simple, achievable targets. The meeting was given an example of four church members (80+) who were amazingly supportive and were great with the children.

## **Financial Review** (to be read in conjunction with the Honorary Treasurer’s Report in the 2023 Annual Accounts)

The 2023 Annual Accounts for Holy Trinity show that our annual expenditure (£118,049) exceeded our income (£113,294) by £4,755. This is compared with a deficit of £762 in 2022.

Income was down from 2022. Planned giving dropped in 2023 while cash collections increased. There were no legacies in 2023 compared to a legacy of £3,470 in 2022. Expenditure was also down from 2022.

Whilst the deficits of recent years are small in comparison to the funds held by the PCC they are resulting in a gradual deterioration the values of the funds as they are used to offset the deficits. Reducing the annual General Fund deficit is a key area of financial focus during 2024. There will also be a focus on developing a strategy for greater utilisation of restricted funds for appropriate initiatives and investment in the fabric of the church.

In 2023 investment values increased with an unrealised gain of £74,660. This partly offsets the unrealised loss in 2022 of £106,746. The value of investments held at 31 December 2023 was £861,342 (£786,682 in 2022). Income from these investments in 2023 totalled £23,544.

End of year cash holdings for 2023 were £101,616 (2022: £104,549).

Unrestricted funds now stand at £815,345 including:

- Legacy fund was £31,346 for 2023 (2022: £31,346)
- Hall fund was £19,836 for 2023 (2022: £13,787).

Restricted funds now stand at £50,873

Endowment funds now stand at £124,623.

Meaning total funds now stand at **£990,841** (2022: £920,936).

## **Reserves Policy**

The PCC aims to hold, in current assets, unrestricted fund balances equivalent of between six and nine months of unrestricted expenditure. This ensures there are funds immediately accessible to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies. The target is between £55,000 and £83,000. The year-end unrestricted fund balance held in current assets was £78,626.

D Greely  
Hon Secretary  
Holy Trinity Church  
Bengeo