

Registered Charity No. 1175403



Financial Statements
for the year ended
31 December 2023
and

Annual Report

St Mary the Virgin Prestwich Parochial Church Council

Name & Address

The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical parish of St Mary the Virgin,
Prestwich
Church Lane
Prestwich
Greater Manchester
M25 1AN

Legal Status

The PCC is registered with the Charity Commissioners of England and Wales under charity registration number 1175403

Bank Details & Accounts

Current Account:

St Mary's Prestwich PCC Club and Society current account.

01-07-20

49036955

Reserve account:

St Mary's Prestwich PCC Club and Society reserve account.

01-07-20

49036963

Nat West Bank

Prestwich Branch

463 Bury New Road

Prestwich

Manchester

M25 1AB

Independent Examiner

Mr Roger Morley
[REDACTED]

Administrative information

St Mary's Church is situated in Prestwich, Greater Manchester, in the Metropolitan Borough of Bury. It is part of the Anglican Diocese of Manchester. The correspondence address is St Mary's Rectory, 67, Scholes Lane, Prestwich M25 0AW

Members of the Parochial Church Council March 2023 – March 2024

The Rev'd Shaun Conlon – ex-officio (Priest-in-Charge)
The Rev'd Adele McKie – ex-officio (Assistant Curate)
The Rev'd Carole Barnet – ex-officio (Associate Priest)
The Rev'd Gary Anderton – ex-officio (Assistant Curate)
Mr Norman Erskine – ex-officio (Churchwarden)*
Mrs Helen Hicks – ex-officio (Deanery Synod Representative)
Mrs Hazel Froggatt – *Honorary Treasurer*
Mrs Pauline Jones – *Honorary Secretary*
Mr William Max-McCarthy
Mrs Emma Chadwick
Mrs Hazel Delves
Mrs Jill Hughson
Mrs Lindsay Broxap

* = *Resigned as a member/Churchwarden: 1st November 2023*

Objectives and activities of the PCC

St Mary's PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Priest-in-Charge, The Rev'd Shaun Conlon in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

Structure, Governance and Management

The method of appointment of parochial Church Council members is set out in Church Representation Rules. The PCC looks after the general running of the church and oversees finance.

St Mary's PCC consists of the Priest-in-charge (Incumbent), all other licensed clergy in the parish (currently 3), 2 Churchwardens, 3 Deanery Synod representatives, and 12

elected lay members (there are currently vacancies for 2 Churchwardens, 2 Deanery Synod Representatives and 5 other lay members). Deanery Synod representatives (in addition to their general PCC responsibilities) attend meetings with clergy and laity of other churches in the Bury and Rossendale Deanery to discuss, support and further the mission of the Anglican churches within the deanery and the wider Diocese. All members, except those who are ex-officio, and any who are legally co-opted onto the committee, must be nominated and elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting before they can serve on the PCC. All PCC members are required to be on the church electoral roll, and must be actual communicant members. Each year, it is encouraged as widely as possible that all members entered on the church electoral roll consider standing for election.

There is also a statutory standing committee of the PCC, which consists of the Priest-in-Charge, Churchwardens, PCC Secretary and Treasurer (and one other PCC member when all elected positions are filled). The Standing Committee deals with emergency issues that arise between meetings and considers the agenda for upcoming PCC meetings. The PCC normally meets six times a year.

St Mary the Virgin Parish Church, Prestwich

St Mary the Virgin, Prestwich, is an historic Grade 1 listed Anglican Parish Church, currently part of the Diocese of Manchester. The earliest record of a priest serving Prestwich dates from around 1200 and the name Prestwich (derived from the Saxon words for 'priest's dwelling') suggests an even earlier church existed here. It seems likely that Christian worship has been offered on this site for more than 800 years. The parish is a mix of owner-occupied and rented residential accommodation, retail and office premises, schools and community buildings and open spaces. There is a sizeable Jewish population locally. A parish primary school (St Mary's voluntary aided CE school) has strong links with the church community and a very rooted Christian ethos. St Mary's Church was, for a number of years, part of the Prestwich Mission Partnership, which included the parishes of St Gabriel, Prestwich, St Margaret, Prestwich and St George, Simister: the partnership has sought to bring the life of these churches closer together. Towards the end of 2021 the Diocese of Manchester formalised the boundaries of new Mission Communities, which saw an end of Mission Partnerships and ushered in a new pattern for working together with neighbouring churches and their parishes: as well as those mentioned above we are now connected with the parishes of St Hilda, Prestwich and St Paul, Kersal Moor with St Andrew, Carr Clough. St Mary's church is registered with *Inclusive Church* and aims to align its Christian life and vision in ways which are welcoming of all people.

Objectives and achievements

The aims and objectives of St Mary's Church, Prestwich, and members of the Christian community there, include:

- Regular public worship

- Provision of accessible public sacred space for prayer and reflection

The promotion and teaching of Christianity
Engagement with the local community
Provision of pastoral care and support within the parish and to members of the church
Working with local organisations and schools, in particular St Mary's CE primary school
Provision of a safe and welcoming churchyard, open for interments (in accordance with the Diocesan Chancellor's regulations) and visits by the general public
Support of other charities at home and abroad

These aims and objectives were fulfilled in the following ways during 2023:

Throughout the year, the church was open to the public for both the conduct of acts of worship and to provide a still, peaceful and beautiful place for reflection, prayer and exploration. Throughout the year the church was open for public worship every Sunday and Wednesday of the year, as well as on other days and occasions, including major Christian Festivals, Breathing Space monthly on a Wednesday evening, Holy hour and Eucharist monthly on a Saturday morning, and an experiential teaching course (Connecting with God) monthly on a Friday evening. A heritage open day was held in September which included special displays detailing elements of the church's history locally as well as leaflets being available about both the church building and its contents and the churchyard.

A number of individuals visited the church by appointment, and others simply came in to look around or enjoy the silence and prayerful atmosphere during times when the church was open. A small group of pre-school children came to church in December to learn about Christingles and make their own, and visiting teams of bell ringers made use of the church's ring of bells on two occasions.

A number of occasional offices were held in St Mary's during the year, including weddings, baptisms and funerals, and a number of people were buried, or had their cremated remains interred, in the churchyard. A service of remembrance for the many hundreds of former Prestwich Hospital patients who are buried in the churchyard was held in October. In November the church hosted a packed service of remembrance and thanksgiving for the families of people who had died, especially in the past year: this was organised by a local funeral director, Paul Williams, and many who came fed back that they found it a moving and supportive occasion.

In June some members of the church took part in the 'Seven Churches' Walk, which had been established a number of years previously as a joint annual activity of the five churches making up the Prestwich Mission Partnership and is now being continued by all seven churches comprising the Prestwich & Kersal Mission Community: St Mary's was one of the seven 'stops' on the walk.

St Mary's is signed up to the 'Inclusive Church' network and endeavours to offer a welcoming and safe space to all who want to visit the church or worship there. Toilet

facilities for the disabled continue to be provided, as well as large print service and hymn books and audio amplification equipment and a Loop system.

Pastoral care by both clergy and lay visitors was offered in various ways during the year. Housebound members of the Christian community of the church continued to be offered communion at home or in hospital and general pastoral visits and phone calls were made to many members of the community. Other pastoral visits to those who were ill, dying and bereaved, and to those preparing for baptism and marriage, were conducted.

The churchyard provided people with green space to enjoy and a number of tours were arranged by members of the Churchyard Action Group. Work was done to ensure safety concerns were addressed regarding diseased/dead trees and access paths to areas currently in use for new burials were improved. Consideration was given to the beginning of clearing undergrowth from areas which will need to be prepared for new interments when the current section is full. A number of people contacted the church during the year exploring their family history and making enquiries about burial records etc. A new volunteer, appointed by the war graves commission, got in touch to introduce himself as someone who will be keeping an eye on the war graves and their general cleanliness etc. Following a significant collapse of waterworks just beyond church land boundaries, United Utilities used the south-west corner of the churchyard for access to the affected areas and stored some of their equipment on church land (not on areas with graves). Conversations with United utilities and Bury Council about reinstatement once all repair and reinstatement work is completed have taken place and are ongoing in terms of monitoring.

The PCC and wider congregation continued to support local community activities in a number of ways: on-going collections of foodstuffs and other items were donated to the local 'Porch Boxes' charity and also a food bank opened in a local Methodist church; Collecting Boxes for The Children's Society are held by a number of members of the congregation and local people to support the work of this charity across the country; Conversation continued with the local organising group of the Remembrance Sunday events in Prestwich, and representation from the church was made at both the main Prestwich act of remembrance and also a smaller event at the church's war memorial and war graves; Clergy representation was actively visible at the second 'Prestwich Pride' event held in August and clergy and laity from St Mary's were part of a 'faith stall' at Prestwich Clough Day in May; Members of the congregation volunteered as pastoral support for festival goers at the Park Life event held in Heaton Park in June; St Mary's church hosted a concert by the Besses Boys Band in June; contact was continued with the Prestwich Community Eco group through attending meetings, an invitation to be part of an eco-awareness day that was held in church in July and through active involvement with the plastic-free Prestwich initiative, of which St Mary's Church is now an accredited member. This Eco-awareness day ('Food glorious Food') also began a short campaign to raise money for 'toilet-twinning' and St Mary's now has twinned with three toilets in different parts of the world – certificates detailing these twinning arrangements are on display in the church's toilet facility.

A number of social events happened throughout the year, some of them with religious elements. A 'Walk Through the Bible' all-age event was run in November. Following the success of the previous year, a Posada (travelling Crib) connected households during the weeks of Advent. A Christmas Fayre, organised and run jointly with the Church School, helped to strengthen the bonds between the church and school communities. A family 'Unicorn Race Day' was enjoyed by all ages in the church and churchyard in June.

In recent years the PCC has paid the annual insurance on the neighbouring Church Lane Community Centre which provides meeting space for local groups, organisations and individuals, conversations. However, we were informed during the year that the management committee had now formally registered the land with the Land Registry and had legally begun to function separately from the church and would now be paying their own insurance.

The church was used for filming several times during the year. Two different student groups from Salford University came and filmed coursework projects in the church and churchyard, and ITV's *Coronation Street* visited on two occasions in the year, in April and July. These scenes included footage which showed off St Mary's in a very positive way both as a listed building and as a community-rooted faith building. In July, a number of Coronations Street fans from Canada came to visit the church as part of a wider 'Coronation Street Experience' holiday.

A number of Christian Nurture courses were organised during the year, including a Lent Course and a monthly 'Connecting with God' evening. Confirmation preparation for both children and adults was held in the autumn, whilst earlier in the year a significant number of children were prepared for receiving their first Holy Communion. In July, Assistant Curate Fr Gary Anderton was ordained priest in Manchester cathedral, supported by a number of people from St Mary's congregation; the following day he presided for the first time at the Eucharist in St Mary's.

In November we were able to re-launch the weekly (in term-time) Pre-School Praise sessions for children aged 0-4 years. In the space of three weeks the number quickly rose and the weekly average attendance of young children was just under twenty by the end of the year (after 6 sessions). There was exploration as to re-starting Sunday School provision, but a meeting convened to explore this more formally and fully resulted in there still being a lack of people willing to plan and run these sessions.

St Mary's hosted a prospective ordinand on placement over the period of Lent, and in the Summer another ordinand joined the congregation as a regular member following difficulties and upheaval in her previous two 'home' parishes.

Links with the Church school remained strong and continued to develop over the year. The Chair of governors and four other governors are regular members of St Mary's Church, including two of the clergy. The Priest-in-Charge and Chair of governors were

part of the panel which interviewed for, and appointed to, the role of Headteacher, ahead of the then current Headteacher moving to a new post at another school in the Autumn term. Weekly worship was provided by members of the clergy team in school, and numerous clergy visits were made to classrooms and to staff for a range of reasons (wellbeing support, prayer, encouraging the school Ethos Group, teaching and general pastoral care.) Children from the school also visited the church to learn about prayer and different ways of praying. Over the course of the year a number of St Mary's CE Primary School visits and services happened in the church and churchyard, including a Year 6 Leavers' service in July, a visit by Y4 near Remembrance Sunday to explore war graves in the churchyard (poppies made by children from all the classes of the school were brought to church and displayed in a cascade arrangement from the pulpit on Remembrance Sunday). Other services in church included a Christingle, a School Easter Eucharist, a Harvest Festival service and a Christmas Carol Service. Children from each of the eight classes (reception – Year 6) jointly led worship along with the clergy on four Sundays during the year, with two classes attending each time.

The Church choir met weekly for practises during the year (bar August) and welcomed two new members, a tenor and a bass, but sadly also lost three members – two through changed personal circumstances and a third through death. The full choir not only assisted in leading the Sunday worship but also held an Advent Carol Service and a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols in November/December in church for the local community. The level of ability is high and there is an open-door policy for new members, with training and support offered for those who need it.

The Unicorn Race Day



Coronation street fans visiting from Canada



The Bishop of Bolton & Confirmation Candidates



The Bishop of Manchester & Fr Gary Anderton



Current Priorities and Future Developments

The move back to a three-yearly appointment of new PCC members in 2022 has continued to allow for a re-stabilising and better continuity to PCC proceedings. Despite being a small committee with a number of vacant places, members have worked well together and are creating a much clearer and stronger sense of vision and purpose for the future. This has been especially significant around looking at how we might address the church's financial position and create better financial stability moving forwards. Conversations have begun regarding a number of small bequests/funds set up generations ago which need to be rationalised: recent changes in regulations have created more options of this to be done in sympathy with the original bequests' intentions.

Finance was also looked at in new ways to better use and incorporate the new digital giving device which the parish obtained in the spring. In 2024 a much more joined-up strategy of giving streams, linking with the website, will be explored and implemented.

The church website was redesigned and relaunched in the second half of the year and there are ongoing plans for its development both in terms of aesthetics, content and missional usage. Conversation around the possibility of Wi-Fi in church have resumed and will be explored in 2024.

Work with the other Anglican Churches in the Prestwich and Kersal Mission Community continues and the regular pattern of meeting for the clergy of these churches was reshaped to allow for more purposeful meetings and more opportunities for praying together. Whilst some joint plans for 2023 found fruition, others faltered, and efforts to strengthen and extend relationships continue.

A number of new people have begun attending worship and other events during the year, as was the case in 2022. Although many of these do not attend every week, many are now very much part of the life of St Mary's and the need to continue to build up the cohesion and stability of the congregation is an on-going priority. Eco concerns, and continued exploration of how the plan for environmental issues being a more prominent part of the church's life and mission are gathering momentum and should provide increasing opportunity for broader links with other churches and with local community groups and organisations.

The delayed Statutory Quinquennial inspection report of the Church building, undertaken in 2022, was received in the second half of the year. Although there are no major issues with the building, there are many urgent and necessary repairs which need to be effected and this will need time and effort and attention given to it in 202, not least in the current lack of Churchwardens in post.

The need for Officers (PCC members, Churchwardens and Deanery Synod representatives) to come forward is something which is causing additional strain to the functionality of the church as a charity and as a visible presence in the community. This issue is of highest priority in the immediate future, and there needs to be more careful succession planning and hand-over preparation moving forwards.

Risk and its management

Potential adversities may be categorised according to their combined risk/impact potential. Those with a high risk but low impact are set at one end of the scale, with low risk/high impact at the other end. Both parameters are important and both risk and impact should be minimised.

Financial risks are a reduction in income and/or an increase in costs. Both have the potential to have major impact upon the capacity of St Mary's Church to continue all her present activities and functions and limit any future development.

As the Treasurer's report (below) makes clear, St Mary's is currently in a very difficult situation financially, with no substantial reserves and a long way from being able to meet parish share payments. As noted in the previous section (above) this continues to have its roots in a combination of long and medium term factors and decisions and, to a lesser extent, the impact of Covid closure/restrictions. This will continue to be addressed across the congregation in the coming year, with efforts being made to increase the effectiveness of the digital giving machine and linking it with donation tabs on the website as well as launching a campaign to encourage giving by a wider range of donors who have links or connections with the church. There is a plan to advertise a range of identified monthly amounts of money which people will be asked to consider signing up to per month. The church congregation members (and the wider community) still need to be reminded of the fragility of St Mary's financial position and the need for action across a number of areas to improve this situation and raise more funds and build up sustainable sources of income.

Rapidly rising energy costs, and the general high rises in the cost of living, continue to hamper such movement forward, as both church bills and people's bills at home are increasing. Efforts have been made to ensure that St Mary's energy tariff is as reasonable as it can be and other costs have been cut back as far as possible. Grant funding for projects will become more actively sought beyond just large fabric repair costs.

Added to this is the current treasurer's planned relinquishing of the role and the need for recruiting a new treasurer, and their induction into the various aspects of the role.

This will result in a loss of two decades' worth of working knowledge which the outgoing treasurer possesses. As the new treasurer finds their feet they will also need to undertake careful scrutiny of budgets and explore with members of the PCC the possibilities of other income streams and funding.

Physical risks, to people, are judged to be low, but would have a high impact if they materialised. St Mary's carries an appropriate level of insurance. Other risks are also recognised: the protection of children and vulnerable adults is taken seriously and St Mary's complies with the relevant Church of England and Diocesan policies. The PCC is working towards a lower risk/impact potential, not just financial, but across all areas.

Audited Accounts January - December 2023

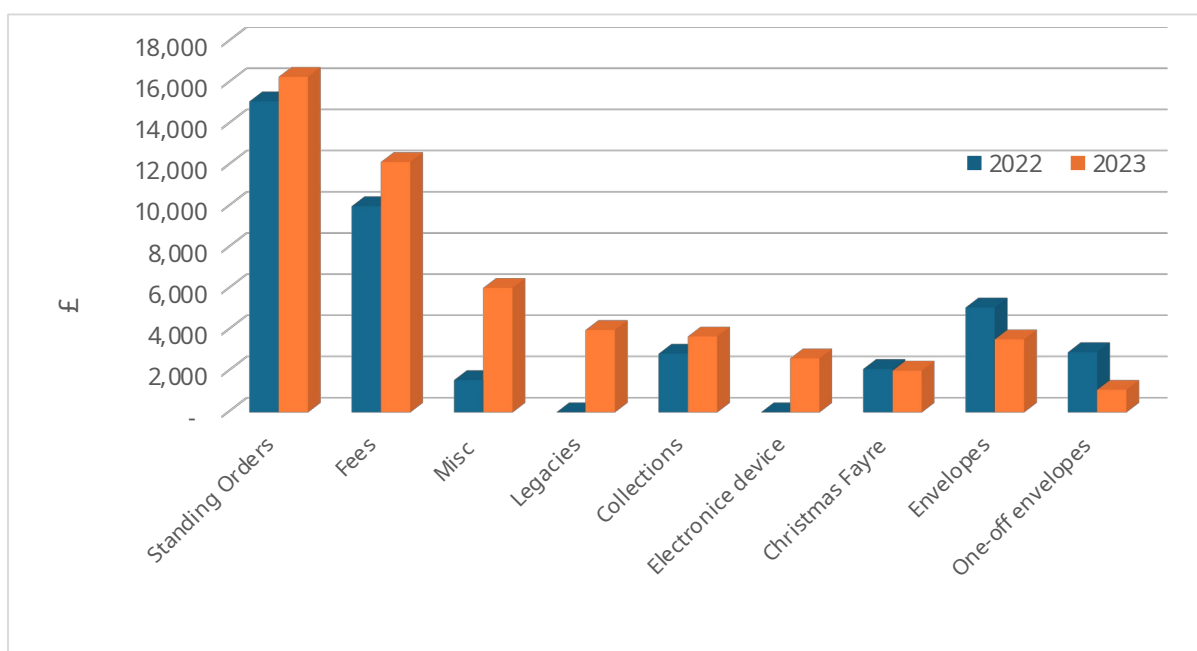
These are printed separately.

Treasurer's Report FOR FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2023

Income

Overall income for 2023 was **£68,571**. This was 19% higher than that received in 2022 (£57,625). Figure 1 below shows the main sources of income received in 2023 compared with 2022.

Figure 1: Sources of income 2023 compared with 2022.



Income received through standing orders continues to be the highest source of income and in 2023 was £16,291 compared with £15,100 in 2022. Thirty people give regularly through standing orders; this is similar to 2022 when 29 people gave. (Two new members of the congregation signed up to give through standing order, and one member stopped giving.)

Average donations through standing order was £45.18 per person per month compared with £43.39 given in 2022 which explains the slight overall increase.

The amount most frequently donated by standing order per month was between £30 to £40.00, given by six members of the congregation; as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Chart showing the individual monthly amounts donated through standing order.

£5.00	£5 to £10	£10 to £20	£20 to £30	£30 to £40	£40 to £50	£50 to £60	£60 to £70	£70 to £80	£80 to £90	£100 +	Total
2	3	5	1	6	3	3	3	2	1	1	30

Fees for weddings and funerals were slightly higher in 2022, and once fees paid to the diocese are considered, fees provided a net income of **£6,594** compared with £6,600 in 2022.

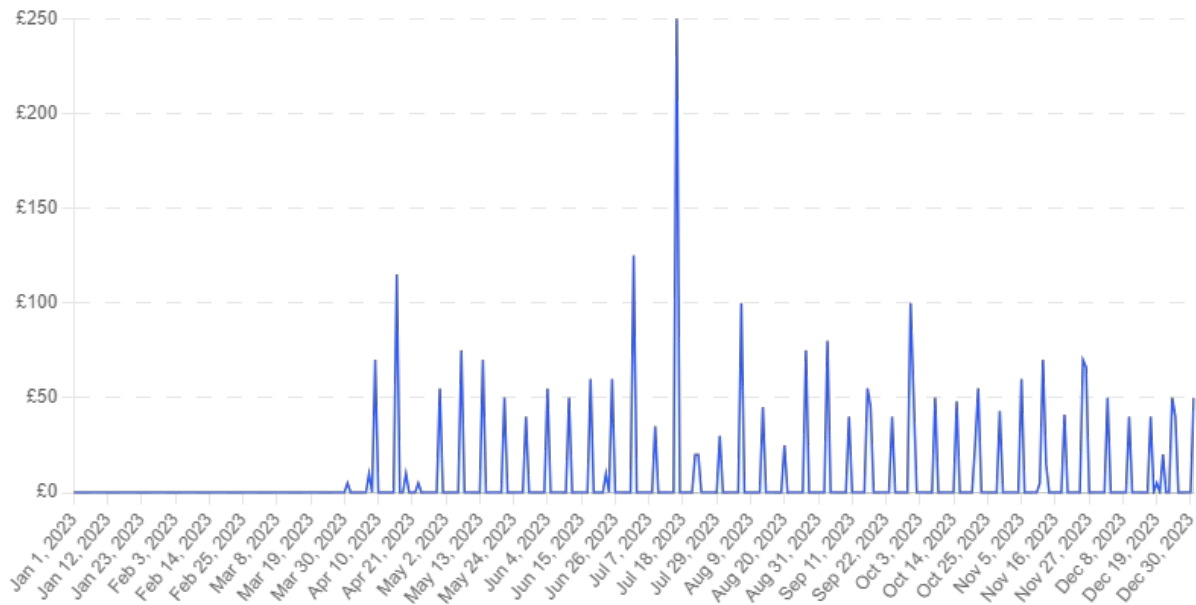
Miscellaneous income includes **£5,250** from ITV filming.

The year had two legacies: **£1,000** (Jean and Eddie Murphy) and **£3,000** (Marian Eckersley).

Collections at services is **£6,303** in 2023 compared with £2,850 in 2022, an increase of £3,453. This total includes **£2,623** – collected via the electronic giving device. The congregation was offered a new method of donating more easily at services in April 2023 by installing an electronic giving device in the church, which enables contactless giving using debit cards or Apple Pay. (Figure 1 above shows collections at services and that received through the contactless machine separately.)

Figure 3 below, shows the weekly donations given using the newly introduced contactless machine. There was a total of 267 donations. The average weekly donation was **£10.18**, and there were 112 unique donors.

Figure 3. Income donated through the newly introduced contactless machine.



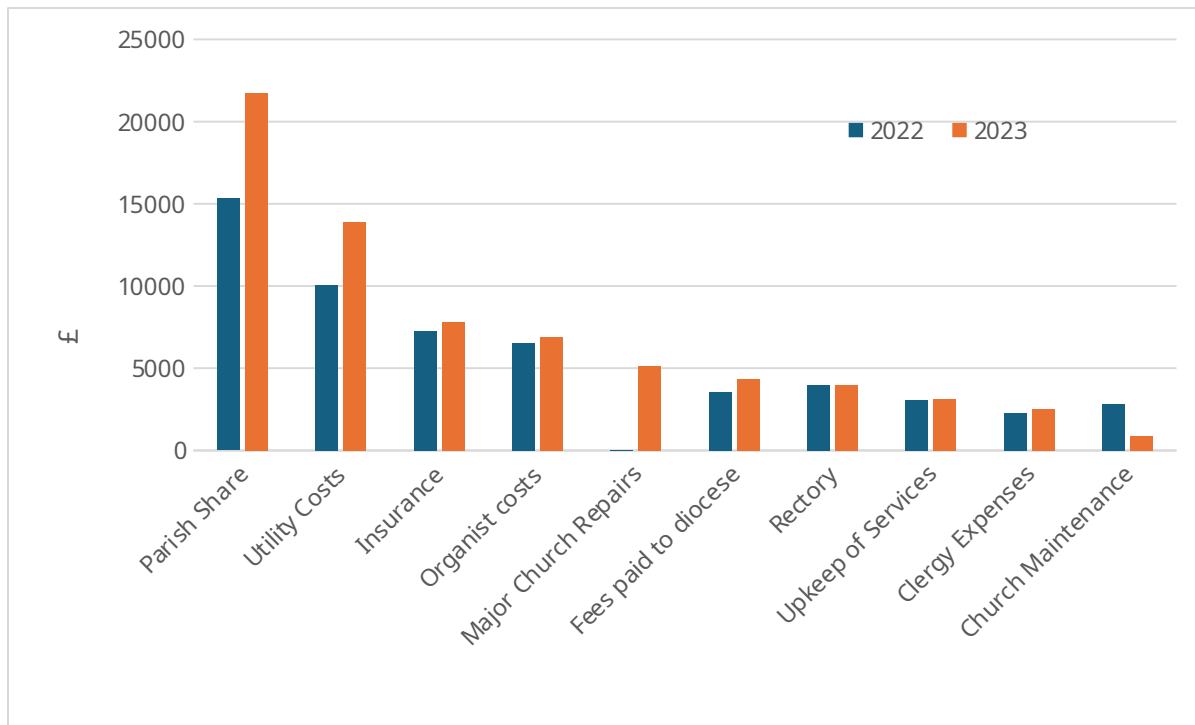
Although total collections at services increased in 2023 by £3,453 income received through the envelope scheme and one-off envelopes decreased by **£3,375**. It was hoped that by offering a means of giving electronically, donations would increase, however it appears that so perhaps the congregation has chosen to give electronically and not through the envelope scheme resulting in similar levels of donations to that given in 2022.

This year's Christmas fayre raised **£4,167**, similar to that of 2022. Half of the funds raised were donated to the school.

Expenditure

Total expenditure in 2023 was **£124,347** of this £50,000 is represented by the write-off of Church Lane Community Centre which was previously included in the Balance Sheet. Church Lane Community Centre is no longer considered to be an asset as it cannot be sold for profit and as such does not represent a financial asset.

Figure 4. Major items of expenditure 2023 compared with 2022.



As in previous years the Parish share contribution continues to be the largest item of expenditure. (Figure 4). In 2023 the maximum amount of funds available to contribute to the Parish share was £21,744 which is 39% of the total assessment required by the Diocese (£54,360.90). Gift aid raised from donations (£2,535.29) is included in the £21,744. The congregation's generosity enables the diocese to sustain an effective ministry funded through the parish share by not fulfilling our commitment to pay the parish share in full means that our church relies on other congregations to finance the mission and ministry across our diocese.

Expenditure on day-to-day activities was kept to a bare minimum and totalled **£61,753**, the highest items of expenditure being utility costs of **£13,882** compared with £10,058 in 2022.

Only essential repairs were made:

- Toilet roof: The church contributed half of the total repair costs, £3,600 with the other half being paid by the Churchyard Action group.
- Replacement of stolen flagstones, £1,512, which was reclaimed from insurance.

Reserves

At the end of 2023, the reserves, and the current account total £37,192. (an increase of £870 from 2022): Of this amount, £14,176 are funds with specific spending purposes and therefore restricted from general day-to-day use. Leaving an available balance of **£23,016**.

Conclusion

The amount of expenditures in 2023 was kept to a bare minimum, including contributions to the Parish Share, and only committing to essential repairs. There was a slight increase in congregational income of approximately 6%. Moving forward, it would be great if income could increase and allow the church to contribute more fully towards the parish share, as well as grow our reserves from the current £23,016 to facilitate expenditure on the maintenance of the church.

May I appeal to those who enjoy our church, who may not be doing so already? Please consider committing to regular giving through a standing order, direct debit, internet banking, or other means.

And please would you complete a Gift Aid form if you are a UK taxpayer, which enables the church to claim back an extra 25% from HMRC. Forms are available at the back of the church, and it only takes a couple of minutes to complete.

Our bank details are as follows:

Nat West Bank

Account number: 49036955.

Sort Code: 01-07-20.

Hazel Froggatt - Treasurer

Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council

Purpose

The purpose of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) is to set the strategic direction and vision for the life of the parish. Its main focus is on:

Mission & outreach

Finance & Governance

Discipleship & Pastoral care

Worship & Spirituality

PCC membership is now following a new pattern of three-year terms of service, following the amendment by motion carried at the previous year's APCM. The number of places filled at the APCM in 2023 once again fell short of the allotted places: two 3-year term spaces, and one 1-year term spaces were filled, leaving the PCC short of 5 elected members, as well as there being four ex-officio spaces (two (from November, when the serving Churchwarden resigned on his doctor's advice) and Churchwarden spaces and two deanery synod spaces). This continues to result in a PCC which is less effective than it could be and has again, like the previous year, raised a couple of issues about being legally able to hold meetings when some members have been unable to attend, partly because of the need to be quorate and partly because laity must outnumber clergy, and with 4 clergy and only 8 laity as members. These issues will be noted in public announcements in church services and via electronic communications ahead of the 2024 APCM

The PCC have continued to meet bi-monthly, with standing committee meetings happening in the months inbetween.

Over the year, the inclusion of a regular standing item for Safeguarding issues was implemented. The Prestwich & Kersal Mission Community continued to be a standing item on the agenda, so that members can regularly be updated on, and reminded about, the forging of new links across the churches of the Mission Community. Regarding the poor financial position of the church, discussions were held about how best to utilise the new digital giving machine, what literature might be displayed in church pews regarding how much it costs to run St Mary's, and suggestions were developed as plans for a fundraising push in 2024. There were discussions about the updating and relaunching of the church website. The annual review of the Church Organist's contract and remuneration, as well as heating fee costs for weddings/funerals, was undertaken. New missional/fundraising activities were discussed and affirmed, including a summer all-age eco-event in partnership with various local organisations and statutory bodies, an all-age 'Walk Through the Bible' event in November, Heritage Open Day in September, a Christmas fayre in conjunction with the church school and the posada (travelling crib) during Advent.

These all linked in with the mission plans for the short and mid-term future, which the PCC agreed the previous year. Three key strands of these plans for 2023/24 were:

- Community Building – in light of the changed/changing demographic of congregation/church attendances
- Growing and Deepening Faith with both adults and children
- Giving/Fund Raising, linked to the Gospel and to people's spiritual growth

Pauline Jones – PCC Secretary

Electoral Roll Report

The Church Electoral Roll has undergone the annual revision, which has resulted in a number of additions (9). There have been 3 deletions of congregants who have died during the past year. It is important that the electoral roll represents the actual current congregation and doesn't carry names of people who have moved away, or are worshipping elsewhere, from one full revision to another (a six-year period). If this happens then there is often a huge drop in numbers on the roll following the next full revision (which will be in 2025)

The number of those currently on the roll, following its annual revision in 2024, is 135.

Mrs Helen Hicks remains the Electoral Roll Officer for the parish.

Fr Shaun Conlon

Deanery Synod report 2023 Meetings

Deanery Synods are part of the legislative apparatus of the Church of England, linking PCCs in parishes and the Diocesan Synod. The Bury & Rossendale Deanery Synod (of which St Mary's Prestwich is a part) met four times throughout 2023, on 17th January (zoom), 24th April (in person), 27th September (in person) and 27th November (Zoom). Currently the members of Synod from St Mary's are the four clergy plus Helen Hicks, who is our only lay member, with two vacancies for other lay representatives unfilled.

At each meeting there were brief updates and other reports concerning environment issues and topics, as Eco-Church & Environment is a standing item on the agenda. It was noted during the year that the following churches in the deanery had made progress towards eco-awards:

Working towards Bronze – St Andrew's, Hillock & St John's, Bircle, St Mary's Prestwich.
Bronze – Christ Church, Ainsworth, St Mary's & All Saint's, Goodshaw & St Paul's Kersal Moor.

Silver - St Paul's Church, Constable Lee.

It was noted that: a Bury & Rossendale Stepping Stones course is being planned for Spring 2024;

One of the electives in the 2024 ALM course is Eco & Creation;

Eco Champions meetings happen regularly on Zoom – the next was planned for 12th December and then every 4 weeks. The meeting is open to everyone.

Reports and presentations made during the year included the out-going Archdeacon of Bolton, The Ven Jean Burgess, speaking about Growing (one of the three diocesan strands, along with nurturing and serving); Bev Angier & Kim Morgan-Jones speaking about Focal Leadership in parishes, and later in the year Kim speaking more widely about lay ministry and development in the Church, and reminded members about the transforming prayer network; The Ven Mike McGurk, newly-appointed Head of Evangelism & Growth in the diocese, speaking about how to move PCC conversations from maintenance issues to mission; The new Bishop of Bolton, Rt Rev'd Matthew Porter, speaking about his life and faith, what it means to receive God's grace and what it is to be a Christian.

Other items on the agendas included:

The new Deanery Transformation Support Officer, Mrs Ima Lomax, being introduced;
A range of financial concerns, from Parish Share to Deanery accounts, being reported upon over the four meetings;

The sharing of 'good news' stories and information from various deanery parishes;

Clergy and lay roles which were vacant, and people changing roles. During the year, this included the Area Dean becoming the new Archdeacon of Bolton, and The Rev'd Donna Williams becoming the new Area Dean.

If you would like to fill one of the vacancies for Deanery Synod members, and play a role in this wider engagement with the Diocese and the Church of England, then please speak with one of the parish clergy.

Fr Shaun Conlon

Child Protection/Safeguarding

St Mary's takes the protection of children and vulnerable adults seriously and complies with the Church of England's guidelines in these areas. At a Parochial Church Council meeting on 13th July 2023 the following policy statement was reviewed and agreed and continues to be in place .

In accordance with the Church of England Safeguarding Policy our church is committed to:

- *Promoting a safer environment and culture.*
- *Safely recruiting and supporting all those with any responsibility related to children, young people and vulnerable adults within the church.*
- *Responding promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation.*
- *Caring pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons.*
- *Caring pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns or allegations of abuse and other affected persons.*
- *Responding to those that may pose a present risk to others.*

The Parish will:

- *Create a safe and caring place for all.*
- *Have a named Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) to work with the incumbent and the PCC to implement policy and procedures.*
- *Safely recruit, train and support all those with any responsibility for children, young people and adults to have the confidence and skills to recognise and respond to abuse.*
- *Ensure that there is appropriate insurance cover for all activities involving children and adults undertaken in the name of the parish.*
- *Display in church premises and on the Parish website the details of who to contact if there are safeguarding concerns or support needs.*
- *Listen to and take seriously all those who disclose abuse.*

- *Take steps to protect children and adults when a safeguarding concern of any kind arises, following House of Bishops guidance, including notifying the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) and statutory agencies immediately.*
- *Offer support to victims/survivors of abuse regardless of the type of abuse, when or where it occurred.*
- *Care for and monitor any member of the church community who may pose a risk to children and adults whilst maintaining appropriate confidentiality and the safety of all parties.*
- *Ensure that health and safety policy, procedures and risk assessments are in place and that these are reviewed annually.*
- *Review the implementation of the Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Practices at least annually.*

Each person who works within this church community will agree to abide by this policy and the guidelines established by this church.

This church appoints Claire Almond as the Parish Safeguarding Officer

Clear information about safeguarding was included online when the church website was redesigned and relaunched

Fr Shaun Conlon

Pre-School Praise Report

It has been a pleasure and privilege to re-establish St Mary's Preschool Praise in November 2023.

This delightful group initially ran from February 2016 to the summer of 2019. I felt called to another purpose that summer, but the global pandemic and subsequent periods of lockdown in 2020 and 2021 changed many things for us all. I am most grateful God has called me back to his ministry both as a member of St Mary's Church choir and specifically for Preschool Praise. I am humbled by the unquestioning welcome acceptance of my return and the love and understanding from my friends in the choir, the clergy and congregation.

Preschool Praise has always had a nurturing and homely feel. We have a magnificent team, none of whom we could do without. Alison (from St Mary's choir) is a superb baker, making the most delicious biscuits and cakes. She is excellent at welcoming and involving both the parents, carers and children who come to our services. Stella and Carol are invaluable, providing tea, coffee, juice and refreshments. Tracey (also in St Mary's Choir) creates the most wonderful craft activities which the children love. With

extended regular support whenever possible from Stewart (with his legendary Victoria Sponge), Rev'd Carole and Fr Shaun; together we smile, share and extend the love of God and 'family' of St Mary's Church. All members of the team are caring and dedicated, providing their skills, time and talent voluntarily.

Preschool Praise is an important service offering a welcoming friendly approach to, what is for many young children, their first experience of church attendance. With prayers and Bible stories told in an exciting simple way for young children to understand, we share God's teachings. This, together with music, relevant songs, nursery rhymes and using puppetry, actions, movement and dancing activities, we have a lot of fun. It is especially meaningful and valuable also to the parents and carers, providing a sense of community and friendship. We consistently receive a great deal of positive feedback.

I'm delighted how from a small gathering in early November of 6 children initially, to an average of 20 or more children in a matter of a just a few weeks, we are regularly attaining the numbers we previously had. I hope the popularity of the service encourages those who attend to broaden their involvement and participation in other services at St Mary's Church. I pray that they continue to enjoy and support St Mary's now and in the future.

Justine Thomas

Adult Ministry Report

This report outlines the key aspects of adult ministry for the calendar year 2023. During the year, we have continued to see a change in the profile of our congregation with new people starting to attend worship on a regular basis. From an adult ministry point of view, we have therefore continued to develop opportunities for both new and existing disciples to deepen their faith and spirituality. These included:

- the continuation of our monthly (third Wednesday of each month) Breathing Space group - to enable people to take time out from the busyness of life to spend with God through reflective music, a short bible passage, followed by space for silent prayer; and
- our Connecting with God group (first Friday of each month) involving interactive discussion and providing practical guidance to help people to grow in their relationship with God. After a year focusing on different forms of prayer, 2023 was dedicated to helping each other to find God by exploring a variety of tried and tested ways of reading the Bible, enabling us to experiment along the way and, hopefully, to be nourished by the results.
- This concluded with a 'Walking through The Bible' experience which took place in November. It was pleasing to see both new and more long-standing members of the congregation come together and to take individual responsibility for designing and leading the various 'stations' which took us from Genesis to Revelation in a creative and

hands-on way. The event was enjoyed by people across all ages and those who attended were so impressed and immersed in the experience that we have been requested to run it again in 2024.

Our adult Lent Group for 2023 took place on Tuesday Evenings in Church. The chosen theme focused on Christian Aid materials entitled, 'Talking Climate Justice', which invited us to explore the Lenten themes of repentance, sacrifice, redemption, reparation and restoration vis-a-vis the realities of the climate crisis.

In July, and continuing the theme of climate injustice, we held an all-age event in and around the Church and church grounds based on the topic of Food and Lifestyle, entitled 'Food Glorious Food'. This enabled us also to engage with local businesses in the area and was well received by those able to join us. (A copy of a 'write-up' about this event is attached at the end of this report).

We also took part in a Toilet Twinning initiative inviting people to raise funds to enable those in the poorest nations of the world to have clean water and a proper toilet, and to learn about hygiene. In the event, we raised enough money to "twin" our own toilet in Church with three latrines in poor communities. Pictures of each of the locations are proudly displayed in the toilet area in Church.

We had the privilege of preparing a further three adults for Confirmation in November and I think we all enjoyed the opportunity to grow together in faith. It is encouraging to see that almost all the adult confirmation candidates have continued to attend Church on a regular basis, some of whom have begun to be actively involved in Church life.

During 2024 we will continue to offer similar opportunities for us to grow together in our faith. All are welcome to join us for any, or all, of our groups. These tend not to be sequential, so it does not matter if people are unable to attend every one of them. Looking forward, we also intend to adopt an underlying 'environmental-focused' theme to some of our activities. All being well, these will include another Summer event in July and an Eco-Christmas Tree Festival in November.

As ever, my prayer is that as many people as possible will join us so that, as we move forward together, we will grow in love for God and for one another. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

The Rev'd Carole Barnet – Associate Priest

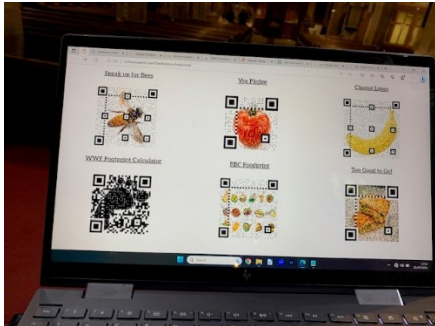
Eco-event – Food Glorious Food – Write-up

On Saturday, 22nd July, 2023, St Mary's church in Prestwich held an All-age Eco event, entitled Food Glorious Food, as we thought about the part we can play in the fight against Climate Change; in fulfilling our mission 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'; and how we can all make a difference by making changes to our lifestyle and taking small steps in the right direction.

The theme for the day was Food and Lifestyle. Events began with a 'Bring your Own Lunch' where we invited people to bring food in recyclable or biodegradable containers and using as little as possible, if any, plastic. We also encouraged them to bring locally sourced produce as far as possible.

During the afternoon, we offered a variety of activities, including contributions from local external companies, such as Village Greens, Prestwich Environmental Forum and Plastic-free Prestwich representatives, as well as Greater Manchester Recycling. There were arts and crafts,

including bee-making, decorating biscuits in the shape of a recycling bins, making pictures out of brightly-coloured pasta, plotting on a world map where our food is sourced, as well as games, planting, quizzes, maps, even recipes. In the interests of minimising the amount of paper used, we offered the opportunity for people to access many of these using QR codes – some even on-line!



We looked at the beauty of creation compared with the damaged caused by climate change. We even had a little home-made toilet into which people could put money to send off to countries where water shortages mean little or no sanitation, promoting toilet twinning.



Although we were not blessed with good weather, the event was positively received. Parishioner comments included:

I think that we have made fantastic connections with the Prestwich community which will only grow over time. We also had new people coming into church which is amazing. Everyone that came thoroughly enjoyed themselves and saw how much we had done. We put on a good show! People had chance to chat to us and each other which is all about building that sense of community. We will have also hopefully have ourselves a twinned toilet very soon!

One incredibly important note for me personally is how much I've thought about the 2 very simple tasks of sourcing an eco-friendly lunch and researching ideas for the pasta plates - the real sense of wonder and awe of creation combined with the quite terrifying way we are mindlessly using plastics and contributing to climate change has really hit home.

The external companies appreciated the invitation to be involved and welcomed our commitment to a greener world. As a result, we have been invited to sign up to become an ally of Prestwich Environmental Forum/Plastic-free Prestwich initiative.



Choir Report

During the past twelve months the Choir has gone about its work with ever increasing efficiency, and has continued to help in the leadership of Public Worship in this place.

Services have been enhanced with an expanding repertoire of Anthems sung by the choir, and these are beginning to include some of the very finest examples of English Church Music, some of which is usually the exclusive preserve of Cathedral and

Collegiate Choirs. We are indeed fortunate in our Choir – a group of people who meet regularly to rehearse on Thursday evenings for 44 or so weeks of the year, as well as turning out on Sundays, and for weekday services as required – all of this is done voluntarily – though the standard of singing attained is quite professional. (Remember, if you are interested in joining us, the prerequisites are simply a reasonable singing voice, a keen “ear”, a willingness to be moulded, and most importantly of all, a sense of humour! If you can commit to Thursdays 7.30pm – 9pm, and Sunday morning Service, then please speak to the Organist).

Along with the entire congregation here at St. Mary’s, we were all shocked and deeply saddened by the very sudden death of Nina Maxwell in the weeks leading up to Christmas. We are however, delighted that both Nick and Eleanor Maxwell are continuing in the Choir. It is also a pity that we have lost two altos – Amanda Lloyd, due to continuing illness; and Amy Potts, who has left us temporarily. It is encouraging that we have managed to attract to new men into the Choir; Max Hebditch, a Bass and husband of Sarah Matthews (Soprano); and following the Christmas Services, Joe Dykes a Tenor contacted me, and is now with us. Numbers therefore stand at 14 in total, and produce the following statistics: 6 Sopranos; 2 Altos; 2.5 Tenors; 4 Bases (The Rector and Rev. Carole are extra to these figures).

On Advent Sunday, we held the Advent Carol Service, following the success of a similar service last year – the Choir worked very hard in the Autumn to produce the Music for this Service, along with Music for the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. This year, we held the Nine Lessons Service on Thursday 21st December at 7pm – this proved to be a good move, and brought a number of people to St. Mary’s from the Parish and elsewhere, many for the first time. I was also very grateful to my good friend Mr. Philip O’Connor, ARCO (Organist & Choirmaster of Bolton Parish Church) who accompanied us at the Organ. Following both Carol Services, many favourable comments were made by grateful parishioners. As I have said in the past, the enthusiasm generated by these Festival Services should not detract from the all important round of weekly rehearsals and Sung Services; and it is quite clear, that the work of the Choir in this respect, is very much appreciated by our Congregation and visitors.

I will end this report by expressing my sincere thanks to all the members of the Choir for their continued loyalty and hard work. Also, to Rev Carole, for her attendance and singing in rehearsals, and Services as and when she is available; to Rev. Adele and Rev. Gary for their obvious appreciation of the Music and the Choir. Above all however, sincere thanks are due to the Rector who, despite his ever-increasing workload, rarely misses a rehearsal, and is extremely appreciative of the work and support of the Choir.

Gary Hulme, ARCO, LTCL - Organist & Choirmaster

Churchyard Action Group

Over the past twelve months the churchyard action group has worked hard, come rain or sun, to keep on top of a range of jobs; below is a list of some of the tasks we have undertaken which are additional to our ongoing regular work (such as tidying graves, collecting litter, maintaining gardens and beds around the church and removing brambles along Clough Drive).

The roofs on the toilet block and hearse house have been replaced by contractors to ensure that they are watertight. Following this work, members of CAG then fitted new ceilings in the toilets and replaced the gutters. Although this voluntary labour saved money, the cost of the materials was not cheap.

Paths in the churchyard have been improved, with gravel chippings and lintels being put in place in the newer burial areas.

Space has begun to be cleared for more new graves/ashes burial plots.

Several collapsed graves have been filled in, and the last of the kerbstones on the Demetriadi grave have been put back into place.

A new wooden bench has been erected.

Steps in the lower churchyard, which were stolen by thieves, have been rebuilt.

Over 150 graves were marked with small poppy crosses at Remembrance-tide (with help from children from St Mary's School.)

A number of quotes have been received in relation to the felling of trees which are diseased or dead. Members of CAG have begun to tackle felling some of the smaller silver birch trees that are dangerous, and signage has been erected in areas affected by the unsafe trees.

Following a tremendous rainstorm in the autumn, a culvert in the Clough collapsed and did a large amount of damage. This resulted in United Utilities bringing in large diggers and other heavy plant through the bottom part of the churchyard, and which necessitated the removal of several trees and a section of churchyard fence. Later this year the areas where the damage was caused will be made good or reinstated as it was.

As always, we are thankful to all the additional efforts from the Community Payback teams who work in the churchyard on two or three days each week, as well as our own volunteering team, both regulars and occasional helpers. If you would like to join us then we meet on Tuesday mornings each week – come and introduce yourself! We are also thankful for both monetary contributions and also the many words of thanks we receive from various people from the local community and beyond.

If you would like to know more about our activities, or churchyard tours, then you could try the following:

[Facebook.com/alanjamesjennings](https://www.facebook.com/alanjamesjennings)

[Prestwich.org.uk/bookings](https://www.prestwich.org.uk/bookings) (for tours)

[Prestwich.org.uk/people](https://www.prestwich.org.uk/people) (about people from Prestwich, many of whose graves are in the churchyard)

Bill Cottam

Fabric Report January to December 2023

The "Terrier's" contents, which includes all silverware etc photographed and catalogued in 2015, is up to date.

The "Logbook" is also up to date updated with the inclusion of historic alterations from Faculty records. All modern changes have been recorded.

Altarware – As stated in previous reports, the Altar frontals and fabric for the high altar continue to be in a poor condition and are in need of repair.

General Building –

1. The Quinquennial report, which gives a snapshot of the condition of the building, was finally delivered in the summer by Buttress Architects in Manchester. Although there are no hugely big individual issues, there are many smaller things which need to be attended to internally and externally. Cumulatively, these will cost a great deal of money and so there will need to be careful consideration of which things are the most pressing and also how best to get value out of any erection of scaffolding etc as certain repairs might be done at the same time.
2. All scheduled annual servicing and maintenance of essential equipment continues to be done. All statutory inspections, (fire extinguishers, alarm, gas, electricity), are up to date and the Gas Boilers and Organ are regularly serviced.
3. The 5-year Electrical Inspection was last carried out in 2022.
4. A fault in the electrical circuit for the Fan Heater in the Porch has been repaired
5. A number of York flagstones were stolen from the church footpaths in the summer. These have now been replaced and Ecclesiastical Insurance have reimbursed the PCC.
6. The Bell Striking equipment installed in 1997 continues to need attention, and most probably an upgrade. It is estimated that the cost of upgrading the system to a modern-day equivalent would be £4000- £5000, with a service charge of £800-£1000. The system is currently out of action.
7. Movement of the South Aisle flooring, which has been present for several years requires investigation of the supporting brickwork. The stone flooring in the North entrance porch requires some minor repair. The carpeted steps in the nave are awaiting the fitting of edging strips to reduce the potential trip hazard.
8. The ceiling in the Lever Chapel has become potentially unsafe. This has been noticed since the Quinquennial inspection took place. The decorative oak struts appear to be coming loose in places and need to be professionally assessed and reattached.

Currently the pews below this part of the ceiling is being cordoned off during worship/opening hours for safety reasons.

9. The condition of the outbuildings continues to be a cause of concern. During the past year the roofs were made watertight, thus assisting in giving more time to address the wider issues of proper restoration/usage.

10. The condition of the choir vestry floor and the cause of damp under the vestry stairs continues to need investigation.

11. An observation of water ingress into the bell chamber from the tower roof has been reported. Some temporary remedial work has been carried out but this requires further investigation.

Additionally, in early 2024:

12. During two recent services plasterwork has fallen from the clerestory in the pulpit area and water ingress has been noticed in the North aisle. Both will require investigation.

Churchyard -

1. The section of the retaining wall of one of the older sections of the churchyard, adjacent to the footpath on the southside which gave way in 2021, is still not reinstated. The rebuild cost was estimated to be £16,000 in 2022. This work remains on hold until finances permit.

2. A number of dead and/or diseased trees have been identified in various areas of the churchyard and quotes are being obtained for the work needed to fell them. In the meantime, warning signs have been erected in the affected areas.

3. The lower section of fencing on the south-western edge of the churchyard needs reinstating following essential maintenance work carried out by United Utilities after serious a watercourse collapse in late 2023. UU and Bury Council have been in conversations with Fr Shaun and the Churchyard Action Group about the reinstatement of this section of the fence and making good other additional damage on land belonging to the church.

Shaun Conlon - Priest-in-Charge (in lieu of there being no Churchwardens in office)

APCM AGENDA

Sunday 21st April 2024 at 12.00noon in St Mary's Church

Annual Meeting of Parishioners

1. Welcome & Opening Prayer
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes from the previous meeting (26th March 2023)
4. Election of Churchwardens

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Opening Prayers

2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the previous annual parochial church meeting (26th March 2023)
4. Matters Arising Those items which are not covered by the reports
5. The reports (*please note: most of these can be found in this booklet*)
 - (i) The electoral roll report 2024
 - (ii) Annual report – what the PCC has done since the last APCM
 - (iii) Financial report, including 2023 audited accounts
 - (iv) Annual fabric report
 - (v) Deanery Synod report
 - (vi) Churchwarden's Report (*not applicable, as there are currently no Churchwardens in role*)
6. The elections and appointments
 - (i) Election of PCC members (6 vacancies: 4 x 3 years & 2 X 2 years)
 - (ii) Election of Deanery Synod Members (2 vacancies for two-year term)
 - (iii) Appointment of independent examiner
7. Chairman's Report (*to be given verbally at the meeting*)
8. Any other business
9. Closing prayers

Followed by a short PCC meeting to elect officers (PCC Vice Chair, Hon Secretary & Hon Treasurer)

Minutes of last year's meetings

ST MARY'S PRESTWICH - ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS **Minutes of the Meeting held on Sunday 26th March 2023 at 12.00noon in St Mary's Church**

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer
2. No apologies for absence – (The chairman advised that this meeting is for anyone on St Mary's electoral roll from beyond the parish boundaries as well as anyone who lives in the parish)
3. Minutes of previous meeting accepted. Proposer Stewart Barnet, seconder Lindsay Broxap
4. Election of Churchwardens
 Candidate's name – Norman Erskine. Proposer Gary Hulme, seconder Stewart Barnet. Norman Erskine elected for the coming year. Archdeacon's Visitation will be in June 2023; Stewart Barnet will remain churchwarden legally until then.

ST MARY'S PRESTWICH - ANNUAL Parochial Church Meeting

Minutes of the Meeting held on Sunday 26th March 2023 at 12.10pm in St Mary's Church

- 1. Opening Prayers**
- 2. No apologies for absence**
- 3. Minutes of previous meeting accepted. Proposer Emma Chadwick, seconder Anne Parkinson**
- 4. No matters arising which were not covered in the reports.**
- 5. The reports – contained within document entitled Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022 and Annual Report**

(i) The electoral roll report – there has been a slight increase, with new additions ready to come on.

(ii) Annual report – what the PCC has done since last meeting - PCC members continue to meet bi-monthly and minutes kept. PCC has been exploring how they can move forward within the community and church life. It has been a quiet year regarding decisions to do with the building.

(iii) Financial report, including 2022 audited accounts – The Chair thanked Hazel Froggatt for the annual reports and her services as Treasurer, given the limited funds available. The accounts were accepted at the last PCC meeting. Proposer Hazel Froggatt, seconder Gary Hulme.

(iv) Annual Fabric report – Majority of the work which has been carried out has been small. No major work requires doing. Awaiting the quinquennial report.

(v) Deanery Synod report – The Chair advised for the last three years St Marys has been carrying two lay vacancies, with Helen Hicks being the only member. Licensed clergy are members of the Deanery Synod. Meetings are held via Zoom or in person. The Deanery now covers a wide area, so going forward the winter meetings will probably be via Zoom.

(vi) Churchwardens report – There is some work which requires doing (electrical and toilets). Stewart Barnet standing down after approximately 9 years. The Chair advised it is good for the role to be circulated and Stewart will be mentoring Norman regarding the legal aspects of the role that need sorting prior to the Archdeacon's Visitation. Stewart advised it has been very enjoyable being Church warden.

6. Elections & appointments

(i) Election of PCC members (8 vacancies: 4x3 years & 4x1 year)

Two applications received

<u>Candidates name</u>	<u>Proposer</u>	<u>Seconder</u>
Emma Chadwick	Pauline Jones	Hazel Froggatt
Hazel Delves	Emma Chadwick	Pauline Jones

No election has been required as Chair has deemed them elected and advised can always co-opt to fill the remaining vacancies as the year progresses.

(ii) Election of Deanery Synod members (3 vacancies for a three year term)

It is part of the Church of England's legislature that lay persons should be present on the Deanery Synod. The number of lay persons is dependent on the number of a Church's electoral roll.

<u>Candidates name</u>	<u>Proposer</u>	<u>Seconder</u>
Helen Hicks	Nicholas Holmes	Jean Plant

Helen Hicks elected for a new term of office.

(iii) Appointment of independent examiner

<u>Candidates name</u>	<u>Proposer</u>	<u>Seconder</u>
Roger Morley	Hazel Froggatt	Emma Chadwick

7. Clergy report. Fr Shaun gave the following report.

Yesterday was one of the Major Festival days in the church's calendar – the Annunciation; especially poignant for us here in a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Mary is invited, through the message of the angel Gabriel, to be part of God's plan of salvation, by giving birth to Jesus. And, of course, Mary says yes. Whether she really knew what she was committing herself to is doubtful ... which mother or father can?

And standing here yesterday two other people said yes to each other, as I conducted the marriage of a couple, Jamie & Chloe, who were childhood sweethearts and have now reached the age of 30 and are still very much in love. Even though they have traversed many things over the years that their love has flourished, saying yes in marriage to another person, and the vows that are made, is something else that brings with it a lot of unknowns too.

And in three months' time Fr Gary, our curate, will stand before the Bishop in the Cathedral and make vows to be faithful as a priest, as he continues to grow into the vocation he believes he has in his heart from God. This too will bring with it a lot of unknowns.

And, of course, we could go on with many other examples of those things we commit to in our lives, wholeheartedly and in good faith, even though we cannot know the full extent of what, exactly, it is we are committing ourselves to. Things in life in general, and things in our life of faith.

Some are much firmer commitments and promises than others. One can always easily step aside from being a helper at a playgroup, but less easily step aside from being a mother or a husband or a priest.

And even though, when we make such commitments and vows in our lives, we cannot know what may come our way, there is one thing we can be sure of: the unfailing love of God. Giving birth to the Saviour and being his mother, exchanging marriage vows,

declaring one's ordination promises, becoming a school governor, or a member of the Church Council, or helping out with a foodbank, or befriending a lonely person, or knocking on the door of an elderly neighbour whose curtains haven't been opened for a couple of days... so many things come with a host of unknowns. But standing with us in those unknowns is Christ, offering strength and insight, direction, forgiveness, clarity and hope. We don't have to accept the things he offers us in love, but when and if we do, we find new possibilities and new things about ourselves.

Last year I asked two questions as part of my report at the APCM. These were:

How do we do things for Christ?

How is God calling us to be not only citizens of his kingdom but also agents of his love and saving power?

These are still very live and pertinent questions as we move on in our life together here in this place and the wider parish. The bedrock of the answer, though, is that, whilst we might not know the future and what that calls us to be and do, we DO know that God is with us. And this is important. For if we truly trust and believe God to be about salvation, about revealing love and justice and hope and new life, then we can face the unknowns with confidence.

We can only really do things for Christ when we do things WITH Christ; when we recognise that he is God-with-us, Emmanuel. If we try and be the Church in our own strength, and rely only upon our own vision or understanding then we will fail.

And we can only be agents of God's love and saving power when we immerse ourselves in prayer and worship first; when we recognise that we are, as it says in the New Testament earthenware pots, clay jars, which contain God's glory. St Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians:

4 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ... 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

St Mary's, like so many other churches in the diocese of Manchester, and across the country, is a quite different place to what it was three years ago before Covid. It seems that very few church communities have settled back into the same pattern of worship, social engagement and mission that it had previously. In the past few days I've been fortunate to hear, and be part of, many conversations with clergy of many different backgrounds at diocesan Synod yesterday, at a training day on Thursday for those with new curates, and a meeting of Mission Community leaders with the Area Dean and Archdeacon on Wednesday. A common theme is about what is God calling us to in

these changed situations in our churches? How do we move forwards and embrace God's will in similar, but different, parish situations?

Firstly, we need to recognise that God is standing with us. He doesn't call us to go it alone; he comes with us.

Secondly, we need to be unafraid to embrace wholeheartedly the 'yes' to God – and to each other – that enables us to set out in trust and faith.

Thirdly, we need to be willing to live a little more sacrificially. To give a little more attention, a little more time, a little more money, a little more commitment, to the things of God, and to God himself. If our faith is to be meaningful to us then we need to nourish it and encourage it to continue to grow. God stands at the door of our hearts and knocks – he doesn't barge in and take over, but he waits for us to open the door of our heart and invite him in. But opening our hearts to him, welcoming him into our lives, brings with it the responsibility that saying YES always does: the responsibility to embrace what we say yes to, like becoming a mother or a husband or a priest or a school governor or a foodbank helper... but the yes comes with the support of the Holy Spirit – the gift Christ has left to his Church to help us be his people; to help us do things for God, and to be agents of his love and saving power.

We need to be ready to offer our help and our time, rather than thinking others will do things; we need to be ready to offer our help and our time rather than wait to be asked.

For we are one family in Christ; limbs and organs of one body.

Despite the many acknowledgements in all the conversations that I've had with other clergy this week, one thing remains constant – the church will only survive, grow and thrive when we recognise that everyone has a part to play in its life and worship, in its mission and ministry.

Today – every day – God knocks on the door of our heart and has an offer of love to make to us, and an invitation to say yes to him, an invitation to be those clay jars that reveal his extraordinary power. No-one else can say yes for us. No-one else can open the door to admit this holy, loving visitor, but us.

Let us each carefully consider God's call to our hearts, and also support one another in that journey of discovery too.

8. Any other business

The Chair advised when Stewart legally hands over to Norman, something will be said then, but in the meantime he wanted to thank Stewart for all he has done as Church warden and all he will continue to do as he moves forward in his ALM role and pastoral care.

5. Closing prayers

The APCM followed by a short PCC meeting to elect officers (Vice Chair, Hon Secretary & Hon Treasurer)

Vice Chair - will be done at the first PCC meeting following the APCM

Secretary: Pauline Jones proposed by Hazel Froggatt Seconded by Helen Hicks

Treasurer: Hazel Froggatt Proposed by Emma Chadwick Seconded by Lindsay Broxap

2023 in pictures



The choir before Fr Gary's First Eucharist as a priest display



The altar of repose on Maundy Thursday handover

Remembrance Sunday



The posada visits choir practice for a



Mothering Sunday daffodils awaiting distribution



Christmas, looking westwards