

Annual Meeting of the Parishioners Agenda – 27th April 2025

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Legal Notices
3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 21st April 2024
4. To Confirm Carol Jager and Robert Smith in their role as Churchwardens

Annual Parochial Church Meeting Agenda – 27th April 2025

1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st April 2024
2. To Receive a Report of the Numbers on the New Electoral Roll
3. To Confirm Assistant Churchwardens
4. To Appoint Sidesmen and Team Leaders
5. To Elect One Representative to the Deanery Synod
6. To Elect Seven Representatives to the Parochial Church Council
7. To Receive Audited Accounts for the Year Ending 31st December 2024
8. For the Appointment of the Independent Examiner or Auditor
9. Note Receipt of the Deanery Synod Report
10. To Receive the Annual Report from the Vice-Chairman, Noting Receipt of the Church Group Reports
11. Any Other Business

PARISH OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI, WELWYN GARDEN CITY

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parishioners, followed by the
Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on Sunday 21st April 2024**

Present: The Rev'd Jenny Fennell, Vicar, and parishioners including:

Denise Crabb, Keith Crabb, Julie Owen, John Owen, Carole Sharpe, Thomas Sudell, Charlie Sudell, Pam Doyle, Margaret O'Donnell, Cathy Bloye, Graham Bloye, Cynthia Warrilow, Sheila Compton, Heather Perrin, Elizabeth Hyde, Dougie Agnew, Marcia Agnew, David Burling, Lynn Burling, Carole Moeve-Hill, Karen Porter, Tony Porter, Sarah Bucknell, Anthony Packer, Elizabeth Chamberlain, Tracey Chamberlain, Richard Chamberlain, Alison Daniels, Francine Ross, Janet Turnbull, Sue Alphonse, Simon Munt, Clare Smith, Rob Smith, Carol Jager, Rosalind Munro, Paul Dunstan, Jo Dunstan, Fiona Burke, Montse Day, Julia Buck, Julie Lowes, Simon Fennell, Gavin Johnstone, Margaret Hindle, Sally Ewers, Barbara Pavyer, Eric Pavyer, Miriam Nendick, Jennifer Witt, Tony Boon, Pui San Apling

Annual Meeting of the Parishioners

- 1. Apologies for Absence:** Margaret Breeze, Stuart Richardson, Jan Nafzger, John Butler, Craig Lowes
- 2. Legal Notice**
Rev'd Jenny Fennell confirmed that all legal notices required had been displayed
- 3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23rd April 2023**
The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd April 2023 were signed as a true record
- 4. To confirm Carol Jager and Rob Smith in their roles as Churchwardens**
Carol Jager and Rob Smith were confirmed in their roles as Churchwardens.

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23rd April 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd April 2023 were signed as a true record with one amendment to item 2 To receive a report on the numbers entered on the Electoral roll St Francis electoral roll – report for the APCM 23rd April 2023.

The numbers reported were incorrect having been reported as 185 in total, with 101 resident and have been updated as per the note below:

The Electoral roll has been kept under review since the formal revision made in the April 2022 APCM and the PCC have been informed of all changes. A formal revision was made prior to this APCM.

All legal notices required by the Rules have been displayed and dispatched as appropriate.

The names of those who are now on the roll, and those removed since the April 2022 revision, have been on display for the past 14 days. An electronic copy of the roll is held in the Parish Office and a paper copy is also available for enquirers.

There are now 183 names on the roll, 99 are resident in the parish and 84 are non-resident.

2. To receive a report on the numbers entered on the Electoral roll St Francis electoral roll – report for the APCM 21st April 2024

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There are now 171 names on the roll, 92 are resident in the parish and 79 are non-resident.

Barbara Pavyer
Electoral Roll Officer

Rev'd Jenny Fennell thanked Barbara for her report and work during the year.

3. To confirm Assistant Churchwardens

Stuart Richardson was confirmed as Assistant Churchwarden and Rev'd Jenny Fennell thanked him for all his hard work and support, we wouldn't know what to do without him. Rev'd Jenny Fennell said there is a vacancy for an Assistant Churchwarden and if anyone would to be consider taking this on, they could be co-opted on to the team.

4. To appoint Sidesmen and Team Leaders

The lists of sides-people and team leaders and were read out by Rev'd Jenny Fennell and agreed

5. To elect two representatives to the Parochial Church Council

Two candidates were nominated: John Owen and Andrew Watkinson.

As there were two vacancies these two candidates were elected, leaving no unfilled vacancies. Rev'd Jenny Fennell said the PCC decides how the church operates and that opinions were valued, being on the PCC was not a tick box exercise and it really does make a difference to those who are part of the community.

Rev'd Jenny Fennell also thanked those who had stood down for all their hard work and commitment.

6. To receive the Audited Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2023, and a statement of the funds and property of the Council and to reappoint the examiner and approve the Budget for 2024.

See Annual Report and Financial Statements document.

Rev'd Jenny Fennell started off this section of the meeting by thanking Will Brimley for all he had done as Treasurer, as he had decided to stand down from this role. A new Treasurer will be appointed at the first meeting of the new PCC.

The 2023 Accounts (A copy of the Treasurer's Report has been placed on file

with the APCM documents for 2024)

Rev'd Jenny Fennell asked that the Accounts for 2023 to be adopted after giving an overview. There were no questions from those present.

Rob Smith proposed, and John Owen seconded the motion that they should be adopted. All present were in favour and there were no abstentions.

The Budget for 2024

Rev'd Jenny Fennell gave an overview of the last 12 months, but we still need more financial support, and we need to understand the financial constraints, she asked that the Budget for 2024 should be adopted. There were no questions from those present.

John Owen proposed, and Clare Smith seconded the motion that the 2023 Budget should be adopted. All present were in favour and there were no abstentions.

7. Appointment of the Independent Examiner or Auditor

Rev'd Jenny Fennell also asked that Clare Parker be appointed to continue as the Independent Examiner of the accounts for 2024.

Pui San Appling proposed, and Sally Ewers seconded this proposal. All present were in agreement.

Rev'd Jenny Fennell also thanked the Finance team for their continued to support.

8. To note receipt of the reports from the various Church Groups

A copy of the statutory required reports have been put on file on the St Francis Church website and copies had also been available at the back of church.

These included a statement that: the PCC has complied with its duty to have due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

9. To receive the Chairman's Report

A copy of the Chairman's report is appended to the minutes.

10. Any other Business

Alison Daniels asked that thanks be given to those responsible for the Newsletter as it had been missed. If anyone wants to receive a copy, please sign up via the website.

Tony Boon thanked Rev'd Jenny Fennell for her support and leadership of our church. The applause from the those present showed how appreciated she is.

Rev'd Jenny Fennell thanked Tony Boon for his kind words and thanked everyone for attending.

Financial Report

2024 was a challenging year financially, following on from five years of sustained deficits due to increased costs and a steady reduction in income.

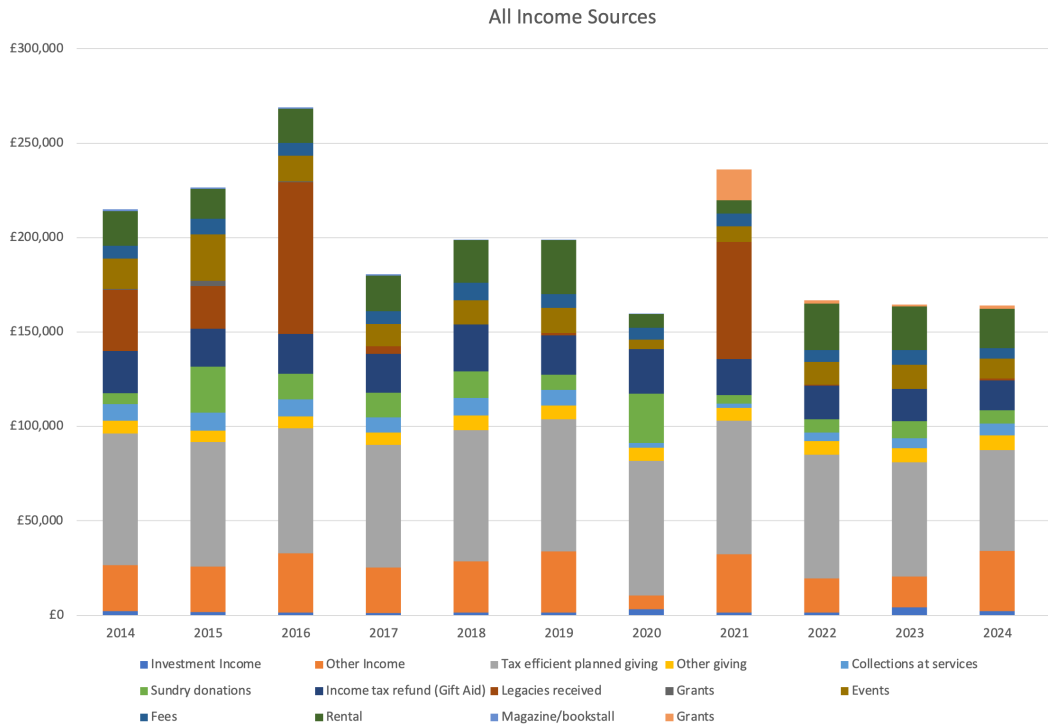
The PCC agreed that action needed to be taken, as previous requests to the church membership to find ways to boost income have not led to a material change, and maintaining an ongoing annual deficit at the current rate would lead to the church being unable to meet its obligations under its reserves policy within two years.

Total income in 2024 amounted to £164k, almost identical to 2023. However, expenditure exceeded income significantly at £211k, 2% higher than 2023. This led to another year of deficit and a shortfall of £47k. This is the third consecutive year with a deficit in excess of £40k.

This is unsustainable.



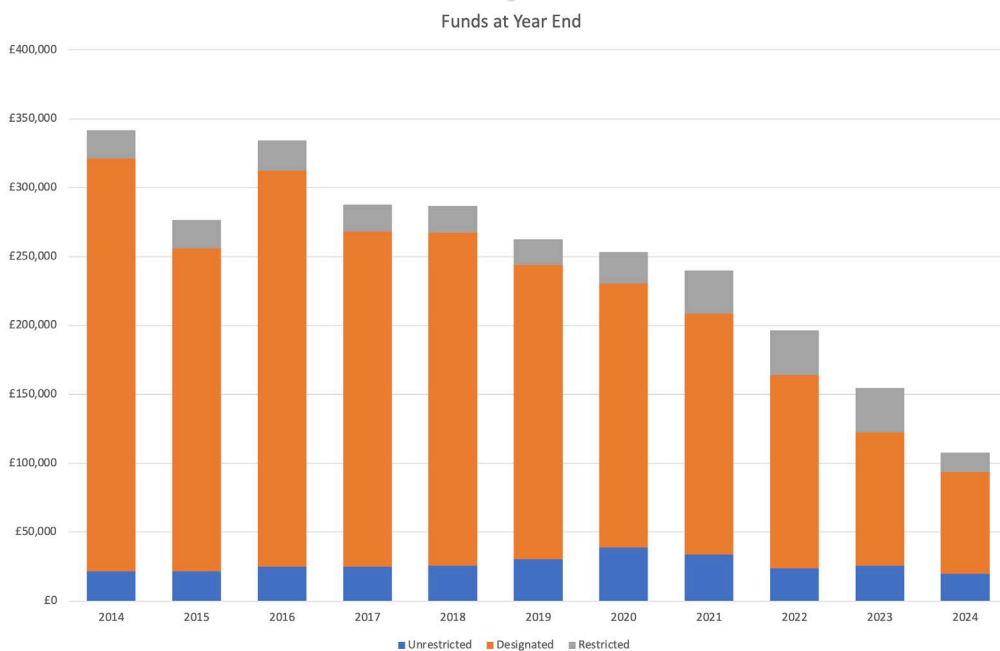
55% of church income comes from personal donations and Gift Aid, while the rest is largely derived from fund raising and rental income.



2024 saw £90k in personal gifts donated, down 10% on 2023, but concerningly down 45% on the average income from 2014 – 2021.

In the same period, our costs have not reduced.

At the year end, total bank balances stood at £107,567. In contrast, 2014 ended with over £340,000. In the intervening years, expenditure has exceeded income by over £228,000.

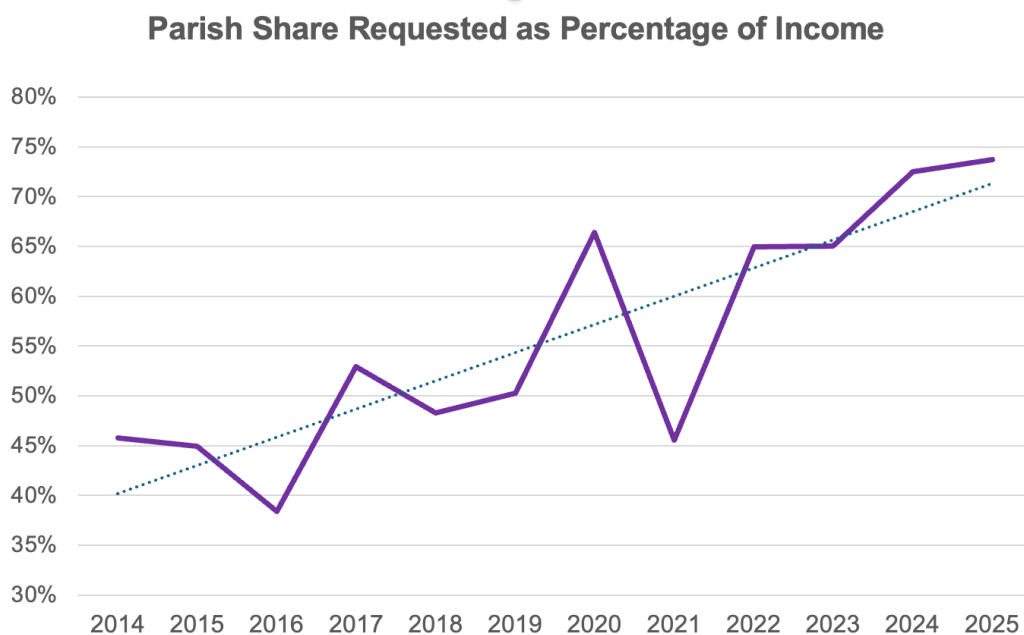


It is clear that this position cannot continue and the PCC has approved various actions which have been taken in the last six months:

The Diocesan Board of Finance was notified that the church cannot meet its Parish Share request for 2024 of £105,708 and it was agreed that this would be reduced to £79,283 in the period, with a further reduction to £60,000 in 2025. A dialogue is now underway with the Deanery to agree future funding as the current metric to calculate Parish Share is not sustainable given current income.

Had the Parish Share been paid in full in 2024 it would have amounted to a claim of over 70% of income. Based on our 2025 budget, it would have been nearly 75%.

We accept that the Parish Share is an important means to support the wider church, but the current share requested cannot be met.



Historically, the church has operated a range of bank accounts with large current account balances earning no interest. During the year, these have been rationalised, and accounts with HSBC, NatWest, Scottish Widows, Skipton Building Society and Redwood Bank have all been closed and day to day banking is with CAF Bank and funds are held on deposit with CCLA in the CBF Church of England Deposit Fund.

This action has reduced bank charges and a daily sweep ensures deposit credit balances are maximised. Use of CAF's dual signatory system means all payments are signed digitally by two authorised signatures. Balances are now split to ensure no one bank's exposure exceeds the Financial Services Compensation Scheme aggregate limit of £85,000.

The church moved to the Church of England approved Parish Giving Scheme from October 2024 transferring all congregational giving to this third party scheme. Payment is managed by Direct Debit with an annual indexation option, and Gift Aid is settled monthly. This simplifies accounting, reduces any risk of Gift Aid processing

errors and boosts cash flow. Migration was smooth, and the church has seen a 10% increase in giving, together with the scheme's adoption by more members. I encourage all members of the congregation to sign up to this giving approach as it is secure and free to use.

In addition to Parish Giving, the church supports Just Giving for online card payments (again, Gift Aid is managed on our behalf), and Easy Fund Raising for commission payments from online retail. The payment device in the foyer has had its value thresholds changed and is regularly used for contactless payments with a Gift Aid option.

Like many churches, cash remains a payment option, although steps have been taken to reduce the volume processed by the introduction of SumUp contactless readers for events and Sunday coffee. Cash management has been reviewed and all cash transactions are now recorded in the accounts at the time they are counted, prior to banking, improving the accuracy of records and ensuring our cash holdings are insured.

The main drivers for the 2024 deficit were maintenance and major repairs (£28,717) including replacing the fire exit in the Clare Chapel. Additionally, over £15,000 of Chris Lake's estate has been held by the church in restricted funds due to be paid to the church in Zimbabwe since 2021. This has now been paid through Southwark Cathedral's connections.

Historically, budgeting has focused on unrestricted funds, failing to recognise that other funds have been depleted leading to recent years' deficits. Going forward, the budget presented to the PCC, for approval at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting includes all income and expenditure to give a clear view of the church's operation and allow for accurate monthly variance reports so remedial action can be taken where needed.

It is recognised that moving from a deficit position to a surplus immediately is impractical, and the budget proposed, and shown below, assumes a small continuing deficit for 2025, with the expectation that subsequent years can achieve a balanced budget. This will be contingent on an acceptable Parish Share agreement being reached.

	2025 Budget
Income	£
Collections at Services	6,500
Fees	4,500
Fundraising Events	12,700
Gift Aid	15,855
Gift Days and Sundry Donations	7,050
Interest	2,725
Other Giving	6,000
Other Income	5,400

Outreach Income	5,400
Rental Income	18,250
Tax Efficient Planned Giving	60,600
Total Income	144,980
Expenditure	
Administration	1,800
Bank Charge	300
Charitable Giving	0
Choir Pay	1,500
Cleaning	7,800
Disbursement of Fees	4,000
Fundraising Costs	3,800
Hall Running Costs	900
Incumbent Expenses	780
Insurance	2,640
Maintenance	12,000
Outreach Expenditure	6,000
Parish Share	60,000
Payment Processing Fee	420
Staff Costs	32,880
Upkeep of Services	3,000
Utility Costs	10,320
Total Expenditure	148,140
Net Income	(3,160)

The budget assumes no major additional expenditure, but increases the resources for maintenance so we can start to address some of the long-standing issues that are driving additional costs.

I hope that this budget is a worst case scenario, and we can see greater income, continuing cost control and a move towards more stable finances and long-term financial security.

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.

Deanery Synod Report 2024

The year brought several significant personnel changes across the deanery. Aled Lloyd Owen joined as the new Lay Chair, while Rev Andy Gardner retired from St. John's South Hatfield and was succeeded by Rev Laura Bechervaise. The deanery welcomed Rev Sara and Rev Indira Broschat to St. Mary's North Mymms and St. Etheldreda with St. Luke's respectively, while Christie Gilfeather was licensed as Team Vicar at Codicote church. Bishop Alan returned to work mid-year after successful surgery, and Archdeacon Janet completed her sabbatical. The deanery also celebrated personal milestones, including the birth of Rev'd Emma's baby boy.

Throughout the year, the Synod hosted several impactful presentations addressing key areas of church life and community service. In March, Rev Ruth Barr shared valuable insights on creating inclusive environments for hearing-impaired congregants, particularly timely as her church prepared to welcome a profoundly deaf curate. The Alban Way project, presented by Rachel Drury, outlined important initiatives for youth engagement, including programs for Year 6 students and young adults aged 18-35, featuring residential weekends and pilgrimages on the Camino way.

The June meeting highlighted the Dispute Advisory Service, with Suzanne Clackson and Corinne Lewis explaining their confidential support system for managing church-related conflicts through four front-line advisors. Later in the year, Catherine and Stephen Jupp presented their charity, Furniture Friends, which provides essential furniture to those in need through a network of 22 volunteers, working closely with social workers and clergy.

Significant organizational developments included the restructuring of the Pastoral Committee, which established a new communication system through WhatsApp and sought representatives from three deanery areas. The Standing Committee retained responsibility for grants, while pastoral matters were handled separately. The deanery successfully implemented a shared Lent group centred around an Art Exhibition at the Focolare centre and began developing a Knowledge Hub to share policies and building project information.

Looking ahead to 2025, designated as the Diocesan Year of Spiritual Renewal and Wellbeing, the diocese has planned a comprehensive program of events including quiet days, pilgrimages, and retreats. Elections for Diocesan Synod representatives addressed six clergy and five lay vacancies, while the Church of England provided resources for engagement with the general election period through their "Pray Your Part" initiative.

Throughout the year, attendance at meetings remained steady, with particularly strong lay representation. The deanery maintained its focus on safeguarding compliance and training, while developing new initiatives to encourage inter-church

visits and strengthen community bonds. These developments reflect a commitment to serving both church members and the wider community, while adapting to changing needs and circumstances.

The year's activities and changes demonstrate the deanery's ongoing dedication to pastoral care, community support, and spiritual growth, while laying strong foundations for future development and engagement.

CHURCH WARDENS' REPORT ON THE FABRIC, GOODS AND ORNAMENTS OF THE CHURCH 2024-2025

An annual Deanery inspection by Fr Darren Collins took place in September and he was pleased, and his report found everything to be in order.

Church roof repairs due to winter storms in January 2024 were covered by insurance.

The Quinquennial Inspection took place in August 2023. The resulting report identified several tasks to be done urgently, some being minor repairs to the roof. The repairs to the main Church roof have been completed, the Hall roof work remains to be done. It should be noted that the contractor reported that the roof (in common with many other roofs in the town) is not in good condition and that further repair works would soon be necessary. We are currently looking at whether complete replacement of the roof would be a sensible long-term strategy as opposed to spending money on ever increasing repairs. We are also investigating the possibility of applying for grants.

In the gardens we have managed to keep on top of the growth with the support of the probation services who are now helping out on a regular basis since March 2024. The pergola in the prayer garden needs some attention and we will see if this can be done as part of the work.

Improvements:

New bins have been installed in Frankie's Garden (thanks to Craig Lowes and his group). There has been a huge reduction in the amount of litter in the garden and general disturbance in this area.

In the warmer months we had a new development in another area of the garden in the form of a man regularly sitting on the bench near the cross. A substantial amount of litter including beer cans collected around the bench. To make this area less hidden the trees and hedge were cut back. This has in the most part stopped during the wet and cold winter months.

The usual annual servicing and safety check of gas appliances was carried out, no problems were found. This covers the central heating for the Church, Parish Room, and Hall and also the separate water heater for the Hall kitchen sink taps.

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

Suggestion box placed at the back of the church since February 2024 – not widely used but it is checked regularly, and it may be worth promoting it again.

'Garden Party Cream Tea' October 2024 – low cost church get together before Frankie's at 5 was a huge success and we raised £234

Christmas Tree Festival in December 62 trees. The community spirit was very heart warming and already talking about 2025. A huge thanks to all volunteers and participants, your commitment was greatly appreciated.

Church quiz on 30th September 2024 run by the Dunstan's and again in March 2025.

St Francis Talent Show on 9th November 2024 – we need to decide if we would run this event again.

The hot water urn in the kitchen was serviced in September 2024 by Stephen Long at J&P Vending.

September 2024 – leak in the cellar due to heavy rain. Rainwater downpipe/hopper blocked causing rainwater to pour down into the cellar via a disused but not sealed manhole cover above an old coal shaft.

December 2024 – water heater that supplies kitchen taps not working. Repair scheduled in January 2025.

Verger's room clear out still on the cards for 2025.

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

Frankies Garden safety check was carried out by ROSPA in May, and a new delivery of playbark was spread over the area in July 2024.

The brick memorial plinth in the Prayer Garden was damaged and has been repaired.

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 faculty has been granted to replace the Clare Chapel windows and external door. The first phase of the work- a new external door and door surround together with a concrete access ramp - has been completed.

The work to replace the windows has been delayed but we are now able to use money left to us to complete this work. We are granted 30 months from February 2024 to complete the project.

Christmas Tree Festival



7 and 8 December 2024 saw the arrival of storm Darragh in the UK, coinciding with the Christmas Tree Festival.

Coincidentally, the theme was “our beautiful planet” with many trees focusing on climate change as part of their designs. We didn’t expect this theme to extend to the leak in the hall roof or the 50mph wind battering outside.

Despite the horrendous weather, 64 trees were set up, and over 2,000 people visited. The Scouts did their best ever catering, with very positive feedback.

The festival printed programme was fully funded by advertising, allowing all promotional materials to be produced at no cost. The total cost to the church for the weekend was just heating, and extra toilet roll! This cost control, together with some changes in pricing, led to an income of nearly £10,000 for church funds.

Ahead of the event, the Knit, Hook and Stitch group arranged for a post box topper to advertise the event on the corner of Guessens Road.

It looked great and survived the wind and rain!

The mayor and our new MP both attended spending a lot of time looking at the trees and talking to visitors. The choir did a great a capella set of carols.



MP Andrew Lewin with the funniest tree winner, and Craig Lowes’ double runner up entry!

The event is back this year, on 6th and 7th December – the theme will be “90”. More details will be available in May.

Communications Team

Getting our message out to the wider community is a key part of mission and outreach.

During 2024 we've been working at improving how we do this, and how we engage with our congregation and the community around us. There's plenty more we can do, but we've made a good start, with activities including:

Launch of the **digital newsletter** by Matthew Dunstan – some great content including faith journeys by some of our members

More use of **social media** in a coordinated manner – followers vary widely by channel, with X (formerly Twitter) 87, Instagram 147 and Facebook 627.

We've reviewed use of our **internal notice boards** to reduce clutter and duplication and give clearer messaging. Next on the list is the outside poster frame by the entrance door.

The tired Velcro **noticeboard** was removed last July and replaced by a new timeless board with 5 weatherproof A3 poster frames. This allows us to keep it up to date and print content in house, whereas before the A2 posters needed to be printed professionally at a cost of £15 each. We have a major cost saving and the ability to update our external shop window easily.



Google Streetview of the new signage

The Guessens Road sign will be removed once the ground is dry enough to access it. It suffers badly from tree moisture, and the hedges obscure it for most of the year between cuts.

We're still tinkering with the **pew leaflet**, as we want it to cover the whole week, but to reduce print costs at the same time.

The **website** has been reviewed and much out of date material removed.

There's still a lot to do!

Eco Church Committee
Report to APCM April 2025

On 28th of March 2024 we were told that we had achieved the Eco Church 'Silver' Award. This had followed a year of increased focus on environmental issues and a lot of hard work by the Eco Church Committee and many more members of the congregation.

The Eco Church Programme is a scheme run by A Rocha UK. As part of this, churches might choose to undertake an independent assessment to determine how effective they are on the way they care for God's creation. Depending on how they are scored, they might obtain an Award. There are three different possible awards (Bronze, Silver, or Gold).

At St Francis Church we have always championed environmental principles and when we heard about this programme, the PCC made a formal commitment to improving the environmental credentials of our church. We started the first assessment in 2022, gaining a Bronze Award in March 2023. The programme offered ideas and inspiration which meant a renewed focus for us: we formed an Eco Church Committee, reporting to the PCC monthly. We looked at the resources provided by the Eco Church organization to help churches make improvements and followed some of the specific suggestions to become a more ecofriendly church. Some of these initiatives included: dedicating worship, prayer and teaching time to caring for God's Earth, improving on our energy consumption in various areas, encouraging waste reduction and recycling, and looking after the wildlife in our gardens.

The Eco Church assessment is based on a score system. You can score up to 1,200 points. Points are given for lots of different reasons. However, to gain an award you have to score high on every one of the predetermined areas: Worship, Buildings, Land, Community Engagement, and Individual Lifestyles. In March, the Eco Church Committee felt that there was a chance of obtaining Silver, following the work done in the previous 12 months. We were very pleased to learn that after the reassessment we had obtained enough points to gain an overall Silver Award, and even a Gold Award in two areas (Worship and Land).

St Francis is one of the only 16 churches in the Dioceses of St Albans who has received the Silver Award.

Following the award, the Committee continued to work to maintain the newly acquired status, and with a focus on the following areas:

- Reviewing the Environmental Policy of the PCC with the aim of submitting recommendations for amendments, if any, to the PCC.
- Monitoring improvements that have been made to ensure that they continue to be effective.

- Specific areas of work during the last year:

Printing

Revising the printed pew leaflet to minimise paper usage

Use QR codes, and screen displays, to help people access information online, rather than printing, where feasible.

Flowers

Consider using donations to purchase more permanent displays, pot plants, annual bulbs and seeds, moving away from cut flowers.

Charities

Choose Eco/Fair Trade charities for consideration when decisions are made regarding Charitable donations from the Church.

Eco information at Events

Eco Committee had an (unmanned) promotional Eco stall at the Fete.

Eco Committee entered a tree to the Christmas Tree Festival

Encourage purchase of Fair Trade wine for events incl Concert Club.

Flora & Fauna

Survey sheets were posted up in the Porch for people to record birds, animals, and plants identified in the Church grounds.

Comms Group

Build on synergies between Eco Group and Comms Group.

Continue to maintain an Eco Church page on the website.

Heating Controls

The Church and Hall heating control systems were modified to allow remote access. This allows a simple process to vary the heating programmer times to suit the scheduled activities on a daily basis in both locations, thereby minimising energy wastage.

SR February 2025

Flower Team Report for year 2024/2025

Why do we have flowers in church? They symbolise the presence of God and reflect the beauty of his creation and we also hope they create an inviting and welcoming atmosphere during worship and signify the keeping of the seasons.

Here at St Francis, we have a team of seven people, generally working in pairs, who arrange flowers and foliage during the year, Lent and Advent excepted. As explained in last year's report we receive no allocated money and so are dependant on donations from members of the congregation. We are very grateful to those of you who have signed up on the list in the porch to provide flowers for specific dates, to celebrate a special occasion or to remember a loved member of your family or friend. These are acknowledged in the pew leaflet. In addition, we make special appeals for flowers at Easter, Harvest and Christmas and these are always gratefully received. Without your ongoing support we could not continue with weekly flowers.

During the year, teams of us have arranged flowers for the funerals/thanksgiving services for much loved members of our congregation, Vi Shannon, Kay Pearson, Les Hyde and Judith Claxton. It gave us an opportunity to remember our friends and, we hope, enhance the appearance of the church building for families and visitors. Kay and Judith were both members of our flower team for very many years.

We are very grateful to Julie Lowes and Claire Meola who have kept us in order during the year and for the support of Pui San Apling. If anyone would like to join our happy team, we should make you very welcome and promise that you would not be dropped in at the deep end. All help provided. Please consider it!

The Flower Team

Report on St Francis Church Gardens April 2024 – April 2025

A lot of work has gone into improving the look of the church gardens over the last year, despite the lack of volunteers to help. As indicated in the Eco Church report, plans have been produced and were implemented for the maintenance of the hedges and grassy areas as well as the pruning of the roses, wisteria and other shrubs. These included allowance for legislation and good ecological practice. Once again, we undertook 'No Mow May', thus ensuring that all the lawns' grasses had a chance to flower and seed, helping the wildlife that relies on them for sustenance. Hedge cutting took place outside the Bird Nesting Season of 1st March to 31st July, thus ensuring that there was no risk of disturbing a nesting bird, in compliance with legislation. The grassy area of the Car Park and a 1 metre strip around the Garden of Remembrance and the field of Frankie's Garden were left, as in recent years, for wildflowers to develop, blossom and seed for the benefit of the gardens' wildlife. In all of this we were greatly helped by teams from the Community Payback Scheme, provided by arrangement with the Probation Office. In addition to lawn mowing and hedge cutting these teams cleared all of the church paths of weeds, trimmed all the lawn edges, cut back the laurels adjacent to Churchfield House, helped with the pruning of shrubs and other plants, and generally ensured that the church grounds were kept neat and tidy, and there have been a number of positive comments from both church members and passers-by.

Over the last year 5 bird nesting boxes have been donated, 3 of which were in place for last Spring's nesting season, and one of these provided a home where a family of blue tits was raised. It is hoped that all of the boxes will be in use this year. For the third year running clear evidence was noted in the summer that the church hedgehog house had provided a snug place for a hedgehog to hibernate over the winter, and initial signs are that it has been occupied again this winter. A Wildlife Survey was posted on a noticeboard in the church porch. Unfortunately, this was not well used, and it is hoped that one posted this year will have better usage. If successful, the results will be made available to national surveys.

Report on the Altar Servers 2024 - 2025

Sadly, this report once again highlights the lack of servers, although the number of the younger servers increased by one when Calum Burke joined us at Easter 2024. However, this is offset by the fact that all the younger members have other commitments on a Sunday morning, including needing more time for study as they get older. There have not been enough servers for every Sunday at 8.00 a.m. for well over a year now, 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 8.00 before they can start their own duties.

We only have enough servers for a full team at the 09.15 service on average about once a month now, meaning that the older servers usually have to take two roles. Sometimes there is only one person available, something which used to be considered unacceptable at St Francis but is rapidly becoming normal. It means that there is so much to do that the server feels as if the opportunity for worship has passed them by. At the time of writing this report St Francis relies on the services of 5 adults, 3 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 outside of St Francis and cannot be there every Sunday. They would like to spend time in the congregation when they can as well.

All our adult servers have completed the necessary Church of England Safeguarding training, and at the beginning of the year also completed the Awareness of Domestic Abuse training, which has become mandatory too.

St Francis has relied on the loyalty of a few adult servers and more heavily on the willing availability of children to help for far too long. The adults continue to grow older, and the children have grown up and left home. As a result, preparing a servers' rota is very difficult without overloading the willing few, and for holiday periods is virtually impossible. The possibility of only one, or on occasion no servers at 09.15 must be faced by the congregation as a whole. By the time you read this report the post of vicar at St Francis will be in vacancy, and the church will be relying on a number of visiting clergy to take services. Not all of these will be used to St. Francis, the way things are done or where things are kept. They will rely heavily on the altar servers for help and guidance, but there may be none to give it. What will happen then? Yes, they will do their best, but the service may not be exactly what the congregation is used to.

Could you help? 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 one of the other adult servers.

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

Anthony Packer
Head Server

Thursday Lunches

We have an average of 15 people attending most Thursdays throughout the year. Most of these people do not come to St Francis church at any other time and welcome the opportunity to meet other people in a warm and welcoming environment.

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. We sometimes have special occasion lunches of bacon rolls or beef burgers, which go down very well. During the summer months we try to provide cold meats and salad in lieu of soup.

We also have 2 willing volunteers who set up the tables and chairs plus unloading and loading the dishwasher. Some of the attendees are willing helpers in putting tables and chairs away at the end of the lunch - for which we are grateful.

All volunteers have already undertaken a Food and Hygiene course and Safeguarding training, and a Risk Assessment has been done.

On December 12th 2024 we arranged a Christmas dinner attend by 36 people. It was a great success and went on until late in the afternoon. The funding was provided partly by Sainsburys but we had additional monies from two private donors (neither of them attend our church). The Christmas Lunch was run by our dedicated team of volunteers, who prepared all the vegetables, cooked turkeys and set the festive tables. For many this was their only Christmas Dinner so it was really appreciated.

THANK YOU to all the volunteers.

Craig and I have decided to step down from running Thursday Lunches at the end of 2024 (after running it for 8 years) and have 'passed the baton' over to Clare Smith (& Rob!).

Julie & Craig Lowes