

Annual Report 2023



Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Incumbent:

Revd. Canon Clive W Jones

Principal Address:

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Kent
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Gravesend

National Savings Bank
Glasgow
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CAF Bank Ltd
West Malling
Kent

Parochial Church Council of Higham with Merston

Report on the proceedings of the Council

Aim and Purpose

St. John's Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of co-operating with the Priest in Charge, the Reverend Canon Clive W Jones, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

Objectives and Activities

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to use and worship at our church and to become part of our parish community at St. John's. The PCC collaborates with the Parish Priest and Churchwardens in decisions made about acts of worship particularly with a view to involving the groups and organisations that operate within the parish. Our pattern of worship is hinged on the regular celebration of Mass and Morning and Evening prayer. Our worship puts faith into practice through prayer, scripture and Sacrament.

Public Benefit

When planning our activities for the year, the Parish Priest, Churchwardens and PCC have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the specific guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In particular, we try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the Gospel
- Provision of pastoral care for both those who live within the parish and non-resident worshippers
- Leading our Church into Growth – Missionary and outreach work

To facilitate this work, it is important that we maintain the fabric of the Church of St. John and its churchyard and the churchyard of St. Mary's, Higham.

Administrative Information

St. John's Church is situated in Higham, Kent. It is in the Deanery of Gravesend, part of the Church of England Diocese of Rochester, and under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Richborough.

The PCC is a body corporate (PCC Powers and Measure 1956, Church Representation Rules 2020) and a charity registered with the Charity Commission. The PCC takes regard of the Charity Governance Code and is working towards compliance with the Code where it is relevant to the PCC's activities.

PCC members who have served during 2023 are:

Ex Officio:

Parish Priest	The Revd. Canon Clive Jones	Chair
Churchwardens	Mrs Helen Walker	Vice-Chair
	Mrs Teresa Joblin	

Representatives on the Deanery Synod:

Mr Stephen Phillips - Stepped down May 2023.

Miss Lynne Chesterton – Elected May 2023.

Mr Neil Jerome – Elected September 2023.

Elected Members

Mr Edward Hance	Asst. Hon. Treasurer & Data Compliance Officer
Mrs Valerie Laurens	DBS First Recruiter
Mrs Carole Rough	Hon. Secretary & Electoral Roll Officer
Mrs Sarah Wright	Hon. Treasurer
Mrs Anne Tammas-Williams	DBS Second Recruiter.
Mrs Nancy Hughes	
Mrs Elizabeth Croker	
Mrs Tracey Jerome	Parish Safeguarding Officer
Mrs Catherine Ody	

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Recruitment and appointment of New Trustees

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

Induction and training of New Trustees

All new members of the PCC are mentored by serving members and are advised of their duties and responsibilities.

Committees

To manage its time in an effective way, the PCC operates several committees, which meet as appropriate throughout the year. The Parish Priest is an ex officio member of all committees including one or both of the Churchwardens. Committees have the power to co-opt non-PCC members for a specified period of time as appropriate.

Standing Committee: is the only committee required by law. It has power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings, subject to any directions given by the Council. The Churchwardens are ex officio members and usually the Secretary, Treasurer (and/or the Assistant Treasurer) and one other PCC member. This should equate to about one third of the PCC.

Finance Committee: oversees the general financial dimension of the work of St. John's by monitoring income and expenditure and preparing budgets for future expenditure. It is responsible for the co-ordination of the annual review of Planned Giving, which usually takes place during February. They also normally provide a recommended plan for the PCC's charitable giving each year. The committee usually comprises the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer, Stewardship Recorder and both Churchwardens.

Social Committee: is responsible for the organisation of various fund-raising events throughout the year, refreshments after special services and any other social aspects of life at St. John's to bring together our Church and our community.

Policies Committee: was established to ensure that matters which require a standard response to any possible enquiries are agreed by the Parish Priest and the PCC, e.g., baptism, burial, St. Mary's Church and Churchyard, marriage, blessings, St. George's School, content in principle/management of St John's website, etc.

Social Media & Communications Committee: was established to co-ordinate and oversee all aspects of media used by St. John's as tools in furthering the Church's work in the Community.

Volunteers

Members of the PCC act in a voluntary capacity and very much rely on the assistance of people outside of the Council. It has not been possible to quantify the value of volunteers.

Church Attendance

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on the 7th May 2023 it was reported that the number of names on the Electoral Roll stood at 70.

Sunday attendance of adults, together with the number of communicants, has been stable over the year. Children's attendance remains variable week to week but a core group of children with their families do attend.

Zoom Masses remain available throughout the year and the aim is for these to be an ongoing offer while there is a need. Some Parishioners still use the Zoom Mass offer e.g. when unwell, away on holiday.

Achievements and Performance

A total of 6 PCC meetings took place between January and December 2023 on a bi-monthly basis with an average of 10 members in attendance. There has been 1 Extraordinary meeting, with Standing Committee meetings/ decisions taking place via email.

Following Fr Clive settling into St John's and a Vision Day held by Bishop Norman, a working party has been formed and met in November to discuss plans to further develop mission, outreach and vision at St John's.

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Episcopal Care: Formal application was made to the Bishop of Rochester in 2015 to ask for arrangements for episcopal care to be made in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the ministry of Bishops and Priests. We have still not received a written reply to date. However, the appointment of Bishop Norman as an Assistant Bishop of the Diocese implies that this meets our situation in part. The PCC reviewed its resolutions with regard to the ordination of women as bishops and priests in July 2021 and agreed that its position was unaltered.

With the support of Bishop Jonathan, Bishop of Rochester and Bishop Norman, Bishop of Richborough, it was decided due to concerns regarding Fr Clive's health, that he should step down from his role as Priest in Charge of All Saints in August 2023. He is now serving as full time Priest in Charge at St John's.

Worship and Prayer: Except for Thursdays, the daily celebration of Mass continues to form our main act of worship at St. John's. The opportunity to request weekly intercession and thanksgiving prayers has continued to be made available. The chance to light individual, votive candles in memory of deceased loved ones on All Souls Day continues to be popular. The Church, being open for prayer, is used by others as well as members. Lighting prayer candles is a frequent occurrence most days.

As well as our regular services, we enable the wider community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of life's journey. We have celebrated 2 Baptisms and 1 Marriage in our Church and have led 7 funerals for the Community, 3 of these at the crematorium, and 4 in Church; 5 burials of ashes have taken place.

Music: We do not have a contracted Organist at St John's. We are fortunate to have Mr. John Mountford, Head of Music at Kings School, alongside other organists, to support us, when available, by playing the organ at services and working with the Singing Group.

Mission and Evangelism: has continued to be at the forefront of the PCC's discussions. The Monthly Prayer Cycle continues to be used, ensuring that every road within the village is prayed for along with various village organisations and businesses. Bishop Norman's cycle of prayer for the 'Richborough family of Parishes' is also used daily. The monthly Coffee and Conversation sessions which provide a meeting place on a Saturday morning for anyone in the village wishing to get out of the house, meet/make friends and have a good chat took place. Lent Lunches have again been held on Saturdays in Lent 2023, raising money to support Christian Aid.

There continued to be members among the congregation who serve the village community e.g. Friends of S. Mary's, Higham History Group.

Church members and the wider parish are invited to donate to a food collection at St John's, at least once a month, which is then taken to a Foodbank in Gravesend. The generosity of donors has been amazing. In these ways, the people of God and the church of Christ are working for the benefit of the entire community.

A Community Carol service was held on the third Sunday of Advent. The Crib service on Christmas Eve was well attended. Both events drew in a number of participants from outside the usual Congregation. Fr Clive is building links with Higham Primary School and Gads Hill School. Attending their carol services and being involved in assemblies.

Children and Youth work: All activities for the children and young people throughout the year are approved by the PCC and subject to the usual permission being granted. All volunteers working with children require the approval of the PCC and are DBS checked, where necessary. We follow Diocese & Parish guidelines for safeguarding and social media. The safeguarding contacts for children are publicised throughout St John's and on our website.

A growing number of families attend Junior Church regularly, and are getting together in their own fellowship. Regular communication to families continues via email. The teaching team was increased to three, with the addition of Mavis Hearn this year, and we have enjoyed the support of and prayer for each other. Additional teachers/leaders would be very much welcomed. We are hoping that parents, who are becoming increasingly confident and helpful during Junior Church, may be encouraged to help lead in the near future.

We put up a summer board again this year, for which members of the congregation sent in postcards from their travels, highlighting that 'God is Everywhere'. The children made and laid a wreath at the war memorial during our Remembrance Service. We held a Light party at the beginning of December. We had a Children's Activity Table at the Christmas Fair where we promoted our Sunday Junior Church meetings. Children were involved in the making of Christingles, and in participating with readings at the Crib Service as well as helping bring figures up.

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We're very appreciative of Fr Clive's active encouragement of families and Junior Church and the children's participation in Masses. We envisage promoting Junior Church further in the coming year, perhaps with involvement and handouts at coffee mornings and other seasonal events. We will continue to write articles for the Higham Bridge magazine.

Four of our older youth participated in a day out at Carrotty Wood in October half term again this year, along with Fr Clive and Nancy Hughes, and several churches from south London. The day consisted of outdoor adventure, craft, and worship activities. We plan to repeat this in 2024 and hope we can encourage more youth to attend. Charitable funds raised through the Penny Jar collection, totalling £21.88 this year, were given to Mary's Meals.

Social Media and Communications Committee: The Higham Bridge (renamed and redesigned in 2023) – The number of copies printed each month was 265. The quality of printing had increased significantly with the new photocopier and the price of the magazine was reviewed in July 2023. The cost to subscribers was not increased for the period October 2023-September 2024 with 242 copies now being printed for this period. The introduction of a digital version was taken up by 19 subscribers at a slightly reduced fee assisted to reduce the costs.

The Website – Weekly church bulletins are provided online for those who are unable to attend mass. It provides a place for reminders of special masses, foodbank collection dates, and a source for daily readings and prayers. Work on the website is ongoing with updates made to ensure accuracy of content.

Facebook & Twitter – Our social networking sites enable us to engage with the congregation, the community and the wider church with news/announcements, seasonal celebrations and campaigns, and inspirational content. We follow Diocesan policy and guidelines for adults and children, and respect those who do not wish to appear on social media. We are always seeking to improve the relevance and vitality of our social media activity. Visits to our Facebook page have increased significantly this year, with a 23% increase in new followers over the previous year. Twitter/X remains fairly constant with a very slight increase in followers.

Social Committee: This group continues to organise food following major feasts and solemnities, to facilitate, encourage and foster a greater ministry of welcome and hospitality e.g. St John's Dedication day, the Coronation.

This year, fund-raising events were organised for Burns Night and Harvest Thanksgiving.

The Policies Committee: The Marriage policy was amended and the changes agreed by the PCC on 21st March. There is a local guidance document regarding Burials.

The Vestry Hall: Is generally available to be used by the wider community for family celebratory events, outreach groups, exercise groups, meetings etc. Some local groups normally use the facilities most weeks, as well as the hall being used for study groups and church social events which the wider community is encouraged and invited to attend. Groups that used the hall in 2023 were – Higham Choral Group, Knit & Natter, T'ai Chi, Cardcraft, Yoga, the Parish Council, Higham Village History Group, Higham Duo. Users of the hall follow the Vestry Hall Guidance document. Due to increased costs it was decided at the July PCC meeting to increase the donation for use of the hall from £8 an hour to £10 per hour for local people/parishioners and from £10 per hour for business groups to £12.

No.17 Hermitage Road: Fr Clive received for signature two copies of a Trust Deed compiled by the Diocesan Solicitors, Cripps, in respect of 17 Hermitage Rd, which clarified that the Diocese is the custodian trustee on behalf of the PCC as beneficiaries. Letting agents M&M continue to manage the property under a shorthold tenancy that is reviewed every year in October. A copy of the inventory which was initially taken and held by M&M has now been received. The tenants that moved into No. 17, in October 2022 continue to rent the property. Mrs Walker, Churchwarden, keeps a log of all work and/or repairs carried out at the property.

St. Mary's Church and Churchyard: Usually four services are held each year. This year, one mass and two vespers services took place. The programme of vegetation clearance, to keep the Churchyard accessible to the Higham community and other visitors, has continued, funded by Rolfe's Charity. Also a volunteer who lives locally has been supporting with nettle clearance.

General Church Repairs: General maintenance and repairs have taken place at St John's Church over the year. Work has also taken place to:

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Repair wiring to the sockets of the wall heaters in the Vestry Hall and a burnt-out socket in the kitchen. Application has been made for a faculty to update the lighting board in the church and to change all the security lights to LEDs.

The Quinquennial inspection took place in April, some recommendations were made which are being followed up.

The tree survey was carried out by Down to Earth in October, a few recommendations were made and a quote for £270 was given to carry out this work.

Bell Tower: Our group of bell ringers continue to improve and practise. They carried out events to support the celebration of the Coronation. 'Ringing for the King', a quarter peal (45 rings) took place on the 6th and 7th May. Also the bell tower was opened for visits by the public on 8th May (risk assessments completed) before joining the Village Parade with the handheld bells. In July the clock in the tower was inspected and some servicing completed to ensure the clock is now functioning.

Financial Review:

Finance remains a major item on the PCC's agenda. It continues to be difficult to raise sufficient funds to ensure the smooth running of St John's. The cost of living has impacted on us all and on St John's. Energy bills have risen sharply and take up a good proportion of our income.

In 2023, our expenditure at £90,879, was £1,924 more than our income of £88,955. However, some of the expenditure was for items for which we had received donations in previous years. It is also worth noting that without support from Rolfe's charity and Locketts, our expenditure over income would be far more and we thank these charities for their support.

Our biggest expense this year (energy bills aside) was replacing a 24" Corpus and a 42" Corpus at a total cost of £3,733.05. Most of this money came from legacies that we had received in previous years – we did not receive any legacies in 2023. We also purchased a new lectern at a cost of £917.80 with money given to us for this purpose. Legacies are placed in our CAF Gold account.

In 2023 we opened a CAF cash account as otherwise we would not have been able to keep our CAF Gold Account. Extensive research was carried out at the end of 2022 when we were informed of this change as to whether a different deposit account should be opened. However, after the results of the research were reported to the PCC it was decided that a CAF cash account should be opened and the Gold account retained.

With regard to expenditure and invoices, we are currently investigating the charges made for our photocopying – we have asked the company to check their counters (It is all done remotely) as they are charging us for many more colour prints than we feel we could possibly have done!

It is the policy of St John's to maintain unrestricted funds which are the free reserves of the PCC which equates to 2 months unrestricted expenditure. This provides sufficient funds to cover administration, maintenance and support costs and to respond to emergency situations.

It just remains to say thank you to you all for your generous giving, and to ask you to continue to support St John's financially or in whatever way you are able.

Away-Giving: It is the policy of the PCC to work towards being able to give away to charitable causes a sum equal to 5% of our disposable income, less expenses beyond our control, e.g., Parish Offer, rates and taxes, and restricted funds.

Each of the causes listed below was paid the following sum during 2023:

Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage - £100

College of St Barnabas, Gravesend Daytime Hub, Diocese of Rochester Poverty & Hope appeal and Friends of the Holy Land - £485 each.

In addition to this:

£450 was raised for the Turkey and Syria Earthquake appeal.

£500 was sent to Christian Aid as a result of Lent Lunches, 'fines' and personal giving .

£780 was raised during Christian Aid week.

£660 was raised following the Harvest Lunch, raffle and bucket appeal. Half the money was sent to Mary's Meals and the other to Christian Aid's Libya appeal.

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Planned Giving: Mrs Cheryl Robins continued with her role as Stewardship Secretary. The Finance committee produced their annual planned giving appeal, taking into account GDPR, by distributing packs to all members of the Congregation.

Risk Management

It is the PCC's intention to identify the major risks which impact on the work of the Church in the Parish. We already have in place, a policy on the Recruitment of Ex-offenders, a set of financial procedures, a grievance procedure for employees, a Health & Safety Policy, a policy on Domestic Violence and Lone Working Guidance. The PCC has also adopted the diocesan Dignity at Work policy. Health and safety risks are monitored on an on-going basis and are dealt with as they are identified, and a risk analysis is updated annually.

The Council has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 to have due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. The PCC has appointed Officers to deal with the requirements of the Disclosure and Barring Service and Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection.

Safeguarding

Mrs T Jerome continues in her role of Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO). She is also now a PCC member so any needed information or updates can be shared during meetings. Mrs Jerome receives updates regarding Safeguarding via the Diocesan Safeguarding Newsletter.

Mrs. C Rough continues in her role as the Lead Recruiter and Mrs. N Hughes continues in her role as Second Lead Recruiter. The PCC receives regular updates from Mrs C Rough regarding DBS.

Safeguarding is a standing item on each PCC agenda. All members have undergone DBS checks and newly elected members will be DBS checked.

The Standing Committee met in May 2021 to discuss and complete an updated version of the 'Delegation of Reporting of Serious Incidences to the Charity Commission' form. This was discussed at the July PCC meeting, and it was agreed to accept the updated version of the form.

A Safeguarding Audit was completed in April 2019.

The PCC accepts and implements the House of Bishops' 'Promoting a Safer Church Policy Statement' and adopts the same as its own policy.

A Parish Safeguarding Handbook is kept in the Safeguarding folder in the church for easy access to all.

All re-elected Members and Officers of the PCC have completed the required level of online Safeguarding training. Newly elected members will be supported to access this training if needed asap.

Health and safety: We have a CCTV system to help minimise the risk of leaving the Church building unlocked during the day. An asbestos check and a fire risk analysis on the church buildings have been completed and recorded. Fire evacuation procedure is outlined on occasion to the Congregation and large groups, and there are signs and notices on display. Full details of this procedure are also given to organisations using the church building for events. All Sidesmen are aware of the procedure. Maintenance of fire extinguishers and PAT testing of electrical items is carried out on an annual basis. A full electrical inspection and a lightning conductor inspection take place every five years.

Policies and Guidance: The PCC has agreed and recorded local policies and/or guidance regarding burials, baptisms and marriages, the use of St Mary's Church and Churchyard and St John's Churchyard, which are additional to the Diocesan Regulations. Local policies have also been agreed regarding the signature by the Parish Priest of application forms for entrance and free travel to St George's school, and the use of social media. Also, policies regarding the personal safety of lone workers and legacies to St John's are in place.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR): The PCC takes into account GDPR that became law in May 2018. The Parish's Data Controller is the Incumbent in conjunction with the PCC. Mrs V Laurens was appointed as Data Compliance Officer. Policies, consent forms and privacy notices were produced in compliance with the regulations.

In July Mrs Laurens updated the Social Media Policy and appendices to reflect some recent changes in GDPR regarding the photography/filming of adults in church. PCC members agreed the changes to the updated Social Media Policy and Guidelines document.

Lay Ministry

Mr Phillips' Lay Minister at St John's, stepped down from his role in October.

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Sarah Wright

Reverend Canon Clive W Jones

Hon. Secretary

Priest in Charge