

**The Parish of St George the Martyr, Shirley**  
***Following Christ + Serving the community + Welcoming all***

**Agenda for the Annual Vestry Meeting for 2024**  
**to be held in the Church on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**Apologies**  
**Minutes**  
**Appointment of Church Wardens**

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**Agenda for the Annual Parish Church Meeting for 2024**  
**to be held in the Church on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**Apologies**  
**Minutes**  
**Reports**  
    **Vicar's Report**  
    **Electoral Roll**  
    **Report on the PCC**  
    **Finance Report and Appointment of the Independent Examiner**  
    **Churchwardens' Report on the fabric, goods and ornaments of the Church 2023**  
**Election of Laity to the PCC**  
**Election of representatives to Deanery Synod**  
**Other Reports**

Hall Report  
Health & Safety  
Premises  
Croydon Addington Deanery Synod  
The North Wall Annexe  
Eco Group  
Safeguarding Report  
Junior Church Report  
Georgettes  
Men of St George  
Little Dragons  
Pop In  
Shrublands Food Bank  
The Church Garden/Grounds  
Longheath Community Care and Church Centre  
Monday Evening Bible Reading Group  
Book Reading Group  
Church Magazine  
Churches Together in Shirley  
Overseas Missions  
Christian Aid  
Church Drama

**Any Other Business**

## **REPORTS**

**Vicar's Report** No Incumbent to present.

### **ELECTORAL ROLL 2023 - 2024**

At last year's Parish meeting the Electoral Roll stood at 110. In the two revisions in 2023 this number increased to 112 which is where it stood prior to the revision undertaken as part of the preparation for this year's meeting. This revision is being undertaken as this report is being written and an oral update will be given at the meeting.

*Owen Whalley  
Electoral Roll Officer*

### **REPORT ON THE PCC**

Role of the PCC can be summarised as keeping the premises in good order and the finances under control. To do this the PCC held regular meetings every couple of months plus several extraordinary meetings to deal with specific topics.

The meetings covered a wide range of things, mundane matters like ensuring the rubbish is collected through to recruiting a new incumbent. Whatever else was on the agenda at each meeting reports were made on the finances, safeguarding matters, health & safety, and upkeep of the premises as well as of the Project Support Group in steering the work on the proposed Annexe. The necessary Insurance Policies were of course kept up to date but during the year all the various documents or "Policy Statements" on how St George's should approach things like Safeguarding, Health and Safety were reviewed and where necessary brought up to date.

Expenditure on major items, like the repair of the Lantern and roof has to be approved by the PCC but authority to pay smaller bills has delegated. The retirement of the incumbent during the year necessitated the revision of the the mandated signatories to the bank accounts.

In the latter part of the year the PCC was very much involved in the activities associated with recruiting a new Incumbent.

A major concern of the PCC is monitoring the church finances, looking for way to reduce expenditure and organising events to raise much needed money not least applying for grants.

*Eric Baldwin-Smith  
PCC Secretary*

### **FINANCE REPORT**

A verbal report on the Finances for 2023 will be made at the APCM. The entire report can be accessed by following the link <https://stgeorgeschurch.co.uk/apcm/> but the "Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 December 2023" and the "Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 December 2023" are reproduced below.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PARISH OF ST  
 GEORGE THE MARTYR, SHIRLEY, CHARITY NUMBER 1134140  
 FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2023

**Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 December 2023**

	Unrestricted funds	Designated funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total 2023	Total 2022
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Income and endowments from:</b>						
Donations and legacies (note 1)	64,420	11,004	5,315	-	80,739	121,205
Income from charitable activities (note 2)	820	-	-	-	820	4,422
Other trading activities (note 3)	3,724	19,694	-	-	23,418	21,450
Investments (note 4)	14,103	-	117	-	14,220	7,990
Other income (note 5)	-	-	-	-	-	1,484
<b>Total income</b>	<b>83,067</b>	<b>30,698</b>	<b>5,432</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>119,197</b>	<b>156,551</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>						
Raising funds (note 6)	12,834	156	601	-	13,591	10,979
Expenditure on charitable activities (note 7)	69,822	35,513	5,002	-	110,337	114,932
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>82,656</b>	<b>35,669</b>	<b>5,602</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>123,928</b>	<b>125,911</b>
<b>Net income / (expenditure) resources before transfer</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>(4,967)</b>	<b>(170)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(4,731)</b>	<b>30,640</b>
<b>Transfers</b>						
Transfers between funds	14,946	(14,782)	(164)	-	-	-
<b>Other recognised gains / losses</b>						
Gains/losses on investment assets	-	1,546	243	(627)	1,162	(7,965)
<b>Net movement in funds</b>	<b>15,357</b>	<b>(18,207)</b>	<b>(90)</b>	<b>(627)</b>	<b>(3,568)</b>	<b>22,675</b>
<b>Reconciliation of funds</b>						
<b>Total funds brought forward</b>	<b>3,637</b>	<b>477,646</b>	<b>10,144</b>	<b>26,712</b>	<b>518,139</b>	<b>495,464</b>
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	<b>18,994</b>	<b>459,439</b>	<b>10,052</b>	<b>26,085</b>	<b>514,570</b>	<b>518,139</b>

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**Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2023**

	General funds	Designated funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total 2023	Total 2022
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>						
Tangible Assets (note 10)	-	67,338	-	-	67,338	72,902
Investments (note 11)	22,225	16,173	4,344	26,085	68,827	67,665
<b>Total fixed assets</b>	<b>22,225</b>	<b>83,511</b>	<b>4,344</b>	<b>26,085</b>	<b>136,165</b>	<b>140,567</b>
<b>Current Assets</b>						
Cash at bank and in hand (note 12)	(7,033)	377,066	6,103	-	376,136	362,843
Debtors (note13)	5,359	-	-	-	5,359	16,593
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>(1,674)</b>	<b>377,066</b>	<b>6,103</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>381,495</b>	<b>379,436</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>						
Creditors (note 14)	(1,557)	(1,138)	(395)	-	(3,090)	(1,864)
<b>Net current (liabilities) assets</b>	<b>(3,231)</b>	<b>375,928</b>	<b>5,708</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>378,405</b>	<b>377,572</b>
<b>Net total assets</b>	<b>18,994</b>	<b>459,439</b>	<b>10,052</b>	<b>26,085</b>	<b>514,570</b>	<b>518,139</b>
<b>Represented by</b>						
Funds (note 15)						
General Unrestricted	18,994	-	-	-	18,994	3,639
Designated funds	-	459,439	-	-	459,439	477,644
Restricted funds	-	-	10,052	-	10,052	10,144
Endowment funds	-	-	-	26,085	26,085	26,712
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,994</b>	<b>459,439</b>	<b>10,052</b>	<b>26,085</b>	<b>514,570</b>	<b>518,139</b>

Approved by the Parochial Church Council on 9 April 2024 and signed on its behalf by:

Stephen Barker, Chairman

## **CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT ON THE FABRIC, GOODS AND ORNAMENTS OF THE CHURCH MARCH 2023 - MARCH 2024**

As you might expect, our focuses last year differed slightly from the norm as they included Barry's departure and the first half of the interregnum as well as maintenance issues surrounding roof leaks (the lantern and a vestry roof). We have also continued to address some of the issues raised in our last Quinquennial Inspection and we know that the main target this year for our Maintenance Team is some urgent repointing which just needs the weather to improve for work to begin.

We are now also anticipating our five yearly electrical inspection as well as the installation of lightning protection for our building, both of which are legal requirements and included in the QI.

All the statutory maintenance checks have been carried out (including the boilers, fire-fighting equipment and portable appliance testing) and the tower ladder is now fully compliant with the most recent health and safety legislation. The drains and gutters are regularly checked and cleared. The Church Log Book has once again been updated.

As ever, we are grateful to you all for your continued support, especially to Tony Aufenast for his continuing leadership and coordination of his 'Sound System' team; to the 'Premises/Maintenance' team ably led by Evan, Selvin and Kwame who respond to our requests for additional or specific help; and to Brian McGinnis for his continuing work in maintaining the garden so that it remains a place of peace, solace and beauty. We also need to thank our Assistant Wardens, Alexander and Evan, who, apart from generally supporting us, have also enabled us to have an occasional Sunday off.

This year we also have to say a huge thank you to Steve Barker, ably assisted by Susan Wheeler and supported by the rest of the PSG, for the time and effort he has put in to furthering the Annexe project. A task which is certainly not yet anywhere near completion and which he continues to lead.

As we are sure you are now aware, during an interregnum the responsibilities vested in the Church Wardens increase tremendously – we are literally where the buck stops! We hope you feel that we have listened to you and responded appropriately, certainly that will become particularly evident over the next few weeks as we look to interview and (hopefully appoint) a new priest-in-charge for our parish.

Finally, we need to thank Hilary for her guidance and leadership during the interregnum, and the staff team who so ably support her. The next year promises to be interesting (and hopefully exciting) as we look forward to the construction of the Annexe and begin to prepare for a new church hall. We are hopeful that, with all your continued love and support, we can together further strengthen our church's position at the heart of our community as we also prepare to welcome a new incumbent.

*Jan Payne and Heather Barker  
April 2024*

## HALL REPORT FOR APCM 2024

2023 will undoubtedly be our last year with a fully functioning Church Hall in its present form. It proved to be another successful year for children's party bookings although our income continued to be hugely affected by our inability to take late finishing casual bookings. Hall rents and hire charges have been increased by 5% this year to help offset rising utility prices but the loss of income has made our operating margins much tighter.

We did, however, welcome Shirley Neighbourhood Care as permanent residents of the Hall Meeting Room and we have promised them that they will be accommodated in whatever interim arrangements we have to make for our regular hirers through the next phase of our site development.

Last year we also reported on the retirement of our long-term treasurer. As nobody volunteered to take on the task, and in view of the diocesan led plans to demolish the existing hall sooner rather than later, the Hall's finances are now under the umbrella of the Church Finance Team with Liz Bebington having particular oversight of the Hall's accounts. I cannot thank her and the rest of the Finance Team enough for the support they have given me, especially as Liz and I now pretty much constitute the entire Hall Management Committee!

Once again, the bulk of the income from bookings has gone towards Hall salaries, utility bills, heating (including routine maintenance), insurance and running repairs. Whilst we are trying to keep these to a minimum due to the imminent demise of the hall, some of them are still unavoidable.

I am extremely grateful once again to Evan who must sometimes dread a call or message from me asking for help with some of that routine maintenance, but my pleas are always responded to quickly and with a smile. Lastly, I must thank all of you who so generously support us through the 100 Club.

Once again, my report concludes with looking forward to the Church Annexe and ultimately, hopefully, a new Church Hall. In spite of an innumerable number of hurdles, we remain hopeful that next year what is happening inside the new Annexe will be the focus of my next report.

*Jan Payne*

## HEALTH & SAFETY

The PCC take all aspects of Health & Safety very seriously and the policy is currently being reviewed.

## PREMISES

Just as it is important at home to keep an eye on things that need doing at home it is equally important to keep an eye on what needs doing at the Church, the hall and in the grounds.

A regular check is made round the buildings and grounds to see what needs doing or needs replacing. For major jobs like maintaining the bell tower ladder or repairing the Lantern and surrounding roof the PCC invites tenders from relevant firms but the smaller jobs are done by members of the congregation with the appropriate skills. At present work is in hand to repair the roof over the Childrens Corner and once that is done repoint the brick work attend to the inside decoration. Work is in hand to rescue appliances from vicarage for use later. Those of you coming by most days in the week will have recognized a familiar figure cutting the grass, tending the plants and working hard to keep the grounds and flower beds neat and tidy.

*Evan Rusell*

## **CROYDON ADDINGTON DEANERY SYNOD REPORT FOR THE APCM 2024**

St George's lay Deanery Synod representatives, as elected at the APCM 2021 for a three year term, are currently Helen Aylward, Liz Bebington and Anne-Louise Clayton. Ray Wheeler has also been a member of Deanery Synod as he was been a co-opted member of Diocesan Synod while Warden of Readers. Three 'new' Parish Deanery Synod members need to be elected this year though the three of us could continue for one more three year term if wished.

Croydon Addington Deanery is our local subdivision of the Archdeaconry of Croydon and includes the Anglican churches in Shirley, West Wickham, Addington, New Addington and Selsdon. (This is a different grouping from the ecumenical Churches Together in Shirley.) Croydon Archdeaconry is one of six which make up Southwark Diocese. However, it is the Deanery that elects members to the Diocesan Synod and also elects members across the Diocese to the General Synod. I hope that is not too confusing, but it shows the importance that members of Deanery Synod have in the responsibility and governance of the Church of England.

Our current Area Dean is the Revd Debbie Forman of St Mary's, Addington and a new Lay Chair, Janet Davies, has just been elected to replace the long serving Alice Hicks, who held that post all through 2023. The various clergy meet separately from Synod as a 'Chapter' and sometimes, though not recently, Readers and SPAs join them for a Greater Chapter. The Deanery crosses the Borough boundary as all the West Wickham Churches are in Bromley and it does not reflect any 'real' Croydon 'community'.

The various admin issues with circulating Notes of our synod meetings, as mentioned last year, have unfortunately continued this year due to the Secretary's ill health. .

There were three formal meetings in 2023, plus a Deanery Ascension Day Service and a Deanery Confirmation both held here at St George's, a Pilgrimage around the various churches in September 2023 and a Social in November 2023. Sadly, we have not all been able to attend all the meetings but it is good to hear from other local churches about their activities in the regular 'Sharing Good News' agenda item and meet other Synod reps too. Planning any sort of action together seems difficult as everyone is busy and the geographical area is not a 'natural' community.

In 2023, our first meeting was on February 28 at St George's when we heard a report from General Synod and then discussed, in smaller groups, ways in which there might be greater cooperation among our churches. On June 7 we heard about the Anti-racism Charter and considered the role of Lay Chair. Then in October the Archdeacon spoke and this February we heard from the Revd Carol Coslett about Lay Ministries and discussed bereavement support.

*Liz Bebington for St George's Deanery Synod Lay Reps.*

### **. THE NORTH WALL ANNEXE AT ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, SHIRLEY A GENERAL SUMMARY FOR THE APCM 2024**

The original basis for the proposed new annexe to the church (first discussed in early 2022) was to make provision for fully inclusive toilet facilities on site. Not glamorous but needed! Early consideration was given to where we might site such a new facility, with thoughts ranging from its placement in Children's Corner, to where the (false) organ pipes sit, to a re-build of the current general use toilet (sited off the corridor behind the altar). For a number of valid reasons, none of these ideas could be progressed. Furthermore, once discussions opened up, it was considered ideal if we could increase in-church toilet facilities even further, build a kitchenette, add some storage

capacity, cover over the steps leading down to the boiler room (which often floods), and to have space to run Junior Church (without the need for the children to be taken out and up to the current church hall). The idea for the new annexe was born.

The church does not have a great deal of money, but we have key assets. To fund the new annexe, Church Cottage was sold. [Whilst a source of income, keeping the cottage was becoming more problematic and the church was not well suited to be a landlord. A requirement to have to spend upwards of £100,000 to fully refurbish the cottage was the prompt to sell and invest that money to build the annexe instead.] At present, the funds from the sale remain ring-fenced for the annexe.

In the Autumn of 2021, following a competitive tendering process, architects were hired to start the design process and a number of surveys undertaken to make sure we could build a lasting structure – given that the Vicarage is only ‘young’ in house terms and is now to be demolished because of subsidence! To prepare the site (along the North side of the church) we had to remove a yew tree amongst others, with the intention to plant new trees, in greater number, on site, as part of the scheme overall. We have appointed also, a Quantity Surveyor, Structural Engineers, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, and have a number of other consultancies in-putting.

We have been faced from the outset with two ‘hurdles’ to overcome, requiring permission from both the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and Croydon Council’s Planning Committee. Our first sets of plans were rejected by the DAC and it took us well over a year to come to a point of compromise with them whereby they were mostly in agreement with our design proposals. You may be aware that after a failed first attempt to gain planning permission from Croydon Council, prior to Christmas past, we were successful at our second attempt. However, that meant going back to the DAC to further alter our original drawings and thoughts, now fitting in with the requirements of the Council, to see if the DAC were also happy, as without a ‘faculty’ from the Diocese we cannot progress the build! You may be aware that a faculty was in fact granted a short time ago. However, we are ‘not there yet’ as the faculty came with a series of (six) conditions that until met, means we still cannot move forward.

The next step is to complete what is known as a ‘Contractor’s Pack’ – this details, fully, what the annexe will look like, all services to it, and how it will be internally fitted out. On the basis of this pack, we hope that we will be able to get final approval to build from the DAC whilst simultaneously, be able to choose the contractor that will actually build the annexe. We hope to see a positive outcome to this stage of process just after Easter.

There are risks however and the PCC are aware of these and discuss them fully. Primarily, if the final costs to build the annexe are significantly more than the budget we have, we may not be able to proceed. Second, if the DAC does not grant final permission to proceed on this round, we will be forced to abandon the scheme – losing funds already spent! We hope and pray that all will proceed – in budget.

Once complete, the annexe, in combination with the church itself, now far more flexible for use following removal of the pews, we should have a very welcoming, all inclusive space, that allows for everybody to enjoy what St. George’s has to offer and in addition, to open it up far more to the wider Shirley community. Following, comes the next part of the overall plan!

The current church hall is rapidly becoming ‘time expired’, with a kitchen now not fit for purpose, non-inclusive toilet facilities, an increasing number of repairs needed, and a heating bill that is unsustainable. Simultaneously, the Vicarage (owned by the Diocese), as stated above, is unsafe to live in and has to be demolished. The Diocese have to provide a Vicarage for the new incumbent, following our current *interregnum*, and to do this they intend to sell the land associated with it. In praise of our forebears, 50% of the land proposed for sale belongs to us as St. George’s Church and hence, we may be in the fortunate position of then having funds to construct a new church hall that



fits with current regulations (for a kitchen and fully inclusive toilet facilities especially), is low-maintenance, and which will benefit the church and wider community for decades to come.

The Diocese is keen to move their plans forward as quickly as possible. We are looking however, to make sure that all current hall users have the opportunity to be decanted to the church/annexe combined facility prior to any redevelopment of that far end of the church site. Change is coming which can be very unsettling. What we are trying to do is make St. George's even more welcoming and inclusive for our congregation and the wider community, for now and for the future. The PCC asks for your support and prayers as we proceed.

*Steve Barker – Project Support Group Lead and PCC member. March 2024*

## **ECO GROUP REPORT FOR APCM 2024**

Since the gaining the Silver Eco Church Award in April, 2023, the Eco Group has continued to work towards attaining the Gold Award.

St. George's has continued to be aware of caring for God's earth through our Creation Services and prayers. The Eco Group has continued to organise activities to raise the profile of caring for God's earth.

The community litter pick in Long Lane Woods has now been increased to four per year. The numbers attending do fluctuate, but we are hoping that more of the congregation, as well as the wider public, will join us this year. A WhatsApp group has been set up for easier communication between those who are able to use this service.

Big thanks go to Revd Hilary Fife, who has met with Jan Turner on a number of occasions. She has worked through some of the files and has implemented various ideas to enable us to complete some of the questions. The files are available for anyone who wishes to look at them. Please speak to Jan Turner should you wish to do so.

The Buildings section continues to be the most challenging area to complete, but the Group is trying to gain points for some of the smaller items. However, we will not be put off as we continue to aim for Gold.

*Jan Turner*

## **SAFEGUARDING REPORT for 2023 - 2024**

The Safeguarding Committee has met twice since last year's APCM and is due to meet a third time in the near future.

'Safeguarding Sunday' was introduced in 2022 at a main 10am Eucharist. This has now been held successfully in 2022, 2023 and will be held again this year on 17 November 2024 for the whole congregation. We followed material produced by the charity Thirtyone:eight. The first year we used a questionnaire to establish a baseline of the congregation's understanding of the meaning of 'safeguarding'. We divided the congregation into discussion groups to facilitate exchange of ideas. In 2023 the congregation's engagement with safeguarding was extended by presenting three different scenarios common in church congregations. The congregation was split into 6 groups with two groups each considering the same scenario. Feedback was provided via group facilitators to the Safeguarding Committee. There is generally a very good understanding of safeguarding matters amongst most members of the congregation.

The frequency of DBS renewal required by the Diocese has changed in the last 12 months from being every 5 years previously, to now being every 3 years. All personnel required to have DBS checks have completed online applications and received their DBS clearance certificates. There is a rolling programme of DBS renewals which is regularly reviewed by the Committee. The next check to be renewed is due in August 2024. In addition to the necessary DBS checks all PCC and staff members, Junior Church leaders, paid staff and volunteers have undertaken the requisite online safeguarding training and received certification through the Church of England safeguarding portal.

With the upcoming interviews for prospective candidates for the Priest-in-Charge post here at St George's, it is reassuring that the Churchwardens and key personnel in the parish have undertaken the Church of England Safer Recruitment training.

At the beginning of this calendar year all safeguarding policies and procedures were reviewed by the Safeguarding Officers and then ratified and adopted at the February 2024 PCC meeting. The up-to-date policies are on display in the church porch and the hall where they are readily available to view.

*Susan Wheeler and Toyin Magbagbeola*  
*Parish Safeguarding Officers*

## **JUNIOR CHURCH REPORT May 2023 - April 2024**

Looking back at my report from last year's APCM, I see we were expecting to say farewell to Jaqualyn Moore at this point in 2023, after eight full years of service as a leader in Junior Church. In fact, it was a few months further on before Jaqualyn's move to a new home in Hampshire came to fruition. However, before Jaqualyn's departure I am pleased to say the leadership of Junior Church was enriched in May 2023 by the addition of Asitha Wasalatantri to the team. In the Spring term 2023, we had eleven children regularly attending Junior Church aged between 6-11 years with the occasional grandchild of a congregant joining the group from time to time.

Due to several significant events happening through the summer of 2023, including the King's coronation, the church Summer Fayre, the baptism of Sebastian Apodei (the youngest member of the church family) and Sue and Revd Barry Hengist's Farewell Service and lunch at the end of July, we did not hold the annual Junior Church summer party. Instead all the children and families joined in the festivities organised to wish Sue and Barry farewell and God speed as he retired from full-time ministry at the end of July. By the end of the Summer term 2023 we had thirteen children regularly attending Junior Church with the core ages still 6-11 years.

In August the leadership team (a total of six), together with interested members of the congregation (another 19 people), benefited from training funded by the Diocese and delivered by an organisation called *Growing Hope* focussing on sensory awareness and neuro-diversity. The training was extremely valuable with the trainer bringing examples of sensory aids for the participants to see and handle, a video being shown of an autistic child's view of the world in a shopping centre and a demonstration of how different noises and textures can be overwhelming for an individual. The training session has helped to inform the way Junior Church sessions are delivered each week, with more built-in physical movement around the hall, assisting all children to engage more fully with the teaching.

At the beginning of September, Bishop Rosemarie came to preach and celebrate the Eucharist. The children and young people had their school and college bags blessed by her at the beginning of the service. This is widely practised amongst other churches nationally, and is fast becoming a tradition at St George's also, since this was the second year the beginning of the new academic year has been marked in this way. Due to increasing numbers of children attending Junior Church (by the beginning

of the Autumn term 2023 we had fifteen children regularly attending) and the wide age range now involved, it became necessary to rota three adults a week onto the team and to start differentiated teaching across the group. Fortunately, although Jaqualyn Moore had stepped down as a leader in April, due to her original house move falling through, she agreed to come back on a temporary basis to help as an extra leader.

In October, a working group of the PCC began preparing the Parish Profile which would be sent out to applicants when the vacancy at St George's was advertised. To ensure the children's voices were included in the Parish Profile, we spent a Sunday morning in Junior Church asking them to focus on the qualities they wished to see in our next Priest. The result of their work is displayed on the noticeboard in the Children's Corner on the back wall. It is certainly thought provoking, so if you haven't read their work, do seek it out!

During November 2023, Jaqualyn's house in Hampshire finally completed and she moved away from Shirley permanently. At the same time, Sheila Fenner's family circumstances became such that she reluctantly stepped down from her involvement as a Junior Church leader of many years' standing. For a few weeks, the leadership team was down to just five adults, but fortunately with Christmas and the school holidays intervening, this situation did not put the team under too much pressure.

For the first time to my knowledge, Junior Church was asked to contribute to the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols this year. The children and young people were very pleased to be asked and enthusiastically learned by heart and performed the carol 'It was on a starry night' at that service. Other services at which our children and young people contribute are the monthly All-Age Services when they may be Welcomers, Intercessors, Lesson Readers or assisting with the Offertory. All of the school age children are competent readers and enjoy participating in services.

By January 2024 we had eighteen children regularly attending Junior Church. Mary Brown agreed to join the Junior Church team as an assistant to the leaders on a Sunday morning, helping to bring the total number of rota'd adults to six, with three adults per session. However, only having a total of six adults on the team and requiring three adults each Sunday to help deliver differentiated teaching to a minimum of two different age groups (but in reality three separate group activities), meant a considerable strain was being put on all members of the team. It has always been my aim to ensure that anyone on the Junior Church team regularly has two Sundays a month off duty and therefore is able to worship and be spiritually fed by attending a church service, otherwise it is all too easy to be drained completely when required to give constantly without opportunity for spiritual refreshment.

At the beginning of March 2024, Miranda Haslem joined the leadership team of Junior Church, bringing the total number of serving team members to seven, plus Sheila Fenner who assisted at the 'Step Into Good Friday' workshop recently and has agreed to help with any other ad hoc activities as she is able.

Unfortunately this year, although Revd Hilary Fife emailed both the local primary schools in good time asking them to circulate their parent bodies with details of the 'Step Into Good Friday' free workshop, she had to follow up during Holy Week with a second email asking them if they had received her original email. Only Monks Orchard Primary School responded, advising that they would send out the invitation to parents on Wednesday 27 March; giving parents only two days' advance notice. The result was a drop of almost 50% in children attending the workshop; we had only 14 children this year compared to 2023 when 22 children attended (8 from church and 14 from the local schools). Last year, and again this year, I was able to apply for and obtain grant funding in advance for this outreach event. Two new families were brought into the church as a result of last year's workshop. Sadly, this will not be the case this year.

With the onset of the Summer months, and the conflict of football and other activities versus church worship, I am expecting that one or two perhaps less committed families will fall away from

attendance. However, we still have a core membership of sixteen children and young people with a core group of six young people aged 10-12 years old. I am therefore currently exploring the possibility of running a monthly social activity/discussion group for these young people and am awaiting feedback on their availabilities for a meeting day and time. This new group would be facilitated by Miranda and myself and may include pizza and pop with discussions on Christian themes/challenges the young people face; possible social outings to help cement their church friendship group and other topics/activities as the young people decide.

Reviewing the exponential growth of Junior Church since January 2020, when regular attendance (prior to the outbreak of the pandemic) was eight children, and remembering the time prior to that when we frequently had just one child attending, I give thanks to the Lord for the children and families he has brought to St George's. I believe it is also important that members of the congregation give thanks for, and recognise, the commitment, faithfulness and dedication of the team of leaders I've had the privilege to work with since 2019 and that members of the church recognise how the Lord is rewarding this faithfulness through the growth of Junior Church. It is vital we do not take this gift for granted.

Please join with me in taking this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication, faithfulness and commitment of Timi Ashaye; Liz Bebington; Mary Brown; Sheila Fenner; Miranda Haslem; Faith Okpara and Asitha Wasalatantri.

*Susan Wheeler*  
*Junior Church Leader*

### **GEORGETTES REPORT FOR APCM APRIL 2024**

The Georgettes met several times last year with events geared around social gatherings, visits to the Churchill Theatre and a stand-out visit to the Mithraeum including lunch. Our events continue to be well attended and we are pleased to say that whilst we welcomed several new members last year, we have even more new members and innovative ideas already amongst our future activities.

This year we have once again planned events right up to December, with different group members again taking the lead on specific events and activities which has once again make for different and really interesting additions to our program.

*Jan Payne*

### **MEN OF ST GEORGE**

The MoSG meet regularly each Wednesday by Zoom. The numbers vary but usually there are 5 or 6 on line often including members who have moved away. There is no set programme, what we we talk about is just what comes up on the day. From time to time we meet up for a meal or visit somewhere of interest, the most recent visit was for breakfast at the Shirley cafe. The group is much stronger from sharing the 'ups and downs' of life. We also discuss issues like the loose church fire escape door, to get a common view. New members will be welcome, for details contact Tony Aufenast.

*Tony Aufenast*

## **LITTLE DRAGONS**

The little dragon toddler group at St George's has been running with a few volunteers after Reverend Barry and Sue Hengist left. Every Sunday after church the men and Junior Church Children and Leaders help to set up.

Little Dragons meets on Monday mornings, starting at 9.30 and finishing at 11.30 and tidy up continuing till after 12pm.

Activities includes: Play dough table, colouring table, book corner, train and car corner, baby corner, and much more. We also have rhyme and song time.

I have recently bought new toys, doctor kids, push chairs, builders tool set, I donated disney safari animal toys and book set, which the children love playing with.

The group has become very large with the minimum of 36 children every Monday. Children love coming that they can not wait till the next Monday not to talk about mums and dad's, grandparents and childminders love Little Dragons, it is now like a big family house in church.

Refreshments tops it all, with tea, coffee, biscuits, fruit and squash after song and rhyme time.

We charge £1.50 per child, but parents and carers want us to put the price up at least to £2.00, which will start from September 2024. After expenses, we pay the rest of the money into church funds to help with the cost of heating.

Running Little Dragons is a big commitment. Debbie a volunteer from the community does the weekly food shopping and helps. Mary and Pauline members of the church helps with refreshments and tidying up and rearranging the chairs back to normal church service settings. Tony in the background helps with administration and on call, Jan obviously checks on us and always on standby.

I have a very strong network volunteer team, which has make running Little Dragons very smoothly and successfully. Glory be to God.

My sincere thanks to junior church children and leaders, Evan, Nick, John, Shante, Jonathan, Tiffany, just to mention a few and not forgetting baby Sebastian.

*Regina Mensah*

## **POP IN**

Pop In is meets on a Monday morning and numbers are growing, typically we have over twenty coming along, several members coming with their carers. Most weeks we have a quiz but always refreshments, tea coffee biscuits etc and from time to time we have a lunch, usually fish & chips. New members are always welcome.

*Ron Bright*

## **SHRUBLANDS FOOD BANK**

At the present time supporting the Shrublands food bank with both food items and with money donations is a very important activity. Every Thursday I take the groceries that have been donated and each monthly we are able to give the food bank, often over £200 made up by a donation of £150 from the PCC, plus donations from regular donations plus any other ad hoc donations which have been made. It is very important that where people are making impromptu donations, often in

an envelope put in with the collection on a Sunday that the envelope is clearly marked as a donation for Shrublands. This means that it counts toward getting Gift Aid refunds.

*Evan Rusell*

## **MONDAY EVENING BIBLE READING GROUP**

Zoom means that a group which is very diverse in every way (not least geography) can meet fruitfully for 40 minutes every Monday evening – fitting in with work and family commitments, and not making unrealistic travel demands on those at the upper end of the 50 year age span. When I say the geography is diverse, I mean in particular Great Yarmouth! Two members kindly share the Zoom hosting. Each of us takes a turn at leading the evening's study. Very happy to welcome new (regular or occasional or "just testing") members. The programme and the notes are on the parish website, and text/commentary are provided on request where needed; so you can join in even without joining in. After some very rewarding time studying Psalms, which are deeply embedded in our daily worship but not always included in our Sunday morning services at St George's, we have moved on to Ecclesiasticus – which might not even appear in your Bible. It is proving a treasure trove of learning. We don't always agree with each other in discussion – though, perhaps surprisingly, we often do. We always learn from each other – sometimes through a follow-up Email as someone reflects further.

Bible Reading Footnote: A reminder that, as well as the Bible Reading Group, there are a number of resources to support your personal or family Bible study: The weekly Service Sheet captures the Sunday readings for follow-up during the week; and you can access commentary on-line if you want more background. Just type in the text reference, and google. If you decide to read any one Bible book in full, it is worthwhile getting a commentary, to capture what you are likely to miss if you just read the text. Tom Wright is a good bet, but there are lots of options. Some of us have shelves of commentaries if you want to borrow one. The Bible Reading Fellowship produces a range of Bible Reading Notes if you want to daily (or less frequent) Bible reading. Check their website for options.

*Brian McGinnis*

## **BOOK READING GROUP**

As with the Bible Group, the Book Reading Group programme features in the magazine and on the website. We look at something new each month: a small number of books, and larger number of extracts. This structure keeps the cost down. We gave up monthly physical meetings during Covid and because of Covid; and are now Emailing each other to share comments rather than venturing onto Zoom. This means we can include a member who now lives on the coast. Good books nourish discipleship, and there are a lot of good books on offer. By no means all of them are formally "religious" books. Each and every one of them encourages thought. If you want to suggest a book, and to share with us in reading it, please speak up. Two of our recent choices were inspired in that way.

*Brian McGinnis*

## **CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SHIRLEY**

The "pagan" world was impressed by seeing "how these Christians love one another". In today's "secular" world, it is important that those looking in from the outside can at least see that Christians

in their multitude of separate groupings at least “know one another”. Every Shirley church has resource issues, so, as well as doing various things together, we need to be informed about separate church initiatives. That knowledge provides a context for the healthy St George’s tradition of praying every Sunday for our sister churches. The outward expressions of Churches Together can be seen in the annual Unity Service (not obviously bringing visible unity any nearer), the World Day of Prayer, Shirley Neighbourhood Care, and the churches’ support for the Shrublands Food Bank. We meet each month for shared prayer – mainly on Zoom these days.

*Brian McGinnis*

## OVERSEAS MISSIONS

St George’s was launched in 1938 with a firm commitment to SPG – the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Mr Houghton, our then (Lay) Reader, was a champion of this cause. The core message was that being a Christian meant being a missionary – in word and in deed. Now, we are probably more hesitant about challenging other faiths, and more cautious about serving people with an objective of converting them. We can no longer kid ourselves that this is a Christian country, and the rest of the world our mission field! However, a church which is not a missionary church is missing a heart beat. At least, find a prayer slot for what is now USPG, and maybe for one particular “other place” you know something about. When USPG magazines and prayer diaries are on offer, brief yourself. Our own church is very far from being financially well off; but the USPG resources show many parts of the world where our income and expenditure would be dream-land!

*Brian McGinnis*

## CHRISTIAN AID WEEK 2024: MAY 12-18

The 2023 Christian Aid Week did better than expected, though less well than hoped – with commercial delivery of envelopes in some roads where there was a volunteer collection point not too far away. We raised from St George’s an overall total of about £1,080 – plus any on-line donations we didn’t know about. These 7 days are very important for an international aid charity which tries to help people permanently out of extreme poverty 365 days a year. Once upon a time, we were able deliver CA envelopes to, and collect envelopes from, most of the houses in the parish. Cold Calling rules (and lack of human resources) make that scale of fund-raising impossible. We have to rely on: deliveries with a **local** collection point, sponsored events, and hosted initiatives such as coffee mornings. Maybe a Concert? *A sponsored 70K in May is one option, If you would be willing to Do 70K, deliver envelopes, receive envelopes, host a fund-raiser, or do something more imaginative, please let Brian McGinnis or Pauline Russell know as soon as possible.* There will be envelopes available in church, and, of course, the on-line giving option. *Every contribution is important. What might seem to you a very modest offering might well be more money than someone in extreme poverty sees in a normal week.*

*Brian McGinnis*

## **THE CHURCH MAGAZINE**

A monthly opportunity to inform people about the church, for those with some sort of interest in the church – including a number of people who have moved away, or are still in the area but not attending the church. The information is important, but the emphasis is on the challenge to think about the information. This is not church propaganda (“What you ought to think”), but “When you think about this, what do you think?”. At a time when there is so much propaganda circulating, this is important. We have reduced the monthly print to 130 copies. A few are left over each month, but if there weren’t, there would be no copies for the casual visitor or interested stranger. Some people are happy to read everything on-line. A lot of people much prefer to get to grips with a printed text (including large print) in their hand. If you don’t “take” the magazine each month, please try it. £5 for twelve issues is a real bargain. Feel free to comment.....and to contribute.

*Brian McGinnis*

## **THE CHURCH GARDEN**

An emphasis on buildings and on access can make the rest of the ground controversial; and of course different people want that ground for different purposes. (The dog and dog walker and the children wanting to play can both be accommodated successfully, but only if the former do some clearing up after their visit. The folk wanting a quiet drink or a bite to eat, or even a vape/smoke, can fit in with others....but again some end of visit tidying up would be good.) Most of the human visitors expect “look good”. Nearly all the much larger number of other creatures that visit, expect “eat good”. There can be some clash of interests here too. We are trying very hard to cater for everyone and everything. Help in so doing is always appreciated – though please check that tidying up is not destroying. I still remember the gardening lady who asked non-gardening husband to help by tidying up in the garden. She came back to find no weeds...and no fruit bushes and no flowers. “A blank, my Lord”, to quote Shakespeare.

*Brian McGinnis*

## **CHURCH DRAMA**

This is just a marker that for much of our St George’s history religious drama was very much at the heart of what we did – across the age range. We do need to keep in mind, and keep as a physical possibility, the potential of both church and hall for the learning experience of enacting and watching drama. The Mystery Plays, etc, spoke to generations with no radio or TV, and without universal literacy. Religious drama could speak as powerfully to the YouTube generation.

*Brian McGinnis*