



**St. John's Church**

# Annual Report – 2024

Presented at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting

18<sup>th</sup> May 2025

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## **Electoral Role Report**

The 2024 Electoral Role stands at 44.

A complete revision of the Electoral Role will take place in 2025.

## **Safeguarding**

The PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.

## **Vicar's Report**

It is very easy to regard a church's APCM (and the much shorter Annual Meeting of Parishioners immediately before it) as merely a business meeting. Of course, these two meetings do deal with a lot of what could be considered "business items". Churchwardens are elected; the accounts are presented; important items such as Safeguarding are reported on; and PCC members are admitted.

Most of these are actually statutory requirements, not just set out for us by the Church of England in its *Representation Rules*, but indeed by the government. It's perhaps good to remind ourselves of the fact that every parish church is a registered charity in its own right, and that PCC members are trustees with legal responsibilities and duties under laws set out by the Charity Commission. And so, in some sense the "business items" that we need to look at and deal with at an APCM are there simply because of that.

However, I think there is another reason why we consider them, and in fact value them; why they are important. And that's because I think they give us a structure. They help us to have a good foundation that will underpin our mission, and strengthen it. That's the ultimate purpose of making sure that these "business items" are dealt with appropriately and why we have things in place.

I say all this because as I look back on the 6 months of 2024 that I had the privilege of being the Vicar of St John's, I think we have done quite a lot of that: making sure things were in good order, building a structure, ensuring there is a good foundation, so we are ready for mission in this parish. And there were two areas that we focused on in particular: Safeguarding and Finance.

St John's did not have a Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO), and after consulting with the Diocese, I was appointed as interim PSO. Safeguarding policies and procedures were brought in line with Diocesan guidelines and national guidance. PCC members undertook enhanced DBS checks, as well as completing mandatory safeguarding training provided by the Church of England. This obviously does take some time, and at the end of 2024 we weren't quite there yet, but I am pleased to say that at the time of writing this report in May 2025, we are fully compliant.

On the finance side of things, the 2023 annual accounts were completed and approved, and work started to ensure that the 2024 accounts would be ready for filing on time, something which hadn't happened for several years. Our Treasurer, Anne Handley indicated that she would like to move on, and David Beesley took over the role.

David started work on several things to improve our financial systems, procedures and overall position. I am very grateful to David for his commitment, eye for detail and diligence. At the end of 2024, work had started on changing accounting software and a Gift Aid claim was being prepared. Work had also started on financial policies and the preparation of an annual budget. Several other important policies were also revised and updated by Meg Murphy, for which I am very grateful.

Related to our financial position, in December negotiations with Supersteps Nursery, which had been ongoing for several years, were completed and a 5-year lease for the use of the Church Hall was signed. This not only provides St John's with a secure income stream, the terms of the lease also result in a significant reduction in costs.

A lot of these changes in the areas of Safeguarding and Finance happened in the background. There were also changes that were more visible. I updated our service booklets to improve our liturgical hospitality. Meg Murphy designed a new logo and we became more active on Social Media,

mainly Facebook. I also worked with Simon Fitzgerald to update our website, and I am very grateful to Simon for his continued IT support to St John's, despite him now living in Stafford.

Our service pattern also changed. The midweek Said Mass moved to Wednesday morning. We started saying Morning Prayer on a Monday, and a monthly Rosary service on Thursday evening was started by Alex Evans. We had several special services, including a service to bless schoolbags, and a special pet service which was followed by a RSPCA fundraiser, organised by Amarah Quak-Winslow. Harvest was extra joyful because of a double baptism, as well as a bumper collection of goods for the Foodbank, not least because of the generous support from St John's school, where it has been a joy for me to serve as Chaplain.

As Chaplain, I have enjoyed leading worship in the school, as well as getting to know staff and children and supporting them either practically in class, or through one-to-one chaplaincy. I am very grateful for the commitment of headteacher Anna Pyatt to the link between our church and the school. It has meant that there are weekly opportunities to share the good news of God's love with over 400 pupils and their teacher, parents and carers, in the school, but also in the church during special so-called "retreat days".

In November, we welcomed Fr Tony Halton from St Saviour's as our preacher for All Saints' Sunday, and we welcomed the Brass Foundry for Remembrance Sunday. Of course, the latter also returned during Advent for our annual carol service which once again saw St John's filled with joy and lots of people. Our Christmas services were well attended, and it was really good to see new people coming along to these services.

None of our worship, whether it's a special celebration or just an ordinary Sunday morning, happens without the commitment and support of many dedicated volunteers. I want to say a special "thank you" to Richard Bond who accompanies our sung worship most Sundays on the piano. I am also grateful to Daniel Tonks for his contribution on the organ on other Sundays. Thank you to Alex Evans for the liturgical support and all his work as Sacristan – a lot of that goes on "behind the scene" but nevertheless is very important. Thank you also to David Beesley and Bill Sabor who serve at the altar.

Thank you to all those who read and lead intercessions, serve as chalice assistants, rings bells or hand out service booklets. Also, the refreshments faithfully served after the service each week by Eira Waite and Debbie Ducroq – thank you both.

Children and young people are important at St John's, and we are very fortunate and blessed to have Chrissie Cockburn as our Children's Missioner. The fact that we have 10-15 children and young people worship with us most Sundays is a real testimony to Chrissie's welcome and commitment to their spirituality – so "thank you" Chrissie!

But worship is not all we do at St John's, and neither should it be. It was really great therefore to restart regular parish lunches, and a big "thank you" goes to Bill Sabor for organising and cooking these, as well as to Tomasz Wasilewski and other helpers.

The parish lunches helped us to build relationships and community, and another exciting way we did this was through a new initiative which was started by Claire and Meg Murphy: Faith & a Pint - an informal meeting every first Tuesday of the month at the Estcourt Tavern to discuss faith and life together, whilst enjoying a pint (or suitable alternative!). A big "thank you" to Claire and Meg for organising these evenings.

I said earlier that my report is just for 6 months of 2024, because of course I only started at the end of June. That brought to end the interregnum. An interregnum is always hard for a church, as everyone needs to "muck in" and work that bit harder. However, it is particularly hard for those who serve as Churchwarden, never mind if you are the *only* Churchwarden. So, I want to make a special mention of Jenny Nickson and thank her once again -on behalf of all of us- for all her time and the hard work she did for St John's during her term as Churchwarden.

But not only did she serve faithfully during her time as Churchwarden, when she stepped down, she also managed to find two new Churchwardens! At this point therefore, I want to say "thank you" to Jill Bennett and Tom Cockburn for everything they have done during 2024 – and not just for what they have given to our church, but also for the support they both have given me. And related to this, also a "thank you" to Clive Bennett, Jannice Mordue, David Beesley, Robert Wildmore and Brian Handley for

serving on the PCC, and to Richard Southern for his time as lay chair during the interregnum.

A final big “thank you” goes to Sophia Dunncliffe. Sophia often works over and beyond her contracted hours, both as Parish Administrator and as PCC Secretary (and Electoral Role Officer!), and she is a real asset to St John’s.

So, a lot of “thank yous” as we come to the end of this report. But in a way that brings us back to where we started. I started this report by talking about mission and the importance of structure and laying strong foundations for mission to happen. And a lot of those things are to do with proper processes, robust Safeguarding and sound financial policies and procedures.

However, ultimately a parish church is a local expression of the Body of Christ, made up of individual believers giving their time, their gifts and their energy to the church, to serve each other and the community around them. Without you and me there will not be mission, even if we have the best structures, foundations and processes in place. Ultimately it comes down to you and me, strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, as we reflect on the year that has been, as we give thanks for the things we have achieved and the people who have made it happen, let’s commit ourselves to another year of building St John’s together, to the glory of God and for the good of our community.

***Fr Corniel, May 2025***

## **Fabric Report**

### **1. St John’s Church**

Our quinquennial architect, Charles Sheppard, completed his quinquennial inspection report in November 2024, which flagged a wide range of work that is required or recommended for the church building. Much of this was known from the previous report in 2019, and whilst many aspects of the building require attention, little deterioration was observed.

It was apparent even before the quinquennial inspection was undertaken that some works to the roof were required as at least one leak had been identified above the children's area towards the front of the nave. Drone surveys from contractors and Charles Sheppard's visual inspection confirmed that there are a number of slates that have slipped. The quinquennial report advises that this requires urgent attention to refix slipped slates to avoid further damage. However, the need is likely to be more extensive as the pins fixing the slates to the roof are at the end of their life, and slates will continue to slip. Therefore, alongside the urgent work to refix the slates that have slipped, in order to keep the church watertight in the short term, we will need to plan for an entire overhaul of the roof. If this is to take place, it would be prudent to take the opportunity to undertake other high level works that are needed as part of the same project.

Quotes were obtained to undertake the work to refix slipped slates, and it is anticipated that the work will be undertaken in 2025.

In the meantime, Charles Sheppard has retired from his practice, and a new professional adviser and quinquennial architect will need to be appointed, who can advise on a project for the overhaul of the roof.

## **2. Church Hall**

A five year lease of the church hall was executed in December 2024, and Super Steps Nursery continues to trade from the hall. The PCC remains responsible for keeping the building watertight.

## **3. Church House**

The church house continues to be let out to tenants.

## **4. Inventory**

Through generous gifts, we have acquired a number of new vestments to ensure we keep a full suite of vestments for the various parts of the liturgical year. We have acquired a set in each of green, blue, white and gold.



## **Deanery Synod Report**

All churches in Watford (and Bushey) send representatives to Deanery Synod meetings. Our Deanery representative is Robert Wildmore. All clergy are ex-officio members of Deanery Synod.

In addition to reviewing topics and items of common interest and local mission news and business is received from Diocesan (and General Synod).

In 2024 Deanery Synod met three times. Main topics discussed were the Diocesan Budget; proposed changes to the structure of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF); plans for a “Year of Spiritual Renewal and Wellbeing” in 2025; and putting together a bid for strategic development funding from the Church Commissioners to grow younger and more diverse across Watford.

## **Financial Statements**

The PCC has prepared financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011. An independent examination of the PCC’s accounts was carried out by Gary Howard of Howard Wilson, Chartered Accountants and Tax Advisers under section 145 of the 2011 Act. In carrying out the examination all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act were followed.

A copy of the accounts will be made available at the APCM.