

Trustees' Annual Report for the year ended 31st December 2024

The trustees present the annual report and statements of Receipts and Payments, including Assets and Liabilities for Desertmartin Parish (Church of Ireland) for the year ended 31st December 2024.

Objectives and Activities

The charitable purpose of the Church of Ireland is the advancement of religion.

The principal function of Desertmartin Parish is to support the advancement of the Christian religion by promoting, through its work, the whole pastoral, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical mission of the Church. Being open to and engaging with society, and offering support to those who need help, are fundamental to the practical delivery of Christianity's benefits.

As a result of its activity in advancing the Christian religion, Desertmartin Parish has custody of property and records, materials, and artefacts of significance to the cultural and religious heritage. The select vestry of Desertmartin Parish maintains these.

Achievements, Performance & Public Benefit

Worship and Prayer

Desertmartin Parish Church is under the incumbency of the Reverend Philip Benson and is part of a larger group that includes Termoneeny Parish (Knockloughrim). The parish offers a wide range of weekly public acts of worship, including Morning Prayer and the celebration of Holy Communion. Our worship is conducted in accordance with the Church of Ireland's Book of Common Prayer, and we also join with our sister parish for the bi-annual "Confirmation" of faith service, led by the diocesan Bishop. We also provide for baptisms, weddings, funerals, and ongoing pastoral care. Special services throughout the year include Christmas Carol Services, Lent/Holy Week Services and Advent Services, which all provide intimate and reflective environments for worship. All are welcome to attend our worship services.

In addition to our regular services, some parish members are unable to attend church due to illness or age. Rev Benson regularly visits such parishioners to celebrate Holy Communion with them and to offer pastoral care and practical support, either in their homes, hospitals, or nursing homes. We have also introduced live streaming, allowing those unable to attend our services in person to participate from home. This is particularly important for those who are housebound or unwell.

At present, there are 80 families consisting of 164 individuals. The average weekly combined church attendance was 50, rising during special festivals. We celebrated one baptism during 2024, but no weddings or funerals.

In addition, the parish has hosted religious services in association with local community groups, including the Loyal and Masonic orders, such as the Orange Order, and the Royal Black Preceptory. Rev Philip is also a member of the Board of Governors for Knockloughrim and Magherafelt Primary Schools and is part of a rota for leading morning assemblies.

Additionally, in association with "Mid Ulster Clergy Together," an ecumenical group representing a diverse range of Christian denominations within the Mid Ulster council area, we have participated in community-wide acts of worship and supported the Magherafelt Food Bank Christmas appeal.

Desertmartin Parish has engaged in “Safe Church” training and is a registered “Safe Place” to support those in our community suffering from domestic violence.

Sunday School & Messy Church

Our parish has a well-established Sunday School, open to all children of preschool/primary school age. We also hold regular Messy Church-style events throughout the year, which are open to the broader community and well attended. Children and young people are an essential part of our parish. Rev Benson has a regular children’s address during our worship services, and children from the Sunday School participate in our monthly Worship Together Services.

Other Parish Activities

Other parochial groups include our Bible Study, Ladies Group, Indoor Bowling Club, and Craft and Chatter Group. These groups draw membership from our parishioners and the wider local community. We also hold several events over the year, including a children’s Easter Egg Hunt, an open-air service, and a Picnic and Parish Dinner.

Over the year, we have continued developing our Parish News magazine, distributed to our parishioners and freely available at the back of the churches. The magazine keeps our parishioners informed about important matters affecting our parish and includes articles that deepen our knowledge and faith in Jesus.

Mission and Evangelism

The church supports mission partners and other local charities, such as Crosslinks, Bishops’ Appeal, Tearfund, local food banks, Poppy Appeal, CMSI, and the Air Ambulance.

Cross-Community Relationships

The Select Vestry continually works to improve relationships with other denominations, particularly within the Roman Catholic community. Rev Benson takes an active role in the local clergy groups, including representatives from many local churches. These groups are inter-denominational, organise joint events and shared services, and represent their congregations in the public sphere by raising concerns about social issues. In addition, many of the activities and events we organised during the year were supported by all community sectors, and everyone was welcome to share in our activities and services.

The Rectory

Our rectory is located within the parish boundary and is well-maintained, with regular maintenance to keep it in good condition. In addition to providing a home for Rev Benson and his family, it is also used for meetings, pastoral appointments, and other parish activities. Termoneeny Parish assists with a share of our rectory costs and parochial expenses.

Diocesan Synod

Representatives of the parish sit on the Derry and Raphoe Diocesan Synod, providing an essential link between the parish and the broader structures of the Church of Ireland.

Public Benefit

The benefits of public worship include contributing to the spiritual well-being of participants, reinforcing Christian values, and providing practical support to struggling local families through Desertmartin Parish Church's partnerships with specialist support organisations. Our Child Protection

Policy is in accordance with the Safeguarding Trust policies of the Church of Ireland. We confirm that we have mitigated any potential harm arising from the parish's activities by adhering to the requirements of the Church of Ireland Safeguarding Trust policy for the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

The Parish has carefully considered the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities entered during the year have helped to achieve the Parish's objectives and activities and provided public benefit.

Financial Review

The year's results are set out on pages nine to fifteen, which the Trustees consider satisfactory.

The reserves of the parish are held for the advancement of its charitable purpose, other than restricted reserves, which are held for a designated purpose.

Going Concern

The trustees have reviewed the budgets for the year ahead. They are satisfied that adequate funds are in place to ensure that the Parish can continue its activities and that the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2024 can be signed off as a going concern.

Structure, Governance and Management

Governing Document and Constitution of the Charity

Chapter III of the Church of Ireland Constitution governs Parishes and Parochial Organisations. The Select Vestry members are the Charity Trustees.

Recruitment and Appointment of Select Vestry (Trustees)

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, allowing 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. The Select Vestry is elected as part of this General Vestry meeting. The Select Vestry will hold their positions for one year. Select Vestry members may be re-elected annually, and there is no limit to the number of terms that may be served.

Pay and Remuneration

The parish does not pay the rector directly. A monthly assessment is paid to the Diocese, which comprises a stipend, locomotory allowance, employer's national insurance and employer's clergy pension contribution. No other trustee receives remuneration, reward, or other private benefit for carrying out their trustee responsibility.

Organisational Structure

The select vestry is responsible for the day-to-day management of the parish. The Select Vestry consists of the members of the clergy serving in the parish, any curate assistant ("the curate"), the churchwardens, the glebe wardens and generally not more than twelve other members of the general vestry elected at the Easter Vestry.

The select vestry is chaired by the parish's incumbent or other clergy member officiating. Its members are responsible for making decisions on matters of general concern and importance to the parish, including how parish funds will be applied.

The select vestry meets at times fixed by the members or by the diocesan synod. The chairperson or the churchwardens may convene special meetings at any time. In 2024, the Select Vestry met 9 times, with an average attendance of 93%.

Compliance with Public Benefit

Desertmartin Parish has carefully considered the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities entered during the year have helped to achieve the Parish's objectives and activities and provided a public benefit.

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report, the statement of receipts and payments, and the statement of assets and liabilities in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

The law applicable to charities in Northern Ireland with an Income of less than £250,000 requires the trustees to prepare a statement of receipts and payments, and of assets and liabilities, for each financial year.

The trustees are responsible for keeping accounting records sufficient to show and explain the Parish's transactions and always disclose the Parish's assets and liabilities with reasonable accuracy. They are also responsible for safeguarding the Parish's assets and, hence, for taking reasonable steps to prevent and detect fraud and other irregularities.

Signed on Behalf of the Trustees


Chairperson: Rev Philip Benson


Treasurer: Mrs Lois Austin

Date: 28th October 2025