



Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin
Rickmansworth

*Welcoming and serving the whole
community with the love of God*

**Annual church meetings on
26 April 2026**





St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

Welcoming and serving the whole community with the love of God

Annual Meeting of Parishioners to elect churchwardens and

Annual Parochial Church Meeting 11am, Sunday 26 April 2026

All welcome

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The accounts for the year ended 31 December 2025 are available on the church website.

Agendas for annual meetings to be held on 26 April 2026

Vestry Meeting of the parishioners of Rickmansworth to elect churchwardens

- 1) Opening prayer
 - 2) To receive any apologies for absence
 - 3) To agree and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2025
 - 4) Election of churchwardens
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Annual Parochial Church Meeting

- 1) Apologies for absence
- 2) To agree and sign the APCM minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2025
- 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 2025
 - 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 Deanery Synod representatives
 - b) Election of Parochial Church Council members
- 5) Appointment of the Independent Examiner
- 6) Report from the Vicar
- 7) Any other business
- 8) Closing prayers

Minutes of annual meetings held on 25 May 2025

Vestry Meeting of the parishioners of Rickmansworth to elect churchwardens

Present: 53 parishioners

The meeting was chaired by the Vicar.

- 1) The meeting opened with prayer led by the Vicar.
- 2) Apologies for absence were received from: Brenda Bell, David Carruthers, Jan Carruthers, Chris Hillier, Sue Hillier, Alistair Howse, Sue Howse, Barbara Humphrey, Brian Morgan, Janet Page
- 3) The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2024, having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record of the meeting.
- 4) Election of churchwardens
Three nominations had been received and accordingly David Carruthers, Martyn Gowing and Roger Willett were elected to serve as churchwarden for the coming year.
- 5) There being no further business, the meeting closed.

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Present: 53 parishioners

The meeting was chaired by the Vicar

- 1) **Apologies for absence** were received from: Brenda Bell, David Carruthers, Jan Carruthers, Chris Hillier, Sue Hillier, Alistair Howse, Sue Howse, Barbara Humphrey, Brian Morgan, Janet Page
- 2) **Minutes of the APCM held on 28 April 2024**
The minutes were approved as a correct record of the meeting.
- 3) **Electoral roll**
The electoral roll had been completely revised this year. There are 103 people on the roll, a decrease of 9 from 2024-25. 17 new people have joined the roll. 26 people have not requested to be on the new roll, many of whom are no longer able to get to church.
- 4) **Reports**
The meeting received reports, previously circulated, and were invited to ask questions:
- 5) **Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council**
The Vicar thanked everyone who had served on the PCC, commenting that it had been a good year and a great deal had been achieved.
- 6) **Financial statements of the PCC for the year ended 31 December 2024**
The Treasurer highlighted a few key points, one of which is that, although the year had ended with a small surplus, this had been due to the receipt of substantial legacies during the year. He emphasised that, on a day-to-day basis, the church is still running at a deficit.
The Independent Examiner had retired and the PCC had appointed Trevor James as IE for this year. He thanked everyone who had helped during the year and was, in turn, thanked by the meeting.
Gill Gowing asked about the use of the Church Centre by groups from Girlguiding UK in the light of their reluctance to engage with church activities. This will be discussed by the PCC.
John Shaw asked about the PCC's policy on charitable giving and whether or not the percentage given to charities will be increased in the future. The Treasurer informed the meeting that this is reviewed annually in the light of financial circumstances.
Maxine Platzman asked about the hire of the Church Centre to a new nursery. John Glidden informed the meeting that a new nursery has taken on the hire and will be paying full rates from September 2025. Until then they will pay a daily rate as they develop their business.
- 7) **Fabric, goods & ornaments of the church**
- 8) **Proceedings of Rickmansworth Deanery Synod**
Jim Pummell asked whether the Deanery had any input or influence regarding the Vicar's accommodation. Jane Earl, Lay Chair of Deanery Synod, responded that the Synod is aware of the issue but has no direct responsibility for resolving the situation.
- 9) **Committees and other groups and organisations of St Mary's**
Churchwardens: Roger Willett reported that they continue to apply pressure to the Diocese regarding the Vicarage.
Community & Events team: Thanks were expressed to everyone who had helped and/or supported events during the year. Further offers of help are always welcomed.
Fabric & Churchyard team: The planning application for the north porch and layby project has now been submitted to Three Rivers District Council. It was suggested that people write in support of the application. The reference number of the application will be made available.
Maintenance working party: Only a few people regularly help with maintenance and more are welcome.
Stewardship & Finance team: The meeting was reminded that the church is still running at a deficit and the best way to grow income is to grow the congregation. The Chair thanked everyone who currently supports St Mary's financially.
Mission & Outreach: The Mission Action Plan had been revised and is now available to view on the church's website.

Safeguarding: The Parish Safeguarding Officer, Hilary Stevenson, thanked everyone who had contributed towards the achievement of compliance with the increasing demands by the Diocese. Thanks were given to Hilary for her considerable work on this aspect of church life.

Bellringing: David Hibbert reported that new ringers have joined the band.

Children's Church: Jean Dodds reported that work continues to be done to develop this area of ministry and thanked everyone for their hard work.

Gardening: Tim Tims thanked everyone for their advice.

Flower arrangers: Lizzie Tims thanked everyone in congregation for their interest and contributions.

Lunch Club: Gill Gowing thanked everyone who had helped during the year.

Lads Who Lunch

Joan Martin house group

Wednesday house group

The Vicar thanked everyone for their contributions to the life of St Mary's during the year.

10) **PCC Elections**

The following were elected to serve on the PCC for three years: Jean Dodds, Petra Hedges, Alison Vincent-Edwards.

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

It was unanimously agreed that Trevor James be appointed Independent Examiner for the forthcoming year. [Proposed: John Glidden; Seconded: Petra Hedges]

12) **Report from the Vicar**

The full report had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

The Vicar reported that it had been a busy and positive year. He is encouraged by the church and the church community.

Staff recruitment had not been as easy as envisioned. Tim Smith's short tenure as organist before his untimely death had been productive with Tim encouraging Gary to see the role of Director of Music as an integral part of the church's mission.

Mill End churches: Gary has been looking after these churches during their vacancy. The new Vicar is due to start in September, after which Gary's workload should ease.

Relationship with St Mary's School: Gary visits at least once a week, as often as he can, and the relationship continues to grow. He will also be working to grow the relationship with Rickmansworth Park School with the new Director of Music.

Churches Together in Rickmansworth: Gary meets with the other ministers in Rickmansworth every couple of months but there is little appetite to develop CTR.

In summary, Gary reported that St Mary's is a positive church; the sense of cooperation and support make it successful.

Sincere thanks were expressed to Gary for his leadership and all that he does for St Mary's.

The meeting closed with prayer.

Reports from committees/teams

Electoral roll

This year, the electoral roll only had to be updated having been completely renewed for 2025-26. Note that a complete renewal is only required every six years.

Changes to C of E electoral roll – Additions:

There has been 1 addition to the roll since the 2025 APCM.

Changes to C of E electoral roll – Deletions:

4 – Parishioners who died during the year –

RIP Michael Baker, Vicky Lewis, Maxine Platzmann, Anne Rhodes

Total number on 2026 roll - **100**, thus a reduction of three from 2025 roll

Revision of C of E electoral roll for 2027:

For revising the electoral roll for 2027 and onwards until 2031, we annually update the roll to add the names of those who joined St Mary's during the year, and to take off those who have indicated that they wish to be removed from the roll. 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 Rural Dean, Revd Charles Burch, signed the inventory as correct during the annual inspection on behalf of the Archdeacon. The major acquisition during the year was the new sound system which was installed in the spring. A number of items associated with junior church were also bought, namely a notice board for the Children's Corner and items of furniture for under the tower.

Roger Willett, Churchwarden

Report of the Parochial Church Council

The PCC met five times during the year (May 2025-March 2026).

All members of the PCC served on a sub-committee/team:

- Community & Events
- Fabric & Churchyard
- Mission & Outreach
- Stewardship & Finance

Membership of the committees was augmented by people who were not on the PCC which has helped share the workload.

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 Parish Safeguarding Officer, Hilary Stevenson, provided regular updates to the PCC. The workload for the PSO was increasing and the PCC were extremely appreciative of the work done by Hilary and her team.

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

- Project to improve accessibility to the church via the north door
- General maintenance issues including electrical work
- Project to recast and rehang the bells, made possible by a generous benefactor

We were saddened by the death of an active and loyal member of the Council during the year. Maxine Platzman served on the PCC for several years and her invaluable input will be greatly missed.

Most of the work at St Mary's is undertaken by parishioners who give their time and skills to keep everything running smoothly. We are truly grateful to everyone for their contribution to the life of our church. There is a constant need for people to step up and volunteer, either for specific projects or to join teams, and it is hoped that such appeals for help will receive a positive response going forward.

Buzz Coster, Secretary to the Parochial Church Council

Churchwardens

The Archdeacon's annual inspection was carried out by the Rural Dean who found that everything was in order.

The churchwardens met with the Vicar most months during the year to discuss a multitude of matters of importance for the parish.

Progress with the diocese on developing the current Vicarage site was a regular item for consideration. The church wardens, particularly Roger Willett, have maintained pressure on the diocese to provide a suitable vicarage for the parish. Thankfully a new house in the parish has been identified, and the Vicar will be taking up residency there shortly.

Our ministry team is being expanded as Revd Fiona Souter has joined the team, and Chris O'Hara joins us in July as curate. This is welcome news and will allow us to pursue new opportunities of outreach and work in the community.

We have worked closely with Elaine Dobbs, our Church Administrator, who is on a temporary employment contract with us whilst Alex Fleming is on maternity leave. The running of the church administration has progressed smoothly during the year.

Progress with plans to redevelop the North Porch of the church continues and during the year much consideration has been given to adding a drop off point outside the church. This has added time to the whole project, and we have now prepared a survey to obtain views on this proposal from the congregation that will be circulated in the next few months and views taken.

The project to provide new bells for St Mary's remains an important one and is being monitored by the churchwardens.

Considerable time has been spent on overseeing maintenance work in the church and church centre.

The insurance policies and risk assessments are up to date.

The new sound system continues to be, in most respects, a major improvement, but we still have problems concerning the broadcasting of services online and work on this is a priority for the churchwardens.

The Quinquennial work on the church premises is just starting and will occupy considerable time over the coming year for the churchwardens.

A number of other projects are ongoing and are dealt with in the various committee reports.

David Carruthers, Churchwarden.

Community & Events Team

The terms of reference for the team are:

- Encouraging and helping plan events that raise our profile and build positive relations with the wider community
- Enhancing social unity within the church and its members through events that help build up the church community
- Encouraging social events and activities across the generations that are welcoming and inclusive
- Encouraging others to join the church community and to feel attracted to it
- Helping to raise funds for the church

We have had another busy and pleasurable year with many of the activities which were popular last year repeated. The Parish Pantry is always successful, and it is a delight to see members of the congregation and friends from the wider community enjoying a relaxing chat while enjoying coffee and cake and buying books.

There have been two craft mornings for children, one at Easter and one at Christmas and children were also involved when we had a stall at the Winter Evening in the High Street in December. They once again made snowmen out of marshmallows and jelly tots and we gave out flyers to the public with details of the Christmas services.

Specifically for the congregation, we had two Bring and Share lunches which were both well attended and, as always, the food was delicious. There were also two excellent Quiz evenings thanks to our wonderful quiz master.

In November we decorated the church once again with poppy displays, some from last year and some new ones, too. After that, it was the Christmas Tree Festival and we had 28 trees provided and decorated by local organisations, schools and church groups. Both of these encouraged many people to visit our lovely church.

In February, the Batchworth Community Council held a market in the Church Centre and we provided refreshments and sold books.

Many of these activities have raised money for the church which is, of course, important but our prime objective always relates to fostering a sense of community within the St Mary's family and with the wider community.

We have an amazing and enthusiastic team of people but can always do with more help, why not come and join us.

Judith Haigh

Fabric & Churchyard Committee

F&C Committee members 2025-2026: Martyn Gowing (Chairman), Paul Harding, Petra Hedges, David Hibbert, Gary Norman, Maxine Platzman, Hilary Stevenson and churchwardens David Carruthers and Roger Willett.

The main responsibility of this committee is to ensure that the church buildings and churchyard are maintained to a reasonable standard in accordance with statutory regulations, building regulations, planning and health & safety.

Our church architects are MDP Architect. Our contacts are Matthew Stevens and Jess Wood. Quotations for the Quinquennial Works following the 2023 report have been received but are considerably more than we can realistically afford so we will be meeting soon to discuss the reduction in the scope of the works to a level we can manage. Planning consent for the North Porch and Access Layby project was rejected. We are considering submitting a new application with a different planning consultant. Before doing this, we will be conducting a survey to get the views of the congregation as to the most important elements of the project.

TRDC have repaired the churchyard wall which was damaged by a car. In addition, they carried out repairs and repointing to the whole of the churchyard wall.

The F&C Committee obtained DAC approval for the Gardening Group to plant trees in the area adjacent to the care home. To date two trees have been planted in memory of Gillian Baker and Victoria Lewis (Vicky Rodden).

The wooden hall floor which was badly damaged by the previous nursery in 2024 is being sanded and resealed this summer following acceptance of our claim from our insurance company.

We obtained a free 'Energy and Net Zero Carbon Audit' just before the last APCM which we reviewed following the APCM. The report recommended replacing the remainder of our non-LED lights and replacing our gas heating with electrical alternatives, as well as replacing the 'new' drafty doors in the

hall. The estimated expenditure over the five years to 2030 was £250,000. In addition, the electrical supply to the church would need to be upgraded. The quotation we obtained for this was £55,000+VAT. In addition to the bi-monthly meetings, the committee organises a monthly cleaning and maintenance working party on a Saturday morning to tackle regulatory checks and minor maintenance work, including cleaning areas of the church where the cleaning contractor has no access.

Martyn Gowing, Chair

Mission and Outreach Team

The focus of this committee continues to be on St Mary's outreach and ministry role.

During this year, we reviewed the current MAP and briefed the PCC, where it was agreed that it should continue:

- 1) To grow in how we reach out and welcome people
- 2) To grow in wise stewardship and management of resources with particular emphasis on of funds left to the church for outreach projects.
- 3) To develop empowered and inspiring leadership.

More recently, we have started to revisit this MAP and update it. This will be completed during the summer and presented to the PCC. With a new Curate joining our team in June/July 2026, we expect to bring further ideas for our outreach in the parish.

Music: One of our key objectives remains to develop and use music as a means of reaching a wider audience in the community. We have moved forward on a number of fronts, looking at mission with children, families and youth across the community. We have seen progress in developing our current music resources, and we have made good progress in building up our church choir, which is rehearsing each week and is now singing a new anthem each month. Equally important has been the introduction of the Come and Sing events, which have been focused on a very different genre of music. Events have taken place with a variety of themes, including Disney music, Christmas songs and Musicals. This has been well received by the community and has encouraged many different people to join us at St Mary's. We intend to continue and develop this venture. We are also exploring other initiatives, such as founding a rock choir and/or a ukulele group to broaden our outreach.

Families, children, young people and senior citizens: Children's Church at the 10am service has been reorganised and is run by a great team of supporters. We have seen the number of children attending gradually increase, and new equipment and furniture have been obtained to enhance this work. We continue to work closely with our church school, and the Vicar has conducted weekly worship services there, which have been really well received and valued by the school. We have not yet been able to use music as a way of developing our relationship with the school children. This has been due to the lack of availability of time from our Director of Music. We will reconsider how we can take this initiative forward in the months ahead. Overall, we have seen a much closer connection with the school and its staff. We also continue to promote St Mary's as a venue for musical events. We have made changes in the church to make our children's areas more visible and attractive, and we have run both Christmas and Easter craft events.

We run a service each month for the residents at the Riverside Care Home, which is well attended and is really appreciated by the residents.

We have continued our outreach efforts through the Batchworth Christmas Fair, which is seen as an excellent way to encourage children and parents to attend our church services. We have used this event to publicise all our Christmas activities and services. A new initiative this year has been our involvement with the monthly Batchworth Market, where we join with other churches in Rickmansworth on a "Churches Together" stall, to meet people, and let them know what we are doing in the area. We want to continue our involvement and would welcome new helpers to support this work.

Going Deeper into God: We have organised Lent study groups and continue to welcome people to use the church and be guided in acts of prayer and meditation. Monthly Lectio sessions have been organised

to consider the scriptures. We continue to explore the possibilities of running outreach courses to meet demand and respond to interest within the parish. (e.g., Alpha and Seekers Courses)

As always, the M&O activities rely on every member of St Mary's church supporting them in prayer and action and thanks are offered to all who have made this work possible.

David Carruthers, Chair

Stewardship and Finance Committee

The Stewardship and Finance Committee of the Parochial Church Council has met formally on three occasions since the 2025 APCM. At each meeting, progress against the agreed budget for 2025 was monitored and discussed. Further ad-hoc/email exchange meetings were also held. 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
- Monitoring the operation and financial state of the Woodland Wanderers Nursery
- Preparation of the draft budget for 2026 for final approval by the PCC

During 2025, various people ran or organised fund-raising activities that raised some £6,612 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 online and contactless ways of receiving contributions and donations outside the Planned Giving Scheme, particularly via the Payaz contactless terminal and web site.

For 2025, we were expecting to be facing a deficit of income over expenditure for the day-to-day expenses of running the Parish. The final deficit was smaller than expected but was still some £8,000. The S&F Committee would like to highlight the fact that day-to-day income will continue to be challenging and warn that the underlying financial position is not as healthy as it may appear from the accounts. Our apparently comfortable position results largely from generous legacies we received in 2024 and 2025 which we cannot guarantee will happen again. However, for 2025, the S&F Committee was able to recommend St Mary's donating a portion of the money received as part of our Planned Giving/Stewardship to charities as was our usual practice. The sum of £4,492 was agreed and approved by the PCC. In addition, £1,428 has also been raised for outside charities from contributions by members of the congregation.

So, looking forward for 2026, our discussions again took place against a background of St Marys being in a difficult financial situation regarding the income and funds used for the day-to-day expenses of running the Parish. We are budgeting for an end of year deficit of £16,000. Included in this calculation is an assumption that the Nursery can continue to run, our deficit will increase considerably if this is not the case.

This is due to several factors, including:

- 1) Certain expenses incurred in the work of the parish will increase, eg, for outreach and growth projects being planned, although some of these will be covered by using funds from a legacy received during 2024.
- 2) Due to the recent high rate of inflation and other global events, we will be faced with some major increases in costs going forward, particularly for utilities.
- 3) We have had to assume that income from Planned Giving is unlikely to increase from the 2025 level.

Additionally, there are likely to be some major expenses incurred during 2026 which will have to be covered by drawing on our reserves. This includes work on the Hall, which has now reached the age where some major maintenance is required to maintain the integrity of the building for future use.

Similarly, there is work required on the church itself as identified in the last Quinquennial (5 year) inspection.

It is still 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 2026 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

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

The Parish is committed to the safeguarding of children 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 (*duty to have due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults*).

The PCC adopted the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policies and Practice Guidance, as well as the Church of England's Safeguarding Policy for children, young people and vulnerable adults ("Promoting a Safer Church"), the Safeguarding Policy for our church, the Policy on Responding to Domestic Abuse and the Recruitment (Ex Offenders) policy, at the meeting held on 9 September 2024. The latter three documents are displayed on the church website.

A Safeguarding Data Privacy Notice was re-adopted by the PCC in November 2025. A copy is available to view on the church website's Policies page.

There is a Parish Safeguarding Officer, a Lead Recruiter, and an Assistant Recruiter.

Those who work (employed or voluntarily) with vulnerable groups in the parish are recruited in accordance with the Church of England's practice guidance on Safer Recruitment. DBS checks are renewed every three years. Employees, volunteers and members of the PCC are required to complete mandatory safeguarding training and to refresh the training every three years.

Contact details for those wishing to obtain advice, raise concerns or make referrals to the statutory authorities are displayed in the porch and on the church website. A leaflet with information about how to raise a safeguarding concern is available at the back of church.

Safeguarding is a standing item on the agenda of every PCC meeting and the Safeguarding Leadership Team meets regularly.

There is insurance cover for activities involving children, young people and/or vulnerable adults undertaken in the name of the parish.

Once again, I am extremely grateful to my colleagues in the safeguarding leadership team for their support as we work to ensure that we comply with safeguarding procedures and policies.

And I thank those of you who have complied with the recent request to complete safeguarding training. To those who have training outstanding, please can you complete it as soon as possible.

To the PCC, I also extend my grateful thanks as they support the efforts which we are making to comply with safeguarding procedures and policies.

Together, we are ensuring that our church is a safe place where people can come to worship or to visit.

Hilary Stevenson Parish Safeguarding Officer

Deanery Synod

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

The **July meeting**, was held at St Andrew's Chorleywood and Revd Charles Burch started by welcoming the new Curate at St Andrew's, Revd. Ali Martin. The speaker was Rev Canon Dr Tim Bull FRSA, Director of Vocations and DDO, who spoke on "Living as a Human in an AI World" - Faith and AI. Tim set out his guiding principles for the use of AI:

- 1) Be wise in your use of AI
- 2) Keep alert for truths
- 3) Keep using your physical and mental attributes.
- 4) Don't expect AI to save the world.
- 5) Do uniquely human things to stay fully alive.

He stressed the shortcomings and dangers of unthinking use.

The meeting continued with each parish sharing their experiences and challenges as suggested at the February meeting. The idea was that this would lead to the basis of a Deanery MAP. We were also updated by Richard Doughty on the Trinity Project.

The **November meeting** was held at All Saints' Croxley Green. The main part of the meeting was a listening exercise led by Revd Mark Rodel on Corporate Spiritual Discernment. He explained that a new Diocesan Ministry strategy is being prepared. We were updated by Tony Barton on the Trinity Project to help newly transferred children at secondary school with their mental health. The vacancy at St Oswald's was also discussed.

The **March meeting** was held on Zoom. There was a very interesting talk by Nigel Hollington on Gaza and the West Bank. Nigel is a member of the Baptist Church at Bovingdon. He has visited the area twice, the last time in November 2025 along with a group of 20 people of different faiths from different countries. Nigel referred to a speech by Archbishop Stephen Cottrell (who was visiting at the same time) which is available on the C of E website. On the visit they held 30 meetings with different people/groups living in the area to assess what it is like to live there in the current regime.

Lots of Palestinians are Christian and there are several churches but only one mosque in Bethlehem. There are Christians in Gaza too. Christians make up 20% of the population in Palestine. The bishops were showing their solidarity with Palestinian Christians. Nigel went onto discuss life in Gaza where there are give examples of: Denial of Human Rights, Apartheid, Ethnic Cleansing, Violence and Genocidal Acts. He considered that these acts were carried out or condoned by the Israeli state and not condoned by Jews generally. There are organisations such as Jews against Israeli brutality who demonstrate against the Israeli government.

The meeting was informed St Oswald's has appointed Revd Ritah Namakula as its new vicar who will be licensed on 20 May. Revd Canon Miriam Mугan will retire at the end of July, and her last service will be on 19 July. The Trinity Project has appointed a chairman, Jon Cox, a member at St Oswald's and the project is moving forward to achieve charity status.

Sue Hillier, Deanery Synod representative

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

Bellringing

We have been in the past year very fortunate in having 3 new learners (Sussane, William and Alison). Our two previous learners (Miriam and Stan) are now well advanced and are able to ring with us. Miriam recently rang her first Quarter Peal at Langleybury. She also has been able to ring at a number of other churches in our area including St Albans Abbey.

Bell ringing is one of England's oldest activities which has continued unbroken since the 16th Century. At present, St. Mary's has a ring of 10 bells, several of which were cast in 1765. They have served the local community well and are now at the end of their useful life. Together the basic musical pitches of the bells are only approximately in-line. No amount of turning or tuning the bells will make them into a bright tuneful ring.

St. Mary's now has a once in a lifetime opportunity to continue to maintain its place in history with a new peal of bells. The inscriptions on the old 10 bells will be preserved, and the new bells, a ring of 12, will be recast using the bell metal from the present ring. A benefactor is financing this project to the tune of nearly £400,000 plus VAT. However, there is an opportunity to contribute to this amazing initiative.

David Hibbert, Tower Captain

Children's Church

Children's Church which has just passed its third birthday, is part of St Mary's Church's mission to families. The number of those attending in the *Tower Room* during the Sunday 10am Sung Eucharist Service varies but we have a core of regular attenders. Those who come comment on the welcome and happy environment. We use the Sermons4kids material for teaching.

A new development in mid-2025 was planning the refurbishment of the *Tower Room*. This was undertaken by the Mission and Outreach Committee and the Children's Church team. On a Saturday in early summer a team cleared the *Tower Room* and new child friendly furniture and storage was purchased for both there and the *Children's Corner*. On Sundays the latter acts as an extension of Children's Church for those families who prefer to use this. Also, it is available for use during the week by visitors to the church

Children's Church could not run without the steadfast help, warmth and care from these leaders who serve on the rota. Many thanks go to: Alison, Christine, Dorothy, Jane, Janet, Margaret, Sue H, Sue J, & Tracey. Also to Gary Norman, our Vicar, and the PCC for their support and help.

Jean Dodds, Children's Church

Choir

Since starting as Director of Music at the end of April 2025, I have been warmly welcomed into the St Mary's community. On my first Sunday, the choir only consisted of a handful of regular members. Now, on the first Sunday of the month (when we normally sing an anthem) we've had up to fifteen people singing in the choir. Anthems have ranged in difficulty, from our most musically challenging anthem, 'Ave Verum Corpus' by Mozart, to our most technically challenging anthem (and for some members, most stressful!) 'If Ye Love Me' by Tallis. Month to month, choir members with a wide range of experience levels have learnt how to better sing together while developing their musical and performing skills. I look forward to being part of their continued development and learning new anthems together in the months to come!

Sean Frost, Director of Music

Churchyard community gardening group

We continue to meet on the third Tuesday of each month and at other times by arrangement with Tim Tims, the lead for this group. Our tasks include the weeding and maintenance of the beds around the churchyard; hedge trimming and shrub pruning; path maintenance, especially around the north, south and Bury churchyard entrances. We also have other specific projects in hand - see below.

For our monthly Tuesday gardening mornings we can normally expect up to five people for our working parties. Vicky Lewis, a founding member of this group, sadly died suddenly in December. We shall all miss her wide gardening experience and unstinting efforts to care for all the beds and other nooks and crannies around our churchyard.

Other projects

Clearing of the area by the Bury entrance: The original concrete base has now been cleared. Our aim is to erect some suitable shuttering to hold the earth back around the concrete base. This will then help make this area more useable - perhaps for a small storage shed - to be discussed with your committee.

Memorial tree planting on the east lawn: With many thanks to Martyn Gowing for his negotiations with the St Albans Diocese, this project has now progressed well. With the aid of sponsorship from friends and family of deceased church members we have planted three Prunus Hanagasa (Pink Parasol) trees since last November. The ground underneath this lawn is full of building debris - presumably from the 1970s' construction of the church centre - so we have made sure that the planting holes are well cleared of this debris and filled with good soil. The trees all seem to be thriving well and flowering. In ten years' time they should grow to a size of 5m x 3m. Part of this memorial planting plan includes the introduction of a new notice board with information about the churchyard and projects like the planting of new trees and bulbs in the churchyard. I will keep your committee informed as this project progresses.

Construction of pallet bug hotel in wooded area by the South entrance: Tim Tims is a member of the charity Caring for God's Acre, an organisation that provides lots of help and advice about caring for churchyards in a biodiverse manner. A bug hotel is one of the churchyard additions this organisation promotes. As and when help is available, we hope to complete this project to help enhance the biodiversity within the churchyard area.

Gardeners Group Risk Assessment. In March 2025 I was discussing with TRDC garden maintenance teams the introduction of a wild flower strip by the war memorial, I was referred to the leisure services manager who asked to see a copy of our 'Gardeners Risk Assessment'. Hilary Stevenson kindly helped me to produce a suitable form which was sent to TRDC in June 2025. I have not had any further comment from TRDC.

Tim Tims

Flower arrangers

Flower arranging in the church has continued as in the previous two years. We now do not use plastic floral foam (Oasis) at all to support arrangements and, where possible, try to choose British-grown flowers. This follows guidance from the Sustainable Church Flowers organisation. During the coming year we plan to explore further obtaining flowers from a local flower farm.

This year one more lady has joined our group and we hope to encourage more to join in the coming year.

Sponsored pedestals to mark weddings, birthdays etc and in memory of loved ones are as popular as ever.

In November we joined the Gardeners' Group in a 'thank you outing' to Woodoaks Farm, which was much enjoyed by all despite the chilly weather.

During the year we have received a few unsolicited donations towards general flower arrangements and it has been heartening to see our work appreciated in this way.

Lizzie Tims

Lads Who Lunch

Lads who Lunch is an informal gathering of men from St Mary's Church. We meet in the Coach & Horses in the High Street on the first Thursday of each month from 12:30. The lunch menu ranges from bar snacks to main meals.

The management at the Coach and Horses reserves 20 places for us although we usually number between 12 and 18, so there is always room for new members. An email reminder is sent out about a week prior to meeting. Please ask for your email address to be added to the list if you are interested.

Martyn Gowing

Lunch Club

The Sunday Lunch Club has met every third Sunday this year (April 2025 – March 2026) other than in August. Invitations are sent to some 40 individuals. The numbers attending, including helpers usually being around 30. This year the third Sunday in March was Mothering Sunday and we had only 19 attendees as many of our regulars had family gatherings to attend.

As usual 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.

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

Gill Gowing

Joan Martin House Group

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 followed by 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, aiming to finish by noon.

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

John Shaw

Wednesday Evening House Group

As usual we have met in members' homes on the second Wednesday evening of every month, apart from during Lent when we all joined different groups.

We finished the *Holy Habits* course, started *God's Green Book* - a course of Bible studies about the environment, and also had a summer bring-and-share social.

Our discussions are lively but we always find time to share good and bad news so we can support each other. We would be pleased to welcome anyone who would like to join us.

Jane Pummell