



# Annual Report for 2023

**Encountering** God

**Growing** as Followers of Jesus

**Participating** in the Life of His Spirit

*Prepared by the PCC, the Coordinators and other leaders*

*Fabian Wuyts*

*Vicar*

*08 April 2024*

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*Registered Charity No:* 1130757.

*Full name of the charity:* The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St. James, Taunton.

*Short names:* St James Church PCC; St James Church Taunton.

*Address:* St James Church Office, St James Street, Taunton, TA1 1JS.

*This report covers calendar year 2023 and has been written to meet the requirements of the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practices (SORP FRS102).*

## Foreword by the Vicar

### ***Come and See***

We live in a “Come and See” kind of world. We might tell a friend, a neighbour or a family member to:

- Come and See this movie.
- Come and See this post, this video.
- Come and See this game
- Come and See this person, this performer, actor, singer, etc.

We invite people to come and see what we’re most excited about!

In the opening chapter of John’s Gospel, a new follower of Jesus called Philip finds Nathanael and excitedly tells him that he “had found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.” (John 1.46) Following Nathanael’s perplexed reaction, Philip invites him to “come and see.”

In 2023, we sought to be intentional in inviting our friends, neighbours and family members to “Come and See” for themselves why we are excited about Jesus. The *Stable Manners* event gave us all an opportunity to have friends and family hear the familiar story of the birth of Jesus in a creative and thought-provoking way. For me it was an occasion to invite my neighbours and the evening led to a further conversation around a good bottle of wine!

To grow a culture of “Come and See” takes time, but I am encouraged to see people being more confident in inviting friends and families to a church activity or a church event. Now, a “Come and See” vision is not just about bringing people to church activities, but also about inviting them into our homes and into our lives. It is about sharing what God has done in us and showing in words and actions the difference Jesus is making in our daily lives.

“Come and See” is about the power of Invitation and Relationship. It is an invitation into a relationship, for that is what Jesus is all about. In this first chapter of John’s Gospel, we see John inviting two of his disciples, including Andrew, to come and see Jesus. Andrew inviting Peter to come and see Jesus. Philip inviting Nathaniel to come and see Jesus. Jesus inviting all of them to “Follow Me!” Our job is to invite people to “COME and SEE.” Jesus is the one who invites people to “FOLLOW ME.”

### **Prayer for Growth**

*Heavenly Father, increase in number your Church at St James as you deepen us as followers and learners of Christ.*

*Help us to show uninhibited reliance on your grace and power as we seek renewal of our lives, our church, our community and our world.*

*Give us courage, imagination and generosity in order that your kingdom may come and your abundant life be known by all.*

*We make this prayer in the name and to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

Rev Fabian Wuyts

## Introduction

St James Church, Taunton, is a parish church within the Diocese of Bath and Wells in the Church of England. Its parish includes the Roughmoor, North Town, Priory and Firepool areas of Taunton. The church's membership is drawn partly from within the parish, partly from across the rest of the town, and from nearby villages. Its services and activities are open to all, and the church works with other churches and local inter-church organisations in proclaiming and applying the good news of Jesus Christ.

The size of the worshipping community at the end of 2023 (as declared for the "Mission Statistics" return to the diocese) was 160 adults and 27 children. For comparison, the 2022 figures were 158 adults and 20 children. At the 2023 Annual Meeting, there were 168 people on the Church Electoral Roll.

## Objectives

The governing document is The Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956. In common with other Anglican (Church of England) churches, this gives the objects of the church as to:

*Promote in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.*

The PCC's registration with the Charity Commission (using headings provided by Church of England Guidance at the time of initial registration) expands the statement of objects as covering:

- *Regular public worship open to all.*
- *The provision of sacred space for personal prayer and contemplation.*
- *Pastoral work, including visiting the sick and the bereaved.*
- *Teaching of Christianity through sermons, courses and small groups*
- *Taking of religious assemblies in schools.*
- *The provision of a youth club with a Christian ethos.*
- *Promotion of Christianity through the staging of events and meetings, and the distribution of literature.*
- *Promoting the whole mission of the Church through provision of activities for senior citizens, parents and toddlers and other special need groups.*
- *Supporting other charities in the UK and overseas.*

## Public Benefit

The PCC has noted the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit, including publication PB4 *The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit.*

Worship services are all open to the public. The church building is open as many days as possible for private prayer, and is available for weddings and funerals of parishioners as required. Baptisms of parishioners are normally conducted during Sunday morning services.

Pastoral support is available to anyone who requests it. Church members also receive support through home groups.

Significant effort goes into supporting St James Church School, with volunteers helping to lead assemblies, assist school staff run Christmas, Easter and Leaver's services in the church building, listen to children reading and run a mentoring scheme. It also supports local Christian organisations including Street Pastors, Taunton Team Chaplaincy, Besom, Open Door and Taunton Area Debt Advice.

A church does not exist in isolation, but is part of one world-wide church of all denominations. St James supports the work of WEC (church planting), TEAR Fund and Samaritans Purse (emergency and relief work), and Barnabas Fund (support for the persecuted church worldwide).

The PCC also has maintenance responsibilities for St James' Church building (Grade 2\* listed) and the church halls. The halls are available for hire by community groups. The church building is also used for concerts and by some other groups, such as the NHS Blood Donor service.

## How St James Church Operates

St James Church has long had a tradition of Every Member Ministry, with all members encouraged to play an active part – and not wait to be told what to do. This applies to all parts of church life except those where licenced clergy are required to undertake a specific role.

**Paid staff:** Vicar, Church Administrator and Caretaker. The administrator handles bookings for the church halls. A caretaker works alongside the administrator and together they look after the needs of hirers of church premises.

**Church officers:** the churchwardens, together with the vicar, manage the day-to-day business of the church, assisted by the administrator. All financial matters are handled by the Treasurer, assisted by the Planned Giving and Payroll Officer. The PCC Secretary manages the routine business of the PCC and looks after governance matters.

**PCC:** The PCC meets monthly, except in May (Annual Church Meeting) and August (summer holidays). It approves all major non-recurring financial expenditure and decides proposals to undertake any major new activity. The PCC's Standing Committee is empowered by law to conduct PCC business in between meetings of the council. Its members are the church officers plus one ordinary member of the PCC.

**Readers and service leaders:** a small group of licenced Readers assists the vicar in leading services and preaching. Alongside them a number of church members are now occasionally leading services.

**Coordinators:** a number of coordinators were appointed from 2012 to manage certain aspects of church life with delegated responsibility from the vicar and PCC. The aim is to avoid overloading the vicar with too many decisions in a church which is steadily growing. The original intention was that this structure would evolve with experience. The Worship, Discipleship and Facilities (premises and technical) Coordinators continue to function largely as originally envisaged. The Outreach post was discontinued as having too wide a remit for one person to manage, and some aspects have been taken over by forming other groups and teams. The Pastoral area is currently being reviewed, as is the leadership of Children's Church.

**Groups and Teams:** a number of groups and teams have been established to look after specific activities, again with the expectation that they will progress their business without unnecessarily troubling the vicar or churchwardens. The following groups and teams are currently operating: Mission Review Group (support for mission partners), Welcoming Team, Prayer Team, Deputy Wardens, Tech Team, Pastoral Team, Worship Group, Safeguarding Team, Premises Team (including gardening), Flower Team, Hymns and Tea Team, and the Churchyard Development Group. A Communications Team is currently being formed.

**Fellowship and Interest Groups:** Lest the previous paragraphs give the impression that everything is business related, most of the groups and teams work with a strong element of fellowship. The same members may also be part of other groups, such as Life Groups or specific interest groups such as the Bellringers, the Art Group and St James Players.

**Diocesan authority:** various provisions decided by General Synod or decisions made by Diocesan Synod govern, for example, the type of formal public worship services that can be provided but allow a church to develop its own style. The appointment of clergy and readers is managed by the diocese, in consultation with the parish. Payment of clergy is carried out via the diocesan Common Fund, to which all parishes pay their Parish Share. Maintenance work and alteration of the church building is overseen by a Diocesan Advisory Committee, through faculties granted by the diocesan chancellor; this process is in lieu of civil planning procedures. The parish is required to appoint an architect approved by the diocese to advise on and specify all works required.

## Activities

### Worship

There is one service on a Sunday at 10.30 am which is live streamed on Facebook and available later on the church YouTube channel. This service is Communion on the first and third Sundays and Morning Worship/ All Age Worship on the second, fourth and fifth Sundays. These services are planned by Fabian and are each part of a themed series. Fabian works in collaboration with Ray Crooks (the Musical Director) and Worship Coordinator as well as a range of church members

who contribute to, lead, preach, read and lead prayers within the services. Fabian organises these rotas. Church Suite is used to support this.

Alongside this prayer ministry happens after each morning service as well as within communion services. This is led by Vicky Dykes and Sue Lucas. Ongoing training takes place for the team.

The Musical Director selects the songs and hymns in consultation with the vicar and the Worship Coordinator and those leading the service.

The style is contemporary corporate worship with a range of songs and instrumentation that complement this. The music team is comprised of instrumentalists and singers with the Music Director providing settings to match the available skills. New music is introduced in collaboration with the Musical Director, Worship Coordinator, and the Vicar and meetings take place as required to practice new worship songs. There is excellent commitment and engagement from the team with different members leading the praise section of each service. There are also meetings when required with the Vicar and (until recently) the Curate to look at the praise and worship within the morning service.

Sue Doyle leads the dance ministry which enhances our worship and adds dimension to our prayers during each service. Members of the church are encouraged to use the flags to express the lyrics of the songs we sing or words we say.

St James Players have contributed dramatic interpretations of Bible passages to our services to help our understanding in particular over the summer months of All Age Worship and in special services during the year.

Alongside Morning Worship there is young people and children's worship in the hall planned and led by the CYP team and that is engaging the youngsters and it is well received with excellent feedback.

The crèche area for younger children continues to be well used and the south side of the church is arranged to encourage family groups and participation.

This side of the church is also used by members of a nearby residential home. Their support workers comment that they respond well to the music in particular those with actions and signs.

A great deal of planning, preparation and set up goes into each service. A hard working and dedicated team of volunteers runs the various elements of the technical set up, sound, live stream, visuals on screen, flowers and banners as the visual expression of the season or theme, refreshments/hospitality, and the welcome team.

Online Morning Prayer continues on Mondays and Wednesdays at 9.15am on Zoom, streamed on Facebook. Church Members are encouraged to meet in the Prayer Space in church each Friday at 5pm.

An innovation this year has been the re-introduction of a monthly evening service known as "The Room". This is on the first Sunday of each month at 7.00 pm in the Hall. The format is more informal and contemporary with a mixture of songs supported by a small worship band of guitar, keyboard, drums and singers. The idea is to give people space (the room) to worship, contribute, reflect, respond and worship in a more informal setting. This includes songs, readings, media, testimony, prayer and response. It is led by different members of the congregation each month and has been well received by those who attend.

We continue to consider how we reach out to those who are currently outside of the church and those without a church background and endeavour to make worship accessible and relevant within the changing landscape.

I would again this year like it noted that there is a great commitment required for both online and face to face services in facilitating the technology required and my thanks go to all those who give their time to this ministry.

Richard Lucas, Worship Coordinator

## **Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care is at the heart of the Christian faith and discipleship. While we all have a responsibility to look out and care for those whom God put on our path, the local church needs to put in place systems and activities that make pastoral care available to all.

Much of the pastoral care takes place within the Life Group system. Life groups comprise of traditional home groups as well as interest groups such as Bell Ringers, the Art Group, the Thursday Fellowship, Hymns and Tea, the Flower Team, etc. A new poster promoting Life Groups has recently been devised and Life Groups will be regularly promoted during Sunday Services to encourage new people to join in.

To ensure that those who cannot attend a service are still able to feel connected with the life of the church, each Sunday is live streamed on our Facebook page and the service is also available on our YouTube Channel.

After many years of fruitful ministry, Annie Reid felt it was time to step down from her role of Pastoral Coordinator. After a time of prayer and reflection with the PCC, it was decided to form a new Pastoral Visiting Team. The Vicar has approached a few people who have been showing gifts and skills in pastoral care and the team is currently going through the process of safe recruitment. The team will be available to visit, phone or write to those in the church who need encouragement, prayer, a listening ear or guidance.

At St James, we also know the importance of giving a warm and effective welcome. This happens through our dedicated Welcoming Team Ministry and a 'fit for purpose' building. The welcome team is responsible for making the first personal connection with visitors and new comers. They seek to get to know them and connect them with established members of the St James community. Three times a year they organise a Welcome Lunch which gives newcomers an opportunity to learn about the vision and life of St James and meet key leaders of the church.

Anne Tuckley continues to oversee the email based prayer chain. Anyone in the church is given the opportunity to send a specific prayer request to a dedicated church email address. That request is shared in confidence to a team of dedicated prayerful members of the church. We also have a Prayer Ministry Team that provides prayer during Holy Communion and after each Sunday service. Three times a year they meet to review the ministry, get training and encourage each other in this key area of pastoral care.

With the growing number of families and children there is a growing need to find suitable pastoral care for them. This took place through the oversight of our Curate, Dave Wilkie, working closely with the Children Church Leaders and helpers. Dave will soon be moving on and the PCC has agreed to employ a part time Children Church Pastor who will be working with the Vicar to oversee the Sunday Children's Church and pastoral care of families (established and new ones).

## **Discipleship**

With God continuing to grow the numbers attending church, 2023 was primarily a year of getting to know new people, and reacquainting with others. Requests from new members to join a Life Group have been satisfied, and I have enjoyed many fruitful conversations in response to questions of faith and discipleship.

One Alpha course was offered, and run successfully with 8 participants, of which 3 completed only half, and 5 fully completed and made new or re-commitments to God. The expectation for 2024 is to run at least two courses.

Study notes for Home Groups (with copies available to all) continued to be produced 'in house' by four authors in monthly rotation, namely Richard Carpenter, Dave Wilkie, Fabian Wuyts, and myself. These notes have been well received and will continue.

Last year I reported that the number of Life Groups (Home Groups) had reduced by one, but I am pleased to say this has been reversed, and we are back up to 11 groups, with, in total, approximately 95 members. Both I and the church are indebted to the 11 leaders for their faithful ministry, a role which is often challenging. We continue to invest in this valuable resource, to fully support the leaders as they develop their ministry to their group and look for growth in fellowship, discipleship, and commitment. In expectation of God continuing to bring new people into our church, I hope to be reporting next year of a further increase in Life Groups.

I have reported previously that the challenge of this Discipleship role is communicating with church members who choose not to be in a Life Group (for a variety of valid reasons). How to meet any

needs which I fail to identify, because I may not have spoken to them for weeks (lots of people attend on a Sunday!). Please be assured I am always open for a friendly chat.

Roger Fenton, Discipleship Coordinator

## **Children's & Youth Work**

Dave Wilkie continued to build and strengthen a team of leaders and helpers for the Children's Church. The leadership team has been blessed with the arrival of Steve and Karen Sancto. The number of children of primary age attending is usually between 15-20 each Sunday. Recently we have seen a significant growth in weekly numbers of 20-25 children and we are currently in contact with 45 children. A few new families have joined, one in particular coming nearly every week. The program remains creative, giving space to both activities that are more "sportive" in nature and creative actives. Each week there is space for worship, learning from the Bible, praying and reflecting on the story/theme through fun and creative activities.

With Dave moving on, the church is now recruiting a paid post to oversee this important ministry. In time, the person in post will seek to recruit a few more volunteers to help and at least another person willing to take a lead once a week.

To resource the team, the church has started a membership with "Raise up Faith", a resource website that provides material for church and school assemblies. The membership will be reviewed twice a year.

The youth group has not restarted and there is still no provision for them on a Sunday morning. Similarly the weekly Toddler Group has not restarted. The view of the PCC is to concentrate on recruiting a paid Children's Church Pastor and then to create a paid post for outreach. Our discerned priority is to build up on our school link and the reputation we have in the community through our special events like "Fun Day," "Messy Christingle," "Crib Service," etc.

This year, families connected through TLG, Besom, the local school and foodbank were invited for an Easter Banquet. Half of the families present were from the community and the other half were already linked to the life of the church. This was a great opportunity to form friendship. The chef who oversaw the meal came with two of his employees and provided his service for free.

For Easter, Dave created an Easter trail and for the Christmas season we had much better attendance both at our Messy Christingle and Crib Service.

During his curacy time with us, Dave has had a great impact and ministry among families and we are grateful to God for bringing him and his family to our church for the last three and half years. His departure will leave a gap, but a great team of leaders and volunteers are stepping up and we look forward to what God will do with us this coming year.

## **Schools Work**

St James church continues to have a strong link with the local Church of England St James Church School.

**Collective Worship:** Fabian and Dave lead weekly all school collective worship. The content of the collective worship is a mixture of singing, Bible story, reflection and prayer. There is good participation, fun and a sense of anticipation. Fabian is looking to form a team to help him now that Dave is moving on. Mike Gillingham has already expressed a willingness to lead collective assembly and has started the safe recruiting process. We hope for an April start.

The school continues to hold their Christmas and Easter services at St James Church as well as a special Leavers Service that includes a free lunch and activities provided by a team of volunteers from St James church.

Our involvement with North Town School consists mainly in offering the church for their Harvest, Christmas, Carol, Easter and Leavers services. Once a year Fabian helps with the Harvest Assembly and is always available for Christian input where needed.

**Teaching:** The school has also asked the Vicar to help teach specific years about Christian Festivals and occasional services such as Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals. The teaching takes place in the classroom or in the church.

Fabian and Vashti take part in the Ethos Group that meets several times a year to look at the Christian and Pastoral input across the school.

**Mentoring and Reading:** David Jordan leads a team of 5 mentors who have been trained through TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) who are working with 5 individual children referred by the school who feel they would benefit from individual time. Two of the mentors started at the beginning of 2024 having done the necessary training. In addition, David coordinates four other people who go into listen to children reading. It has been a great privilege to partner with the school in this way and we have been warmly welcomed.

**Prayer:** As a church we pray for the schools and meet twice a term at St James Church for a prayer meeting – although mainly attended by the school volunteers and staff members it is open to any church member has a heart for supporting the school.

## Outreach

- Church members have continued to volunteer in a host of different community organisations activities including Besom, Foodbank, Street and School Pastors, schools work, and chaplaincy, as well as in their own neighbourhoods.
- *Hymns and Tea* has been started on a Sunday afternoon at the initiative of Carol Sweeting. It has proved popular for those who enjoy hearing the organ, singing hymns together and enjoying tea, cake and chat afterwards in the church. Thanks to Carol, Dave on the organ and the refreshment providers for this fortnightly event.
- Thursday Fellowship meets once a month. Vicky and the committee provide a varied programme for church members and nonchurch members, but also the ongoing care and prayer for the members.
- The Eco group have continued to advocate for a positive response to our responsibilities in God's Created world. The churchyard space is subject of discussion by a small development group and plans are under discussion as to how the area can be used by the community
- St. James Players presented *Stable Manners* an original "pantivity" (a cross between a pantomime and a nativity) written by Chris Doyle in January – which told the Christmas story from a lively and slightly different angle and was well attended providing the opportunity to invite non-church friends and to raise money for the Foodbank and ACTs Uganda a local initiative providing support for children with profound disability. In the Summer the Players were involved in bringing drama to the all age worship services in a series about heroes in the bible. Planning is now in hand for another original presentation - a Whodunnit for Easter entitled *Bodysnatchers*. The aim being to enable church members to invite friends. Money raised for the presentation will go to the Open Door Raising the Roof Appeal.
- The Art Group continues to meet in the Hall offering an opportunity for those who enjoy creativity through different art mediums.
- Open Church and Prayer Space – The church is now open from 9-5 during the week and the side Chapel has been transformed by Vashti and her team to provide a comfortable and relaxed area for people come and sit, pray and contemplate in quiet and peaceful surroundings.
- The Flower Team continues to produce wonderful displays that add to the worship experience but also are frequently commented on by visitors. More importantly the fact that the team are often working in the church on a Friday gives them an opportunity to talk with visitors to the church.
- Caretaker, Administrator and others: in the same vein we should not underestimate the opportunities to talk with visitors and enquirers to our church, when a chance conversation, the handing out of a booklet or leaflet provides an opportunity to share God's love.
- We also continue to foster good relationships with hirers of church premises. The many concerts held in the church during the year help to make residents aware of us as a church, as do the frequent blood doning sessions run by the NHS.



## Communications

Communication includes both internal information provided to church members and external messaging for those who may be interested in who we are and what we do. Anything internal needs to be written such that it is also intelligible to enquirers.

**Internally** the weekly bulletin is the main means of informing church members (and anyone else who has signed up to receive it) of what is happening. It is sent out by the church office by email from our ChurchSuite database. Immediate notices are also displayed before and after morning services through a video carousel on the screens. Various noticeboards in the church carry other information, but this cannot be relied on to reach everyone.

The church magazine is published quarterly - thanks to Chris Doyle for his hard work in putting this together and for the quality of the presentation. As well as hard copy it is also available on the website. It carries a wide range of articles from church members, and a summary of what the PCC has been looking at.

**Externally**, online media are our main method of communication, and we are still developing our approach to this. The PCC has recently decided to form a Communications Team, one whose remit is to take a proactive approach rather than react to events as they are planned.

The website is the core of the online presence, being the overall source of information that can be referenced from other media. It has now been consolidated and most of the pages have been overhauled. Most of the site contains ongoing information, but the front page is regularly updated with new information and links to topical items in the rest of the site. A "Bible Bytes" page carries audio recordings of the Sunday morning talks, which are posted a day or so after the service, and also "Bible Reflections" drawn from the twice-weekly online morning prayer services.

Facebook is the main online front window and the page is kept up to date weekly. The Sunday morning service is livestreamed to it, as are the twice weekly Morning Prayer services whose participants meet on Zoom. The new Communications Team will hopefully further develop this page and make it a "must see" site for the local community, and also develop our Instagram page.

YouTube carries tidied-up videos of our morning services. Many people prefer to catch up this way rather than via Facebook. It also carries other occasional videos. The service recordings used on YouTube are also sent out on DVD to church members who do not have the internet.

## Local and International Mission Partners

We have active links with six local Christian organisations working in the local community and four nation/international organisation involved in humanitarian relief and the Mission of the Gospel. We also have growing connections with two other organisations both based in Africa.

Our **local links** are as follows and, in all but one we have church members volunteering in them:

- **Street Pastors** (ministry to young people visiting the town's night clubs and local community areas during the day time) and School Pastors.
- **Taunton Team Chaplaincy**: Chaplaincy team members and Rail Responders are operating as before the pandemic and the Courts Chaplaincy is now well established at the magistrates court and hopeful of extending to working in the Crown Court in the future
- **Besom**: remains very busy and are receiving referrals from keyworkers for gardening, decorating, furniture and starter packs for people setting up in new accommodation.
- **Open Door** continue their work with the homeless.
- **Taunton Youth for Christ** have continued to work with schools and detached youth where possible and their work with young people has developed a greater urgency. They now have a bus which provides a mobile meeting point. Kelly Jones is the coordinator and is supported by the trustees and volunteers and is passionate about working with young people on the margins.
- **Taunton Area Debt Advice** have adapted to using more technology to assist their work.

In addition we have links with the following National organisation:

- **Transforming Lives for Good** – is a UK organisation which supports and encourages local churches in partnering with local schools, offering training for mentors and support for Make Lunch Activities. We have a mentoring team operating at our church school. We now have 5

mentors working with 5 young people. It is a great privilege to be actively part of working with the school in addition to other activities there involving other church members and the Vicar

The church continues to support the following **overseas missions**, financially and in prayer:

- **TEAR Fund** (emergency and relief work).
- **Samaritans Purse** (international relief organization); and
- **Barnabas Fund** (which supports the persecuted church worldwide).

We continue to make financial grants to the above charities and have maintained our commitment to give 10% of our income to mission. Last year we had to make the difficult decision to reduce some of the grants due to our own reduced income. The grants have again been reviewed in early 2024 and a small surplus in our income enabled a partial restitution to be made.

Our formal link with **WEC** ended in 2023 when Dave and Margie Whitehorn retired from their role as Area Director in Western and Central Africa. Dave and Margie had been our links for over 30 years and will still continue to keep us in touch with their prayer letters.

In addition we have been developing links with **Rooted in Jesus** – a teaching ministry in Africa. Both the Vicar and Roger Fenton have engaged in this ministry and Roger made a return visit in January 2024.

We also have had links with **ACTS Uganda**, a small local charity providing support for disabled children in Uganda. Ruth Preater-Gillard was part of team which went to offer professional support in 2023 and she has subsequently raised additional funds for the charity.

It will be noted that Home for Good and Watch are not listed in the above report. These were not organisations that we supported locally and following review with the people who formerly represented them it was not felt that we had sufficient active connection to continue their being on our active list.

Jenny Wakefield, Mission Review Team

## Facilities

43 jobs were completed during the year, comprising a mixture of immediate repairs, routine maintenance and small improvements. The number of backlog items continues to fall slowly.

The focus of 2023 turns out to have been replacing light fittings. The major project was the replacement of all the main lights in the Nave, Aisles and Side Chapel (which were discharge types) with dimmable LEDs. Moving the light switches also simplified the replacement of the 1975-vintage distribution boards, which will be done in February 2024, along with various other improvements to the installation. Separately, old and/or failed lights were replaced in the toilet cubicles, the link corridor, tower noticeboards, boiler house, and the vestries. The new vestry lights have emergency light batteries, and permission is being sought to install emergency lights in the church itself, the last part of the premises not yet to be so equipped. After the remaining half-dozen assorted discharge lights are replaced, most lights will be LEDs, with the remainder fluorescents.

The major excitement of the year was the discovery of movement of the stone parapet on the west side at the top of the tower, which resulted in the main church door (below it) being closed for several weeks. The actual repair to one weathered mortar joint was straightforward, but the experience has led us to look at a proactive maintenance programme for the tower stonework. A rope-access conservation company has visited and we await their recommendations.

Progress continues on work identified by the 2020 Quinquennial Inspection. Two items are outstanding, one of which is in hand. The other, some repointing on roof upstands, we will probably leave until our new architect can clarify the requirement in the 2025 QI. Meanwhile our regular works contractor has carried out numerous other repointing jobs over the course of the year.

The gardening team continues to enhance the conservation area in the churchyard, and the annual Drains and Gutters Working Party carried out its essential tasks. This year we added a very effective Maintenance Working Party day, which we will continue with in future years.

The technical team has established a workable balance of Sunday operations to cover sound, projection and livestream, but could do with more volunteers to make it easier to deal with holidays

and other absences. The team is now planning to rewire the AV distribution system to allow the replacement of obsolescent equipment and temporary workarounds.

Some progress has been made in rationalising furniture, with the disposal of 70 heavy chairs (yet to be replaced) and the acquisition of 12 staging units which will remove our dependence on borrowing from other organisations. Several older items of furniture have been identified as redundant, but they have ended up in the chancel which has become a storage area. Once they have gone, the temporary screen arrangement in the chancel can be reviewed.

Martin Wakefield, Facilities Coordinator

## Financial Review

The majority of the PCC's income is from direct giving by church members (including tax reclaimed under Gift Aid), with a smaller proportion deriving from hire of premises. No funds are raised from the general public.

**2023 Significant events.** Income has shown strong indications of returning to pre-covid levels following 3 years of noticeable reductions. Stewardship levels continued to increase despite economic challenges with at least 80% of the congregation continuing to support through regular giving, and despite a slight decrease in numbers was up by 5%. It should be noted that this equates to a slight decrease allowing for current inflation levels. Hall hire also increased throughout the year, and despite still not reaching 2019 levels, was well up on 2022. Increases in Stewardship and hall hire meant that the predicted deficit for the year was less than expected.

Expenditure, other than expenditure on maintenance and repairs, was at a similar level to 2022.

The General Fund ended the year with a balance of £179,079, of which £3,050 were restricted funds. This was £8,439 less than at the end of 2022.

During 2023 the main church lighting system was totally replaced at a cost of over £7,000.

**Investment Policy:** it is our strategy to invest our funds balances in the Church of England's Central Board of Finance deposit funds.

No funds are held as custodian trustee on behalf of others.

**Reserves policy:** within the General Fund, the PCC has designated the following reserve funds:

**Projects Fund** – for capital projects being planned by the church and as a place to hold legacies when first received. There is no set level for this fund, monies being assigned to it as needs arise and funding allows. Although designated for projects, this fund will need to be used for day to day running expenses should a further shortfall arise.

**Fabric Fund** – for major fabric repairs that will occur from time to time but cannot be met out of annual income (for example, gas boiler replacement, re-roofing, repairs to stonework). The intention is to maintain this fund at £30,000, but that level will fluctuate according to demand (during 2023 the main lighting system was replaced).

**Risks Fund** - for maintaining essential church activities for a period of up to around one year should there be a loss of income for any reason. This fund is set at 10% of Stewardship giving (and Gift-aid), which allows, for example, for members moving away; plus 30% of non-giving income (i.e. hall hire and car park charges, over which church members do not have control).

The Reserves Policy is reviewed annually.

At the end of 2023, the designated reserve funds stood as follows:

Projects Fund:	£134,055 (£139,317 at the end of 2022.)
Fabric Fund:	£24,000
Risks Fund:	£21,024
	(10% of giving = £12,137, plus 30% of other income =£8,887)
Total:	£179,079

The total exceeds the £98,146 needed to cover the recommended accounting practice of holding in reserve 6 months' budgeted expenditure.

The £134,055 held at the end of the year in the designated Projects Fund was not assigned to specific projects. This figure has been drawn upon at the end of the year, as has the fabric fund. The church maintains a Capital Expenditure Plan detailing future projects which may in due course

draw on this Fund. The PCC has decided that some of the funds can be used to pay for the proposed Children and Families Worker, but the exact amount has not been determined, pending a further appeal. Similar to 2022 there is no surplus on the General Fund (after allowing for designated reserves and restricted funds).

**Grant-making policy:** the PCC has a policy of donating a minimum of 10% of stewardship giving (including cash collections and income tax recovered) to other Christian organisations. This is because an individual church such as St James is part of the one worldwide Christian church, with different parts of the church undertaking different responsibilities, and also being dependent on each other. Local organisations supported have aims which overlap with those of St James church. Organisations outside the local area are largely ones with which the church has had a relationship for some time. From time to time, the PCC also supports church members undergoing Christian training, and undertaking full-time work with Christian organisations.

Richard Sainsbury, Treasurer

## Staff and Volunteer Support

Approximately three full-time equivalent posts are paid. One of these is the vicar, and another is made up of two part time posts: the Church Administrator and the Caretaker. A curate has been with the church since mid-2021; this is a training post, funded by the diocese. Dave Wilkie, left us in February 2024 to become a vicar in Exeter Diocese.

The majority of effort spent on preparing for and running church activities comes from volunteers: 81 members carry out various roles within the church on a voluntary basis. This is equivalent to at least 10 full-time posts.

The contributions of all volunteers are much appreciated and are essential for the running of services, children's and other groups, maintenance, pastoral care and every other aspect of church life. In particular, the churchwardens, treasurer, and Music Director all carry heavy loads.

**Appointment of volunteers:** where a post involves working with children or vulnerable adults, appointments are made using the Safer Recruitment process set out in the Church of England's safeguarding guidance. This includes having a formal job description, being interviewed with references taken up, and the completion of DBS checks. Other appointments are made using a lighter process.

**Supporting volunteers:** everyone who volunteers has a right to be able to discuss their roles with the relevant coordinator in order to agree expectations, receive support, be reasonably resourced, discuss training needs and, as far as practicable, have these met.

## Safeguarding

As a church we adhere to the Church of England Policy – Promoting a Safer Church:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/cofe-policy-statement.pdf>.

The latest guidance documents can be found in the e-manual on the Church of England website:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual>

The Church of England Safeguarding Handbook continues to provide practical information; a copy of this is kept in the office, on the safeguarding noticeboard or can be found online at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/ParishSafeGuardingHandBookAugust2019Web.pdf>.

Volunteers and those who lead teams within our church community need to be aware of the guidance with particular references to sections 11 and 12 which refer to how we conduct our activities and involvement in social media as safely as possible.

The aim of the Church's safeguarding policy is to encourage a safer culture within the church. We are *“called to share the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. The life of our communities and institutions is integral to how we address this task. The good news speaks of welcome for all, with a particular regard for those who are most vulnerable, into a community where the value and dignity of every human being is affirmed and those in positions of responsibility and authority are truly trustworthy. Being faithful to our call to share the gospel therefore compels us to take with the utmost seriousness the challenge of preventing abuse from happening and responding well where it has”*; from Promoting a Safer Church 2016.

In 2023 we were fortunate to be able to appoint Jacqui Sainsbury as assistant Parish Safeguarding officer working with our existing Parish Safeguarding officer, primarily to assist with the administrative work. This has been an enormous help and we can now say we have a Safeguarding Team. Work has continued in using the Parish Dashboard system which has been advocated by the Diocese as a bespoke means of maintaining Parish Records. We are also now using Parish Hubs which will eventually enable storage of Recruitment and training records with easier access for the team and Vicar.

The Parish Safeguarding Team working with the Vicar, Wardens and PCC, has a responsibility to:

- Carry out safer recruitment procedures
- Respond to any disclosures or concerns
- Work with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team on any matters connected with parish safeguarding
- Raise the profile of safeguarding in the parish and ensure PCC is kept up to date with developments
- Advise regarding training.

Safer recruitment procedures are carried out for all appointments involving working with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults, which all require DBS clearance.

For other voluntary posts there is a recruitment procedure in place operated by those in charge of different volunteers. We follow the guidance issued by the Church of England as set out in the Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance

<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safer-recruitment-and-people-management-guidance>

Currently we have 81 volunteers from within the congregation engaged in a number of different teams and roles within the church.

The Church of England recommends that anyone who acts as a volunteer should have safeguarding training, at least at basic awareness level (formerly C0) and for many roles working with children or vulnerable adults a higher level of training (Foundation or Leadership) is required. This training is available online but for people who are not comfortable with this technology the PSO offers to support their training with in-house sessions as agreed with the Diocesan Safeguarding Manager (DSM). Training should be renewed every three years and reminders have been sent out. The use of the Parish Safeguarding hubs with assist in the administration of this and the Safeguarding team is very grateful to church volunteers for their response which in general is very good.

Safeguarding Training is obligatory for all clergy, PTO clergy and licensed readers, and this is overseen by the diocese. The diocese has been working hard to increase the number of leadership courses available. The PCC members have all completed the Domestic Violence Awareness and Foundation courses, which are available online. All church officers required to undertake leadership training have done so in the past 12 months.

Members of the prayer team, home group leaders and pastoral visitors have been encouraged to complete the Domestic Abuse Awareness Course and virtually all have now done so.

In November 2023 St. James took part in the National initiative of Safeguarding Sunday with a service aimed at helping the congregation understand more about keeping our church a safe place to be in.

Jenny Wakefield, Parish Safeguarding Officer

## Risks

**Finance:** the main risk to the operation of the church is financial support. Most funding comes from church members, supplemented by income from hiring the church hall and car park. The church is not in receipt of any regular funding from other sources, either from within the Church of England, or the government. Grants may be obtainable to cover partial costs of some projects, and legacies may occasionally be received, but such sources do not impact on routine planning.

The church's finances are thus vulnerable to:

- Fluctuations in income from hall hire;
- Church members moving away;

- Gradual changes from one generation to another of members' understanding of their financial responsibility;
- Unexpected large costs for repairing the church building;
- Increases in the Parish Share contribution to the diocese which can be well above inflation.

In 2020, one of these risks materialised, in that the majority of income from hall hire ceased due to Covid; it has now recovered.

The PCC keeps a proactive watch on these matters through reports from the Treasurer to alternate meetings of the council. An annual stewardship campaign, led by the Planned Giving Officer, aims to refresh church members' awareness of the principles of giving.

**Communications:** as the church grows in numbers, there is a risk of fragmentation due to the inability of all members to know every other member and what the various groups and teams are doing. The PCC has recently agreed to form a Communications Team (which will also cover outreach communications).

**Disaster Recovery Planning:** The loss of the use of the church building is not considered to be a major risk. In 2001, the church moved its activities temporarily to the local church school, while the floor in the church building was replaced. It is considered that similar arrangements could be made again. The PCC does not consider that any disaster recovery plans need to be maintained for specific activities; the scale of operations is such that contingency plans are best drawn up in response to the nature of any issue that may occur.

**Health & Safety:** physical risks are managed through the church's *Health and Safety Policy*, which is reviewed annually by the PCC. The policy includes a schedule of risks using a checklist provided by the Ecclesiastical Insurance Company. The Schedule sets out the procedures for mitigating and managing each risk. Equipment safety checks (gas appliances, security alarms, lightning conductor, fire extinguishers and electrical PAT testing) are undertaken annually. A summary reminder is issued to all volunteers annually.

## Trustees

The members of the Parochial Church Council are the trustees of the charity. PCC members who have served from 1st January 2023 until the date this report was approved were:

Vicar:	Rev Fabian Wuyts	Chairman	*	
Curate:	Rev David Wilkie		*	<i>Until 9 February 2024</i>
Churchwardens:	Mr Nigel Bright Mrs Joyce Kirk	Vice chair	* *	
Deanery Synod:	Mr Richard Carpenter			
	Ms Chris Rickard		*	
	Mr Martin Wakefield	Secretary	*	
Elected members:	Mr Martin Bluemel			
	Mr Roger Fenton			
	Mrs Marilyn Gibson			
	Mrs Fiona Hope			<i>From 9 May 2023</i>
	Mrs Lyn Jones			
	Mr David Jordan			
	Mrs Sue Lucas			
	Mrs Sheila Marlow			<i>Until 9 May 2023</i>
	Mr Richard Sainsbury	Treasurer	*	
	Mr Johan Smit			<i>From 9 May 2023</i>
	Mrs Jenny Wakefield			
	Mrs Vashti Wuyts Smit			
	<i>There was one vacancy for an elected member from 9 May 2023.</i>			
Ex-officio	Mr Nic Tall	Diocesan Synod & General Synod.		

\* Asterisks indicate members of the Standing Committee: the Church Officers plus one ordinary member of the PCC.

**Appointment of trustees:** The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church of England's *Church Representation Rules*. The number of elected members is 12, with a minimum of four places to come up for election each year.

Ex-officio members of the PCC are:

- Clergy licensed to the parish.
- Two churchwardens, separately elected annually.
- Three representatives of the parish to Deanery Synod, elected every three years.
- Any members of Diocesan Synod and General Synod who are members of the church.

**Recruitment of trustees:** all Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and consider standing for election to the PCC. Active recruitment may occur when one sector of the church appears to be under-represented on the PCC.

**Training of trustees:** new members are provided with a copy of the *PCC Standing Orders*, which sets out how the PCC works, and a copy of the booklet *Trusteeship – an introduction for PCC members*. They are encouraged to obtain a copy of *A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors* and to attend any training events run by the diocese. PCC members also receive safeguarding awareness training.

**Custodian Trustees:** The Diocese of Bath and Wells is the custodian trustee for property owned by the church, i.e. the church hall and associated buildings and land.