

Churchwardens' Report on the Fabric, Goods and Ornaments of the Church for the Annual Report 2023/24

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

The Quinquennial Inspection was carried out in August 2023 and was carried out by our inspecting Architect, Michael Garber, who produced a detailed report covering all aspects of the Church and Hall buildings. Although he found the Church premises to be generally in good order and well cared for, many items were flagged up as requiring attention, including issues with the roof. The Standing Committee has appointed a small working party to set up a project to deal with this in the most economical way.

Church roof repairs due to winter storms in January and February 2024 are being undertaken and will be covered by insurance.

The 5-year Electrical test for the Church and the Hall were carried out. Various minor issues were identified, and remedial works have been carried out. All power sockets are now RCD protected. The Emergency lighting was also tested, and necessary remedial work done, including replacement of the batteries of the emergency lights at the back of the Church.

The annual Electrical testing of Portable Appliances (PAT testing) was completed in December, no issues were found.

A faulty hand dryer in the Hall toilets was replaced in January.

The Annual Gas appliance servicing and safety check was done in August; no issues were found. This covers the central heating for the Church, Parish Room, and Hall and the separate water heater for the Hall kitchen.

The central heating control systems for the Church and Hall have been upgraded to allow remote control of timing and temperature by mobile devices, and thermostats have been fitted in both areas.

The annual rainwater guttering check was done in December, including rodding downpipes and removal of moss.

The project to replace the Clare Chapel windows was delayed when it was found that the proposed UPVC replacement design did not match the existing design sufficiently closely. A design using hardwood was obtained and a faculty application has been approved. Our Inspecting Architect is involved in this process, and we expect to start work on this during 2024.

In the gardens we have managed to keep on top of the growth with larger shrubs and trees being tackled by professional people. We have engaged the probations services to help with garden maintenance from March 2024. The pergola in the prayer garden needs some attention and we will see if this can be done as part of their work. The brick memorial plinth in the Prayer Garden was damaged and has been repaired.

Frankies Garden safety check was carried out by ROSPA in May, and a new delivery of playbark was spread over the area. New signage has been installed in Frankie's Garden along with more wood chips. Regular litter picking is underway as this problem increases.

The trees in Frankies Garden and those bordering Church Road and Parkway are included in a Tree Preservation Order. One of the lime trees on the border with Guessens Road was found to have died and was removed once permission from Welwyn Hatfield Council had been obtained. The Council require us to replace the tree with a similar one within two years as a condition of this permission. This will probably be done late 2024 or early 2025 at the optimum time for planting.

Hedge cutting and garden tidying at various times during the year was carried out by contractors, however in the latter part of the year the lawns have been cut by volunteer effort for which we are grateful.

The Scouts have made good progress in reorganising the Scout Room to make space so that some Christmas Tree Festival materials can be stored in there.

A Suggestion box has been placed at the back of the church and we would welcome your suggestions as to how we can improve our communications with you.

Name tags for volunteers have also been introduced.

Social Events: the Summer Fete took place in June 2023, this was done at minimum cost whilst there were few external people in attendance a reasonable number of church goers did attend.

A Church quiz took place in October 2023 which was run by Rob Smith, this was well attended.

Rob Smith and Carol Jager – Churchwardens
March 2024

Welwyn Hatfield Deanery Synod – report for 2023 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.

Three meetings of the deanery synod were held in churches across the deanery: in February, May and October. The Revd. Darren Collins has succeeded The Reverend Canon Jenny Fennell as Rural Dean of Welwyn Hatfield following her extended term of office.

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.

In addition, each meeting discussed a particular issue after hearing from an invited speaker.

At the meeting on the 7th March the guest speaker was the Revd. Canon David Kesterton (vicar of All Saints Luton and Area Dean of Luton) who for the past three years has been working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers. He first had experience of Asylum seekers on a trip to Sweden in 2016. The churches there had staff to support the Asylum Seekers. His first experience of them in his church was in 2020. In Britain they were housed in hotels, they arrived without clothing, so one of the first jobs was to collect donated clothing. The Home Office produced a basic amount, no footwear. The church hall has been their base for supporting these people. It provides opportunities for activities, board games, filling in forms, as well as providing a home for spare clothing. Having this many people in a hall obviously provides Safeguarding issues. Sometimes need to close the hub, to give the volunteers a break.

He then went on to comment that sometimes food provided by the hotels was not good, or appropriate culturally. This was also a problem to overcome. Other help included providing bicycles, sports shoes and other things to help improve their quality of life. There are some self-catering properties, where private landlords are in agreement with the Home Office and will rent out houses, but these can be overcrowded. Some people are moved on – which is difficult if they have formed friendships. David’s church is part of the “City of Sanctuary” building a network of support across the country to Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Kate Ford (Diocesan Giving Advisor) spoke to us on the 17th June about how we can prepare our churches to be ready to receive financial gifts. This can either be done through contactless giving, regular giving, on-line giving – QR code, or

through legacies. She spoke of the importance of holding conversations with Stewardship Committee and PCC on how to grow giving. National Data shows that people need to be asked, thanked and given clear instructions. People do not readily think of church as a charity and they need help to realise this, when thinking about making their will.

Those who give can be divided into four groups, Regular worshippers, Occasional worshippers and Visitors and Local community. She went on to describe how to use the different ways of trying to improve the way people give. Examples like the envelope scheme, standing orders and contactless giving. On the 12th October the Revd. Canon Dr Tim Bull (Diocesan Director of Vocations) gave a talk on AI. Tim started off by giving us a brief account of his background and how this was relevant to AI. His starting question was "How worried should we be?" He went on to explain how some of the things we may see may seem to be real but are actually artificial, showing different images of people doing things on screen but were artificially made. He went on to say there are seven big questions that AI might raise.

How should we use AI? who sets the limits.

Availability – who gets access to AI /s

Unknowable AI – what should we do when we can't ask why?

1. Failure Bias and lies – what happens when AI gets it wrong?

2. Idolatry – make "Gods" where do we place our faith, God, Humans or AI?

3. Redefining Human Uniqueness in AI, what is it to be human, made in the image of God? 4. When Sci fi

becomes real. Could machines become conscious? What if the whole Internet became conscious

He concluded that we don't need to worry about AI just the people using it.

Tony Boon

March 2023

Children's, Youth and Families for the Annual Report 2023/24

Nikki, our Children's & Families' worker is employed for 18 hours a week on 48 week per year contract. She is currently on parental leave with plans to return in September this year. Nikki continues to lead Wild Church during this time and the occasional YACC session.

Sarah Webb, recruited January 2024, is on a fixed term contract and is currently leading our Toddletime session until the end of July this year. Sarah is a qualified Nursery nurse with a wealth of childcare experience and we are really pleased to have her on the team.

Rachel Hickey, Children's & Families' Worker Assistant, ended her role with us Summer 2023 and is now working back in the teaching field at a local school. We take this opportunity to thank Rachel for all her hard work & dedication during the

past 5 years. Rachel remains an active member of the Church and supports with YACC.

YACC: 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 which are led by Simon & his team of volunteers. The youngest two groups remain together in the hall and the age range is 0-9 currently.

Nikki & her team of volunteer's lead this session. 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. in the younger group we extend this with Bible story, songs and a linked focused activity. We also start with our teaspoon prayers, where the Children write down something to say Thank you, Sorry & Please for. This is shared with the adults who attend zoom prayers on Wednesday nights and they pray over the Children's prayers.

WILD CHURCH: Wild Church went well last year, and we have had 2 sessions so far this year. We are running 5 more 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 an hour 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 coming sessions.

TODDLETIME: Toddletime continues to be a busy & well attended 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.

Sarah & our two wonderful volunteers Cynthia & Joan are a fantastic team and really enjoy providing this session for our local community. They follow a programme called 'Little seeds' which is a CofE programme which helps us bring a Christian message and lots of fun to our Toddletime session.

May I take this opportunity to say a huge thanks to every single volunteer that makes running all the groups possible. We really couldn't do any of the above work without all those who give their time to help minister & spread God's love to our young people and their families.

Please consider joining us if you feel you would like to support Children, Families and Youth Work in the coming year ahead. Volunteers for Wild Church are needed in particular

Nikki Clare
March 2024

Safeguarding report for 2024 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 Parish Safeguarding Officer is now using the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard to record volunteer roles, training records and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates.

The Church of England updated their training requirements last year in response to new guidance and you should have been notified of any training required by your group leader. St Francis is now using the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard to record volunteer roles, training records and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates.

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 stepping down as Parish Safeguarding Officer at the APCM. Cathy Bloye will be taking on this important role supported by Louise Viner and Nikki Clare. I would like to thank John Butler, Tony Boon and Craig Lowes for their contribution to the safeguarding group over several years.

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 2024

Report on the Altar Servers for the Annual Report 2023/24

Last year's report highlighted the reduction in the number of servers since Covid, and it is sad to report this year that the number has again dropped, due to failing health, people moving away, and several of the younger members having other commitments on a Sunday morning, including needing more time for study as they get older. We were also sad to learn of the death of Diane Hemmings, who had been a loyal server for a number of years. We no longer have enough servers for the 8.00 a.m. every Sunday, and attendees will have noted that one Sunday a month there is no server, which puts additional demands on the vicar, who has to get everything ready beforehand, and on the 09.15 servers who have to clear away and wash up after the 08.00 before they can start their own duties.

We rarely have enough for a full team at the 09.15 service, meaning that the older servers usually have to take two roles. 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 passed you by. At the time of writing this report St Francis relies on the services of five adults, two teenagers and two 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.

For many years now St Francis has relied on the loyalty of a few adult servers and more heavily on the willing availability of children to help. Adults have aged and the children have grown up and left home. As a result, preparing a servers' rota is difficult without overloading the willing few, and for holiday periods is now almost impossible. The possibility of only one, or on occasion no servers at 09.15 must be faced by the congregation as a whole.

This report is just stating the facts - we need help, and lots of it. The role of an altar server is to be unobtrusive – many people don't even notice us, which means that we are doing the job well, but the absence of any servers will doubtless be rapidly commented on. Serving at God's altar is not difficult. 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) you need to be tall 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 same steps unaided while carrying a cross or candle. All our servers will tell you that the duties are not difficult to learn - the youngest have regularly proved it is literally "child's play", while the oldest server was in her nineties. The Orders of Service are clearly annotated as a guide, and there are always experienced

servers on hand to help or advise. 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 Revd. Jenny.

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

Anthony Packer
Head Server
March 2024

Choir Report for APCM 2024

This year has had its challenges, disappointments, excitement and rewards – perhaps more so than any other recent year. Both back and front rows of the choir have changed significantly. In the back row, Ben and Martin Wakefield left to go to Redbourn with Rachel; latterly, family commitments have seen Nigel Cox leave us as a permanent choir member. Penelope Dunn and Emily Bolton moved from the front to the back as they had reached their 15th birthday together with Andrew Fennell whose voice had broken. In addition, Heather Pollock and Annelise Apling left to go to University.

Further recruitment has maintained the front row numbers to around 20 but unfortunately, the lack of recruitment during the Covid years has meant that when the senior trebles moved on, there was a rather large gap in age and experience left behind them. However, the junior members are enthusiastic, quick to learn and work very hard in support of the worship. With more students leaving for University and others leaving for differing reasons, we are now looking for Tenors and Basses to join us from September onwards. Please ask around and see if anyone you know is interested – or maybe there are members of the congregation who would like to give it a try?

The major disappointment of the year was the cancellation of the residential Choir Week at Salisbury Cathedral because the nearby school cancelled our reservation, due to major maintenance being required on the buildings. However, this was compensated for by invitations to sing in Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral. This was a privilege and an opportunity that no one will forget. Support from the congregation was enormously appreciated by the choir. Choir Week is now becoming extremely difficult to arrange and whilst Cathedrals are keen for us to sing, we cannot find accommodation as foreign language schools, who can afford to pay more, take accommodation at suitable boarding schools for the whole of the summer holidays. At the time of writing, it has been impossible to find accommodation even as far as 2028!

My thanks go to all choir members who, with enthusiasm and good humour have delivered a demanding musical programme. We have benefitted significantly from the skill and dedication of Michelle Boylan as sub organist/deputy choir director without whom we would not have been able to deliver either the variety or standard of music.

I wish that I could be as positive in my remarks about the organ! We have experienced several major problems this year and whilst they have been overcome, at a cost, I fear that we are heading into troubled waters. The instrument is now in desperate need of a major clean and overhaul. There are parts that no longer work and intermittent problems keep occurring which can be covered up on occasions by the skill of the organist. However, there is no way to overcome one quarter of the instrument not working as happened a few weeks ago! The Director of Music climbing a ladder into the workings of the instrument whilst on the telephone to the organ tuner to solve problems is not really a long-term solution.

The choir, Michelle and I are privileged to support the worship in St. Francis with our music-making and we hope that it will continue for many years to come.

Eric Pavyer
Interim Director of Music
March 2024

Report from the Flower Team for the Annual Report 2023-24

The use of fresh flowers in church is known to enhance the spiritual experience of worship and reminds us of the beauty of God's creation.

We are fortunate in having a small team of people who give of their time and talents to provide arrangements in church but, sadly, our numbers are decreasing and we would love to welcome more members. Diane Hemmings, our leader for 20 years died recently and she did so much to encourage and organise us. Mandy Kirk and Lynn Burling are also stepping down this year and we shall miss them all greatly. We have been a good team and enjoyed our times together.

The observant ones among you may have noticed that there have been fewer flowers in church this year than previously. This follows a decision by the PCC not to give money to the Flower Team because of our precarious financial position. This means that we are dependent on donations from the congregation and special appeals to cover Festivals. Members of the Team decided to do what they could with flowers and foliage from their own gardens topped up with a bunch from the supermarket for the weekly arrangements. This is not really sustainable in the long term and we do urge members of the congregation, who do not already do so, to consider making regular donations, perhaps to

commemorate loved ones, to celebrate birthdays etc, so that we can all continue to enjoy the flowers in our church.

The Flower Team
March 2024

Report on Thursday Lunches for the Annual Report 2023/24

We have an average of 18 people attending most Thursdays throughout the year. Most of these people do not come to St Francis church at any other time. Our team of 13 volunteer helpers and 9 soup makers (5 of whom are also volunteer helpers) work really hard to make sure we are provided with homemade soup, fresh bread and cheese plus tea/ coffee and cake/biscuits. During the summer months we try to provide cold meats and salad in lieu of soup. The volunteers have already undertaken a Food and Hygiene course and in February 2023, all those who could, attended a Safeguarding course. On December 14th 2022 we arranged a Christmas dinner and had 29 people attending. One homeless person arrived late but we were still able to provide him with hot soup and a meal to takeaway. The funding was provided mainly by Sainsburys but we had additional monies from a private donor (who does not attend our church). Thank you to all the volunteers.

Julie & Craig Lowes
March 2024

Communications Group Report for the Annual Report 2023/24

The Communications Group was reformed during the year, and comprises Andrew Watkinson, Graham Bloye, Rev Jenny Fennell, Karen Porter, Montse Day, Paul Dunstan, and Rob Smith.

Activities have been low key initially, focusing on remedial work on the website with a full review and update of all its content, and a refresh of our social media presence, with regular posts on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram. Across all 3 channels, we have over 800 followers – Facebook accounts for 75% of these.

The external noticeboards are in a sorry state, with the Velcro mounting system at the end of its life and the plywood backing (behind the blue composite board) suffering from damp. They have had no maintenance for 6+ years, and the Parkway board is in full sun, contributing to its state. These are the most visible “shop windows” of the church and we recognise we need to address this urgently. Currently, the noticeboards are designed to hold 5 weatherproof posters



which cost around £15 each – thus the reason they are not changed often and are largely generic.

Once the weather improves, and we can get mud-free access to the noticeboards, we plan to remove the Velcro, repaint the border, seal the damp reverse, and affix 5 weatherproof A3 poster frames on the lower half of each. Whilst the poster areas will be 20% smaller, the main advantage is that we can print very cheaply in-house and have a constantly changing showcase of what is on in the church, maintaining a freshness that we cannot do today.

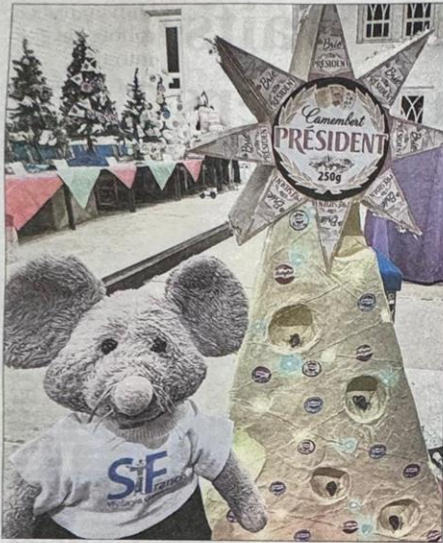
The Christmas Tree Festival had two positive articles in the Welwyn Hatfield Times with good photo coverage.

A new e-newsletter is in the pipeline – more information on this in due course!!

Graham Bloye
March 2024

Report on the Christmas Tree Festival for the Annual Report 2023/24

A full-page report in the Welwyn Hatfield Times summed up our 25th Christmas Tree Festival and set the bar high for this year!



The Merry Christmouse tree.

Picture: St Francis Church

Thousands attend annual Christmas Tree Festival

OVER 2,500 people attended a Christmas Tree Festival at a Welwyn Garden City church. The event was the 25th of its kind at St Francis Church, on Church Road, and took place on Saturday, December 9 and Sunday, December 10. Members of the community and local businesses decorated 62 trees for the festival, which were admired by Welwyn Hatfield Mayor Pankit Shah and his wife. To mark the event's 25th anniversary, many of this year's trees featured a silver theme. A 'Campfire Cafe' was also operated by the Scouts. 'Have Your Elf: A Merry Little Christmas' – decorated by Julie Stedham's Let's Do Art primary school art club at Templewood School – won an award for Best Decorated Tree. The Most Creative Tree with a Silver Theme was won by 'We're dreaming of a Coral Christmas' by 9th Welwyn Garden City Brownies. This tree highlighted the damage to our oceans caused by waste and pollution. Lastly, Funnies Tree was awarded to 'Merry Christmouse' by local social media celebrity Whiskers Mouse. This tree took the form of a 1.2 metre block of cheese in the shape of a Christmas tree. A spokesperson for the festival said: "The church and Scouts are very grateful for the support of the community in making this such a successful start to the Christmas festivities."



A tree created by Templewood School.

Picture: St Francis Church



Mayor Pankit Shah and Rev Jenny Fennell.

Picture: St Francis Church



Christmas trees at St Francis Church in Welwyn Garden City.



A tree created by the 9th Welwyn Garden City Brownies.

Picture: St Francis Church



St Francis Church, during the Christmas Tree Festival.

We estimate that over 2,500 people visited over the two days, with 60 trees on display – many were new to the Festival and it was great to see our local community and businesses embracing the event. For our silver jubilee, we invited trees to reflect a silver theme, and there were some very creative entries.

The Scouts provided catering again, and their wider menu was very popular, with tables full throughout both days and a great buzz in the hall.

The event is the church's biggest fund raising activity and contributed nearly £8,000 last year. It takes a lot of people to make it a success, and I am very grateful for everyone who gave time over the weekend and in the set up and tidying up stages.

In just eight months, the 2024 festival, with its green/eco theme will be a memory – watch out for your chance to be part of it. It would be great to see some more trees from church members – take this as your advance notice!!!

Merry Christmas!!

Graham Bloye
March 2024