

## Parish of St Paul, Bedford



**PCC Review of the Year  
01 January 2023 to 31 December 2023  
for the APCM**

*Adopted by the PCC on 21 March 2024*



# Annual Report for APCM 2024



# Annual Report for APCM 2024

## PCC Annual Report - Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023

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## Annual Report for APCM 2024

### 1. Aims and Purposes

St Paul's Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility for cooperating with the incumbent, The Reverend Canon Kevin Goss, in promoting, within the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church - pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It is also responsible for the maintenance of the Parish Church, which is a Grade 1 listed building.

### 2. Objectives and Activities

The PCC commits itself to carrying out prayerfully God's will as it maintains an overview of worship and identifies and plans ways in which we can reach out to and value the many diverse groups living within our Parish and its surroundings. These plans are set out in the **Parish's Mission Action Plan** with the vision that:

***'In 2024 St Paul's will be a church which is growing and actively engaging with the people of Bedford and beyond, by living and sharing Jesus' love.'***

St Paul's is a welcoming and inclusive church that endeavours to serve Christ and to share his love and Good News with others:

- Our services offer meaningful worship in an inclusive catholic liturgical style with a range of high-quality music, and we hold special services for the civic life of the borough and county.
- The church is open every day, offering a place of prayerfulness and peace for our ministry of worship, witness, and inclusive welcome, with a special care for the vulnerable and needy.
- Our pastoral work includes listening, support, prayers and encouragement, in addition to practical help and signposting to specialised agencies when needed. Members of our Pastoral Team visit those unable to attend church, and our Pastoral Assistant works with the ecumenical Town Centre Chaplaincy in mission to businesses, shops and shoppers.
- We endeavour to be proactive in reaching out to the community with the love and Good News of Jesus. We have an active ministry of community engagement, sharing God's love and generosity by working in partnership with local community groups and institutions to provide care and support for the most vulnerable.

### 3. Achievements & Performance

The year 2023 started with some measure of normality following two years of pandemic upheaval. As the year progressed, under guidance from the Vicar and the PCC, the reintroduction of previously established practices was welcomed by all.



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### 3.1 Worship and Welcome

As Covid was still in evidence at the start of the year it was decided that, until further notice, standing for communion and use of intinction (no chalice) would remain, and this continued to the end of the year.

In January we were delighted to re-introduce the popular Wednesday Fellowship Lunches, which had been put on hold since the start of the Covid pandemic. It was wonderful to share a meal and conversation to strengthen relationships. After all, scripture shows us that the Lord had many meals with those He wanted to have personal relationships with!

Wednesday coffees and teas, started as a way of offsetting the loneliness experienced by people during successive lockdowns, continue. We meet, often in the Anderson Room, from 11.00 am before the noon Wednesday Eucharist. Initially we were few, but our numbers have grown, friendships have been forged, and new people have been introduced to the church and welcomed. Our retired clergy have actively engaged in the inclusion of new people in the delivery of the service. As we approach our second year, we look for our friendships and numbers to grow.

February saw the reintroduction of prayer ministry for healing and other concerns during communion in the Parish Eucharist on the fourth Sunday of each month, and this has supported many congregation members over the course of the year.

June was a great time for celebration at St Pauls. Firstly, a sad farewell but congratulations and God's blessing to Fr Luke Lerner as he left to take up a new appointment as priest-in-charge of the parish of St Andrew, Luton. There were gifts, drinks and a cake! The following Sunday we helped the Vicar celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood, with drinks and cake after the Sunday Eucharist. The Sunday after that we congratulated Fr Roger Stokes on the Golden Jubilee of his Ordination to the Priesthood as we celebrated after Sunday Eucharist – with drinks and cake. We realised Sundays would not be the same without drinks and cake!

In September we were very pleased to welcome Fr Anthony Davis who joined us as Assistant Curate, to serve the final two years of his three-year curacy and to take the lead in our work of community engagement. We were delighted to celebrate Sr Hazel's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in October, and we were treated to drinks and cake once more following the Sunday Eucharist. In November the 9.30am Saturday Eucharist was gladly reinstated by request.

We were able, once again, to hold the full range of Christmas services: Christmas Confessions, Advent Carol Service, Christingle Service, Festival of Lessons & Carols by candlelight, Crib Service, Midnight Mass and All Age Festival Eucharist.

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, the number of young members remains low, but an activity table is provided allowing young children to remain with their families during services. Over the course of the year, we have been most heartened to find that the ethnic profile of our core congregation has become more closely representative of the local population.



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### **3.2 Pastoral and Community**

During 2023 we continued to reach out into our community offering practical and pastoral support to those in need.

Grants from Bedford Borough Council and the Diocese of St Albans as well as some individual donations enabled us to continue supporting households in need through our existing homeless voucher scheme and also to provide support for those unable to cope with rising energy bills amidst the cost-of-living crisis. During the year we issued £10,000 value in individual vouchers through these schemes, as well as providing practical and pastoral

support through the work of our Pastoral Assistant, our Curates and others. We also gave away 19 foodbank vouchers in 2023 and gave back to Bedford FoodBank through collections in church and Fr. Anthony's role as a member of their Board of Trustees.

Alongside this our community organising work has continued, deepening our partnerships with local Churches and organisations, and building new ones. Highlights from 2023 included the Mayoral assembly in April, which was held in church, where all 5 candidates for Mayor of Bedford answered questions and gave commitments on the Real Living Wage and homelessness policy. These have been followed up with Mayor Tom Wooton and the Borough Council since his election. This community organising work was made possible through a partnership with charity Citizens UK and was pioneered by Fr. Luke, who, along with his practical engagement, was able to secure a grant of £3,000 from the Verulam House Fund Trust at the Diocese in 2023 to help support it.

Our warm space, which we opened during the winter of 2022/3 was expanded for the winter of 2023/4 through a partnership between St Paul's and St Andrew's Church, with both churches providing volunteers to welcome visitors to the Anderson Room in church, make cups of tea, coffee, soup or pot noodles and provide a listening ear. This has provided an important oasis of warmth, friendship and company to the many, often vulnerable guests who have used it. As the year came to an end, we continued our relationship with Dine With Us On The Streets, originally initiated by Fr. Luke, to host their Christmas meal for vulnerable members of our local community.

This pastoral and practical work in the community comes alongside our regular patterns of visiting residential care settings with communion, hosting schools for seasonal services and visits, and a wide variety of other activities, all made possible by the hard work of our clergy, staff, and volunteers, and the generous support and giving of parishioners.

***Fr. Anthony Davis, Assistant Curate***

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### **3.3 Learning and Training**

During 2023 there were three Lent study groups looking at 'Failure – how to live well with the mess of everyday life.'

In September we congratulated Tom Otley who, having completed his Reader training, was licensed at St Albans Abbey.

The PCC secretary took part in the well subscribed APCM training on Zoom.

Teaching continues through Sunday sermons given by the licensed clergy and readers, and retired clergy; we are fortunate to be blessed by their different approaches.

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## 3.4 Church Attendance

Number on the electoral roll reported at the 2023 APCM	<b>116</b> (22 resident), 94 non-resident).
Number on the electoral roll at the end of 2023	<b>117</b> (21 resident, 96 non-resident).
Average weekly church attendance during October (Eucharists 10.15am Sunday, 12 noon Wednesday, 9.30am Friday)	<b>102</b>
Attendance on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day (Crib service, Midnight Mass, 10:15 Eucharist on Christmas Day)	<b>395</b> (165 communicants)
Attendance at church services during Advent, held for the congregation and local community	<b>Over 2,000</b>
Attendance on Easter Day or Vigil service on Easter Eve	<b>204</b> (173 communicants)
Number of infant baptisms	<b>3</b>
Number of confirmations	<b>0</b>
Number of marriages	<b>2</b>
Renewal of vows/ Blessings of Marriage	<b>0</b>
Number of funerals in church	<b>4</b>
Number of funerals at the crematorium	<b>2</b>

## 3.5 Special Services and Events

A number of civic, special and public services and events were held in 2023.

The annual blessing of the Great River Ouse, led by the Vicar and Fr Luke Lerner, took place in March to highlight the importance of caring for our local environment and to celebrate the beautiful river running through the heart of our town.

In May a Vigil was held for the Coronation of HM King Charles III. This gave the opportunity for people of all beliefs and none to pray for the King, our country, nations of the world and our communities. There was a Reading and a short time of led prayer every 15 minutes, interspersed with opportunities for silent prayer and the lighting of candles.

The High Sheriff’s Justice Service was held in September, and in December carol services for local schools were held.

The Serbian Orthodox Church continues to hold regular services at St Paul’s.

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### 3.6 Digital Communications

Reflecting the Church of England nationally, the requirement for churches to embrace and make effective use of digital communications to reach as many people as possible is now an imperative. St Paul's own digital communications have evolved and improved in recent years but technology and behaviours don't stay still and so with that comes the corresponding need for the church to move with the times.

Most of the St Paul's community will be familiar with the church website, still in its present form since 2014. While it continues to serve a need, the time has come for a major refresh in terms of design, content and functionality (the way it works on laptops, mobile phones etc) as the technology behind it is now out of date. For those who don't use social media, the website should be the first port of call for information relating to service and opening times, events and other updates. The weekly pew sheet is always available to download from the homepage, which also has the links for our social media channels and other sources of information including A Church Near You, Cathedrals Plus, Inclusive Church and Living Wage Foundation. I hope to be able to bring news of an updated site later this year.

Our **Facebook** page continues to enjoy good growth as it has in the past 3 years. Results for 2023 show that our Facebook page "reach" increased by 67% to reach 67,000 people in the 12 months, while the number of visits to the page was up an amazing 303% to over 9200. Our page has a healthy 531 followers, 74% of whom are women. The dominant age range is between 35 and 65, 65% of whom live in Bedford. Facebook is managed out of the office, and if you have a Facebook account please don't forget to "like" and "follow" the church page to encourage growth and to keep in touch with updates.

Although it was launched initially as a response to the Covid shutdown, the **Friday email** has become an established part of church communications and outreach, sent on the majority of Fridays to around 140 subscribers. It has had organic growth over the year as people can sign-up to receive it via a form on the homepage of the website: they do not need to be on the electoral roll or even regular worshippers to keep in touch with church news. It continues to get high usage rates, read on average each week by 70% of recipients. It complements the weekly pew sheet as it is used to contain click through links for further information including to the pew sheet itself, third party websites, links to tickets etc.

The church **You Tube** channel has remained mainly dormant for some time now following a decision to stop the live streaming of Sunday and midweek services. We retain the equipment to live stream when necessary, such as weddings, civic services or large funerals or indeed if there was the demand for a return to stream some of our regular services.

**Robin Bartlett, Centre Manager**



### **3.7 Church Hire**

St Paul's church has long been available for third parties to hire the various spaces and use for concerts, meetings and other events. However, through a combination of active promotion and general organic growth as the word spreads, enquiries to use the church from outside organisations grew significantly in 2023. This is a positive development as it puts less strain on our shrinking volunteer base to provide regular fund-raising events, and one which we all collectively need to support.

As a building to hire, the church has limitations, including the parking (although this is scheduled to be improved this year) and lack of bespoke meeting rooms. However, the main church space is its greatest asset, a space which lends itself to a variety of uses - in addition to concerts - when a more creative approach is adopted. Income generated in 2023 through church hire to outside organisations totalled more than £10,500 and included an eclectic range of events, from the usual selection of classical and choral performances to a variety of Saturday fairs and markets, and even a 'Silent Disco'.

The use of sacred spaces for events such as dances and discos has recently made national news, following the increasing use of church buildings to host such events; our own Silent Disco held in May had already been to Manchester, Chelmsford and Hereford Cathedrals and while it is to be recognised that not everyone is happy about this development, they do bring in much needed income as well as attracting a wide group of local people who enjoy the church's beauty and ambience, putting it at the centre of the community.

How is it looking in 2024? By the time you read this, we will have already hosted events through March and April, some new and some returning from last year including the local music festival Bella Ciao! One of the office priorities will be to keep the momentum going.

***Robin Bartlett, Centre Manager***

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### 4. Financial Review

As in 2022 my task as treasurer during 2023 has been made much easier by the help I have received, both from inside and outside the church. Both churchwardens, especially Florence Bignell with her weekly counting and banking, Florence and Robin for their handling of gift aid claims and Robin Barlett and Sharon Evans for their tireless work in the office. In the latter part of the year Fr. Anthony Davis has provided me with a huge amount of support especially in the preparation of accounts and the transfer of our online accounting system, from Quick Books to Data Developments. The Data Developments system is specifically intended for use by Churches and will therefore much more useful than Quick Books, which is geared for small business use. I am also grateful for the support of the vicar and of all the members of the SFC and PCC.

Generous giving by members of the congregation, combined with fund-raising activities, continued to provide the bulk of the church's income. We were also fortunate to receive a number of donations from both charitable institutions and private individuals. Tuesday concerts and Saturday organ recitals were in full swing throughout the year and provided a valuable source of regular income. During 2023 the combined earnings from these sources raised £10,265 plus some gift aid (an increase of £1,757 over 2022). These enjoyable events will continue to provide pleasure and valuable income in 2024. We are indebted to Alison Phillipson for all her work in arranging the Tuesday concerts and finding such talented performers for these as well as for the Saturday organ recitals. Robin and Sharon continued to vigorously promote the use of St. Paul's by outside organisations. The hire income achieved from these special services, concerts and other events are vital to our income.

The hire of St. Paul's to outside bodies raised £15,504 during 2023, an increase of £2,961 over the 2022 income. All income records for the ever-popular Christmas tree festival were broken with almost £24,000 being raised over the five days of the festival. £11,987 of this income comes to St. Paul's. Many thanks are due to Margaret Oakley, members of the festival committee and the numerous volunteers and helpers who make the festival possible.

We are once again grateful for the continuing support of the Friends of St. Paul's, The Gale Family Trust, Williams & Co. and the Dorothy Hilda Porter Trust. We also received a grant of £500 from Bedford Borough Council for the Warm Spaces scheme, to be run from January to March 2024. Regular congregational giving via standing orders, stewardship envelopes and cash giving was supplemented by a number of generous donations. Giving via standing order increased noticeably towards the end of the year, as congregation members responded generously to the Vicar's appeal on stewardship Sunday.

The cashless giving terminal is proving a useful income source, providing £2,369 after costs.

Fund raising for the Tower, Clock and Bells appeal continued throughout the year. A guided tour of Southill Park, organised and run by James Collett-White proved so popular that it had to be repeated, such was the demand! The rather complicated process of applying for a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund is under way and we must hope for a favourable outcome.



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Energy costs continued to be a cause of great concern throughout the year and will have an ongoing adverse effect on our finances during 2024. General inflation which stood at over 11% at the beginning of the year fell as the year progressed but of course this does not mean things are getting any cheaper, it just means that they are not rising quite so fast. In September, due to the low level of our available funds, we had to take the regrettable decision to suspend payment of our parish share. We were already paying only just over 50% of what was due, but the Diocese were very understanding about our position. It remains the PCC's ambition to eventually return to full payment of our parish share. Until energy prices return to a more affordable level and inflation is brought fully under control this will remain an ambition rather than a reality. We resumed payment of just over 50% of our parish share in January 2024 but may have to review this as the year progresses.

### **4.1 Ongoing Concern**

Principle concerns for the coming year remain the twin challenges of increasingly unsustainable energy costs and general inflation. To mitigate, as far as possible, the energy costs, church heating has been kept to an absolute minimum. This policy was carried over from 2022 and there is little room for further savings. Heating the church has been restricted to Sunday services, Tuesday concerts and events where the organisers have been charged for heating. Gas and electricity payments for the year were approximately £29,140. Fortunately, this figure is somewhat below the figure of £45,000, projected at the start of 2023. This welcome saving is largely a result of tight control of our energy usage.

### **4.2 Reserves Policy**

It has been PCC policy to try to maintain a balance on free reserves (net current assets) which equates to at least three months' unrestricted payments. This ambition has not been realised in recent years and it seems that, given the current economic climate, with huge energy costs and inflation still running at more than twice the Bank of England's target, it is unrealistic to expect the reserves policy to be achievable in the near to medium term. Furthermore, in the event of the situation improving, the PCC might well take the view that other priorities would outweigh the fulfilment of its reserves policy, for example reducing the shortfall on payment of our parish share.

It remains our policy to invest short term investment fund balances with the CCLA Church of England Deposit Fund.

### **4.3 Ongoing Financial Planning.**

As in previous years, 2024 will continue to challenge St. Paul's financially. Increased and even tighter control on costs, particularly energy costs will be essential. Difficult decisions will have to be and, in some cases, have already been taken. Maximising income sources, through concerts, recitals and other events will continue to be a priority, as will be the promotion of the use of the church building to outside organisations. Robin and Sharon have been, and I am sure will continue to be, very active in this respect.

We have been fortunate to receive money through grants, but these tend to be for specific capital project purposes, for example the pinnacles, North Porch and the Tower, Clock and Bells Appeal. We do receive two significant grants and a number of smaller ones which, together with the substantial sum raised by the Christmas tree festival, help cover various ongoing costs but generally grants to cover the daily costs of running the church are far more



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difficult to source. We will continue to be alert to the possibility of accessing funds, to help with routine costs, whenever the opportunity arises.

### **4.4 Accountant and Independent Examiner.**

Garner Associates continue to act as accountants to St. Paul's PCC

George Hay Chartered Accountants continue to act as our independent examiner.

***David Price, Treasurer***

## **5. Fabric**

The year 2023 began well with the completion of the Pinnacles Project and the removal of the corrugated iron screening. There have been various organisational changes during the year. The committee is now comprised of Fr. Kevin Goss (Vicar), Malcolm Smith (chair), Claire Price [secretary] Anne Collett-White, Rachel Brown, Steven Stanford, James Saunders and Tom Otley. Florence Bignell has stepped back from the committee but has kept an eye on the work scheduled for the North Porch. This began in September but by the end of the year had still not been completed. It will be a blessing to give the St. Peter and St Paul statues a home in our building after a gap of so many years.

Various minor works have been overseen. The damaged red notice board was repaired by Stephen Buckle and Malcolm Smith. The carpet to the right of the High Altar has been swept and replaced. The runner from the High Altar is now secure. An investigation into the possibility of woodworm in the choir stalls is still ongoing but an infestation looks less likely than hitherto. Robin Bartlet has overseen the repair of the pulpit lights and circuit. A skip was organised, and a number of obsolete items were de-cluttered. Some of these had been mentioned as hazards in the quinquennial report. Several chairs were repaired.

One morning the office team had a clean up to organise as water had flooded into the Choir Vestry [Alexander Room] after a torrential downpour. There was worry about the parquet floor and if the blocks were sealed well enough not to swell. The water had entered through the top of the windows as it had overflowed the parapet above because of a leaf and plastic blockage in the downpipes. Two church wardens were needed to sort the problem and check that the remainder of the roof was clear. The floor is fine!

A claim was made with Ecclesiastical Insurance for the replacement and repair of two lead downpipes which had been hidden behind a gravestone in the church yard awaiting collection by metal thieves.

The Tower, Clock and Bells project continues. Thanks to Steve Stanford a considerable amount of work has gone into preparing our thoughts on a grant application from the Heritage Lottery Fund. We are however still short of funds. It is hoped that the Council might contribute towards repairing the clock as they have plans for lighting the outside of our building and improving the paths around the church. This will include a screened compound for the bins. Tom Otley has worked with the council on this, and we are grateful for his efforts.



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We are still working on completing some of the issues raised in the quinquennial report, but these are minor and will naturally be finished when the time and expertise are available. My thanks go to all those who support the fabric of the church either monetarily or through their time and talents.

***Malcolm Smith, Churchwarden and Chair of Fabric Committee***

### **6. Safeguarding**

**At its March 2023 meeting, St Paul's PCC confirmed that it continued to adopt and endorse the policy set out in the House of Bishops' 'Promoting a Safer Church' 2018 statement. The PCC also confirmed their commitment to the Response to Domestic Violence Policy.**

The PCC affirmed their duty of care to protect children, young people, and vulnerable adults in our church community. The welfare of the child, young person and vulnerable adult is always paramount.

Safeguarding is part of our core faith and an integral feature of the Christian life in our church.

As Parish Safeguarding Officer and Lead Recruiter I support those in positions of responsibility in the church to renew their DBS every three years. Safeguarding Training is key to updating all those who work and volunteer within the church and this also is on a three-year rolling programme.

Safeguarding information is displayed in the Narthex, Choir Vestry and Bell Tower.

There have been a number of issues of safeguarding concern reported during 2023. These matters have been dealt with according to the relevant safeguarding policies and guidance by the Parish Safeguarding Officer, the Vicar and the Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

The team at the Diocese are essential as they support all that is done within the parish. This year Martyn Hedley has stood down as Assistant Safeguarding Advisor.

The diocesan team is now made up of:

- Jez Hirst Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor
- Mandy Davies Assistant Safeguarding Advisor
- Dave Adams Assistant Safeguarding Advisor
- Warren Lucas (new to the team as Martyn's replacement) Assistant Safeguarding Advisor.

Thank you to all those who have completed the required Safeguarding training this year. Our church community is increasingly busy and our congregation growing in diversity. More than ever, we need to be aware of how to respond appropriately to those amongst us who are at risk. Thank you also to those in leadership who are totally committed to setting Safeguarding at the centre of all we do. I want to thank them personally for the support they have given me as Parish Safeguarding Officer.



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I will be standing down from this role at the APCM.

Until that time, if you have any concerns about someone's safety, please speak to one of the ministerial team and/or contact:

**Sue Gray - Parish Safeguarding Officer:** 07702219910

[safeguarding@stpaulschurchbedford.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@stpaulschurchbedford.org.uk)

**Wendy Jones - Deputy Parish Safeguarding Officer** wpjones87@gmail.com

### 7. Volunteers

The life and mission of St Paul's would be impoverished without the work of our numerous faithful volunteers: assisting at worship by serving at the altar, looking after altar linen, singing in our small voluntary choir, reading lessons, leading intercessions, operating the sound system, and helping in other ways with flower arranging, catering, organising concerts, fund raising, welcoming, serving on the PCC, PCC treasurer, PCC secretary, cleaning, bellringing and many other often unseen tasks. Fellowship Lunches are now being served on some Wednesdays thanks to a very small team of volunteers, but we still need more volunteers so that we can restart the weekly Saturday café.

The stewardship renewal campaign in October 2023 resulted in a few new offers of help. However, since Covid we have struggled to find enough people to cover some tasks, especially serving at the altar, catering, operating the sound system, welcoming, and we can always welcome more volunteers in any of the tasks listed above.

Our thanks to all who give generously of their time to helping in so many and varied ways.

**Florence Bignell, Churchwarden**

### 8. Administrative and Governance Information

St Paul's Church is located in St Paul's Square, Bedford, MK40 1SQ, which is also the correspondence address. St Paul's Church is part of the Bedford and Elstow Deanery in the Diocese of Saint Albans within the Church of England. The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The Parochial Church Council was registered with the Charity Commission in March 2010 and its registration number is 1134614.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. Our membership of the PCC consists of the Incumbent (the Vicar), Assistant Curate, Churchwardens, Readers and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the electoral roll of the church, to both the PCC and to the Deanery Synod. Currently, the parish is permitted to have 3 representatives on Deanery Synod and 12 elected PCC members. All those who attend our services / members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC. The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent.

The full PCC met six times during the year, once virtually using Zoom and five times physically in church. The average attendance was 81%. Given its wide responsibilities, the PCC has several committees, each dealing with a particular aspect of parish life. These committees,



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which include the Standing and Finance and Fabric committees, are all responsible to the PCC and report back to it regularly. Separate informal groups make recommendations to the PCC on outward giving and develop ideas for fundraising. The reports from committees and groups are set out in Appendix C.

On the basis of the activities described in the main report and in the appendix, PCC members, as charitable trustees, are satisfied that they have met the requirements of the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion.

The PCC is also satisfied that in its arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. It has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have due regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults).

Parochial Church Council members who served from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 until the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 are listed below. The 2023 Meeting of Parishioners and APCM were held in church on Sunday 14th May, with 31 people physically present.

Apart from reimbursement of expenditure on activities undertaken for the benefit of the parish, in 2023 no trustee received any payment from PCC funds.

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## 8.1 PCC Membership

Unless otherwise stated, PCC members served for the whole year - attendance at PCC meetings in brackets – 6 meetings for the full year.

The Revd Canon Kevin Goss (Chair)	Vicar (ex officio) (5/6)
The Revd Luke Larnar	Assistant Curate (ex-officio) (3/3)
Alison Phillipson	Warden from APCM 2020 to APCM 2023 (ex officio) (2/2)
Florence Bignell	Warden from APCM 2019 (ex officio) (5/6)
Clifford Harris	Reader (ex officio) (5/6)
Wendy Jones (Deputy Chair)	Deanery Synod Representative from APCM 2023 (ex-officio) (6/6)
Malcolm Smith	From APCM 2020 (6/6), Churchwarden from APCM 2023 (ex-officio), Deanery Synod from APCM 2023
Harry Bagnall	From APCM 2020 (0/2)
Sue Gray	From APCM 2020 (2/2)
Claire Price	From APCM 2021, Deanery Synod Representative from APCM 2023 (ex-officio) (6/6)
Pat Whittome	From APCM 2020 (5/6), Secretary from APCM 2021
David Price	From APCM 2021 (6/6), Treasurer from APCM 2021
Valerie Lane	From APCM 2022 (4/6)
Linda Byer	From APCM 2022 (5/6)
Rachel Clover	Co-opted November 2022 then From APCM 2023 (3/6)
Kaye M <sup>c</sup> Lelland	Co-opted in November 2022 then From APCM 2023 (5/6)
Rachel Brown	From APCM 2023 (4/4)
Stephen Buckle	From APCM 2023 (2/4)
Ann Collett-White	From APCM 2023 (3/4)
The Revd Anthony Davis	Assistant Curate from September 2023 (ex-officio) (2/2)

Harry Bagnall and Sue Gray left the PCC at the 2023 APCM, having come to the end of their allotted time. Alison Phillipson stood down as Churchwarden at the 2023 APCM.

We were sorry to lose them as PCC members and we thank them for their valued contribution over the years.

Having come to the end of her allotted time, Claire Price was voted on as Deanery Synod Representative at the 2023 APCM and she remains an ex-officio member of the PCC.

In July Fr Luke Larnar came to the end of his curacy at St Paul's and he was installed as Priest in Charge of St Andrew's, Luton. We were very sorry to see him go, and all our good wishes went with him.

We were very pleased to welcome Rachel Brown, Stephen Buckle and the Revd Anthony Davis as new members, and Ann Collett-White as a returning member.

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## **APPENDIX A – The Vicar’s Address to the APCM**

### **The Vicar’s Address to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting 28 April 2024**

I count it a real blessing to be Vicar of a church with so many lovely, dedicated and talented people. I am deeply appreciative of all that so many give to our life together as Christ’s Church in this place. St Paul in the 12 Chapter speaks of the church of Christ as one Body with many parts.

## **PEOPLE**

### **Ministry Team**

It is a delight to be able to share the work of ministry here with my clerical and lay colleagues. Fr Luke Larner left us last July to become Vicar of St Luke, Luton, having made a huge impact here in so many ways. He was, with my fullest support, able to use his Community Organising skills, training and experience to develop our witness and engagement with our parish and wider community, working in partnership with agencies, charities and voluntary groups. We were delighted to welcome Fr Anthony Davis as our curate in September, immediately after his priesting, for his second and third years in training. He has already given us so much in the short time he has been here, not least his expertise and experience in finance with the Church accounts. Like Fr Luke, he has a real passion for the Church’s engagement with the community which he has led with slightly different emphasis with great effectiveness, the Warm Spaces project this winter being a particular highlight. I want to emphasise that curates-in-training are exactly that: not simply another pair of hands, and it is important that he is given space to reflect on practice as his ministry develops. Thank you, Anthony, for all your support and most of all for what you are doing here. I am most grateful.

Sister Hazel Smith has decided that the time has come to hang up her chasuble, but I want to say how much I appreciate her ongoing presence with us, her prayers and her love for us all. I was delighted that Sister Hazel was the first woman to celebrate the Eucharist in this Church in 2018, something which has continued quietly and we are keen to expand. I thank Canon Michael Bradley and Fr Roger Stokes. Although now retired they, have in a most good-natured way, been most generous with their time and energy, their liturgical and pastoral support. Thank you, Fathers.

In September, it was a delight to welcome Tom Otley as our newly licensed Reader who has joined Cliff Harris and I thank them both most warmly for their ministry. I believe we all benefit from the different style and insights from our various preachers. Wendy Jones and Kaye McLelland our Lay Leaders of Worship exercise a most valuable ministry, not only as liturgical deacon and subdeacon at the altar but also in other ways, and I affirm and thank them most warmly. Without the support and assistance of both assistant clergy and lay ministers, the worship and pastoral workload would be utterly impossible.



## Annual Report for APCM 2024

### Churchwardens

We have been served by magnificent wardens this past year in Malcom Smith and Florence Bignell. I won't repeat what I said earlier, except to say that we are most grateful to you both. Thank you, Malcolm, for your unfailing support and wish you well for the next year. Thank you, Florence, for these last five years during which you have served with utter distinction. As you stand down, we wish you every blessing. We are profoundly grateful to God for you and to you both.

I wish to thank all the members of the PCC, and all members of its Sub-Committees, with especial thanks to Pat Whittome our Secretary and David Price, our Treasurer.

I express my appreciation of the office staff, Robin Bartlett and Sharon Evans, whose work underpins much of what we do, and who are working at full capacity. I shall return to that point later.

Our Church could not function without our various teams: the Flower Guild who produce the most amazing arrangements every time, seemingly out of next to nothing; the Mothers Union raise the profile of family life here; the musicians whose singing lifts our spirits, and the Bellringers whose efforts fill my heart with joy every time I hear them; to our valiant team of Welcomers who play an essential part of our ministry to visitors; to our Pastoral Visiting Group who support the sick and housebound; to Miriam our cleaner and all who do various tasks around the Church Building.

Safeguarding has to be very parish priest's highest pastoral priority, and everyone else's too! I thank Sue Gray for her dedicated and conscientious work as Parish Safeguarding Office over many years, who now feels she needs to stand down. Finding a replacement has been incredibly difficult. I am therefore most grateful to Wendy Jones and Pat Whittome who have nobly and willingly offered to take this on, but I am also deeply aware that they already have several church responsibilities. Succession planning has become critical: it has become increasingly difficult to find volunteers to take on jobs and responsibilities, from serving coffee on Sundays to finding a new churchwarden. These are too often falling on those church members who have more than enough roles and responsibilities already, or on the paid staff. More of this later.

### Worship

Worship of God is our highest priority. It is fatally easy, in consideration of all the churchy things we have to do, to forget this. There are some significant points to note. Numbers for the Wednesday Eucharist in the Nave, appear to validate the decision not to return to the Trinity Chapel, as happened before Covid. Also, that despite the various comings and goings over the past year, by comparing the number of adults and communicants in the registers in 2022/2023 with 2023/24, numbers at the Sunday Eucharist have more than held steady with a noticeable net gain.

Our prayer ministry is also now well established and much valued. I also believe God is doing a new thing at St Paul's, for over the past year we have welcomed an increasing number of



## Annual Report for APCM 2024

people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, making us more representative of our local community. This presents an exciting opportunity, as well as a challenge to find ways to include everyone more fully in the life of the church, and especially within the leadership. The Lent Course on Inclusion was much valued, which someone said the best course they had ever attended, and I hope will have helped us move this forward.

### **Music**

Mary Butler raised a question about this, and with her agreement, I have said that I will deal with this now.

A key part of the life of St Paul's, Bedford, has always been the music tradition, for Sunday worship, other services, and for civic events. Like many I was saddened by the Director of Music's decision to resign at the end of August. Ian is an excellent musician and has played a key role in ensuring a high standard of music at all times at St Paul's Church. The music produced has enhanced the life of the church and the events offered for the local community, e.g. civic services following the death of Queen Elizabeth (Sept 2022) and Prince Philip (April 2021). The music has always been to the highest standard and both I and the churchwardens have repeatedly affirmed Ian and expressed our appreciation of Ian's contribution to this, not least at last year's APCM and at his last service at the end of August. Sadly, Ian himself took the difficult decision to resign and we respect his choice. As this is a confidential HR matter, I am unable to discuss any further details.

Sadly, there is always rumour, speculation and gossip regarding any event in any community. However, one should always remember that because there is almost always another side to any tale we hear, we need to be open to the possibility that what we hear is inevitably subject to the style of its delivery, and is open to misrepresentation and therefore distortion. In the absence of reliable information, the proper Christian response in these circumstances is not to jump to conclusions, but instead to maintain a dignified silence.

I was deeply saddened that a good number of the choir felt unable to continue in September. However, the choral and music tradition at St Paul's is continuing into the future, albeit in a different shape. The annual Justice Service went ahead, and those choir members who remained have re-formed as St Paul's Singers. They have provided us some wonderful music, not only on a number of Sundays but also at the Advent and Candlemas Carol Service, and the services of Holy Week and Easter in which their plainsong was most inspiring. I am sure that I speak for us all when I say that I am grateful to the St Paul's Singers who have loyally remained with us, and that the music they are offering is deeply appreciated. We will be advertising for an organist shortly and we have confidence of finding someone.

Before leaving the subject of music, I wish to highlight the success of our Tuesday Concerts, which bring in a substantial audience and a substantial income. I am grateful to Alison Phillipson for organising both these and the Organ Recitals.

### **Fabric**

Turning to Fabric matters, many of you will know of the decades long saga relating the medieval statues of Peter and Paul. A number of years ago, I proposed their re-siting in the



## Annual Report for APCM 2024

North Porch. I sound a note of triumph on your behalf, in that the Diocesan Advisory Committee has relaxed their opposition, and the Chancellor has ruled in our favour. Therefore, I am glad to say that they are now installed high up in the North Porch which has been thoroughly cleaned, with a skylight, new lighting, new glass doors and handrail installed. It is magnificent, so please do go and have a look at it afterwards. We are most grateful to the Trustees of the Dorothy Hilda Porter Trust who have generously financed this work. The North Porch and statues will be rededicated on Thursday 27 June in a Sung Eucharist, at which the president and preacher will be the Bishop of Bedford.

There are two other projects in hand. First, the Tower Clock and Bells Appeal, launched in October 2021, has raised a considerable amount of money. Together with a considerable grant from the Dorothy Hilda Porter Trust, for which we again express our gratitude, and also to Steve Stanford in particular who has worked tirelessly on this project, we now have over half of the money needed. However, the Appeal has stalled, and we are presently refreshing the Appeal with the aim of reaching our target. I am most keen that we are able to do this and that the work can begin as soon as is feasible.

Secondly, I am delighted that, as part of the Bedford Town Deal, the Borough Council are working with us to improve the churchyard, including new paving and bins, and lighting the church externally which will eradicate the 'Black Hole' in St Paul's Square at night. I hope work on this may start shortly.

### **Finance and Human Resources**

A word or two about our finances and Human Resources. First, our finances. Our thanks to David Price and Fr Anthony for all their hard work with the accounts. I have however been most concerned about the state of our finances. It was clear that, by November's PCC meeting, St Paul's was in a very precarious position financially; having to suspend our payment of the Parish Share entirely had put the future of the ministry at St Paul's at risk. If a parish cannot pay its share, then it will lose its vicar. It's a case of no parish share, no vicar. It was clear that drastic action would have to be taken, a point which has been stressed repeatedly by the Bishop and Archdeacon. All expenditure, including staffing and heating, has had to be ruthlessly examined and cut where possible. The survival of St Paul's itself is at stake. While parish giving has increased since November, the fact remains that we shall still be in deficit by the end of the year as far as our Parish Share is concerned.

Secondly our Human Resources. With regard to the human resources available for these priorities, it has also been essential to think and plan strategically, in view of the departure of our curate in 2025, with little chance that he will be replaced. We need to plan for that eventuality, including who will take on the role of community engagement and run the projects which have been so successful. Releasing our Pastoral Assistant from some other responsibilities is crucial in this area. Tom Otley, our Reader, will be leaving us to move with his family to Yorkshire over the next twelve months, so the ministerial team will shrink over the next year.



## **The Spire magazine**

Which brings me to the Spire magazine. Mary Butler has asked for clarification regarding this, so I will do so here.

It is only fair to say that Robin's piece in this month's Spire, is very limited in its information and is misleading in that it has not provided you with the full picture, including the good news of its replacement.

First, it is important to recognise that the PCC's decision has not been taken either lightly or quickly but has been the subject of considerable discussion in three PCC meetings since last November.

Just 60 copies of the Spire are printed each month. The PCC acknowledge that it is a well-produced and appreciated publication. However, while on the surface it appears to make a small profit, there are substantial hidden costs. With the lack of a volunteer, editorial responsibility had fallen to the Pastoral Assistant, while printing and posting is done by the Parish Administrator. Despite appeals, he has also regularly struggled in finding new contributors. Staff costs therefore result in an annual net loss of over £825 for the Pastoral Assistant alone, clearly outweighing any savings that could be achieved by simply printing in black and white, etc; Indirect costs include the considerable time taken for the preparation and writing of articles by the Vicar, ministry team and Pastoral Assistant, which could otherwise be spent on ministry, community engagement and pastoral care.

The PCC considered who the Spire was actually for. It concluded that the Spire was less a parish magazine with a missional purpose, that is outreach to those who are not church members, but it was more an in-house publication, principally for a limited number of existing church members. The PCC also considered whether there were better cost-efficient ways of doing both the latter and fulfilling any missional purpose which would reach more new people. The PCC also noted that there were now few churches locally who produce a printed magazine, and for the churches who do, the work is done by a volunteer. That is important.

The PCC recognised that the Spire is a convenient and appreciated source of information for church members. So it was not intended that all paper communication would now cease. Therefore, the PCC considered other options for achieving this, including online means and the replacement of the Spire, maybe by an alternative publication which would be less costly both in terms of staff and clergy time. The form and shape is yet to be decided.

In conclusion, I thank you for all that everyone has done and is doing and for your kind support of me. Though we are many parts we are actually one Body, the Body of Christ himself. So let us go forward hope and trust in him, fixing our eyes on him, rather than on ourselves. And so let us make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The peace of the Lord be always with you. (And also with you).

***The Reverend Canon Kevin Goss, Vicar***

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## **APPENDIX B – Churchwardens' Response**

### **Churchwardens' response to the Vicar's Address 28 April 2024**

Thank you, Father Kevin, for your round up of the various issues, problems and successes we have had over the past year. We give thanks for your commitment to us and the amount of attention that has gone into the planning, the variety and range of services and worship over the course of the year and for your pastoral care. The ministerial team you have around you and managed by you have done us proud over the year. Father Roger, Father Michael, Father Anthony, Sister Hazel and our Lay readers and altar team have delivered admirably.

Last Christmas and Easter were a joy and attending so many occasions (for the first time) was very satisfying and uplifting for me. This year (2023) was the first full year when we could consider ourselves free after the pandemic. As such restoring the old ways has proved a challenge. Many of us got used to doing less and liked it. Others tipped over into not being able to do as much, therefore there have been areas of church life which have not resumed or not in the same way, but we have laboured on and overcome a number of challenges which has included finding more volunteers. Thank you again Kevin.

Having commented about the challenges of finding volunteers Florence and I are aware of how many we are blessed to have attached to this church, who give of their time, their talents and their expertise freely and with love. There are so many of you who operate across many fields of interest, becoming involved in different disciplines at different times of the week, take charge, organise and gather teams around them. Our thanks go to all who give a warm welcome, despite the chill inside, all who polish, all who clean, make drinks after services or during the week, cater, especially on a Wednesday. Those who are sides people and their organiser. The sound team. The singers. The Flower Guild. Those who read the word of God, who compose intercessional prayers. There are so many differing jobs, tasks and chores we all cover in one way or another.

We express thanks to the office and Miriam for their huge contribution to our community, either through managing the building, our paperwork or finding organisations who wish to rent the premises and keep our finances afloat.

The PCC give a great amount of thought and take responsibility for running so much. Our thanks go to Sue Grey who has spearheaded Safeguarding over the last years, to David Price who with the help of Florence and Father Anthony keeps our finances in order, to Pat Whittome who is the PCC secretary and very busy at this time, to Linda Byer our electoral roll officer. Our thanks also go to Alison and Claire for organising concerts on a Tuesday and organists for Saturdays and to those who support the organisation of these events.

Have I forgotten anyone? I have tried hard not to and am sorry if I have.

Finally, I have to mention the North Porch. I have been coming to St. Pauls for a long time. When I was on the PCC in the late 1980's I vaguely remember there was an issue with St's Peter and Paul. They had resided outside the South Porch for a number of years perhaps centuries. Since they were taken down, they have been sequestered by the High Altar, hidden in the office, discussed and wrangled over for many years.



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Successive Vicars, and Churchwardens, various Fabric committees, the Architect, The Dorothy Porter Trust and all who have given advice, time or money have allowed this project to be finalised at last.

Father Kevin, we give you thanks.

***Malcolm Smith, Churchwarden***

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## **APPENDIX C – PCC Sub Committee Reports and Review of Church Activities**

### **C1. Music**

#### **Church Music**

The choir and musicians have continued to excel in leading our music within the liturgy, for the Sunday Eucharist and monthly Choral Evensongs. The music offered during Holy Week, especially by the men at the Good Friday Liturgy were particular highlights, and the music by the full choir for the seasonal services of Ascension Day and Corpus Christi have been much appreciated and we thank them all.

We have been fortunate in having the services of Ian Runnells as our Director of Music and Organist, who is an excellent musician and has played a key role in the leadership of the choir and in ensuring a high standard of music at all times at St Paul's Church. Sadly, last Summer, Ian took the difficult decision to resign and move on and we respect his choice.

While, sadly, at that point some members of the choir decided not to continue at St Paul's, we are glad and grateful to those who have remained with us and, having presently reformed as St Paul's Singers, have continued to offer choral music at the Eucharist and at the Advent Carol Service which has been much appreciated. We have also been fortunate in securing the services of some excellent organists to play for the Sunday Eucharist and other services, to whom we also grateful. The choir and music tradition at St Paul's for the Glory of God will continue into the future and it is intended to recruit a new Director of Music during the Spring of 2024 to develop the choir.

*The Revd Canon Kevin Goss, Vicar*

#### **Concerts & Recitals**

We have been delighted to host a rich variety of lunchtime and evening concerts again at St Paul's during 2023. There were 36 lunchtime concerts during the year featuring a wide range of local professional and amateur musicians, and also students and postgraduates from the Royal College of Music who have been great supporters of our concerts. The range of music has again been impressive: violin, piano, flutes, cellos, recorders, saxophones, solo singers, and choirs. We also ran 7 Saturday organ recitals with organists recruited from a wide variety of other churches. All the musicians have been most generous with their time and enthusiasm, and we have enjoyed the support of a loyal and regular audience. The donations received have proved to be a significant addition to St Paul's income during the year. Several of our recitalists have returned to perform at St Paul's saying they find our audiences appreciative and that the space provided in the church gives a special acoustic.

Our evening concerts have again been an important, and growing, part of our musical offering. We hosted the Katherine of Aragon Festival for the second year running; two days of lively music and dance which had previously been located at Peterborough Cathedral. The Continuum Choir held 2 concerts in St Paul's as did Bedford Sinfonia.

The Christmas Tree Festival in December proved an even greater musical success than in 2022; 41 school and community groups in total performed during the week, comprising nearly 1200 individuals. The Festival also included a very popular evening concert by the Woburn Piano Trio (all professional musicians associated with the Philharmonia Orchestra) on the Friday evening of the event.



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Many thanks again to Claire Price, particularly, for her lead in organising the Christmas Tree Festival music, and to Robin Bartlett and Sharon Evans for their support and hard work in organising and publicising all these musical events.

***Alison Phillipson, Concert Organiser***

### **C2. Bedford Deanery Synod**

Since the APCM of 2023 there have been 3 meetings of Bedford Deanery Synod, your 3 Deanery Synod reps (Malcolm Smith, Claire Price Taylor and Wendy Jones) have attended each meeting. Each meeting began with a short period of worship.

#### **Issues Raised:**

Prison Chaplaincy Support: Donations such as books to help support this service can be left at Elstow Abbey and they will be passed on.

Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF): Update on the problems of finances that the Diocese and individual churches are experiencing on the matter of Parish Share.

Finance: Deanery accounts were presented and agreed.

Safeguarding: Safeguarding is a regular item at each meeting of Deanery Synod.

Historic Churches Trust: Churches were reminded that churches can both contribute to and apply to the Fund for support. The major fundraising event for the trust is the annual Bike and Hike event.

Reports from both General and Diocesan Synods: Presented.

Warm Spaces Project: Presentation by Wendy Jones and the Reverend Lucy Davis about the proposal to establish a Warm Spaces project in Bedford, based at St Paul's church, staffed by the support of volunteers from town Churches.

Young People and the Environment: A presentation by young people from the Church of the Transfiguration in Kempston, the presentation involved some videos around the work that they have been undertaking.

Communicating well: Presentation by staff from the Diocesan Communications Office regarding how the Diocese communicates with parishes and parishes with worshippers.

New Arrivals: The Reverend David Thomas has taken over at Christ Church. He was formerly serving in Hounslow.

For further information about any of the issues raised please speak to any of your 3 Deanery Representatives.

***Wendy Jones, Deanery Synod Representative***



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### **C3. Catering**

We are now starting to get back to some sort of regular pattern of Saturday catering, albeit that at present, we only cater for the second Saturday in each month. To do this we need a few more people willing to give a commitment to help on a regular Saturday morning. This could be every second or third month. All offers of help very welcome.

Robin Bartlett has arranged some extra bookings for Saturdays, and it may be possible to provide some limited catering for these events if the event organisers are willing. All offers of help for these events gratefully accepted.

Sunday coffees continue to be a very welcome event, giving us all a chance to meet with friends, welcome newcomers, and catch up on events. We would like to remind everyone that voluntary contributions towards the cost of tea/coffee are invited.

Please give full consideration to any help that YOU could offer towards any of these catering events. To discuss any issues or to offer any help please contact Wendy on 079046 489 063 or 353027, email [wpjones87@gmail.com](mailto:wpjones87@gmail.com)

With every blessing,

***Wendy Jones, Committee Chair***

### **C4. Flower Guild**

During the past year, (though some weeks with great difficulty), we have managed to continue to provide floral decorations in the Church. We would, however, be the first to admit that these have perhaps not always been to the quality or quantity previously expected in our ancient building.

Christmas, Easter and Harvest were especially difficult mainly because of our now reduced membership. From a group of 10 people when I became involved with the Guild, we are now down to just 7 and although we were extremely pleased to welcome 1 new member this year, we do still often struggle to be able to meet our regular commitments.

It also has to be acknowledged that, because of this reduced membership, what we would have previously called a full set of arrangements is taking much longer to prepare than once they did and this has also become a little worrying as it generally means fewer separate pieces around the building!

There has been the usual pattern of additional or special services, such as memorials and weddings as well as "significant" birthdays of members of the congregation when flowers have been requested.

The appeal last year for new volunteers was a little disappointing. Only two people came forward and whilst we would have very much liked to have had her skills and talents in our midst, it turned out that for one of these, her personal existing commitments meant that she could not make herself available on any Saturday - when the building is guaranteed to be open - a great shame and a considerable loss!



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Access continues to create some difficulties for all of us especially on those days when the Church is not actually open, and our planned attendances have to be fitted in with the advertised public opening times. Not always easy!

The price of flowers, especially those imported for winter use, has continued to rise and we would therefore again greatly appreciate any donations or contributions to the flower fund. Having perhaps sounded rather pessimistic about the future, the PCC and the congregation can be assured that we will do our very best to continue to enhance and beautify our lovely church for as long as we are able. But do please consider again if you or any of your friends or relatives may actually be able to help us.

***Susan A Stewart, Guild Lead***

### **C5. Servers**

I must once again start with a massive thank you to our very small Serving team for their hard work, dedication, adaptability, and patience. Whatever the task, they always carry it out with a good sense of humour and high degree of professionalism. This is all the more amazing as the small numbers put increased demands on the team and two of them are constantly juggling a serving rota and a ministerial rota.

During the last year, you may have noticed the return of Shirley to the role of Acolyte. It's great to have her back on board and she quickly remembered all her old tasks and is keen to learn more. Also, we have welcomed two Boat Girls Lexi and Abigail to the serving team. It's so refreshing and exciting to have two young and inquisitive minds to "show the ropes" to. These new and returning faces, fill me with hope that one day soon we can return to regular services with a full team of six servers back round the altar with all the "bells and whistles" allowing a fuller and smoother support for the clergy and a more majestic celebration of the eucharist.

If you think you or someone you know may be able help the serving team, even once a month, then please come and talk to me, you will be warmly welcomed. Full training and support will be given, and the team is always very friendly.

***Robin Harris, Head Server***

### **C6. Bell Ringing**

#### **Sunday General Ringing**

The ringing that takes place on the 2nd and 3rd Sundays has been a great success, with enough regular ringers to enable us to ring all 12 bells for an hour. The ringing has consisted only of rounds and call changes due to the inexperience of the ringers in terms of their technical ability and also their physical ability to ring bells that are challenging to ring.

#### **Fourth Sunday of the Month Quarter Peals**

The Fourth Sunday ringing which takes place during the afternoon has provided the opportunity for experienced ringers to ring changes. This ringing has been based on Quarter Peal attempts and the following were successfully completed:

- i. Grandsire Cinques x 3
- ii. Erin Cinques x 2
- iii Grandsire Caters x 1
- iv. Grandsire Triples x 1
- v. Plain Bob Doubles x 1



### **Other Ringing**

There have been other events where ringing has taken place. These include:

- i. The High Sheriff Service
- ii. Ringing for the people of Ukraine
- iii. The Coronation of King Charles III

### **Monday Practices**

We continue to have Monday practices with the First Monday being a 12-bell practice for the benefit of Bedfordshire ringers. This practice has been hugely beneficial to a number of young bell ringers from across Bedfordshire by providing them with an introduction to the art of ringing on 12 bells.

### **New Learners**

Unfortunately, this year has seen a shortfall of new ringers wishing to be taught how to ring bells. We'd love to encourage some members of the congregation to come and visit the tower with a view to learning to ring our bells. Come and see us after the morning service on the 2nd and 3rd Sundays.

***James Saunders, Tower Captain and Steeple Keeper***

### **C7. Mothers' Union**

In 2023 the Branch met 11 times. During that time the programme included:

- A talk by Canon Michael Bradley
- An illustrated talk on Morocco by David Whittome
- "Pilgrimage in the Holyland" an illustrated talk by Malcolm Smith
- "Working as a midwife in Pakistan" by Margaret Brady, and
- "Harvest" a talk by Clifford Harris.

In December we shared our Christmas family traditions.

In June we welcomed Wendy Jones into the Branch, and more recently Heather Posnett, previously a member in Sheffield.

We enjoy our worship together, and value our fellowship. Through God's good grace we continue to uphold the aims and objectives of the Mothers' Union.

***Sheila Smith, Branch Leader***

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### **C8. Outward Giving**

The Committee raised £395 from Saturday Coffee mornings held once monthly throughout the year normally to coincide with Saturday organ recitals. More volunteers are needed to enable us to resume Saturday coffee more frequently each month. We also received donations for Outward Giving of £300. Together with the balance brought forward from last year for general distribution of £696 we were able to make donations during the year to 8 charities and also contribute £50 towards the cost of the Lent Services run jointly by Bedford Town Centre Churches.

Charities supported during the year were:

Delhi Brotherhood	£200
Swaziland Schools Project	£200
BRASS	£200
Bedford Street Angels	£50
Missions to Seafarers	£150
Christian Aid	£100
The College of the Transfiguration	£242 (to continue to fund their 'Theology' subscription)
The Bishop's Harvest Appeal	£100 (plus retiring collection £199)

***Cliff Harris, Committee Chair***