

CHURCH WARDENS' REPORT ON THE FABRIC, GOODS AND ORNAMENTS OF THE CHURCH 2022-2023

2022-2023 has seen us come out of lock down in a staged approach to ensure our parishioners felt safe and secure, as rules were relaxed. We now offer communion in both kinds and our parishioners have the choice if they wish to take wine or not. We believe our approach, keeping parishioners informed, and listened to any concerns has been appreciated.

We were visited by the Archdeacon for the annual inspection in September and were pleased that her report found everything to be in order.

The Quinquennial will take place in August 2023 and various tasks are being completed to ensure updates have been made in accordance with the Quinquennial from 2018

In the gardens we have managed to keep on top of the growth with larger shrubs and trees being tackled by professional people. The pergola in the prayer garden has been restored with new posts.

A 'Bug Hotel' has been constructed in the main lawn area adjacent to the hedgerow.

Mandy Kirk, as always, has done another amazing job in keeping the flower beds and low levels shrubs looking wonderful for us all to see. Our thanks go to Mandy for such an amazing job and her time given.

Improvements:

The two lapel microphones have been replaced with new microphones that operate on dedicated radio frequencies and we have purchased an annually renewable wireless microphone licence to cover this use. This should eliminate interference from other users of wireless equipment in the vicinity of the Church. The microphones are provided with rechargeable batteries and a docking station to keep them charged.

The halogen ceiling lights in the Parish Room have been replaced by low wattage LED lights. This provides greater light output for a greatly reduced electricity usage.

The wooden fence at the side of Frankie's Garden suffered accidental damage and has been completely replaced, including the gate to the childrens' play area, and the double gates to the side of the Hall.

Three faulty external PIR (movement activated) lights at the side of the Hall and one outside the exit by the kitchenette have been replaced by new LED lights.

Three faulty Emergency light fittings have been replaced – in the Clergy Vestry, just inside the Parkway door, and at the top of the stairs to the Song School.

The two wooden posts on the outside entrance have been replaced.

Routine essential maintenance activities carried out by contractors:

- Gardening – regular lawn mowing, leaf blowing, hedge cutting
- Hall cleaning – increased to 3 times weekly during the pandemic, now reduced to twice weekly
- Church cleaning – once a month
- Window Cleaning – twice a year
- Gas safety inspection and servicing annually - there are three separate gas central heating boilers and a water heater.
- Portable Electrical Appliance Testing annually
- Frankie's Garden ROSPA safety inspection annually
- Gutter inspection and cleaning – annually after leaf fall

CCLI licences are obtained annually – these are to allow use of copyright material by the Church for various purposes e.g music sung by the choir, and also for live streaming services.

The contract for the Parish Office photocopier was renewed for a 5 year period.

Routine Fire Risk Assessments and Premises Safety Checks have been carried out by the Wardens.

It was a pleasure to see the Christmas Tree Festival in December back to full force with numbers back to pre-Covid times and over 65 trees. The community spirit was very heart warming and we're already talking about 2023!. A huge thanks to all volunteers and participants, your commitment was greatly appreciated.

The Warden team would like to thank everyone who has supported St Francis church throughout the year in whatever way, it never goes unnoticed.

Amanda Williams and Rob Smith
Churchwardens
March 2023

Welwyn Hatfield Deanery Synod – report for 2022 to Welwyn Garden City St Francis APCM

Paragraph m5(1)(e) of the Church Representation Rules requires the PCC to present a report of the of the proceedings of the deanery synod the APCM. This report aims to fulfil that requirement.

St Francis is a member of the Welwyn Hatfield Deanery. In 2022, the vicar of St Francis was the rural dean.

Three meetings of the deanery synod were held in churches across the deanery: in February, May and October. The PCC received reports on these meetings. The synod received reports on General Synod matters and meetings, diocesan synod meetings and the work of the Diocesan Board of Finance and its various committees. The Synod also considered safeguarding and data protection issues at each meeting. In addition, the pastoral committee of the deanery synod had regard to the wellbeing of the clergy.

The synod reviewed the parish share factors for the deanery and gave recommendations to the diocesan authorities.

The parishes' responses to topical issues were discussed, for example the platinum jubilee celebrations and the welfare of refugees.

In addition, each meeting discussed a particular issue after hearing from an invited speaker. The February meeting discussed the Living in Love and Faith process; the May meeting met the then new diocesan secretary David White and introduced him to the deanery; the October meeting discussed the work of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Historic Churches Trust.

John Butler
February 2023

Children's, Youth and Families report March 2023

Children's and Youth Church on Sundays are running all Sundays during term time. The older two groups meet in the Parish room and Cellar. The youngest two groups remain together in the hall and the age range is 0-9 currently. Rachel

and Nikki are working hard to reconnect with families and hope to see a bigger more regular following.

Rachel will move to looking after the older two groups from after Easter. We hope to recruit a new team of volunteers to join us from September with a view to ask the current volunteers to move up into the oldest two groups which is where their Children currently are.

We continue to follow the lectionary reading, roots and tath resources so we can offer a whole family learning approach, so all Children, teens and adults come away having shared the same message.

Wild Church went well last year, and we decided to offer more sessions this year. We are running 9 sessions this year on the 2nd Sunday of the month at 3 pm. We offer an all-age approach, we have a reading or parable as our main focus, we have activities, questions and discussion points that are tailored for the 3 different groups i.e. child, teen, adult. We explore the reading together, have a small snack together, then go into an activity or walk and look for items. We always have time for discussions and finish in prayer. The session usually lasts between 60 and 90 minutes and has been well received and attended by several families. We are yet to have teenagers or adults as a regular following. This is something we hope to encourage over the next few sessions.

Baby group is where we had seen a real change in numbers, so we have looked at finding ways of reaching out to the community to make sure people are aware of what we offer. We also now allow walkers to attend and have already seen an increase in numbers. The families who attend are regulars and they attended weekly or every other week.

We have started to focus on our marketing as well as networking locally. This is an area where Rachel and I are committed to really work on as we need to fill from the bottom up so we can continue to have young families accessing Church.

Toddletime continues to be our busiest group. We regularly have between 20-28 children attending. We have a healthy mix of childminders and local families, some who have returned with their 2nd or 3rd child and have been long associated with the group. We get lots of lovely regular feedback and people say how welcoming and enjoyable the group is. We do occasionally have to turn people away when we are full, but we now offer to guarantee them a place for the following week as long as they arrive before 10:10am. This has worked well so far. Our volunteer Joan has been such an amazing support and is crucial to us and our session.

School's week in December was a huge success! The St Francis team and Applecroft really enjoyed it! For the first time ever, we got to see every single child at Applecroft in the period before Christmas, either during School's week, or

class visits and nursery visits and we were able to share the Christmas Story and message. We also visited Rowan Tree Day nursery and shared the Christmas Story with the pre-school aged children. Nikki led a Christmas service for pupils and parents at Lakeside School. It was very special. We hope to host all of the above again this year, plus assemblies and year group work at both Lakeside and Applecroft, if the schools want us to.

Looking Ahead

Nikki and Rachel continue to try and make connections with our extended congregation and local community. We have various posters up as well as on various social media sites.

We are working hard to be the face of our Children and Young people's work. We are both very aware that this needs to be our focus for the next 6 months so we can reconnect, rebuild and create more relationships, so we can make St Francis the buzzing hub of our community.

Over the next 6 months our next steps are looking at and focusing on:

- Re-organising our job roles, looking at our strengths and weaknesses as a team and how we can best make use of our hours and time to make the biggest impact on our mission and core values.
- What we can offer and provide our families and young people based on the current needs.
- Continuing to build on our relationships with our 3 local schools so we can continue to spread God's word.
- Attend training so we can develop and train so we can lead and minister to our families and youth.
- Implement and lead events that encourage our Church families and community to reconnect.
- Continue to work alongside the Ministry team and PCC to develop people's Christian faith and provide opportunities for our congregation and community.

Thank you to all our volunteers that make running all the groups possible. Please consider joining us if you feel you would like to support Children, Families and Youth Work in the coming year ahead.

Nikki Clare and Rachel Hickey
March 2023

Safeguarding report for 2023 APCM

St Francis Church endeavours to keep everyone, children and adults, safe and to comply with all relevant laws. The safeguarding group supports the PCC and all the people of St Francis in trying to do this.

The parish is, in turn, supported by the diocesan safeguarding team and the national teams. They provide the opportunity for training and advice on policies. Some policies, processes and training courses are mandatory.

It is important that everyone in our community at St Francis understands their own responsibility and is appropriately trained. Training varies according to role, not only must people be trained but we must keep a record of this training. The Church of England update their training requirements in response to new guidance and your group leader will be in touch if you are required to complete the e-learning modules. These are available on the Church of England website for free.

In addition new volunteers for certain roles within the church must complete a 'safer recruitment' process. In some limited cases, if necessary, people need to be checked with the government's Disclosure and Barring Service.

Alison Paterson is the current Parish Safeguarding Officer, she is supported by John Butler, Tony Boon, Craig Lowes, and Nikki Clare. Denise Crabb has decided to step back from this committee after 4 years, we would like to thank Denise Crabb for her contribution to this important work.

All our safeguarding information including important contacts are available on the Church website. Through the work of the ministry team, PCC and the safeguarding working group the PCC has complied with the duty to have "due regard" to the House of Bishops' guidance in relation to safeguarding.

Alison Paterson
Parish Safeguarding Officer
March 2023

Report on the Altar Servers 2023

The book of Numbers records how God set aside people dedicated to serve at His altar, and all servers follow in that tradition. The only limitations to being a server at St Francis are height and mobility. At the younger end of the age spectrum (usually about 8 - 9 years old) at St Francis you need to be big enough to carry an acolyte's candle up the chancel steps without it banging on the step. At the other end you must be able to go up and down those steps unaided while carrying a cross or candle. All our servers will tell you that the duties are not difficult to learn - the youngest regularly prove it is literally "child's play". The Orders of Service are clearly annotated as a guide, and there are always experienced servers on hand to help or advise.

However, the number of servers has dwindled badly since Covid, due to failing health, people moving away, and several of the younger members finding that their calling is in the choir. We just about have enough servers for the 8.00 a.m. on a Sunday. We rarely have enough for a full team at the 09.15 service,

meaning that the older servers usually have to take two roles, and sometimes there is only one person available, meaning that there is so much to do that one feels as if the opportunity for worship has been missed. At the time of writing this report St Francis relies on the services of 5 adults, 4 younger teenagers and 2 children to cover the duties of four servers at every 09.15 or equivalent weekday evening service. All of these have other commitments/interests outside of St Francis and cannot be there every Sunday. They would like to spend time in the congregation when they can as well. Preparing a rota for holiday periods has now become difficult.

This report is not intended to be 'all doom and gloom'; it is just stating facts. The role of an altar server is to be unobtrusive – the fact that many people don't even notice us means that we are doing the job well, **BUT** more are needed. It is not difficult, and the oldest person to serve at our altar was in her nineties, so age alone is clearly not a barrier. Some worry that they will make a mistake. God never asks us to do something He knows we cannot do, and how many readers of this report last noticed that a server had got it wrong?

If you feel God may be calling you, or your children, to serve Him at His altar and would like to know more, please contact me, or talk to a member of the clergy.

Please include both our current serving team and our need for more servers in your prayers.

Anthony Packer
Head Server
March 2023