

## HERTINGFORDBURY ST MARY WITH ST JOHN PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners by Zoom at 8.00 pm Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

The Chair was taken by Rev Alan Stewart who opened the meeting with a prayer.

1. The Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021 were reviewed and approved.
2. Election of Churchwardens

Wardens Robin Bishop and David Gorton had both expressed their willingness to stand for re-election. In the absence of any other candidates for the post, David Gorton's re-election was proposed by Philip Juniper and seconded by Paul Attridge. Robin Bishop's re-election was proposed by Paul Attridge and seconded by Philip Juniper. Both were unanimously re-elected to the warm approval of the Meeting.

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Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held immediately after the above meeting of Parishioners

Present: Rev Alan Stewart (Chair), PCC Secretary Rachel Carter and 17 Parishioners

1. **Apologies.** Apologies had been received from Elizabeth Dempster, Robin Densem and Jean Walker
2. **Minutes of the Meeting** held on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021 were reviewed and agreed.
3. **Matters arising from the Minutes.** There were no matters arising.
4. **Report on numbers entered on the Electoral Roll.** Rachel Carter reported that the list prepared by Elizabeth Dempster, the Electoral Roll officer for April 2022 showed a count of, in total, 63 members, of whom 20 were resident in the parish, 43 not.
5. **Report from the Priest-in-Charge.** Rev Alan Stewart delivered the following report:

‘It’s not so much that the church has a mission, it’s that the mission of God has a church’ Those are the words of Alan Hirsh, an Australian author and expert in church growth, and his point is that it’s God who sets the agenda, it’s his mission; God who is already at work, often in overlooked and unexpected of places. Our job therefore as a church is to identify where he is already at work and to join in.

We discern this I believe through asking for eyes to see and for a passion and a compassion to join in. Prayer is where mission begins and ends. It is in prayer that we work out what our calling is, and it’s in prayer that we find the resources to empower that calling.

My plea then is for more of us to take seriously our need to pray; individually, yes, but also and perhaps more importantly together, corporately. Each month, we have that opportunity in our Saturday morning prayer gathering Breathe. And at present it’s a small and faithful gathering online.

My question to each of us tonight therefore, is if we don’t prioritize this, why?

Is it the time perhaps? – 8.30am on a Saturday. Talk to me

Is it because it’s online? Again, talk to me

Is it that we think it’s only for those who are the spiritually keen or especially ‘good’ at prayer?

Well, of course, there's no such thing. Good prayer is just honest, heartfelt, simple and often silent prayer.

Is it perhaps that we're afraid of being asked to pray aloud or to share something too intimate? I promise that won't happen.

Or is it that we just don't see the point in praying?

If that's the case, my challenge is to give prayer the benefit of the doubt, to come along and see how through prayer, we might actually discern God's mission, should we choose to accept it. Come and see how through prayer God might actually change things, beginning with you and with me. The next Breathe is first Saturday of May – 7th.

Sermon over.

After two years of disruption and uncertainty, it was wonderful and incredibly moving to celebrate the resurrection just eleven days ago, with so many at the Dawn service and then at our All Age. A sobering contrast to our celebrations were those of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters who one week later celebrated Orthodox Easter, amid the trauma and the horror of war and displacement. Over the next few months, Hertford and the surrounding villages will be welcoming over 40 people fleeing from Ukraine. Across our town, the outpouring of generosity and hospitality has been humbling, and in collaboration between St Andrew's and the parish of All Saints, plans are afoot for the wider church to welcome and support some of those families and those hosting, both practically and socially, starting with an afternoon drop-in at the St Andrew's Centre. A town-wide WhatsApp group has been created to share news and support and if you would like to know more, please contact me.

It's been great over the last few months to gradually reintroduce various aspects of our tradition back into our services, such as the offertory procession, kneeling at the altar and post-service coffee.

At our Advent service last year, we said a huge thank you to John Roberts who stepped down as choir master. I'm delighted that John still lends his expertise to the choir which I'm also delighted to say is slowly growing and would welcome new recruits; anyone who enjoys singing, in the shower or elsewhere! Thank you to the choir for their faithfulness in leading our worship especially through these ever-changing times. Our thanks as always go to Paul our organist and now choir master, for his skill, professionalism, humour and openness to new things (Bohemian Rhapsody on the organ for an upcoming wedding!)

One highlight for many of us over the past year was the worship and fellowship at our joint Away Day at High Leigh with our sister church St Andrew's. It's such a great way of building connections and friendships across the two congregations. The response from those who came was overwhelmingly positive and we're already planning another, this time with more spaces, so I'd encourage more of St Mary's folk to think about coming and to book early!

Our Zoom services have been and continue to be a lifeline for many including those who are shielding, self-isolating, prefer it or are holidaying. More than that, through Zoom we are pioneering new forms of worship and helping to build a new congregation that stretches far and wide. I'd like to say a huge thank you to the team, in particular to Kath Oates and Nick Hoyle. It was a privilege to license Kath at one of our Zoom services as both Pioneer Minister and Lay Leader of Worship with a particular focus on online outreach and the new housing development officially within St Andrew's parish but closer to St Mary's as the crow flies. Kath is our point of contact for those who join our congregation online and works carefully to help everyone feel valued and included. Our online presence is key both to the present and future ministry and mission of our church. It's our hope that everyone, however and wherever you worship feel part of one body, one community.

During this year we also commissioned Maria Henriksson-Bell as Pioneer Enabler and Lay Leader of Worship. Hopefully Maria will be able to share her reflections at some point here at St Mary's. Her pioneer work will be focusing on the Home-schooling, LGBTQ+ and the arts communities within the town. At St Andrew's Maria heads up a small Eco group who are researching ways that the church can reduce its carbon footprint. If any members of St Mary's would like to form a similar

initiative, please let me know.

As already mentioned, the new development of 300 plus homes on Sele is a wonderful opportunity to reach out and our Reaching New People Group are planning to hand-deliver a 'welcome to the neighbourhood' pack, and offer other ways to help people connect such as walking groups in Panshanger Park; some social, some more mindful and reflective.

As we move forward in mission, we want to be listening to God and listening to others. On Sunday 8th May we will be asking our congregations two questions 'what matters to you?' and 'what do you long for?'. We will then ask each member to ask at least one friend who doesn't come to church these same questions. Our hope is that through this exercise in listening, we will discern what's really important in these times, and how and if we might respond.

It was certainly very clear that what matters to many people is the relationship they have with their pets, not least during these past years of Lockdown. It was wonderful then to celebrate this back in September and who can forget the canine chorus of All Things B and B at our follow-up Pet Service. You'll be glad to hear that by popular demand, we will be holding another Pet service this year on the afternoon of 25th September.

We also of course are blessed with beautiful outdoor space, and we continue to be grateful to the Churchyard Team who keep the grounds looking so immaculate. We're very much looking forward to using our wonderful grounds for the return of our parish Family Fun Day on Saturday 9th July complete with Cream teas, model railway, build your own rocket and the Teddy Bear zip-wire! Our thanks go especially to Jean Skinner, David Gorton and the team.

Tracy and I have become very used to the great outdoors as we've led collective worship and special services with our church schools and St Joseph's in playgrounds and woodlands this past year. We look forward to seeing how God blesses and uses the Outdoors church or Woodland Wonderings, which meets in the Forest School area at St Joseph's. Our thanks go to the school for their support and generosity.

By popular demand from a few of the residents at Calton Court, we've reintroduced a fortnightly communion service there with currently around ten people attending.

We're very grateful to Geoff Oates for coordinating a St Mary's Home group over the past few years. This has gone on hold for now but our hope is that there will be renewed interest in meeting informally to reflect on our faith. If you'd value such a group where deep church happens, please let me know.

Although for the moment we are financially solvent, the days are fast coming when a church will not be able to support itself financially purely from the stewardship giving of the congregation. We have to look therefore for other revenue streams to support the mission and ministry of St Mary's. We're very grateful then, that building on the work of Chris Maunder Taylor and others, Helen Bishop and a small group are due to launch a Friends of St Mary this Saturday at our Parish Breakfast. The remit of the Friends group is to raise funds for the restoration and preservation of the church buildings and churchyard. A programme of events is now available.

I want on your behalf to thank several people for their administrative support within the church. Thanks go to Rachel Carter who is not only PCC secretary but also updates and maintains our website. Thanks also to Robin Bishop who updates the congregation through email and thanks to Karen Cox who this year has taken over from Kerrie as our wedding administrator for both parishes and is doing a wonderful job.

This past year we have commissioned Christine Gorton as a new Pastoral Assistant, alongside Kay Juniper and Helen Bishop. Each is licensed to take home communion to the sick or housebound, and help to coordinate all the wonderful care and support that happens across the congregation. Our thanks go to the expanding ministry team of our assistant priest Bill (who in retirement continues to offer his gentle and wise ministry among us), our Readers Melanie and Geoff, and our Lay Leaders of Worship Forbes, Kath and Maria.

Huge thanks also go to our wardens who tirelessly work behind the scenes, each as you know wearing many hats.

There are in a community like this so many people to thank; those who help with coffee mornings,

sides duties, refreshments, intercessions, readings, cleaning, flower arranging, visiting, editing the church magazine, serving on PCC, school governors, bell-ringers, leading compline and Mindfulness... and the list goes on. Thank you.

And lastly on a personal note, on behalf of my family and myself, I'd like to thank you all for your encouragement, love patience, prayers and support. I count it a great blessing and a great privilege to be called your vicar.

O God, make the door of this house  
Wide enough to receive all who  
need human love and fellowship;  
Narrow enough to shut put all envy, pride and strife.  
Make its threshold smooth enough  
to be no stumbling block to children, nor to straying feet,  
But rugged and strong enough to turn back the tempter's power.  
God make the door of this house the gateway to thy divine kingdom.  
Amen.

**6.1 The PCC and the Parish generally.** Rachel Carter noted that matters relating to this item had been covered under the Priest's report and PCC minutes were available to consult on request.

**6.2 Churchwardens on fabric, goods etc.** David Gorton reported as follows:

The general maintenance is in good order: Gutters, downpipes and soakaways have been cleared and cleaned. Fire extinguishers tested and replaced as necessary. The 5 yearly electrical testing for the main body of the church has been completed and certified and the required PAT testing also done, all necessary for insurance purposes. The boilers were serviced prior to the winter period and have proved to be running well with only some minor work necessary to a switching system / valve to the BR addition.

The twice-yearly servicing and tuning to the organ has been done and a repair to one of the valves is booked to be done on the next visit.

The annual inspection was carried out by the Rural Dean Mark Dunstan who was generally happy that all was in good order. The Quinquennial inspection is due this year.

The NW gate repair was completed and restored to its former glory!

The south wall plaster repair work is due to be carried out this year and now that conditions are suited to drying times etc I am waiting for information on timing.

The long running enquiry into relaying the paths in resin bound gravel finally established a suitable local contractor and quotation for the final specification at circa £30,000. We would choose to go ahead with this if ideally we could gain a grant to subsidise some of the cost.

Following last year's report regarding the Brace Room roof leaking, various repairs were carried out before further investigation, including site visits from original builders Lodge and son and architects Michael Dales, identified design faults in the manufacture of the roofing system! Our architects have put responsibility with Lodge to take the matter up with the roofing system manufacturer under their contractual liability. I am currently waiting for the latest report.

**Churchyard:** The front and central areas of the churchyard have been in fairly good order throughout the year, although some additional work is required to cut the south boundary hedges.

The lower churchyard however has been mostly out of control for most of last year and will be difficult to get back in shape this year without a concerted effort from an energetic team ! As grateful as I am for the volunteers helping with regular cutting, I am afraid for various reasons the numbers are diminishing.

I can report that it is great to return to "normal" services and my sincere thanks go to the regular teams that help with all of the duties and work at St Mary's. I never take for granted the fantastic support group that we have.

Thanks to my counterpart Robin, particularly for his work on admin and safeguarding and all of the additional online requirements that have been needed during the last year, aside from his work as treasurer.

Well done Philip for another fantastic year working on our Parish Magazine,

Thank you to Alan and Bill for their wonderful ministry as always, particularly having lost the extra support from Wendy. I finish by saying once again, we are truly blessed.

**6.3 The Deanery Synod.** Robin Bishop gave the following report from the Synod, produced by Marion Little, Deanery Secretary:

Deanery Synod met four times during 2021: on 8th February, 16th March and 12th May via Zoom, and on 23rd September in person in Holy Trinity, Bengoe.

*February: Clergy Well-Being*

In February the main discussion was a reflection on the General Synod Measure on Clergy Well-being and was led by The Revd Ysmena Pentelow, The Revd David Sheppard and Katy Little, an Ordinand.

*March: Where are we now? Seeking the way ahead (post Covid)*

The Synod considered the bishop's document on recovering from Covid disruptions to worship – "Where are we now? Seeking the Way ahead." The discussion was led by the Rural Dean and considered the following questions: How do we regain our confidence and hope after the virus has pulled us apart and caused wide disruption to church and society? What have we learnt from our experience of isolation, including our online presence, pastoral care and need for togetherness? What opportunities (other than restoring vital shared worship) look most important in your parish context?

*May: Faith in Young People*

Christian Cole, the Diocesan Youth Missioner, addressed Synod with the findings of a major piece of research conducted in the Diocese by Youthscape Centre for Research. The research was carried out in early 2020, before Covid. The report identified trends in young people's engagement with our churches, presenting us with positive stories and a serious challenge. It was evident that the pandemic had had a significant effect on the extent to which young people were involved in the life of our churches, and therefore the report's recommendations are all the more urgent. Many Christians report coming to faith as young people and part of our calling is to ensure that today's young people get to hear about Jesus. To make that happen, we need to understand our context and look hard at what we can offer. Everyone is encouraged to read the report, "Faith in Young People", available on the Deanery website under "General Papers" in the "Documents" section.

*September: Deanery Vision - Facilitating Mission across 23 Parishes.*

After celebrating our first in-building gathering for two years with an extended time of worship, the two main items of business of the September Synod meeting were the elections of the new Standing Committee and the new Rural Dean's presentation of the Deanery Vision which included some of the steps that would need taking in the short term to see this vision realised. The newly elected Standing Committee was given the task of identifying and building the administrative structure in

the Deanery which would enable these steps to be taken.

**Other News:** During the year – The Revd Canon Jo Loveridge stood down as Rural Dean and The Revd Mark Dunstan took over as Rural Dean with Revd Ysmena Pentelow becoming Assistant Rural Dean. Revd Doug Loveridge stood down as Secretary, and with the permission of Synod, the post of secretary was filled by Marion Little from St Mary’s Ware (but not a member of Synod). Diana Perkins continues as Lay Chair until 2024 and Janet Bird continues as Treasurer. Elections to Diocesan Synod and General Synod were also conducted this year. Our Diocesan Synod currently has two vacancies in the house of laity and two vacancies in the house of clergy. Grant applications from St John the Baptist, Gt Amwell, and Christ Church, Ware, were supported by the Deanery and approved by the relevant Diocesan committee. This will help continue and enhance mission and ministry in these parishes over the coming year. Parishes are encouraged to apply for small “kickstart” grants from special Diocesan funds, either to restart initiatives which have closed because of Covid or to start new ones. There is a link for more information (including an application form) on the Deanery website under “General Papers” in the “Documents” section.

Our Deanery comprises 23 parishes – the two towns of Hertford and Ware and all the surrounding villages stretching from Hunsdon and Widford in the east to Essendon in the west; from Newgate Street in the south to Aston and High Cross in the north. The Synod and its various officers, committees and teams work to provide practical, financial and spiritual support to the parishes of the Deanery as they seek to conduct their mission and ministry for the glory of God. We are also the link with the Diocesan Synod which makes wider decisions about mission and ministry in our area, and, through Diocesan Synod, we are linked with the national General Synod.

The Deanery Synod provides a website for information about parishes and churches and our joint mission to Live God’s Love. It is hoped this will be developed over time. Your suggestions would be most welcome.

We are currently looking for volunteers for a series of project teams to help the parishes face the challenges of the next few years. The teams will be looking at:

- Social Action,
- Environmental Concerns,
- New Housing Developments,
- Pioneer Ministry and Reaching New People “where they are”,
- Ecumenical Partnerships, and
- Communications.

If you have interest and/or expertise in any of these areas, please do get in touch.

## **7. Safeguarding**

Robin Bishop gave a report on Safeguarding as follows:

It remains incumbent upon us all to take responsibility for safeguarding. The failings of the past must not be repeated. If in any doubt, any concerns should be shared with the Clergy &/or the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO).

Courses and declarations are an important part of the fight against abuse. In November the Diocese issued revised (and more straightforward) requirements. These can be found at the diocesan website <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/diocese/safeguarding/>

PCC members/Wardens/Choirmaster/PSVs:

Basic (formerly C0), Foundations (formerly C1), Responding Well to Domestic Abuse, DBS check. Other than Basic, all to be renewed every 3 years

PSO:

Above plus Leadership (formerly C2), Safer Recruitment & People Management both to be renewed every 3 years, PSO Induction

Since the last report I have been reviewing who has courses to attend. Of the 13 people eligible, 7 are up to date, 2 have one to complete, 1 has two complete, 1 has three to complete, 1 has four to complete, 1 has five to complete. It is a priority of mine to ensure that outstanding courses/declarations are completed as a matter of course. In the final analysis the Incumbent has the right to suspend membership of the PCC until courses/declarations are complete.

The above notwithstanding, during the course of the year the PCC met all requests from the Diocese.

During the course of the year it was agreed, that during an interregnum, the safeguarding material held by the incumbent of Hertingfordbury St. Mary would be held together with the material relating to the parish of Hertford St. Andrew in the St. Andrew safe

During the course of the year no referrals had been made to the PSO or to the Team Vicar.

Rachel Carter reported that over the past year members of the PCC had complied with their duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). All the relevant paperwork regarding to safeguarding was held in folders and/or displayed in the South Porch.

**8. Financial Report from the Hon Treasurer.** The audited financial accounts were available on the website. Robin Bishop's summary was as follows:

These accounts refer to the calendar year 2021.

I am grateful to Karen Murphy for the auditing of the accounts. The accounts were approved by the PCC via e-mail (as permitted by current diocesan regulations). The accounts can be found on the St. Mary website

### **Overview**

Overall there was a surplus of c£7.3k (2020 c£1.3k) which is a pleasing outcome in difficult times, reflecting a return to more normal income levels with tightly controlled expenditure

### **Income**

The biggest source of income is giving by the congregation. The increasing use of the Parish Giving Scheme and Standing Orders, is to be welcomed. Signing up to the PGS can now be done online and takes 5 minutes, so if not signed up please give serious thought to so doing. Although the plate and envelopes make up a small proportion of income, on the return to regular services, many people made additional contributions to cover the weeks when services were not held. Some fundraising events returned which helped. There was an increase in fees from weddings and funerals but still lower than pre-pandemic. We were also fortunate to be the recipients of several very generous donations.

### **Expenditure**

The biggest items of expenditure are non-discretionary ie Parish Share (c90% of which covers clergy costs) and insurance, so there is little leeway in respect of most other expenditure.

### **The Future**

Whilst it was good to run a surplus, half of that can be attributed to one-off donations and it is not a sensible strategy to rely on such generosity. The immediate challenge is to control energy costs. Longer term the PCC still wishes to replace the main path and looking further ahead the boiler will

need replacing.

The Wardens will continue to monitor expenditure closely and the Treasurer is happy to receive ideas that will increase income.

I am grateful to Karen Murphy for the auditing of the accounts. The PCC approved the accounts at its meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The accounts can be found on St. Mary's website:  
[www.hertingfordburystmary.org](http://www.hertingfordburystmary.org)

**9. Appointment of Independent Assessor** The Treasurer, Robin Bishop expressed warm thanks for the work of Mrs Karen Murphy and was delighted to inform the Meeting that she had agreed to continue as Independent Assessor.

#### **10. Election of members to the Parochial Church Council**

Three members of the PCC had come to the end of their term of office. Ritchie Copues and Stephane McCarthy were re-elected to the PCC. Emma Waring had decided to step down, and was warmly thanked for her contribution.

#### **11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

Rev Alan Stewart closed the meeting with a prayer.