



Annual Parochial Church Meetings 2023
Tuesday 21st May 2024 at 7.00pm

Contents of this booklet

Agendas for Annual Parochial Church Meetings	2
Minutes of the Meeting of Parishioners for the Election of Churchwardens 2023	3
Churchwardens’ Report	3
Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2023	4
PCC Secretary’s Report	6
PCC Treasurer’s Report	7
Safeguarding Report	7
Deanery Synod Report	9
Incumbent’s Report	9
Hopes for the future	10
Vision Portfolio Reports	11
Organisational Reports	14
Appendix – Electoral Roll and Eligibility to serve on PCC	24

The Trustees Report and Accounts to the year ended 31st December 2023 are available in a separate document.

AGENDAS

Meeting of the Parishioners to Elect Churchwardens

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of last Meeting of Parishioners to Elect Churchwardens
3. Churchwardens' Report
4. Election of Churchwardens

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes of last Annual Parochial Church Meeting
2. Matters arising from the Minutes
3. Trustees' Report
4. Electoral Roll Officer's Report
5. PCC Secretary's Report
6. PCC Treasurer's Report
7. Safeguarding and DBS Officer's Report
8. Deanery Synod Report
9. Incumbent's Report for the past year
10. Hopes for the coming year
11. Vision Portfolios
 - a Inspiring Hope
 - b Inspiring Faith
 - c Inspiring Faith in schools
 - d Inspiring Love
12. Election of one member to the Deanery Synod for two years
13. Election of twelve members to the Parochial Church Council
14. Appointment of Independent Examiner for the Accounts
15. Organisations' Reports

Meeting of the Parochial Church Council

1. Election of Vice Chairman
2. Appointment of Secretary
3. Appointment of Treasurer
4. Appointment of two Deputy Wardens
5. Appointment of sidesmen
6. Dates of future meetings
7. It is proposed that the next meetings of the PCC take place at 7.00pm on Tuesdays, 16th July 2024, 17th September 2024, 19th November 2024, 21st January 2025 and 18th March 2025.
8. AOB

2 Minutes of Meeting of Parishioners to Elect Churchwardens

held on **Tuesday 16th May 2023** at 7.00pm in St Mary's Church

Present: The Revd Sean Semple (Chairman), five members of the Ministry Team and 36 parishioners.

The Rector welcomed parishioners and opened the meeting with a verse from Psalm 126

"Those who sow in tears shall reap in songs of joy. Those who go out weeping. Bearing the seed will come back with shouts of joy bearing their sheaves with them".

He talked about the evidence of God at work through people and how the people work together for the good of all. He read the passage from 1 Corinthians 12 which describes the variety of gifts of the Spirit. We are the body of Christ and individual members of it. He concluded in prayer.

The Rector opened the meetings at 7.10pm.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Pam Altree, Edward Barnaby, Andrew and Allison Chalmers, Paul Cummings, Mike Donovan, Dene Eward, Jean Harrison, Judith and William Hazelton, Anne Hughes, Pat Milnes, Andrew Morris, Peter Reynolds and Rosie Winyard.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 4th May 2022 were accepted as correct.

3. Churchwardens' Reports

The churchwardens' report was accepted and no questions were asked.

The Rector thanked Bryan Jones and John Setchfield for all their work during the year. He thanked John for all his work in seeing the reordering of the church through - as the report stated – the project is finished. As John is standing down this year there will be a presentation to him in due course.

4. Election of Churchwardens

It was proposed by Derek Glover and seconded by Paul Eward to elect Bryan Jones as churchwarden.

It was proposed by Bryan Jones and seconded by Rachel Lewis to elect Mark Sanderson as churchwarden.

There being no other nominations, Bryan and Mark were elected as Churchwardens until the next Annual Meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.15pm.

3 Churchwardens Report

St Mary's church, like its community, continues to be in very good shape. Even the briefest glance at our visitors' book will reveal many positive comments and hearty congratulations on a building that seems to speak of a community in tune with the 21st century and clearly serving its locals well.

The lighting system installed in 2014 has been causing problems ever since it was first installed and expensive kit to reach high levels has had to be hired all too often to replace failing fittings. The PCC took the decision to replace all of them and that has now been done. Some of the fittings that are still working have been used to provide up lighting to some window recesses, arches and monuments. (As they fail at floor level they can very easily be replaced.) This has greatly improved the range of lighting combinations that can be created at different times of day and for different purposes.

We were also able to install a projector and screen this year which has greatly widened the kind of events we can effectively host as well as available resources for worship. Our thanks to The Friends for raising the funds for this expensive installation.

We have also been refining the sound system installed at the end of 2022 and I think we can now say we have got there (April 2024) with speakers in new locations on some of the pillars. Our thanks to APi and to Dave Blackham for their help with this.

Work has also been going on to improve and enlarge the platform at the east end of the nave. At the time of writing, we think we can report that The Friends have now raised all the funds we need for this (through grants) and we are about to appoint a contractor. The Diocesan Advisory Council (DAC) has approved our plans and we just await the granting of the faculty by the Chancellor. We hope the work will take place this summer or autumn.

Bryan Jones and Mark Sanderson, Churchwardens

1 Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes of last Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Proposed: Nick Nelson Seconded: Paul Cummings Unanimous

It was resolved that the minutes of a meeting held on 4th May 2022 be accepted as an accurate record.

2. Matters arising from the Minutes

Nick Nelson asked that a prominent space for prayer be available in the church for visitors.

3. Electoral Roll Officer's Report

The report was accepted. On 30th April 2023 there were a total of 132 members on the electoral roll, an increase of four since the last Annual Meeting held in May 2022. However, several names had been removed due to death or moving away and the actual number of new names was nearly 20, representing the significant growth in our congregations over the last year. A full revision of the Roll takes place in 2025.

The Rector thanked Julian.

4. PCC Secretary's Report

The secretary's report which outlined the work of the PCC over the year was accepted. The Rector thanked Rachel for her work as secretary. There were no questions.

5. PCC Treasurer's and Trustees Report

The treasurer was pleased to report a healthy set of accounts. His report and accounts were accepted. The Rector thanked Roy for his work as treasurer.

Proposed: Bryan Jones Seconded: Mark Sanderson Unanimous

It was resolved to accept the Report of the Trustees.

6. Safeguarding and DBS Officer's Report

The Safeguarding and DBS Officer's report was accepted and the Rector thanked Judith for her work in fulfilling this very demanding role.

The Diocese has a "dashboard" scheme for parishes to show their level of competence in safeguarding. St Mary's has reached the median level (well in advance of the Diocese's current expectation) and there are no areas needing to be addressed as a matter of urgency. One of the challenges we now face is that of the strict safer recruitment process for all volunteers.

All PCC members also need to undertake safeguarding training at a basic level while those with greater responsibility need to complete the next level of training (most have done this). DBS applications are no completed online but to date, this has not speeded up the process and the initial form filling still has to be undertaken by Sean or Judith.

7. Deanery Synod Report

The Deanery representatives were grateful to Paul Connell from Walford for sharing his report with St Mary's. The Rector thanked the Deanery Synod reps. Members had nothing to add.

8. The Incumbent's Report

The incumbent's report which included news from all three parishes of the benefice and details of the many the demands on the ministry team was accepted.

9. The Curate's Reflections

Tiffany described her journey so far in Ross. Her report was accepted.

Mark expressed thanks to both Sean and Tiffany for all they do on behalf of all the Parish.

10. Vision Portfolios

The Inspiring Faith report was accepted and noted.

Inspiring Hope report was accepted and noted. Paul Cummings spoke to his report. It is important to find the right balance in putting the church at the heart of the community and the prayer needs of the church.

The Community Hub idea is continuing as an online source of advice. Some of the other initiatives in this area are not being taken up by more than one or maybe two people, e.g the Tuesday Job Club and Thursday Warm Space.

The Inspiring Love report was accepted and noted.

Inspiring Faith in Schools – this was covered under Brampton Abbotts Primary School and Open the Book in the general organisations reports. An additional aspect of this, covering older children is the concept of a LifeLink Chaplain.

A leaflet had been distributed describing a scheme whereby a LifeLink Chaplain might be appointed to work in the Ross Parishes and the Ross & Archenfield Deanery. The scheme would involve John Kyrle High School which is supportive of it and allow for a full-time chaplain (non-ordained) to work alongside students and their communities. 60% of the funding would come from the Diocese with a further 40% from parishes in the deanery including St Mary's. Caroline Pascoe and Mark Sanderson answered questions on the scheme.

11. Election of four members to the Deanery Synod

Proposed: Bryan Jones Seconded: Paul Eward Unanimous

It was resolved to elect to the Deanery Synod Gerald Atree, Rachel Lewis and Mark Sanderson.

12. Election of twelve members to the Parochial Church Council

Proposed: Bryan Jones Seconded: Gerald Atree Unanimous

It was resolved to elect to the Parochial Church Council, Janet Cooper, Paul Cummings, Philip Dazeley, Mike Donovan, Paul Eward, Julian Hallett, Roy Milnes, Melanie Mellor, Anne Morris, Peter Reynolds and Rosie Winyard.

13. Appointment of Independent Examiner for the Accounts

Roy Milnes had ascertained that David Bennett was prepared to continue as Independent Examiner for the Accounts prior to the meeting.

Proposed: Roy Milnes Seconded: Paul Cummings Unanimous

It was resolved to appoint David Bennett as Independent Examiner for the Accounts.

14. Resolution to amend Church Representation Rule M8 (1) (c)

There are new regular worshippers who have joined St Mary's but did not join the electoral roll until it was too late to be elected to the PCC. In order to allow such candidates to be eligible for election to the PCC in the future, it was felt appropriate to amend the rule stating that PCC members must be on the Electoral Roll for at least six months.

Proposed: Rachel Lewis Seconded: Bryan Jones

the meeting voted in favour with two abstentions and none against

It was resolved to amend rule M8 (1) (c) which states "A person is qualified for election as a parochial representative of the laity to the deanery synod or PCC if his or her name is on the roll of the parish and, unless he or she is aged under 18 at the date of the election, has been on the roll for at least the preceding six months", to "A person is qualified for election as a parochial representative of the laity to the deanery synod or PCC if his or her name is on the roll of the parish and, unless he or she is aged under at the date of the election".

15. Organisations' Reports

The organisations' reports had been published prior to the meeting.

Sean commented on many. These included:

Altar Servers, Bell ringers, Bereavement Support Group, Bible-a-Month Club, Bible Study Groups,

Brampton Abbotts Primary School, Church Hall Committee, Church Welcome, Commercial and Industrial Chaplaincy, Community Food Larder, Flicks in the Sticks, Flower Rota, Hospitality, Hospital Chaplaincy, LEAF Youth Group, Messy Church, Mothers' Union, Music, Open the Book, Prayers for St Mary's, Ponder & Pray, Prayer Chain, Residential Communities, Sidespersons, Social & Fundraising Group, Sunday Kids, Toast and Tiddle, Thursday Morning Prayer Meeting.

Verbal reports were given on behalf of the Friends of St Mary's and Daily Morning Prayer Zoom.

The Rector asked if there were any other comments

Pauline Leggate asked if the APCM could revert to being held in the hall due to difficulty in hearing what was being said.

Philip Dazeley expressed his thanks for the welcome he had received when coming to St Mary's for the time following the closure of Christchurch.

The Rector pronounced the Blessing and the meeting closed at 8.25pm.

REPORTS FOR THE APCM, May 2024

3 Trustees' Report and Accounts

See separate document

4 Electoral Roll Report for the year 2023

The cut off date for members being added to the roll prior to the Annual Meeting was Sunday 5th May. A report on changes since the 2023 APCM will be given at the meeting.

A full revision of the roll will take place in 2025.

5 Ross PCC Secretary's report for the year ending December 2023

The Trustees' Report gives full details of membership of the PCC.

Seven meetings were held in the year including a brief meeting, immediately following the APCM and a brief extraordinary meeting in May.

The Rector chaired five meetings and the Revd Tiffany Jackson (Curate) chaired two.

Town Council - Councillor Rob Taylor continued as the representative from the Town Council to report on the Closed Churchyard and attended one meeting during the year. The area near the tower was resurfaced and work on the wall along Church Street had been approved. He also informed members that the Town Council's eco group were looking at ways of improving the environment and would keep the PCC up to date on discussions concerning the open churchyard.

Standing Committee (Chairman, Churchwardens, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary) met five times with decisions being ratified by the PCC at the following PCC meeting.

PCC Meetings begin with prayer and/or a reading and the agenda reminds members:

1. **Is what we are thinking of Christian?** In other words, is this in line with the person of Christ and inclusive Christian values?
2. **Is it in line with our Vision?** Because we have a God-given vision.
3. **Who benefits from what we are thinking of?** The powerful, the poor, others, us?

Finance

The treasurer has kept members up to date with accounts and a report at every meeting.

Charitable giving for the year was to Medical Aid for Palestinians, Christian Aid and the DEC for use in Ukraine (each donation was £1,500).

The scope of work covered during the year

Discussions and decisions can broadly be divided into these categories and full reports on each can be found on the following pages.

- **Safeguarding** - all PCC members are required to undertake Safeguarding training, all groups using both hall and church have been noted approved by the PCC
- **Inspiring Hope** (Paul Cummings)

- **Inspiring Faith and Inspiring Faith in Schools** (Peter Reynolds, Paul Mason and Anne Morris)
- **Inspiring Love** (Julian Hallett, Melanie Mellor and Rosie Winyard)
- **LifeLink Chaplaincy Project** (Caroline Pascoe, Mark Sanderson, Paul Mason and Anne Morris)
- **Church Building** (see churchwardens report)
- **St Mary's Hall** (see Hall committee report)
- **The Open Churchyard** (Churchyard Angels, repairs to the wall by the carpark)

Bryan Jones has continued in his role as Health & Safety Officer and Jane Rothery took on the role of First Aider.

Support of nominations of Local Worship Leaders – Paul Cummings, Meryl Bedford, Andrew Chalmers, Janet Cooper, Melanie Mellor, Local Pastoral Visitors – Melanie Mellor, Margaret Bickerton (since resigned) and a Local Missioner – Anne Morris, were made throughout the year.

Fees and salaries were approved, the process for replacing the Administrator was implemented and discussion with the diocese regarding the curate's house are ongoing.

In addition, the PCC has continued to monitor and review its policies and adopted a Lone Working Policy and a Code of Conduct for members.

Rachel Lewis, PCC Secretary

6 PCC Treasurer's Report 2023, including the Trustees Report

The accounts for 2023, which have been completed on a cash accounting basis continue to show a healthy position following some excellent fund-raising events in 2023.

Anticipated additional expenditure in the future, particularly relating to the LifeLink Chaplain, mean that we must not become complacent or overlook inflationary pressures on the finances.

I have previously mentioned the Parish Giving Scheme, which is well supported in Ross. This offers the chance for participants to increase their contributions by the rate of inflation each year. Before any increase is implemented donors are given the opportunity to vary the increase. If you currently do not use the scheme or do not index link your contributions, I would ask you to consider doing so, the benefits to the church are significant and there is no charge to contributors or the church for the use of the scheme.

The full report, accounts and Trustees Report are available in a separate document.

Roy Milnes, Treasurer

7 Safeguarding and DBS Officer's Report

We have now been using the "Parish Dashboard" online tool to produce regular safeguarding action plans and safeguarding action summaries for a complete year. The Dashboard system gives a very clear picture of the compliance in the parish with safeguarding requirements for the PCC and the activities approved by the same. As mentioned previously, the Dashboard employs a "traffic light" colour code so users can literally see at a glance whether issues have been satisfactorily dealt with (green), require attention (amber) or demand action as a matter of urgency (red). Although most issues have shown green, there have been persistently amber areas, which need attention. However, there have never been any red alerts. The parish has consistently retained its status of Level 3 - the highest level on the Parish Dashboard.

The Parish Dashboard scheme has now been expanded and includes the roles and safeguarding training requirements of the PCC members. It has a function which alerts the user to the need for members to renew their safeguarding training. While most PCC members have promptly responded to requests to renew or extend safeguarding training, I am saddened to report that one member of the PCC has persistently been unable or unwilling to undergo the requisite C1 Foundations safeguarding training, despite frequent reminders and offers to assist with online training or to arrange face to face training if required.

The PCC agreed some time ago that all PCC members would agree to undergo C1 Foundations training. It is now a Diocesan requirement. Failure of all PCC members to be so trained means that the Dashboard will always show amber in the "Learning and Development" category. I would respectfully submit that any new PCC members standing for election to the PCC at the APCM must commit to undergoing the C1 Foundations training within a reasonable timescale or otherwise be deemed ineligible to sit on the PCC.

It should be noted that those PCC members who act in a Leadership or influential role should undertake C2 Leadership safeguarding training. Some of the members who currently occupy those roles have already undertaken this training. However, unlike the other safeguarding training, it is not possible to undertake Leadership training independently, it can only be accessed through the Diocese when such courses are scheduled. I have sought such training for the relevant PCC members and will continue to pursue the same.

St Mary's "hosts" a number of activities that are authorised by the PCC. It is necessary for all leaders and helpers who run activities involving children, young people and/or vulnerable adults to undergo C1 Foundations Safeguarding and some are required to obtain DBS certification. While the leaders and helpers have fully co-operated with requests to undergo C1 Foundations training, the Diocesan DBS officer is only employed to deal with DBS issues on Thursdays and Fridays. This means that it is taking an unconscionably long time to process DBS certificate renewals and/or fresh applications. Where any relevant leader and/or helper does not hold a valid DBS certificate, the Parish Dashboard shows amber - indicating that there are outstanding issues which require attention. Moreover, with the number of leaders and volunteers involved in the numerous activities at St Mary's it seems that there is always someone whose DBS certificate and/or training is up for renewal. It is for this reason that some of the PCC approved activities have persistently shown amber.

As previously stated, the prevalence of amber on the Parish Dashboard can be disheartening, but it is actually a sign that this is a vibrant parish with many wonderful activities taking place. The Diocese has also insisted that all new volunteers are recruited using The Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance. This means that volunteers are required to make an application for the role, provide referees, and undergo interview and induction processes. We are very lucky that so many of our new volunteers are willing to go through this somewhat demanding procedure. It is also very time consuming for those who are engaged in interviewing etc. Any members of the PCC who are willing to undergo online training in The Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance would be very welcome as they could then help interview new volunteers. The Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance also means that there has to be regular supervision, review and feedback meetings with those engaged in the relevant activities. This is again time consuming and is likely to be even more demanding during the vacancy.

It should be noted that in the last year, a number of home communion providers, pastoral visitors and local worship leaders have undergone The Safer Recruitment and People Management procedure as these activities have been resumed after the easing of Covid restrictions. A number have been commissioned through the Mission and Ministry Department of the Diocese. It is good to see these important aspects of parish life and ministry being resumed.

The PCC members will be aware that in the last year an urgent safeguarding issue relating to the bell tower, which was originally dealt with in 2022, was resurrected when the individual concerned renewed his application to ring the bells at St Mary. The then Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, Mandy McPhee, was involved and the matter was fully considered and once again dealt with by the PCC.

The PCC may be aware that Mandy McPhee has now been superseded in her role of Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor by her then assistant, Carl Steventon. The new Assistant Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor is Lisa Anderson. There has been no further indication of when the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer is to conduct an audit of the Benefice, but I am confident that we are working hard to be compliant and to deal with safeguarding requirements and issues appropriately as they arise. I am pleased to report that I was recently informed by Lisa Anderson that she and Carl Steventon feel that the benefice of Ross has adopted and maintained a good culture of safeguarding practice.

It does not do to be complacent, however. Tiffany Jackson, our curate, undertook a large amount of work in relation to risk assessments for the relevant activities and her work will now fall upon the shoulders of other group leaders. It falls slightly outside the ambit of this report, but the fact we are now entering a vacancy with our Rector's appointment as the Bishop of Cyprus and The Gulf cannot be ignored. Sean was hugely supportive of safeguarding policies and practice and gave a great deal of his time and effort to the smooth operation of the Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance - I can only hope that others will step up in place of Sean and Tiffany in these areas in so far as they are able.

I am deeply grateful to the PCC members and all the relevant group leaders and helpers for their willingness to co-operate with the stringent safeguarding and Safer Recruitment and People Management placed upon them. I would ask that this continues so that we can maintain the high standards of compliance and conduct that marked the last year.

Judith Wiggins, Benefice Safeguarding and DBS Office

8 Deanery Synod Report

The Deanery Synod, locally called a “Gathering” is made up of all the clergy and lay representatives from each parish in the Deanery. The Ross and Archenfield deanery stretches from Dinedor and Dewsall in the north to Wyesham and the Gloucestershire border in the south and east and Garway in the west. The population is about 30,000 people, well over a third living in the parish of Ross. In 2023 there were six fulltime clergy looking after all the churches in eight benefices this area. Following the resignation of Revd Sean Semple and Revd Crispin Pemberton there are now four.

The Revd Sheila Anthony (retired) was appointed Rural Dean following the resignation of the Revd Sean Semple as Rural Dean and the Revd Tim Starling as assistant Rural Dean. Paul Baker continues as Treasurer and Helen Foy took over as secretary. There is currently no Lay Co Chair.

St Weonards has been in vacancy for three years but a new priest starts in July 2024.

Canon Freda Davies has been appointed by the Bishop to be Sub Warden of Lay Ministry for the Deanery.

The Gathering met four times and topics covered included the following:

- The future of children and family work within the Deanery – a talk by Revd Tiffany Jackson
- LifeLink Chaplaincy project
- Deanery Pastoral Plan
- Parish Share
- The poor state of Revd Tim Starling’s house
- Deanery Leadership Team changes of personnel
- Opportunities for St Mary’s Choir, Ross to sing a full choral evensong at deanery churches
- The Bishop’s Year of Prayer
- Training opportunities
- The Vacancies in St Weonards and Stow Caple
- Lay Ministry – a talk by Revd Dr Elizabeth Wilde
- Good news shared by individual parishes

Rachel Lewis

9 Incumbent's Report

This will be my final APCM report as Rector, and it is written with gratitude and love for the 5 years of ministry in this benefice. A parish priest and parishioners can form very deep bonds, and I believe this is true of us. When I think of how I came here in summer 2019 the word “unsuspecting” comes largely to mind. Who was to know that within a few months there would be a visit to Ross-on-Wye by the then Prince of Wales and the start of a global pandemic; and thereafter a series of national events like the death of the Duke of Edinburgh, the Platinum Jubilee, the death of the Queen, and then the Coronation of King Charles the Third.

We navigated all these events and change within our parishes: the completion of the re-ordering in St Mary’s; the discerning of a benefice vision; developing online worship; the encouragement of people to use their gifts for the Lord and the Church; an increasing community-facing use of our church buildings; a striving for both excellence and kindness in how we operate; and a commitment to be inclusive and intergenerational. All have borne good fruit, and each of our three parishes is now, in their different ways, in a better place than they were – and they are happy parishes. It must also be said that Jenny and I, and our family have been very happy here and that we anticipated staying considerably longer. But this was not to be.

My election to the See of Cyprus and the Gulf has been an extraordinary process that speaks of a divine hand at work. Since God has called me to this new ministry, I believe that he will provide you with a new rector that will

continue your journey of faith, hope, and love that is such a blessing to the communities you serve.

Know that this benefice is attractive to clergy: Ross-on-Wye is a lovely town to live in and it has a wonderful Rectory; the three parishes are in good heart, and there is a strong ministry team and churchwardens. My leadership has largely been about letting people use their gifts and get on with it. And look at how that has turned out: there is now so much good going on in these parishes that the new rector will not have to flog a dead horse but will rather need find their seat on a frisky thoroughbred! There is also the excitement of recruiting a LifeLink Chaplain, and a House for Duty priest for Walford this year. Overall, there is a clear sense of a vibrant benefice moving forward in its calling and development.

Thank you for your support, friendship, and collaboration in the Gospel. You have “shown that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God...” (2 Cor. 3.3). May God continue to bless you to be a blessing to the world around you.

The Revd Sean Semple, Rector

10 Hopes for the Future

Our 2020 vision of “Growing as Inclusive, Intergenerational churches where people of all ages and backgrounds can find a welcome and a home” and our 2020 mission of “Inspiring faith, hope and love among the people of Ross and beyond” continue to shape our direction of travel, planning and decision making in the Ross Parishes. Alongside this, we also have our three “test” questions: “Is it Christian?”, “Is it in line with our vision?” and “Who benefits?” (knowing that God has a bias to the poor and disadvantaged).

The reports in this booklet describe some of the very encouraging progress made in 2023. At the same time significant work has also been going on behind the scenes in the Ross Parishes, deanery, diocese, and wider Church of England, to help to take this vision and mission further forward in 2024 and beyond.

Here in the Ross Parishes in 2023 we led the way by initiating a deanery primary schools network to link School + Church + Homelife/Community among primary aged children and their families and we also initiated a Ross Parishes/Deanery/Hereford Diocese partnership to place a “LifeLink Chaplain” into John Kyrle High School to do the same for local teens. With funding from the diocese, deanery, angels, and the Ross Parishes in place we expect to be able to recruit a chaplain in 2024.

A Benefice House for Duty Associate post is also planned, reaching back out into the community in Walford parish and regrowing intergenerational congregations there, working with our primary schools to connect school + church + homelife/community, and helping to regrow our Life Events ministry (christenings, weddings and funerals) as parishes.

And of course, in 2024, it is now our hope to recruit a Rector to come and share the very exciting journey that God is leading us on here in the Ross Parishes.

We are very encouraged by the direction of travel of the recently renewed diocesan strategy – and by how aligned we are with that in the Ross Parishes. We welcome the opportunity to work with the wider deanery and diocese to be resourced, to encourage others, and to learn and grow together over the coming years.

The diocese is seeking to see the following list of features in each local church, and we are encouraged that we are making good progress with this checklist through our 2020 Vision and Mission implementation and planning.

- ✓ A clear mission and purpose with missional and enabling leadership.
- ✓ A team of lay and ordained ministers.
- ✓ Clergy and congregations who want to see growth and are willing to change and adapt.
- ✓ A clear path for all to grow in faith.
- ✓ A culture of welcome and good relationships.
- ✓ An all age missional worshipping community.
- ✓ Youth/Intergenerational mission in school, home, church and community settings.
- ✓ Young people involved in decision making and leadership.
- ✓ An engaging digital presence.
- ✓ Sustainable buildings and finances

Our goals in 2024 include continuing to grow intergenerationally – and in particular, to see our First Sunday 9.30am All Age congregation at St Mary’s regularly have an attendance of over 100 and an age demographic closer to that of the population of Ross. We welcome the opportunity to participate in the diocesan Year of Faith 2024 to help us all continue to deepen our roots in the life-changing love of God, and our ability to live, share, and shine with that love.

As Inclusive Churches, from 2024 onwards, we will be making Prayers of Love and Faith available and, flowing from our 2024 Vision Day, we will be continuing to work on the quality of our welcome so that people of all ages and backgrounds truly can find among us a welcome and a home.

The Revd Prebendary Caroline Pascoe

11 Vision Portfolios

a Inspiring Faith Report

Faith, the first of our priorities in our 2020 mission of "Inspiring Faith, Hope and Love in people of all ages and backgrounds in Ross and the wider area" rests on our own ongoing growth as Christians and how we ourselves live and share the faith that gives meaning to our lives. So the ongoing opportunities that are part of the of our rhythm of our lives as a church and as Christians are really important.

These included in 2023 the many opportunities for prayer, in groups, in person, online, in chains and the regular Bible Studies open to all online and in person. Also, in 2023 special study and discipleship groups enabled particular issues and new groups of people to meet and explore together. We also grow together as we worship together and 2023 saw steady growth of our ‘first Sunday’ All Age worship. It is wonderful to see our 2020 vision of "growing as an inclusive intergenerational church" bearing fruit.

2023 began with the joy of seeing a small group of our young people and teens take the step of being baptised/confirmed and they have continued to grow in faith as members of our GROW Youth Group and Youth Choir, and gradually taking on leadership roles.

The journey to faith is made up of many little steps, starting with making points of connection. Through the year we made many opportunities to connect with the people of our town - through the rich programme of concerts and talks and events such as the Christmas Tree Festival seeing more people regarding St Mary's as "their church" or as a place of welcome at times of need, or for visitors.

In 2023 there were also many opportunities for all ages to go on and to explore faith - not least through the significant festivals and community events that took place in and around St Mary's. The year ended for example, with our biggest Christmas attendance at a mix of styles of events and worship from Crib Services through to Midnight Communion. As well as our regular primary school visits we also saw the first John Kyrle High School Carol Service in St Mary's since Covid - a fruit of our growing relationship with the school through the LifeLink Chaplaincy Project. This Project has also brought us closer to the deanery and to the diocese as we have worked in partnership with them to reach out to the teens of our town and surrounding area together. We have also valued the opportunity to collaborate with the ecumenical mentoring team working in John Kyrle High School and with Christians Together in Ross as we all witness together to God's great love to the people of our town.

As we look ahead to 2024 our emphasis will continue to be on making opportunities for people of all ages to connect, explore, respond, and grow in faith through the year. While outside the official scope of this report, the spring brought us news of successful diocesan partnership funding for the LifeLink Project so we can take that ahead in 2024, and the hope that we will also be able to recruit a House for Duty Priest to work across the benefice, growing our Life Events Ministry and our schools work. We also look forward to participating in and contributing to the Diocesan Year of Faith 2024.

Finally, may I give heartfelt thanks to the numerous faithful members of the congregation who give up their time and effort to make our worship more fulfilling: the servers, crucifers, readers, intercessors, flower arrangers, cleaners, sides people and coffee makers, the choir and so many others servants of the church. Without you, the transformation of this church over the last few years just could not have happened. Thank you.

Peter Reynolds

b Inspiring Faith in Schools

Lots of great work has been taking place over the year in our local schools. A member of the Ministry Team visits at least once a month to take an Act of Collective Worship in both Walford Primary and Brampton Abbots Church of England Primary Schools and Open the Book teams visit regularly to both these schools where they share Bible stories with the children through dramatic storytelling. Another Open the Book team, drawn from St Mary's and other local Churches visits Ashfield Park Primary School.

Bibles were presented to the Year 3 group at Brampton Abbots School and the Scripture Union *It's your Move* resources were handed out to the Year Six Children in both Walford and Brampton Abbots School in the Summer Term to strengthen our connections with them and their families as they moved onto their Secondary Schools.

This Year, a Deanery Schools Network has been setup, meeting in October at St Dubricius Church, Whitchurch initially, allowing people in the various benefices to meet, share ideas, encourage each other, and get a clear picture of the great work going on in our schools across the Deanery. This day was run by Caroline Pascoe and two Mission Enablers, Hannah Legge and Dom Conidi from Scripture Union. They were able to share with us the important steps towards Faith we can help Young People and their Families take, through enabling them to Connect, Explore, Respond, and Grow. Pre-pandemic research by Scripture Union showed that 95% of the young people of England did not attend a church of any sort. However, we know they all attend School and so we were able to share ideas on reaching 'the 95' in our Primary Schools.

The Schools Network met over Zoom at the end of November to share our Christmas plans for linking Schools and Church. At this meeting Caroline was also able to share with everyone the wonderful news that the stage 2 bid for the LifeLink Chaplaincy project had been successful and which has now gone forward successfully to the Bishop's Council at the end of January 2024. This means that we are now able to start to recruit a Chaplain to work part time in John Kyrle High School, part time in the Ross Parishes helping us to grow as intergenerational churches (as a market town "Hub") and part time into other rural Hubs in the deanery.

During Advent, two Travelling Crib with knitted figures set off from St Mary's Church on the first Sunday of Advent. One successfully completed its journey around homes with young families connected to St Mary's through Sunday Kids, Messy Church, Youth Choir and Toast and Toddle, strengthening the connections we have with them and some of these Families then attended the Crib Service on Christmas Eve. The other Travelling Crib visited the Nurseries and Reception Classes of Walford, Brampton Abbots and Ashfield Park Schools, where it was used to share the Christmas Story with the younger Pupils. Both Cribbs returned to St Mary's Church where they featured in the Christmas Eve Crib Service.

The Ross Parishes hosted Christmas Services for John Kyle High School, Brampton Abbots and Ashfield Park Primary Schools and Oak House Nursery School in St Mary's and for Walford School in St. Micheal and All Angels' Church, during the run up to Christmas. These were all well attended and enjoyed by Parents. The Head Boy and Girl from Walford School were involved in St Michael's Carol Service where they read one of the lessons. Ashfield Park School visited St Mary's to hold an *I Sing Pop* Event and Oak House Nursery visited for their Harvest Festival.

Our vision for the year ahead is to reach substantially more of the children and young people of our parishes (the '95') through our schools' work and the LifeLink Project, inspiring faith, hope and love in them and their families, not just as children, but as they grow as teens too.

Anne Morris

c Inspiring Hope Report

"Inspiring Hope: This role will help build on our current Christian care for those who are struggling due to illness, bereavement, relationship breakdown, loneliness, or any other issue—and our work in this field with other agencies including the Community Larder, Addaction, NHS, etc" - **Taking forward our 2020 vision together** - *St Mary's, Ross-on-Wye PCC - November 2020*

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023

Though significant events were less than in 2022 we have been able to ensure that St Mary's has remained a focal point for major events in Ross-on-Wye. Events have included:

- 6th May 23 - The Coronation of the King, with screening in the Church Hall and in the Church
- Schools' Art exhibition in St Mary's with participation by all 9 of the local Primary Schools
- 7th May at 11am Service – special service of celebration and thanksgiving for the community
- h.Art
- Remembrance Week activities

All have been delivered by the St Mary's Team to a very high standard which has enhanced the reputation of both St Mary's and the Town. In addition, the Entertainments Committee and Friends of St Mary's have worked extremely hard to deliver innovative and imaginative fundraising projects including numerous presentations/talks, Concerts, Suppers, etc all of which have had a positive influence on the Church's reach and reputation. We have worked closely with RBL who have very supportive of all the events noted above. As in 2022, the Town Council have contributed enormously to help deliver events in cooperation with St Mary's.

CHALLENGES FOR 2024

The Community Larder continues to meet the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis and offers support, friendship, practical help as well as useful and much needed contributions of food to those on need. We again responded to the request to provide a warm space and with the assistance of Ross CDT supported several individuals, who we could not normally reach, through a weekly event delivering companionship, refreshment, and entertainment (Oct – May 24) – it has now been discontinued but will be reviewed in the Autumn. We will continue to contribute strongly to Ross Community Development Trust management and the delivery of its activities, in particular befriending, shopping, and post-hospital support. Derek's work creating a dementia friendly church within a dementia friendly town is hugely positive. We are working with Hereford Diocese and Herefordshire Council to consider how best we might meet the challenge of homelessness, especially during the winter months. We are considering how best St Mary's can reach out to the Uniformed Youth Groups through the ongoing chaplaincy to the Sea Cadets and provision of a Lay Worship Leader to act as the Air Cadet's Chaplain.

The exciting development of the LifeLink Chaplaincy proposals will create further additional opportunities for outreach especially to the younger generation.

Paul Cummings

d Inspiring Love

Rosie, Melanie and Julian have continued to share leadership of the Love Portfolio, which encompasses many of the regular (and occasional) activities at St Mary's.

We participated in meetings with Sean in November, where a 'hub approach' was decided upon, to replace any rigid demarcation between projects that apply across various the portfolios of Faith and Hope and Love. Melanie and Julian joined the group, headed by Caroline, to plan for the appointment and supervision of the LifeLink Chaplain and we look forward to working with that new post holder, as soon as they are appointed.

Our ongoing focus on the environment has continued, with an interesting guest speaker on Environment Sunday in June, where Yolande Watson from the Hedgehog Trust came and spoke to the congregation. During the last year, the churchyard has been enhanced with hedgehog houses made by the team at Enviroability. The church also subscribes to A Rocha, the Christian charity supporting the churches' response to climate action.

Julian, Melanie and Rosie continue to be members of the Management Board of Enviroability (a local Ross charity supporting individuals with a range of support needs) and some of their service users attended an event in church to sell their bird seed, last summer.

Melanie and Julian met with the Cabinet Member for the Environment and the Mayor of Ross, Louis Stark, to discuss our approach to the management of the churchyard. After a period of difficult public perception of our aims last summer and a focused effort to gain new volunteers to help with Churchyard Angels, it is especially good to see the churchyard looking much tidier, whilst balancing the need to protect biodiversity.

Melanie has extended her role at St Mary's by joining the Lay Worship Leaders team and both Julian and Melanie sit on the Ross Educational Foundation Committee.

The portfolio leaders also provide ongoing support to regular activities happening in church including the church choir and Toast and Toddle.

Julian Hallett

15 Organisations' Reports for 2022

Altar Servers

We have had a very busy year as Servers and managed to recruit some new adults and children to help. With the increase of the congregation numbers pressure seemed to build up, but the team rose to the challenge. I am very grateful to them all, and to those who step in at the last minute to help. I am particularly grateful to Hugh James and Alun Thomas for agreeing to take over organising the Servers rotation from April. We look forward to an even better year for 2024/25.

William Hazelton

Bell Ringers

During 2023 we rang for morning service every Sunday as well as church festivals and celebrations of weddings and funerals. A major event was on Saturday 6 May, when we joined the rest of the country to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III and 'Ring for the King'. We opened the tower to anyone around us to 'have a go' and the ringers were joined by visitors and members of the church community; a total of 37 people made a sound by chiming and ringing. Ringing coincided with the Bellringers' turn for the coffee morning and the live screening of the ceremony in church which made for a lovely celebration. More recently, we rang all of the bells for the Christmas services and rang in the New Year.

As we continue into 2024, we rang a quarter peal for Colin Leggate's 80th birthday. At the end of March, we finally said goodbye to Roman Sadowski, our previous tower captain and ringer in Ross since 1978. We cancelled the Tuesday practice and retired to the Royal Hotel to wish him well with suitable liquid refreshment.

In common with other groups within the church community, we are aware that some of our members are becoming older and frailer. We would welcome anyone to join us, both those who have rung in the past and would be interested in taking it up again and those who have never rung but would be interested to learn a very ancient skill. Two of us completed the required course for teaching bell handling so we would love to practice our skills.

Elizabeth Walker, Tower Captain

Bereavement Support Group

Our monthly 'Just B' provides a welcoming space for those who have been bereaved. Meeting together to chat and maybe share our anxieties without any pressure allows us to 'just be ourselves.' The help and support provided by members of the Bereavement Support Group is much appreciated by those who come.

Several services have been held over the last year which have focused on bereavement and loss: -

- Our annual All Souls Service of commemoration of those who have died was well attended
- A short service was held to mark the end of Baby Loss Week
- A Carol Service with a difference was held in December for those who felt unable because of bereavement, illness or any other difficulty to join in the regular Carol Service
- In March we continue to hold a service at The Plague Cross to mark the National Day of Reflection

I am grateful to our technology team led by Mark Sanderson for enabling many of these services to be live streamed. This and the possibility of live streaming funerals and memorial services has ensured that we can provide so much more support and care for people during the darkest and perhaps most difficult times in their lives.

Freda Davies

Bible-A-Month Club

The two Bible Study groups of St Mary's met throughout 2023 either in person or by Zoom, and have continued to participate in Bible Society's Bible-a-Month scheme so that others around the world can have access to their own Bible or portion.

Each month £15 has gone to provide Bibles to those who long for them, due to war, poverty or persecution all over the world. Regular prayer letters are circulated to let us know how our donations are being used.

We are hopeful that in 2024 more Bible Study or other church groups will join in supporting Bible-a-month. Unfortunately we have not been able to send any additional donations for other Bible Society appeals, but have enough in reserve to continue our current level of giving in months when the groups don't meet.

Janet Nelson, St Mary's, Ross-on-Wye and Bible Society Hereford Action Group.

Bible Study Group

Both original groups are still going on a fortnightly basis and for this last year it has really been "Bible".

Matthew and Luke are pretty long gospels and the group doing Matthew has slowly and methodically taken each chapter and asked, "What did it mean"; "What does it mean"; "How should it shape my life".

The other group has asked the same questions while working through Luke, but with the help of an online study, slightly edited where "click here" would be meaningless!

There is a new third group, also studying Luke, that has started to cater for those who prefer to come in the afternoon but all three meet on a Monday.

This coming year it is possible that studies may branch out into moral and or liturgical ground and of course we make a detour during Advent and Lent to make our study relevant to the season.

I am writing this on the Sunday when our reading from Acts was the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. Philip was only able to help this important Ethiopian because he knew his scriptures and "Starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus".

Do come and join us and get to know your Bible.

The Revd Colin Leggate

Brampton Abbotts Primary School - The Church of England School in Ross

Schools are almost back to normal in the now post-Covid era and this is certainly true for our own church school. One of the metrics of normality is the presence of Ofsted and the school has again been judged 'Good' in a recent Ofsted inspection. The children "enjoy school and are enthusiastic about their learning."

A further sign of the times was the Ofsted observation that "Staff make extensive use of technology to assist with pupils' learning. All pupils, including children in Reception, have access to an electronic tablet where work can be presented visually."

Sean has continued to lead Collective worships at school and an Open the Book team has regularly visited. If any members of our church would like to join the Open the book team – no acting ability required – please say. We presented bibles to BA's year 3 pupils, as has been our practice for a number of years, and at the Leavers' service, we gave to all Year 6 a copy of "It's Your Move", a Scripture Union produced booklet made up of helpful information and advice for children moving schools.

BA, as a church school, relies on Foundation Governors, "to ensure, as far as is practicable, that the character of the school as a voluntary (C of E) school is preserved and developed". We have been well served by Roger Hanson, Eleanor Kercher, Paul Mason and Sean Semple who have represented St Mary's as foundation governors during the last year, but we have vacancies - please have a word with me if interested, we would be pleased to welcome new faces.

Paul Mason

Churchyard Angels

Angels continued their work in the open churchyard in 2023. The Probation Service provided a great deal more help than previously and a new plan was agreed for continued maintenance. In addition, the old compost area was emptied, and completely new fencing was constructed.

The PCC decision to support the application to close the area for future burials may mean that the Town Council (or Herefordshire Council) will have to take over responsibility for maintenance of the area in the future.

Thanks in particular to Mark Sanderson, Alan Sonn and Simon Cutter for their help with implementing the plan.

Dr John Setchfield

Church Hall Committee

The Hall continues to provide useful service to the Church and the wider community.

The Food Larder in the basement provides a fantastic service to the disadvantaged members of the community. It also pays its way for the costs we incur in providing the space.

A major part of our income comes from Turning Point who occupy most of the upstairs area. We still await the signing of a formal lease, but they are respecting the spirit of our agreement.

Hall rentals are generally up over the year, with many regular users and some occasional. There is still some availability for rentals, so members of the Church Community are requested to suggest the hall as an option for meetings and events to their friends and contacts. The Church Administrator is the first point of contact.

Flicks in the Sticks may be moving to the Phoenix to provide tiered seating for its attendees who now number 45 – 60 most months, which makes viewing the screen difficult from the back 4 rows.

Finances are sound, with an average of £9000 balance over the year. This despite the astronomical cost of running the night store heaters (£1800 since 1 Jan) We are therefore investigating other possible heating systems, hopefully more efficient, warmer, and cheaper.

Peter Reynolds, Hall Committee Chair

Church Welcome

We continue to welcome visitors to St Mary's from Monday to Saturday between 11am and 3.30pm with three one and a half hour sessions each day. Welcomers do anything from one to five sessions per month, some with a regular slot and others fitting in around their other commitments. It is an enjoyable "task", especially rewarding when visitors come in for the first time and are stunned by the beauty and atmosphere of our church – many visitors are on holiday and appreciate the warm welcome we try to give. Some come for peace and quiet and an opportunity to pray while others are interested in the history, services or how the building is used for the community.

Our numbers have gone down during year due to illness but we were pleased to have recruited two new welcomers in 2023. We hope to have another coffee morning soon when we encourage anyone interested in finding out more to come along. Thanks to everyone who helps in this welcoming ministry.

Rachel Lewis

Commercial and Industrial Chaplaincy

Calling to mind this past year in order to write this report has got me considering whether I need to attend Freda's Bereavement Group on a Tuesday!

Let me explain. The Christmas Tree Festival is a delightful opportunity to give a little insight to the public about what I get up to essentially on my own. Not a good example to church work but I have never been able to solve this problem – ordained people are welcome to enter many doors, lay people not so. Any suggestions on how to overcome this state of affairs will be welcomed.

However, back to my "bereavement". My tree at the festival is simply decorated with small luggage tags, on one side of which is the name of one of the workplaces I visit. This year I was immensely saddened by the number of tags I had to discard from the ones kept from two years ago. The firms just weren't there anymore. I know there were a multitude of reasons but mainly it could be summarised as in financial terms they hadn't

done well enough and had stopped trading. Good people, working hard with families and employees depending on them, but the “god of economy” (one of our false gods) takes no prisoners!

The other side of the tag says: “We believe in a God who works! – Pray for our Industry”. Please join me in prayer for our commercial and industrial enterprises.

The Revd Colin Leggate

Community Food Larder (CTRD)

Once again this year we have been overwhelmed by the generosity of the people of Ross and surrounding areas. Our shelves are never empty despite the increase in the number of clients coming to us. The rise in the cost of living has put severe pressures on day to day living and we have noticed an increase in the number of young families needing our help.

Our supermarkets allow collection points for goods and the ‘green bag scheme’ in Morrisons means we receive the goods we actually need. We also have regular donations through direct debit and from organisations who contact us to know which foods we need. The gift of Easter eggs and Christmas parcels were well received.

Tea and Toast has continued and became a Warm Space. Our clients value having somewhere warm and dry to meet and talk with their friends.

We are grateful to St Mary’s for the use of the basement of the Church Hall.

It is a sad reflection of our times that Food Banks are still needed. The future is not looking bright for our clients. Please hold them in your prayers.

Thank you for your support.

Margaret Mason

Contemplative Prayer Group

The aim of the practice of Contemplative Prayer is to empty the mind and try to achieve an inner silence thereby enabling all our being to focus on God. Contemplative Prayer is not easy but over time those who try it will begin to develop an increasing awareness of God’s love.

We meet at my home on the third Wednesday of each month when in the stillness, we try to focus our minds on God usually aided by a sentence from scripture.

While this form of prayer is not for everyone, the group would be happy to welcome anyone who might like to try this for themselves. Do ask me for more information.

Freda Davies

Flicks in the Sticks

We (the group of 8 people organising Flicks in Ross) show the film via a DVD. We buy the DVD out of our own money and keep the DVD. The cost of the DVD does not feature in the accounts.

We need to book the rights to show the film via Arts Alive. It costs £93.00 per film. (This has now increased to £116.75 from January 2024 onwards.)

Entry costs £5.00 per adult, £3.00 per child. Punters can book tickets online via the Arts Alive website and this cost is then deducted from the bill for the viewing rights, which we receive from Arts Alive after we have shown the film. Most punters pay in cash at the door.

We provide tea, coffee, beer, wine, and some snacks. We do not charge for this, but ask for a donation. We suggest 50p for a cup of tea or coffee, and £2.50 for a bottle of beer or a glass of wine. Once we have repaid the person in the group who bought the above items, we are usually left with a small profit. The refreshments profit varies depending on how much stock we have bought.

We pay all takings, both for the film and for the refreshment to the parish office. We provide the office with a copy of the bill from Arts Alive, and the office settles this bill with Arts Alive.

We show a film every month as part of Flicks in the Sticks. We also show 2 films as part of Borderlines Film Festival. Door profits for these two films are shared between Borderlines and us (60/40 split, where we get 40%). We also showed one film (with a very low turnout) as part of the Ross Children’s book Festival, organised

by Tim Shelley. For this film we gave Tim Shelley the door takings and he settled the bill for the viewing rights etc. with the office directly. It does not feature in the account below.

Accounts

10 th January 2023. Film – The Worst person in the World	£92
14 th February 2023. Film – Balloon	£92
4 th March 2023. Film - Living (part of Borderlines)	£135
12 th March 2023. Film – Decision to Leave (part of Borderlines)	£121
14 th March 2023. Film – Parallel Mothers	£69
11 th April 2023. Film – Lars and the real girl	£79
9 th May 2023. Film – Bread and Tulips	£114
13 th June 2023. Film – Tatie Danielle	£47
11 th July 2023. Film – Compartment No. 6	£136
8 th August 2023. Film – The Girl on the Train	£39
12 th September 2023. Film – The Darjeeling Express	£114
10 th October 2023. Film – Hive	£88
14 th November 2023. Film – Shoplifters	£157
12 th December 2023. Film – Babette’s Feast	£123
Total money generated for the parish in 2023	£1406

*Claus Kopp, Ruth Kirchmeier, Jeremy Hulpert, Penny Hulpert, Andrew Leeman,
Wendy Leeman, Peter Smith, Christine Smith 9th January 2024*

Flower Arrangers

This has been a quiet year for flowers in church mainly due to having no festivals. We were due to put on a flower festival in August 2024, however unfortunately time went by too quickly and it was decided to postpone it until 2025.

Harvest - With the cost of flowers increasing, the decision was taken to scale down the amount of arrangements.

Christmas and Easter - We have been very lucky with the amount of donations, which almost covered the cost of flowers on both occasions not to mention the kind generosity from the person who supplies our flowers.

I am looking at different ideas for doing arrangements without using flower foam and hopefully to do some workshops to promote them.

Flower Rota - We seem to be losing flower arrangers and we really need more volunteers. Hopefully the workshop may encourage some to come forward.

Sue Jones

Friends of St Mary’s Church

The Friends had a successful year hosting events, particularly the Open Gardens led by Wendy and Andrew Leeman which raised approximately £9,000. The only disappointment in the year was that the Friends did not gain significant new members as we had hoped and membership income dropped from £2,700 to £2,200.

However, income from other events increased considerably from £1,700 in 2022 to £5,200 in 2023. We were also successful in obtaining large grants (over £20,000) and were able to fund the new screen and projector and the new sound system as a result. The architect’s fee for the new nave platform was paid for by the Friends and the church is now looking for a contractor to carry out the work.

We have decided to hold Open Gardens every other year so without the £9,000 being raised this year we shall have a hole to fill. Thankfully the Leemans have agreed to head Open Gardens in 2025, and we are looking forward to that. We shall maintain our successful partnership with Rossiter Books and continue to grow our musical offerings. The book event with Caroline Lucas MP on Friday, May the 24th has already sold close to 70 tickets with almost a month to go. The recent success of the Monmouth Big Band evening was particularly encouraging.

Two one-off events we are hosting later this year will be fun. In early August we shall be hosting an evening for the Hereford Historic Churches Trust with Revd Dr Nicholas Henderson speaking on English country churches. On Saturday, the 31st of August we shall be presenting the kick-off for the recognition of the death of John Kyrle 300 years ago with Dr Hazel Wilkinson of the University of Birmingham, speaking about the poem, 'The Man of Ross' by Alexander Pope.

The Friends of St. Mary's is looking forward to continuing bringing a broad range of events to our beautiful historic church and to successfully raise money for its maintenance and improvement.

Bill Fulp, Chairman of the Friends of St Mary's

Fun, Food and Funds Group (FFF)

2023 has been a year of increase! We began the year with six members (Paul C, Janet N, Freda, Mark, Judith L and Rachel) but during the year welcomed Pat, Roy, Jane, Fiona and Jean B to join us. Not only did we increase our membership but we also increased our remit as, on the retirement of Colin as Catering organiser, the Social and Fundraising Committee became the Fun, Foods and Funds Group. And not only that, we raised a record £21,000, more than ever before.

The first of three Come & Sing & Sup during the year was held at Epiphany with hot suppers following two of the singing events. The three suppers raised a total of £1,380. These were quite challenging with the limited facilities in the kitchen but the group succeeded in feeding over seventy people on each occasion with hearty meals.

Lent offered an opportunity for everyone to use their "talents". We gave our "servants" £275 at the start of Lent and at Easter they returned nearly £5,000 having used much imagination to increase their initial stake.

A St George's Day Concert raised over a £1,000 thanks to Ted Willis and the Hereford Police Choir. H.Art was held again in September raising £2,700 and a Christmas Tree Festival raised £5,600.

Janet Nelson organises the monthly Saturday coffee mornings, now with our Welsh speaking friends, which raised £1,500 and is also in charge of our "wine cellar" and we regularly provide a "bar" for concerts in church held by other organisations, making a bit more money for the church as well as showing hospitality. The hundred club made £3,000.

Fun was had at many of the fundraising events but in addition we were able to entertain members of our community and join in many Coronation celebrations. In July we enjoyed a Safari Supper and in August, a walk up Garway Hill followed by a pub lunch.

We are grateful to Fiona Barnaby and her team for taking on the catering side of things – many of our events rely on refreshments to make them both profitable and fun. We provided daily lunches for h.Art and the Christmas Tree Festival and afternoon tea for the bereavement service and a concert. Christmas time meant mince pies and hot fruit drinks – provided after the Carol Service and two Carols under the Spire services.

As we move into 2024, we have a series of lunchtime concerts and a Hedgehog Fayre to look forward to as well as the regular Come & Sing & Sups and h.Art. We also welcome any initiatives from members of our congregation to do their own thing from coffee mornings to garage sales or dinner parties to organising outings.

My thanks to the FFF Group for their enthusiasm, imagination, hard work and washing up skills. Finally, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the many cooks who provide amazing cakes, puddings and soup and to all those who support us in any way. Thank you.

Rachel Lewis

LEAF / GROW Youth Group

In 2023, the LEAF Youth Group continued to meet weekly in term time until the end of the summer term, led by a team coordinated by Revd Tiffany Jackson. It attracted both teens with a church connection but also some teens from John Kyrle High School without a connection to our churches, but with curiosity. We were very keen to encourage them but as Tiffany moved to take up her first incumbency we had to accept that we didn't have the capacity to be able to continue to run a weekly after school youth group. It is our hope to restart a "Connect

Youth Group” and perhaps an “Explore Youth Group” when a LifeLink Chaplain joins us to play a leading part and when we have been able to recruit a larger team of leaders.

GROW Youth Group

Although we didn’t have the capacity to continue a weekly after school Youth Group, Revd Caroline Pascoe and Revd Sean Semple worked with some of the existing LEAF and some new leaders to set up a monthly after church “GROW Youth Group, starting in September 2023. This group is aimed at young people of the benefice who have been confirmed, to encourage and support them on their journeys making sense of life and faith as they grow up through their mid teens. We have had a core attendance of 6 – all of secondary school age.

We are also encouraging those young people to grow as young leaders – playing their part in leading worship and in helping other young people explore life and faith.

It is our hope in 2024 to see both Senior (Key Stage 4) and Junior (Key Stage 3) GROW Youth Groups develop as the next cohort of young people become old enough to attend. We are also hoping to see a Confirmation Group of Young People in 2024 and possibly some adults too.

The Revd Prebendary Caroline Pascoe

Messy Church

Messy Church continued to meet monthly through 2023 as a Fresh Expression of church for families and people of all ages who are exploring or growing in faith – whether they have a previous church connection or none at all.

We began Messy Church as lockdown restrictions started to ease and family groups were able to meet in socially distanced settings for activities such as church, wellbeing and mutual support.

Meeting in the empty nave of St Mary’s socially distanced on picnic rugs was wonderful, and over time, more and more Messy activities were possible – including our big nativity stable build, exploring living water with paddling pools in church, and lots of very Messy paint and pancakes! Furloughs and working from home meant that many parents were free to bring their families. The synergy with the Thursday rehearsals of the Youth Choir was also wonderful – giving us the opportunity to disciple youth choir members through Messy Church – and giving them all the opportunity to socialise together.

This year however more and more parents are back at work and unable to bring their families, school days are running later, and the youth choir has grown in age and confidence to be able to join the senior choir on Fridays instead of meeting on Thursdays.

In response to these changes we anticipate exploring a range of options for reshaping Messy Church in 2024. Messy Church is a really important offering of a different style of church and chance to explore and grow in a relaxed setting. We are committed to continue to offer this sort of opportunity to families – but in a way that works better for them now. We are also keen to make a better linkage so that moving from Toast and Toddle to Messy Church is a natural next step for more families.

We look forward in 2024 to visiting other Messy Churches and working with our diocesan Messy Church Advisor to look at options – and of course, most of all, to reimagining and reshaping the next phase of our Messy lives together with our young people and their families.

The Revd Prebendary Caroline Pascoe

Mothers’ Union

It has been a difficult year with many members having various health problems. Membership is slightly reduced by this. However, we still managed to make donations to our usual causes.

Posies were provided for Mothering Sunday service.

Branch members continue to participate in the majority of church activities from Toast and Toddle to Open the Book, doing the Laundry and helping with the Larder.

Margaret Willis, Branch Leader

Music

The ongoing work of maintaining the weekly round of services is the most important task of any church choir and for that I am, as always, indebted for the wonderful support from my colleague, Adrian and to all the members of our choirs.

St Mary's Youth Choir has continued to grow through 2023, both in numbers and skills and at the end of the year we switched rehearsals so that they now rehearse on Fridays, with half of the rehearsal overlapping the adult one.

The adult choir enjoyed their usual cathedral long weekend in the summer – this year in Chichester. We're looking forward to visiting Bath Abbey this year and to having the youth choir with us for one of the days.

Come & sing evensongs have continued to happen, and now with the wonderful addition of a supper afterwards. These are termly events, and we are trying to find different occasions to hold them.

New in 2023 was the establishment of *Round Byrd*, an occasional choir specialising in English choral music of the 16th and 17th centuries. This is based at St Mary's and draws singers from a wide area who are prepared to do most of the learning at home then come together for a Saturday afternoon rehearsal followed by evensong at 5pm. We now have a mailing list of around 90 singers. Come along to our next service at 5pm on 1st June when we will focus on the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Mark Sanderson, Director of Music

Open the Book

Open the Book, which is a Bible Society initiative, has been going into Walford School once a fortnight for thirteen years. During that time we have always been warmly welcomed. Members of our team number nine and come from St. Mary's Ross and St. Michael's Walford. We still have at least two original members of the team.

The children seem to love us going and the format is as follows; we introduce the background to the bible story we are reading and one member of the team says "Let's open the book" and does so and reads it while the others act it out. There is always a lesson to be learnt from the story and at the end we ask the children to sit quietly and think about it. We then say a short prayer and invite the children, if they want to, to make it their prayer by saying "Amen" at the end.

We have recently been supplied with new Story Book Bibles which use language which is more inclusive and appropriate for today's world. For the majority of last year we followed the New Testament but since September we have followed the Old Testament reading about David. Last time we introduced Solomon and his wisdom.

There is another team of seven from St. Mary's who go into Brampton Abbots once a month. They follow roughly the same format and are doing Bible Stories about St. Paul.

The third team which is ecumenical with members mainly from the Baptist Church but with a few of us from St. Mary's go into Ashfield School every Monday morning and again we are made very welcome.

All teams end with an appropriate song and sometimes the team sing to the children and sometimes, as at Walford, the school sing to the team.

Pauline Leggate

Prayers for a full St Mary's

Prayers have continued to be said in church (usually the Markye chapel) at 12 noon on the first Monday of every month for the fulfilment of a vision received over 10 years ago of a full church for every main service. We would be glad of more members of the congregation to join us on a regular or ad hoc basis.

Janet & Nick Nelson

Ponder and Pray

Meeting on zoom, the Ponder and Pray group meets twice a month on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays from around 11-15am. Focusing on a particular issue or passages of scripture we 'ponder' on its relevance in our own lives, share our ideas and spend time in prayer and contemplation. During Lent we met weekly and focused on Jesus'

journey towards Jerusalem. We very much value being able to meet via zoom and are grateful to Mark Sanderson for maintaining our link and for his valued assistance when any technical problems arise.

Do contact me if you are interested in learning more about joining this group.

Freda Davies

Prayer Chain

From time to time, we are asked to pray for people who would prefer their request not to be made public. These requests are passed on to members of the Prayer Chain to be included in their private prayer. As co-ordinator of the Prayer Chain, I would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in being part of this and am always happy to pass on requests for prayer ensuring requests are dealt with sensitively and always maintaining confidentiality.

Freda Davies (Tel 01989 562366)

Residential Communities

There had been limited involvement with the residential homes between the Covid period and the end of 2022. That has now been rectified and a team are concerned with supporting liaison work with two dementia specialist homes. At Westbank we provide one 'big' interdenominational service and one communion each month, together with chaplaincy support and one to one weekly meetings. Additionally, some Westbank residents are brought across to Sunday morning services and Messy Church when appropriate and, if weather inhibits this, the 'congregation' watches online in the lounge. Our intergenerational focus is being strengthened by a small adult confirmation group for 2024. At Rosedale there is one hymn singing service and one to one sessions each month and 'full house' Christmas, Easter and Harvest services. There is also support for the monthly communion services held at Ross Court, Bernard Hackett Court, Woodside, and Goodrich Court. This work is supported by Sue Jones, Mary Phillips, Jane Rothery and members of the Local Ministry Team. We estimate that this mission ministry touches between 90 and 100 people each month.

Derek Glover

Sidespersons

Thanks to the team of around 30 people who have welcomed people to almost all the regular services at St Mary's throughout 2023. In the course of the year the teams carrying out traditional sidesperson duties, have been supplemented at the 9.30am services by a welcomer outside the church door. This is much appreciated, especially by visitors and newcomers, so special thanks to those who do this as well as or instead of being at the welcome desk. It is hoped that in 2024 some families or your people who attend the All Age services will also join the team.

The pattern of holding private services for Baptisms continues, and it is a privilege to be able to welcome new members of the church and their families on these occasions, which often take place at 11.30am. Thanks are extended to members of the 9.30am congregation who willingly assist with moving the chairs to provide an appropriate setting for these significant family events. Sadly the number of these events declined this year.

Current Sidespersons List

Mr Gerald Atree	Mr Paul Cummings	Mrs Anne Downing
Mr Victor Downing	Mr Julian Hallett	Mrs Jean Harrison
Mrs Judith Hazelton	Mr William Hazelton	Mrs Anne Hughes
Mr David Hughes	Mr David Jenkins	Mr Peter Jenkins
Mrs Susan Jenkins	Mrs Judith Landau	Mrs Sarah McGilveray
Mrs Pat Milnes	Mr Roy Milnes	Mrs Janet Nelson
Mr Nick Nelson	Ms Anne Remmington	Mrs Marilyn Reynolds
Mr Peter Reynolds	Mrs Susan Ryan	Mr Bob Ryan
Mrs Ann Stirrup	Mr Alun Thomas	Mrs Gill Tipton
Mr Geoff Tipton	Mrs Margaret Willis	

The people listed above have indicated willingness to serve as sidespersons during the next year.

Janet Nelson

Sunday Kids

We have extended our ministry provision for our younger Church Members with an extra session this year and Sunday Kids now meets during the 9.30 Service on the second, third and fourth Sundays of the month. The sessions run with an average of four - six children who attend on a regular basis. The children leave the main Service during the first hymn to go into the Children's Room where they take part in a short Service and bible-based activities from Urban Saint's Energise Programme. We are however, looking to find some new resources to use which will allow us to base our sessions on the Lectionary Readings used in the Sunday Services. The Children then re-join the main Service in time for Communion and to share their activities with the Congregation.

During the Service on the third Sunday of the month, the Explorer Group now meets in the choir vestry, drawn from the Youth Choir and older members of Sunday Kids. They use the Scripture Union 'Rooted' resources as they begin to explore and develop their Faith.

I would like to thank those people who plan and lead the group, helping to provide this important provision for our youngsters.

Anne Morris

Toast and Toddle - Toddler Group

Toast and Toddle has continued to thrive. Currently we have quite a few very young children, some of whom 'disappear' to Nursery when their mums finish their maternity leave and return to work, but there are some older children too. We have two expectant mums at the moment, which is something we like to see as it means we'll be in business for a while yet....

We were fortunate enough to receive a grant with which to purchase new toys and equipment. So far we have bought some floor cushions for the adults and a variety of interesting toys. It has been great fun opening them – as much for the Toasters as for the children!

We continue to run a holiday session during each school holiday and it is so good to see older siblings, some of whom were our original Toast children. Our mums are a lovely lot who are so appreciative of what we do. A few of them have gone on to Messy Church and also have come along to the Crib Service. There was a very good take-up of the Travelling Crib amongst our families.

My thanks to our great little team of loyal and good-natured Toasters who work hard and are such fun to be with.

Helen Setchfield

Thursday Morning Zoom Prayer Meeting

We continue to meet each Thursday at 11.45.a.m. Our meeting is always informal and friendly. We usually start by catching up with each other on personal and local news. This conversation gives us the chance to find out what we might pray for that morning. Prayer is always informal, and no one is obliged to contribute. Over the years we have been meeting in this way we have known many, many wonderful answers to our prayers, and a greater confidence and ease as we 'talk to God' in this way. We always welcome any who would like to try the group out. The 'prayer' section of the church website gives details about this. Failing that, the Church Office might help!

Sue Spence