



## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**For year ending 31st December 2023**

**(As required by Church Accounting Regulations 2006)**

Registered Charity Number 1129833

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2022**

**Table of Contents**

<b>ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>AIMS AND PURPOSES</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<i>1a Team Rector’s Report [Charles Miller]</i> .....	<i>3</i>
<i>1b Church Electoral Roll [Richard Kirby]</i> .....	<i>7</i>
<i>1c PCC [Eluned Hallas]</i> .....	<i>8</i>
<i>1d Safeguarding [The Rector]</i> .....	<i>8</i>
<i>1e Abingdon Deanery Synod [Sue Scott]</i> .....	<i>9</i>
<i>1f Abingdon Diocesan Synod [Sue Scott]</i> .....	<i>10</i>
<b>2 STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>3 PROPERTY</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<i>3a Enock House, Musson Close [Linda Hobbs]</i> .....	<i>11</i>
<i>3b Fairacres Road [Rob Bough]</i> .....	<i>12</i>
<b>OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>PUBLIC BENEFIT</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>TREASURER’S REPORT ON THE YEAR ENDED 31 DEC 2023</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendix 1 St Helen’s Church Church Wardens’ &amp; Fabric Reports</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix 2 St Michael and All Angels’ Church Church Wardens’ &amp; Fabric Reports</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix 3 St Nicolas’ Church Church Wardens’ &amp; Fabric Reports</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix 4 Faith Forum</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix 5 Abingdon Society of Bellringers</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix 6 Report on the activities of the Church in Abingdon</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix 7 Report on St Nicolas School</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 8 Report on the Abingdon Foodbank</b> .....	<b>30</b>

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (Continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2021**  
**(As required by Church Accounting Regulations 2006)**

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames is a registered charity, Charity Registration Number 1129833.

The Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames is situated in the town of Abingdon, Oxfordshire. It is part of the Diocese of Oxford within the Church of England. The correspondence address is:

The Hon Secretary, Abingdon-on-Thames PCC  
c/o The Parish Centre, St Helen's Court, Abingdon OX14 5BS

The Parish comprises the churches and congregations of St Helen, St Michael & All Angels and St Nicolas.

### **PCC members**

PCC members are the Trustees of the Charity. PCC members who have served from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 until the date that this report and the financial statements were approved are:

#### **Stipendiary Team clergy:**

The Revd Dr E C Miller  
The Revd P A Smith

#### **Non-stipendiary clergy:**

The Revd J Brown  
The Revd P T C Masheder (to 1 Sept 2023)

#### **Licensed Lay Ministers**

Mrs G Bevington

#### **Churchwardens:**

Mrs E Hallas  
Mrs L Heffernan  
Mrs L Hobbs  
Miss J Kelly  
Dr G Meen (to April 2023)  
Mr D Pope (from April 2023)  
Mr P Rast-Lindsell (from April 2023)

#### **Officers (from April 2023):**

Chairman	The Revd Dr E C Miller
Vice Chairman	Mrs S Scott
Secretary	Mrs E Hallas
Treasurer	Mrs S E M Read

#### **Ex-Officio**

##### **– representatives on Diocesan Synod:**

Miss A Scott  
Mrs S Scott

##### **– representatives on Deanery Synod:**

The Revd R Rutherford

#### **Elected representatives - Deanery Synod:**

Miss A E Green  
Mrs E Hallas  
Miss A Scott  
Mrs S Scott  
Dr H Glennie

#### **Elected PCC members:**

Mrs K Burland (from April 2023)  
Mr J Clare  
Dr H Glennie  
Mrs J Fishpool  
Dr G Lewis  
Dr J Metcalfe (from April 2023)  
Mrs S E M Read

#### **Auditors**

Mercer Lewin Chartered Accountants  
41 Cornmarket Street,  
Oxford,  
OX1 3HA

#### **Weblinks:**

<http://www.abingdonparish.org.uk/>

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

## **AIMS AND PURPOSES**

Under the PCC (Powers) Measure 1956, the parish of Abingdon-on-Thames Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent, the Reverend Dr Charles Miller, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. Each DCC is similarly required to co-operate with the minister in charge of the district church. The PCC is also specifically responsible for the maintenance of the Parish Centre (in St Helen's Court) and Enock House (2 Musson Close).

## ***1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE***

### **1a Team Rector's Report [Charles Miller]**

The Year began with preparations for my second sabbatical leave agreed with the diocesan sabbatical committee in mid-2022. I left the parish and the UK for three months in France to fulfil the Oxford diocese's three desiderata for a clergy sabbatical: retreat, rest and study. In my case the element of study dominated in so far as I used the majority of the time for research and writing of my book on the Chapel of the Rosary in Vence. My interest had been pricked in the course of my Church-in-Abingdon Lent Lectures a number of years before on the Dominican friar and artist Fra Angelico; in a different way the Vence chapel had its own Dominican connection. The retreat time took me to the women's Benedictine community of Ste-Francoise Romaine in Bec, Normandy, the sister community to the men's community at the ancient monastery of Bec Hellouin with its long and rich ties to the Church in and of England. The rest came chiefly from freedom from the relentless multi-tasking of parochial ministry together with the endless enjoyable distractions at hand in Paris and (in the third month of the sabbatical) Nice – voluble and at times violent manifestations against the reform of France's retirement rules notwithstanding!

It was a privilege and relief to leave St Helen's in the able hands of Canon Charles Masheder who had selflessly lengthened his period of ministry among us to smooth the way for my sabbatical (I remain very grateful to him and Felicity for that), and the parish under the careful eye of Team Vicar Paul Smith. Jen Brown, and with her honorary assistant clergy and Lay Ministers, all stepped up in helpful ways. Ruth and Richard Pyke were good to arrange PTOs before my departure so that they could aid and abet the ministerial efforts.

All of that support meant that the return after Easter in time for the APCM was as smooth as any such re-entry can be. I was thankful that able warden Dr Geoff Meen was succeeded by Mr David Pope at St Helen's, and that St Nicolas was able to fill its decanal ranks at the same APCM.

As settling back into the Team Rector's role gained traction I was able to turn to some especially important areas of parish life which I knew would be my concern through the rest of 2023. I remark briefly about each of them in what follows.

#### ***1. The appointment of the next House-for-Duty priest***

As mentioned on previous occasions both spoken and written, our Diocese of Oxford has made it its policy that the protocols and procedures for all House-for-Duty appointments follow the pattern used for the appointment of incumbents, that is, full-time stipendiary 'vicars' and 'rectors'. That change of approach (changed, that is, since our previous two appointments of Mary Williamson and Charles Masheder) was explained to the PCC Standing Committee when we first turned to the Archdeacon of Dorchester to progress Charles Masheder's successor.

What did that mean?

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

It meant adhering to numerous additional statutory meetings of the PCC and the parish required by the diocese; drawing up a not-quite-full new parish profile for all three churches and shuffling it back and forth between DCCs and the PCC; involving the Deanery leadership; arranging the post advertisement content and schedule of publication with diocesan approval; and, most significantly, scheduling the interview days for a large panel of interviewers including: the Area Bishop, the Archdeacon, a member of the Deanery; a select set of parish wardens, and the relevant clergy of the parish Team. In addition – as is rightly the case for an incumbent vacating post – no interviewing could begin until Canon Mashedor was off the scene.

So although it had been hoped that progress could be made during my sabbatical leave, in fact the summer and early autumn were spent taking forward the particulars related to such a protocol and process and those involved with it.

We were fortunate to have three respondents to our advertisement and felt confident in short-listing two of them. Interviews took place in early October and, as they say, the rest is history. The Bishop offered the post to the Revd Dr Andrew Adam (known as AKMA) based on the interview panel's agreement. The personal circumstances of him and his wife Margaret prompted us to give them access to Enock House in November (a generous move amply appreciated by AKMA and Margaret!); residence in Abingdon enabled a relaxed period of adjustment before the formal licensing service by the Bp of Dorchester on January 30th 2024.

It is gratifying that we have a H-f-D priest who brings both a sensitive pastoral heart and a well-honed skill as teacher and preacher to our mix of clergy and other ministers. AKMA is by training a New Testament scholar, but has a long track-record with parish-related ministry, and so he will worthily amplify the array of expertise our clergy bring to the parish. Taking into account our honorary clergy and others, we must surely be one of the most theologically well-resourced parishes in the country if not the whole Anglican Communion! (I caution against the sin of pride.)

## **2. *Working Agreement and Enock House protocols***

Through the late winter, spring and continuing still (!) was the issue of settling the required Working Agreement for and with the next H-f-D priest. It is important to remember the origin of the post: a decision by the St Helen's DCC as part of its strategic plan which evolved after much discussion and consideration beginning around 2011. (At that time, remember, the parish was not split (2013) and the joint workings of all of our congregations was much less advanced than it is now.) The resignation of Associate Tim Hewes had made the issue of clergy support for the Team Rector a priority in consideration of the size of St Helen's electoral roll and the scale and scope of pastoral ministry and congregational worship and programmes. The DCC therefore made the acquisition of a house a priority as a preliminary to the appointment of either a H-f-D priest or a curate.

For that reason the original post description was cast in terms of the needs of St Helen and support for the Team Rector's ministry. From the start I realized that there would be occasions when the H-f-D would support the Team Vicar and his congregations, but such support, gladly offered, would be occasional to aid in extremis, to relieve stress, to fill unexpected gaps.

The Working Agreement still honours the priority of post commitments at St Helen's but has over the years led to an expectation of ministry exercised by the H-f-D priest in the other two congregations. That expectation led St Nicolas and St Michael's to ask that the Working Agreement text be less 'St Helen's focused', and that, in turn, led to a complicated and protracted discussion about how many of the 24 hours give to the parish the H-f-D priest would spend in ministry in those two congregations beyond time given to St Helen's. You may feel the quicksand thickening! It became a case of a free-will grant of ministry time to the two smaller congregations changing from

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

ad hoc provision to a defined expectation – something the original conception of the role by St Helen's and the first Working Agreement never anticipated.

So the summer and autumn were spent going back and forth on these questions with views moving between PCC and the DCCs. Of course Fr Paul and I discussed these matters regularly at the weekly chapter and never (I think I can safely say) being convinced that the highly definitional approach to the ministry time of the H-f-D was suitable. Secular habits of time-sheets and clocking in and out are inimicable to the pastoral spirit. I know very few clergy who 'watch the clock' in the course of their ministries; their problem is rarely doing too little and usually doing too much. If you doubt me, then ask one of our honorary assistants how it's worked for them through their years of formal ministry.

As I write, alas, the matter is still not settled.

From where I sit, and knowing our H-f-D priest as I have already come to know him, the problem, if there is one, will be his doing too much all 'round the parish and not too little. My job is to protect him from that.

**3. *Enock House – who pays for what?***

The complexities related to the Working Agreement that took time and energy through the summer and autumn have been exceeded by debate about costs associated with Enock House (3 Musson Close). In this case there was no expressed basis for covering costs associated with the house between the three congregations when the H-f-D arrangement began for reasons linked to the original aims of the post described in 2 above. The St Helen's (and now Parish) treasurer allotted portions for payments against costs to our three churches on terms she thought reasonable. The financial arrangement vis-a vis the three congregations grew as organically as the deployment of the H-f-D in St Michael's and St Nicolas. (Remember that there was at least one months-long period when Fr Paul's medical issues required a major provision of ministry to his congregations. It thus became 'normal' to see the H-f-D leading worship.) As to finance, though, it was right for the other churches to want to review those terms and work out liabilities between the three churches on an equitable footing.

It would be pointless in this report to recount the divergent views that have dominated PCC discussions of this matter. It is relevant to say how much time and energy some of our able church leaders have put into the question and, from my point of view, how challenging I have found it to chair discussions about the matter at our PCC and Standing Committee meetings.

We will, of course, get to resolution, but, as I see it, these mundane matters, however relevant to some leaders in our congregations, have distracted from the more urgent business which was the PCC's valuable theme at its summer Away Day, namely, welcome and initiation into our spiritual communities. But then, I recall what years ago, in another pastoral context, I came to call 'Miller's Law', namely, that the Church is only as strong as it deserves to be'.

**4. *The St Nicolas School and Education Trust (CIO) Abingdon***

The summer period saw a rebuilding of initiative with the work of the new Trust, moving forward as lead trustee with the other ex officio trustees: the Team Vicar and the two St Nicolas wardens. We faced three important and time consuming tasks:

1. Working through solicitors, we submitted a proposal to the Charity Commissioners to set aside the so-called 'recoupment schemes' which have been in place since 2005.
2. Again following the lead of our solicitors, we settled on three investment firms to manage the trust's assets and then arranged a day-long interview process to assess each firm's suitability. We unanimously and confidently chose Investec-Rathbones to take our portfolio in hand.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

3. Following that decision, a key meeting was scheduled for early 2024 to create an investment policy, taking into account the trust's short- and mid-term prospective financial needs.
4. The ex officio trustees also began discussion of bringing the trustee group to its full complement (6).

I led that four-fold agenda well supported by trustee (warden) Eluned Hallas acting as the trustees' minute-taker and by Alison Talbot's legal assistant at Winckworth Sherwood, Ruo Wu.

Amidst all of the above we had the task of preparing for the farewell of Canon Charles and Felicity Masheder. All three of our congregations took time and action to show deep appreciation for their almost four years with us. I felt proud of the generous spirit that prevailed throughout the parish in their regard.

Departure at the start of September meant, though, that through the intensely busy autumn and early winter season we were 'one man down' in the Team. Honoraries helped with the load but there were a few crunch points when it was my job to fill gaps. It meant a heavy round of day and evening duties:

- the 3-evening Circle of Love preparation for Holy Matrimony
- 4 Faith Forum Sunday morning sessions about my sabbatical
- Organizing children's First Communion preparation with Canon Gordon Oliver
- Undergoing my annual Ministerial Development Review
- Chairing DCC and PCC meetings and Standing Committee meetings
- Preparing and leading the intense period of special services between All Saints' Sunday and Christmas
- Writing Newsletter covers
- Preparing rotas for the Wednesday HC services, the sacrists, and funeral and baptism officiating
- Developing the new First Sunday Eucharist order and preparing young people to take part in liturgical roles
- Monthly meetings with wardens
- Weekly clergy chapter meetings
- Attending C-i-A staff and governing body meetings
- Dealing with safe-guarding issues
- Exercising pastoral care
- Performing rota-ed presiding and preaching
- Engaging with lay staff on a day-by-day basis
- Attending to matters related to the Friends of St Helen (FoSH) trust
- Participating in regular and special meetings of Christ's Hospital governors
- Completing preparation for publication of the new book on Matisse's chapel

By the time Christmas came and went (which included five successive services), I was spent.

The late summer saw annual review of our Parish administrator, Jackie Cunningham, and other particularly St Helen's staff.

Volunteers are not reviewed, of course, but thanks need to be registered to parish treasurer Susan Read and her helpers Ann Murdoch and Kate Burland for their persevering work on parish finances. Jenny Smith is also to be thanked for her assiduous taking in hand of the St Nicolas finances. Eluned Hallas continues her careful work as PCC secretary.

Amidst this I have been well supported by St Helen's wardens. I salute Linda Hobbs since, with the close of 2023, she enters the final leg of seven years of robust service as warden. I am also thankful for the smooth transition as David Pope stepped into the shoes of Geoff Meen. Each warden brings

# PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

## Annual Report (continued)

### FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023

his or her personality and gifts to the task and over time the role re-shapes itself accordingly. That is how it should be. As 2024 dawns we look forward to a successor to Linda Hobbs at St Helen's and, perhaps, to new wardens in our other congregations. Let's see how the Spirit moves.

*The Revd Dr Charles Miller, Team Rector*

#### 1b Church Electoral Roll [Richard Kirby]

There is a Parish Electoral Roll Officer for Abingdon-on-Thames, but each of the three churches in the parish maintains a section of the Roll.

##### Electoral Roll Numbers 2022 to 2023

	2022	2023				
	roll	deletions	additions	change	roll	% change
St Helen	214	17	17	0	214	0%
St Michael	68	3	4	1	69	1%
St Nicolas	64	5	4	-1	63	-2%
<b>Abingdon on Thames</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>0%</b>

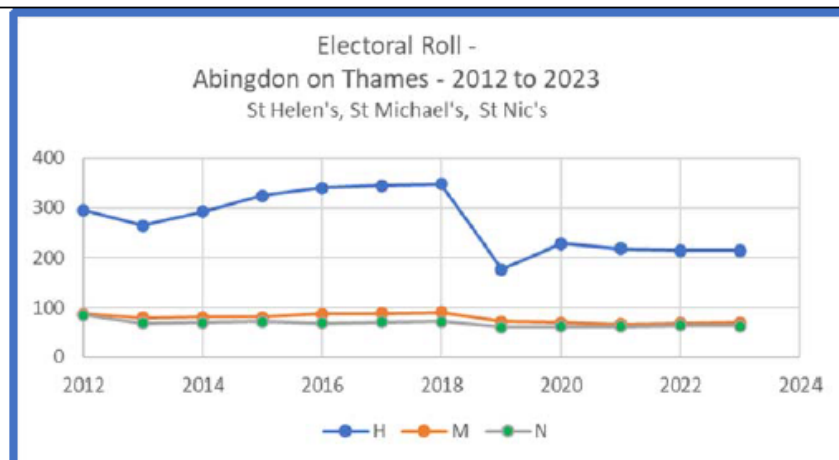
##### History

	St Helen's	St Michael	St Nic's	Total	% change
2012	295	87	85	467	
2013 new roll	264	79	68	411	-12%
2014	292	81	69	442	8%
2015	324	81	71	476	8%
2016	340	87	68	495	4%
2017	344	88	70	502	1%
2018	348	91	71	510	2%
2019 new roll	177	71	60	308	-40%
2020 (Oct)	228	69	62	359	17%
2021	218	66	62	346	-4%
2022	214	68	64	346	0%
2023	214	69	63	346	0%

It is the nature of my character to speak with data, rather than emotion or subjective views. Hence there is nothing I can say for either the optimists who would like to read improvement nor the pessimists who would like to read deterioration.

In statistical terms, looking at the past few years there is stability in the numbers.

Returning further, to 2019 we understood the influences that caused the change in St Helen's. Try not look at the numbers as a competition between the churches; the influences are many and complex and largely beyond the control of an individual church (death, illness, moving, transfers, ...)





# PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES

## Annual Report (continued)

### FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023

I am not aware of any significant events that will influence the impending revision, so the 2024 figures are likely to be similar to 2023. This year will be a normal revision of the roll. In 2025 we have the excitement of starting from scratch again (every six years).

I am not sure whether the Electoral Roll Officers, Eluned (St Nic's), Kate (St Helen's) and Keith (St Michael's) perceive the work as excitement, but the rest of us are very appreciative of their hard work, to complete this very necessary work. A huge thank you to the threesome (perhaps in this context trinity would be a better word?)

*Richard Kirby, Parish Electoral Roll Officer, 23rd Jan 2024*

#### **1c PCC [Eluned Hallas]**

The business of the PCC concerns those issues best approached on a Parish, rather than Church, basis. It is also a useful forum for communications throughout the Parish, including details of Parish and Church sponsored events, staff updates and feedback on Deanery and Diocesan issues.

The PCC of the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames met in person seven times during 2023, with the Standing Committee / Clergy & Wardens Group meeting regularly during the year. A successful Away Day – looking at Welcome and Initiation – was held in June.

Discussions during the year focussed on

- The appointment of a new House-for-Duty Priest, including the appointment process, and the allocation of costs and time between the three Churches in the Parish;
- Safeguarding in the Parish, especially in light of personnel changes during the year;
- Finance – including regular monitoring and budget setting;
- Clergy availability for out of hours emergency cover;
- Opportunities for education and discipleship;
- The A-Rocha Eco-church awards scheme;
- The Deanery Action plan – looking at post-covid changes, opportunities and challenges in the parish.

The September meeting started with a presentation from Joshua Townson, Diocesan Generous Giving Adviser on Congregational Giving and Fundraising to which all DCC members (and others with a particular interest) were invited. Suggestions made are being followed up by the Parish and individual churches.

The PCC continues to review and approve faculty applications and other fabric matters across the Parish, and GDPR, Safeguarding, Health & Safety and Parish Policies remain regular items on the PCC agendas. Individual DCC minutes are circulated to PCC members to improve communication within the parish, and PCC members receive regular updates on the work of the Deanery & Diocesan Synods and the Church in Abingdon.

We were also delighted this year to endorse the candidacy of Linda Hobbs (St H Churchwarden) for Licensed Lay Minister (LLM) training. We wish her well.

#### **1d Safeguarding [The Rector]**

Through 2023 the parish has not had a full complement serving on its safe-guarding team.

St Nicolas (Jenny Fishpool) and St Helen's (Emmanuel Chukwuma) have congregational officers (and St Helen's has a safe-guarding rep for its choir, Norman Dawson), and we have a 'dash-board'

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

manager (warden David Pope). Fr Paul Smith acts as officer at St Michael's until a lay officer can be found, and I and warden Linda Hobbs have functioned at a parish level when required. So bases have been covered.

While concerns have arisen through the year no issues properly speaking have been raised.

In 2023 Erica Hegg (former Thames Valley Police) was appointed diocesan team officer for our episcopal area and we have been in positive correspondence with her at times through the year. She is knowledgeable, balanced and supportive.

2024 will see me aiming to identify a parish SGO and an DBS Verifier. Please pray and consider offering to fill one of these posts.

*Charles Miller, Rector*

### **1e Abingdon Deanery Synod [Sue Scott]**

Abingdon Deanery Synod is part of the Diocese of Oxford and is one of 11 deaneries within the Archdeaconry of Dorchester whose membership represents 25 churches in 9 benefices.

The Synod is a vehicle to discuss key issues and to look at the church's ministry and mission in a geographical area. The Deanery Synod sits between the Parishes with their PCCs and the Diocese with the Diocesan Synod. It is a key channel of communication.

The Synod is a place to support each other in difficult times and a place to celebrate the good things happening in our churches. It is also a place where the views of the Parishes can be brought together. Proposals can be made to Diocesan Synod for discussion if the Deanery feels this is necessary/appropriate. Clergy and Laity have equal status in the Synod.

The Parish currently has 5 elected members from the House of Laity:-

Alexandra Green (St Helen's)

Hazel Glennie (St Helen's)

Alexandra Scott (St Michael and All Angels) ex officio Diocesan Synod

Sue Scott (St Michael and All Angels) Lay Chair and ex officio Diocesan Synod

Eluned Hallas (St Nicolas)

This has been a challenging year for many of our churches and things continue to be difficult for many. The aim has been to create a balance between providing information, giving time for discussion and also responding to common concerns. The Synod met 4 times in 2023 (February, May, October and November). In response to feedback some of the meetings now take place on zoom and some in person. Some of the business covered has included: -

- Finance issues including the Budget, Parish Share, The Deanery Parish Support Fund and Mission Grants
- Opportunities to share good practice and expertise to develop Parish Mission Action Plans
- Prayer and Party meeting – an opportunity to pray about the Mission initiatives of each of our churches/Parishes and to share some social time.
- Raising awareness of Diocese resources and how to access services eg Churchwarden Training, use of Safeguarding Dashboards and Church Energy Audits
- New Congregations/New initiatives/ Eco church/Children and families/LLF updates

A key role of the Deanery Synod is to represent the views of the Parishes and to seek ways to support the work of the Church in this place. Please speak to your Parish representatives so that they can raise issues questions or concerns on your behalf. Churchwardens are also very welcome to attend.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

Minutes of all Synod meetings and Standing Committee meetings can be found on the website at [abingdondeanery.org.uk](http://abingdondeanery.org.uk) together with other news and information about the work of the Deanery Synod.

Please could you pray for the work of the Deanery Synod as it strives to seek God's guidance to support the work of the Church in this place.

*Sue Scott, St Michael and All Angels representative and Lay Chair Abingdon Deanery Synod*

### **1f Abingdon Diocesan Synod [Sue Scott]**

We currently have full representation for the House of Laity and no representation from the House of Clergy in Abingdon Deanery.

The Synod meets 3 times a year to consider issues facing the church and also to share experience from right across the diocese.

Synod met in March, June and November 2023.

The Church is facing a time of great challenge. Some of the issues which have been discussed are : -

- Living in Love and Faith
- Eco church
- Common Vision
- Environmental issues and steps needed to achieve net zero by 2035
- Finance, Parish Share, SSM/LLM fees
- Ukrainian Crisis
- How parishes can more easily access diocesan resources – what is out there?

Further information about the work of the Synod can be found at [oxford.anglican.org](http://oxford.anglican.org).

The pathway to follow is – homepage>who we are>How we are governed>Diocesan Synod>documents

The Synod does not always speak as one voice. But the aim is that together we can work towards being a more Compassionate, Courageous and Contemplative Church.

*Sue Scott, Diocesan Synod Representative*

## **2 STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP**

The Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames is served by a Team Rector, based at St Helen's, and a Team Vicar shared between St Nicolas' and St Michael's.

Abingdon has a Local Ecumenical Project – the Church in Abingdon (CiA) – to which all the Anglican churches belong.

The Parochial Church Council of Abingdon-on-Thames is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure, and was formally registered with the Charity Commission on 27 May 2009.

Lay members of the PCC are appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Church Representation Rules, as originally authorized as Schedule 3 to the Synodical Government Measure 1969 and subsequently amended by the General Synod. All eligible church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

In addition to the Parochial Church Council (PCC) for the parish of Abingdon-on-Thames, there are three District Church Councils (DCCs). The PCC has delegated to the DCCs responsibility for detailed implementation of most of its functions, in a continuation of a Scheme approved by the Bishop. The PCC is therefore able to concentrate on those matters which cannot be delegated, or are of common concern. It has two committees:

The *Standing Committee* (comprising the team clergy, church wardens, the secretary, the treasurer, and the vice-chairman) has power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings, subject to any directions given by the PCC.

The *Finance Working Group* (comprising the Parish Treasurer, the Treasurers of the DCCs and a limited number of co-opted members) oversees the financial activities of the parish, including the annual budget and financial statements. It meets as required. The budget and financial statements are approved by the PCC after individual church finances have been considered by individual DCCs. In addition to meeting the statutory requirements of the Charities Commission, the immediate aims of the Group are, firstly, to provide a forum at which the Treasurers can discuss common problems and learn from each other. Secondly, the Group is attempting to develop key performance indicators that provide early warnings of potential difficulties. Third, the Group expects to undertake risk analysis which will include longer term projections of our financial status.

PCC members (and DCC members) are encouraged to attend training sessions as appropriate. Most often these are courses organised by the Diocese of Oxford.

The PCC is exposed to risks associated with buildings, finances and availability of volunteer effort. Dealing with the secular aspects first: buildings are insured and regularly inspected, finances are managed by the parish treasurer, and DCC treasurers and volunteers are constantly sought to carry the administrative burden of the PCC and DCCs. The maintenance of ancient buildings is a heavy responsibility for the PCC, but this is not unusual in the Church of England. Health and Safety, Child Protection and other pertinent legislation is adhered to, and there are policies in place to this effect. DCCs operate within a budget and financial envelope determined by their annual income and reserves and approved by the PCC. Each church has an annual stewardship programme to invite donors to respond to the income targets. Special appeals are launched for special projects (typically capital projects) as appropriate. To say ‘The Lord will provide’ may not be an acceptable approach to financial risk management in the secular world; but seeking the Will of God through constant prayer and responding to His Will moment by moment are key instruments by which the PCC manages risk in labour and financial matters.

### **3    **PROPERTY****

#### **3a    **Enock House, Musson Close [Linda Hobbs]****

Enock House was purchased in 2015 to be used as accommodation for the “House for Duty” Associate Priest. Until October 2023 the property was the home of Rev. Canon Charles Masheder and Felicity his wife, until they vacated the house to “retire” to the Cotswolds.

The property is now occupied by Rev. Akma, the new House for Duty Associate Priest, and his wife Margaret.

The property was well cared for by Charles and Felicity, they carried out many improvements at no cost to the Parish, for which we are very grateful. The result of their care meant that on vacating the property, very little work was required.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

This last year has seen very little work being required to the property, except for the water tanks in the roof needing to be replaced, (as detailed in the 2023 report) This work took longer to complete than expected, but we now have confidence that there should be no further expense due to water tanks.

The only remedial work required to enable Akma and Margaret to take up residence, was the painting of a ceiling damaged by water ingress when the roof required extensive remedial work. The re-painting of the ceiling was carried out at no charge to the church or Parish.

As always any expenses required to maintain the property will be kept to a minimum, it must be understood that all expenses cannot be predicted or budgeted for, all properties need maintenance, if regular maintenance is not carried out the value of the property will be adversely affected.

The property continues to be managed by Linda Hobbs

### **3b Fairacres Road [Rob Bough]**

Pursuant to a bequest from Mr Derek Enock in 2009, each church in the parish has an interest in a residential property in Fairacres Road, Oxford, which is held on a trust. The current occupant of the property has the right to reside there for as long as she wishes. If the property is sold, she will be entitled to the income from the invested sale proceeds. Upon her death the property or proceeds from the sale will pass to the five beneficiaries of Mr Enock's estate:- The trust is administered for the beneficiaries by Freeths Solicitors, who have reported:

It has been a quiet 12 months following the completion of the administrative work in relation to the change of trustees and dealing with registration of the trust on HMRC's Trust Registration Service.

The life tenant continues to live in the property, and the insurance was renewed this month for a further 12 months.

The cash balance is £6,302.80. This is slightly less than the balance last year on the basis the annual trust administration expenses and the insurance premium were paid in August 2023 and February 2024 respectively. There was also a small amount of interest received in the period.

A schedule of condition on the property will not be due until around 2025/26.

## **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

The following Vision Statement was agreed by the PCC on 22nd November 2000 and continues to apply to the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames:

“A single unified parish with a Team Ministry in which clergy and laity work together to serve interdependent congregations, within an active ecumenical organisation where:

- The Gospel of Christ is celebrated through worship and fellowship, with individual congregations providing a spectrum of traditions
- The life of the Church is built up through teaching, preaching, evangelism, pastoral care and ecumenical co-operation
- God's love is made known in mission and service to the community and society as a whole.”

The following objectives for the Team Rector appeared in the Parish Profile agreed by the PCC in November 2005.

- In liaison and collaboration with the Church in Abingdon, to refresh and progress the strategy for the development of a Christian presence in south Abingdon.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

- To encourage, enable and release lay leadership and ministry to enable the Parish to be better equipped to respond to the changing patterns of stipendiary ministry.
- To continue to develop joint working within the churches and across the team, to ensure we use our resources effectively in the propagation of the gospel.

The activities undertaken to enable the PCC to achieve these objectives are described in the Achievements & Performance section, and in the reports from the constituent churches.

The PCC is heavily dependent upon the contribution of volunteers to drive forward the mission of the church and the Kingdom of God.

The PCC delegates to DCCs the matter of policy for making grants and donations from their income. The financial statements record donations made during the reporting year.

***Public Benefit***

The PCC is aware of the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit in "The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit" and have regard to it in their administration of the Parish. The PCC believes that, by fulfilling its responsibility to work together with the incumbent in the Parish and co-operate in all matters of concern and importance for the promotion of the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical, it provides a benefit to the public by:

- providing resources and facilities for public worship, pastoral care and spiritual, moral and intellectual development, both for its members and for anyone who wishes to benefit from what the Church offers;
- promoting Christian values, and service by members of the churches in the Parish to their communities, to the benefit of individuals and society as a whole.

***Reports from individual churches and the Church in Abingdon are attached as Appendices to this report.***

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**TREASURER'S REPORT ON**  
**THE YEAR ENDED 31 DEC 2023**

The Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames consists of three churches (St Helen's, St Michael's and St Nicolas') which have separate treasurers and accounts. The Parish accounts are produced by consolidating the accounts of the three churches.

**Income and Expenditure**

The "bottom line" of our Parish shows a net movement in funds of £6k surplus (2022 £74k deficit), but this is largely caused by movements in the global investment markets. We should instead look at the figures before the investment gains and losses where we show a £41k deficit (2022: £1k deficit).

St Nicolas raised some funds in 2022 in readiness for a big project redeveloping the church annexe. In 2023, £46k, was spent converting the annexe into a much-needed kitchen and disabled toilet with a ramp to enable disabled access.

Giving and collections provide the biggest part of our Parish unrestricted income, but the amounts have not risen as hoped (2023: £226k, 2022: £227k, 2021: £216k). This is attributable to the excellent fund-raising efforts at St Nicolas Church in 2022.

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.

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).

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).

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 and will need to sell some of its investments soon. (St Helen's 5.9 m, St Michael's 1.6 m, St Nicolas 7.5 m)

**Balance Sheet**

The Parish owns two freehold properties, the Parish Centre and the House for Duty property purchased in 2015. Legal title of both is held by the Diocesan Trustees (Oxford) Ltd as custodian trustees on behalf of the Parish. Both are held for the mission of the church. The two properties appear in the balance sheet as Tangible Fixed Assets.

PCC policy is that unused fund balances should be invested with CBF Church of England funds. At the end of 2023 92% (2022: 92%) of Parish investments were with CBF Church of England funds. The value of the Parish investments increased by 9% in the year but still exceeded their value in 2020 (2023: £553k, 2022: £507k, 2021: £587k, 2020: £472k).

**Going Concern**

The PCC is required to operate on a going concern basis. Liquidity is a currently a concern where St Michael's is concerned. Also that there should be reserves, appropriate to each church, to cover the

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

future demands of building maintenance. This is less easy to evaluate and needs further consideration. I do not consider there to be risk of any of the churches being unable to pay for their building maintenance in the next three years, but we need to keep this under review.

*Susan Read, PCC Treasurer, 7 March 2024*



**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 1**  
**St Helen's Church**  
**Church Wardens' & Fabric Reports**

It has been encouraging to new families and individuals regularly attending worship. We are pleased to report that Sunday congregational numbers are now approaching those pre-covid. We hope this will enable some of the budget deficit to be addressed through an increase in Planned Giving and through the loose plate.

Two very successful "Newcomers" lunches have been hosted in the last year, formally welcoming many of those new to the congregation. The importance of these occasions cannot be over emphasised, the aim is to continue these outreach opportunities.

**District Church Council**

The DCC met regularly in 2023, managing the budget and business of the church. Recently the budget has been a discussion priority, looking at how the budget deficit can be addressed.

A DCC Away Day enabled attendees an opportunity to discuss how to grow the church, congregation, mission, and outreach.

**Pastoral Team**

The Pastoral Team under the leadership of the Rev. Canon Charles Masheder continued to meet regularly until his departure as House for Duty Priest; in the absence of a post holder the team continued its work led by Linda Hobbs; Akma as the new House for Duty Priest will now lead the team.

Home communion is offered to those who are "house bound" with regular monthly services at Cygnet Court.

**Finance**

Unfortunately, the financial position of the church continues to be an area of concern. We must all be aware without financial stability, activities and outreach will be adversely affected. Financial stability ensures we can pay our Parish Share obligation, heat the church, fund charitable giving, plan to grow the services we offer to both town and congregation.

Currently budget forecasts indicate we will once again be in deficit, despite rigorous and successful fund raising. It is important that the finance of the church again returns to a surplus, the church can not continue to sell investments to meet its obligations. The outgoings of the church are closely monitored by our Treasurer Susan Read to whom thanks must be given for her time, diligence, and expertise.

**Stewardship**

The church continues to be open each day, appreciated by our many visitors and those who come to spend time in prayer. Between Easter and September, we aim to have Stewards on duty for part of the day. Our stewards enable visitors to enjoy and appreciate the history of our building, whilst appreciating its important role in the town of Abingdon.

**Friends Of St. Helens Shop**

The shop is now under new management. Revenue from the shop helps support repairs to the fabric of the church.

The Christmas period saw the shop having available an extensive range of cards and goods, with good sales being achieved. It is anticipated new and varied goods will continue to be introduced.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Friends Of St. Helen's (FoSH)**

A small team of volunteers continues to arrange events and talks for members and non-members, these events are important opportunities for learning and fellowship.

The summer AGM culminated with a tea enjoyed by all who attended. All event proceeds support the work of FoSH, whilst offering opportunities to explore topics of interest. The team hope events will increase in number with more involvement from those in the town interested in the church, its history, and its role as the Civic Church.

**Macmillan COFFEE MORNING**

The church again hosted a successful coffee morning, the event being supported by volunteer cake and coffee makers and of course all who attended and consumed large amounts of cake! raising in excess of £650 for this wonderful cause.

**Faith Forum**

The Rev Dr. Jen Brown continues to lead and organise talks. Talks continue to be varied and well supported by congregation members from all three churches, but mainly from St Helens.

As an experiment, February saw talks scheduled to follow the Sunday Eucharist, this is aimed to enable those from our sister churches to attend. The result from this experimental change will be reviewed and a decision taken as to the most appropriate timing.

**Christmas Market**

November again saw the Christmas market, its aim being to raise funds for the church. The event was again well supported with over £2,000 being raised.

**Mission And Outreach**

The West Porch again opened prior to Christmas and Easter, volunteers valiantly "battling" adverse winter weather. Despite these difficulties the Christmas services welcomed several people with whom conversations had been had.

Late December saw volunteers from the three churches outside St. Nicholas handing out free chocolates and mince pies, whilst also handing out Christmas service details.

It is important that mission and outreach continues, growing opportunities for our churches to be seen as available, open, and relevant to all.

**Safeguarding**

Our Safeguarding officer, Maria Gibbson, has stepped down after serving for 10 years in this important role, we thank Maria for her time. The role will now be facilitated by 3 members of the congregation.

Safeguarding ensures clergy, lay ministers, wardens and all volunteers have current DBS clearance, with appropriate safeguarding training.

**Re-Ordering**

The long process of designing and approving a new church lighting scheme has continued, led by Chris Jefferies. It is anticipated the finalising of plans is imminent. Once finalised, permissions will be sought from the Diocese to enable work to commence. It is anticipated that the process of obtaining permissions will be protracted. Whilst awaiting permission, a team will "spear head" fund raising. If you are interested in being involved or have experience, please speak to Chris or the Rector.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Parish Centre**

The Centre facilities continues to be available to hire, unfortunately hire of the Centre has not recovered post-covid, resulting in reduced revenue. To make hire of the Centre more attractive, we have ensured competitive hire rates, so hope underutilisation of this facility will improve.

The Centre and church office continue to be efficiently managed by Jackie Cunningham, we must thank her for her efficiency.

**Mothers And Toddlers**

The group continue to meet each Monday morning, offering a warm and stimulating welcome to all who attend. Many attendees are from the town, this important outreach must be supported, and thanks must go to all volunteers.

**Candle in the Window**

This monthly “magazine” continues to be edited by Rob Rutherford, thanks go to Rob for ensuring it is always an inspiring and varied read. Each edition continues to offer articles which challenge and inform. Each edition is available to download, with hard copies available from the office.

**Celebration Services**

We have been privileged this past year to host celebration services for the Rector, The Rev Canon Charles Masheder and Professor John Barton, respectively, they were celebrating 40th, 50th and 50th years of Ordination! Congratulations are offered to all, All occasions being marked with our customary hospitality.

*Linda Hobbs & David Pope, Churchwardens*

**FABRIC REPORT**

We have continued in 2023 with the implementation of recommendations from the Quinquennial Report of 2022. This included an investigation of the fire alarm system for the church. The system had been installed in 1991 to provide protection for the Painted Ceiling and the organ, but the smoke sensors had not been tested for some time. The system was found to be fully functional, despite its age, and is now included in the six-monthly fire maintenance schedule.

There has been a programme of improvement for the Parish Centre which had been in a poor decorative state. External doors and woodwork have been sanded back and varnished and the iron gate has been repainted. Our thanks go to the church caretaker Robin Day for taking on a significant amount of additional work in this area. The Centre had suffered in the past from rats in the gardens, both front and back. A pest control contract seems to have been effective, but we will need to monitor this closely. The gardens have been tidied up to reduce the number of potential rat nesting sites, with wire netting added under fences to block easy access routes for rats.

The regular church roof maintenance has continued, primarily to keep the rainwater system clear, but also to fix minor problems such as repairs to pointing. One of the Nave eaves gutters was uneven, with considerable backfall. The gutter has been repositioned so that the downpipe now collects the water correctly.

There was a major problem with the church heating system in November, with a leak in the heat exchanger for one of the boilers. The system has two boilers working in a cascade configuration, but unfortunately it wasn't possible to isolate the failed boiler. The church had a few weeks without any heating until a new heat exchanger could be fitted.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

There has been discussion with a professional archivist about the storage conditions for the church archives. The archive room is not heated, so there is concern about cold and damp. I have started recording values of relative humidity and temperature via a data-logging hygrometer. The results so far (after two months) show that humidity is slightly above the recommended range, but not sufficiently high to cause condensation or mould growth in the archive room. The logging will continue over a few more months so it covers the full range of weather conditions. If there is a problem with humidity, we will look at the options for conservation heating or dehumidification of the room.

*Stephen Thomas, Fabric Officer*

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 2**  
**St Michael and All Angels' Church**  
**Church Wardens' & Fabric Reports**

**CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT**

**Worship and Services:**

During 2023 we held our regular pattern of services with a Sung Mass on Sunday at 09.30 and a Said Mass on Thursday at 12.30 (although during the winter months we changed this to a Tuesday for reasons of energy economy).

In addition, we celebrated certain Holy Days, such as Ash Wednesday, Dedication Festival, All Souls Day.

The average attendance on Sundays is 44 and the average attendance for the midweek mass is 10.

Easter: in Holy Week, Mass was celebrated on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

On Maundy Thursday we observed the Mass of the Lord's Supper with the Washing of the Feet.

On Good Friday morning Carol Bowman led a short inter-active children's service which was attended by 27 adults and 18 children, and which was followed by a variety of craft activities whilst refreshments were served. This was followed by the Liturgy of the Passion in the afternoon.

The Lighting of the New Fire and Easter Vigil was celebrated on Holy Saturday, and this was followed on Easter Day by The Sung Mass of the Resurrection.

Christmas: our Christmas celebrations commenced with our popular Crib Service, led by Carol Bowman, and was attended by 62 adults and 40 children.

The Service of Nine Lessons and Carols took place on Christmas Eve with an attendance of 178. Many thanks to Glynne Butt and the choir for their very significant contribution to a beautiful service.

Christmas Morning Mass was held at 10.00 and attended by 40 people.

We had 4 Baptisms, 3 Weddings, and 5 Funerals in 2023

We are incredibly grateful to our honorary clergy and our clergy for enabling us to worship at St Michael's.

**Outreach:**

Abingdon School held 4 services during the 2023. A Leavers' Service in June, with 200 in attendance; and Lower School and Parents and Boarders' Carol Services in December with a total of 440 in attendance. A Choral Evensong Service was also held with an attendance of 45 people.

St Nicolas School held their Easter Service for the first time in several years.

The Oxford Diocese Ride and Stride was held as usual. We opened the church to meet and greet the cyclists and offered refreshments.

The Albert Park Singers continue to use the church for their rehearsals and held 2 concerts during the year; both were splendid occasions.

Abingdon Passion Play held a Come and Sing of Handel's Messiah Part 2 in aid of fundraising for the 2024 Passion Play.

During the year, the church was hired out to various organisations to hold concerts: The East Oxford Community Choir, Abingdon Music Festival, The Abingdon Chorale Choir.

The church room is used by one group on a regular basis. It has been hired on an ad hoc basis during the year.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

We have continued to support various charities throughout the year: TAB, Tariro, Oxfordshire Homeless, Be Free Young Carers, Abingdon Foodbank.

### **Volunteers**

As usual, we would like to thank all our volunteers who help keep things running smoothly: those that come in and do the cleaning, the flower arrangers, the safeguarding officer, those who do the odd vital jobs – fixing things or sorting out the heating or sound, those who make the coffee, the vergers at weddings and funerals, the faithful creator of the pew leaflet and contributors to the website. We thank you all.

### **Many thanks**

To all who help in our worship – those who serve at the altar, our sacristans, our organists, readers and intercessors, our dedicated choir members, our bellringers, to the DCC members, and all our sidepersons.

Finally, a big thank you to Fr Paul for his leadership, support, kindness, and love. Let us continue to pray for the Lord's blessing on him.

*Joyce Kelly and Louise Heffernan February 2024*

## **FABRIC & ENERGY REPORT 2023**

Routine maintenance was conducted as usual during 2023. The organ was tuned, the PAT testing carried out, the fire alarms and extinguishers maintained, the heating system serviced.

As a result of the Quinquennial Inspection 2021 the urgent work was carried out in early 2023.

In early November, the boilers failed, and initial inspection suggested that there was a problem that could not be repaired. However, a second opinion was sought from Uniheat with a positive outcome. The boilers were fixed and the Uniheat engineer, at Ming's request, also investigated and sorted out a problem with the underfloor heating which has been much more efficient since then. The Fabric and Energy committees (combined) will research options to replace the boilers in due course, so that we can be more prepared to deal with future issues.

Since September, our electricity contract has been brokered for us by the Parish Energy Basket. In December we were able to join the Parish Energy Basket for gas. This gives us some security against fluctuating prices and also lower unit prices though higher standing charges. Our gas and electricity usage has been faithfully monitored each week by David Duce, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. The change in service times over the winter has resulted in a reduction in usage and the monthly cost is lower than the equivalent period last year, though admittedly it has been a mild winter so far.

*Louise Heffernan and Joyce Kelly February 2024*

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 3**  
**St Nicolas' Church**  
**Church Wardens' & Fabric Reports**

This has been the first year of my second stint as St Nicolas Churchwarden. My thanks go to Rev. Paul Smith; my fellow warden, Eluned Hallas; the St Nicolas DCC and the church congregation for their support.

**Services:**

Our Sunday Service conforms to the normal pattern, with the 8.00a.m. Parish Holy Communion (1662 rite), alternating monthly with St Helen's, and our main morning service at 11.15a.m.

Despite Covid no longer being at the forefront of our minds, some echoes remain. At Communion, both bread and wine are offered, but some communicants still prefer to receive in one kind only. It is rare to see a mask being worn, though the Peace is still more generally exchanged without contact. We also still offer the opportunity to join our services via the Zoom video system.

As well as our usual range of 8.00a.m. and 11:15a.m. Services, St Nicolas provided an Ascension Day evening Communion and St Nicolas Evensong to the Parish (with the support of musicians from our sister churches and wider afield). Our Carol Service and Crib Service were also well attended.

In October, it was a delight to welcome the Diocesan Deputy Warden of Readers who licensed congregation member Sue Holligan as a Lay Reader with Permission to Officiate in the Parish.

At our St Nicolas Evensong we welcomed the Archdeacon of Dorchester, the Venerable David Tyler, who both preached and blessed the Annexe. Towards the end of the Service the Archdeacon welcomed congregation members Gwyneth Lewis and Colin Sanderson into the Fellowship of St Birinus, in recognition of their work towards the refurbishment of the Annexe. The post service refreshments appeared to be enjoyed by all.

It has also been good to be able to restart our monthly Services of Communion by Extension in Bridge House, and to be able to welcome residents of Old Station House to a monthly Service in Church, followed by a time of fellowship.

We again provided the venue for the Church in Abingdon week of lunch time prayers for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – each session focussing on the activities of one or two of the CiA Task Groups.

**Activities:**

Throughout the year the church was open Church to visitors - primarily on Monday mornings, but also for the OHCT Ride & Stride Day, Heritage Open Days, and to coincide with Saturday events in the Market Place. We often have other visits from various groups, both local and from further afield. Thank you to all who have assisted in Stewarding at these events.

The after-service coffee on Third Sundays offers the opportunity for the congregation to talk and get to know each other more. A lunch social was held at Pizza Express, and the usual St Nicolas Day Lunch at Coseners House in December was attended by members from all three churches in the Parish.

There have been a few fundraising concerts for St Nic's plus other Sunday afternoon concerts by Abbey Chamber Concerts. We also organised a book-sale which gave folks good opportunities for socialising as well as raising funds. The church has been open to visitors for other events such as

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

those organised by Mostly Books and Abbey Artists. Thanks to all who organised and supported these events.

**Fabric:**

In general, the church building is in good repair though a few floor tiles are loose. However, we also have a problem with water ingress in the wall at the West end. It has been looked at but requires further investigation. The Lightning conductor was tested and passed.

Thank you to the team who, during the year, worked so hard to complete the Toilet Block refurbishment.

**Thanks:**

On behalf of the congregation, I'd like to give thanks to all those (ordained and lay) who have led services at St Nic's over the year. Also, to Jenny for all her work as Treasurer. Thank you too, to those who have led our prayers and our music, and to the people who provide flowers.

Especially, I would like to thank everyone who has supported St Nicolas throughout the year.

Whether it is practical work week by week; by doing those small tasks which we would only notice if they were not done or offering donations and prayers.

**FABRIC REPORT 2023**

Twenty twenty-three saw the fulfilment of plans to refurbish the Annexe (toilet / kitchen block) to give St Nicolas facilities fit for the 21st Century. Thanks to the hard work of a small team, and the generous financial support of the whole congregation, we now have a welcoming space comprising a uni-sex equal access toilet cubicle, with baby change facilities; and a refitted kitchenette with cupboards, white goods and separate sinks for food and flowers. There is hot water to all sinks, and space heaters. Funds raised also permitted the building to be reroofed and all doors / windows to be replaced with double glazed units. The building is accessed via a freestanding ramp, bridging the existing in-situ gravemarkers.

We are already enjoying the benefits of the new facilities and thank all those whose hard work, generosity and prayers made it all possible.

In the spring we were also able to complete the various high level works identified in our 2021 Quinquennial (five-yearly) inspection – some retiling, work to the tower roof and repairs and repainting of rain goods.

Routine testing of the lightening conductor, central heating, automatic doors, fire extinguishers and portable and electric installations was carried out during the year, the latter requiring some small upgrades. The organ and piano were retuned regularly.

As reported last year we have started consultations on the refurbishment of the Blacknall Memorial / Blacknall Aisle. To this end the stalls have been moved to the Sanctuary to enable access to the aisle walls. We were delighted to receive a legacy from the will of Mrs Doreen Barnes, with the stipulation that it be put towards the restoration of the memorial.

*Eluned Hallas*



**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 4**  
**Faith Forum**

Faith Forum is part of the parish's adult education provision, and gives an opportunity for members of the congregations and others in the parish to hear talks on aspects of the Christian faith and how Christian faith relates to other areas of life and culture. The pattern of Faith Forum has been to meet in the parish centre hall on the first Sunday of the month in seven or eight months of the year (whether or not there is a Faith Forum in April depends on the date of Easter) before St Helen's 10.30am service, with a buffet breakfast provided.

A newly formed Faith Forum planning group met in the autumn of 2022 to plan the Faith Forum talks for Spring 2023. Unusually, there were only two Faith Forum sessions in the spring, on the subject of the theology of hospitality and welcome. Speakers were Revd Canon Charles Chadwick and Esther de Waal.

The planning group met again in June 2023 to plan for the autumn series and beyond. The Rector, Revd Dr Charles Miller, provided the talks for the autumn series, 'Faith in France', based on his experiences and study during sabbatical.

Since the pandemic, Faith Forum talks have been available on Zoom. This has had two advantages – those unable to attend in person for reasons such as mobility issues or illness could still 'attend' the talks live and participate in Q&A; the Zoom session can be recorded and posted to the parish website, allowing those unable to attend in person or for the live Zoom to watch later.

The planning group agreed that future Faith Forum series will cover:

- The Sacraments (Spring 2024)
- Ways to Engage with the Bible (Autumn 2024)
- 'Big Topics' in Theology (Spring 2025)

The planning group is next due to meet following the conclusion of the spring 2024 series, to review the new time and luncheon format, and to agree speakers for future series.

Revd Dr Jennifer Brown  
Associate Priest, Faith Forum Lead

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 5**  
**Abingdon Society of Bellringers**

**Tower Bell Ringers**

Abingdon has one of the largest and most proficient bands of ringers in the district. This reflects the commitment to sustained effort over the years in training and building the band. It's pleasing that now there are younger members taking over responsibility for managing and running the ringing. This includes learning to conduct.

The bells are rung every Sunday morning at both St Helen's and St Nicolas', while Tuesday evening practices alternate between the two towers. On Friday afternoons we welcome a large group of boys from Abingdon School to St Helen's for their practice. This is followed by a session for our own youngsters, who are a lively group and really progressing.

For adults, the Saturday morning basic teaching and mentoring of trainee teachers has evolved. Abingdon has been joined by similar centres at Dorchester, Kirtlington and Witney to form the Oxon Ringing School.

Last year the Christmas period was busy as usual with extra services, including ringing for school carol services. For the coronation, we arranged special extra ringing in the town to accompany the traditional bun throwing. We made sure that all of our younger ringers were able to participate in this historic occasion.

We have welcomed various visitors to see the ringing, including local cubs and brownies. Visitors are very welcome to come up the tower to see the bells and ringing. We are happy to teach girls and boys (from age 10) who may be interested in learning to handle a bell and join in.

[www.abingdonbells.org.uk](http://www.abingdonbells.org.uk)

*Brian Read*

**Handbell Ringers**

In 2023 we welcomed three new members to our team, making us 13 people. This put us in the excellent position of being able to put on a performance even when some of our members weren't available.

We held eleven weekly practices starting on 1st October. We again met in the Parish Centre each Sunday evening.

We provided background music at three church Christmas fairs this year (St Michael's, St Helen's and Dorchester Abbey). We entertained at two clubs for the handicapped, two care homes and two church carol services. We also gave a talk on handbells to a WI group.

I'd like to thank all the handbell ringers again this year for their helpfulness and for the fun we have had.

*Susan Read, 5 March 2024*

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 6**  
**Report on the activities of the Church in Abingdon**

**Parish Representatives:**

St H: Alexandra Green

St M: John Clare

St N: Sue Holligan

**Member churches and staff:**

Member churches and staff: Much of the life and work of the CiA returned to pre-Covid operation but with some lasting effects on congregation numbers. There have been a few changes in the clergy over the past year: Peachcroft Christian Centre have been going through the process of finding a new minister; Kath and Phil Cooke left Christ Church; Charles Masheder left St Helen's; Alex Devine of the Salvation Army is now covering both Oxford and Abingdon Salvation Army; Christ Church appointed a new youth worker Abigail Pike after the departure of Bea Ellaby.

**Task groups and associated projects:**

Task groups

- The Christian Aid group in Abingdon held several fundraising activities as well as Christian Aid Week.
- The Christian Forum column continues to appear in the Abingdon Round & About monthly magazine under the direction of the CiA Administrator Debra Mcknight.
- Several exchange visits of the Church Twinning group have taken place – one to Abingdon, one to Sint Niklaus and one to Argentan.
- The work of Desire continues in a slightly different format having been limited by a lack of youth workers and leader.
- An Alpha launch night took place at Christ Church to which other churches were invited and several churches ran both in-person and online Alpha courses.
- The work of Prayer Spaces in Abingdon schools is recovering after Covid.

Associated projects

- 35 Ock Street, a hospitality centre for the community offering a café and a listening ear, and meeting rooms for local groups and agencies.
- The Abingdon Bridge, which has continued to reach out to the youth of Abingdon, providing support, advice and guidance to an increasing number of vulnerable young people in the community.
- Abingdon Street Pastors who are out on the streets of Abingdon on Saturday nights
- Experience Easter returned live to Trinity Church although the popular online version continued to be on offer.

**United activities 2023**

**January**

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the usual events took place: the Inter-church quiz, which took place at Peachcroft Christian Centre, was won by the Long Furlong team, and raised £177.40 for Tearfund's Hunger Crisis appeal.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

***February***

The CiA AGM took place, at which the need for a debt advice centre in Abingdon hosted by the CiA was carefully explored. However, it was later concluded we didn't have the resources in place at this point in time.

***March***

The World Day of Prayer service took place at St Michael's organised by the CiA Administrator and volunteers from the previous WDP committee. The service for 2023 was prepared by the women of Taiwan with the theme 'I have heard about your faith'. Revd Charles Masheder led the service. £315 was raised for WDP.

TrinityLearning's Easter Experience returned live to Trinity Church; the popular online version was also available.

Many churches ceased their 'warm spaces' scheme, except St Edmund's, which continues to run as 'Open Door'.

***April***

The procession of witness took place on Good Friday stopping in the Market Place for a short outdoor service led by Revd Paul Smith.

Church Twinning arranged a visit to Sint Niklaus in Belgium.

A CONNECT event took place at Christ Church.

***May***

The Christian Aid week activities took place with adaptations.

***June***

***July***

The South Abingdon Play & Activity Day event took place in Southern Town Park with Abingdon Vineyard and Abingdon Baptist Church taking part.

***August***

***September***

A CONNECT event took place at Christ Church.

Christ Church held an Alpha launch night, which was open to other churches. Several churches ran Alpha courses both in person and online.

***October***

The Michaelmas fair service took place with Deacon Selina Nisbett leading.

To celebrate 20 years of Church Twinning, Argentan, our Normandy twin town, invited 15 people from Abingdon to commemorate this link.

***November***

The Annual Bereavement Service took place at Christ Church in collaboration with their Footprints Bereavement group.

Church Twinning ran a local long weekend event in Abingdon with people invited from all its twin towns.

***December***

People from all the churches gathered in the Market Square to sing carols and give out leaflets detailing all the Christmas services taking place across Abingdon. Children's crafts, festive nibbles and a nativity scene were also on offer this year.

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Finance**

The grants paid in 2023 were:

The Abingdon Bridge	£2500	for their work with disadvantaged young people
DESIRE youth network	£1000	to help run schools weeks and larger events
DESIRE prayer spaces	£150	to provide prayer spaces in schools
Abingdon Street Pastors	£1000	to fund their ongoing help for people out at night
Experience Easter	£750	to help school children and their teachers explore the Easter story
Salvation Army Drop-in Centre	£100	to provide drop-in centre for the homeless and needy
Passion Play 2024	£1000	

**Debra McKnight CiA Administrator**

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 7**  
**Report on St Nicolas School**

The Parish continues to be represented on the Governing Body of St Nicolas School by Eluned Hallas (Foundation Governor) and the Revd Paul Smith (Associate Governor)

Fr Paul takes regular assemblies in school, and the whole school Church Services at Christmas (Trinity Church), Easter (St Michael's) & end of school year (St Helen's).

We are delighted to report that the School was OFSTED inspected in February 2023 receiving a Good outcome

In accordance with the government's requirement for all Governing Bodies, the three core strategic functions of St Nicolas CE Primary School's Governing Body are: 1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school 2. Holding the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils 3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

During the year Staff and Governors spent time looking at how our school vision and mission are embedded into school life, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Based on Jesus' words in John 10:10 "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full", we recognise that we are all on a journey together and we are here to serve our local community.

The 'NICS' approach adopted last year, is now firmly embedded in our school life, and is easily memorable and applicable for all pupils, even from Reception:



The Governors full annual report to parents may be found on the school website:

<https://www.stnicolasprimary.co.uk/meet-the-governors/> Annual Governance Statement

**PARISH OF ABINGDON-ON-THAMES**  
**Annual Report (continued)**  
**FOR YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

**Appendix 8**  
**Report on the Abingdon Foodbank**

Abingdon food bank continues to see an increase in referrals for families and individuals. Two food banks continue to operate in Abingdon, Preston Road Community Centre serves South Abingdon, North Abingdon being served by Christ Church.

As inflation affects many families in Abingdon more referrals are anticipated. Clients continue to require referral, ensuring only families or individuals currently in need receive assistance, each client being interviewed by volunteers trained to assist and advise on benefit entitlement.

Refugee families continue to receive support; to aid integration, a Friday “Language Café” offers facilities for children, whilst their parents learn.

This year saw the retirement of Hillary Beale after many years as volunteer manager, with a new manager now appointed.

Christmas saw the preparation of approximately 300 Christmas parcels, these being distributed to clients in need

As always additional donations are required, some supermarkets in Abingdon as well as Millets Farm, now donate surplus food, these donations being freely available to clients. Regular monetary donations enable specific food items to be purchased as required.

The Community Fridge and Community Larder continue operating, supporting those who are vulnerable in the community.

Parish congregation continue to donate generously, food being collected and delivered. It’s important that support for food bank continues, by contributing, we support those in our community who are vulnerable.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this cause in the last year.

*Linda Hobbs*

*Church Warden and Food Bank volunteer.*