

All Saints' Parish Church Antrim

Trustees' Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 2024

The trustees present the annual report and accounts for All Saints' Parish Church Antrim for the year ended 31 December 2024.

All Saints' Parish Church, Antrim, is situated in the heart of Antrim town, and the Parish Centre is one minute's walk away in Railway Street.

Correspondence can be addressed to:

The Vicar, Ven. Dr. S. R. McBride
The Vicarage
10 Vicarage Gardens
ANTRIM, BT41 4JP

Matters of a financial nature can be addressed to:

Mrs. Brian Neill
c/o All Saints' Parish Centre
18 Railway Street
ANTRIM, BT41 4AE

Purpose

The principal function of the Parish is to support the advancement of the Christian religion by promoting through the work of the Parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, social and ecumenical.

All the functions of the Parish relate to the advancement of religion through holding regular worship and communicating with and caring for parishioners of all ages especially the sick and elderly and others in our community.

Additionally, the Parish is entrusted with the care of numerous historical items, and the maintenance of these assets, along with the preservation of the various buildings, constitutes a secondary charitable purpose. All properties and valuable items are fully insured and undergo regular revaluation.

Governance, Structure and Management

Governance

The principal document for the governance of Antrim Parish is Chapter III of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland, which governs Parishes and Parochial Organisation. Diocesan Regulations are also issued periodically, and these interpret some aspects of the Constitution where that responsibility has been delegated by the General Synod to Diocesan Councils and Synods.

The other major factor in parish governance is civil law, particularly Health and Safety, Child Protection legislation, Safeguarding Trust regulations, and Employment and Management procedures for lay staff. For example, as children and young adults are important in our Charity, we carry out the necessary checks on all youth leaders and we are fully compliant with the Church of Ireland Safeguarding Trust.

A dedicated Health and Safety team oversees the compliance of all Parish Centre users with the established Conditions of Use, ensuring strict adherence to Fire Evacuation procedures and the completion of necessary Risk Assessments. Regular Fire Evacuation drills are conducted for both the Church and Parish Centre, with procedural updates implemented whenever recommendations for improvements are made.

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Structure

All members of the Church of Ireland who are over the age of 18, and are either resident within the parish or live elsewhere but have been accustomed members of the congregation for at least three months, may register as members of the General Vestry of the parish; this allows them to attend and vote at meetings of the General Vestry and to stand for election to the Select Vestry.

Meetings of the General Vestry are held at least once a year, and at the Annual General Vestry meeting, held at Easter time, the Select Vestry members are elected. The Select Vestry hold their positions for a period of one year. Select Vestry members may be re-elected annually, and there is no limit to the number of terms that they may serve. The members of the Select Vestry make up the Charity Trustees.

Trustees:

Chair: The Ven. Dr. S. R. McBride

Jacqueline Adams

Cecil Barton

Sylvia Barton

Rev Peter Blake

Colin Brooks

Cynthia Cherry

Brian Ford

Irene Gates

Willaim Hurst

Stephen Kelly

David McClean

John McMaster

Carol Moore

Brian Neill

Paul Smyth

Wendy Smyth

David Tate

Rev Claire Thompson

Sheila Thompson

John Wallace

Management

The Select Vestry meets regularly at times fixed by the members, with the Vicar or the Rev Blake in the Chair. Ad hoc meetings may be called by the Vicar when necessary.

The primary responsibility of the Select Vestry is to ensure the ministry and witness of the Parish is maintained, developed, and safeguarded both legally and financially. The Vestry is specifically tasked with overseeing the administration of the Parish finances as well as the maintenance and care of the buildings, both internally and externally ("Finance, Fabric and Furnishings"). Additionally, the Select Vestry acts as the legal employer for all lay staff and holds responsibility for Health and Safety, insurance and the care of the Parish's assets.

The Select Vestry may delegate responsibility for aspects of its work to persons or to sub-committees, who report back to the Select Vestry. The Finances are managed by the Honorary Treasurer, Mr Brian Neill, who reports back to the other Trustees at Vestry meetings monthly or in-between if necessary. The Trustees are updated with the financial situation at each meeting.

The security and safeguarding of all financial resources are paramount to the Trustees, with all money being counted under dual control.

The Church of Ireland organises 5-yearly inspections of its buildings which are carried out by a qualified architect or conservation specialist with a qualification in historic buildings conservation. Parishes are supplied with a Quinquennial Inspection Report which may contain recommendations for repairs. As a parish we are diligent in our compliance to carry out the recommended repairs. In recent years, following receipt of our Quinquennial Reports from the Diocesan Surveyor, Chris McCollum, we have undertaken improvements such as the erection of external safety railings, internal balustrading in the church gallery and improvements in the vicarage.

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In view of all the various organisations that utilise the Parish Centre (see Public Benefit section), and events such as funeral teas, a catering team has been formed. All team members hold HABC Level 2 in Food Safety in Catering, which is regularly updated. The local Council conducts regular inspections, and the Parish Centre currently holds a rating of 5.

Principal Office-bearers

Vicar:	Ven. Dr S.R. McBride
Pastoral Administrator:	Rev P Blake
Curate Assistant:	Rev Claire Thompson
Hon Treasurer:	Mr Brian Neill
Hon Secretary:	Mrs Irene Gates
Vicar's Church Warden:	Miss Carol Moore
People's Church Warden:	Mr David McClean

Independent Examiner

Ian Johnston (A.F.A.)
For and on behalf of Stevenson & Wilson, Chartered Accountants
22/30, Broadway Avenue
Ballymena. BT43 7AA

Bankers

Ulster Bank
49 Wellington Street
Ballymena
BT43 6AD

Finances

Income

Our income from parishioners and visitors remained at encouraging levels. The Freewill Offering (including Gift Aid) totalled £136,676 (2023: £137,050), and Fabric Fund (including Gift Aid) came to £20,114 (2023: £23,121 included a one-off donation of £4,000). Loose donations on the collection plate at the Sunday and Wednesday services came to a total of £2,291 (2023: £2,647).

The parishioners continue to donate 20p coins in "Smartie tubes" and the proceeds contribute to our annual donation to CMSI, which helps fund students training to be church ministers at the Kitwe Theological Seminary. In 2024 the Smartie tubes total was £951 (2023: £1,124).

The "Extra Mile" bucket continues to gather in coins, banknotes and even cheques at the back of the church. At the start of 2023 we were still collecting for ShelterBox; in February and March we collected for the Cathedral chair appeal; and from April onwards we collected for the Leprosy Mission NI, interrupted in October by collecting for Greenisland Parish Church which had suffered from a fire. As a result of this ongoing work, in 2024 we collected £2,278, but with contributions made in 2023 we were able to hand over £1,000 to ShelterBox, £150 to the Cathedral appeal, £500 to Greenisland and £1,400 to the Leprosy Mission.

Any small decrease in the contributions above is far outweighed by the congregation's magnificent response to the appeal for funding for the tower repair. Parishioners donated £43,508, and Gift Aid increased that to £49,960. There were fundraising events like Quiz Night, donations from Antrim Historical Society and the local Orange Order lodge, and a first instalment grant of £86,354 from National Heritage Lottery, meaning that £138,352 has been added to our bank account. Work on the tower should start to take place in 2025.

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A total of £1,624 was donated by several individuals and families to general church funds, including a £1,000 Harvest donation, a £200 Remembrance Day donation, and a \$50 donation from an American tourist. Interest on endowments brought in £4,133. Grants totalling £2,491 for Youth Work were received from the Education Authority, and a grant of £600 was received from RCB towards our young people's evangelical trip to Spain. A grant of £500, received from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, was used to help pay for the Evergreens' Christmas Lunch, and we acknowledge our thanks to the Council for this contribution.

Special collections were lifted at four church services, with the proceeds being passed on as appropriate:

March: £340 raised at the midweek Lenten service for the Rural Deanery project.

June: £700 raised at the Mothers Union area service.

October: £506 raised at our Family Service for NI Hospice.

November: £365 raised at the Town Carol Service for the Mayor's Charities.

The Parish Centre is used by a number of organisations, including Starburst Theatre School and the Contact Centre. The financial contributions towards the running expenses of the Parish Centre totalled £7,168 (2023: £7,390). Two concerts were held in the Church, and we received donations totalling £250.

Our property in Innishmoyne realised a rental of £10,545. There was no outlay on repairs this year. The usual expenses of management fees, rates and insurance totalled £2,235, leaving a surplus for the year of £8,310.

Expenditure

The bulk of our expenditure is on "normal" expected items, such as salaries and wages; utility bills for electricity, gas, oil, water, telephone; buildings and contents insurance; buildings maintenance.

In 2024, there were a few items which were not run-of-the-mill:

£1,426 for a new printer/scanner for the parish centre office.

£1,968 for trimming trees at the vicarage.

£9,016 for the new sound/broadcast system in the church.

£3,180 for the upgrade to the disabled toilet.

£7,978 to Corish Film & Video for the promotional church video.

Annual donations

The healthy nature of our finances allowed us to continue our tradition of making Christmas donations to a variety of Church organisations and missions, such as the Chaplaincy at Queen's University Belfast, the Chaplaincy at the Missions to Seamen and the Church of Ireland Youth Department. Eleven donations ranging from £260 to £410, and totalling £3,110, were made.

The third annual payment of £1,800, to pay for tuition fees for two students studying at the Theological College in Zambia, was paid via CMS Ireland in April. The Select Vestry voted to extend these payments for a further three years.

The first of a new set of three annual payments of £3,000 each to Muckamore Parish Development Association (as described in the 2021 report) was made in December.

A donation of £750 was made to St. Anne's Cathedral in response to their cathedral chairs appeal.

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In summary

The financial situation at the end of 2024 is:

Current account in credit by £19,657.50

Deposit account in credit by £259,490.99

The Deposit account is designated to cover urgent maintenance and repairs to Church properties as advised by the Diocesan architect. At the end of 2024 it also holds the donations and grants received for the repair work to the Church tower; this work should take place during 2025.

All other Assets and Liabilities are stated in the Annual Report and all properties are vested in the RCB and owned by the Parish.

All legitimate invoices and requests for payment in 2024 were paid in full when received.

Public Benefit

The charity Trustees have carefully reviewed the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that our activities align with the charity's purposes and provide meaningful benefits to our beneficiaries. A detailed overview of our activities and their associated benefits is provided below.

The primary function of the charity is the advancement of religion, the provision of spiritual care for the elderly and infirm, and the development of younger people within the community. To fulfil our public benefit objectives, we engage in regular worship, outreach efforts within the community, and a variety of social and fundraising activities throughout the year.

The Church

Church Services - a full programme of services has been led by the parish clergy team including a monthly Family Service in the Parish Centre on the third Sunday of each month, offering a more informal form of worship aimed at younger families in the parish. This service is preceded by refreshments, giving parishioners an opportunity to chat in a relaxed atmosphere. The parish also took part in the annual 'Big Coffee Break' at the Family Service in October. This was well supported by parishioners, raising £506 for the NI Hospice.

The parish continues to see an increase in the size of its congregation, with several new families from different ethnic backgrounds joining us. A common comment is that an exploratory visit to church had met with such a warm and friendly welcome that the newcomers decided to make All Saints' their place of worship.

Parish Choir – the mixed-voice Parish Choir leads the singing at all services, offering special music on feast days and other significant occasions. Its members range in age from 11 to over 80 years, reflecting the inclusive and intergenerational spirit of the parish. The choir rehearses every Sunday morning from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. and continues to be an integral part of worship at all church services, under the expert direction of choirmaster and organist Mr Alex McBride. In December, choir members visited two local residential homes to sing Christmas carols and share the message of Christmas with the residents.

Wednesday morning services – the midweek service of Holy Communion continued throughout 2024, preceded by an informal time for coffee and conversation. A regular and faithful group of parishioners attend each week, finding both spiritual nourishment and social connection through the shared experience of the Wednesday morning service.

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The Church Calendar

January Activities – the New Year began with a number of meaningful events and initiatives within the parish. A Mothers' Union (MU) Enrolment Service was held on 10th January, along with a special dedication of the new preaching scarf for the MU All Ireland Chaplain, Archdeacon Stephen McBride. On 15th January, a new seven-week Bible study series began, focusing on The Chosen (Series 3), offering fresh insights into the life and ministry of Jesus. The Smartie Tube Appeal also continued, encouraging parishioners to fill empty Smartie tubes with 20p coins or £1 coins to support theological students training for ministry in the Church of Zambia. With an annual cost of £600 per student, the parish remains committed to sponsoring two students for the coming years.

February Activities – the Rural Deanery's mid-week Lenten services began on Ash Wednesday, offering a time of reflection and spiritual growth. On 7th February, the parish celebrated Annabella Hayes Day, the founder of MU in Ireland, with a special Zoom service featuring guest speaker Baroness Ritchie, along with the All Ireland MU Chaplain, Archdeacon Stephen McBride, Rev. Claire Thompson, and the All Saints' Parish choir and organist. A fundraising Parish Quiz was held on the 16th at the local Golf Club, raising over £500 for parish activities. St Anne's Cathedral's 120 Chairs Appeal was introduced in the parish, with the Dean of Belfast appealing to parishes and individuals to support the £75,000 campaign to replace the original wooden chairs at St Anne's Cathedral. The new chairs are to be in place for the Cathedral's 120th Anniversary of the consecration of the Nave on 2nd June 2024. All Saints' Parish contributed by purchasing six chairs in support of the appeal, alongside individual parishioners who chose to purchase chairs in memory of loved ones.

March Activities – March was a spiritually rich and community-focused month for All Saints' Parish. On 1st March, members of the parish attended the World Day of Prayer, hosted by Greystone Presbyterian Church, an annual global event that unites people in prayer and reflection, focusing on the voices and experiences of women around the world. The parish clergy team led a special Palm Sunday service, A Holy Land Walk with Jesus, combining picture, word, and song to bring the events of Holy Week to life. Throughout Lent, mid-week services were hosted by churches across the Rural Deanery and were well attended by All Saints' parishioners. During Holy Week, joint evening services were held with other local churches, including High Street Presbyterian, Antrim Methodist, and the Christian Fellowship, fostering ecumenical connection. On Good Friday, parishioners joined the wider community in the 17th annual Walk of Witness, a powerful event that continues to promote unity across the town. In the evening of Good Friday, All Saints hosted a moving Tenebrae service. Easter Day began with an early morning Holy Communion service by the shore of Lough Neagh, followed by breakfast in the Parish Centre. Later, a joyful Family Holy Communion service was held in the church at 11:30 a.m. Both Easter services were memorable and well attended, marking a meaningful end to the Lenten season.

April Activities – the Annual Easter General Vestry Meeting was held on 8th April, providing an opportunity for parishioners to reflect on the past year and look ahead. On 11th April, the Mothers' Union members participated in a digital prayer journey, uniting members in faith and reflection. A fundraising Beetle Drive organised by the 5th Antrim Scouts took place on 16th April in support of the Antrim & Newtownabbey Food Bank, offering a fun evening while supporting a vital local cause. On 21st April, branch members attended the Mothers' Union Annual Festival Service at St Anne's Cathedral. Later in the month, a new Alpha Course began - an eight session journey exploring the basics of the Christian faith, with an Away Day on 15th June at Ballycastle Parish Centre.

May Activities – from 12th to 18th May, parishioners supported Christian Aid Week, helping to make a global impact through prayer and giving. On 14th May, the Evergreens group enjoyed an afternoon of storytelling and music with special guest John Porter. The Connor Mothers' Union Songs of Praise Service took place on 19th May, featuring members' favourite hymns and raising funds for the Mums in May appeal, an All-Ireland project held every three years. The month also saw the launch of the "Extra Mile" project in support of The Leprosy Mission, highlighting how a donation of £24 can provide a full course of medication to cure one person of the disease. On 25th May, Mothers' Union members enjoyed a memorable outing to Brownlow House in Lurgan. To round off the month, a wine tasting evening was held at the local Golf Club, raising over £1,100 in support of the Tower Restoration Fund.

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June Activities – on 2nd June, parishioners attended a Eucharist of Thanksgiving at Belfast Cathedral to mark its 120th Anniversary. All Saints' Parish contributed by purchasing six of the new cathedral chairs, with additional personal donations made by individual parishioners. On 6th June, All Saints had the honour of hosting the All Ireland Holy Communion Service, which also marked the 90th anniversary of the local Mothers' Union branch. The service was led by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev George Davison, and was attended by All Ireland President June Butler, Zonal Trustee Iris Sutor, Down & Dromore Diocesan President Mavis Thompson, and former members and friends from neighbouring branches. On 11th June, the National Churches Trust announced a grant of £34,985 awarded to All Saints to carry out urgent repairs to the south elevation of the church tower. This vital funding will help safeguard the historic building, ensuring it remains watertight, weatherproof, and open for community use. Rounding off the month, an Open Mic Concert was held in the Parish Centre on 14th June, raising £1,750 in support of the youth team's upcoming mission trip to Spain in July 2024, a joint venture with Ballyclare Parish.

The **summer months** brought vibrant energy and meaningful outreach to All Saints' Parish. From 22nd to 26th July, children from P1 to P7 took part in the All Stars Holiday Club, held each evening from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The club offered a fun and faith-filled programme of stories, games, and crafts, helping children explore what it means to belong to God's family. Also in July, three members of the Next Steps Youth Fellowship joined young people from St John's Ballyclare as an Exodus Ex-change team, travelling to a small church based in the city of Valls near Tarragona, Spain. Their focus was delivering a holiday Bible club for local children, but the team also visited families, participated in worship with a Spanish congregation, and supported local youth through street evangelism and sports ministry. It was a transformative experience that allowed the young people to grow in faith, connect with new cultures, and share the message of the gospel. On August 29th, the parish received notification that our application for the All Saints Tower project, "The Sky's the Limit," had been successful. The project has been awarded a generous grant of £172,708 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

September Activities – on 8th September, the Family Hog Roast and Gift Day brought together 125 parishioners to enjoy lunch and a time of fellowship, raising an impressive £31,000 on the day for the Tower and Spire Restoration Project. That same evening, a new initiative, Family Fun & Chat, launched with games, coffee, and conversation - offering a relaxed space for families to connect. On 11th September, the parish hosted its first visitor experience tour, welcoming members from other churches, local council representatives, and parishioners for a guided insight into the church's history. As part of the European Heritage Open Days, the church welcomed 34 visitors across 14th and 15th September. On 28th September, the parish launched All Saints' 'Blend' Breakfast, a bi-monthly social gathering at a local restaurant held on the fourth Saturday of the month. The month concluded with a joyful Songs of Praise service on 29th September, part of a new fifth-Sunday tradition, blending modern and traditional hymns with musical support from the Family Service band.

October Activities – on 13th October, the Harvest Thanksgiving service brought parishioners together to celebrate and reflect on God's provision. From 4th to 6th October, a group from the parish participated in Connor Takes the Castle, an exciting event that brought together young people from across the diocese for worship, teaching, karaoke, sports, and much more. On 20th October, the Family Service hosted a NI Hospice Big Break Coffee Morning, raising an impressive £506 to support the vital work of the Hospice in providing care for those in need. The month also saw the launch of the first of two Bible study sessions focused on the Book of Ruth.

November Activities – on 8th November, The Very Rev Dr. Houston McKelvey, former Dean of Belfast Cathedral, delivered a poignant lecture on the Antrim community members who served in the Second World War. The evening raised £410 for the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. On 10th November, the parish hosted the Royal British Legion Annual Remembrance Service, to honour those who sacrificed their lives. The Antrim Community Choir Winter Concert on 23rd November was a delightful community event - held in the parish church and enjoyed by many. The Bible study series on the Book of Ruth continued with the second session on 27th November, deepening participants' understanding of the biblical text. The month also saw the Antrim Town Carol Service, attended by the Mayor of Antrim and local councillors, fostering a spirit of unity and celebration.

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On 30th November, several members of the Mothers' Union attended a Ladies' Breakfast at Antrim Methodist Church, further strengthening the bond between local churches.

December Activities – December was a month filled with music, community, and some unexpected challenges. On 5th December, the Lagan Camerata performed a beautiful music concert in the parish church. On 15th December, parishioners enjoyed a fun and relaxing movie night at the local cinema. The church was also honoured to host the Antrim Grammar School Christmas Carol Service on 17th December, a heartwarming event that brought the festive spirit to the parish. On 19th December, HIDDEN NI, a programme exploring Northern Ireland's lesser-known places, featured All Saints' Parish Church and Churchwarden Carol Moore, airing on UTV at 8:30 p.m. **Christmas Services** – throughout Advent, All Saints' Parish offers a full programme of services, including the Family Service of Carols for Christmas and the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols by candlelight, as well as the very popular Christmas Eve service and First Holy Communion of Christmas. Every year, the Funday Club children take part in the Christmas Nativity play, which is performed during the Christmas morning service, bringing the story of Christ's birth to life for all to enjoy.

The month was marked by an unfortunate fire in the church building on 27th December, which resulted in significant smoke damage; however, thankfully, there were no injuries, and the church building sustained no structural harm.

Other Parish Based Activities and Initiatives

Bible Study & Alpha Course – at the beginning of the year, parishioners gathered for a Bible study series based on The Chosen – Series 3, a powerful retelling of the life of Jesus and His followers. The sessions encouraged deep reflection, meaningful discussions, while exploring how faith can shape daily life. In April, a new Alpha Course was launched, guiding participants through eight sessions on the foundations of the Christian faith, culminating in an Away Day at Ballycastle Parish Centre in June. Later in the year, parishioners took part in a two-part Bible study on the Book of Ruth, offering further opportunity for spiritual growth and fellowship.

WhatsApp – the parish also has an 'active WhatsApp group' with the clergy team, where parishioners regularly comment on the United Christian Broadcaster's Word for Today daily devotional material or share their insights on the daily bible readings set out on the weekly News Sheet.

Flower Guild – the Church Flower Guild is made up of six dedicated volunteers who arrange fresh flowers each week for the church. This service is provided for parishioners and non-parishioners who wish to donate towards church flowers in memory of loved ones or to commemorate special events, such as anniversaries or birthdays. These thoughtful contributions are greatly appreciated by the clergy and those attending services. In 2024, the Flower Guild provided floral arrangements for several special services, including the Connor Diocesan Big Sing, the Monthly Diocesan All-Ireland MU Holy Communion Service, and the Remembrance Day Service.

Electronic Tablets – the parish continued its service providing electronic tablets for parishioners without internet access or the ability to attend church in person. A dedicated team of volunteers ensures that the Sunday service is downloaded onto the tablets, which are then distributed at the beginning of the week and collected later. This service has been greatly appreciated, allowing parishioners to "attend" church virtually. Additionally, it has fostered new friendships, with volunteers and recipients connecting on doorsteps during tablet deliveries and collections.

Home visits – pastoral visiting is the backbone of parish life. It enables the clergy to get to know new families in a more relaxed setting of their own homes. It is also a way to keep up regular contacts with those who are house bound. Times of illness or bereavement are occasions when pastoral visits are most effective. Our clergy team prioritise such visits and it is encouraging to know that many members of the parish provide less structured but equally effective visits to their fellow parishioners who are experiencing difficult times.

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Extra Mile projects – this year, the parish supported The Leprosy Mission, a charity founded 150 years ago by Irishman Wellesley Bailey. In 1986, the Vicar visited a Leprosy Hospital in Salur, Andhra Pradesh, an experience that powerfully illustrated the devastating impact leprosy continues to have in parts of the world where poverty, poor sanitation, and limited healthcare persist. While leprosy may seem like a disease of biblical times, it remains a harsh reality for many today. The Leprosy Mission works to prevent its spread, runs hospitals, supports affected families, and advocates for their needs. Just £24 can provide the life-changing multi-drug therapy needed to cure someone of the disease.

Smartie Tube Appeal – Smartie tubes were distributed at the services in early January, inviting parishioners to fill them with 20p pieces or £1 coins as we continue to support the students who are studying to be future clergymen in the Church of Zambia. The fees for one student are £600 per year and we are committed to sponsoring two students until 2027.

Saints Alive & Sunday News Sheet – Saints Alive, a quarterly magazine, is produced and distributed to parishioners, keeping them informed about all activities within the parish. In addition, a weekly News Sheet is created and circulated at the Morning Service, offering updates on current and upcoming parish events, as well as including weekly Bible readings. A copy of the News Sheet is also available on the parish website each week, ensuring that parishioners stay connected both in person and online.

Food Bank project – in partnership with the Oasis Group, the parish has collaborated with other churches in Antrim to support the Food Bank project. This initiative has provided essential practical care to families in the Antrim area facing challenging circumstances, offering much-needed support during difficult times.

European Heritage Open Days (EHOD) – a celebration of architecture, history and a chance for everyone to explore the wonderful shared cultural heritage right on our doorstep. As part of the 2024 event, All Saints' Parish Church opened its doors to the public on 14th and 15th September, with volunteer parishioners serving as visitor guides, helping to showcase the church's rich heritage.

The Parish Centre

All Saints' Parish Centre – located in the heart of Antrim town, the Parish Centre serves as a versatile venue for a wide range of activities. It is used by parish groups, diocesan organisations, local primary schools, and external groups from the surrounding community, making it a central hub for both church and community events.

Next Steps - is a vibrant youth group for young people aged 11 to 18, meeting on Sunday evenings from September to June for fun, food, and fellowship. Thanks to generous support from the Education Authority and the Massereene and Ferrard Bequest [specifically designated for youth work], the group has enjoyed a range of outings, including trips to Glengormley Bowling Lanes, McDonald's, Go-Karting, and Antrim Omniplex. In July, several members attended Summer Madness, a major outdoor Christian youth festival, and one participant took part in Street Reach on the north coast as part of the 'Serve' course in Christian leadership. In September, the group joined the Connor Big Sing at Lisburn Cathedral, a lively event combining music and worship for young people across the diocese. A highlight of the year remains Connor Takes The Castle, where All Saints continues to field one of the largest parish groups. The year concluded with the Connor Youth Christmas Party at Monkstown Parish. At its heart, Next Steps is about helping young people build lasting friendships and grow in faith in a supportive and engaging environment.

Our Parish Youth groups are open and welcoming to all young people in the area, catering for all ages, and are well attended; indeed, at times a waiting list for new members has to be in place. The groups are made up of young people of diverse backgrounds, and all are made welcome.

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Scouts – the 5th Antrim Scouts meet every Tuesday evening from September through June. The Scout section caters to young people aged 10½ to 14½ years, while the Explorer Scouts support those aged 14½ to 18 years. Both Scouts and Explorer Scouts follow a structured programme designed to help them explore the world around them, discover their own abilities, and understand the importance of health and fitness. Through their badge work, members develop a range of skills, including creativity, teamwork, leadership, and reflection on personal values and attitudes. Scouting offers young people the opportunity to be part of a team, build lasting friendships, and engage fully in the adventure and challenges of life.

The programme also promotes a strong sense of community responsibility, with members actively participating in fundraising initiatives for local causes. In 2024, the Scouts organised a fundraising Talent Night involving Beavers, Cubs, and Scouts, successfully raising funds for three local charities.

Whenever possible, activities are conducted outdoors to prepare for the highlight of the year -camping under canvas. During these sessions, Scouts learn practical skills such as pitching tents, planning and preparing camp menus, and cooking safely. They also gain essential knowledge in areas including food hygiene, safe food storage, vermin control, the Country Code, fire safety, and first aid.

Beavers – In 2024, there were ten members (boys and girls aged between 5 years 10 months and 7 years 11 months). The group was led by two dedicated female leaders, supported by two Explorer Scouts who developed their leadership abilities through Young Leader roles. Over the year, a total of 85 badges were awarded, reflecting a wide range of activities including teamwork, cooking, creativity, disability awareness, gardening, health and fitness, hobbies, international engagement, exploration, safety, sports, and hiking. The programme included numerous games and activities designed to foster enjoyment, peer connection, and the development of essential social skills among the young participants.

Cubs – the Cub pack includes nine members, supported by a dedicated team of three adult female leaders and three young male leaders - Explorer Scouts working towards their Young Leader badges. Over the past year, the Cubs earned an impressive 142 badges across a wide range of activities, including athletics, collectors, entertainment, home help, international awareness, art, astronomy, air activities, and faith development. Notably, one Cub achieved the prestigious Chief Scout Silver Award, the highest honour in the section. The group remains actively involved in the community, regularly carrying out litter-picks in Castle Gardens, the Lough Shore, and around the Parish Centre. Cubs also took part in various District events such as orienteering, hiking, football, canoeing, and team challenges. Joint activities with 1st Muckamore Cubs included a winter camp at Dunluce Castle, a District camp in May, and an educational visit to Lough Shore Rescue where they learned about life-saving techniques and the vital role the team plays in responding to emergencies and incidents in and around Lough Neagh. These experiences helped the Cubs build confidence, develop essential life skills, and grow through fun and challenge in a safe, supportive environment.

Brownies – the Brownie unit consists of ten girls aged between 4 and 7 years. The group meet every Monday evening from mid-September through to the end of April. The Brownie programme includes work towards a range of interest badges such as Construction, Book Lover, Animal Lover, and Family Tree. The Brownies also observe key Christian festivals, including Easter and Christmas. Each year, the girls renew their Brownie Promise – “I promise to think about my beliefs and to be kind and helpful” – at a special evening attended by parents, friends, and family.

Rainbows - the Rainbows meet on Monday evenings in the Parish Centre and cater to girls aged between 4 and 7 years. In 2024, there were twelve members who took part in a variety of crafts and games each week, guided by two committed leaders. These activities are designed to help the girls develop essential life skills in an enjoyable and engaging way. The Rainbows also work towards badges in line with the Girlguiding UK programme. Each girl renewed her Rainbow Promise during the year.

The Funday Club - the Funday Club meets in the Parish Centre on Sundays from 12:00 pm to approximately 12:45 pm, except on the third Sunday of each month when families are encouraged to attend the Family Service together. The Funday Club is aimed at children of primary school age, typically welcoming between 15 and 20 children aged 4 to 13 years.

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Each week, the children engage in a variety of fun, faith-based activities designed to help them learn about God and enjoy fellowship with one another. Activities include:

- Singing and dancing to children's worship songs
- Individual and team games linked to Bible stories
- Listening to Bible stories and watching related short videos
- Creating crafts connected to the day's lesson
- Group discussions and quizzes to reinforce learning
- Learning about global issues such as famine and life in other countries

Highlights of the year included the Christmas party, with special guest Santa, and the Nativity Pantomime led by the Play it by Ear team, performed by the children during the Christmas morning service.

Additionally, children are invited to take part in the Holiday Bible Club, held in either July or August. In 2024, the 'All Stars Holiday Club' ran from 21 to 26 July, encouraging children of Primary School age to "come along for stories, games and craft and to find out what it means to be part of God's Team". The Holiday Bible Club is open to all primary school aged children from the wider local community.

The Funday Club provides a valuable opportunity for children to explore Christian faith, ask questions, and build important social skills such as turn-taking, listening, and teamwork. While children are engaged in these enriching activities, parents can focus on the church service with the reassurance that their children are being well cared for and spiritually nurtured.

The leaders also find great fulfilment in their roles, enjoying the interaction with the children and feeling they are contributing meaningfully to the life and ministry of the church.

All the organisations listed above are open to young people from all backgrounds, not just those from our parish and we welcome children of all denominations or none. Each group meets on its designated day from September to June. Through their involvement in activities at the Parish Centre, we hope these young people will be drawn into deeper engagement with our church community and worship life.

The Evergreens - the Evergreens is a group for the 'young at heart' in the parish that meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 11 am in the Parish Centre, with 40 to 50 attendees. Open to all, the group enjoys a morning of fun and fellowship, starting with tea, coffee, and biscuits, followed by a guest speaker or musical entertainment and then a light lunch. An example of a guest speaker was Trevor Dawson who gave an engaging talk on beekeeping, sharing insights into the craft and offering members the chance to sample and purchase his homemade honey. He rounded off his visit with a lively performance on the bagpipes. The club operates for ten months of the year (closed in July and August) and organises two outings annually to local hotels or restaurants for lunch. All events are held in a Christian atmosphere, helping foster meaningful friendships and a sense of shared community.

Tots 'n' Us – meets weekly during school term time and is run by dedicated volunteers from our parish. The group provides a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for parents, carers, and their children from the local community.

The group regularly supports up to 25 adults and 30 children each Friday. A wide variety of activities are offered, including a different craft each week, free play with educational toys, and regular singing and rhyme sessions. These activities support children in developing social and confidence-building skills that prepare them for nursery or early years education. At the same time, the group offers adults an opportunity to connect, relax, build friendships, and access peer support.

Refreshments are provided: tea, coffee, and scones for adults; and toast, cheese, grapes, and water for the children. The group warmly welcomes families from all faiths and cultural backgrounds, treating everyone with equal respect and dignity. All beliefs and lifestyle choices are respected, and the group actively fosters a spirit of inclusion.

Over the past year, the group has supported several parents who needed someone to talk to about their child or personal circumstances. Volunteers have provided listening support and shared information about relevant

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services and organisations when appropriate. We also support breastfeeding mothers and offer a private, quiet area for those who prefer a more discreet setting.

The volunteers themselves benefit significantly from their involvement in the group, forming strong friendships and support networks. As a gesture of appreciation, they enjoyed a social evening together at The Stone Hound this year, celebrating their shared commitment and contributions.

Mothers' Union - All Saints' Mothers' Union meets on the second Thursday of each month (excluding summer) and is attended by both members and non-members, with ages ranging from 40 to 98 years. For those unable to attend due to age or illness, regular visits are made to keep them connected. 2024 marked a special milestone, celebrating 90 years of the Mothers' Union in the parish. Key events included a 90th anniversary dinner at Dunadry Hotel, participation in the World Day of Prayer with local churches, attendance at the Festival Service in St Anne's Cathedral, and a special service in June with members from across Connor Diocese. The branch is a close-knit, supportive group, with members always eager to volunteer for MU projects and support parish events. The Vicar, Archdeacon Dr Stephen McBride, continues to be a great source of support.

Bowling Club - the Bowling Club meets every Wednesday afternoon in the Parish Centre and is open to all members of the local community, whether experienced bowlers or beginners. While the club is not currently involved in league or competitive bowling, it offers a relaxed time of fun and fellowship. Club bowls are provided, so there's no need to bring your own.

Heritage

All Saints' Parish Church in Antrim was built in 1596 and has been described by Dr Paul Larmour, one of Ireland's leading architectural historians, as the finest example of an Elizabethan Gothic church in Ireland.

The church building continues to serve as the central venue for significant acts of civic worship.

Although the physical building is over 425 years old and has played a central role in the lives of so many people, we are grateful that it continues to be a place where the living stones, the disciples of Jesus, still come to worship and receive their spiritual guidance and direction. We take seriously our duty with regards the safe keeping of parish records and items of historical interest, and these can be viewed on request by interested parties.

In conclusion, All Saints' remains a thriving and vibrant church, supported by an industrious clergy team and well attended church services. The parish is in a sound financial position, and this report provides an overview of the activities and worship that takes place in the church, made possible through the efforts of a wide range of dedicated volunteers.

Our links with local churches help to ensure the Christian religion continues to thrive throughout the Antrim area. Antrim was once statistically Northern Ireland's, most sectarian town. Thankfully, through the lead of several local churches including All Saints, initiatives such as the Borough's Community Safety Partnership and the Civic Forum (which dealt with flags and emblems issues), the town is a more settled area, and incidents of a sectarian nature have diminished.

The clergy from All Saints, St Jude's Muckamore, Antrim Methodist, High Street Presbyterian, St Joseph's and St Comgall's parishes and Antrim Christian Fellowship Church meet quarterly for prayer breakfasts in the 'Top of the Town'. These gatherings help strengthen the cordial relationships between the clergy, evaluate the previous events and make plans for coming activities. In a town where each of these denominations are relatively strong and with full parish activities, it is encouraging that every effort is made to look beyond our own denominational boundaries. Our joint Holy Week services, Walk of Witness and Lough Shore Dawn Communion on Easter

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Sunday serve as powerful symbols of the good relations that exist not only between the clergy but the parishioners of the above denominations.

We appreciate the tireless efforts of our clergy, who continue to innovate and develop ways to engage more people of all ages into following the way of Christ.

Statement as to disclosure to our examiners

In so far as the trustees are aware at the timing of approving our trustees' annual report:

- there is no relevant information of which the Independent Examiner is unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant information and to establish that the charity's independent examiner is aware of that information.

Independent Examiners

The examiner, Ian Johnston (A.F.A.), for and on behalf of Stevenson and Wilson Chartered Accountants, has indicated his willingness to continue in office, and a resolution concerning the reappointment was agreed by the Vestry on 18th September 2025.

On Behalf of the Trustees



Ven. Dr S.R. McBride

Date: 18th September 2025



Mr Brian Neill (Hon Treasurer)