



St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

Serving the whole community

Annual Meeting of Parishioners to elect Churchwardens

and

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

11am, Sunday 28th April 2024

All welcome

Items contained in this document

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Annual Accounts are in a separate document.

Annual Meeting of the Parishioners to elect Churchwardens
28 April 2024
Agenda

1. Opening prayer
2. To receive any apologies for absence
3. To agree and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2023
4. Election of Churchwardens

Annual Parochial Church Meeting
28 April 2024
Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. To agree and sign the APCM minutes of the meeting held on 16th April 2023
3. To receive reports as follows:
 - a. Electoral Roll
 - b. Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council (PCC)
 - c. Financial statements of the PCC for the year ended 31 December 2023
 - d. The fabric, goods and ornaments of the church
 - e. Proceedings of Rickmansworth Deanery Synod
 - f. Reports from committees, groups and organisations of St. Mary's
4. Church of England Elections
 - a. Election of Representatives to Deanery Synod
 - b. Election of Parochial Church Council members
5. Report from the Vicar
6. Any other business
7. Closing prayers

**Minutes of the Vestry Meeting of the parishioners of Rickmansworth to elect Churchwardens
Sunday 16 April 2023**

Present: 52 parishioners

The meeting was chaired by the PCC Secretary.

- 1) The meeting opened with prayer led by the Rural Dean.
- 2) Apologies for absence had been received from: Dorothy Denzer, Molly Hedges, Chris & Sue Hillier, Anne Kay, Colin & Annette Leveridge and Adam Shiels
- 3) The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2022, having previously been circulated, were approved and signed.
- 4) Election of Churchwardens
Three nomination had been received and accordingly David Carruthers, Martyn Gowing and Roger Willett were elected to serve as Churchwarden for the coming year.
- 5) Thanks were expressed to everyone who had stepped up to help in the absence of churchwardens over the past year, especially members of the PCC and the Vacancy Working Group, in particular thanking Jane Earl and David Carruthers who had led this group.
- 6) There being no further business, the meeting closed.

**Parish Church of St Mary's, Rickmansworth
Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting
Held on Sunday 16 April 2023**

Present: 52 parishioners

The meeting was chaired by David Carruthers

Thanked everyone for their help and for stepping up without CWs and Vicar

- 1) Apologies for absence had been received from: Dorothy Denzer, Molly Hedges, Chris & Sue Hillier, Anne Kay, Colin & Annette Leveridge and Adam Shiels
- 2) Minutes of the APCM held on Tuesday 24 April 2022
The minutes were approved and signed as a correct record of the meeting.
- 3) Electoral Roll
The Electoral Roll Officer, John Glidden, reported that the number of people on the Electoral Roll is 115 which is unchanged from 2022. Five new people had joined the roll and, sadly, five people had died. Members of the church who had died during the year were remembered: Susan Foreman, Lilian Gowing, Celia Martin, Bill Sylvester, Mary Hazell. Joan Martin, a longstanding and faithful Methodist member of the church, was also remembered.
- 4) Reports
The meeting received reports, previously circulated, from:
 - a) Fabric, goods & ornaments of the church
 - b) Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council
 - c) Safeguarding
 - d) Proceedings of Rickmansworth Deanery Synod
 - e) Committees and other groups and organisations of St Mary's
- 5) Elections
The following were elected to serve in the coming year:
 - a) Deanery Synod: Buzz Coster, John Glidden, Sue Hillier
 - b) PCC: Jean Dodds, Jane Earl, Judith Haigh, Petra Hedges, Maxine Platzman, Adam Shiels
 - 6) Receipt of the accounts to 31 December 2022

John Glidden presented the accounts on behalf of Adam Shiels (Treasurer). The accounts and report of the trustees had been previously circulated, noting some of the differences now that the church is a registered charity.

He noted that the overall financial position is much better than forecast owing to generous donations, fundraising activities and legacies. Church hall lettings have also resumed since COVID-19. However, it was noted that the downturn in the stock market has had impact on our investments. The significant increase in energy costs continued to have impact on the financial situation and, despite being in vacancy, the church still has to pay 80% of the parish share.

The PCC had taken the difficult decision to suspend charitable giving while the church was operating a deficit budget but it was hoped that this could be resumed when finances permit.

The independent examiner, Nicola Anderson, was thanked for her work in helping the church address the new requirements as a charity. Further thanks were given to Jane Earl who had compiled the trustees' report, and David Gilbert for his help with banking and stewardship administration. The PCC and Stewardship & Finance Committee were also thanked for their engagement with financial matters over a challenging year.

7) Appointment of the Independent Examiner for the accounts for St Mary's PCC

It was unanimously agreed that Nicola Anderson be appointed.

8) Vacancy update from the Rural Dean

The Rural Dean, Revd Simon Cutmore, reported that the parish profile has been completed and the advertisement is now live on the Diocesan and Church Times websites. He has every reason to believe that the role of Vicar in Rickmansworth is an attractive one and expects a good response. He thanked everyone for their work in keeping everything going.

9) Any other business

David Carruthers thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for their commitment to St Mary's during the vacancy. He further thanked Buzz Coster for her work in maintaining the website, keeping it fresh and up-to-date.

The meeting closed with prayers and the Grace.

Formal Reports

Electoral Roll Report

Changes to C of E Electoral Roll:

Additions to roll

There have been 2 additions to the roll since the 2023 APCM.

Deletions from Roll

4 – Parishioners who died during the year –

RIP Ann Godfrey, Isabelle Bond, John Rhodes and Gillian Baker

2 – Names removed for statutory reasons –no longer habitually worshipping at St Marys

The two names removed, purely for legal reasons and with their prior knowledge and understanding, are those of Derek and Jennett Day. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all the support and help they gave to St Mary's over many years while we were a joint Anglican / Methodist partnership.

Total number on 2024 roll - 112, a decrease of 4 from 2023.

Revision of C of E Electoral Roll for 2024:

In 2025 the Electoral Roll will be completely renewed as is required to be done every seven years. This means that this time next year everybody will be asked to complete an Electoral Roll Application form. So, something for us all to look forward to.

In the meantime, it is helpful to me (as Electoral Roll Officer) if people can inform me, or a member of the Clergy Team who will pass the information on, if they change their address or other details (e.g. email or telephone number. This also helps to ensure that the contact information we hold within the Parish is up to date.

John Glidden, Electoral Roll Officer

Goods and Ornaments of the Church

The Registers and Records of the Church are all in good order without any new or withdrawn items in the last 12 months.

The churchyard, which is closed, is generally well maintained by the local authority, and our own internal churchyard maintenance group have significantly improved the state of the church yard and replanted the area behind the church office. Following representation from the Church Council, Hertfordshire County Council have carried some pathway repairs using paving slabs.

The new garden of Remembrance (2023), for which a Faculty was obtained is now in use and up-to-date plans for the location of the ashes placed there have been prepared, and are held in the Church Office. Swift boxes are to be installed on the Church tower in 2024 and permission for this have been obtained from the Diocese.

Plans to make the church more easily accessible continue to be worked on and are currently in the hands of our architects. In addition to making church access easier via the north door, detailed consideration is being given to improving access to the church by car for the disabled. Full liaison is taking place and all necessary approvals will be sought when plans are available.

We wish to reorganise and renovate the room at the base of the tower to provide a more suitable space to be used by children during services. Some simple improvements have been made but we would like to upgrade this space further to make it more welcoming and suitable for younger children attending services there.

There are plans to divert the down pipe carrying drainage over the vestry roof and this will be handled at the same time and as part of the quinquennial work to be carried out this year.

Finally we are planning to carry out major maintenance work on the church bells and if DAC approval is required then this will be sought.

David Carruthers, Churchwarden.

The Parochial Church Council

The Council met six times during the year (April 2023-March 2024). All members of the Council also served on one of the sub-committees which met in alternate months to the PCC.

For the first time in many years, all positions on the PCC were filled. Very sadly, John Rhodes, representative on the Diocesan Synod and lay Vice-Chair of the former United Church Council, died during the year.

At each meeting, the Treasurer presented a financial report with up-to-date information on income and expenditure against budget.

The safeguarding of vulnerable people is the responsibility of the PCC and one which it takes seriously. During the year the Safeguarding Officer, Hilary Stevenson, provided regular updates to the PCC. The PCC has complied with its duty to have due regard to House of Bishops guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

The PCC continued its regular pattern of meetings during the vacancy and were delighted at the arrival of Revd Gary Norman as our new Vicar in October 2023

During the year a range of topics were put before the PCC for discussion and decisions including:

- Extension to the north porch
- Improving access to the church for the less mobile by improving vehicular access
- Fabric maintenance issues including repairs to the sink in the vestry and the emergency lighting
- The installation of swift boxes in the tower
- Church security

The Vicar is keen to offer a place for a curate in training and the PCC warmly endorsed this proposal.

Buzz Coster, Parochial Church Council Secretary

Community and Outreach Committee

This committee coordinates the work of St Mary's outreach to our members and the wider community. We focus on both the physical growth of the kingdom of God as well as our spiritual growth. To support this aim we have arranged a wide variety of activities and initiatives during the past year.

The Parish's MAP priorities as approved by the UCC for the next 3 years are

- 1) To transform communities by providing more support to our neighbours, particularly the elderly and those with young families.
- 2) To make new disciples by offering events and activities to help attract and support newcomers.
- 3) To go deeper into God by developing a series of initiatives to assist our church strengthen and deepen the faith and understanding of our congregation.

The C & O committee maintained its usual activities during the period in which we were without a vicar and thanks go to all the congregation who supported our initiatives during this time. The arrival of our new Vicar in October 2023 has meant that we have continued to move forward on our agenda.

This report will focus on what has been achieved during the reporting period, but we are now reconsidering the role of this committee with a shift in focus towards our ministry and outreach role. The social elements previously handled by this committee will be continued, but could be managed by a separate team.

We have introduced a new children's church meeting each week during the 10am service in the tower. This group took time to get going, but has shown some growth in recent months. We have had up to 7 children attending and their parents have also been in church. The team lead by Jean Dodds have worked enthusiastically to make this a success.

The NEW (Non-eucharistic worship) services held on the 3rd Sunday of each month have continued and provide a variety of worship which has generally been well received. The church still offers 2 other communion services on the 3rd Sunday.

Lent groups were run during March and were well attended with over 30 people attending them.

Community activities have built on previous year's work and have included continued support of the Credit Union and the food bank.

A major work on outreach was our involvement with the Ricky week activities. We supported the Ricky week canal activities, the October Market and the Rickmansworth Christmas Market. In particular we increased our presence at the Ricky week canal festival, maintaining the size of our stall and selling vegetable plants as well as promoting our church. WE discontinued selling cakes and they proved This event gives us expensive exposure in the community and we can build on this to increase our awareness in the area. We also organized a highly successful supper quiz and Sue and Chris Hillier worked hard to make this such a success. The quiz is primarily a fundraising event.

We discontinued the Parish News Letter this year which was previously published 3 times a year and distributed it to every house in the parish. The effectiveness of this is currently being reassessed and as it was a key means of informing everyone about what is happening at St Mary's and spreading the message it may be reinstated in the months ahead.

The Monthly Lunch Club continued to be an important means of supporting and entertaining some of the more elderly members of our community. This commitment is really appreciated and we thank the team of people who organize this event.

The committee continued to arrange a variety of events throughout the year including a second supper and quiz night and a Flower Festival.

The Christmas tree event was held again this year at the beginning of December and was attended by groups from the School, the Cubs as well as other many random visitors. This year we served teas and refreshments over the weekends and spoke to many of the visitors. The displays were excellent and a number of new organizations took part and the church was as usual beautifully decorated.

Our relationship with our school has been a focus of our activity and we have been involved in many additional school services held in the church. Our handicraft group have continued to run a sewing group each week at the school which is very popular and gives us a chance to tell the children about the church. We also have established a group of parishioners to help the school with reading support. This was really appreciated by the school's staff.

We are looking for other ways to support the school.

We continue to focus on efforts to make the Welcome we offer at St Mary's as warm as possible. We have recruited additional welcomers and have produced new guidelines for their use at the 10.00am service in order to maintain and further improve the welcome we offer.

Overall a very active year with much achieved but also much remaining to be done so thanks to all the members who have supported the work of this committee.

David Carruthers, Chair

Fabric & Churchyard Committee

Committee members 2023-2024: Martyn Gowing (Chairman), Paul Harding, Petra Hedges, David Hibbert, Gary Norman, Maxine Platzman, John Rhodes, Hillary Stevenson.

We were saddened by the sudden death of John Rhodes who did so much for the church as a whole and especially for the Fabric & Churchyard Committee as well as the former Church Centre Management Committee.

In addition to the bi-monthly meetings, the committee organises the monthly maintenance working party on a Saturday morning. During the year we have added church cleaning to our list of regular tasks. Many thanks to those who volunteer to help out each month, although we always have tasks for anyone else who would like to join us.

The Quinquennial Inspection took place during the year and some preliminary work has been carried out. Examples are a drain survey (report awaited) and a survey of the bells and bell frame. Several of the items in the QI report are regular maintenance tasks that are carried out by the Church Cleaning and Maintenance Working Party or by the gardening team lead by Timothy Tims and our regular contractors.

The North Porch project is being led by Maxine Platzman on behalf of the church. Maxine is in regular contact with Matthew Stevens of MDP Architects. The primary purpose of the North Porch extension is to provide a more welcoming and step-free access to the church. In addition, a new 'drop-off' layby is planned adjacent to the entrance to improve accessibility to the church.

In addition:

1. Emergency lighting was installed in the bell tower and repairs to the exiting emergency lighting in both the Church and the Church Centre were carried out.
2. The annual fire training was carried out in February with 16 people attending.
3. TRDC cleaned the War Memorial in advance of Remembrance Day.
4. TRDC have started work on the repairs to the Churchyard boundary wall by the office. Repairs to the boundary wall along Church Street are awaiting funding.
5. Paul Harding has enrolled the church in the Eco Church initiative and is investigating possible solar panel installation as part of the 'towards net-zero' commitment.
6. Hillary Stevenson is liaising with the contractor to get the vestry sink unit replaced, including the water heater and Sani-flow unit.

Outstanding tasks from last year include:

1. Updating signage on notice boards.
2. Procuring a new cabinet for the Book of Remembrance.
3. Replacement lighting in toilets to include automated lighting and ventilation.

Martyn Gowing, Chair

Stewardship and Finance Committee

The Stewardship and Finance Committee of the Parochial Church Council have met formally on four occasions since the 2023 APCM. At each meeting, progress against the agreed budget for 2023 was monitored and discussed.

Other topics addressed during the year included:

- Review of various policies & procedures for approval by the PCC (eg Procurement, Charitable Giving)
- Reviewing the level of hire charges for the Church Centre / Church for final approval by the PCC
- Reviewing the level of payments for the Parish Secretary and Organist for final approval by the PCC
- Reviewing the level of fees for ad-hoc facilities provided by St Marys for final approval by the PCC
- Preparation of the draft budget for 2024 for final approval by the PCC

During 2023, various individuals ran or organised fund-raising activities that raised some £4,691 for St Mary's. and it is hoped that further events will take place this year. As a committee, we would like to express our appreciation of their work. We would also encourage everybody to support these activities – and to suggest/run further fund-raising schemes.

Continued use has been made of on-line and contactless ways of receiving contributions and donations outside the Planned Giving scheme, particularly via the Payaz contactless terminal.

For 2023, we were initially expecting to be facing a deficit of income over expenditure for the day-to-day expenses of running the Parish. However, we ended the year with a modest surplus on day-to-day spending but this was due to several unexpected factors that we cannot guarantee will happen again in 2024:

- We received a generous legacy and a high continued level of additional donations from members of the congregation (i.e. outside the planned giving scheme) – for which thanks.
- You supported our fundraising activities – so thanks again to those who organised and participated in these
- Our hiring income from the Church Hall has been maintained.

For 2023 and subject to final approval by the PCC, the S&F Committee is able to recommend that St Mary's resumes donating a portion of the money received as part of our Planned Giving/Stewardship to charities as was our usual practice. The sum of £3,872 has been proposed, in addition to the £500 already paid to the Christian Aid Middle East Appeal. In addition, £3,085 has also been raised for outside charities from contributions by members of the congregation.

So, looking forward for 2024, our discussions again took place against a background of St Marys being in a difficult financial situation regarding the income and funds that may be used for the day-to-day expenses of running the Parish. We are budgeting for an end of year deficit of £8,000.

This is due to several factors, including:

- 1) With the ending of the Vacancy, the Parish Share will be increasing back to its normal level, and certain expenses incurred in the work of the Parish will also increase.
- 2) Due to the recent high rate of inflation, we will be faced with some major increases in costs going forward.
- 3) There will some additional mandatory testing and maintenance costs associated with the Church Hall

It is our hope that we will be able to continue our practice of donating a percentage of the money received from our Planned Giving/Stewardship to various charities. However, this is subject to our financial performance for 2024 and the viability of donating to charities from Planned Giving.

Finally, we would like to thank everybody who has contributed to the life of St Marys, whether financially or using their time and talents..

John Glidden, Chair, Stewardship and Finance Committee

Safeguarding Report

Safeguarding Leadership Team

Vicar	Rev Gary Norman
Lay Vice Chair of the PCC	Jane Earl
Deputy Safeguarding Officer	Sue Johnson
Deputy Safeguarding Officer	Janet Lucas
Parish Safeguarding Officer	Hilary Stevenson

This Parish is committed to the safeguarding of children, young people, and vulnerable adults and to supporting those who have been victims of abuse, as well as those who may present a risk to others.

The PCC has complied with the duty under Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (*to have due regard to the House of Bishop's guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults*).

The PCC adopted the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policies and Practice Guidance, as well as "Promoting a Safer Church" (child protection and vulnerable adults' policy) and the Domestic Abuse statement, at their meeting held on 11 September 2023. The latter two documents are displayed on the Church website.

There is a Parish Safeguarding Officer, a Lead Recruiter, and an Assistant Recruiter. Those who work with vulnerable groups in the Parish will be recruited in accordance with the Practice Guidance on Safer Recruitment. DBS checks have been renewed in line with the Church of England's guidance that all DBS checks must be renewed every three years. Those who have been safely recruited and PCC members have completed the required safeguarding training within the last 3 years.

Contact details for those wishing to obtain advice, raise concerns or make referrals to the statutory authorities are posted on the noticeboard at the back of Church, in the Church Centre and in the Vestry. Safeguarding information is also available on the Church website.

Safeguarding is a standing item on the agenda of every PCC meeting. The Safeguarding Leadership team meets in advance of every PCC meeting.

There is insurance cover for activities involving children, young people or vulnerable adults undertaken in the name of the Parish. There was a safeguarding concern reported in 2023 which was dealt with by the Parish Safeguarding Officer in accordance with the relevant safeguarding policies and guidance.

Hilary Stevenson Safeguarding Officer

Deanery Synod

The Deanery Synod met 3 times during the year in July November and March

At the **July meeting**, unfortunately the speaker from the Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust was unable to attend There was an update on the Deanery Mental Health Project – "The Trinity Project" which is concerned with the Mental Health of young people. The project's first meeting was held at St Oswald's in September for year 7 Students from Little Green School.

The **November meeting** was held on Zoom and there was a guest speaker Professor Nichola Lee who talked on the "Sabbath – The Hidden Heart of our lives" which discussed the various meanings of the sabbath. It was reported that John Rhodes, the Lay chair of the synod had sadly passed away. Simon Cutmore gave a further update on the Trinity project. He also reported that The Geneal Synod had made a decision to allow prayers for same-sex unions to be said as part of a normal service.

At the **March meeting** Simon Cutmore gave a further update on the Trinity Project. It is proposed to work with pupils from Croxley Danes and The Reach schools. They are hoping to recruit a team from the local churches to assist in running the project.

There was an update on the activities from all the parishes.

On April 21st All Saints will be holding a service to celebrate 30 years since Rev Anne Shaw was ordained. On July 10th there will be an open meeting of the Deanery Synod at St Mary's when the speaker will be Rev Paula Gooder who is Canon Chancellor at St Paul's Cathedral and on 16th November Justin Welby, The Archbishop of Canterbury, will be visiting St Albans Abbey.

Sue Hillier, Deanery Synod Member

Reports for the life of the church at St Mary's

Bellringing

The number of ringers we have has dropped, hopefully only a temporary situation, to just six.

The weekly pew sheet requests members of the Parish to join us and we actually gained a potential ringer, Kevin Jones. Though after a number of weeks of tuition, he has subsequently joined the choir and therefore has stopped ringing.

One ringer, Sue Leddington, has been off with a broken limb but has just returned which is great; Oliver Bond has moved to France and Lucy Stephens dropped out since Covid and subsequently moved away. Graham Hodge spends a lot of his time in Egypt - it's a lot warmer there! We have had one experienced ringer, Judy Wallington, who has joined us and lives in Chorleywood, but is only able to ring with us on Wednesdays.

We are unable, unless we have some visiting ringers, to ring all of our 10 bells and are therefore restricted to just the front six bells.

Hugh Thomas, our deputy Captain, is on the Committee for a local ringing District of Watford, which enables us to stay in contact with our fellow ringers in our surrounding area.

Jenny Chapman is our Tower Secretary.

During January we had our bells and their frame inspected by the bellhangers "Whites of Appleton". Their report, dated 12th March 2024, highlighted that the Tenor had a loose gudgeons, (pivots that fit into the bearings on the frame) and that the bell would need lifting out in order to remove the headstock with its gudgeons. A number of other items were listed mostly of missing nuts and a loose pulley. The cost of this work is £10,402 + VAT.

The good news is that we were glad, during October, to welcome our new Vicar the Revd. Gary Norman and his wife Dawn, to the ringing room to watch us ringing.

David Hibbert, Tower Captain

Charitable Giving Committee

The Committee consisted of Rob Kay, Sue Hillier, Jackie Wilcox, Paddy Walker-Taylor, and Buzz Coster. Adam Shiels provided information on the amount available for distribution.

The Committee met in August 2021 to allocate payments in respect of the Planned Giving received in respect of 2020 parish giving.

For many years, the amount available to distribute to charities, has been based on 20% of Planned Giving. Unfortunately circumstances made it necessary to reduce this to 15% for 2020. Some difficult decisions needed to be made to accommodate this reduction.

It was hoped that this reduction would only be temporary, but it had to be reduced further to 10% based on 2021 Planned Giving.

We are now facing a reduction to zero. We are desperately sorry for the charities that we have supported, some over many years. We sincerely hope that the situation can be restored soon.

We do have an emergency fund which has been used twice in the last year. With £500 to the DEC Appeal for the Middle East Crisis and £500 towards the DEC Appeal for the Earthquake in Morocco.

Rob Kay, Chair

Children's Church

In August 2022 the Community and Outreach Sub- Committee of the PCC formulated a welcome plan for children during part of the 10am Parish Communion Service during term time. This was approved by the PCC and an appeal went out for volunteers.

Children's Church did not start until March 2023 due to Recruitment and Safeguarding Training for the volunteers. It was advertised at St Mary's School, on the Church website and with Posters and Leaflets in places like Rickmansworth Library and at the Church itself.

The First Year of Children's Church: Children's Church meets in the Tower Room during term time. Children of 3 years and under must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Various 'play activities' are set out: Toys, books, puzzles, games and crayoning equipment. For those of 5+ years material is used from the Sermons 4 Kids website based on Bible stories. At present when the Communion distribution starts the children join their parents in Church.

Over the last year we have welcomed about 10+ families attending once or occasionally, mostly those with babies and toddlers. Since January 2024 we have three regular families with children in the age range of 4 – 7+.

This outreach could not run without the steadfast help, warmth and care from those that volunteered to be Leaders they are:

Alison, Dorothy, Helen, Jane, Janet, Rachel, Margaret and Tracey.

Looking forward the PCC will be approached with a project from the Vicar and the Children's Church Team to make the Tower Room and an area at the back of Church more 'child friendly' and welcoming to families.

Jean Dodds

Churchyard Community Gardening group

Participants: We currently have about 12 people on our email circulation list. These include both church and non-church members, neighbours, and those who are just interested in the churchyard. For the monthly Tuesday sessions we generally get four/five volunteers and some members find other times to continue with specific tasks that need attention at a time that suits their own schedule.

Tasks that are generally undertaken regularly where possible: These were outlined in detail in our report to St Mary's FCC dated 23 October 2023. In brief it involves all the general upkeep of the churchyard that is not covered by Three Rivers District Council's maintenance visits. We endeavour to maintain helpful cooperation with TRDC's maintenance teams. Churchyard improvement plans in hand during the past year: These were outlined in our report to St Mary's FCC dated 23 October 2023. Briefly, we have made good progress with clearing areas of overgrown vegetation, the removal of Ivy from trees as well as bulb and snowdrop planting. Please let me know if you would like any further details.

Tim Tims

Flower arrangers

At the end of July, Hilary Pearce asked me to take over from her when she moved house and left the district.

We held a bring and buy sale on 10th September to raise funds for reinstating fresh flower arrangements in the church. This was very well supported by parishioners and, together with a few further donations, has provided a much-needed 'flower fund'.

In addition, pedestal flower arrangements in memory of a loved one, or to celebrate a special occasion, have frequently been requested. These pedestals are funded by the sponsor.

Since July, as well as the weekly pedestal arrangement, we have had further flower decorations around

the church at Gary's Inauguration on 2nd October and at Harvest Festival on 7th October. Many of the congregation kindly supported us at Harvest with donations of foliage etc. and we were also given a beautiful home-made Harvest loaf.

At Christmas we helped make and decorate the Gardening Group's 'holly tree' for the Christmas Tree Festival.

For Mothering Sunday, ten people (many of whom had not done them before) volunteered to make posies and it was a joy to see them distributed amongst the congregation.

Outline plans are in place to decorate the church at Easter with lilies in memory of loved ones and also Spring flowers and foliage.

Lizzie Tims

Girlguiding at St Mary's

Rainbows

Both Rainbows Units at St Mary's, (1st Rickmansworth on Mondays and 4th Rickmansworth on Fridays), are for girls aged between 4 and 7. Both are thriving, with 14-18 current rainbows and both currently have a small waiting list. We run both Rainbows Units together with myself being Leader in Charge of 1st Rickmansworth and Lee-Anne Sheehan as Leader in Charge of 4th Rickmansworth with the help of young leaders and rangers completing their Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

During 2023, we have enjoyed a wide and varied programme with the girls following the Girl Guiding programme. The Girl Guiding programme is built around six themes (Know Yourself, Express Yourself, Be Well, Have Adventures, Take Action and Skills for the Future). At our meetings we continue to enjoy a wide range of games, crafts, and working towards earning badges.

Yvonne Wells, Leader, 1st Rickmansworth (St Mary's) Rainbows

Guides

Since the last report in spring 2023, our Guide group has met regularly at the church hall and had some adventurous activities away from the hall. During the summer of 2023 we enjoyed a weekend residential to a local Guiding campsite. It was a very hot weekend and we adapted the activities to include water games which gave the Guides plenty of opportunity to cool down, as well as making the most of the shade in the wood. We marked the King's coronation with a District event attended by all ages, and our unit held a "House of Games" evening with coronation-themed activities.

We finished working on our Have Adventures badge which included a campfire evening, learning about animals, and how to navigate using signs from nature. We also enjoyed some time on the water at the aquadrome.

The Guides worked with the church gardening team for a couple of evenings to weed and plant in the churchyard, and we are planning to do the same next term.

This year we are working on a different badge about taking action in the community. We raised funds for Children In Need and spent time doing activities that help us understand more about recycling and conservation.

We have started 2024 by working on a series of adventure badges relating to Snow, Sport, Land, Height and Water and have so far sledged down a snow slope in a rubber inflatable, enjoyed a night hike across the fields, created our own indoor crazy golf course, and used a climbing wall.

Tracy Jenkins, Leader, 3rd Rickmansworth Guides

Lunch Club

The Sunday Lunch Club has met every third Sunday this year other than in July when Martyn and I were away. The numbers attending, including helpers, have varied in number between 19 and 26.

We have welcomed several new 'members' and sadly lost a few regular attendees either through death or frailty.

The opportunity to meet and chat with others is greatly appreciated.

Everyone contributes £5.00 to the cost of the meal which covers our expenditure. A two-course meal plus wine or soft drinks and tea or coffee after lunch is provided.

Our Christmas lunch was attended by three Batchworth Cubs and one of their leaders. Their help counts towards the community section of the World Challenge Badge. The older people who come to lunch club really enjoy the company of young people.

The help provided by those attending as well as those who provide puddings is very much appreciated.

Gill Gowing

`Joan Martin` House Group

The group emerged from a Lent course at St. Mary`s five or six years ago. We met at Joan Martin`s lovely apartment in The Bury. We enjoyed the format, content, and companionship that the course generated among us that we decided to continue on a monthly basis and have done so ever since. Joan - much missed - died a couple of years ago and we decided to continue at 15, Landford Close. I facilitate proceedings and try to `keep order`.

We meet at 10.30 on the morning of the first Wednesday of each month. We begin with coffee and a chat, mainly focussing on those who are unwell, bereaved, or just `wobbly`. After an opening prayer, we go round and invite each member, if they wish, to share something (a photo, an artefact, a poem, a recent triumph or disaster, a comic event, or whatever). `Passing` is fine and each contribution is (in theory!)|received without comment or further discussion. We then have ten minutes` silence. We then have another `round`, with each person offering a thought which has occurred to them during the silence and/or provoked by the earlier contributions in the opening `round`. Again, no discussion and `passing` allowed. Then `open house` conversation. Aim to finish by noon.

Attendance is good and people seem really to enjoy the experience, particularly the ten minutes` silence and the open friendship which the format generates.

John Shaw

Parish Giving

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to Parish Giving over the last year. The total donated was £87,439.33, the majority of which has been Gift Aided. On behalf of St Mary's, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the work of our church.

David Gilbert, Parish Giving Advisor

Servers Report

It was good to welcome Gary in the Autumn and we are enjoying being able to assist him in Worship at St Mary`s. We would like to thank all the group of Servers for their commitment throughout the year, and filling in at short notice when there is a gap in the rota.

The Altar serving team at St Marys has reduced in number and we now only have 9 Servers, 2 of whom cover the 8am service, and at present there are no young people in our team.

We don`t just serve at the Sunday services but also at the special evening services throughout the year but as you would expect Christmas and Easter are the busiest times of the year. It is always a privilege to serve in the Church and can be a very rewarding experience contributing to the Worship at St Marys.

At present we sometimes have difficulty in covering all the services, and hence we are appealing for some new servers to join the team, of any age but we would especially welcome younger members of the congregation; If you are interested please contact one of us or Gary.

Sue and Chris Hillier, Head Servers

Wednesday Evening House Group

The group has been meeting on the second Wednesday of the month for the past 19 years. Some of us have been in the group from the beginning but new members have joined and others have left over the years. During 2023 we finished our study of the life of David and then embarked on the letters of Peter. During Lent we did not meet as a group but attended different Lent Groups. We have lively discussions but also spend time sharing prayer needs for ourselves and the wider community. We also have an annual social get-together to share food!

Jane Pummell