

St Nicholas with St Mary,
Strood

**ANNUAL REPORT
and
ACCOUNTS
For 2024**

St. Nicholas with St. Mary Strood

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Parochial Name: St. Nicholas with St. Mary, Strood

Postal Address: High Street, Strood, Rochester, Kent
ME2 4TR

Correspondence: The Vicar (Rev Sue Vallente-Kerr)

Address: 3 Central Road, Rochester, Kent **ME2 3HF**

Parochial Church Council Members for 2024

<i>Rev Sue Vallente-Kerr</i>	<i>(Pioneer Minister until December 2024, Vicar from 04.12.2024)</i>
<i>Rob Foxwell</i>	<i>(LLM, Deanery Synod rep for three years from APCM 2023)</i>
<i>Elaine Ford</i>	<i>(Church Warden)</i>
<i>Ken Reynolds</i>	<i>(Church Warden and PCC chair during Interregnum)</i>
<i>Sarah Wilkinson</i>	<i>(From APCM 2022 for three years)</i>
<i>Yvonne Harris</i>	<i>(Stood down APCM 2024)</i>
<i>Jade Goodwin</i>	<i>(Stood down APCM 2024)</i>
<i>Jeff Whiteley</i>	<i>(Stood down APCM 2024)</i>
<i>Olu Odumosa</i>	<i>(From APCM 2022 for three years)</i>
<i>Andy Vince</i>	<i>(From APCM 2022 for three years)</i>
<i>Lanza Wilson</i>	<i>(From APCM 2023 for three years)</i>
<i>Max Russell</i>	<i>(From APCM 2023 for three years)</i>
<i>Ube Casely-Hayford</i>	<i>(From APCM 2023 for three years)</i>
<i>Margaret James</i>	<i>(Deanery Synod rep for three years from APCM 2023)</i>
<i>Robert James</i>	<i>(From APCM 2024 for three years)</i>
<i>Sue Marrable</i>	<i>(From APCM 2024 for three years)</i>
<i>Jeff Whiteley</i>	<i>(Co-opted May 2024)</i>

Number on Electoral Roll: 104

Independent Examiner: Mr G Viggers

Bankers: Barclays Bank, Chatham

Registered charity no.: 1138948

AIMS AND PURPOSES

St Nicholas Church, Strood is a place of worship. We at St. Nicholas with St. Mary seek to fulfil our calling as followers of Jesus Christ. Our primary object is the promotion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. The Parochial Church Council cooperates with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical. We do this in many and varied ways, as the reports below will illustrate. In these ways we witness to the love of God shown to us in our lives and would draw others also into the life of discipleship. This witness is not simply a matter of words but includes practical service to one another and to the wider world, starting from the knowledge that all are loved by God and precious in His sight. We believe that this journey of faith is important for others to find. We also believe that Jesus is in our midst and therefore we seek to serve one another and the Jesus within and amongst us.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

We continue to develop a vision of 'welcome'.

In pursuance of this mission during the year we have:

1. Continued to look at the facilities of the church buildings with a view to improving them for future and current users.
2. Enabled the Worship area of the church be made more available for the onward mission of the church.
3. We continue to aim at implementing the Church of England's Five Marks of Mission:
 - 1 Enabling our church to be mission-minded.
 2. Helping children, young people and adults live out everyday faith in Jesus.
 3. Supporting loving service in local communities.
 4. Encouraging and responding to the prophetic voice of justice and peace.
 5. Protecting creation's life for future generations.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

The centre of our church life is the Sunday services. The live-streaming of the 10:30am Service remains a valuable way for people to worship at home, particularly for those who cannot physically attend church. The email group of over 90 people, is a valuable medium for keeping people in contact with the St Nicholas community and the weekly Rochester Diocesan Digest, which the group receives, keeps people linked to the wider Church and provides useful information about the Diocese. It also gives links to courses and seminars to further members' Christian Faith and informs people of issues within the Church of England and beyond. We were also active in keeping in touch with those who were not online.

The Rev David Green retired at the end of 2023 after 23 years with us, we thank him for his leadership and faith. During the Interregnum year, we were thankful to have the Rev Sue Vallente-Kerr, her family, and many wonderful priests leading our worship. Thanks to them we were able to provide the full "normal" schedule of services.

Rev Vallente-Kerr was appointed and licensed as our new incumbent in December.

Our achievements and the ability to continue the mission of the church would not have been possible without The Rev Sue Vallente-Kerr, our Pioneer Minister, for her vision and active service, her initiative and technical help. To Sue Marrable, our Parish Administrator, for her work in maintaining the smooth running of the church, and for her technical expertise; to Ken Reynolds and Elaine Ford as once again being superb Church Wardens, with Ken also leading our music; to Sue Davis, who has been so helpful in steering our finances, and to all the members of the PCC. We have a Ministry Team, which meets monthly, and ensures that the mission of the church remains central to our church life and vision on a regular basis.

Average weekly attendance: 65 plus those who worship
online 20

Baptisms: 11

Confirmations: 0

Reaffirmation of Faith: 0

Financial Review

During the year, PCC general income reduced by £24,806 (2023 £125,437 2023 £150,243) mostly due to a reduction of grants of £26,258. This is slightly offset by an increase in fees of £1,170 due to the interregnum, an increase of hall rental income of £6,460, an increase in gift aid claimed of £6,113, an insurance receipt of £1,268 and an increase in car park income of £578. There was a reduction of interest of £6,883 due to less reserves in the bank.

General expenditure reduced by £291,521 (2024 £174,411, 2023 £465,932) mostly due to reduced project spending of £274,447 due to the reordering project completing. Parish offer paid was £14,013 lower.

Total cash and balances held in bank accounts at the end of 2024 stood at £132,119 (2023 £201,209).

It is the policy of the PCC to spend reserves under its stewardship to deliver its vision for the future and the PCC continues to discuss the best ways to use its funds to meet God's purpose for the parish of Strood and the wider community.

Of the total cash resources of £132,119 at the end of 2024 £20,881, (2023 £17,468) was held in funds designated for the repair of the church, the installation of a lift to the upper hall and the music fund. £10,621 (2023 £12,123) was held in various restricted funds.

This year income has remained stable. In 2024 income from hall rental, car park and fundraising events increased by 17% on 2023 levels. This income contributed to 40% of general income this year.

We thank God that despite the difficult economic climate, St Nicholas is managing to make ends meet and has been able to make significant improvements to the church and grounds in recent years, as a result of the reserves entrusted to it. We pray for guidance in directing resources to best serve His purpose.

Policy Statements

Liquidity

It is the policy of the PCC to generally maintain unrestricted funds, which are the free reserves of the charity, at a level which equates to approximately three months unrestricted expenditure. This provides sufficient funds to cover management, administration and support costs, and to respond to emergency expenditure and applications for grants that arise from time to time.

Risk Management

The church insurance is reviewed on a regular basis.

Cheques are signed by two signatories.

A Safeguarding policy is in place.

Any potential hazards which come to the PCC's attention are dealt with as soon as possible.

SAFEGUARDING

At the first meeting of a new PCC the House of Bishops' 'Promoting a Safer Church: Safeguarding Policy Statement' is read out and formally adopted by the PCC. A Parish Safeguarding Officer is appointed and details of those to contact if there are any concerns are displayed in church. The PCC adopts the Safeguarding Policy of the Church of England.

AWAY GIVING

We gave to the following charities in 2024:
Friends of Kent churches, Friends of Rochester Cathedral, Christian Aid, Crisis, The Children's Society, The Fishermen's Mission & the Poverty & Hope Appeal

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WORK

See Fresh Expressions.

COFFEE SHOP

The coffee shop is on Saturday mornings and is open to all. It has a small number of regular customers who enjoy being able to purchase refreshments at a reasonable price and the chance to socialise.

CHRISTMAS HAMPERS / COMMUNITY LARDER

At Christmas in collaboration with Strood Rotary club who donated £500 and Toys from The Salvation Army, we were able to provide over 50 hampers to help those families most in need. Thank you to all who helped contribute financially, with items, toys, and a special thanks to a great team who came to help wrap boxes, pack and deliver the hampers. We continue to regularly support several families locally with food. Thanks to Medway council for a generous grant enabling this to happen and to Jeff Whiteley and Sue Marrable for assisting with shopping.

DEANERY SYNOD

Deanery Synod Report 2024

awaiting

ELECTORAL ROLL

To be revised by 13th April

Number of people living within the parish

Number of people living outside the parish

Number of women

Number of men

Total

Fabric Report

We moved into our newly reordered church space at the end of last year even though the project was not quite complete. The completed church was finally handed to us in February 2024 and the new chairs arrived in March. At last, we had the flexible space we had long desired and over the course of the year, we have tried various ways of using it. One or two little problems have arisen over the year, but the contractors have dealt with them very quickly. There were also problems with the church heating which took some time to resolve, caused by buildup of sediment in the system and more recently an issue with the thermostat which has also been resolved.

Inevitably in any older building there are ongoing problems caused by age and, also in our case, the weather. We have a lingering problem with roof leaks, but hopefully these are gradually being resolved.

We also had to restore the south porch doors which were badly affected by the weather and difficult to open. These have now been restored, although the surrounding frames need restoration. In addition, the outer doors leading into the lower hall needed urgent attention. A temporary repair was made and we are planning to replace them; but we have been waiting for the necessary permission for this to go ahead since November 2024.

FRESH EXPRESSIONS

Children and families:

Over the last year our contact with children and families has continued to grow.

Sunday school:-

Although children and families are welcome every Sunday, on the first Sunday of the month we have Sunday school. Thanks to the committed help of Janet Hughes, Jade Goodwin, Rob Foxwell and Jean Kerr. We continue to try and follow a similar theme to the main service through age-appropriate activities and have something for the children to take home to remember the theme.

We had another 7 children receiving communion before confirmation after completing a course.

Families@3

On the third Sunday of each month we hold Families@3 in the afternoon. This involves craft activities and games in the hall followed by a Bible story, an interactive song and creative prayers. We conclude our time together with refreshments.

It has been a real joy to welcome families to these events. We held our First Family Good Friday event with 84 people coming to experience the Easter story. A special thank you to Janet Hughes, Jeff Whiteley, Jean and Paul Kerr for their help and support.

Toddler and Chat

The numbers for the Thursday toddler group fluctuated over the year. It continues to be one of the only free places for toddlers to attend locally, which we feel is important.

The group is a safe space for parents, grandparents and carers to come along, meet others and for the children to play. The highlight is the singing at the end. Thanks to Sue Marrable, Jeff Whiteley and Janet Hughes for their great

commitment to the group especially for setting up and tidying up every week!

Schools

We continue to have good contacts with the schools. We held harvest and Christmas assemblies at All Faiths and Gordon school. We also take termly assemblies for both KS1 and KS2 at Gordon school. We've been into the schools to conduct R.E. lessons and Christingle services and all 3 schools had Christmas celebrations in church.

Ken Reynolds, Brian Davies and I continued to take weekly assemblies at St Nicholas Primary School. We have also been invited to several school production performances and assisted with their Christmas services and Christingles too. We also had the pleasure of welcoming Reception class for a mock baptism where they had chosen parents and Godparents, a name for the baby, and even had a baptism party afterwards.

HALL GROUP

The Church has two halls and the Swain Vestry for the use of both the congregation and outside groups, for social and fund-raising events. The Upper Hall was used by a Playgroup on weekdays all year and Rainbows one night a week. It is also used by a Street Dance group weeknights and a Ballet class for young children on Saturday mornings. The Lower Hall was used by GA, AA, The Phoenix Art Group, Garden Club, Compassionate Friends, Friends of Medway Archives, CA, Strood Fellowship and Floral Art. A church run Parent Toddler used the Lower Hall too.

The Swain Vestry was used by the church, Friends of Rede Common, Warblers Close and Kent Family History for meetings. Compassionate Friends held a monthly Sunday afternoon meeting to support bereaved families until mid-year. Raising Youth continued to be based on site, using the Swain Vestry as an office.

MAGAZINE GROUP

The magazine editorial group, comprising of four people, made decisions by email during 2024.

MUSIC REPORT

We were able to get used to the splendid acoustics for music in our new reordered space, with our regular services and the occasional concert. We had wonderful congregational singing, led by our very loyal and able choir. Thanks to them for all that they do in leading our worship.

The organ was really beginning to show its shortcomings with slow and silent notes with strange sounds sometimes emerging. The last major work was done in 1984. After 40 years, there has been an accumulation of dust, splitting of fine leather as well as collapsing rows of pipes, which all affect the sound and playing. We began fundraising to start the process of repairing and restoring our wonderful organ.

Ken Reynolds

PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

The full Council met six times during 2024. The APCM was held in May. The Standing Committee met bi-monthly in person, and the rest of the PCC were consulted, if needed, via email. At the start of 2024 there were three ex-officio members of the Council and ten elected members and one co-opted. Average attendance at meetings was 69%. Our financial advisor, Sue Davis attended the meeting in March to answer any questions about the financial report for the APCM.

At the first meeting after the APCM, in May 2024, Sue Marrable was appointed as Secretary to the PCC. Ube Casely-Hayford was appointed as Safeguarding Officer and The PCC accepted the Safeguarding Statements of the Church of England House of Bishops. Jeff Whiteley was co-opted and appointed Treasurer.

Rev Sue Vallente-Kerr, Jeff Whiteley, Elaine Ford, Ken Reynolds, Sarah Wilkinson, Rob Foxwell, Sue Marrable and Sue Davis (Financial Advisor) were appointed to form the Standing Committee.

Financial reports prepared by Sue Davis, our financial advisor, were considered and approved at each meeting.

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding at St Nicholas continues to be robust.

Sue Marrable and I work together to ensure all relevant courses and checks are updated and in place.

Over the year we have worked closely with the PCC and our church wardens to ensure that our church environment is inclusive and safe. Posters and relevant information from various courses are linked to our website and posted in the

church.

Our new vicar Rev Sue Vallente-Kerr has been actively involved in safeguarding cases.

Each disclosure has been treated with respect, openness and confidentiality.

We continue to work closely with the Diocesan Safeguarding board.

We marked Safeguarding Sunday in November, as our visiting vicar kindly gave a sermon about it.

In our PCC meetings we discussed the Church of England's national safeguarding standards to ensure good practice. Safeguarding continues to be on every PCC agenda.

I have attended some virtual courses and local meetings. I attended the annual Rochester and Canterbury Safeguarding Conference which had a focus on spiritual abuse. Relevant links to this and other courses such as Kent and Medway Adult Safeguarding and recruitment of Ex-offenders are on our website.

Our aim as a church is to ensure that everyone feels safe and knows where and how to get support when necessary.

Ube Casely-Hayford February 2025

SOCIAL AND GENERAL FUND-RAISING GROUP

Aims:

To provide the social links within our Church and to extend these to the local community.

To encourage and involve the congregation to be part of fund-raising events of our Church.

Objectives:

SOCIAL

To try to target all ages within our Church and community.

FUNDRAISING

To use a variety of events to encourage wide participation and interest.

In 2024 we were able to hold events in our reordered church space. We held a Book Sales, Jumble Sales and Table Top Sales In June we had a Big Lunch in the grounds, with activities for children, and in October we had a Harvest Lunch. For both events people brought their own food or food to share with others. We held a Christmas Bazaar in November which was very successful and well attended.

STANDING AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Aims

To meet prior to each PCC meeting to think through the agenda for that meeting, making any necessary recommendations to the PCC. The Committee also makes interim decisions for the PCC when appropriate.

To work with the Accounts Advisor, who prepares the Accounts for us and gives advice about our financial position. The Standing Committee met bi-monthly during 2024.

WARM SPACE

Warm Space began in December 2023 and ran until March 2024. It opened again in December 2024. The number of people attending slightly increased and it fulfilled a need for people living on their own to have company.

WORSHIP GROUP

The aim of the Worship Group is to be a forum for discussion of every aspect of worship in our church. This includes consideration of the services we provide now, reviewing those that have taken place since we last met, and putting forward ideas for future services. The group also considers feedback from the congregation. The group met regularly throughout 2024.

The Annual Report was accepted at the APCM held on the 27th April 2025

Signed

Date.....

**Independent Examiner's Report to the PCC of St
Nicholas with St Mary, Strood**