

## HERTINGFORDBURY ST MARY WITH ST JOHN PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners in St Mary's Church on Sunday 27th April 2025 at 10.30 am.

The Chair was taken by Robin Bishop.

1. The Minutes of the Meeting held on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024 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 Kay Juniper and seconded by Juliet Curry. Robin Bishop's re-election was proposed by Malcolm Bishop 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: Robin Bishop (Chair), PCC Secretary Rachel Carter and 27 Parishioners

1. **Apologies.** Apologies had been received from Rev Alan Stewart, Jean Walker, Barry Wade Simkins, Helen Harris and Virginia Maunder Taylor.
2. **Minutes of the Meeting** held on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024 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 noted that Elizabeth Dempster had stepped down from the role of Electoral Roll Officer and Christopher Maunder Taylor had kindly agreed to take on this responsibility. They were both warmly thanked for their contributions. Christopher Maunder Taylor reported that the 2025 Electoral Roll for this Parish had been completed. There were 57 members of the Church congregation listed on the Roll, of whom 28 were resident and 29 non-resident. The Roll was now displayed in the Church Porch.

#### 5. Report from the Priest-in-Charge.

Rev Alan Stewart had delivered the following report before the meeting:

As this is my last but one Sunday with you before I disappear on Sabbatical, I thought I'd share with you a quote from Barbara Brown Taylor's aptly entitled memoir 'Leaving Church'!

"Gradually I remembered what I had known all along, which is that church is not a stopping place but a starting place for discerning God's presence in this world. By offering people a place where they may engage the steady practice of listening to divine words and celebrating divine sacraments, church can help people gain a feel for how God shows up—not only in Holy Bibles and Holy Communion but also in near neighbors, mysterious strangers, sliced bread, and grocery store wine." Church is a 'starting place' where we listen for the many ways God shows up. As I reflect on this last year, I've been humbled by the many ways I believe God has shown up among us.

And here are just a few:

After what felt like a very long time of repeat advertising, prayer and searching for a new Children and Families Worker, a chance comment at St Mary's PCC prompted a new member there to invite a friend to apply. That friend was Lindsey, and although this was a new ministry for her and therefore a steep learning curve, her energy and commitment, her passion and compassion have proved beyond doubt that this was absolutely the right appointment. And it's been a real joy seeing Lindsey grow in confidence, and the children respond to her warmth, wisdom and care. A huge thank you also is owed to Lindsey's predecessor Tracy, who over the last eight months has acted as Lindsey's mentor.

Tracy has now stepped back from school's work, and Lindsey very capably has stepped into her shoes. Our work continues across three schools (St Joseph's, Hertingfordbury Cowper and Hertford St Andrew's) with whole-school weekly Collective Worship on Tuesdays and Early Years on Wednesday morning.

A particular highlight for me was last month when we welcomed the children of Hertingfordbury Cowper into church for the Easter Experience. Across six different stations the children engaged with an interactive retelling of the Easter story, and explored their own hopes and dreams; their own sadness and their joy.

There was such a powerful stillness and presence during those times. Thank you again to the amazing team who led this especially the story tellers who told their story 30 times that day!

During my sabbatical, Lindsey will continue to lead Collective Worship fortnightly.

During this past year our Eco Committee has met and we're very grateful to them for all they are doing to help us more carefully steward the valuable resources of our planet and work towards the Church of England's target to become carbon neutral by 2030. We've decided to set aside one Sunday each year to focus on our commitment to the environment, and this year's will take place on Sunday 5th October, the weekend before Harvest.

Another joy was to host a six week Exploring Faith course at here at St Mary's during February and March this year, with about 16 people attending across the two churches and from beyond. The feedback has been incredibly encouraging, with one person describing the course as 'friendly, interesting, informative and therapeutic'. Another person writes of 'a great sense of us all joining together on our own and each other's spiritual Journeys. Each session beautifully, gently led and discussed with thought provoking ideas and interactions.' So, when we do it again in the Autumn, if you haven't done it, speak to someone who has and do consider coming along.

It's been wonderful to host two Confirmation services over the past year, at St Andrew's on June 24 and more recently here at St Mary's on March 25. Over the past year it's been wonderful to welcome new people into our congregation and one of the factors that keeps people here is our welcome. So, keep up that good work, and try please to speak to people you haven't yet spoken to! We're hugely grateful to the Friends of St Mary's who over the past year have hosted lots of wonderful events which help raise invaluable funds for the church's upkeep and future, and also bring people together. The Christmas Market and Café Francais were particular highlights with so many people through our doors and such wonderful atmospheres. Special thanks go to Helen Bishop who chairs the Friends so brilliantly.

We're looking forward to our annual Summer Fun Day on Saturday 12th July, and our theme this year will be Computer Game Heroes with the return of the ever-popular Teddy Bear Zipwire!

We have eight weddings booked for this year and I'm hugely grateful to Karen our administrator, and to Bill and Simon Cutmore who will take those weddings that fall within my Sabbatical.

It was great last September to welcome all creatures great and small (well mainly dogs and humans) to our annual Pet Service and we look forward to our next one on Sunday 22nd September.

Over this year we've enjoyed a wide range of different services both here and at our sister church, St Andrew's. To enhance our worship, we would like to buy some new hymn books which contain lots of the newer songs we've been singing for a while. If you'd like to sponsor a hymn book or books in thanksgiving or memory of someone, please speak with our treasurer, Robin.

A few weeks ago, we welcomed Rev Scott Martin as Assistant Priest to the parish. This is great timing considering I'm disappearing for three months! We look forward to Scott practicing his gifts and ministry among us and I know that you will all respect the fact that Scott has a demanding full-time job alongside. I'm very grateful to Bill and the wider Ministry Team for all they've given this year and will continue to in my absence. We've had to do some creative thinking around how to sustain things while I'm away. To avoid overloading our priests, the monthly all-age services will for the next three months be non-Eucharistic, and led by our Readers, Melanie and Geoff. Online Compline will continue, as will Soul Food, Evening Prayer and Mindfulness both online, in person and on Sele. Maria will lead our monthly prayer gathering Breathe. Zoom services will also continue under the care of Kath and Nick.

In my absence, Bill will be first point of contact for baptisms, funerals and any pastoral matters, supported ably by our Pastoral Visiting Team, Helen, Kay, Christine and Helen.

There are so many people to thank, who week by week sustain the ministry, hospitality and mission of this church, including our incredible organist and choir master Paul, our choir, our PCC and in particular PCC secretary Rachel, our fantastic churchwardens Robin and David who wear many different other hats, our Pastoral Team, our magazine editor (the magazine just gets better and better. Thank you Philip), flower team, cleaning team, coffee teams, bell-ringers, caterers and grass-cutters.

We're also very grateful to those who open and lock our church each day enabling lots of people to enjoy this beautiful space and find some invaluable quiet and reflection. This does fall on the shoulders of a few, so if you have any time when you can regularly help with this, please speak with David.

As I prepare to take a Sabbatical for three months, I know I leave our churches in safe and loving hands. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to rest, explore and refuel. If you do see me out and about, please do say hello. Just don't talk about church! It's hard to believe that I've been with you 18 years now, and some might say that's too long. I often ask myself whether I've overstayed my welcome, but so far it feels right to stay and I hope that's OK. I am so incredibly proud to be called the leader of such a welcoming, inclusive and openhearted church.

## 6. Annual Reports

### 6.1 The PCC and the Parish.

6.1.1 Rachel Carter noted that the PCC had met six times since the last APCM. The majority of the business of the PCC had been covered in the Priest's Report. She noted in addition that the Eco Church group had produced a Reflective Churchyard walk and a Nature Trail to encourage people to explore the churchyard and these were available on the website. There had also been some discussion with the Diocese around the dissolution of the Hertford Team Ministry. Full details of all meetings were contained in the minutes of meetings and these were 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 Bishops' 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:

He thanked all those who had made the work of the church run smoothly over the past year and those who had helped with maintaining the church and the churchyard.

### **6.2.1 The Fabric of the Church**

This was generally in good order, annual maintenance was to schedule, all certificates for electrics, extinguishers and lightning conductor were up to date. The gutters and downpipes had been cleared and cleaned. The boilers had been serviced and were in good working order.

The Quinquennial Inspection had been carried out in November 2024 and had showed no priority issues only regular general maintenance so as to avoid any future problems.

Work carried out included:

- A section of the tower downpipe had been replaced with an access point to enable clearing of any blockages (a previous issue caused water ingress).
- A new soakaway and drain had been installed at the NW corner of the tower. Internal plaster repairs had been carried out to the Chancel and south Nave walls.
- Power had been run to a new socket by the porch entrance and fitting of a contactless card reader following the removal of the damaged wall safe.
- An additional CCTV camera had been fitted for porch door entry.

Work in hand or on the agenda included:

- Redecoration of Brace Room, particularly to repair water damage, and to refurbish the outside timber; redecoration of the ringing chamber; to refurbish the clock face and hands.

Although these items were mostly cosmetic, they would be necessary to keep St Mary's as we would like.

Christopher Maunder Taylor asked a question about the proposed Brace Room repair. David noted that he had received one quote, and was seeking another.

## **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 2024.

March – The Deanery of the Future

Synod looked at some of the realities of the life of our deanery and began to consider possible futures. It was noted that only two of the benefices contribute (through their Parish Share) the full cost of placing a priest in post, and these effectively subsidise the rest of the parishes (whose full share request falls short of the total cost of ministry). It was observed that some parishes are paying their share by dipping into reserves and that many were being funded by donations from generous ageing congregations. If current trends were to continue, it would not be long before the diocese would need to consider further amalgamations. The challenge for the deanery was how to be ready with suitable answers to any such proposals. The following questions were discussed in groups: What would your reaction be to the suggestion that your parish be united with [a parish adjacent to yours] when the next minister resigns (yours or theirs)? What would be gained? What would be lost? What don't you know that you think you need to know?

The increase in the governance burden on churches and the simultaneous volunteer-crisis were also discussed. Much important ministry is carried out by lay people, but it is getting harder to fill the posts of warden, treasurer, secretary and PSO. Members were asked:

What do you think could be done about filling this need? What is your own parish situation with regard to filling vacancies for posts like churchwarden and treasurer?

Synod will return to these matters later.

#### July – Social Function and Elections to Diocesan Synod

All five vacancies in the House of Clergy were filled without election. Our representatives are Ysmena Pentelow, John Hookway, Alan Stewart, Sarah Forrest and Mark Dunstan.

Five of the six vacancies in the house of laity were filled without election. Our representatives are Liz Horner (St Mary the Virgin, Ware), Tim Crowther (St Mary the Virgin, Ware), Janet Bird (All Saints, Hertford), Colin Bird (All Saints, Hertford) and Bob Barker (Christ Church, Ware).

This Synod was followed by a relaxed and enjoyable BBQ, giving members an opportunity to deepen friendships and share ideas, issues and best practices.

[www.hertfordandwaredeanery.org.uk](http://www.hertfordandwaredeanery.org.uk)

#### November: Generous Giving

The Diocesan Giving Officer, Kate Ford, has been in post for about two years. Her role is sponsored by funds from the National Church. She is helping parishes to grow generous giving by advising on giving mechanisms and communications and through running giving campaigns. She gave a thorough and encouraging presentation.

Questions and comments from the floor related to a wide range of topics including: legacies; the benefits, costs and use of card readers; the positives of using the National Parish Giving Scheme and Gift Aid. After the plenary, Synod members were given the opportunity to look at template documentation resources and two card readers.

The vacancy in the House of Laity for Diocesan Synod was filled by Shirley Taylor from Hertford, St Andrew's (unopposed).

All the meetings also included other reports from Diocesan Synod.

#### Deanery Collaboration

The Deanery Synod is currently engaged in six important streams of work:

- Environment
- Growing Younger and More Diverse
- New Development
- Parish Share and Finances
- Reaching New People / Fresh Expressions
- Social Action

By sharing wisdom, experience and best practice, the teams responsible for each of these streams aim to encourage and support parishes across the deanery as they face challenges in these areas. The core teams are all looking for more members. You do not need to be a member of Synod to be on the teams. All that is needed is an interest in the relevant field and a heart to see the good news of Jesus transforming communities through the work carried out by the parishes of the deanery in that field. Could you help?

The Deanery website now includes a functional “social network” which means that members can contribute to discussions about these matters online as and when they think of things (rather than needing to commit to meetings). Anyone interested can register with the website at [www.hertfordandwaredeanery.org.uk/register](http://www.hertfordandwaredeanery.org.uk/register) and join one of the groups. N.B. usernames can be seen by everyone, so we recommend applicants do not use their email address as their username. The social network also has a dedicated group for Church Wardens to communicate with one another (i.e. for asking for advice about aspects of the role and specific circumstances they encounter, e.g. recommendations about contractors or “what to do if...” scenarios). There is also a general “Deanery Chat” group which is for people to keep up to date with deanery news, advise others about events in their parishes or ask questions.

It is hoped that many people will register with the site to keep informed and to be engaged in the deanery's mission over the coming year.

**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 deficit of c£10k (2023 c£10k surplus) principally explained by repairs to the Brace Room roof. Income was down c£7.5k, Expenditure increased c£4.5k. However, please note the more detailed breakdown below.

### ***Income***

Donations, which vary from year to year, were down c£5.6k.

Fees down by c£1.5k reflecting fewer funerals.

Covenanted giving was up c£5.1k.

Investment income was up c£2.3k

Legacies. Nil (as opposed to one of £5k in 2023).

Fundraising now comes under the Friends, so a fall of c£1.3k reflects the transition taking place during the year.

Magazine income was up £0.5k

Brace Room Three elections in a year is always good news!

Friends It should be noted (as not shown in the accounts) that the Friends settled the £1.5k bill for the re-plastering in the Sanctuary.

The biggest single income source at 60%+ is giving by the congregation. Most 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.

### ***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 Down £1.6k

Work - Church Up £11.3k explained by;

- Repairs/maintenance increase of £11.8k principally reflecting the bill for repairs to the BR roof

- Churchyard up £0.8k

Although offset partially by;

- Utility expenditure down c£1.7k the level of which is really beyond our control but helped by.

### ***The Future***

The generosity of the congregation, principally financially - but with some giving in kind - is keeping St. Mary's head above water. That said – and whilst we should be pleased that HSM is solvent – there is no room for complacency.

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.

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 two members had come to the end of their term on the PCC. Stephane McCarthy had agreed to stand again and Alastair Curry who was coopted onto the PCC at the last APCM, had agreed to become a full member. These changes were proposed by Christopher Maunder Taylor and seconded by Christine Gorton. Both members were re-elected to the warm approval of the meeting.

## **10. Safeguarding**

10.1 St. Mary's Safeguarding Officer, Robin Bishop provided the following report:

General

Whilst the Clergy, PCC members and Pastoral Visitors have particular safeguarding responsibilities it remains incumbent upon all involved with HSM to take responsibility for safeguarding. The failings of the past must not be repeated. A concern of any sort should be shared with the Clergy &/or the PSO.

The PCC has Safeguarding as an agenda item at every meeting.

The PCC takes seriously its collective responsibility to protect and safeguard the welfare of children and adults who may be vulnerable. It has complied with due regard to House of Bishops guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

PCC Members and Pastoral Visitors are required to undertake regular safeguarding training. The Church of England requires PCC members and PVs to complete Basic (C0) and Foundation (C1) level training and additionally the course raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse (RADA). C0 needs to be taken only once. All other courses need to be re-taken every three years. The Parish Safeguarding Officer is required to take also Leadership training (C2). One of the Wardens/Treasurer/PSO is required to undertake Safer Recruitment training (S1). The PSO has completed the course.

PCC Members and Pastoral Visitors are required to complete an enhanced DBS check. These checks are undertaken by Thirtyone:eight and are valid for three years.

HSM's Safeguarding Risk Assessments for all activities involving children and young people are reviewed annually at the November PCC meeting together with all other policies.

A copy of all HSM's policies which include 'Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults', 'Lone Worker' and 'Safer Recruitment' are kept on the church website and in a folder at the entrance of the church. The Diocese requires a number of Safeguarding posters to be displayed, all of which can be found in the South porch

The Diocese of St Albans support our safeguarding practices in a number of ways:

- Regular safeguarding newsletters ensure that parishes are kept up to date with current legislation and of any changes to policies, procedures and training requirements.
- The 'Parish Dashboard'. This is a useful online portal which records all the safeguarding measures we take as a church including risk assessments completed and policies and their review date.
- The 'Parish Safeguarding Hub'. This stands alongside the Parish Dashboard and is designed to help with safer recruitment and people management. It contains details of all those who have completed training and DBS checks and generates automatic reminders when these are due to be renewed.
- Monthly Zoom drop-in sessions and an annual Safeguarding Forum for Parish Safeguarding Officers.

- Also on its website is a comprehensive set of policies, procedures and information documents, many of which have been used as a basis for HSM policies and procedures.

2024

Of those who are required to complete courses, at the time of writing 4 members/Pastoral Visitors have one certificate due for renewal.

Of those who are required to have a DBS check, at the time of writing all 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.

In 2024 the Church of England published their National Safeguarding Standards which asks all parishes to assess their safeguarding work against five standards:

Standard 1 - Culture, Leadership and Capacity

Standard 2 - Prevention

Standard 3 - Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk

Standard 4 - Victims and Survivors

Standard 5 - Learning, Supervision and Support

The Diocese of St Albans has asked that PCCs review each of the five standards to examine safeguarding in their parish and identify their strengths and weaknesses. HSM PCC have agreed to review all standards

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## **11. Any other business**

### **11.1 Friends of Hertingfordbury St Mary**

Helen Bishop, Chair of the Friends provided the following report:

It has been another successful year. The following events took place;

- Race Night
- Village Breakfast,
- Summer Fun Day
- Hike and Bike
- Café Français,
- Christmas Market
- Beer and Carols
- Welwyn Garden City Male Voice Choir – May and December.

My thanks go to those organising and/or helping with these events

The Friends has a bank balance of c£9k and deposits of £10k. It was pleasing to be able to give the PCC £1500 for essential plaster repair work to the south wall of the nave and chancel.

Kay Juniper and Jean Skinner have stepped down as trustees of the Friends. I am very grateful for the contribution they made when setting up the Friends and in its early days and thank them. We have been pleased to welcome Kath Oates and Liz Simkins as trustees.



I should like to thank everyone for their generous donations, the many who help with events and all those who attend and support them.

Helen was warmly thanked for all her work as Chair.

## **11.2 Bike and Hike**

Christopher Maunder Taylor provided the following report, noting that a Silver Certificate had been received from Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust in recognition of the fundraising from St Mary's on the Bike 'n Hike 14th September 2024. Nicholas Tufton had thanked the whole congregation for their support.

'The result of the 2024 Bike 'n Hike in aid of Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust has been published. There are 21 areas within the Trust and our Parish is part of the Hertford Deanery, which comprises 37 Churches of which 18 participated in this annual event.

The Bike 'n Hike is the most important fundraiser for the Trust and is key to enabling it to continue to give grants to Churches and Chapels for the care and repair of their buildings, which are so important to the lives of our towns and villages.

In the Hertford Deanery, 42 people were actively involved, amongst them 5 from St Mary's. As a whole the Trust raised £103,647.12 from the event, which exceeded the target of £100,000.00. The Hertford Deanery raised £9,878.76 and the contribution from St Mary's was £1,834.26 (including Gift Aid).

In the area covered by the Trust there were a total of 169 Churches taking part and a total of 465 people were actively involved.

The 2025 Bike 'n Hike will take place on 13th September 2025. Any participation, encouragement and/or support will be greatly appreciated.

The Church Organiser for St Mary's is Christopher Maunder Taylor who will be very pleased to hear from you : 07860 228294 [maundertc@aol.com](mailto:maundertc@aol.com).'

The meeting concluded at approximately 10.50 am.