



PARISH OF ABINGDON
(St Helen's -- St Michael & All Angels' - St Nicolas')

ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHONERS & ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING
To be held on Thursday 8 May 2025
in St Michael's Church

AGENDA

ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHONERS 7:00pm

1. Minutes of the meeting on Thursday 18 April 2024 (*attached p2*)
2. Resolution:
To suspend, in the Parish of Abingdon on Thames, the automatic disqualification of a member for the office of Churchwarden following six consecutive years of service.
This resolution may be rescinded at any future Annual Meeting of Parishoners
3. Election of six churchwardens, noting nominations by the Annual District Church Meetings (ADCMs)

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING (APCM) 7:15pm

1. Opening prayer
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of the APCM held on Thursday 18 April 2024 (*attached*)
4. Matters arising
5. Notification of any other business
6. Report on the 2025 full revision of the Electoral Roll (*Kate Burland*)
7. Election of representatives of the laity (as nominated by ADCMs) to the PCC
8. Annual report on activities of the Parish in 2024 (*written report available*)
9. Report of the financial affairs of the Parish 2024 (*written report available*)
10. Appointment of Auditor and Independent Examiner for 2025
11. Team Vicar's Remarks
12. Any other business (as previously notified)



(St Helen's-- St Michael's --St Nicolas')
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS
held on Thursday 18 April 2024
7.00 pm in the South Aisle, St Helen's Church

The Team Rector, led the opening devotions and welcomed those present

1. Approval of minutes from the Meeting of Parishioners for Thursday 20 April 2023

There being no changes proposed the minutes, circulated in advance, were approved.

2. Election of Church Wardens

The following nominations had been received from the Annual District Church meetings:

- St Helen's: Margaret Horton proposed Halcyon Pope, seconded Simon Tonks
David Pope proposed Gwen Bevington, seconded Mary Anderson
- St Michael's: Joyce Kelly proposed Beryl Clements, seconded Nicola Ng
Louise Heffernan proposed Louise Heffernan, seconded Peter Squire
- St Nicolas': Eluned Hallas proposed Roderick Smith, seconded Jenny Smith
Paul Rast-Lindsell proposed Jenny Fishpool, seconded Gwyneth Lewis

There being no further nominations from the floor the six Wardens were declared elected.

The Rector expressed thanks to Linda Hobbs for her seven years service as St Helen's Warden, and presented her with a card and a bouquet of flowers.

He also commented that the Wardens worked closely as Parish team – and met regularly for discussion (and cake).

Meeting Closed at 7.15pm



(St Helen's-- St Michael's --St Nicolas')

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

held on Thursday 18 April 2024

7.15 pm in the South Aisle, St Helen's Church

Present: The Revd Charles Miller (Chairman), Revd Andrew Adam, Gwen Bevington, Keith Bowman, Kate Burland,

Val Casemore, Colin Casemore, Hilary Clare, Kath Cook, Peter Foster, Norman Gee, Hazel Glennie, Alexandra Green, Eluned Hallas, Louise Heffernan, Linda Hobbs, , Margaret Horton, Elizabeth Irving, Chris Jefferis, Joyce Kelly, Geoff Meen, Sue Pemberton, David Pope, Revd Ruth Pyke, Revd Richard Pyke, Robert Rutherford, Susan Scott, the Revd Paul Smith, Roderick Smith, Jenny Smith, Marian Ward,

Apologies: Mary Anderson, David Bevington Carol Bowman, the Revd Jen Brown, John Clare, Beryl Hill, Susan Gee, Sue Holligan, Patrick Holligan, Richard Kirby, Gwyneth Lewis, Halcyon Pope, Susan Read, Revd Rosalind Rutherford, Alex Scott, Sue Scott, David Scott, Elizabeth Simpson

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING of last meetings

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | The minutes of the APCM on Thursday 20 April 2023 were approved
Proposed the Geoff Meen, seconded Linda Hobbs. Passed Nem Con (with one abstention from a member not present last year) |
| 2 | Safeguarding: the Rector confirmed that for much of 2023 he and the Team Vicar had acted as Safeguarding Officers for St Helen's and St Michael's churches. A Church Safeguarding Officer had now been appointed for St Helen's but the Team Vicar continued to act for St Michael's.
As yet the posts of Parish Safeguarding Officer and Parish Verifier remained vacant.
David Pope had taken over the maintenance of the Parish Dashboard
Safeguarding was discussed regularly at PPC, DCC and Clergy meetings. |

ANY OTHER BUSINESS – none notified

ELECTORAL ROLL

3 Richard Kirby, Parish Electoral Roll Officer, and unable to be present had sent a written report (available at the meeting) showing a net increase of 12:

	2023	2024				
	roll	deletions	additions	change	roll	% change
St Helen	214	6	21	15	229	7%
St Michael	69	3	1	-2	67	-3%
St Nicolas	63	6	5	-1	62	-2%
Abingdon on Thames	346	15	27	12	358	3%

	<p>That the report be received was proposed D Pope, seconded Joyce Kelly and agreed nem con.</p> <p>The Rector echoed Richard Kirby's thanks to the Church Electoral Roll Officers and thanked him in for his role as Parish Electoral Roll officer.</p>
<i>ELECTION of LAITY to the PCC</i>	
4	<p>St Helen: Mary Anderson proposed Sue Pemberton, seconded Gwen Bevington St Michael John Clare (to 2027) proposed Joyce Kelly, seconded Barbara King Hilary Clare (to 2026) proposed Ming Ng, seconded Beryl Clements St Nicolas: Gwyneth Lewis proposed Jenny Fishpool, seconded Hildegard Hyde There being no further nominees from the floor, all were declared elected.</p>
<i>ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ACTIVITIES of the PARISH</i>	
5	<p>The Rector thanked all contributors to the Annual Report which had been made available in advance in hard copy and via the church websites, and invited questions or comments. None were forthcoming That the report (already approved by the PCC) be received was proposed Linda Hobbs, seconded Alexandra Green and passed nem con.</p>
<i>FINANCIAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS</i>	
6	<p>A set of Parish Accounts (approved by the PCC and the Accountants) had been made available in advance of, and at, the meeting. The Parish Treasurer, unable to present, had also prepared a two-page summary – also available in advance and at the meeting – which the Rector summarised.</p> <p>The accounts for 2023 showed a bottom line net surplus on movement of funds of £6k. However this included a large unrealised gain in investment value. Looking at the figures before the investment gains and losses there was a £41k deficit (2022: £1k deficit).</p> <p>This in part was due to exceptional spending of over £45k on the St Nicolas Annexe project, for which funds had been raised in advance.</p> <p>Giving and collections provide the biggest part of parish unrestricted income, but the amounts have not risen as hoped (2023: £226k, 2022: £227k, 2021: £216k). The 2022 figure is in part attributable to the excellent fund-raising efforts at St Nicolas Church for the Annexe.</p> <p>The Parish was happy in 2023 to receive a legacy of £20k for church fabric split equally between St Helen's and St Nicolas' Churches.</p> <p>Fund raising income at St Michael's was exceptional, exceeding their efforts the previous year (2023: £9k, 2022: £7k). St Helen's Church, impressed by St Michael's success, increased its fund raising efforts (2023: £7k, 2022: £5k).</p> <p>The Parish Share makes up more than half of the costs on the General Fund, but the diocese maintained the previous year's overall charge and our share reduced slightly compared with the previous year (2023: £158k, 2022: £168k, 2021: £162k).</p> <p>PCC policy on liquidity, i.e. the amount easily available for spending is that each church should hold the equivalent of at least two months of average expenditure at all times. St Helen's and St Nicolas churches have higher liquidity ratios but St Michael's is too low.</p> <p>The Rector invited attendees to direct any specific questions to the Parish Treasurer on her return.</p>
7	<p>The Rector then read a letter from Susan Read expressing her resignation as Parish Treasurer, and from the PCC, from July 2024, ie after compiling the consolidated half yearly results. She</p>

	<p>was willing to continue as St Helen's Treasurer, and to oversee book keeping for St Helen's, St Michael's, Friends of St Helen's and the Parish.</p> <p>In her absence the Rector thanked Susan for her work as Parish Treasurer, and in particular for moving all three churches onto a single online accounting system. Susan taking on the annual consolidation exercise had also reduced external accountants costs considerably.</p> <p>Looking forwards, the Rector questioned whether there was in-house expertise for a Parish Treasurer, or would the parish need to employ external support? This was becoming increasingly common in churches, but he had no idea on potential costs.. To this end he had requested a meeting with the parish's accountants.</p> <p>It was noted that St Michael's were also looking to appoint a Treasurer</p> <p>During discission it was suggested that the role of Treasurer was particularly church specific. Book keeping and accounting skills could be 'bought in' but the role of Treasurer involved the interpretation of the accounts to the PCC /DCC / congregations and an understanding of the requirement / wishes of the DCC / PCC. An external advisor would be less likely to be able to take on this role than people embedded in the churches.</p> <p>It was noted that the online package used had reporting facilities which were not currently used on a Parish basis (as the Treasurer did much analysis 'of line'). It may be that these would provide the 'operational' date needed by DCCs / PCCs (as currently used by St Nicolas').</p> <p>The need to understand the figures in context was important. And informed forecasts formed an important part of strategic planning. Trends are important.</p> <p>The Church Administrators Network (UCAN) might also have information which could help in the discussions.</p> <p>The matter would be taken up by the PCC.</p>
<p><i>APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS for 2024</i></p>	
8	<p>That Mr Andrew Churchill Stone (of Mercer Lewin Chartered Accountants, Oxford) be appointed as auditor/examiner of accounts of accounts for the parish until the conclusion of the next APCM</p> <p>was proposed: Kate Burland, seconded: Jenny Smith and passed nem con.</p>
<p><i>REPORTS FROM THE CHURCHES</i></p>	
9	<p>The Reports from the churches, previously circulated as part of the Parish Report were noted. There were no questions.</p> <p>The Inventories and Log Books of St Helen's, St Michael's and St Nicolas' would be presented at the first meeting of the PCC.</p>
<p><i>TEAM RECTORS ADDRESS</i></p>	
10	<p>The Team Rector started by thanking all those involved in the work of the Parish over the year. He then announced his retirement, after 18 years as Team Rector, at the end of the year, with his last Service in the Parish to be All Saints' Sunday 3 November.</p> <p>In his final address to the Parish (Appendix 1) he wished to stress a few key points and make some suggestions for the future direction of the Parish.</p>
11	<p>As Christians, our main focus should be on the good news of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Details of administration / governance can often overshadow this, but we must maintain perspective.</p> <p>We are called to witness always to the Good news, and must keep this focus.</p>
12	<p>Buildings: the parish has four very distinct buildings, and should be looking to build on their strengths going forward:</p>

	<p>Finance: in all these scenarios cost is a concern. Also as the number of clergy (and volunteers) decreases, parishes are needing to find funds to cover administration costs. This can come from increased congregational giving. Or is it time to consider other income possibilities?</p>
13	<p>He felt that the parish should concentrate on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the Gospel Pastoral Care Quality Worship Good Facilities <p>To move forward will require energy, enthusiasm & faith – as individuals, churches and a Parish. To quote John Henry Newman: To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often. The future has the potential to be very exciting.</p>
14	<p>In response the Team Vicar thanked the Rector for his work in the parish to date, and his honesty in his final address. Which was reinforced by general acclamation. He thanked the Rector for his call to focus on the Good News of Christ, agreeing that it can be easy to be distracted from this by other callings And ended the meeting with prayer.</p>

The meeting closed at 8:20pm.

Appendix 1

Rectors Address to the APCM - April 18th 2024

My report to the parish tonight is a looking ahead on the basis of thoughts, hopes and dreams which are themselves the fruit of 18 years as Team Rector. My role is conceived chiefly as a strategic one but one exercised (as the Profile for the ministry I have occupied since 2006) with 'a light touch'. I hope I've honoured the 'light touch'. I realize, though, that light touches are perhaps most suited to easy, care-free times. I fear such times, were they ever prevalent, are now or soon to be gone. What I share tonight is indeed in the vein of strategy but it may not feel like a light touch.

Why is that?

The picture on the broad canvas is of a church 'in decline'. I use the phrase 'in decline' in inverted commas since what makes for 'decline' can be assessed in different ways and from different perspectives. Our Diocese of Oxford, which has enormous financial resources at its disposal and comprises some of the wealthiest counties and areas within the Kingdom, is perhaps an exception to the trend yet not in all regards and not absolutely. As is the case with the effects of climate change, so here: the wealthy can delay and to some extent evade the impact but they cannot in the long run escape it.

My aim tonight is not to defend that assessment of decline. I assume that to be true and, given that, I think the following formula will apply to our parochial situation:

- ***fewer committed people***
- ***will have less and less ordained ministry***
- ***while the costs of whatever ministry they have and of the maintenance of buildings and of administrative support will continue to rise.***

In light of that looming and unavoidable scenario I think three areas are important for consideration when clergy and lay leadership within the parish look ahead.

1. The Good News not Passing Socio-cultural Trends. Focus needs to be not on maintenance of the received institutional structures and stock of buildings and appurtenances, but on a clear grasp of what the Good News of Jesus Christ is; focus on that means studious, articulate, creative and pastorally engaged living, teaching and sharing that Good News. No church worth the name has a right to continuance unless that 'pearl of great price', that 'one thing necessary', the Good News of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension and giving of the Spirit is the basis and foundation of the common life of the Body of Christ. Clubby, comfortable fellowships of the like-minded do not fit the bill. Jesus Christ will not bless what is not made in *his* own image.

2. Our Material and Fixed Assets. Recognizing that we have a stock of buildings ancient, fine and complementary, they must be put to more effective and creative use both in service of presenting and nurturing the Good News and as sources of income for congregations and the parish. In particular:

St Nicolas Church must think afresh about how it can use its highly visible position in the historic centre of Abingdon and as a gateway to the ancient abbey and its spiritual legacy. It should consider how better to receive visitors to our parish and brain-storm with the rest of the parish how to re-order the building both for regular worship, catechesis and events, and as a spiritual gateway into the rich history and contemporary life of the parish and its congregations' events. While the building currently can serve those ends, and is better equipped now with the impressive new facilities to its north, I think that it could serve them far better by means of a wholesale re-ordering plan. The Blacknall bequest and the emerging St Nicolas CIO are potentially significant resources toward that end, and that end should co-opt the commitment of the entire parish both in dreaming, in deciding, in planning and in execution. Will St Nicolas' leadership wish to partner with the St Nicolas Trust to such an end? When the time is right, yes, I think so.

St Michael & All Angels is, amongst other things, our finest acoustical space and is located and in a part of Abingdon that differs refreshingly from the town centre. Proximity to the park, alas, impacts

access to the church and its programmes *vis-a-vis* parking restrictions. At the same time, its proximity to Abingdon School could provide unexplored opportunities for weekday use and cooperation precisely because of the church's excellence as a venue for musical practice and performance. Might a partnership with the school provide a financial life-line in the face of serious current and future budget challenges? Could a win-win relationship be fashioned that would make the church a six or seven day usable space and a valued asset to an important Abingdon institution while relieving the financial burdens of the congregation by a reliable influx of commercial 'rent'? That is an avenue that ought to be explored.

St Helen's is poised to begin fund-raising for its new lighting scheme, one that will transform the interior space and have a significant impact on the church's carbon footprint. It will render the space far more amenable to one of the chief goals of the entire re-ordering process: to celebrate the creative Spirit in the community. The remaining plans for areas less conspicuous to the average Sunday worshipper are important too: a contemplative prayer space in the former choir-chancel area, a re-ordered baptistery where the rite and symbols of Holy Baptism are better related to the eucharistic community and its worship, and a renovated sacristy in preparing for the round of daily services in the ancient 'parish church'. St Helen's is the natural choice for big services for the parish and for big programmes and events for all users. Its new, small events team needs to grow and develop. Might the mid- or long-term aim be an events organizer for all three of our churches?

The Parish Centre needs major overhaul as a base for parish-wide events and programmes best located in a non-sacred space AND as a meeting and administrative centre. It is one of the three elements in the strategic plan which the St Helen's DCC embraced about ten years ago yet it awaits full engagement.

It's clear to me that the nation's headlong drift from Christian faith and a lack of Christian teaching and moral formation in schools will make the need for serious and thorough teaching of 'faith and manners' more and more necessary for the Church in its Anglican guise to survive and to flourish. The CoE's desideratum that the church be 'at the centre of every community' is a misguided ecclesiology and cannot prevail except by the evacuation of what the Church of Christ really is: a community of faith called out -- that's what *ekklesia* basically means - and set apart; To be called out from the midst means inevitably to be at the edge. A so-called national or established church, at least as that concept is now understood, in fact if not by intent, rejects what the New Testament teaches us about the Church of Christ.

But the edge is not a bad place to be. But a church - a parish - at the edge will have to be a place where order, rigour, persistence and creativity characterize a thorough-going formation and nurture in the Christian faith as a centre-piece of the parish's agenda is. Catechesis and spiritual formation need to happen in suitable places and the Parish centre, while not the only place, ought to be fit-for that purpose better than it currently is.

If St Nicolas' Church were to become a place of offerings to the interested and enquiring public, our Parish Centre would have a complementary but different atmosphere, serving as a venue for small groups and expanded pastoral programmes, while St Michael's would offer itself as 'a place apart' with the resources of labyrinth and park.

3. Finance. The time is right to consider re-organizing the financial arrangements of our congregations. Does our received and current arrangement in handling our financial resources meet the maintenance needs and missional opportunities before the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames? Is it sensible that there is no uniquely PCC account to manage shared expenditures?

I would say 'no'.

Over the past few years our now former Parish Treasurer, Susan Read, worked doggedly to bring the congregational accounting into a shared format. (Thanks to those among you who have assisted in that laborious task.) A chief aim of that complex process was to enable the DCCs and the PCC to analyze trends of expenditure and income and make financial decisions on a strategic basis, that is, looking ahead over

five years or so, maybe longer. To some extent that is already possible, yet the result of trends among our three churches is not wholly positive and comfortable.

I think it is time for the PCC to embark on a forthright, no-options-off -the-table discussion with the DCCs about how our significant resources can better serve the corporate interests of the parish. The twenty-first century will see the parish system of the CoE radically reshaped, and that will happen either reactively or proactively. This parish will be best served by *proaction* motivated by this first principle: **we either stand together or we fall separately**. In this context 'standing together' means, in my view,

1. pooling resources,
2. investing resources well, and
3. more direct PCC manage expenditure of resources to maintain and enhance the richness of the church life and witness of our three congregations.

The aim is not to put any congregation at risk; just the opposite, it's to amalgamate in order to strengthen the identity and unique resources and offerings that each congregation can make.

The era of self-standing, single-benefice-with-single-vicar days are gone, so yearning for the flesh-pots of Egypt is not an option and we mustn't allow ourselves to tarry in fantasy! We need to step forward on new terms if we're to hold on to, live out and offer 'the faith once delivered'. Financially speaking all of our congregations have much to gain from pooling resources and by stepping out of the rather passive reliance on the CCLA to multiply our 'talents'. We can in fact do better than that and especially if we were to erect a shared portfolio that could withstand the adverse gales of our uncertain century and, more importantly, enable us to honour our God-given dreams.

All of that 'programme' is possible with the will, with resources and with time.

John Henry Newman once said (in well-known words): '*To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often*'. He wasn't advocating one of our age's obsessions, namely, change for change's sake.

Rather he meant that living as we do on the high-seas of space and time the attainment of what God has created us to be and do requires both letting-go and acquiring anew, and that means change. St Paul talked about 'pressing on', the 'upward call', attaining 'the full stature of Christ' -- such ideas and exhortations being the biblical hinterland of Newman's quotable quote.

What's true of us as individuals is also true of us as 'members incorporate in the mystical Body' of Christ, the Church. That Body, even in its local parochial form, must change; not for change's sake, but by judicious change that takes us as a community further toward embodying the fullness of Christ who seeks to fill all things, beginning with his Body the Church (Ephesians 1.23).

Let me now conclude with a change of tack but with the theme of change at the forefront.

...

Having laid all that on the table, so to speak, I end by announcing the forthcoming change in my own situation. Simply put, it's time to say goodbye. The Bishop of Dorchester has supported my decision to retire this year, and we have agreed that my last service will be on All Saints' Sunday, November 3rd, a feast of special significance to me in my Christian journey.

Ever since the end of the pandemic lock-down I have felt in myself a lack of 'grip' on my role as Team Rector. You may have noticed that. Part of it has been an awareness that I no longer have the energy required to perform the role as it requires; it is a big job. Finally, I recognize that what the Church of England and our diocese now want and need from those in priestly service is not what I am equipped or happily disposed to offer.

So, with much – most? – of our parish's habits and expectations back on track after the pandemic, and with a number of exciting prospects for the parish and its congregations to tackle – such as I have outlined tonight, for instance -- I wish to hand all that over to my successor who will bring the skills and energy needed to lead you into the future the Lord is preparing for you.

My clergy colleagues and the lay leaders with whom I've shared this intention have been generous in receiving it. 18 years in a single ministerial post is, after all, a long time!

Diocesan operatives will work closely with St Helen's as it prepares its profile for a new vicar and with the parish as it considers its desiderata of the next Team Rector. Area Bishop, Archdeacon, Parish Development Officer, maybe the Area Dean too, will partner with the Team Vicar, the other Team and associated clergy, Lay Ministers and leadership through that process.

My task now is 1. to tidy up what I can of my current ministry both in St Helen's and in the parish; 2. to work with the Team clergy and ministers to prepare for the Team Rector's absence; and 3. to turn to the many personal and practical matters that attend both entry into retirement and the vacating of a rectory which will have been a happy home for over 18 1/5 years.

This coming Sunday's Newsletter and other church pewslips will carry a notice of this so that everyone in our congregations gets the same information. The bishop is aware of my announcement tonight and will begin to circulate the news in his office's customary way.

If any consolation is needed, I suggest it is this: you have a fine corps of Team clergy and ministers, of honorary assistants, and of wardens and lay leaders to carry St Helen's and the parish's other congregations through an interregnum flying our parochial flag vigorously and Christianly.

So God bless you all, and be assured of my sincere prayers for good momentum and a fine outcome as you gradually step into that new opportunity.