

HERTINGFORDBURY ST MARY WITH ST JOHN PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners in St Mary's Church on Sunday 30th April 2023 at 10.15 am.

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

1. The Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 28th April 2022 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 Jon Banks and seconded by Philip Juniper. Robin Bishop's re-election was proposed by Philip Juniper and seconded by Jon Banks. Both were unanimously re-elected to the warm approval of the Meeting.

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 31 Parishioners

1. **Apologies.** Apologies had been received from Jean Walker
2. **Minutes of the Meeting** held on Thursday 28th April 2022 were reviewed and agreed.
3. **Matters arising from the Minutes.** There were no matters arising.
4. **Report on numbers entered on the Electoral Roll.** Elizabeth Dempster, the Electoral Roll officer reported that the roll for April 2023 showed a count of, in total, 60 members, of whom 18 were resident in the parish, 42 not. Two additional applications had also been received very recently. Elizabeth was thanked warmly for all her work.
5. **Report from the Priest-in-Charge.** Rev Alan Stewart delivered the following report:

‘Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say, rejoice! ‘

Those perhaps familiar words are from Paul's letter to the Philippians, and in this my own 'letter' to the church, I couldn't have put it better myself.

Rejoice; take joy in who God is, in what He has done and, in the grace and blessing of the life He's given us, both individually and collectively as a church.

Joy was the theme of last Sunday's joint parish Away Day and I think I speak for everyone who came in saying what a truly joyful day it was as we worshipped and socialised, explored and created together. If you've never been to an Away Day, I'd thoroughly recommend that you give it a try next year if possible. During our time together we were reflecting on how joy and gratitude create a positive upwards spiral; gratitude creates joy, joy creates gratitude, and so on.

As we look back on this past year since our last APCM, we have so much to be grateful for, so much to rejoice in.

It began with an outdoors creative print retreat, followed by our family Fun Day, an unforgettably chaotic pet service, lots of wonderful social events, Picturing Advent online alongside a full range

of Christmas services including carols at the White Horse, and most recently a Lent course preparing us for our Holy Week and Easter services, to name but a few.

This also was the year when finally, we admitted children to communion before Confirmation and weekly it's a great joy to see a few of our children and young people more fully participate in this very special meal.

The poet Rabindranath Tagore once wrote 'I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.'

Joy comes from service. And as a church we've sought wherever we can to serve both those within and beyond our community.

It's been humbling to witness how folk from St Mary's have reached out to our Ukrainian guests over the past year, through tea parties and language lessons, through hosting families and supporting individuals in need, and of course through the choir who sang at the recent concert with the Welwyn Male Voice Choir.

We're very much looking forward to the 10.30am service on Sunday 21 May at St Andrew's when a group of Ukrainians will join us in the service to say their own personal thank you. Do drop in.

With the ongoing cost of living crisis, we've responded to the need for warm spaces by placing a hot drinks tab behind the bar at the Golden Griffin.

This year, in collaboration with Sele Hub in Fleming Cres, we've offered free Mindfulness sessions to help with wellbeing, and seen friendship grow within that group.

With the addition of 250 new homes in the parish, our Reaching New People Group are currently exploring ways we can connect with new households and Kath Oates from St Andrew's and our own Stephane McCarthy will soon be visiting door to door with a Welcome to the Neighbourhood card and a gift of some nice biscuits. Our PCC will be meeting in a few weeks time to explore new ideas for how we might reach out more as a community.

Our wonderful magazine continues to reach a wide range of people in Hertingfordbury and beyond, and our thanks go to our editor Philip. We're also grateful to Rachel Carter who is not only our minutes secretary at PCC and today, but also does such great work with the website.

We continue to be indebted to our Zoom team for the energy and creativity they bring to our weekly and other online services. Post Pandemic, these services have welcomed people from far and wide who value the services and continue to offer an invaluable community to those who for whatever reason can't get to our church buildings.

Our thanks go to our Pastoral Visitors, Christine, Helen and Kay, and to our ministry team who help lead our worship; our assistant priest Bill, Readers Melanie and Geoff, and Lay Leaders of Worship, Maria, Forbes, Kath and soon to be commissioned Adrian Walter.

Last summer we said goodbye to our wonderful Youth and Children's Worker, Tracy. I'm delighted that for the time being, Tracy still helps with Collective Worship at the three schools we work with. We continue to advertise and to pray for the right person or people to take up the role of paid Youth and Children's Worker.

As we look forward to the year ahead, we will be shortly reinstating prayer ministry during the 9.15am service in the chapel during communion on the third Sunday of the month.

Plans are also afoot for some short courses including an introduction to the Bible in the Autumn.

There are too many people to thank personally for all that happens here, but I'd like to mention just a few. Week by week our Sunday worship is enabled by our choir and our thanks go to them, and to our organist and choir master Paul. We're also grateful for our faithful troops of bell ringers (both hand and tower).

During the past year we've seen the setting up of the Friends of St Mary's, whose remit is to raise funds for the restoration and preservation of the church buildings and churchyard. We're indebted to Helen Bishop the chair and the trustees for the programme they've helped to plan and run raising vital funds for the future of this beautiful church.

I want on your behalf to thank our wonderful wardens Robin Bishop and David who work tirelessly behind the scenes, each wearing several different hats. Thank you too to Karen Cox our

wedding administrator for both parishes who makes my job so much easier. There are in a community like this so many people to thank; those who help with sides duties, refreshments, intercessions, readings, cleaning, flower arranging, visiting, serving on PCC, school governors... and the list goes on.

And lastly, on a personal note, I want to say a heartfelt thank you to you all for your support particularly during this year. I have felt very carried by your prayers and your love.

My prayer for us all then is that as we find strength and take joy in our God and in one another, so that that same joy will continue to spill out within and beyond these walls.

O God, make the door of this house
Wide enough to receive all who
need human love and fellowship;
Narrow enough to shut out 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. Rachel Carter noted that the PCC had met five times since the last APCM. Full details of discussions are in the PCC minutes, which are available from the PCC Secretary on request.

6.1.2 The current membership of the PCC is as follows:

Rev Alan Stewart (incumbent), Rev Bill Church, Robin Bishop (churchwarden), David Gorton (churchwarden), Paul Attridge, Ritchie Copues, Robin Densem, Philip Juniper, Stephane McCarthy Jan Pearson, Jean Skinner.

Three members had come to the end of their terms of office: Robin Densem, Jean Skinner and Kay Juniper. Robin and Jean were happy to stand again for re-election. Kay Juniper had decided to step down and was greatly thanked for her fantastic contribution during her membership term. Helen Bishop had stepped down as a co-opted member to concentrate on her excellent work in setting up the Friends of St Mary.

6.1.3 Members were invited to consider joining the PCC.

6.1.3. Details of the work of the Parish had been covered in the Priest's report.

6.2 Churchwarden's report on the fabric of the church

David Gorton reported as follows:

6.2.1 All general maintenance has been regularly carried out with all electrical certificates and PAT testing up to date. Fire extinguishers have been replaced or replenished as necessary and all is in good order. The boilers had their pre-winter servicing and have been running without any problems. This is particularly pleasing as it underlines our decision in 2017 to upgrade the boilers at a cost of £3500 rather than the recommended replacement at approximately £20,000!

Current Issues;

6.2.2 At the start of winter 2022 dampness was evident on the inside of the north wall of the ringing chamber. It was traced to a blocked downpipe on the outside of the tower, this has now been cleared, however it will take a good while before it dries sufficiently to redecorate the inside section of wall. We regularly have the gutters, downpipes and soakaways cleared so this was a disappointing problem to discover. To defend our contractor, I will say that the high level of the blockage made physical examination almost impossible.

6.2.3 I reported last year on the problem with the Brace Room roof leaking and showing internal staining in the room. After many months of to and from telephone calls and emails, one email consisting of a 2-page report from our architect, and 4 attachments from the contractors and a further 18-page document, I will summarise: In short, the manufacturers are blaming the installation

contractors for not complying with the installation guidelines and the contractors have gone out of business! Therefore, neither can honour any guarantee, and the architects have a small print disclaimer!

With the help of our architects, we are now investigating the problem and will hopefully find a remedy that will not be too expensive.

6.2.4 The Churchyard: The front and central areas of the churchyard have been in fairly good order throughout the year and extensive trimming and cutting to the south

Boundary hedge has been carried out. The lower churchyard however has been mostly out of control and will be difficult to get back in shape without a concerted effort from an enthusiastic team! As grateful as I am to the volunteers that help with regular cutting, I am afraid for various reasons the numbers have seriously diminished and we are now desperate for new helpers.

St Mary's Team

6.2.5 Robin and I would like to thank all of the people that make up our teams of supporters who put in regular work to keep the wheels of St Mary's turning: the cleaning rota, the flower team, the refreshment team, the sidesmen, the servers, we are most grateful to them all and never take for granted the fantastic support group that we have.

Our thanks to Helen for her work to finally get the Friends of St Mary's group set up and already working to good effect, and making a great start!

Our thanks to Philip for his fantastic work on the Parish Magazine once again, well done.

Thank you to Rachel for her work behind the scenes on our admin and especially for her work setting up and servicing the St Mary's website.

Thanks also to my counterpart Robin for his work with admin and safeguarding and all of the additional online requirements, aside from his work as treasurer.

On behalf of all of us, our thanks to Alan and Bill for their fantastic ministry, we are blessed to have them to lead us in our Services and grateful for all of the work that they do in our community.

6.3 The Deanery Synod. Robin Bishop gave the following report from the Synod, prepared by Marion Little, of the Deanery Synod of Hertford and Ware

6.3.1 The Deanery Synod met three times during 2022.

March – the Role of the Diocese with the Deaneries and Parishes.

Synod met the new Diocesan Secretary David White, who gave an insight into his own life of faith and experience of worshipping in the Church of England. He outlined his vision for the diocesan office as existing for the purpose of serving the life of the diocese in its parishes, schools and chaplaincies. David also noted some of the challenges facing deaneries and the way in which deaneries are working together to support one another. There were questions about the diocesan financial situation post Covid and the challenge of attracting new people to church and encouraging congregations to return to worshipping in church. These questions generated much discussion.

Revd Rachel Wakefield gave a full report on the February General Synod which had discussed issues including Safeguarding; Facilities; Slavery and Human Trafficking.

July – Waterways Chaplaincy & Social Action.

There was a presentation from Lorraine Newman, a local Waterways Chaplain. The chaplain's role is to be a visible presence along the waterways and to work in partnership with the boaters, the waterways authorities and outside agencies. Lorraine explained how she helped those in need living on the waterways with finding medical treatment and mental health support and linking them to food banks and other assistance.

This was followed by a presentation from Revd Sarah Forrest and Lyn Paddon from the Deanery Standing Committee who were leading on the Social Action Group. They talked about the Social Action activity in their benefice and the work they were doing with the Hertford Food Bank and with local homeless people.

Tim Crowther gave a full report on the recent Diocesan Synod which had covered the Environment Net Carbon Zero policy document, Wellbeing of Clergy, priorities for new housing development, safeguarding & finance. Colin Bird reported from the Diocesan Board of Finance, highlighting the

financial deficits resulting from the pandemic caused largely by the reduction in the collection of Parish Share.

The deanery voted on a response to the Triennial Share Factor Review (voting to make no change on this occasion in view of the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic).

There were reports from the remaining Project Teams.

November – Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust & Net Zero

William Masterton from the Hertfordshire & Bedfordshire Historic Churches Trust spoke about their fundraising via membership and the ‘Bike & Hike’ and how churches and parishes could apply for grants. Every parish and individuals were encouraged to join and support this organisation.

Mrs Emma Critchley, Diocesan Pastoral & Advisory Secretary spoke on church buildings and taking steps towards Net-Zero. She outlined the support and advice available from the Diocese and from the Church of England website. Her presentation was followed by a plenary discussion on the issues of maintaining old buildings and looking after the environment (God’s creation).

The continued development of the Deanery Mission Action Plan and Project teams was also discussed.

6.3.2 Other News

The parishes are to be congratulated on their excellent efforts in 2022 to pay Parish Share. Together, we contributed 97.58% of the request made of our deanery.

A Pastoral Aid Support Grant application for St Mary, Ponsbourne, was supported by the deanery for 2023, and it is expected that all the parishes will make their parish share payments in full through the year (2023).

The parishes of Thundridge and High Cross bade farewell to their vicar, Amanda Duncan, at the end of December 2022 and the process for finding new leadership for the parishes has begun. Please hold all concerned in your prayers.

Elections for deanery synod representatives are to be held at the APCMs in each parish. You may have heard that a limit on the number of consecutive terms of office was introduced, but this was subsequently removed. If an APCM wishes to impose its own limit, this can be done, otherwise, there is no limit to how many terms of office a person can hold.

We have the following project teams which would value new members with relevant expertise or interest:

- Fresh Expressions
- Social Action
- Environment
- Finance
- New Developments

The Deanery Synod is a conduit between parishes and the wider church and will continue to support, share and explore issues highlighted and offer support and advice and share best practices.

6.3.3 After many years’ service, Diana Salthouse had decided not to stand again as a representative on the Deanery Synod. She was warmly thanked for all her work in this role.

Robin had expressed his willingness to stand again for election as a representative on the Deanery Synod. His re-election was proposed by Alma Cartwright and seconded by Jean Skinner. He was re-elected and warmly thanked for all his work on the Synod.

6.3.4 Robin invited anyone who was interested in becoming a representative of St Mary’s on the Deanery Synod to speak to him.

7. 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 2022.

I am grateful to Karen Murphy for the auditing of the accounts. The accounts were approved by the PCC at its March meeting. The complete accounts can be found on in the South Porch or on the St. Mary website

Overview

Overall there was a surplus of c£4.7k (2021 c£7.3k) which is a pleasing outcome in difficult times. Whilst Income was up c£2.8K, Expenditure increased c£5.5k

Income

Donations, which vary from year to year, were down c£5k offset by an extra c£2k in collections.

Fees increased by c£2.6k reflecting more weddings but also more funerals.

Covenanted giving was down c£2k reflecting the death of a number of parishioners.

Fundraising showed an increase of c£2.7k reflecting the ability to return to a more normal level activity.

Insurance refund reflects a payment to cover damage to the entrance gate pillar. This will be spent during 2023

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.

I am very conscious that these are not easy times but the church is here 365 days a year and if everyone moved to a regular payment that would help enormously.

Similarly, the Treasurer is happy to speak with anyone who might be considering leaving a legacy to St. Mary.

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.

Work -Ministry The c£1.9k increase is the opposite side of the coin to more weddings and funerals as a share of the fee goes to the Diocese.

Work – Church The increase of c£4.2k reflects principally increases in Utilities c£0.7k, Insurance c£1.2k, Maintenance c£0.8k, Organ c£0.8k and Churchyard c£0.8k.

The Future

Whilst it was good to have achieved a surplus, higher energy bills have been received and there is still scope to reduce usage. That said, we are looking at spending on an Energy Audit with a view to reducing expenditure in the longer term

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

8. 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.

9. Election of members to the Parochial Church Council

As reported above, three members of the PCC had come to the end of their term of office. Kay Juniper had decided to step down after many years of service. Robin Densem re-elected, having been proposed by Kay Juniper and seconded by Jean Skinner. Jean Skinner was re-elected, having been proposed by Alma Cartwright and seconded by Janice Brown.

10. Safeguarding

10.1 St. Mary's Safeguarding Officer, Robin Bishop reported 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 PSO.

Of the 11 people who are required to complete courses and have a DBS check, 8 are fully compliant with three in the process of updating. The above notwithstanding, during the course of the year the PCC met all requests from the Diocese. During the course of the year no referrals had been made to the PSO or to the Team Vicar.

10.2 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 the House of Bishops' Guidance on Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults). All relevant paperwork is held in folders or displayed in the South Porch.

11. Any other business

There was no other business.

Rev Alan Stewart closed the meeting with a prayer.