



**The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin  
Wendover  
Buckinghamshire**

**Annual Report  
May 2024 to April 2025**

**Vicar: Rev Sally Moring**

**Bank: NatWest  
22 Market Square  
Aylesbury  
HP2 01T**

**CAF Bank23  
25 Kings Hill Ave  
Kings Hill  
West Malling  
Kent  
ME19 4JQ**

**Independent Examiner: Jeremy Spreyer - 12 Oldhams Meadow Aylesbury  
Bucks HP20 2UU**

**The church of St Mary the Virgin is situated on the outskirts of Wendover.  
It is part of the Diocese of Oxford within the Church of England.**

**The correspondence address is  
Parish Office 11 High Street Wendover Bucks HP22 6DU**

**The Parochial Church Council (PCC) became a registered charity in August 2009. Its registration number is 1131299.**

**PCC members who have served from 28 April 2024 and 30 June 2024 to the date of approval of this report are:**

<b>Incumbent:</b>	<b>Rev Sally Moring</b>
<b>Associate Priest:</b>	<b>Rev Nadine Rose</b>
<b>Curate:</b>	<b>Rev Matthew Routledge</b>

<b>LLMs:</b>	<b>David Blackmore</b>
	<b>Ian Sansbury</b>

<b>Churchwardens:</b>	<b>Peter Dean</b>
	<b>Sharon Wilson</b>

<b>Deanery Synod Representatives:</b>	<b>Sian Chattle</b>
	<b>Edward Blakeman</b>
	<b>Peter Dean</b>

<b>Elected Members:</b>	<b>Jacquie Smith (Secretary)</b>
	<b>Richard Williams (Treasurer)</b>
	<b>Monica Tompsett</b>
	<b>Jennifer Ballantine</b>
	<b>Catherine Taylor</b>
	<b>Anne-Marie Foster</b>
	<b>Michael Crockett</b>
	<b>Natalie Beach</b>
	<b>Ken Darvill</b>

<b>Ex Officio</b>	<b>Alison Kirk (Diocesan Synod)</b>
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## **A: Structure, Governance and Management**

The method of appointing PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. The PCC has passed a resolution by which a proportion of the PCC members will stand for re-election every three years, limited to a total of six years served. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC. This is achieved by notices given out during church services, articles in the St Mary's weekly update and notices placed around the church.

The incumbent is currently Rev Sally Moring with Associate Priest Rev Nadine Rose and Curate Matthew Routledge. David Blackmore and Ian Sansbury are licensed to serve in the parish as Licensed Lay Ministers (LLM).

The PCC operates by meeting during the year with three committees meeting and conducting delegated activities and taking delegated responsibility in between. Methods of reporting back to the PCC range from the formal pre-distributed reports for discussion at PCC meetings, to informal verbal reports. The PCC became a registered charity in 2009 and is mindful of its responsibilities as Trustees. The major risks to which the church is exposed, as identified by the Trustees have been reviewed annually, and systems or procedures have been established to manage those risks.

## **B: Objectives and Activities**

St Mary's PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent in promoting the whole mission of the Church – pastoral, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the church building, St Mary's Centre, and the churchyard at Church Lane. Since 1992, the PCC has been a party to the Sharing Agreement of 1986 relating to St Anne's Church, Aylesbury Road, Wendover. The PCC also holds a lease over the premises at 11 High Street, Wendover (JUST shop and Parish Office). All of which contribute to our aim to be a church at the heart of the community. Details of our work are described more fully in the following reports from committees and other groups who contribute to our church community. The PCC depends on many volunteers who give freely of their time and talents. A major part of its activity is the training and involvement of an increasing number of volunteers, doing practical projects or duties alongside others who are further involved as a

trustee or a committee member. The benefits from volunteers' work, and our thanks to them, cannot be overstated, without them the viability of our church would be seriously affected. Our grant-making policy is twofold; special appeals which may arise, and giving at a budgeted annual level, where finances are available giving to a local charity, a national charity and an overseas charity.

## **Electoral Roll**

The Electoral Roll is managed by Jacquie Smith, our Electoral Roll Officer. As required, the draft new register was displayed in Church for two weeks prior to the APCM. The number of people on the roll was reported at the APCM on 18 May 2024 as 235, down by 8 from 2023.

In preparation for this AMPC in 2025 a new Electoral Roll will be completed and reported at the APCM.

## **Church Attendance**

We are required by the Diocese to report on the average weekly attendance for the first four weeks in October. This figure is one of the inputs to our Parish Share allocation. For 2024 the average weekly attendance for in person services was 118 and for online services at home was 8.

We also had the following numbers for occasional services held at St Mary's: 18 baptisms, 4 weddings and 16 funerals.

## **The PCC**

The full PCC met seven times during the past year, six times in person at St Mary's and once using the online Teams facility. Committees met between meetings reporting formally to the PCC.

## **Committees**

The PCC operates through a number of committees that meet between full meetings of the PCC:

**Standing Committee** (Chair: Sally Moring) is responsible for transacting the business of the PCC between meetings, subject to any directions given by the PCC. The committee met seven times between the Annual Meeting of 2024 to 2025 and has reported formally to each PCC meeting.

In addition to the Standing Committee, we also have the following committees, **Finance and Governance, Estates Committee and People Committee** that meet regularly during the year and report back at each PCC.

## **C: PCC Review of the Year**

The year started with our first meeting after the APCM on 21 May 2024 where the PCC officers were elected, Peter Dean as Vice Chair, Jacquie Smith as PCC secretary and Electoral Roll Officer. Sally Moring advised that she was having ongoing discussions to recruit a new Treasurer and bookkeeper.

The Standing Committee was elected as follows Revd Sally Moring, Revd Nadine Rose, Peter Dean, Jacquie Smith, Sian Chattle (resigned Sept 2024), Catherine Taylor, Anne-Marie Foster, Treasurer (once appointed). The existing membership of the other committees were confirmed. Helen Blakeman was elected as the Safeguarding Officer and The Safeguarding Policy was approved.

The Financial Report highlighted the decrease in cash balances in part due to the high costs of gas and electricity and the dependence on the shop donations. PCC agreed approval of monies for the repair of the car park where a burial chamber had collapsed, once quotations were received.

A revised Church Inclusivity Statement was unanimously agreed. The Statement will be reflected in revised Premises Letting Agreement which will detail our values.

Discussions were held on emerging themes from the visioning work already undertaken.

**The second meeting was on 2 July 2024** when the updated Vision Statement was approved to direct St Mary's work for the next 5 years with groups being tasked to develop the detail behind the statement. Sally asked that everyone should prayerfully consider the actions we can undertake and the need for ongoing volunteers across all areas of our church life together.

Finance remains an issue due to ongoing costs and ideas were considered for fund raising events and offers to lead events was accepted. The Church's revised hire costs were agreed. A discussion was held regarding Eco Church and whether the silver award could be obtained.

At the extraordinary APCM on 30 June 2024, Sharon Wilson was Elected as a Church Warden and Richard Williams was elected as Treasurer and PCC Member.

**The third meeting was on 25 September 2024.** It was agreed that Rosalind Eccles name should be nominated to the Diocese as the new Junior School Church Governor.

Helen Blakeman attended the meeting to give an updated Safeguarding Report following a published report on the Diocese in response to its actions following a Safeguarding Audit. The report found the Diocese to have a solid foundation and good collaboration between the Diocese and the Parishes. It was agreed that services on Safeguarding Sunday 17 November 2024 would promote safeguarding to help congregational understanding of the issues and its importance.

‘Just’ shop accounts were presented and it was agreed that a third director should be appointed from the PCC. Global churches donations to local, national and international charities were decided and agreed. It was noted with thanks that the Friends of St Mary’s had contributed two thousand pounds towards the car park repairs. Peter Dean confirmed that pledges of £34K had been made for a Pioneer Worker and work was being undertaken on the job description, person specification and advert.

A new initiative for a Sunday afternoon family service, Connect, Create and Celebrate would commence in October.

**The fourth meeting was on 20 November 2024.** It was resolved that David Blackmore proceed with an application for a National Church Net Zero Demonstrator Stage 1 Grant. The PCC were updated on discussions with HS2 Ltd regarding proposed sound mitigations. Whilst there was still no progress, the matter had been escalated with support and involvement from Greg Smith MP. The Treasurer presented a draft budget for 2025 – 2026, the budget was agreed and confirmed that the full Parish Share will be met. The Pioneer Worker post to be advertised before Christmas.

The PCC noted recent safeguarding developments around the national Church following the publication of the Makin Report and the response of the Bishop of Oxford. PCC reiterated a commitment to following best practice locally.

Thanks were given to those who have helped and given a commitment to Connect, Create and Celebrate services. The MAP development work will now focus on developing the Community Café idea.

The PCC Code of Conduct was approved.

**The fifth meeting was held on 22 January 2025.** The interview date for the Pioneer Minister post was set for 10 February 2025. Preparatory work is due to commence on the 2025 full revision of the Electoral Roll. In December 2024, £30K was received from HS2 for noise attenuation preparatory work, including costing of the project and obtaining Local Government and Diocesan permissions. There is ongoing discussion and liaison with HS2 regarding the uplift of funding of the original agreement of acknowledged increased building costs due to the lengthy delay in receiving any funding.

Safeguarding had been discussed at the Area Deans Annual Conference. Bishop Stephen had spoken of the need for safeguarding to be at the top of the Churches agenda. St Mary's Safeguarding Officer is to directly contact all PCC members regarding training and DBS checking. Finances were healthy due to the HS2 funding and a significant donation from 'Just'. Ongoing discussions regarding the proposed Diocesan Formula for Parsh Share.

The success of the Christmas Services was discussed along with the lack of volunteers which inhibited the outreach that could be achieved without welcomers for a large number of visitors to our Church. The rest of the meeting was a discussion looking ahead to later in the year when there will only be one cleric within the Church. What was fully discussed was the tasks that have to be undertaken by the incumbent and the lack of clerical capacity within the Diocese for cover. As a Church Family we have a duty of care for the wellbeing and support of our Vicar. Ideas were put forward to be developed in smaller working groups and later to be consulted on within the whole Church Family.

**The sixth meeting was held on 11 March 2025.** The Safeguarding Officer was in attendance drawing PCC members attention to Safeguarding Information on the diocesan website and webinars she had taken part regarding awareness of the signs of Domestic Abuse and the rehabilitation of those who have previously caused harm.

The PCC formally approved the delegation of financial authorisation to the Standing Committee for the spending of up to £30K (provided by HS2) for the

preparatory work required for the Sound Attenuation Work on the Church Building, following recommendations of the Technical Working Group. Faculties will be sort for the Church Roof, Windows, Bell Tower and Porch. PCC further discussed consultation ideas and processes for when there is only one cleric in post from November 2025. A Sub group was formed to plan the process for June 2025. Sally Moring thanked Jennifer Ballantine and Monica Tompsett for their contributions to the PCC over the past six years. There would be three PCC vacancies to fill as Sharon Wilson was to step down as Church Warden and PCC member.

**The final meeting of the year was held on 28 April 2025 via Teams.** The meeting was held to approve the Annual report prior to the APCM meeting on 18 May 2025.

*Report by Jacquie Smith PCC Secretary*

## **D: Financial Statement of the PCC**

### **Treasurer's Report on the accounts for the year to 31 December 2024**

I took over as Treasurer from Matt Ryan last Summer. We owe a big thank you to Matt for the 6 years he did in the role of treasurer. The role has become ever more demanding post lockdown, as it has for most churches, as income has tended to diminish, and costs increase.

A decision was taken to split the treasurer's role in two. The bookkeeping duties were initially taken on by Julie Hadley and at the end of 2024 on a temporary basis by Bev Crowe. We will need to find a more permanent solution for bookkeeping responsibilities in 2025.

I am responsible for strategic matters. These involve overseeing the activities of the bookkeeper, approving payments, and liaising with various other parties who have a role to play in the Church's finances. I have also been providing strategic input to seek to help solve the long running issue with HS2 over the payment of a grant to contribute to our costs of soundproofing the Church. Late in 2024 we received an initial grant of £30,000 which has enabled us to commence the process of drawing up plans for the works.



Fund details for the financial year to 31 December 2024 are summarised in the table below. Please note that fixed assets and depreciation have been excluded from the figures as they relate to past expenditure and not cash spent in 2024. Overall, our total income in 2024 was £13,773 higher, mainly due to the church receiving the £30,000 grant from HS2 mentioned above. In 2023 several grants (for several larger projects that were planned and carried out in 2023) were received which helps to explain why the income increase was not higher.

The General Fund below reflects the income and expenditure arising from the day-to-day activities of our Church. Other Funds for the Church have special rules applied to them and these restrict how the funds can be spent. During 2024 the Church accounts showed a small increase in total funds by £330, which is outlined below.

Funds	Income	Expenses	Transfer / gains	Surplus/ (deficit)	Funds at 31.12.24
General	£185,151	£186,439	(£3,703)	(£4,991)	£32,984
Designated (All)	£15,499	£26,664	£-	(£11,165)	£35,213
Fabric (Restricted)	£-	£3,535	£-	(£3,535)	£6,748
Legacy (Restricted)	£-	£-	£-	£-	£23,207
Other Restricted	£36,236	£20,362	£4,147	£20,021	£155,298
<b>Total</b>	<b>£236,886</b>	<b>£237,000</b>	<b>£444</b>	<b>£330</b>	<b>£253,450</b>

### General Fund

2024 saw a steady pattern for our finances at St Mary's. Planned giving, via the Parish Giving Scheme and regular standing orders was consistent with 2023, albeit slightly down on an inflation adjusted basis. The weekly cash collections were down on 2023. Our income from hiring the church and centre and some fundraising activities was a little up from 2023. The JUST shop, once again made an enormous difference to our income as it donated £11,829 from profits and contributed £9,671 towards running costs.

Our general fund costs increased in the year with costs rising from £166,139 to £186,439. The largest general fund costs for the church in the year were Parish Share of £103,521, which was paid in full and meant that we were able to support the ministry of other churches in the Oxford Diocese. We are however

bearing more than our fair share of the deanery aggregate and this amount is not sustainable bearing in mind our income and other costs. Running the shop cost £13,634 and our utilities rose again very significantly to be a large proportion of our costs due to continuing high energy prices. Larger works this year for repairs included works to deal with the car park (although this work was partially funded from grants), and some required electrical works.

We ended the year with the General Fund making a loss of £4,991. As agreed in 2021, the Global Church fund was increased by taking 2% of our general fund income which amounted to £3,703 which is used to make grants to local, national and international organisations. The balance at the year-end was £3,825.

### **Other Funds**

In the year the Ministry Development Fund, which had been set up to support the plans shown in the Mission Action Plan, spent £23,024. The church has made a commitment until November 2025 regarding payments for our Associate Priest. It was agreed by the PCC that legacies received by the PCC would be designated to be used towards Ministry Development, unless restrictions were given by the donor. Donations received and allocated amounted to £14,750. At the year end the Ministry Development Fund had £17,735 left for the 2025 costs.

A donation from the Friends helped to support the car park works mentioned above.

It should be noted that none of the other restricted funds can be used against St Mary's running costs, being restricted to fabric, the churchyard, bells, flowers amongst other things.

In the year our flow of overall funds in and out more or less broke even. That position is however somewhat illusory due to the grant from HS2 which was received in late 2024 but will be spent in 2025. It remains the case that we will all need to look to fundraising, increased giving and pursue significant grants if we wish to continue doing what we currently do, in addition to looking after the building.

### **Thank you**

I would repeat Matt's words from last year by saying a big thank you to all of you who have continued to support the church over the last 12 months. We are fortunate to continue to have a faithful and generous congregation who

support our work in Wendover. It is already apparent to me that although our financial situation is not an easy one it is better than many other churches, and that is largely down to the work of all of our friends and colleagues.

Grants from outside sources have been received with much gratitude. Thank you to the donors, but also those who worked hard on researching and requesting fundraising.

Thank you also to those of you who have helped us to keep our costs down, whether that be volunteering with posts or actively trying to save money on our running costs. Every bit helps.

Yet again, we are very grateful to Helen Blakeman and her team at JUST who have run the shop and have once again done an amazing job. The “cost of living” crisis did not make their task in 2024 any easier and for a long time it looked like the year’s income would fall short of 2023. However, a very strong end to the year materialised, and this helped them repeat 2023’s success.

I would like to thank Julie and Bev for coming to the bookkeeper role. Like me, they have had a large learning curve.

None of us would have managed without the continuing guiding hand of Matt Ryan, and his unrivalled knowledge of all things to do with running the church’s finances. We, particularly I, continue to owe a large debt of gratitude to Matt.

Thanks also to Sally for putting up with my questions as I have gradually gained knowledge about all the different working pieces in the fabric of the church’s finances. Her patience and help have been invaluable.

Sarah Bishop has continued to help with our banking and cashiering and she goes about her work efficiently and without fuss – thank you Sarah.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone else who has supported me as treasurer since I was appointed. Since I assumed the role, I have encountered nothing but willingness and friendliness, which has been very important. Thank you very much everybody.

*Report by Richard Williams PCC Treasurer*

## **E: Churchwarden's Report including the fabric, goods and ornaments**

The past year has seen a number of activities completed and new strategic projects started in line with our Mission Action Plan – there has been a lot to do. We have completed works on the church estate, supported the PCC in providing good governance, successfully started new strategic projects and broadened the range of activities supported by the churchwardens. The return to a full complement of two churchwardens has allowed us to expand our presence and range of activities. The churchwarden role is unlimited in scope and no single person can possibly cover every expectation. Over the last year, we have been able to provide more support for the Thursday service community, and some additional social and fundraising activities which was not possible before.

The Estates Committee continues to meet regularly and oversees and prioritises the on-going maintenance, repair and development of the church estate.

At the time of last year's report, we were working to resolve the problem with the car park following the collapse of the grave vault and the appearance of the deep hole. There were complexities in dealing with a Victorian grave but following advice from the DAC, a helpful local contactor in Mark Endean and external financial support we were able to resolve the problem and reopen the car park.

More recently we have commissioned and completed external cleaning and repair work to roofing/guttering which has stopped further internal damage. Once fully dried out we will complete the work with internal redecoration. We have also completed stonework repairs in the nave and chancel.

An emerging issue over the last year has been the increasing fragility of our audio-visual equipment and infrastructure. Although we replaced the projector and an amplifier in recent years, much of the rest of the equipment is now quite old. We have undertaken short-term repairs and have kept what is now a vital part of our services operating but this area will require significant investment in the future if we are to meet expectations.

In addition to these minor works, we are progressing two major buildings-related initiatives; HS2 mitigation and our move towards net-zero.

Finally, after years of work by Sally Moring, William Avery and many others and with the support of our new local MP Greg Smith, HS2 have provided £30,000 to enable us to begin the design and approval process for the sound mitigation works. We have formed a working group to take this forward and have commissioned the initial professional design work. We have also opened an informal dialogue with the DAC prior to making a formal application for a faculty. We anticipate that the design and approval work will take the rest of 2025 with the work commencing in 2026. We will keep the PCC and the rest of the community informed of developments as we progress.

The net-zero project continues albeit slowly – in partnership with Oxford Diocese, we have applied to the national church for funding to explore net-zero heating options. We are waiting for that to progress. The aim of this project is to ensure we can plan for the replacement of our gas boilers as they move towards end-of-life. The Church of England will no longer approve replacement heating with fossil-fuel based solutions unless it can be clearly shown that there is no alternative.

In addition to the physical work on the estate we continue to review and develop our approach to risk management, health and safety, and insurance. We recently completed a successful audit of these arrangements by our insurers, Ecclesiastical. They approved our processes unconditionally, making only a few recommendations for further enhancements.

The PCC continues its oversight of our activities and receives regular updates. We continue to modernise our governance to ensure we meet our obligations as a registered charity, particularly around safeguarding and employment law. In response to a General Synod initiative, PCC approved a Code of Conduct for members. This complements our Terms of Reference which specify what we do with a Code of Conduct that specifies how we do it. St Mary's PCC has always operated collegiately but the Code makes this explicit and will help new members understand their role more easily.

Looking forward, we are of course delighted that Jack Curham has joined us as Pioneer Children's, Young People and Families Minister. This has been made possible by the generosity of the St Mary's community together with developmental support from the diocese. Jack is already making an impact in

the role and we look forward to his contribution to our work. The administration of pledges and donations has been managed by the churchwardens as it is important to keep this independent of the ministry team. Supported by the finance team, we have successfully implemented the pledge scheme ensuring that the new post is on a secure financial footing.

The next year will see further major changes to our ministry team as Matthew Routledge completes his curacy and Nadine Rose comes to the end of her contract as Associate Priest. We have all been greatly blessed by their ministries and, together with the on-going contributions of Sally and the LLMs, we have enjoyed a rich and varied period in the life of our church. Realistically, as Nadine and Matthew move on, we will need to consider what is most important to us and what it will be possible to provide sustainably. There will necessarily need to be some change. Following on from the APCM we will be entering a time of prayer, consultation and discernment as we collectively come to a view on the next phase in our life together as a church. This will be an exciting time as it gives us the opportunity to think clearly and deeply about what God is saying to us and how we can live out our lives as a church at the heart of the community.

*Report by Peter Dean and Sharon Wilson Churchwardens*

## **F: Churchyard Report**

St Mary's Churchyard is the Parish Churchyard for Wendover and managed by the Churchyard Care Committee. The committee comprises of nominated councillors from Wendover Parish Council, the Vicar and members of St Mary's Church. Funding comes from the Parish Council. A contractor is employed for a number of days throughout the year, a tree contractor employed as required and there are a regular team of volunteers and additional people undertaking ad hoc volunteering.

Matthew Routledge has been part of the Churchyard Care Committee for many years and we are grateful for his contribution and will be sad to see him moving on to other areas of work. Is being part of this committee something you could be part of? If you are interested, please let us know.

In recent years a large part of the Churchyard has been allowed to grow wild. However, with different weather patterns over the past couple of years and changing circumstances for some volunteers, things did get out of control last summer and the contractor we had had working for us for a number of years, ceased to undertake gardening work.

From early autumn, a great deal of work was done by a few volunteers in scything long grass, strimming, mowing and clearing large areas of debris. A different contractor was employed to help us in this clearing up. The work continued through the winter and now the weather is improving more is again being done. Now you can see right across the Churchyard and many people are stopping to chat saying how the Churchyard is improving and access to graves is easier.

Volunteers from Men's Sheds have done some clearing of ivy from gravestones and following conversations with the team at Community Payback we have had a team working for a number of Saturdays this year. We hope both these initiatives will continue throughout the year.

Yes, it can be hard work, but there are also gentler tasks, weeding around the yew trees, clearing up fallen twigs and branches, general tidying, everyone is welcome to come and help - regularly or infrequently, doing a little or something more strenuous.

The Churchyard is a very special place to be and well used by many people. As we have been working in the older area in recent weeks, we have seen huge areas of snowdrops in flower and at the time of writing this, it is hard to know where to put your feet as there are so many clumps of primroses and a spread of beautiful wild anemones. As you stand and take a moment or sit and look around, we see the beauty of a creator God with our Church set firmly within the area. You can feel and experience that deep peace around you and within, the peace that comes from our God, our living Saviour.

*Report by Jacquie Smith for the Churchyard Care Committee*

## G: Deanery Synod Report

Wendover Deanery Synod has met twice since our last APCM. We gathered at St Mary's, Great Hampden on 30 September 2024 and were delighted to have Asa Humphreys, Buckingham Area Parish Development Adviser come to speak about thriving in rural churches. This is an area that concerns many of the parishes in our deanery and was a useful conversation. We were also able to see the restoration work that has happened at Great Hampden.

In March 2025 we met at St Michael and All Angels Aston Clinton, and had invited Sir Hector Sants, Chair of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance, to speak to the Deanery Synod about Parish Share as this continues to be a thorny issue for the deanery. He was able to explain the concept behind parish share and to answer questions from members of the synod. It is hoped we will be able to find a way forward during 2025 that means Wendover Deanery is paying its full allocation.

*Report by Rev'd Sally Moring Area Dean*

## H: Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

The Church of England and the Diocese require each church to have in place policies on Safeguarding, to support our '*working with children and young people*', to consider in our own context all aspects of the '*Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults in the Diocese of Oxford*' policy - to ensure procedures are in place to ensure a safe environment for children and young people, and Vulnerable Adults - in all aspects of St Mary's work. Within the policies and guidance, it considers all aspects of current disclosure procedures under the "Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to ensure safe recruitment of volunteers and employees".

2024-5 has been a particularly challenging year for the Church of England at National, Diocesan and Parish level because of the independent Makin report into the abuse perpetrated by John Smyth, and the consequences of that publication, notably the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Liturgical resources were published under the heading "Towards a Safer Church" which together with other materials provided a template for worship on Safeguarding



Sunday, this year, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2024. At St Mary's we marked this Sunday with two specific services at which I was present and had the opportunity to speak about Safeguarding at St Mary's. A pastoral letter from the lead Bishop for Safeguarding, Joanne Woolway Grenfell highlighted practical actions we can take to promote good Safeguarding - being attentive to the needs of victims and survivors of abuse if they come forward, signposting for them appropriate support. I had the opportunity to participate in two webinars in January/February, looking at "Reducing the risk of Domestic Abuse", and "How to manage the risk within Church communities of those who have sexually offended". These training sessions were offered to incumbents and PSO's and were hosted by an Oxford-based charity "Reducing the Risk". Each of them was thought provoking; nationally, much work is continuing to refine training materials.

One of the earliest letters sent by the new Bishop of Buckingham was to PSO's, highlighting the awareness of reform that is being undertaken in the Church of England, and acknowledging the positive change of culture at parish level. Despite the current huge pressure on the Diocesan Safeguarding Team, we are extremely fortunate to have a proactive Area Safeguarding Adviser, Tsungai Muchegwa, and an accessible Head of Safeguarding, Louise Whitehead. Sally and I have had occasion this year to seek advice from Tsungai – her responses have been prompt and appropriate, with helpful follow-up suggestions.

Nationally there has been much discussion about revised Safeguarding structures within the church at all levels, and in February 2025, General Synod considered different models under the heading "Future of Church Safeguarding". There is likely to be an external scrutiny body relating to Safeguarding, and there is ongoing consideration of the contractual basis of Diocesan and Cathedral Safeguarding Teams, which has been highlighted by the media.

Louise has recently sent out very helpful update on current Safeguarding developments within the church and I plan to share this with the new PCC following the APCM. This update highlights a move to a single complaints policy; this should address the fact that currently there is no appeal process within current Safeguarding procedures. There will be the development of an independent scrutiny body which will be tested robustly – within the Church, with victims and survivors, and with professionals.

An independent Audit which took place in June 2024 considered safeguarding in our Diocese to be robust and acknowledged areas of strength plus areas to build on.

Louise has undergone certification to enable her status to move from Diocesan Safeguarding Advisee to Diocesan Safeguarding Officer. Oxford is one of the first Dioceses to implement this change. This change of status gives the DSO responsibility for Safeguarding matters, expanding from an advisory role to one of professional leadership and management of safeguarding. In this context, the DSO and her team will strive to bring about positive safeguarding cultures across the diocese.

At St Mary's we follow the guidance and good practice on Safeguarding issued by Oxford Diocese. Our current Safeguarding Policy, for Children & Vulnerable Adults can be found in the church porch and centre. We make an annual return the Oxford Diocesan to confirm that we are following guidelines and that we have noted changes in requirements. Making this return has become more streamlined through the Safeguarding Dashboard for Parishes, and the questions asked help us to know that our policies and procedures are in line with requirements, or that some aspects require renewal, or need to be developed. The Dashboard reflects the requirements of the national Safeguarding Handbook 2018 (revised 2019).

The ministry team, led by the Vicar, receive specific Safeguarding training and guidance from the Diocese. The PSO (Parish Safeguarding Officer) last year completed three levels of Diocesan training and is now Certificated at Leadership Level. The PSO has the opportunity to participate in the regular on-line "drop-in" sessions hosted by Tsungai Muchegwa.

The PCC considers St Mary's approach to Safeguarding in the context of current Diocesan Guidance and model Policies, particularly taking account of the role of volunteers and the changing nature of activities in the church. At St Mary's we have many volunteers helping to lead the various activities for both children, young people and vulnerable adults. All volunteers and paid workers have to undertake periodic training in safeguarding awareness under the auspices of the Diocese, the majority of which is delivered on-line. Much work has been done by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team to regularise levels of training necessary for different roles, and the frequency of such training. Most on-line training modules last between 60, 90, or 120 minutes, and the PCC will

consider how to support individuals needing to complete training modules, but for whom doing so online is not possible from home.

The online training modules are continually updated and each module comes with helpful guidance on how to navigate through the course on a computer or tablet, and it is set up to enable users to pause in a module, or to see the spoken commentary as printed text (PCC members, and Volunteers, whether working with children or vulnerable adults, requiring initial or updated training, have already been able to use online resources from the Diocese during the past year).

Safeguarding and Communication issues in the context of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) remain an important consideration, as do compliance with National Guidance on the use of social media.

The sub-committee structure of the PCC now makes it easier to address issues of protocol, and to look in detail at policies and documentation requiring ratification – for example, the policy and guidance on Safer Recruitment and People Management, and procedures to deal promptly with any Safeguarding allegation or concern. The PCC should confirm the nature of reporting on Safeguarding it requires for its regular meetings – sub committees should consider this, bearing in mind their different areas of responsibility.

What is most important is that all volunteers are aware of ‘Best Practice’. St Mary’s has adopted two Good Practice Guides – one for children and one for vulnerable adults. These guides include a Code of Conduct and other relevant support materials. These documents have been distributed in the past to volunteers working in the church community in different contexts; they will now be reviewed in the context of current guidance, and once adopted by the PCC will be re-distributed. Bellringers have recently received specific guidance and training from the Diocese, and have identified members of that team requiring DBS clearance which is now being processed by the Verifier, Anne-Marie Foster.

Volunteers are DBS checked as required, through AccessPCS, the Diocesan preferred Verification organisation. As the APCS procedures enable automatic renewal communication with individuals (**if they sign up to this**), the work of the Verifying Officer is helped. The PSO has recently gained access to management reports from AccessPCS which clarify the DBS checks that have been undertaken, and when.

The PSO, following the 2025 APCM, will construct a new spreadsheet of the Training completed, and DBS checks processed, in relation to members of the new PCC and other volunteers. On the Diocesan website there is detailed guidance to clarify which volunteers need to be DBS checked, and at which level. On the Government website linked to DBS is further definition of “Volunteer”.

In addition to guidance provided by the Diocese, excellent guidance is available on the NSPCC website in relation to “keeping children safe”. The Diocesan guidance includes helpful protocols for communication with Families, Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults – whether by phone, electronic means, by distance or by face-to-face visiting.

Currently, related to Safeguarding, if anyone has cause for concern about any vulnerable adult or young person and would like to talk in confidence, then please contact Helen Blakeman, the Safeguarding Officer. ([h.blakeman3@btinternet.com](mailto:h.blakeman3@btinternet.com))

*Report by Helen Blakeman Safeguarding Officer*

## **J: Children’s and Families Work**

It has been another joyful and creative year in the life of our children and families work. We give thanks to God for the opportunities we’ve had to connect with families in our community, to nurture faith, and to have fun together.

A particular highlight this year has been the launch of our new monthly Connect, Create and Celebrate service. Meeting at 3pm on the third Sunday of each month, this new service really does what it says on the label! We begin by connecting - building relationships between families and with the wider church community. We create, with a variety of craft activities and hands-on fun that explore the theme of the day. We finish with a short time to celebrate, which includes a Bible story, songs, prayers, and reflections. It’s informal, creative, and welcoming - perfect for families of all shapes and sizes. We’ve already had some great themes including Creation, Christingle, Stars, and Lent, and look forward to seeing how it develops.

Our toddler group Sparklers continues to go from strength to strength. This is thanks to the incredible commitment, warmth, and hard work of the volunteer team. Each week, the church is full of energy and laughter as babies, toddlers, and their carers come to play, sing, chat, and enjoy refreshments. It's a vital space of support and friendship, and we're seeing new families coming along all the time.

We have also held some special events through the year. Our Light Party provided a gentle Christian alternative to Halloween with crafts, games, and a message about Jesus being the light of the world. Though numbers were smaller this year, it was still a lovely atmosphere and those who came thoroughly enjoyed it. Our Pancake Party was great fun for all ages—an opportunity to bring people together before Lent began, complete with pancake flipping (not real ones), games, and a chance to reflect.

Looking to the future, we are thrilled that we now have the resources to employ a Pioneer Children and Families Minister. This is a significant and exciting step forward. It will allow us to build on what is already in place and enable us to reach more children and families in fresh and creative ways.

None of this work would be possible without the faithful and enthusiastic support of volunteers. A huge thank you to everyone who gives their time, energy, and care so generously. We are sowing seeds of faith and friendship, and we pray that these will continue to grow in the year ahead.

*Report by Rev'd Nadine Rose Associate Priest*

## **K: Vicars Report**

2024 and moving into 2025 have proved to be an exciting time at Saint Mary's. In the earlier part of 2024, we spent time thinking about where we are placed and the needs of both our church community and the wider community and after input from a number of places and people, we were able to develop our new vision.

This vision was launched in June 2024 stating that we would 'continue to seek to be at the heart of the community of Wendover, will live out our faith by

loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, and loving our neighbours as ourselves'. Our priorities remain similar to our previous vision and are:

- Children, families and young people – encouraging them to grow in faith.
- Pastoral Ministry - caring for each other.
- Engagement within our church community and with our local community whoever they may be.

Since the launch we've been able to make some really good progress in some areas, most notably in terms of our provision for children, young people and families. As a church we committed to raising the money to be able to appoint a pioneer leader for children young people and families; we had a successful bid for Diocesan Development Fund money of £60,780 and have almost matched that from the amazing generosity of members of the congregation who have pledged over £40,000. This allowed us to advertise for the role which we named 'Pioneer Families and Children Minister' and for which we successfully recruited Jack Curham in January. We look forward to seeing how Jack's work develops in church and in the community.

Nadine Rose has continued to lead on the children's work in church including working with David Blackmore to launch Connect, Create and Celebrate, a monthly afternoon service for children and their families (more in her report). Sparklers has also thrived.

As part of his curacy, Matthew Routledge undertook a Mission and Ministry project working with a group from the congregation to explore their feelings about sharing their faith and what further support they think might be needed to help build their confidence. This produced some encouraging findings and will help to shape some of our future preaching and other activities in church.

In the later part of 2024, we have been seeing new faces join St Mary's Church and becoming involved in the many areas of church life. I am constantly grateful to all those who give so much of their time to the life of St Mary's – those who clean, flower arrange, make coffee, make music, read and intercede, do many jobs behind the scenes often unnoticed. We couldn't do without you all and say a huge thank you. Peter Dean and Sharon Wilson have served as Churchwardens, Richard Williams as PCC Treasurer and Jacquie Smith as PCC secretary - we are grateful for all they do. The PCC has met and served diligently as reported elsewhere - thank you.

Our Ministry team Rev'd Nadine Rose, Rev'd Matthew Routledge, Ian Sansbury, David Blackmore, Sarah Frost and Tim Crapper have served well - meeting regularly to plan worship and sermon themes. We are so very lucky to have a team with such talent and range of thoughts.

We are able to serve our local schools and nurseries in a number of ways – Matthew and I along with Rosalind Eccles serve as governors at Wendover Junior School; we regularly go in along with Nadine and Remco from the Free Church to take Collective worship (previously known as assemblies) getting to know both staff and pupils. We also have relationships with the John Hampden Infant School, Wendover Youth Centre where Nadine is a trustee and the Children's Room nursery.

Sadly, over the last year we have lost a number of the congregation, with funeral services being held for Reina Free, Margaret Seabrook, Anne Glazier, Brian Smith and Elizabeth Sorrell. We miss them and all their contributions to our church over many years.

Having recorded the sad death of Bishop Alan Wilson at the beginning of 2024 we were delighted to hear the announcement of our new bishop of Buckingham, Dave Bull, formally vicar of Marlow and Area Dean of High Wycombe. Dave was consecrated on 27 February 2025 and welcomed into the area a few days later. We look forward to his ministry amongst us.

An APCM is to look back over the previous year and to record all that has happened and to give thanks. We must also look ahead to all that might be – and our vision gives us plenty of scope for that. We do know that in the course of 2025 we will lose two members of our ministry team as Matthew's curacy comes to an end in July and he moves on – he will continue his work as part-time chaplain of St Peters College, Oxford and to whatever else God is calling him to do. At the beginning of November, Nadine's licence to us as Associate Priest, comes to an end after 6 years and she will leave us. Please be praying for both her and Matthew as they continue to discern God's calling for the next chapters. We will have opportunity in due course to give thanks to them and to Howard and Andrea.

I am grateful for the support and work in this church that allows me to serve as Area Dean of Wendover and Commissary Archdeacon in this area. I am also indebted to Paul to his care and support.

*Report by Rev'd Canon Sally Moring Vicar*

