

HERTINGFORDBURY ST MARY WITH ST JOHN PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners in St Mary's Church on Sunday 28th April 2024 at 10.30 am.

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

1. The Minutes of the Meeting held on Sunday 30th April 2023 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 Craig Pettengell and seconded by John Roberts. Robin Bishop's re-election was proposed by Rachel Threlfall and seconded by Jan Pearson. 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 29 Parishioners

1. **Apologies.** Apologies had been received from Elizabeth Dempster, Philip Juniper, Pat Nicholls and Jean Walker.
2. **Minutes of the Meeting** held on Sunday 30th April 2023 were reviewed and agreed.
3. **Matters arising from the Minutes.** There were no matters arising.
4. **Report on numbers entered on the Electoral Roll.** It was reported that the number of those on the Roll stood at 59, of which 17 were resident and 42 non-resident. There had been a small number of changes over the year, but numbers have remained steady. There would be a full revision of the Roll next year. Elizabeth Dempster was stepping down as Electoral Roll officer and was thanked for all her work over the past few years. Anyone interested in taking on the role should contact the PCC Secretary. [Secretary's note: Christopher Maunder Taylor has kindly volunteered for this position.]
5. **Report from the Priest-in-Charge.** Rev Alan Stewart delivered the following report:
'As beautiful, and cared for and historic as this building is, this building of course is not the Church. And as familiar and comforting and inspiring perhaps as the liturgy, tradition and music might be, this also is not the Church. Take them away, and we still have the Church. Why? Because we are the Church; you and I members of a community of ordinary, beautiful and yes broken people with the purpose of living out our call to be Christ's presence where we are.
The American theologian John Howard Yoder unpacks something of that call: 'The church seeks to help form people who can risk being peaceful in a violent world, risk being kind in a competitive world, risk being faithful in an age of cynicism, risk being gentle among those who admire the tough, risk love when it may not be returned, because we have the confidence that in Christ, we have been reborn into a new reality.'
Peaceful, kind, faithful, gentle, loving. This is our purpose and our calling. And we all know that however hard we try; at times we fall short. As the saying goes; 'If you find a perfect church, don't

join it'. Because if you do, it will no longer be a perfect church.

So here we are, perfectly imperfect. And we gather today to reflect on this past year together, to give thanks for all that Christ has achieved in us and through us, and to explore a little where He may be calling us next.

Fresh in the memory of many of us will be our recent joint Parish Away Day with our sister church St Andrew's. Our theme this year was 'Wholehearted' living, defined by Brene Brown as 'Engaging with our lives from a place of worthiness... cultivating the courage, compassion and connection to wake up in the morning and think, 'No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.'

It was so special to have so many of us, of so many different ages gather to worship, explore and connect. Our thanks in particular go to St Joseph's in the Park school who offered such wonderful hospitality not to mention delicious food. If you haven't tried an Away Day, you really are missing something very special.

Our work within the three schools including St Joseph's, Hertingfordbury Cowper and Hertford St Andrew's, continues with whole-school weekly collective worship (or assemblies) on Tuesdays and Early Years on Wednesday morning (one of the absolute highlights of my week). I'm indebted yet again to Tracy Plumpton who continues to work alongside me. It's always a joy to welcome our schools into the church building for their special services. It was also great to represent our church at the school's Christmas Tree festival.

Our congratulations go to Hertingfordbury Cowper who this year were awarded the highest accolade by the Church school's inspectors, SIAMS.

Last year we trialed Forest Church in the Forest School area at St Jo's. We weren't entirely sure it was right format and location, so we took the decision to suspend that for the time being as we pray about other expressions of outdoor church, the first of which was A Soulful Walk on Palm Sunday in Panshanger. So, watch this space.

This year we held a joint parish Bible Course here in the Brace Room which was hugely appreciated by those who came. We hope to hold that again beginning Thursday 6th June and to offer a follow-up course on Romans in October. We will be holding two Exploring Confirmation sessions in May here in the Brace Room and we look forward to hosting a Confirmation service at St Andrew's on Tuesday 4th June with the former Bishop of the Falkland Islands no less! If you're interested in joining those sessions, whatever your age, you'd be more than welcome without any obligation whatsoever.

You'll have noticed no doubt the new housing development Blakemore Manor on Sele is nearing completion. This year Kath Oates and Stephane McCarthy have been welcoming the new residents with a card and a gift of some biscuits, and have been having some wonderful conversations. Many of those who live there look towards St Mary's even though officially they live in St Andrew's parish. One of the things that came up a lot was how fortunate we are to have Panshanger Pk on our doorstep, so we're beginning to explore how we might create opportunities for people there to connect with one another and with something greater in that particular Great Outdoors. It was wonderful to have our first New Year's Walk there ending with a welcome beverage at the Golden Griffin.

Our fortnightly Mindfulness sessions at the Hub on Sele seem to be going from strength to strength with a really lovely and supportive community growing there. Our weekly Wednesday evening Mindfulness and Meditation continues to be popular. I love leading these sessions but it's a big time commitment, so starting in June, it will run fortnightly with every other session being hybrid both in church and online. That said, I'm afraid I'm on holiday in June so there will just be one session on Wednesday 5th.

We're hugely grateful to the Friends of St Mary's who have hosted lots of wonderful opportunities to connect and fundraise for the church. Among these have been several concerts, the ever-popular Race Night, the Christmas Market, the Summer Fun Day and the Parish Breakfast to name but a few. We're looking forward to Café Francais (mais oui) on the 28th September.

We continue to hold Evening Prayer here monthly and a weekly compline online. Many of us and

our four legged friends enjoyed a chaotic but wonderful pet service in September and look forward to this years canine chorus on 22nd September. This year, across both churches, we've introduced a few new seasonal services; A Mindful Christmas proved very popular as did Beer and Carols in the churchyard which was for many people the highlight of their Christmas.

We continue to be very grateful to the Zoom team who enable folk from far and wide to connect with others and with God.

My huge thanks go to all the individuals and teams that sustain the ministry and mission of this church including the Choir, our choirmaster and organist Paul, our fantastic wardens and PCC, our grass cutters, flower arrangers, coffee teams, caterers, bellringers, pastoral visitors and locker-uppers who enable the church to stay open. And we know that many people appreciate this space to pray and reflect outside of services.

This year it's been wonderful to add several new people to the Ministry Team, Adrian Walter and Nick Hoyle as Lay Leaders of Worship and Maria Henrikson-Bell taking on the added hat of Pioneer Leader. Our particular thanks as always goes to Rev Bill Church who continues to exercise his wonderful ministry among us.

You will perhaps be aware that the Church of England has authorised new prayers of blessing for those in same-sex couples entitled Prayers of Love and Faith.

In the pastoral guidance The C of E writes; The Prayers of Love and Faith make provision for stable, faithful relationships between same-sex couples and for giving thanks for their faithfulness and their fruitfulness in service to God and neighbour. In that sense, they recognize the couple's commitments to one another. They ask for God's grace in the holy ordering of companionship and godly love as they follow Christ and seek to grow in holiness. They ask for God's blessing for them and their families as they offer self-giving love to one another, and in their witness and service to their neighbours'.

These are currently only authorised within existing services but there may come a time when it will be possible to have a separate service of blessing. The pastoral guidelines state that it's up to the individual priest as to whether they are happy in conscience to offer these prayers. It will perhaps come as no surprise to you that I am fully supportive. It will be important however to consult with the PCC and with the wider congregation. If you have anything you'd like to contribute to that conversation, do please talk to me.

I'd like to end by saying how grateful I am to be your priest, and how thankful I am for your support and your care. Thank you to each one of you for all that are and all that you bring to the life and worship of this perfectly imperfect church we call St Mary's.'

6. Annual Reports

6.1 The PCC and the Parish.

6.1.1 Rachel Carter noted that the PCC had met regularly since the last APCM. The majority of the business of the PCC had been covered in the Priest's Report. Full details of discussions are contained in the minutes of meetings and these are available on the website and in the South Porch.

6.1.2 She reported that the Parish was committed to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and to supporting those who have been victims of abuse, as well as those who may present a risk to others. The PCC has complied with the duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to the House of Bishop's guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). The PCC have adopted all the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policies and Practice Guidance as well as "Promoting a Safer Church" (child protection and vulnerable adults policy) and the Domestic Abuse statement. All documents are available on the website and in the South Porch. Robin Bishop is the Parish Safeguarding Officer and concerns should be addressed to him.

6.2 Churchwarden's report on the fabric of the church

David Gorton reported as follows:

6.2.1 The Fabric of the Church Generally in good order; All certificates for Electrics, PAT testing and Fire Extinguishers are up to date and all certificates in order.

Gutters and downpipes have been cleared and cleaned. Boilers have been serviced and have worked well without any problems throughout the winter period. The organ has been tuned and serviced and is in good order. The long running problem with leaking to the Brace Room has finally been resolved and the recent repairs appear to have been successful. Last year's annual inspection by the Rural Dean was good but the Quinquennial inspection is overdue and will be arranged for this year.

Current work planned or underway:

A new soakaway to be installed at the NW corner, work to commence at beginning of May. The downpipe from the tower to have lower point hopper fitted. The internal plaster repair on the south wall of the nave to be completed this summer. Mains power to be installed for a permanent debit/credit card reader which is to be fitted beside the south porch doorway following the removal of the damaged wall safe. The Resin Pathwork that has discussed over some period of time is still under review and is subject to available funds and or any possible grants. All of these points are in brief, if anybody would like more information I will be happy to elaborate.

6.2.2 The Churchyard

The Churchyard is also in generally good order, although the lower area is always difficult to keep under control through the height of the growing season. The south boundary hedge has been cut to a good level. Some general tree cutting has been carried out on the yew trees in the front area. We have purchased a new brush cutter and two of our mowers have been serviced. I am pleased to report that there are some new recruits to the grass cutting team and I thank them for their work and help throughout the season.

6.2.3 St Mary's Team.

Robin and I would like to thank all of the people that make up our teams of helpers that 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 for the brilliant support that we have. Our thanks once again to Philip for his fantastic work on the Parish Magazine. Thanks also to my counterpart Robin for his general support, and his work with online administration and safeguarding, aside for his excellent work as treasurer.

Thank you to our PCC secretary Rachel for all of her work for us especially considering her new roles for EHDC.

And, on behalf of us all, our thanks to Alan and Bill for their wonderful ministry. we consider ourselves lucky to have them lead us in our services and grateful for all of the work that they do for us and in our community.

6.3 The Deanery Synod.

Robin Bishop provided the following report from the Synod, prepared by Marion Little, of the Deanery Synod of Hertford and Ware:

Deanery Synod met three times during 2023.

March – to receive reports on Environmental Action from each parish

There were reports from 15 parishes detailing projects and activities being undertaken in their parishes to protect and maintain the environment. Much of the focus was related to heating, lighting and maintaining church buildings and encouraging wildlife in churchyards. There was a useful exchange of good ideas and helpful contacts, and much discussion on how to take ideas and best practices and turn them into positive action.

July – Racial Justice Action Group

There was a presentation from Revd Jonathan Gordon, who recounted his own personal journey and explained the aims and objectives of the group. The group has developed a three-year action plan including listening, education, reading, acknowledging privilege and speaking out to challenge racism. He took Synod through some of the changing language, helping people to be inclusive and non-offensive. Parishes were encouraged to take and use the handouts and to participate in the

“Listening Experience” to discuss what individual congregations might do to encourage diversity.

November: Growing Younger and More Diverse

Revd Dan Drew’s presentation explored the problems of the diminishing number of young adults and children participating in church activities and shared the findings of the Diocesan report from 2020 which observed that if the current trajectory continued, we would have no younger people or children in parishes by 2030. The three ages where church attendance drops off are 11, 15 and 18 years old. How do we stop this? The Diocese is training 100 people to expand the involvement of children and young people with a pilot scheme started with funding from the Church Commissioners. The aim is to train leaders spiritually as well as practically so they have longevity. Synod members were challenged to consider what they could do. It was recommended that parishes start with small steps and set simple, achievable targets. The meeting was given an example of four church members (80+) who were amazingly supportive and were great with the children. At this meeting, Synod split into Laity and Clergy to elect officers. A matter of real concern was that no one came forward to stand as Deanery Lay Chair. Everyone was asked to give this matter urgent and prayerful consideration to fill the important vacancy.

All the meetings also included other reports from General and Diocesan Synod.

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

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

Overview

Overall there was a surplus of c£10k (2022 c£4.7k) which is a pleasing outcome in difficult times. Income was up c£10.5k, Expenditure increased c£5.1k

Income

Donations, which vary from year to year, were up c£4.4k.

Fees increased by c£2.2k reflecting more weddings but also more funerals.

Covenanted giving was up c£3.2k.

Investment income was marginally up.

Legacies. One of £5k.

Fundraising now comes under the Friends, so a fall of c£32.5k reflects the transition taking place during the year.

Magazine was marginally up..

The biggest single income source at 50%+ is giving by the congregation. Most of that now comes via the Parish Giving Scheme with a small amount from standing Orders, Envelopes and the collection plate. 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 bulk of this is the Parish Share. Overall a c£0.7k increase

Work - Church The decrease of c£0.7k reflects principally a fall in Churchyard expenditure. Utility expenditure increased from c£2k to c£5.5k despite efforts to restrict use. Repairs/maintenance was down from c£4.7k to c£0.7 but there are some bigger bills in the offing

The Future

Despite increased energy bills, the generosity of the congregation, together with other one off contributions, is keeping St. Mary afloat. Whilst I am grateful for that, there is no room for complacency.

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

It was reported that four members of the PCC had come to the end of their term of office. Jan Pearson and Paul Attridge had decided to step down and were warmly thanked for their contributions. Philip Juniper and Robin Densem were happy to continue in post. Three additional people were put forward for election: Barry Wade Simkin, proposed by Christopher Maunder Taylor and seconded by David Gorton, Kath Oates, proposed by Alma Cartwright and seconded by Jean Walker and Rachel Carter, proposed by Jon Banks and seconded by Kay Juniper. All three were elected to the warm approval of the meeting.

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. A concern of any sort and should be shared with the Clergy and/or the Parish Safeguarding Officer. The PCC have Safeguarding as an agenda item at every meeting. Of those who are required to complete courses, all are fully compliant. Of those who are required to have a DBS check, at the time of writing all with one exception are in date. 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.'

11. Any other business

11.1 Friends of Hertingfordbury St Mary

Helen Bishop, Chair of the Friends reported as follows:

'The Friends of Hertingfordbury St Mary was granted charitable status just before Christmas (Charity number 1206041). The purpose of The Friends is to raise money for the restoration and preservation of the church building and churchyard. The funds are not for the day to day running of the church. That's the responsibility of the congregation. Membership forms, with the FoHSM account details, are available inside the church by the South door for anyone wishing to become a Friend or make a donation. Membership and donations have raised £1560

The Friends of Hertingfordbury St Mary have held 7 events this year raising approximately £4,000. Helen was warmly thanked for all her work as Chair.

Rev Alan Stewart closed the meeting with a prayer.