

Minutes of the 2023 Vestry Meeting and Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Sunday 23rd April 2023 at 11am in St Peters Church, Brackley

Introduction

1. **Welcome:** Rev. Rich Duncan (Chair) welcomed everyone and opened in prayer.
2. **Appointment of Secretary:** Karen Gees (proposed by Rich Duncan, agreed by a show of hands).
3. **Apologies:** Martin Ayers, Jacky Mortimer, Margaret Sheppard, Sylvia and Ian Rhodes, Chris and Mary Bazeley.

Vestry Meeting

1. **Minutes** – minutes of the Vestry Meeting on 24.4.22 were accepted as a true record. Proposed by Steve Gees, seconded by Lucy Mullins.
2. **Election of Churchwardens**
 - Bev Lazenby (proposed by Kath Bell, seconded by Sandy Bates)
 - Nicholas Hebditch (proposed by Jacinta Holden, seconded by Ian Rhodes)

Rich explained that we can have 4 wardens as St Peter with St James, and will aim for more next year to spread the loads but, since in the absence of further nominations, the two above were automatically appointed.

Rich thanked Val Lynam for all her years as a churchwarden and presented her with a bouquet of flowers and John Lewis voucher. Rich led applause for the wardens and prayed for them.

The Vestry Meeting closed in prayer closed at 11.15am.

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on 24.4.22 were accepted as a true record. Proposed by John MacMahon, seconded by Steve Gees.

2. Matters Arising

A collection is now taken at the 9:30am services.

3. Electoral Roll

The Electoral Roll officer, Karen Gees, reported from April 2022 to March 2023, 14 new members enrolled and 7 members came off the list, leaving a new total of 153. Of those 7 who came off, 3 moved away (Stuart Wright, Peter Swift and Grace Cockshott) and 4 passed away (Shelia Robbins, Charles Teague, June Strong and Barbara Saunders).

The following also passed away during the previous year or so, but were not on the Electoral Roll: Richard Murdin, Jean Good, Tim Mullins, John Knight, Stuart Chatterton; Alan Knight, Chris Arnold, Geoff Wilkins.

Karen Gees confirmed that the electoral roll has been displayed in the Church as legally required.

From May 2022 to April 2023 the Parochial Church Council held 10 meetings with an average of 13 in attendance.

Rich prayed for the family and friends of those who have died, prayed for those who have moved away and gave thanks for those who have joined the church.

4. Elections and Appointments

i. Election of PCC members

The following were nominated for election to the PCC for 3 years:

- David Withers (proposed by John MacMahon, seconded by Philippa MacMahon)
- Christopher Bazeley (proposed by John MacMahon, seconded by Janet Blencowe)
- Val Lynam (proposed by Christine Watts, seconded by Simon Marsh)

The following were nominated for election to the PCC for 2 years:

- Elizabeth Goddard (proposed by Karen Gees, seconded by Steve Gees)

Alison Scobie has now finished her term on PCC. Rich thanked Alison for her service. Rich thanked all the members of the PCC for all their hard work throughout the year.

St Peter's may have up to 12 elected members on its PCC (in addition to its clergy, wardens and Deanery Synod reps) given that its electoral is between 100 and 200. The above nominations brought the total to 11. Therefore all nominees were automatically appointed. Rich Duncan proposed that the PCC should be able to co-opt 1 other person on to the PCC in the next year, if this proved helpful. This was agreed by a show of hands.

ii Election of Deanery Synod members

This year is a new 3-year cycle, so the following were nominated for the next 3 years:

- (Alistair) John MacMahon (proposed by Terry Stokes, seconded by Clive Morse)
- Helen Price (proposed by John MacMahon, seconded by Philippa MacMahon)
- (William) Richard Waterhouse (proposed by Lucy Mullins, seconded by Tony Holden)

iii. Appointment of Sides Persons (Welcome Team)

No new nominations were received for the coming year. The Sides Persons (Welcome Team) remain the following:

Martin Ayres, Joan Lewis, Joan Peckover, Sue Robinson, Christine Watts, Caroline Dunning, Roger Hiley, Morven MacDonald, Lucy Mullins, Angela Guess, John MacMahon, Clive Morse, Terry Stokes, Kath Bell, David Bell.

Rich prayed for the PCC, Deanery Synod reps and Welcome Team.

John MacMahon thanked Rich for his leadership in the church and town and prayed for him.

5. Financial Report for 2022 – John Carter (Treasurer)

If you've read the results, you'll see that we spent £218K during 2022 and received £175K, thereby incurring a deficit of £43K – which was nearly £10K less than the previous year. However, it wasn't really £175K because £25K of what we received into the current account was as a result of transferring it out of our investment reserve account, namely the Church House Fund. So, our "real" deficit was £68K!

The main areas of expenditure are, of course, repairs & maintenance, new fixtures and the parish share of just over £75K which pays for all the costs of having a parish priest (salary, house, NI, training, pension etc. etc.) and this has fortunately remained the same for the past three years. In addition to providing us with our own vicar, the parish share will also fund the appointment of our new curate, starting in June/July, although there may be a small amount of additional incidental expenses.

Of the total £70K spent on repairs and new fixtures, £20K just went on previously identified problems of certain areas of the roof, which was during the early part of last year, around 12 months ago, but since then a monthly maintenance schedule has been implemented and, as an example, during the first 4 months of this year, regular maintenance has been only £1,500, or £400/month. The £40K of new fixtures was the lighting system which was installed during April & May of 2022. Knowing that we needed to do this it was agreed by the PCC and permission given by the Charities Commission, that we take some of the money in the Church House Fund (£25K, as mentioned earlier) and invest it in the much-needed new lighting system. The personnel costs, namely our C & F Worker, is entirely met from the

Designated Fund which is the residue of the legacy left for St Peter's from the late Rosemary Miles and this will continue for the next couple of years. Continuing with costs, the light & heat expenditure exactly doubled from the levels in 2021 but as I fixed them for two years they won't increase again until 2024. As a matter of interest, I had a quotation during this last week of the costs if we fixed the rates now for next year and the increase would be 35%. I haven't fixed them yet, so I hope I've made the right decision! Without the lighting and the last of the "emergency" roof repairs, our costs would likely have been around £163K which is an effective £13K deficit, not the rather scary £63K I mentioned at the beginning. We must be wary, of course, of being complacent about running at an actual deficit for too long! So we've had some difficult times during 2022.

However, I am delighted to report, though, that our receipts increased by some £30K during 2022, those of you giving by standing order increased your very welcome donations (now 69 members of the congregation) by £10K. Introducing social events again after the pandemic of 2020/21 generated further funds as did the renewal of hirings of the Church Hall for both church and community events. We were also able to recoup the VAT we spent on repairs during the year under the Listed Buildings VAT Grant Scheme which saw us receive back £9,500 of VAT that we'd had to spend the previous year on maintenance of the church building. To highlight the importance of allowing us to reclaim the gift aid on your giving, we received back from HMRC just over £15,200 and I shall be applying for the 2022/23 refund shortly. So, to summarise, congregations are increasing again, as is the giving. And regular maintenance is hopefully going to avoid dramatic, unplanned expenditure.

To this end our 800 Appeal Fund-raising is now in full swing and we are already approaching the £40,000 mark in donations and pledges, with many exciting fund-raising activities and events, together with applications to Grant Making Trusts, taking place during the rest of the year. This is to fund the longer-term necessary expenditure on a variety of projects which will ensure the survival and enhancement of St Peter's for decades, indeed generations, to come. We have already banked just over £20,000 which is nearly enough to buy a new boiler to be installed during the autumn. So, thank you all for your continued support – there is cause for cautious optimism!

6. Presentation of the Annual Report & Accounts, Appointment of the Auditor

John Carter suggested that Bob Blencowe Chartered Accountant of 15 High Street, Brackley NN13 7DH once again be appointed the position of Independent Examiner. This was proposed by John Carter and seconded by Steve Gees. This was agreed by a show of hands.

7. Fabrics, Goods and Ornaments for 2022 – Val Lynam (Church Warden)

The building remains in good condition with all the urgent works from our last quinquennial inspection having been done. Steve Hughes continues to inspect the roof on a regular basis so any problems can be identified and dealt with before they become a major problem. There are still some outstanding works that will need doing as and when we have the funds from the 800 Appeal. The most urgent of these is to replace the boiler, retile the extension roof over the kitchen and repair and treat the external woodwork of the extension. There is also an active insect attack in the woodwork of the church, tower and nave roof space. This has now been inspected and we are waiting for costings for this to be remedied.

The new audio-visual system has been well received since it was installed. There are problems being able to see the screen from the side aisles and solutions to this are being investigated. The new lighting installation is complete making the church feel very welcoming when people arrive. WiFi has also been installed to enable a livestream of the King's Coronation.

Graveyard

The churchyard walls still remain a concern with a further 60m that will soon require rebuilding. It is proposed that the ivy is killed but left in place to prevent any further damage. The gravestones have been inspected and recorded and any that were found to be unsafe have been laid flat. The gardening team along with the Community Payback team have continued to keep the graveyard in excellent condition for which we are very grateful.

Goods and Ornaments

The goods and ornaments are in good condition.

On a personal note I would like to say that when I was first asked to be a churchwarden and enquired about what it involved I was told that I was responsible for the building. Thinking about this I realised that although I knew nothing about buildings I knew some men who did so I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to the Buildings Development and Maintenance Committee, John MacMahon, John Carter, Bob Israel and Geoff Ball for all their help and hard work in maintaining this wonderful building over the years. I could not have done it without you.

I would also like to ask for some help. None of us on the BDM committee are getting any younger and we are at a point where we would welcome anyone onto the committee who is interested in buildings so that the knowledge gained can be passed on. You do not have to be on the PCC as can co-opt you on and meetings take place about every 3 or 4 months. Anyone who feels this is something they could do please talk to John MacMahon or myself.

8. Safeguarding – Rev. Rich Duncan

Rich said the Church should be the safest environment on the planet, as we embody on earth the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate refuge. Any damage done to people in a church context is magnified and compounded because of the rightful expectation of safety and the added spiritual harm that results. It is the responsibility of the whole congregation to ensure that St Peter's is therefore a safe place for everyone, especially children and vulnerable adults. Rich encouraged people to say something to him or Tony Holden, the Parish Safeguarding Officer, if there was anything (big or small) they felt uneasy about, and to seek help if they needed advice about possible domestic abuse. Rich thanked Tony for encouraging PCC members to receive safeguarding training, for continuing to process DBS applications for those who work with children on a regular basis, and for achieving a 100% score on the diocese's online safeguarding dashboard.

9. Children and Families Worker Report – Helen Price

Church Groups

Tots and Junior Church happen each week during the Sunday service. Our main vision is to help children to know and love Jesus, by providing age-appropriate Bible teaching in a safe and fun environment. Generally our teaching programme matches the sermon series, but occasionally we do something different, such as our "Who am I?" series in January 2023. Both Kate and I have been encouraged by the children's groups over the last year. Tots now has an average attendance of about 10 children. In Junior Church we've grown numerically too – our average attendance has risen from 5.7 children in January 2022 to 9.3 children in Mar–April 2023 (according to our half-termly averages). Spiritual growth is harder to measure, but I have been encouraged by how the children have been listening to the Bible stories, trying to apply this to their lives and asking deep questions. We also have a growing sense of community in both groups, which is so important in helping families feel welcome at church. I'm so thankful for all the Junior Church and Tots leaders who work so hard to make this possible! First Steps continues to be a place of support and community for young families, thanks to the tireless efforts of Val, Karen and Steve. We also have a bible story and we sing a Christian children's song each week, so families can hear about Jesus.

Schools

As well as our weekly assemblies at Brackley Junior School, links with other schools in Brackley have been growing. At Christmas 2022 I was able to go into all 6 primary schools (Brackley Juniors, Waynflete Infants, Southfield, Bracken Leas, Radstone and Winchester House), and again at Easter this year, to talk about what Christians believe about these festivals. I am able to visit most schools about once a half term (approx. 8 weeks) for assemblies or RE lessons. This Easter, with an amazing team of volunteers, we were able to run an Easter Experience at church for year 5 pupils from Brackley Junior School, Winchester House, Radstone and Bracken Leas, which were well received by the schools. Wonderfully, we have had families join us for Sunday services and other events through school connections.

Other events and groups

Our Superhero Holiday Club in August was attended by approximately 40 children and run by a team of about 20 leaders, including some teenagers. It was a great week of faith, fun and friendship, thinking about how Jesus is the

best hero ever. We're looking forward to this year's medieval-themed Holiday Club. Rich and I had talked about the possibility of starting a youth group in September 2022, but we decided to pause those plans for the time being, until we have a few more older children and a group feels more viable. At our Light Party in October we had about 20 families join us to celebrate Jesus being the light of the world. At Christmas we had our usual Nativity Service and three Christingle services, as well as Bake the Christmas Story, where 13 families (approx 45 people) came to make nativity characters out of gingerbread and hear the Christmas story. Our Easter all-age service and Easter egg hunt was well attended and well received by families; we had approximately 35 children. Bake the Easter Story was a fun but small event, if we do it next year we won't do it over the bank holiday weekend. We also started a lending library of Christian books for children and families a few months ago. So far it has been quite well used, and if this continues we might want to think about buying some more books for it. Overall, there is so much to give thanks to God for over the last year! I'm also very aware that all of the children's work relies heavily on lots of volunteers from the congregation, so I'd like to say a huge thank you to all the people who have helped out in various ways over the last year. Thank you also to the whole congregation for the ways you support the children's work and make families feel welcome.

10. Vicar's Report

The main things I weren't to say were in this morning's sermon – that's one of the main reasons we do APCM after a normal Sunday service: so that we are being driven and inspired primarily through God's Word, by his Spirit. But this is also a chance to look back and review the last calendar year and briefly look forward as well.

Looking back

2022 was a hugely encouraging year in the life of St Peter's. This is born out in some of the numbers that have been alluded to. Most obviously lots of newcomers, with the average Sunday attendance of adults increasing markedly. Also the number of children in Junior Church and Tots (as we heard from Helen).

The congregation's planned monthly giving jumped by £10,000. In fact, the 2022 overall deficit of £66k was actually less than the planned deficit we budgeted for (£40k on new lighting, £28k on personnel – all of which was designated spending of the Rosemary Miles legacy). This positive outcome is extraordinary so soon after covid, and despite the high inflation, higher energy costs and increased pressures on the personal finances of those in the congregation who give (at least in the latter part of 2022).

Praise God for his provision and great thanks to all who are giving generously. "Dat Deus incrementum" is Latin for "God gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:7). We must remember this and should be full of gratitude at an Annual Meeting with so much to celebrate. My prayer is that we grow in depth and not just in number: that we would be transformed more and more by the Holy Spirit so that we grow in fruitfulness, thinking of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." One measure of that deep work is the willingness of the congregation to serve. A huge number of people continued to beaver away on various teams, rotas and committees – many entirely out of the limelight – whilst others stepped into new roles. And I want to reiterate my thanks to those who are serving the church sacrificially and cheerfully week in week out.

Two particular areas to mention from 2022 would be the Social Committee restarting a full programme after a couple of very disrupted years. Also, the Welcome Team – at the start of 2022 we revamped the Sidepersons roll and rebranded as the Welcome Team with a broader remit, also introducing notice sheets, not only to improve communication but to regain that point of contact on the door as people arrive in church.

In 2022's Sunday sermons (almost all of which are on our website if you want to listen back): we covered an apologetics mini-series (science, suffering, only way, Bible reliability), our annual series in a Gospel last year was in John's Gospel, I particularly enjoyed 1 Corinthians 15 series unpacking the implications of the resurrection, And then our main Old Testament series was in Exodus throughout the Autumn.

Outside of the Sunday service, the Bible Discussion Group happened fortnightly for discipleship, enquirers courses (like Hope Explored and Alpha) happened every term as a key part of our evangelism, Brackley care homes were

visited monthly by Anne Mellor and Reverend Dave Bell, Rev. Sylvia continued to take midweek Communion services and also became chaplain of Brackley Community Hospital, and Halse Mission Chapel continued to have a monthly Communion service (led by me or Sylvia).

Other highlights included the fabulous new lighting system in May, preparations for the 800 Celebration getting well underway in the middle of 2022 (Robin Morello agreeing to take that on was a gamechanger) and seeing Helen's relationship with the local schools go from strength to strength.

Looking forward

The 800 appeal and events: huge amount of work is going on, especially by the Campaign Management Team and I am enormously grateful. We pray on for God's provision of the funds we seek to raise and also hope, amongst other things, that it will raise the profile of the church in the community more generally.

Curate: Rob Wood will be ordained on Sunday 25th June at Peterborough Cathedral (if you would like me to try to get you a ticket for that please let me know). Do pray for Rob as he gears up to leave his current church and move house to Brackley in a couple of months.

Small groups: we are considering starting small groups later in the year – as these can be so helpful for deepening our relationship with God and one another. Please pray for wisdom on that.

Prayer: as I said in the sermon this morning, ministry in Brackley makes me keep coming back to Matthew chapter 9:37–38: The harvest is so plentiful in Brackley, gospel opportunities are seemingly endless, so we need to ask the Lord of the harvest to send us and others out into the harvest field of Brackley as his workers, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and shining distinctively in the way that we live.

11. Any Other Business (to be submitted at least 48 hours in advance)

None.

12. Questions & Answers

Richard Waterhouse asked what was happening with "Open the Book.". Helen Price said "Open the Book" has been well-received at Brackley Junior School in the past but this stopped due to covid and hasn't restarted so far. Church assemblies have still been Bible-led, but have taken a slightly different direction. Helen will discuss with BJS how they would feel about "Open the Book" resuming in some capacity.

13. Closing Prayer

The meeting closed in prayer at 12 noon.