

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT

ST DONARD'S PARISH CHURCH, BLOOMFIELD, BELFAST (NIC 102121)

c/o The Hon. Parochial Treasurer

Mr Michael Carson

32 Holland Gardens

BELFAST BT5 6EG

1 January 2024 until 31 December 2024

Trustees

The Rev Janet Stevenson (from 1st July 2024), Heather Boyd, Michael Carson, Kenneth Conlin, Fiona Duff, Caroline Fox, John Gilmore, Trevor Matthews, Nelson Morrow, William Moore, Rhonda Moroney, Jonathan Poole, Graeme Smyth, Gareth Watson, Keith White, and Hilary Whiteside.

Finance

St Donard's successfully came through a 9-month period without a Rector, following the retirement of the Venerable Ken Higgins in September 2023. The Rev Janet Stevenson was appointed Rector from 1 July 2024. The appointment process for the new Rector was helped by the overall satisfactory financial position of St Donard's. Churches in financial difficulties encounter difficulties in appointing new clergy.

The previous Rector and the Diocese ensured there was cover for our services until the new Rector was appointed. However, as in many parishes having no Rector in place, freewill envelope (and monthly standing orders) offerings, which fund the day to day running costs of St Donard's Parish were together significantly down in 2024 to £75,030 (2023: £83,614; 2022: £92,596). As in recent years, the decrease also reflected the death of several much loved elderly and generous parishioners. Offerings from those who have moved into care also fell. Many of the younger parishioners have significant financial commitments at this stage of their lives and give as generously as they can. The £75,030 given in 2024 is below the average (£92,822) for the period 2012 to 2024, and the lowest since before 2012. There was an ongoing shift from envelopes to monthly standing orders from 2019 and this shift has been key in helping the Parish through the Covid-19 crisis and providing a level of financial certainty going forward. Those who continue to use FWO envelopes continued to give generously. FWO standing orders totalled £47,457 (2023: £48,847; 2022: £51,037), significantly exceeding the £27,572 (2023: £34,767; 2022: £41,559) given using FWO envelopes. Donations to the running costs of the Church totalled only £277 in 2024, significantly down from £44,966 in 2023 and £13,464 in 2022. Of critical importance, £27,282 (2023: £27,537; 2022: £18,320) of Gift Aid (including Development Fund offerings) was recovered in 2024 from HMRC for freewill and other offerings. All Gift Aid was recovered promptly for 2024 and was in line with expectations, subject to normal timing delays. In previous years, Gift Aid recovered was impacted by the timeliness of recovery, with a significant increase in 2019 (£32,215), compared to 2018 (£17,137) and 2017 (£19,037). The high figure of £32,215 in 2019 was due to the dedication of the new Gift Aid Secretary and the more timely recovery of gift aid. The Parish is now recovering Gift Aid on a timely and regular basis.

In 2023, three legacy payments totalling £8,683 were received by the Parish (2023: £135,036; 2022: £1,830; 2021: £21,247; 2020: £97,920). These 2024 legacies were given to St Donard's by three parishioners, George Glass, Clara Smart and a further payment from the estate of Edna Dunn. Legacy income can vary significantly each year. These significant legacies received over several years, helped with the early repayment of the loan for the new Parish Centre. They have and will also be used to fund new and ongoing initiatives within the Parish.

Parishioners have also been very generous with their ongoing financial commitment to the costs of the new Parish Centre – with £17,080 given in 2024 (2023: £19,135; 2022: £21,805; 2021: £23,810; 2020: £26,330) by monthly standing orders and in 2024 a further £901 (2023: £1,335) through the Envelope Scheme. Sadly, money received by standing order has fallen with the death of several highly committed elderly parishioners. Money given has also fallen as the loan on the New Parish Centre was fully repaid in 2023. There were no

donations to the Development Fund in 2024 (2023: £0; 2022: £1,400). Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, the highly successful car boot sale normally held from April to October, could not be run and is now unlikely to resume. In previous years, the willing band of volunteers who ran the car boot sale enthusiastically raised significant sums, with £12,824 raised in 2019 (2018: £14,094).

Normal Church expenditure, overall, is down by £1,615 compared to the previous financial year. Remuneration remains the most significant cost, £42,586 (2023: £61,423; (2022: £76,340). Remuneration includes the salary and locomotory allowance paid to the Rector; the Clergy Pension Fund contribution paid by the Parish to the Diocese; any payments made to other clergy; non-clergy superannuation costs; and the remuneration paid to the Church Organist. The decrease is largely a result of the previous Rector retiring at the end of September 2023 and not being replaced until July 2024. Other significant costs included the renovation of the Rectory £28,049 (2023: £1,932); Parish's contribution to the Diocesan General Fund £15,228 (2023: £13,671); and Utility payments £10,687 (2023: £10,367). Our utility payments (gas, electricity and water) were significantly higher than in 2022 (£6,517) and 2021 (£4,562). Fire safety works fell back to £2,671 from £8,591 in 2023. Church insurance (£6,760 remained in line with 2023 (£6,252). The Parish appointed a Family Worker in August 2021, with his remuneration £8,126 (2023: £20,158) charged to the Development Fund. The Family Worker cost fell in 2024, following his departure in April 2024. The Parish had agreed to part-fund the rent of a missionary family who returned to Northern Ireland and who were undertaking work for the Diocese and for this Parish. Our contribution, which was £487 per month in 2024, commenced in October 2021 and this cost was met from the Development Fund. In 2024 this contribution was £3,900 (2023: £5,850). Our support of this family ended in August 2024, when Josh Hooker moved to a new role within the Diocese. Despite these significant costs, the Parish still contributed £14,757 (2023: £15,868) to other charities including, for example: £3,500 to CMS Ireland; £2,325 to the Bishop's Appeal; £1,707 to Christian Aid; £1,000 to the Marie Curie Hospice; £974; to the Leprosy Mission. During 2024, £2,310 was raised to support CMS Ireland in future years – the closing CMS Ireland balance at 31 December 2024 now stands at £4,547. This money is held in the St Donard's General Account.

Of continuing importance, during 2021, as a result of receiving significant legacies in 2021 and 2020, £136,000 was transferred from the General Fund to the Development Fund. This money has been used more generally by the Development Fund and since 2021 has helped the Parish fund a Family Worker, assist with the rent of a Missionary family (who were undertaking work for the Diocese and until recently also this Parish), and repay an additional £115,700 (£15,700 in 2023; £50,000 in both 2021 and 2022) of the loan used to build the new Parish Centre.

Our year end balances are as follows: General Bank account £241,504 (2023: £256,933) £44,161 in our Development Fund account (2023: £33,770); and £1,174 (2024: £720) in our Business Reserve account. In late 2024, high cash balances in our General Bank account and Development Fund account, were invested in the Business Reserve account to earn interest (2024: £454). In addition, the market value of our Parish Endowment Funds totalled £57,318 (2023: £53,096). These Funds have risen in value due to better stock market conditions during 2024.

In 2024 our financial statements include the individual accounts of our Parent & Toddler Group. The Parent & Toddler Group's income and expenditure was less than £1,000.

Looking forward to 2025, the financial position remains sound given our significant reserves. However, the income (FWO – envelopes and Standing Orders) received from Parishioners will be kept under active review given the significant falls in 2023 and 2024. Cash balances held in excess of our reserves policy and anticipated future routine expenditure, will be used to improve our family outreach work and work with younger people. As noted above, our loan for the new Parish Centre has now been repaid.

Management

The Finances are managed by the Treasurer who reports to the 16 Trustees at a Select Vestry meeting every two months, or more frequently if necessary. Select Vestry members are elected each year at the Easter

General Vestry.

In July 2024, the Parish warmly welcomed the Rev Janet Stevenson as our newly appointed Rector. From September 2023 until the new Rector's appointment in July 2024, the Select Vestry, as Trustees and with the support of the Diocese, managed the Parish. The Rev Stevenson has successfully lead the Parish since her appointment.

Purpose

The principal function of St Donard's Parish, Bloomfield, is to support the advancement of the Christian religion by advancing the work of the Parish and the whole mission of the Church, which includes pastoral, social and ecumenical outreach. All the activities of the Parish relate to the promotion of religion through holding regular Worship Services; caring for parishioners of all ages, especially the sick and elderly; and also working with around 150 young people within our community. To enhance our outreach work to families and young people, the Parish appointed James Armstrong as a Family Worker in August 2021. Although James left in 2024, a new Family Worker was appointed in early 2025 to continue this important work.

The Parish Church is a historically Listed Grade 2 building and the Parish works to maintain this building to a high standard.

Public Benefit

The Trustees of St Donard's Parish have complied with all their duties in line with the Charity Commission's Public Benefit statutory guidance.

Regular worship and reaching out into the community, both to the elderly and the young, with very varied activities, on a social and fundraising level, have been carried out throughout the year to fulfil our Statement of Public Benefit.

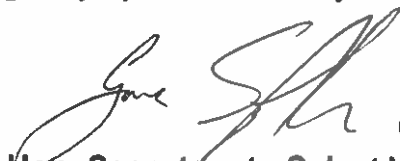
The Parish has regular Food Bank collections to help the needy within our area. Money has been raised towards the work of the Bishop's Appeal; Christian Aid; Church Missionary Society Ireland; Leprosy Mission; and Samaritan's Purse (Shoebox Appeal) – all for the disadvantaged in various countries of the world. Some of the other charities supported by the Parish included, for example: the Bishop's Ministry Fund; Christians Against Poverty, Church Ministry of Healing, Elmgrove Primary School; Marie Curie Hospice, Air Ambulance; Scripture Union; St Donard's Scouts; and WaterAid. A total of £14,757 was donated to charities in 2024 (2023: £15,868).

Our Church premises and halls are used regularly by the community and in excess of 350 people would normally use the premises each week.

Michael Carson

Hon. Parochial Treasurer

10th October 2025



Hon. Secretary to Select Vestry

10th October 2025