

Registered Charity No. 1175403

**Financial Statements
for the year ended**

31 December 2024

and

Annual Report

**St Mary the Virgin Prestwich
Parochial Church Council**

Name & Address

The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical parish of St Mary the Virgin, Prestwich
Church Lane
Prestwich
Greater Manchester
M25 1AN

Legal Status

The PCC is registered with the Charity Commissioners of England and Wales under charity registration number 1175403

Bank Details & Accounts

Current Account:
St Mary's Prestwich PCC Club and Society current account.
NatWest
01-07-20
49036955

Reserve account:

St Mary's Prestwich PCC Club and Society reserve account.
NatWest
01-07-20
49036963

Independent Examiner

Carolyn McGloughlin
St John's House
The Rock
Bury
BL9 0ND

Administrative information

St Mary's Church is situated in Prestwich, Greater Manchester, in the Metropolitan Borough of Bury. It is part of the Anglican Diocese of Manchester. The correspondence address is St Mary's Rectory, 67, Scholes Lane, Prestwich M25 0AW

Members of the Parochial Church Council March 2024 – March 2025

The Rev'd Shaun Conlon – ex-officio (Priest-in-Charge) until Sept 24
The Rev'd Carole Barnet – ex-officio (Associate Priest)
The Rev'd Adele McKie – ex-officio (Assistant Curate) until April 24
The Rev'd Gary Anderton – ex-officio (Assistant Curate) until Sept 24
Miss Lindsay Broxap – ex-officio (Churchwarden)
Mrs Helen Hicks – ex-officio (Deanery Synod Representative)
Mr Max Hebditch – *Honorary Treasurer*
Mrs Pauline Jones – *Honorary Secretary*
Ms Kim Morgan-Jones - *Safeguarding Officer*
Mr William Max-McCarthy
Mrs Emma Chadwick
Mrs Hazel Delves
Mrs Carole Worsley
Mrs Ann Parkinson
Ms Sarah Matthews
Mrs Cath Black

Objectives and activities of the PCC

During normal times the PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Priest-in-Charge in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. During an interregnum the PCC ensures the continuation of services, pastoral care, financial management and safeguarding. They also play a crucial role in the finding of and recruiting a new incumbent and ensuring a smooth transition.

Structure, Governance and Management

The method of appointment of parochial Church Council members is set out in Church Representation Rules.

St Mary's PCC consists of the Priest-in-charge (Incumbent), currently vacant.

Other licensed clergy in the parish (currently 2)

2 Churchwardens (currently 1)

3 Deanery Synod representatives (currently 1)

12 elected lay members

Deanery Synod representatives (in addition to their general PCC responsibilities) attend meetings with clergy and laity of other churches in the Bury and Rossendale Deanery to discuss, support and further the mission of the Anglican churches within the deanery and the wider Diocese.

All members, except those who are ex-officio, and any who are legally co-opted onto the committee, must be nominated and elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting before they can serve on the PCC. All PCC members are required to be on the church electoral roll, and must be actual communicant members. Each year, it is encouraged as widely as possible that all members entered on the church electoral roll consider standing for election.

There is also a statutory standing committee of the PCC, which consists of the Priest-in-Charge (currently vacant), Churchwarden (currently 1), PCC Secretary and Treasurer (and one other PCC member when all elected positions are filled). The Standing Committee deals with emergency issues that arise between meetings and considers the agenda for upcoming PCC meetings. It was decided that during the interregnum that the standing committee would be temporarily suspended and the PCC meet every 6 weeks instead of 8.

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St Mary the Virgin Parish Church, Prestwich

St Mary the Virgin, Prestwich, is an historic Grade 1 listed Anglican Parish Church, currently part of the Diocese of Manchester. The earliest record of a priest serving Prestwich dates from around 1200 and the name Prestwich (derived from the Saxon words for 'priest's dwelling') suggests an even earlier church existed here. It seems likely that Christian worship has been offered on this site for more than 800 years. The parish is a mix of owner-occupied and rented

residential accommodation, retail and office premises, schools and community buildings and open spaces. There is a sizeable Jewish population locally. A parish primary school (St Mary's voluntary aided CE school) has strong links with the church community and a very rooted Christian ethos. St Mary's Church was, for a number of years, part of the Prestwich Mission Partnership, which included the parishes of St Gabriel, Prestwich, St Margaret, Prestwich and St George, Simister: the partnership has sought to bring the life of these churches closer together. Towards the end of 2021 the Diocese of Manchester formalised the boundaries of new Mission Communities, which saw an end of Mission Partnerships and ushered in a new pattern for working together with neighbouring churches and their parishes: as well as those mentioned above we are now connected with the parishes of St Hilda, Prestwich and St Paul, Kersal Moor with St Andrew, Carr Clough. St Mary's church is registered with *Inclusive Church* and aims to align its Christian life and vision in ways which are welcoming of all people.

Objectives and achievements

The aims and objectives of St Mary's Church Prestwich, and members of the Christian community there, include:

- Regular public worship
- Provision of accessible public sacred space for prayer and reflection
- The promotion and teaching of Christianity
- Engagement with the local community
- Provision of pastoral care and support within the parish and to members of the church
- Working with local organisations and schools, in particular St Mary's CE primary school
- Provision of a safe and welcoming churchyard, open for interments (in accordance with the Diocesan Chancellor's regulations) and visits by the general public
- Support of other charities at home and abroad

These aims and objectives were fulfilled in the following ways during 2024.

Throughout the year, the church was open to the public for both the conduct of acts of worship and to provide a still, peaceful and beautiful place for reflection, prayer and exploration. Throughout the year the church was open for public worship every Sunday, as well as on other days and occasions, including major Christian Festivals, Breathing Space monthly on a Wednesday evening, Holy hour and Eucharist monthly on a Saturday morning, and an experiential teaching course (Connecting with God) monthly on a Friday evening. A heritage open day was held in September which included special displays detailing elements of the church's history locally as well as leaflets being available about both the church building and its contents and the churchyard.

A number of individuals visited the church by appointment, and others simply came in to look around or enjoy the silence and prayerful atmosphere during times when the church was open.

A number of occasional offices were held in St Mary's during the year, including weddings, baptisms and funerals, and a number of people were buried, or had their cremated remains interred, in the churchyard. A service of remembrance for the many hundreds of former Prestwich Hospital patients who are buried in the churchyard was held in October.

In June some members of the church took part in the 'Seven Churches' Walk, which had been established a number of years previously as a joint annual activity of the five churches making up the Prestwich Mission Partnership and is now being continued by all seven churches comprising the Prestwich & Kersal Mission Community: St Mary's was one of the seven 'stops' on the walk.

St Mary's is signed up to the 'Inclusive Church' network and endeavours to offer a welcoming and safe space to all who want to visit the church or worship there. Toilet facilities for the disabled continue to be provided, as well as large print service and hymn books and audio amplification equipment and a Loop system.

Pastoral care by both clergy and lay visitors was offered in various ways during the year. Housebound members of the Christian community of the church continued to be offered communion at home or in hospital and general pastoral visits and phone calls were made to many members of the community. Other pastoral visits to those who were ill, dying and bereaved, and to those preparing for baptism and marriage, were conducted.

The churchyard provided people with green space to enjoy and a number of tours were arranged by members of the Churchyard Action Group. Work was done to ensure safety concerns were addressed regarding diseased/dead trees and access paths to areas currently in use for new burials were improved. Consideration was given to the beginning of clearing undergrowth from areas which will need to be prepared for new interments when the current section is full. A number of people contacted the church during the year exploring their family history and making enquiries about burial records etc. Following a significant collapse of waterworks just beyond church land boundaries last year, United Utilities continued to use the south-west corner of the churchyard for access to the affected areas and stored some of their equipment on church land (not on areas with graves). Work in this area finished in the latter half of the year with all ground being left in sound condition and the instalment of new gates on Clough Drive.

The PCC and wider congregation continued to support local community activities in a number of ways: on-going collections of foodstuffs and other items were donated to the local 'Porch Boxes' charity. Collecting Boxes for The Children's Society are held by a number of members of the congregation and local people. A new idea from Paula Holmes-Patel saw the congregation bring new baby clothes and baby gifts on Epiphany with the gifts being given to a local baby charity.

A number of social events happened throughout the year, some of them with religious elements. The annual Christmas Fayre, organised and run jointly with the Church School, helped to strengthen the bonds between the church and school communities, it was extremely well attended and enjoyed by all. We had another successful Heritage Day in September featuring informative churchyard tours, childrens' quizzes, the church mouse hunt and Father Shaun's Unicorn Race. We held our 3rd Eco-Day in July on the theme of Up-cycling Re-cycling. It was a successful event involving other churches within our Mission Community. We continue to collect blister packs, with volunteers taking them into recycling centres on a regular basis.

A number of Christian Nurture courses were organised during the year, including a Lent Course, Breathing Space and a monthly 'Connecting with God' evening.

Pre-School Praise sessions for children aged 0-4yrs continued to grow and be extremely popular with new volunteers joining the team to help with refreshments and care of the youngsters.

Links with the Church school remained strong and continued to develop over the year. Weekly worship was provided by members of the clergy team in school, and numerous clergy visits were made to classrooms and to staff for a range of reasons. Over the course of the year a number of St Mary's CE Primary School visits and services happened in the church and churchyard, including a Year 6 Leavers' service in July. Other services in church included a Christingle, a School Easter Eucharist, a Harvest Festival service and a Christmas Carol Service. Children from each of the eight classes (reception – Year 6) jointly led worship along with the clergy on four Sundays during the year, with two classes attending each time.

The Church choir met weekly for practises during the year. The full choir not only assisted in leading the Sunday worship but also held an Advent Carol Service and a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in November/December in church for the local community, they also performed Stainer's The Crucifixion alongside the choir of Bolton Parish Church during Lent. The level of ability is high and there is an open-door policy for new members, with training and support offered for those who need it.

Current Priorities and Future Developments

Following the departure of Rev Adele McKie in April 24 and the resignation of Father Shaun Conlon and Father Gary Anderton in September '24 the PCC have pulled together as a team to manage the church during interregnum. Whilst many of the PCC members are new or relatively new to their roles there has been a real sense of working together, with experienced members helping and assisting the newer ones. Jobs have been divided amongst PCC members with everyone playing their part, whether it is organising services, collecting post or doing the

banking. Everyone has been keen and willing to help, there is a real desire to see the Church flourish and grow, with new ideas developing all the time.

We sent our Parish Profile to the Diocese at the end of the year ready to start the process of recruiting a new incumbent.

The church website has been continually updated and developed. We have moved to a new newsletter format which is emailed out each week to our mailing list, with links to readings and notices.

Work with the other Anglican Churches in the Prestwich and Kersal Mission Community continues, with clergy meeting and praying on a regular basis. We have been fortunate to host a number of clergy from the Mission Community as they have come to preach and preside for us during the vacancy. We have been incredibly grateful to those who have helped with cover.

A number of new people have begun attending worship and other events during the year, as was the case in 2023. Although many of these do not attend every week, many are now very much part of the life of St Mary's and the need to continue to build up the cohesion and stability of the congregation is an on-going priority.

Eco concerns have continued to be explored, with the hosting of our Eco Day and collaboration with other churches and local community groups. We are constantly looking at how we can be more eco friendly as a church and inspire others to do the same.

Risk and its management

Potential adversities may be categorised according to their combined risk/impact potential. Those with a high risk but low impact are set at one end of the scale, with low risk/high impact at the other end. Both parameters are important and both risk and impact should be minimised.

Financial risks are a reduction in income and/or an increase in costs. Both have the potential to have major impact upon the capacity of St Mary's Church to continue all her present activities and functions and limit any future development.

Rapidly rising energy costs, and the general high rises in the cost of living pose a risk to the income and expenditure of St Mary's, with both church bills and people's bills at home increasing. Our new treasurer Mr Max Hebditch has worked tirelessly to challenge an especially high gas bill this year and continues to ensure that St Mary's energy tariff is as reasonable as it can be, with a new smart meter being fitted to enable us to monitor usage. Other costs continue to be cut back as much as possible.

Grant funding for projects will become more actively sought beyond just large fabric repair costs.

Physical risks, to people, are judged to be low, but would have a high impact if they materialised. St Mary's carries an appropriate level of insurance. Other risks are also recognised: the protection of children and vulnerable adults is taken seriously and St Mary's complies with the relevant Church of England and Diocesan policies. The PCC is working towards a lower risk/impact potential, not just financial, but across all areas.

Audited Accounts January – December 2024

These are printed separately.

Treasurer's Report 2024

Income

Total income for 2024 was **£148,605**. This was 216% higher than the income received in 2023 (£67,180). The majority of this difference was a significant legacy from the estate of the late Marian Eckersall (£67,416.36) but income is broadly up overall.

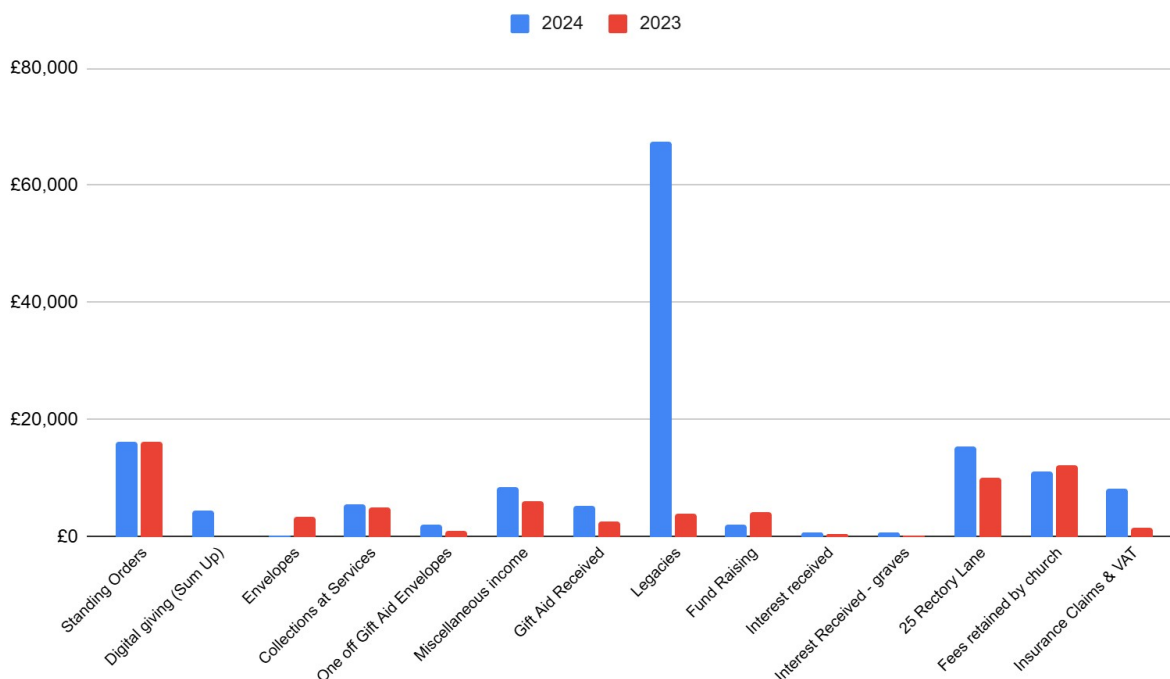


Figure 1: Income sources over £500 for 2024 vs 2023.

Income Sources in 2024

Voluntary Income

Standing Orders

	2024	2023
Standing Orders	£16,347	£16,291
Digital giving (Sum Up)	£4,352	*See table 4
Envelopes	£280	£3,541
Collections at Services	£5,623	£4,912
One off Gift Aid Envelopes	£2,116	£1,098
Miscellaneous income	£8,526	£6,045
Gift Aid Received	£5,393	£2,535
Other	£387	—
Sum	£45,048	£36,445

Table 1: Comparison of voluntary income between 2024 and 2023

Income received through monthly or weekly standing orders continues to be the highest source of income and in 2024 was £16,437 compared with £16,291 in 2023 and £15,100 in 2022. In 2024, 31 individuals donated regularly through standing orders, up from 30 in 2023 and 29 in 2022. Of these 27/31 gave consistently throughout the year with 3 members cancelling their standing order and 1 starting.

	2024	2023	2022
Total Donated	£16,437.00	£16,291.00	£15,100.00
Number of Donors	310	30	29
Average Monthly Amount	£43.94	£45.18	£43.39

Table 2: Breakdown of standing orders from 2024. 2023 and 2022

This year the average monthly (pro-rata) standing order donation was £43.94 down from £45.18 last year.

Monthly Amount	Total Donations
<= £5	24
> £5 or <= £10	50
> £10 or <= £20	53

> £20 or <= £40	54
> £40 or <= £60	98.5
> £60 or <= £80	46
>= £90	34
Total	359.5 Donations

Table 3: Categorised donation amounts for 2024. Note weekly donations have been converted to the equivalent in monthly donations.

Other giving

Voluntary giving has increased by 29.5% for 2024 in comparison to 2023. The new card donation scheme (Digital giving) continues to be a popular and significant income stream and likely explains the drop in envelopes. This year has also seen an increase over last year for collections at services as well as the use of One off Gift aid envelopes.

	2024	2023
Digital giving (Sum Up)	£4,352	*
Envelopes	£280	£3,541
Collections at Services	£5,623	£4,912*
One off Gift Aid Envelopes	£2,116	£1,098
	£12,371	£9,551

*Table 4: Comparison of non-regular giving from the congregation. * Note that collections at services for 2023 includes £2,623 collected using Digital Giving which has been categorised separately for 2024 onwards.*

Amount	Count	Sum
£1	2	£2
£2	2	£4
£3	2	£6
£4	1	£4
£5	229	£1,145
£10	106	£1,060
£20	12	£240
£30	19	£570
£40	1	£40
£100	13	£1,300
Total	387	£4,371

Table 5: Donations from digital sum up

Fees

Income obtained through ceremonial fees for 2024 was consistent with previous years. In 2024 the church received a net income of £6,509 compared to £6,594 for 2023 and £6,600 for 2022.

Month	Retained	Diocese	Total
Jan	£408	£282	£690
Feb	£757	£527	£1,284
Mar	£1,153	£437	£1,590
Apr	£418	£291	£709
May	£356	£436	£792
Jun	£36	£34	£70
Jul	£150	£17	£167
Aug	£869	£855	£1,724
Sep	£1,052	£376	£1,428
Oct	£1,310	£440	£1,750
Nov	£0	£0	£0
Dec	£0	£0	£0
Sum	£6,509	£3,695	£10,204

Table 6: Summary of ceremonial fees for 2024.

Legacies

This year included a substantial legacy gratefully received from the Estate of the Late Marian Eckersall. This generous donation of £67,416.36 had a significant impact on our income for 2024. Of this, £20,000 was placed into the general fund, £20,000 into a fund for fabric, £20,000 was invested into a 1 year savings account and the remaining £7,416 was placed into a mission fund.

Other notable income sources

Additional notable income for this year includes £4,750 from ITV filming for two occasions. A gross total of £3336.77 was raised by the Christmas fayre which was divided equally between the Church and the School.

Rental income from the Rectory Lane property continues to be a significant income source of £15,325.

The Churchyard action group contributed £2,659.60 for a tree felling.

An insurance claim of £7,500 towards the replacement of lead rainwater goods.

Expenditure

Total expenditure for 2024 was **£89,323** down from £124,347, of which £50,000 was the write-off of Church Lane community centre, subtracting this one off expense provides a more comparative value of £74,347 for 2023.

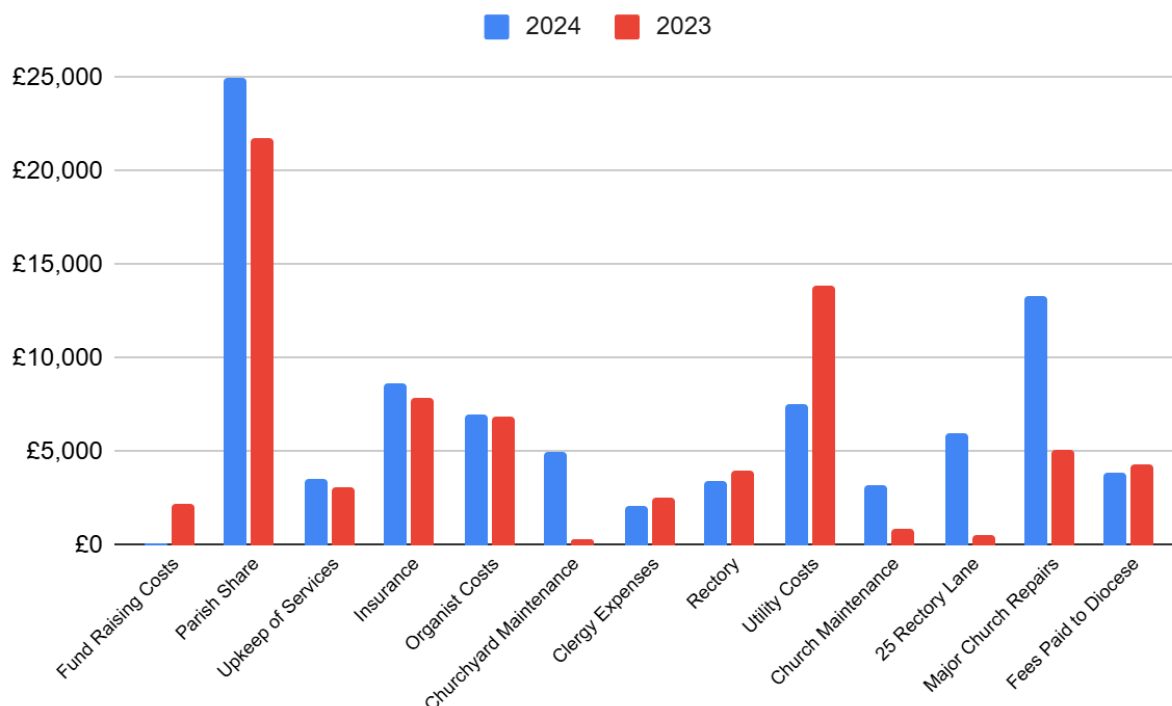


Figure 2: Significant expenditure for 2024 vs 2023

Expenditure in 2024

Parish Share

As with previous years Parish Share continues to be the Church's largest expenditure. This year represents our increased commitment of £25,000 a year compared to £21,744 for 2023 and the PCC has agreed to further increases in our contribution for 2025 (£29,000) and 2026 (£33,000) to ensure we are once again paying our share in full. The congregation's generosity enables the diocese to sustain an effective ministry funded through the parish share, fulfilling our commitment by 2026 ensures that our church no longer relies on other congregations to finance the mission and ministry across our diocese. Gift aid raised from donations from the sum up machine are automatically included for a total of £5211.72 for this year.

Utility Costs

Although utility costs are down for 2024 this is due to an ongoing discussion with our gas supplier due to an issue with the gas meter and this will be a liability for us in 2025.

Repairs and Insurance

A major source of expenditure for this year is repair work. Theft of lead rainwater goods has led to a replacement cost of £8328 including VAT which is recoverable. As well as roof repairs costing £1512 incl VAT and fixing false ceiling beams at a cost of £1260 incl VAT.

The cost of the above items makes clear the necessity of insurance which led to a cost of £8,639 for the Church and Rectory. A claim of £7,500 was made to support the cost of replacing the leadwork.

Church Maintenance

Essential repairs to the church this year included roof maintenance at a cost of £1572 incl VAT as well as other small legally required maintenance items and other small upkeep costs.

Rectory Lane

Expenditure has increased for maintaining the rental property at Rectory Lane, due to a major roof repair of £1945.20, and boiler repair at £450. This total also reflects some changes in the accountancy moving forwards.

Reserves

At the end of 2024 St Mary's had £20,069 in the current account and £62,352 in the reserve account for a total of £82,421. Of this amount £41,740 are for funds with a specific purpose leaving an available balance for 2024 of **£40,681** up from £23,016 in 2023.

Notes

The accounts from the Churchyard Action Group were not supplied when requested and thus cannot be included in this year's accounting.

Conclusion

As ever the PCC endeavour to keep costs to a minimum whilst raising as much income as possible. Our income for 2024 was healthy but this is primarily due to the generous legacy from the Estate of the Late Marian Eckersall. Subtracting this amount, our income is broadly in line with last year (£73,032 vs £65,666), but our expenses have increased overall from £74,347 (subtracting the Community Centre) to £89,323 in 2024. Parish share has also increased this year and in line with our commitment to the Diocese will increase further in 2025 and again in 2026.

May I appeal to those who enjoy our church, who may not be doing so already? Please consider committing to regular giving through a standing order, direct debit, internet banking, or other means. And please would you complete a Gift Aid form if you are a UK taxpayer, which enables

the church to claim back an extra 25% from HMRC. Forms are available at the back of the church, and it only takes a couple of minutes to complete.

Our bank details are as follows:

Nat West Bank

Account number: 49036955.

Sort Code: 01-07-20.

I would also like to sincerely thank Hazel Froggatt who has served the parish faithfully for over twenty years which is an incredible feat. She stepped down from her role in April and completed the financial records till then. Since then she has continued to perform part of the role until the necessary legal work is completed allowing me to take over fully. She has, and continues to be, hugely supportive during the transition as I take over the role and I am extremely grateful for her support.

Max Hebditch - Treasurer

Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council

Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council

Purpose

The purpose of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) is to set the strategic direction and vision for the life of the parish. Its main focus is on:

Mission & outreach

Finance & Governance

Discipleship & Pastoral care

Worship & Spirituality

PCC membership is continuing to follow a new pattern of three-year terms of service. The PCC was joined by 6 elected members in 2024 and this has enabled the PCC to remain quorate when decisions are being made if for any reason a member is unable to attend a meeting. There are three ex-officio spaces to be filled (one Churchwarden space and two deanery synod spaces).

In 2024 following the departure of the incumbent, the PCC took the decision to meet every six weeks as opposed to bi-monthly. Standing committee meetings are currently suspended during the vacancy. The PCC members have worked well together and are creating a much clearer and stronger sense of vision and purpose for the future. This was evident when preparing the Parish Profile to advertise for a new priest.

Along with the Prestwich & Kersal Mission Community, Safeguarding has become a regular standing item on the agenda. The majority of PCC members have now completed Level 1 and 2 training.

The church's financial position has improved following a generous legacy which was left (see financial report for further details). Following a productive meeting in 2024 when Parish Share was discussed, our contribution was reduced to a more realistic amount and in 2024, St Mary's was able to pay their full Parish Share (the first time this has happened for several years).

The church website has been updated and relaunched. The annual review of the Church Organist's contract and remuneration, as well as heating fee costs for weddings/funerals is discussed at the last PCC meeting of the year. The PCC continues to discuss missional/fundraising activities and how we can reach out and grow our community.

Pauline Jones – PCC Secretary

Electoral Roll Report

The new Electoral Roll, which replaces the Roll of 2019, has been compiled from the application forms submitted to apply for inclusion on the Roll.

The total number of people on the 2023 Electoral Roll was 135. In 2024 eight had died. Twelve were recorded by the previous Electoral Officer Father Shaun as Non-Resident Non-Attending (NRNA) drawing on his pastoral experience; NR meant not dwelling in the parish. There was 1 more non-attending who was resident in the parish.

So the total reported in July 2024 was 114.

The current total on the new Roll is 85 of whom 31 were on the former Roll. The number of new members is 54.

It is not unexpected to see a decrease in numbers between the last Electoral Roll before a new Roll. The last Roll will have had additions over 6 years. Deaths decrease the numbers but non-attendance is more difficult to document.

There are a number of logistic problems that have not been considered in proposals at Diocesan level to decrease the Roll each year by the names of non-attenders or to update the Roll by on-line applications. Non-attendance is seldom documented.

The sexennial period was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Attendances are generally down across most parishes, dioceses and denominations.

Helen Hicks - Electoral Roll Officer

Deanery Synod Report

The Rev'd Canon Donna Williams was licenced as Area Dean of Bury and Rossendale Deanery. Father Ronnie Croft of St. Hilda's celebrated 60 years in ministry on 24th May 2024.

St. Mary's Prestwich was represented at all the Deanery Synod meetings in 2024.

Communications

Communications was one of the recurring topics at the Synod. A Church Near You is a valuable introduction for people who are not yet part of the congregation but the information needs to be kept up to date. Social media offers another snapshot. Representatives were asked to share news and photos and to sign up to the Diocese weekly E-news.

Representing the Deanery

There is a need for more people to represent the Deanery. At present there are 4 Clergy and 4 lay representatives for the 7 Clergy and 8 Lay representatives allowed.

Resources

There is a Revitalisation Fund grant for up to £300 to fund schemes/events.

It has been suggested that there be an audit of skills at Deanery Synod. to create a database of tradespeople/helpers/IT support and so on. -

Mission Communities

There are no stipendiary clergy, at Christ Church, Ainsworth. , so the Mission community is largely lay led. There are 4 task groups – prayer and spirituality, serving, growing and nurturing.

In a breakout discussion on 7 May 2024 Father Shaun stated that better communication is needed in all parishes.

Budget Secretary Reports

In May 33% of the 2024 Parish Share in the Deanery should have been paid. Only 16% had been paid so far.

At the end of September the Deanery had paid 65.8% of Parish share compared to the Diocese average of 62.8%. Half the parishes had paid 75% of their total. The Discussion and Agreement meetings resulted in a more realistic amount being negotiated than the original Parish Share. Despite this positive move, there will still be an overall deficit of £1.6 million within the Diocese.

Growing

Targets for 2030 were compared with the current state. All of the 10 items in the report have increased. Here are three of them. There will be money from Church Commissioners to achieve these goals.

	2024	2030
MISSION COMMUNITIES WITH MAP	5	5
NEW CHURCH PLANTS	2	5
No of CHURCHES CLOSED	2	4

Eco Churches

Three Silver and 9 Bronze Eco Awards were granted. Eco matters are gathering momentum at St. Mary's Prestwich. There is an on-line Energy Footprint Tool. All churches need an Eco Champion.

Helen Hicks - Deanery Synod Representative

Child Protection/Safeguarding Report

As a community at St Mary's, we are all responsible for creating a welcoming, friendly and safe environment for everyone. We want to include people of all ages in the life of the church, from the youngest to the oldest, and also make sure that we are making church services and activities accessible to all those with vulnerabilities and additional needs.

To ensure that we are doing this safely, I was appointed as the Parish Safeguarding Officer in November 2024. Since then, we have begun the process of renewing the DBS checks and Safeguarding training for all PCC members. Good progress has been made here, with checks and training well underway. By completing the required training, all PCC members are more aware of the Safeguarding needs across the whole church.

Preschool Praise provides a brilliant, fun, welcoming space for some of our youngest members each week and their parents and carers, and we are in the process of ensuring that all volunteers at Preschool Praise are also trained and DBS-checked for their role.

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of Safeguarding at St Mary's, please do chat to me on a Sunday morning or email me:

kmorgan-jones@hotmail.co.uk

Kim Morgan-Jones, Parish Safeguarding Officer.

Pre-School Praise Report

Preschool Praise is going from strength to strength.

The numbers of children at each service continues to be (on average), about 19: together with either their parents, carers or grandparents. This number works well to maintain and manage. We have seen quite a few new faces in recent months and this is wonderful. Some children started school last September, so have moved on; but numbers remain consistent with new attendees and people regularly coming back each week.

We continue to often receive very positive feedback, for example on Tuesday I was told, "I've been to many playgroups and activities with my own children and now with my grandchildren, but this is by far the best I have ever attended". The service continues to have a warm, relaxed and welcome feel. It is very popular and greatly appreciated.

There have been a couple of changes with our volunteers. Fr Shaun was missed very much by all when he left in September and Stella has been unable to attend for quite some time due to work commitments; however, we have two new recruits with Jan and Rupert Rees who joined us in October and have been an absolute blessing. They are both experienced, completely at ease and have fitted in with our group perfectly. They are adaptable, willing, helpful and efficient.

All the Preschool Praise team of volunteers are committed, kind, caring, friendly and able to step into each other's roles when others may be absent or poorly. I'm very proud and grateful to them all for being so brilliant at what they do.

This term we have introduced a new preschool praise welcome booklet to clarify how our service runs and provide further information regarding St Mary's Church and Parish School. We have also created registration forms, so we have contact details and are able to keep people notified with relevant updates.

These forms are proving beneficial in reaching people and informing them of other events and services available at St Mary's. It helps us to know of any specific needs a child may have, and the booklet provides a clear and concise overview.

I pray the happiness created in our Preschool Praise services may continue to be thoroughly enjoyed, healthily attended and remain a warm welcome for local families into the arms of the Lord. Amen.

Justine Thomas - Pre-School Praise Leader

Adult Ministry Report

—

This report outlines the key aspects of ministry undertaken during the calendar year 2024. During the year, we have continued to welcome new people into our regular worshipping community, a number of whom have started to become actively engaged in various forms of ministry.

From an adult ministry point of view, we have continued to develop opportunities for both new and existing disciples to deepen their faith and spirituality, including:

- continuation of our monthly (third Wednesday of each month) Breathing Space group - to enable people to take time out from the busyness of life to spend with God through reflective music, a short bible passage, followed by space for silent prayer; and
- our Connecting with God group (first Friday of each month) involving interactive discussion and providing practical guidance to help people to grow in their relationship with God. The theme for this year was 'Images of God' as we explored together both how we might see God as well as how God may see us. This involved open discussions about our faith and helped to open our eyes to how God calls us to live as Christians in the modern world.

Our adult Lent Group for 2024 took place on Tuesday Evenings in Church. This year we focused on the four Gospels - the authors, the contexts and the key themes and special insights that are addressed in each Gospel. The groups were well attended and opened up some interesting conversations about individuals' understanding of the life of Christ.

In July, we held the third of our annual Eco-group events based on the topic of Up-cycling and Re-cycling. This year we teamed up with other churches within the Mission Community and with our Parish school and the Whitefield Environmental forum as we worked together to encourage people to play their part in protecting God's creation. Stalls offered vegan food, school uniforms swaps, and various activities and ideas to encourage people to use materials they would otherwise typically throw away, such as tablet blister packs and candles.

Following the departure of three of our clergy during the year and in light of impending surgery for the remaining Priest, the planned Confirmation service for November had to be postponed to March 2025. However, we did then have the privilege of preparing nine children from our Parish school, together with four adults, for that service when it was a delight to be able to present them to the Bishop and see their faces full of expectation and joy as he laid his hands on each of them and prayed for them individually.

Links with school have continued with clergy led worship continuing as far as possible with the reduced resources now available to us. I am indebted to Rev Helen Tyler, Curate from St Margaret's church, for her willingness to go into school from time to time to cover some of the worship for us.

Pre-school Praise has continued with vigour this year. The group is very well attended by children and adults and is delightfully and thoughtfully led by a strong team of lay people, focusing on worship supported by music, craft activities and generously donated cakes each week. My personal thanks go to all who work so hard to make this happen.

During 2025, the intention is to continue to offer similar opportunities for us to grow together in our faith. All are welcome to join us for any, or all, of our groups. These tend not to be sequential, so it does not

matter if people are unable to attend every one of them. Looking forward, we also hope to adopt an underlying 'environmental-focused' theme to our activities.

As ever, my prayer is that more people will join us so that, as we move forward together, we can grow in love for God and for one another. I close with words of special appreciation to my husband, Stewart, who is a stalwart of support for both me and the Parish and to our Parish Officers, Lindsay, Pauline and Max, who, although fairly new to their roles, continue to soldier on with smiles on their faces and love in their hearts.

Rev'd Carole Barnet

Choir Report

During the past twelve months the Choir has gone about its work with ever increasing efficiency, and has continued to help in the leadership of Public Worship in this place.

Services have been enhanced with an ever increasing repertoire of Anthems sung by the choir, and these are beginning to include some of the very finest examples of English Church Music, some of which is usually the exclusive preserve of Cathedral and Collegiate Choirs.

We are indeed fortunate in our Choir – a group of people who meet regularly to rehearse on Thursday evenings for 44 or so weeks of the year, as well as turning out on Sundays, and for weekday services as required – all of this is done voluntarily – though the standard of singing attained is quite professional. (Remember, if you are interested in joining us, the prerequisites are simply a reasonable singing voice, a keen “ear”, a willingness to be *moulded*, and most importantly of all, a sense of humour! If you can commit to Thursdays 7.30pm – 9pm, and Sunday morning Service, then please speak to the Organist).

Numbers in the Choir have remained constant, though we have been fortunate to gain another young Tenor, Matthew (Matt) Dykes who sings with us as regularly as his work permits. The current breakdown is therefore 6 Sopranos, 3 Altos, 3.5 Tenors and 4 Basses – a very healthy balance.

On Friday 20th December, we held our annual Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. Once again this attracted a large congregation, including quite a number of people from the Parish and elsewhere, many for the first time. I was also very grateful to my good friend Mr. Philip O'Connor, ARCO (Organist & Choirmaster of Bolton Parish Church) who accompanied us at the Organ. Following the Carol Service many favourable comments were made by grateful parishioners.

In Lent, once again we teamed up with the Choir of Bolton Parish Church to put on two services (one in each venue) of Stainer's Passiontide Mediatation "The Crucifixion". This has been very successful in bringing a decent sized congregation, and people have found it to be a valuable Passiontide venture.

As I have said in the past, the enthusiasm generated by these Festival Services should not detract from the all important round of weekly rehearsals and Sung Services; and it is quite clear, that the work of the Choir in this respect, is very much appreciated by our Congregation and visitors both lay and Clerical.

I will end this report by expressing my sincere thanks to all the members of the Choir for their continued loyalty and hard work. Also, I must at this time of Interregnum, thank the Rev. Carole Barnet our Associate Priest, who despite recent surgery, has been a constant supporter and contributor to the Music for many years past, and hopefully, many years to come.

Gary Hulme, ARCO, LTCL - Organist & Choirmaster

Churchyard Action Group

Over the past twelve months the churchyard action group has worked hard, come rain or sun, to keep on top of a range of jobs; below is a list of some of the tasks we have undertaken which are additional to our ongoing regular work (such as tidying graves, collecting litter, maintaining gardens and beds around the church and removing brambles along Clough Drive).

Paths in the churchyard have been improved, with gravel chippings and lintels being put in place in the newer burial areas.

Several collapsed graves have been filled in.

A number of quotes have been received in relation to the felling of trees which are diseased or dead. Members of CAG have begun to tackle felling some of the smaller silver birch trees that are dangerous, and signage has been erected in areas affected by the unsafe trees.

Progress has been made to make more space for ashes burials in the lower graveyard. This is now pretty much complete. We've made good progress on the process of clearing trees and all the weeds to allow for burials. This is ongoing and hopefully should be completed later this year.

There were concerns raised by a local resident on Clough Drive about some trees overhanging her property. We inspected the area and decided that we would have to arrange for an arborist to have a look. We asked several for quotes and a local company gave us the best quote so we

engaged Jamie Hilley to do the work which was completed in a day very professionally. We will ask Jamie to come back and quote for other dangerous trees.

As always, we are thankful to all the additional efforts from the Community Payback teams who work in the churchyard on two or three days each week, as well as our own volunteering team, both regulars and occasional helpers. If you would like to join us then we meet on Tuesday mornings each week – come and introduce yourself! We are also thankful for both monetary contributions and also the many words of thanks we receive from various people from the local community and beyond.

If you would like to know more about our activities, or churchyard tours, then you could try the following:

[Facebook.com/alanjamesjennings](https://www.facebook.com/alanjamesjennings)

[Prestwich.org.uk/bookings](https://www.prestwich.org.uk/bookings) (for tours)

[Prestwich.org.uk/people](https://www.prestwich.org.uk/people) (about people from Prestwich, many of whose graves are in the churchyard)

Roger Vant - Churchyard Action Group

Fabric Report

Fabric Report -January to December 2024

Firstly, I would like to express my thanks to Lindsay (Church Warden), Rev. Carole (Associate Priest), Gary (Organist & Choirmaster), Leo and all the acolytes and lay assistants who have helped in the year to the upkeep of services and fabric.

Condition of the Fabric.

I can report that the “**Terrier’s**” **contents**, which were photographed and catalogued in 2015 is up to date.

New Music copies used by the choir have been added to the music library.

A Gold Monstrance, has been loaned by Rev. Carole, for use in ‘Holy Hour’ and a large Silver Gilt Ciborium has been loaned by Rev. Carole for use at the Festivals within the Church Year. Sanctuary Items (Candles, Wafers etc.) have been replenished and new Paschal Candle for 2025 purchased.

The “**Logbook**” is up to date with the inclusion of the damage to the lead rainwater goods over the Wilton Chapel and replacement of missing and slipped slates. This work of repair is ongoing. All modern changes have been recorded.

Silverware – As mentioned in previous reports a number of items are showing signs of wear and tear and will require attention.

Altar ware – Again, as in previous reports, the Altar frontals and fabric for the high altar, are in a poor condition and still a cause for concern. The Green Frontal has been repaired by the Sacristan.

General Building –

1. The Quinquennial report which gives a snapshot of the condition of the building, took place in 2023. No major structural problems were found. Since then, the flooring in the North Porch is moving and lifting and a drainage pipe leading from the W.C. to the pathway has blockage. On investigation it was found that tree roots from several trees close to the church are the probable cause. This should be a priority to prevent further damage.
2. All scheduled annual servicing and maintenance of essential equipment continues to be done. All statutory inspections, (fire extinguishers, alarm, gas, electricity), are up to date and the Gas Boilers and Organ are regularly serviced.
3. The Bell Striking equipment installed in 1997, has been silent since restoration work to the tower, North and South aisles, and Wilton Chapel roofing during 2019-20. It is estimated that the cost of upgrading the system to a modern-day equivalent would be £4000 and a service charge of £800.
4. Movement of the South Aisle flooring, which has been present for a number of years requires investigation of the supporting brickwork.
5. The condition of the choir vestry floor and the cause of damp under the vestry stairs, as reported in 2021/2 still requires investigation.
6. A new sign board skin, with up to date information, has replaced the skin dated 2015.

Churchyard –

1. As reported in 2022, the section of the retaining wall of one of the older sections of the churchyard, adjacent to the footpath on the southside had given way. The insurers had dismissed our claims to cover the rebuild cost estimated to be £16,000. This work is also a matter for concern.
2. A section of York stone paving on the south side adjacent to the aisle has been repaired following the theft in 2020 and poor repair in 2021.

As of 7 April 2025, all is correct.

Stewart Barnet – Sacristan & Verger

Churchwarden's Report

I would like to begin my report saying how much we were all saddened to see the departure of 3 much loved members of the clergy in 2024.

Rev Adele felt called to move churches and left us in spring to spend time exploring different places. After 20 years at St Mary's, she is very much missed, especially by the children who she loved working with, and we wish her luck in her new placement as Associate Priest in Radcliffe.

We were all shocked and saddened to hear Father Shaun announce his resignation shortly after last year's APCM, as he had been offered a new role in Interim Change Ministry close to his home in Co Durham. I will always remember Father Shaun for his sense of fun, his love of Doctor Who and of course the infamous Unicorn Races. We truly appreciate all the work he did at St Mary's during his time with us.

Not long after the resignation of Father Shaun, Father Gary also announced that he would be moving to Llangollen to take up post as Assistant Curate with The Church of Wales. Father Gary often greeted us in Welsh and always spoke of his love of the country, so it was joyous news to hear he would be moving there, despite our disappointment at losing him. It was decided that a joint leaving service would be held for both Father Shaun and Father Gary and we all had tears in our eyes in their last service, a Choral Evensong on Sept 22nd. We sent them away with a 'Mary' Rosebush in the hope that they will remember their time with us when it blooms.

It has been a rapid learning curve being thrown into vacancy only a few months into my first year as a church warden. I am completely indebted to Stewart and Rev'd Carole for their constant support and encouragement. Nothing is too much for them, they are always on hand to answer questions and guide me. I would like to extend a huge thankyou to both of them for the vast amount of work they do behind the scenes, organising services and making sure everything runs smoothly and correctly. I could not have navigated my way through this first year without them.

I attended Church Warden training at St John's house which was immensely helpful and has enabled me to begin to understand the numerous responsibilities and duties the role involves. I hope to improve in my abilities as I learn more and gain more experience.

I would also like to extend thanks to everyone on PCC and in the congregation who have worked tirelessly to keep the church going throughout the vacancy. From cleaning to flower arranging, organising refreshments, collecting post from the rectory, helping with pre-school praise, washing linen, producing the newsletter, arranging activities in the tower room.. there are too many jobs to mention and so many people who are doing their own bit to help. I feel we are all truly pulling together with an 'all hands on deck' approach and we are thriving because of it.

It has been wonderful to welcome Paula Holmes-Patel to the St Mary's clergy team in her role as Ordinand. We hope she spends many happy years with us.

I have had the pleasure of meeting with Roger of the churchyard action group and getting to grips with concerns both he and Stewart have raised about diseased trees in the churchyard and the retaining wall. Whilst we appreciate the retaining wall is a job that we aren't able to do during vacancy we are looking to resolve other issues which need attention.

Whilst it's always a joy being a part of the Sunday ministry, it's also wonderful helping with other events and festivals throughout the year. The Heritage Day drew in a number of people to St Mary's who may not otherwise visit the church. They were given a warm welcome by all of our volunteers and it is worth noting these events are key to engaging the community and hopefully encouraging them to come to other events/services.

The Christmas Fayre was a successful fundraising event in partnership with our school. Again many thanks to all who contributed, from providing goods and prizes, to setting up, manning stalls, clearing up, as well as attending on the day with family and friends.

It was so encouraging to see so many coming to Christmas and Easter services. There's so much that goes on both during the services and behind the scenes to make these such special events in the life of the church. A special mention at this point needs to go to Gary and the choir who never cease to astound and impress with the quality and variety of music. Many thanks to all for your acts of service, both large and small. They are all significant.

Whilst it has been a challenging year for us as a church, I've appreciated seeing us pull together as a fellowship. I would like to encourage anyone who is considering volunteering in any capacity, small or large, to come and chat to either myself or any of the clergy.

Lindsay Broxap - Churchwarden

APCM AGENDA

APCM Meeting

Sunday 11th May 2025 at 12.00 noon in St Mary's Church

Annual Meeting of Parishioners

1. Welcome & Opening Prayer
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes from the previous meeting (21st April 2024)
4. Election of Churchwardens

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Opening Prayers
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the previous annual parochial church meeting (21st April 2024)
4. Matters arising from items which are not covered by the reports
5. The reports (please note: most of these can be found in this booklet)
 - (i) The electoral roll report 2024
 - (ii) Annual report – what the PCC has done since the last APCM
 - (iii) Financial report, including 2024 audited accounts
 - (iv) Annual fabric report
 - (v) Deanery Synod report
 - (vi) Churchwarden's Report
 - (vii) Safeguarding Report
6. The elections and appointments
 - (i) Election of PCC members (no current vacancies)
 - (ii) Election of Deanery Synod Members (2 vacancies for a two-year term)
 - (iii) Appointment of independent examiner
7. Chairman's Report (to be given verbally at the meeting)
8. Any other business
9. Closing prayers

Followed by a short PCC meeting to elect officers (PCC Vice Chair, Hon Secretary & Hon Treasurer)

Minutes of last year's APCM

APCM 2024

Attendees – Fr. Shaun Conlon (Chairman), Pauline Jones (PCC Secretary), Hazel Frogatt (Treasurer), Rev Carole Barnet, Fr. Gary Anderton, Jean Plant, Fred Plant, Paula Holmes Patel, Stewart Barnet, Emma Chadwick, Sandra Merrill, Sarah Matthews, Max Hebditch, Justine Thomas, William Max-McCarthy, Lindsay Broxap, Leo Broxap, Helen Hicks, Alison Hodgkinson, Ann Parkinson, Jakki Turner, Hazel Delves, Catherine Black, Billy Black, Alicia Sukonik, Gary Hulme

Annual meeting of Parishioners

5. Welcome and Opening Prayer

6. Apologies for absence – Kim Morgan-Jones, Bianca Rosetti, Carol Worsley
7. Minutes of previous meeting accepted. Proposer Gary Hulme, seconder Fr. Gary Anderton – carried
8. Election of Churchwardens – Lindsay Broxap proposed by Gary Hulme, seconder Alicia Sukonik. Lindsay elected unopposed.

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

10. Opening Prayers
11. Apologies for absence – Kim Morgan-Jones, Bianca Rosetti, Carol Worsley
12. Minutes of the previous annual parochial church meeting (26th March 2023) accepted. Proposer Stewart Barnet, seconder Alicia Sukonik
13. No matter arising from previous minutes which were not covered by the reports.
14. The reports can be found in the booklets

viii) Electoral roll has slightly increased to 135. Three names were removed due to death. Chairman advised if not on the electoral roll will be unable to speak at the meeting and if there is anyone present who would like to be added, it will be reopened following the meeting for names to be added.

ix) No questions raised regarding the annual report and what the PCC has done since the last APCM. Chairman advised with the PCC being smaller, it has raised issues if a couple of people are away/ill on days of the meeting as we need to be quorate to make decisions. Chairman advised there needs to be more lay people than clergy on a PCC and advised Lindsay's space on the PCC will now be free as she becomes ex-officio as churchwarden.

x) Accounts have been audited (see report). A question was raised regarding whether we should start going round with the collection plates again. Chairman advised this has been discussed at PCC meetings and it was felt as many people do not carry cash any more, we will promote the use of the giving machine and standing orders.

A question was raised about claiming gift aid from those who give via the machine. Chairman advised can be personalised to ask for gift aid. He also advised if anyone gives £30 or less, gift aid can be claimed even if the person is unknown.

Chairman advised there has been a meeting with the Diocese to talk about Parish Share and a slightly different structure has been set up. St Mary's was not in a position to pay the full Parish Share which had been £60,000 for the year. Following the meeting the Parish Share has been set for the next three years at a more reasonable level (£25,000 for this year, £29,000 for 2025 and £34,000 for 2026). It is hoped knowing our position for the next few years will enable St Mary's to get back on a good footing.

Chairman advised Cath will be taking on the gift aid role following Rev. Adele's departure and Max Hebditch will be taking on the role of Treasurer, following Hazel stepping down after being in the role for 20 years. Chairman advised Hazel will tidy up

the smaller legacies before doing a handover and gave Hazel a big thank you for her services. Chairman advised next year, St Mary's finances will be clearer and stable.

The report has been signed by the auditor, Roger Morley and as part of the financial report, the accounts need to be accepted. Proposer Gary Hulme, seconder Fr. Gary Anderton.

xi) Fabric report - There are still some minor repairs outstanding and things such as the bells to get checked out. Some of the work has not been undertaken as the finances have not been available. When quinquennial report received, Churchwarden will review. Advised if able to pay full Parish Share, St Mary's will be able to access funds from the Church of England for repairs. Chairman advised we were left a large legacy last year, £20,000 of which has been set aside for the fabric of the church and would not affect our ability to pay the full Parish Share this year.

Chairman was also hopeful some of the little accounts which have been set up, because there has been a change in the law, we may be able to draw down from those funds to use the money for the churchyard and keeping access open to the graves as well as looking after the graves.

xii) Deanery Synod report - Still carrying two vacancies as Helen Hicks is our only representative. Chairman advised the Deanery Synod is part of the mechanism of the legal governance of the church (via the Diocesan Synod and Church Synod) and meetings are held three/four times a year.

xiii) No Churchwarden report this year as Norman had to step down for health reasons, Fr Shaun prepared.

xvi) Chairman advised safeguarding has been revisited and we are now back on track with this. Claire Almond is the current safeguarding officer and Rev Adele is in the process of doing the DBS checks for the pre-school praise volunteers. The website and boards at the back of church have been updated. Chairman advised PCC will revisit in summer as part of the annual review and it is now a standing item on the PCC agenda.

15. Elections and appointments

iv) There are currently six vacancies on the PCC (4 for three years and 2 for two years. Nominees were:

Max Hebditch proposed by Stewart Barnet, seconded by Hazel Delves

Sarah Matthews proposed by Stewart Barnet, seconded by Hazel Delves

Carol Worsley proposed by Hazel Delves seconded by Emma Chadwick

They will take up three year roles, leaving three vacancies on the PCC left to be filled.

v) No nominations for Deanery Synod, two vacancies for a two year terms remain

vi) Roger Morley was nominated to remain as an independent examiner/auditor. Proposed by Gary Hulme, seconder Rev. Carole.

16. APCM Chairman's report 2024

Being a shepherd was, I think, my first acting role. I would, later, go on to be a strange array of characters over the years, from a bee-person to an ugly sister, from Joseph, of multi-coloured coat fame, to a pierrot clown, from a pearly king to a pregnant woman in 12 angry men. But I have a fond memory of being clad in stripey bedlinen and a teatowel and being 'sore afraid' when a host of heavenly angels appeared with tinsel haloes.

It's hard to be a Christian and not to come across a host of references to shepherds. Across the Old and New Testament there are lots of stories and images which have the figures of shepherds centre stage. Today, the fourth Sunday of Eastertide, is often referred to as 'Good Shepherd Sunday' (and we've already heard some thoughts about this from Rev'd Carole in her sermon). Jesus tells us that he is The Good Shepherd – the good shepherd who knows his sheep. It is not just an image of someone doing a job, or even of someone doing something that is about gathering people together and keeping them safe. It is, most significantly, an image about love. An image about God's great love for us. About God's great love for his people and for his Church.

It's from this understanding that our view of the Church flows. Jesus Christ comes to 'do a job' – to do the will of the Father. He also comes to gather people together and keep them safe – so many stories in the Gospels exemplify this, and, of course, Jesus prays just before his arrest, 'May they all be one, as you Father are in me and I am in you, may they be completely one.' But most profoundly Jesus comes to know his sheep intimately – to know us – and to call us into a relationship of love with God.

This is good news for us, whoever we are and whatever we are about in life. Over the years I've gathered a number of 'secular' things which portray sheep – one of the most recent was this picture (sheep around TARDIS) – by Stan Milne. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, in Essex, I came across this – there was a variety of similar pottery sculptures, all under the banner 'sheep on a hill' but this is the one that drew my attention, maybe because of the Biblical story of Jesus leaving behind the 99 sheep on the hillside and going to find and rescue the one that was lost. In the past week I was visiting a parishioner's home and had my eye caught by a painting of sheep, one of which had half fallen down a cattle grid. It made me think of the image of Christ the good shepherd again.

Jesus Christ is the good shepherd, who knows his sheep, who lays down his life for the sheep, who takes up that life again for the sheep, but in a way that is changed, so that we might be changed. This narrative of love, with pieces filled in at various points throughout the four gospels, is one which informs both our view and understanding of God, and which also helps us understand our life together as his church.

Sometimes, especially at meetings like this, or PCC meetings, we can act almost as if we were not part of that overarching story. We can ponder and discuss and decide things with a purely practical, financial, business-like attitude, which isn't rooted in that love of God, and which isn't rooted in prayer. This is when factions can emerge and grow, and when we suit ourselves, rather than listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd, and heed it.

And this is when things feel mostly about duty – and duties – rather than joy, and the blessings that come from being God's people seeking to understand and grow in our life together as his church and as beloved individuals. But we are still Christ's flock, gathered around him, as much as we are when we worship and pray.

It's probably not just coincidence that some of the significant people in scripture were shepherds too – both Moses and King David were shepherds before they took up new responsibilities by responding to God's loving call. They would know what it was to be a shepherd, sometimes a

hard, tiring and frustrating responsibility, which involved getting dug into the realities of life and getting dirty. But they would also know the satisfaction and the joy of knowing their flock and keeping them safe, and leading them to pasture, and seeing them grow and multiply.

And it surely isn't a coincidence that the first human beings to hear about the birth of Jesus Christ were some shepherds, out in the cold winter fields in the dead of night; the first human eyes, other than Mary and Joseph's, to see the wonder of the Word made flesh, were shepherds' eyes.

This is worth us pondering as we consider where we are and where we're going as a congregation and as part of God's Church. The Good Shepherd calls us, leads us and loves us – and he calls us to roles and responsibilities which, ultimately are about loving one another and leaving the safety of the Church and looking for the lost and the lonely, the sick and the homeless, the rich and the disinterested, the lapsed and the cynical, so that they too may come to know the voice of him who is the Good Shepherd. Sometimes, some of the tasks we're called to might not seem very connected with this calling – doing a balance sheet, ordering candles, washing up after refreshments, typing up minutes, mopping the outside toilets – they all can seem duty rather than joy, and not really about gathering Christ's beloved flock. Yet they are all facets of the whole mission of God's Church, and, indeed, they are all acts of love.

When we undertake these acts of love, we can never know how God might be at work in and through us. As an example, I'll like to tell a brief story. It has been wonderful that we could restart Pre-school Praise last November, and there have been many new people who've come through the church doors as a result. One of these families came to worship on Good Friday morning at the all-age service, and, as a result of circumstances, ended up leaving via the vestry door. As they entered in, the Mum spied the 'story stool' that is used each week in the Pre-school Praise sessions and she pointed it out to her son. She then disclosed that he acted out the story-stool bit of pe-school praise at home, whilst singing the song which Justine Thomas always sings when she gets to this point in the morning's worship and produces something interesting from inside the stool to lead into the Bible story for the day. This moment of revelation, about how in a few weeks a young child has engaged with the worship, was very encouraging – who knows where this might lead him, and his parents, in time to come, regarding their faith journey? Whether our activities seem more duty, or more joy, or a profound mixture of both, we are allowing ourselves to be offered up in the service of Christ in ways which create all sorts of opportunities for his love to be extended, known and embraced.

At this point, I'd like to offer my thanks especially to my clergy colleagues, Rev'ds Carole, Adele and Gary. Each of them give much of their time and enthusiasm, as well as their prayer and wisdom, to the life of our Church and parish school, and they all do so voluntarily. We are fortunate as a church community to gain so much from what they bring to our life together and I want to pay tribute to their ministries in our midst. I also want to say a personal thank you to them for all they do in support of me in my role as Priest-in-Charge and as colleagues, as we pray and as we discuss so much together. Please do pray for them and support them as they continue in their journeys as both leaders of, and members, of Christ's flock.

If we can grow in our understanding and embracing of each of our callings to be those who, through our service, others are guided into the flock of Christ's love, then we will also grow in our willingness to serve. Because serving with this understanding is, yes, still at times hard work and time-consuming and even frustrating, but is done for, and in the company of, Christ the Good Shepherd.

If we can allow our hearts more and more to incline to this then we will both hear the voice of God calling to us, his Church, more clearly, and we will find more and more joy in our service of him who knows us and calls us and loves us.

Shaun Conlon – Priest-in-Charge

17. No other business

18. Closing prayers