



Annual Reports 2023

**Annual Parochial
Church Meeting
Sunday 21st April 2024**

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Rector's Report

2023 has been a very positive year. We have launched our new Mission Action Plan which has the strapline "Inclusive and diverse, striving to share God's love for all." It has been very heartening that as we set out our vision for an active and inclusive community we have, despite some worries, balanced our budget for the year. This is down to the amazing generosity of our congregation throughout the year and responding to a focussed stewardship campaign in November.

At the APCM in April Gill Lyall completed her six years as Church Warden – she has made a massive contribution to the life of St Mary's and continues to offer her time and talents week in week out. Every Church Warden brings their own particular gifts and it has been a delight to welcome Smita Bora as the new Church Warden.

This year also saw Francesco's priesting. This was held at St Pancras Church on Euston Road and was Bishop Rob's last service as Bishop of Edmonton. Francesco's first celebration of the Parish Eucharist, at which Revd Dr Sam Wells of St Martin in the Fields preached, was followed by the Parish BBQ.

There continue to be many opportunities to get involved in church life throughout the week. New ventures this year included an English conversation class, an informal communion for parents with very young. The Chapter House meeting on Wednesdays with tea/coffee and lunch wrapped around the Ilam Holy Communion service has been a great success. We have hosted RE workshops for St Mary's

Primary School covering Harvest, Lent and Holy Communion. The recent Messy Science event in the Spring Half-Term was expanded to two mornings covering weather science on Monday and forces on Tuesday.

An immense amount of work has gone into the Church and Churchyard Project with Helen Bevan taking the lead and with much invaluable assistance from Iain Lyall. We have been successful with funding bids from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Barnet Council Community Infrastructure Levy Fund, National Churches Trust and the Benefact Trust. We also had a great response to our parish Gift Day for the project. All of this has given us great confidence and we hope to begin the project in Spring 2024.

Read about these things and much more that is going on in the life of the church in the reports below.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed their time and efforts to our church this year.

The Rector Fr Philip



Report on the Proceedings of the Parochial Church Council

23 May 2023

The Council elected officers and appointed the following Committees: Standing, Mission, Children & Young People, Estate, Social, Green & Fair, Hall Steering, and Communications. The National Lottery bid, Give Me Shelter! had gone in, results to be published on 30 June. There was still £150k of funding to be found. There were a range of Lent groups on offer, and all of them went well. There are 11 candidates for Confirmation. Francesco's ordination was to take place on Saturday 24 June and he was to preside over his first service on Sunday 25 June. Philip and the Communications committee are looking at a more joined up information management system such as Google Drive.

Karyn Ray was appointed and welcomed to the role of Safeguarding Officer. Karyn's experience of Safeguarding in various contexts will be invaluable to us. Jeff, our treasurer, reported that a Bequest of £50K had been received, specifically for the roof.

Julian, our school Link Governor, reported the tragic news of the death of a year 2 boy. A Maple tree had been planted in remembrance.

12 July 2023

The Safeguarding Action Plan had been reviewed. It was important that PCC members completed a DBS check and Safeguarding training. PCC agreed a new Ex-Offender Policy. This is largely based

on the Diocese model, and covers paid and unpaid/voluntary employment. The Safeguarding Policy was signed and agreed. Fundraising for the Give me Shelter! Project was discussed at length. Suggestions included: a Fundraising committee; an Open Day with tours of the church and a historical tour of our graveyards; re-introducing passing the plate; a small slip/insert with information on ways to give, and Gift Aid. The Treasurer was asked to actively pursue alternative banks for internet banking. Extensive discussion and debate took place around the Common Fund Offer this year. Views amongst PCC members varied considerably. The Common Fund Offer sought for 2024 was £91,300. Two proposals were tabled. PCC did not reach a majority decision on either. The decision was deferred. The Treasurer was instructed by PCC to report this situation back to the Diocese.

Philip reported that Christine Quintal would be leaving the Parish Administrator post at the end of July. An excellent candidate had been interviewed and we were awaiting the results of the usual checks to be completed prior to offering a contract.

18 September 2023

Karyn reported that the Safeguarding Action Plan was going ahead, and she was also monitoring who had completed Basic level Safeguarding training, and who had gone through the DBS checking process.

Helen reported that the Give Me Shelter! Church & Churchyard Project had been approved by the National Lottery. Helen was congratulated heartily by PCC for her dedication and determination to make this project happen. A Procurement Policy had been designed and approved by the National Lottery. A meeting had taken

place between the Lottery and members of the SMAF project team to go over the Heritage Lottery payment schedule and their requirements for attendant progress reports and ongoing new risk identification. Helen and Felix were about to re-visit Barnet Council's Decisions Team to request further funding. This request is strongly supported by Cllr Dan Thomas. Briefs for an Architect and Landscape Architect were due to go out. An Activities Co-ordinator and an Evaluation Officer were to be appointed. Smita will be in charge of publicity for the project. A local resident is keen to set up a Friends of the Churchyard group. This is an excellent way to continue to engage with a range of our local community members, not just church goers, to help take care of our churchyard. Felix was thanked warmly by PCC for his input into negotiations and meetings with Barnet Council, and his rapid response in helping to produce the Procurement Policy. It was agreed to form a Fundraising Committee chaired by John Bier to have a broad range of invitation and involvement.

Three Faculties were formulated and unanimously agreed by PCC. These concerned: stone and tomb conservation and the repositioning of the Georgian sundial to its original site in the south garden; the existing timber picket fence On Rectory Close boundary to be replaced by steel estate railings; for work to be carried out in the Southern Church Garden in line with the concept design in the Give Me Shelter project!

Jeff reported that he wanted to use Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) for online banking. PCC unanimously agreed that we formally approach CAF for online banking. Pat, our Stewardship Secretary reported that several congregation members have increased their giving spontaneously.

The Health & Safety Policy was reviewed and unanimously accepted, including a new Risk Assessment section reflecting the needs of the night shelter. A proposal was tabled: 'that a Common Fund Offer of £91,300 for this year be given as requested, then in the summer, we as a PCC may have to consider a 'pause' for next year'. It was agreed but not unanimously. 13 members for: 3 against: 1 abstention.

The Quinquennial Inspection was imminent and dry rot had been found in the pulpit area.

14 November 2023

Philip reported that he had received good news from the Benefact Trust, a Christian grant-making trust. Philip applied to them for funding and has been awarded £13,950. Philip was congratulated by PCC. Terms of Reference for the Project Leaders for the Give Me Shelter! Project were circulated and unanimously agreed. Helen gave a progress report on the project using the standard reporting format required by Heritage Lottery to enable funding to be drawn down. A Fundraising committee has been convened. Terms of Reference were unanimously agreed. The first event was to be a jazz dinner dance with ENJO on Saturday 10 February. It was reported that a new Stewardship campaign was being planned. There was also to be a Big Giving Day on 26th November, during which the funding needs of the church were to be explained.

A Mission Allocation of £7K was unanimously agreed, as were the proposed allocations to charities suggested by Nigel. Julian, our School Link Governor, reported that school has restarted and pupils are nicely settled. Reception is full with 60 pupils, an upturn on last year. The school has spent quite generously on building work. It will be coming up to church for its Christmas concert.

Philip reported that Francesco had been out on loan to St Mary's East Barnet and would also be presiding in Highgate as well. The Awards Evensong at St Paul's was imminent, and the celebration of LLMs was also to take place there on November 21. The Green & Fair event made £300. A Christmas magazine was planned supported by donations from local shops and businesses. The new Fundraising Committee will submit reports in future to PCC in advance of meeting in line with the new requirement for all committees and other groups. Deji reported that churches Together in Finchley is giving spiritual support wherever it can. The Winter Shelter has been successfully launched and is ready to receive 17 guests each session. Warm thanks were extended to Smita and all her helpers for such well-managed and welcoming provision.

26 February 2024

21 people and 1 dog had walked our newly created footpath around Finchley with the church as its centre point. This is one of the Footpaths activities in the Give Me Shelter! Project. A very enjoyable event with really interesting pit stops along the way to consider aspects of local history. PCC unanimously approved a Faculty to 'undertake roof repair and conservation as detailed by Edwards Wilson' Warm thanks were extended to Helen for her continued hard work on all aspects of the project.

The draft Auditable Accounts for 2023 were presented by Jeff to PCC, were discussed in detail and were approved unanimously. After in depth discussion and several adjustments, PCC unanimously agreed the Budget for 2024. Estate committee will need to cost a new eco- friendly heating system for when the old boiler breaks down. We will be looking at a 5 figure sum to treat the dry rot. There is to

be an Eco-Audit in April, and there a lots of areas in which we are non-compliant that we are already committed to addressing. Smita reported that we are now giving out a redesigned Newcomer Pack with clear lists of ways to donate.

The APCM will take place on Sunday 21 April 2024 in the Hall after Eucharist.

- Barbara Crosbie, PCC Secretary



Fabric Report

The Fabric Report only covers the Church building. Other parts of the estate will be covered in the Estate Committee report.

Overall, the Church remains in a good and stable state of repair. However, on the advice of the Estate Committee, the PCC has committed itself to a major programme of roof renovation and landscaping work in the churchyard:

- Budgets for the roof and churchyard project have been prepared to account for inflation and reduced scope of work, leaving St Mary's with a significant shortfall
- Successful applications have been made to the Barnet Infrastructure Levy, the Heritage Lottery Fund and other grant giving bodies towards the cost of the works, leaving a substantially reduced shortfall in the order of £100,000 still to be raised
- Barnet have received planning approval for the replacement of the fence between Rectory Close and the churchyard. Work will commence shortly
- Our Ecclesiastical Architect has submitted a revised faculty application and a Planning Application based on finalised plans and construction details. Our Quantity Surveyor is updating the budget based on these.

Other activity/works during 2023:

- The Estate Committee continues to monitor several cracks in the North and West walls. There is seasonal movement in the West wall but an old crack in the North wall has opened

significantly. The external section has been repaired and sealed; monitoring continues

- A small crack has appeared in the floor adjacent to the pulpit. This is being monitored
- Various roof leaks are being monitored. The outer South aisle and the Northwest corner are of particular concern and urgent interim works are needed. A new leak occurred in the North Aisle adjacent to the pulpit. This caused significant decorative damage and dry rot is evident in the roof beam. This is being monitored whilst the area is drying out.
- Repairs have been carried out to the Church clock and to the striker
- New altar rails gained faculty approval and are now in use

- **Smita Bora and Iain Lyall, Church Wardens**



Estate Committee Report

The Estate Committee met five times during 2023, to review the condition of our estate, to recommend and oversee improvements, and to monitor routine works, in order to maintain the good repair of the St Mary's property portfolio.

Church and churchyard

Please see the Fabric Report for a report on the Church, including Church related activity and works during 2023.

Halls

The Halls continued to support the Night Shelter in 2023. There have been issues with the Hall roofs and water ingress. Some remedial work was carried out in 2023. Further works are required. Minor works have been carried out during the year as required.

Blue Beetle

An electrical inspection took place in the Blue Beetle. Minor works have been carried out during the year as required.

28 Hendon Lane

Some remedial work has been carried out in the valley gutter area between 28 Hendon Lane and the Blue Beetle. The water tank, which

was leaking, has been repaired. Minor works have been carried out during the year as required.

The Rectory

A large sycamore tree has been removed from the back garden. Finchley Charities have replaced the eastern boundary fence (between the Rectory and Pewterers Court). Minor works have been carried out during the year as required.

- Nick Upton



Mission Committee

This committee of the PCC focuses on God's mission in Finchley, through and by St Mary's. We met five times over 2023 and our work covered the following matters:

We finalised a new Mission Action Plan for the years 2023 to 2026 and launched it. We ensured that it was collected or delivered to as many as possible on the electoral roll and on our contact lists.

We asked ourselves whether the congregation felt that we were diverse and inclusive as we wished to be. We organised a lunch for the PCC and any members of the congregation who wanted to attend, where we discussed these issues. The lunch, attended by about 30 people who were diverse in terms of age and race, was enjoyable and people mixed up very well. At a subsequent service, the congregation was asked to express what was the best thing about St Mary's and a number of people said 'Love'.

As our MAP commits us to organising Retreats and Quiet Days, we followed up a suggestion of Franceso's that we make a pilgrimage to St Albans Cathedral. The visit by more than 30 people took place in October. It was much enjoyed and included a tour and a talk from one of the clergy on the staff about Pilgrimages.

The Church and Churchyard Appeal ('Give Me Shelter'). This was much in our thoughts throughout much of the year. We had a discussion about the need for organised fundraising, and as a result the PCC agreed to set up a fundraising committee, chaired by John Bier. We were pleased to hear about the various activities which would promote knowledge and interest in St Mary's which were all set up with volunteer leaders. We encouraged the fundraising

committee to organise a Gift Day. This was subsequently done, and over £25,000 was raised.

As usual, we considered donations from church funds for mission agencies and charities. We were not sure how much the PCC were intending to spend and so we decided to nominate 9 organisations for a share of a figure to be decided by the PCC. Subsequently the PCC allocated £7,000, as opposed to the usual £10,000. We split the money between the following organisations:

- USPG
- North London Hospice
- St Francis in the Engine Room
- Embrace the Middle East
- St Mary's (East Finchley) Foodbank
- Street Child (recommended by the Junior Choir)
- Winter Shelter
- Five Talents (Butere)
- Children's Society

In March 2024, the accounts for the year 2023 were finalised and the PCC discovered that they had been too pessimistic about the outcome for the year, back in November 2023. So, they allocated £3000 to charities to be chosen by the Mission Committee, to make up for the £3000 shortfall in 2023.

In addition to these allocations, we decided to raise money at the Christmas services for both Noah's Ark Children's Hospice and the Church and Churchyard Appeal. For Good Gifts, which once again John Bier volunteered to organise, we decided that Homeless Action in Barnet should be the recipient the money raised.

Finally, we reviewed the giving to the church funds and in particular stewardship. Noting that because of the pandemic and the financial

crisis, we had not asked the congregation specifically to review their giving since 2019, we organised an approach to the whole congregation. Also included were all those on our contact list for news about St Mary's. It is too early to judge how successful this was, but as giving continues during 2024, this will become clear.

- Nigel Wildish



Junior Church

Throughout the last year the Junior Church has met most Sundays during term time. A number of children attend regularly, if not always on the same Sunday. The year has been punctuated by big projects, most memorably the massive multi-roomed Noah's Ark built of cardboard boxes and tubes in the Summer Term 2023, filled with a menagerie of paper animals. Volunteers from the Junior Church again helped to staff a stand at the school fair in July to advertise the group to parents and carers. The stand offered free craft opportunities to children to give them a taster of the type of things they might do at Junior Church and they were then given flyers to take home advertising not only the Junior Church but Acorns and other church group too. In July 2023, for the first time since before the covid pandemic, the final Sunday of the summer term saw those who'd attended Junior Church receive attendance prizes and certificates during the main 10am service.

The highlight of the Autumn Term was again the Nativity play, written by Colin Platt and providing the opportunity for as many children as possible to take part. The Junior Church has also contributed artwork for special occasions such as One World Week, the Harvest Festival and Holocaust Memorial Day. Members of the Junior Church regularly read and intercede at the All-Age services.

The Junior Church remains small, but consistent. It could not run without the help of the dedicated band of volunteers who give their time and talents on a Sunday morning but it really does need more children - please spread the word.

- The Rector Fr Philip

Churches Together in Finchley

Churches Together in Finchley gathers regularly to pray together.

The Lent Study Group this year looked at different sorts of Psalms.

Ecumenical services were held on Good Friday (at Ballards Lane Methodists) and Pentecost (at St Mary's).

The Warm Spaces initiative has been run again this year starting in mid October. It is hosted by St Margaret's. It provides a warm space physically and also a warm welcome and social space. In January there was a session led by Dementia UK for those interested in becoming a Dementia Friendly. The annual Holocaust Memorial Service was held at St Mary's and was again very well attended.

- **The Rector Fr Philip**

Book Group

We continue to meet on Zoom as it makes it easy for us all to gather for a pleasant hour discussing a range of books. This year we have read: "Whaling" by Nathan Munday, "Small Things Like These" by Claire Keegan, "The island of missing trees" by Elif Shafak and "Klara and the Sun" by Kazuo Ishiguro. We continue to read a wide range of books and will try anything that is suggested. New members are always welcome to join.

- **The Rector Fr Philip**

Bible Reading Group

This group meets fortnightly on a Tuesday afternoon at Claire Disbrey's house. This year we have ranged from Genesis through to Revelation. It always good to see new people!

- **The Rector Fr Philip**

Lectio Divina

Our Lectio Divina or "Holy Reading" group has become a regular feature of parish life meeting fortnightly on Monday mornings for an hour which includes time for a sociable cup of tea too! We read a short passage of scripture prayerfully several times giving an opportunity for us to share the words or phrases that speak to us as we listen. It is a prayerful activity rather than Bible study. This group is open to anyone. Dates are fixed in advance and people can come when they are able to come.

- **The Rector Fr Philip**

Seeking God

A group of up to 13 or 14 people met occasionally in the house of one of us over the year, as we have met for many years now. We choose new topics to discuss each time and over 2023, we discussed:

- The first 5 Commandments
- The seasons celebrated by the Church – Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Trinity
- The Question: How can we deal with Death?
- Worship across different world cultures
- The Question: What do Jews believe? Led by a Jewish couple

We continue to meet every 6 weeks or so, and are very happy to welcome new members or occasional visitors.

Our warm thanks to Friedgard Scrimgeour for hosting us.

- Nigel Wildish



Night Shelter 2023

St Mary's hosted our Night Shelter on Sunday evenings and Monday mornings from the start of November this year. Our volunteers provided hospitality for up to 16 men and women who were experiencing homelessness. Guests received a warm welcome, a hot evening meal, a safe place to sleep and breakfast. There was space for recreation in the evenings and endless cups of tea and coffee. Many volunteers sacrificed their time and gave generously, including Akosua Asantewa-Nkansah who managed to persuade some new volunteers to sleep over with the guests at very short notice.

The final session with our guests was on New Year's Eve. Florence Somers managed to source donations from several local businesses on Ballards Lane, for which we are immensely grateful:

- Non-halal meat by Pdraig O'Shea from *Annie's Freehouse*
- Halal meat by *Shwan Meats*
- Cakes by *Pelny Brzuch*
- Vegetables by *Mega Food Centre*
- Free haircuts by *Vesta Hair Salon*

Alongside these generous donations, Florence's culinary skills and a delicious vegetarian dish prepared by Latifa Latif, we managed to celebrate the New Year in style with flutes of Nosecco, party poppers and fireworks on the television. We look forward to hosting the Night Shelter again in 2024 if our services are required.

**- Latifa Latif, Akosua Asantewa-Nkansah and Smita Bora
Winter Shelter Co-ordinators**



Stewardship

There are some ninety regular stewardship donors. Most regular donors donate by the Parish Giving Scheme. The total envelope and online giving, which excludes the tax refund due on funds donated later in 2023, came to some £115,000.

Social Committee

The social committee organised various events during 2023, including the Easter Sunday morning breakfast, lunch following the Patronal Festival and refreshments after the Carol Service.

- Patricia Bagster

Communication Committee

The Communication Committee initiated and oversaw significant developments and initiatives that have enhanced our parish's outreach and engagement over the past year. Central to our successes has been the intensification of our communication strategies aimed at fostering a closer and more vibrant parish community.

Introduction of Parish Communication and Marketing Officer

This year's outstanding achievement was the appointment of a new Parish Communication and Marketing Officer. This volunteer position has been instrumental in steering our communication efforts towards greater clarity, consistency, and impact. The officer has played a crucial role in developing our messaging, enhancing our visual identity, and ensuring our parish's values are communicated effectively across all our platforms.

Enhanced Social Media Presence

Our parish's presence on social media platforms has seen remarkable growth. Notably, our ventures into advertising on Next Door and Instagram have garnered positive attention and engagement from parishioners and the wider community. These platforms have been invaluable in promoting events, updates, and initiatives, reaching a broader audience than ever before. One of our key highlights was the promotion of new events aimed at enriching our parish life. Among these, the English conversation group stands out as a

testament to our commitment to inclusivity and community building. This initiative has been well-received, providing a welcoming space for local people with no links to the parish

Launch of a New Facebook Group

To create more direct and less mediated communication among our congregation members, we launched a new Facebook group this year. This initiative aims to provide a platform for parishioners to connect, share, and support each other in a more personal and immediate way.

- The Rev'd Francesco Aresco

'Being With' Group

The Being with Group has successfully concluded a year of enriching gatherings, providing a space for young adults and parents alike. Meeting most Fridays at 28 Hendon Lane, the group has continued to be a beacon of friendship, faith, and deep conversation among its members, fostering a unique environment for personal and communal growth in Christian life.

Throughout the year, our sessions have blended biblical readings, thoughtful discussions, and reflective sharing on various aspects of our faith and daily challenges. This mix has not only helped to deepen the understanding of the scriptures of those attending but has also enabled them to consider how to apply these teachings more vividly in their lives.

Significantly, the group has been instrumental in creating and nurturing strong bonds among its members. The atmosphere of openness and trust has encouraged even some from other parishes to join us. The inclusivity and warmth provided have been pivotal in making everyone feel welcome and valued.

In conclusion, this year has been a testament to the incredible impact of coming together in faith and friendship. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all members for their dedication, support, and active participation, which have been vital in shaping the vibrant spirit of our group. Looking ahead, we are filled with anticipation for all we will achieve together, guided by our shared commitment to living out our Christian calling.

- The Rev'd Francesco Aresco



Communion and Baptism Class for Children

The Communion and Baptism Class for Children, conducted on Sunday following the service, has experienced a year of fruitful engagement and spiritual growth among our young participants. Aimed at deepening the children's understanding of Christianity, the classes have offered a dynamic blend of reflection, interactive games, and prayer, enabling them to explore and reflect upon their faith in a nurturing environment.

A fundamental element of the program has been to provide the children with a foundational knowledge of the significance of Communion and Baptism within the Christian faith. Through a curriculum designed to be engaging and educational, the children have embarked on an exploratory journey, enhancing their spiritual knowledge and connection.

Interactive games and activities have played a pivotal role in making the learning process both enjoyable and memorable. By incorporating fun into the educational experience, we have witnessed remarkable participation and interest among the children, fostering an environment where learning about faith becomes meaningful and delightful.

A standout highlight of the year has been the children's acting in the Passion Play. This event allowed the children to embody the stories and teachings they had learned, bringing the narrative of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection to life. The dedication, talent, and enthusiasm displayed by the children in their performances were truly inspiring, making it a profound experience for both the participants and the congregation. This creative expression of their

faith has not only enhanced their understanding of the Easter story but has also enriched the spiritual life of our church community.

- The Rev'd Francesco Aresco



Baptism and Confirmation Groups

As the curate of our parish, it has been a privilege to host and lead the Baptism and Confirmation groups throughout the past year. This report aims to provide an overview of our activities, the spiritual growth witnessed by our participants, and the impact of these groups on our church community. These meetings have been, and continue to be, for individuals seeking to understand their faith and prepare for baptism or confirmation.

The discussions have allowed participants to deeply engage with the material, fostering a supportive community atmosphere. The curriculum covered the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, the church's history and traditions, and the meaning and implications of confirmation as a deepening of one's commitment to the ways of Jesus Christ.

The spiritual journey of the Baptism has not only been transformative for the participants but has also enriched our parish community. The enthusiasm and renewed faith of the newly baptised and confirmed have injected vigour into our collective worship and community life. It is heartening to see increasing numbers of parishioners taking an active interest in nurturing their spiritual lives and those of their fellow community members.

- The Rev'd Francesco Aresco

English Conversation Group

Overview

The English Conversation Group, initiated as an outreach effort, has notably expanded beyond parish bounds to include parents from St. Mary's School and others not directly linked to the parish. Its aim to facilitate language learning and foster community connections has seen remarkable success, making it a vital component of our mission activities.

Participation

The group has attracted a diverse cohort, with many participants from the wider community and St. Mary's School. This diversity has enriched the sessions, providing a broad spectrum of cultural and

linguistic exchanges. The welcoming and supportive environment has been pivotal in its growth and popularity.

Impact

The success of the English Conversation Group extends beyond language learning; it has fostered a sense of belonging among members and bridged communities. Many participants have reported an increased confidence in their English proficiency, leading to better integration into the community and improved professional and personal lives. Moreover, the group has served as an effective form of mission, opening new avenues for outreach and engagement with individuals and families not previously connected to the parish.

- **The Rev'd Francesco Aresco**

Lent Course

Overview

This year's Lent Course centred on exploring Simone Weil's "Intimations of Christianity in Ancient Greek Literature" has proven to be a spiritually enriching and intellectually stimulating series. Following the success of the previous year's focus on Tolstoy's "Resurrection," this course continued to draw many attendees, including a diverse group from different parish groups, showcasing the growing interest and commitment to deepening our spiritual insights through literature.

Course Content and Engagement

Simone Weil's reflections on the presence of Christian themes within Ancient Greek literature served as the basis for our

discussions and reflections. The course facilitated an engaging and thought-provoking environment, allowing participants to delve into the complex relations between faith, suffering, and divine grace as presented in classical texts through a Christian lens. The insightful readings and group interactions uniquely examined our faith and spirituality, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the continuity between classical wisdom and Christian thought.

Attendance and Participation

The Lent Course saw attendance numbers similar to the previous year, confirming the community's growing interest in the theological exploration of spirituality. Participants from parish groups brought different perspectives, enriching the discussions with their unique insights and backgrounds. The inclusive atmosphere encouraged open and heartfelt dialogue, leading to a meaningful exchange of ideas and personal reflections.

Impact and Feedback

Feedback from attendees has overwhelmingly emphasised the course's impact on their spiritual growth and understanding. Many highlighted the value of integrating philosophical and theological perspectives into their faith journey, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to broaden their horizons in such a supportive and engaging setting. The course has notably contributed to a deeper communal exploration of spirituality, further knitting our parish community together through shared intellectual and spiritual pursuit.

- The Rev'd Francesco



Music

2023 was a good and very busy year for our music ministry, with a full roster of choral services enriching our worship here at St Mary-at-Finchley. Both the adult choir and Youth Choir were strong in numbers. New members joining during 2023 included Fiona MacDonald, Elizabeth Moore-Bick and Takatoshi Shigeta. Jane Lee is now our honorary Librarian and Safeguarder for the Youth Choir.

Edmund Griffith retired from choir in January 2023. Thank you, Edmund, for your skill and faithful support of the choir over many decades.

We continued to enjoy the support of organists Tim Hooper and Damon Ying, with our Organ scholar Lamgie Yip scheduled to play monthly. Of the Youth Choir all those aged 8 and above studied successfully for RSCM Voice for Life exams. Congratulations to them all for great singing and lots of enthusiasm and hard work. We welcomed several enthusiastic youngsters into the Youth Choir from local primary schools. The annual Young Voices Festival was very successful, in March 2023, with 25 young singers attending from across London. Penny Davison and Margaret continue to give excellent support to the Youth Choir both musically and administratively. Thank you both for this!



In May 2023 the adult choir took part in the RSCM initiative 'Sing for the King' learning and singing a new piece by Joanna Forbes L'Estrange called 'The Mountains shall bring peace'. We were asked

to sing this for a French TV news channel and had a very entertaining Thursday evening just before the Coronation, being recorded and interviewed. They couldn't quite understand that we weren't going to be AT the Coronation.

During 2023 we planned in secret a very special celebration in music of Philip's 15th anniversary as Rector of this parish. A new organ voluntary was commissioned by Alison and the adult choir from local composer David Loxley-Blount and it received its first performance on Sunday 15th September 2023, played by organist Tim Hooper, with the choir joining for the final page. It was a true surprise for Philip to hear this inventive piece into which the composer cleverly wove some of Philip's favourite tunes. Thank you to Penny Davison for researching exactly Philip's favourite tunes, and to Gladys Vendy for having kept the service sheet from Philip's induction service showing the pieces of music he had chosen.

In October many of the St Mary-at-Finchley choir attended an event organised by ChurchMusicLondon (replaces RSCM) with John Rutter. This was a wonderfully uplifting day, and it was great to sing with other choirfolk from all across London and beyond The – this sounds as if it was the choir's concert.

The Christmas concert for NHS charities was a lively evening with lovely contributions from across the whole community, including some of our Ukrainian friends, young singers from St Mary's Primary School and the youth and adult choirs.

Our visits to Fernbank were put on hold due to illness at the Nursing Home. We hope to resume these in 2024.

For a chat about joining the choir, please contact Alison Smart Fisher: alisonsmartfisher@gmail.com

And to be kept in touch about choral events in the London area please email churchmusiclondon@gmail.com giving your permission to go on the new mailing list (replaces RSCM London).

If you'd like to support our lively concert series eg as a sponsor or helper please email or speak to Alison.

- Alison Smart Fisher

Deanery Synod

St Mary's sends four lay representatives as well as the Rector and the Curate to the Synod. This is a gathering of representatives of all the Anglican churches in the borough of Barnet. The four lay representatives are Deji Makanjuola, Patricia Bagster, Nick Upton and Nigel Wildish. The Synod is led by the Area Dean, the Revd Dr Julie Gittoes and the Lay Chair, Catherine Okrafo-Smart. A secretary and treasurer have also been appointed.

The Synod met 3 times in 2023. At each meeting vacancies for the position of deanery governor at the church schools in Barnet were considered and where possible such vacancies were filled. In addition to the meetings, the Area Dean invited all members to an Evensong service at St Mary's, Hendon on 17 September.

On 8 February, the meeting was at St Paul's Mill Hill. The Area Dean announced that she would be assisted by Sub-Deans who would lead a small group of churches in different areas within Barnet. The Finchley area is chaired as Sub-Dean by the Revd Dave Walker, of Christ Church North Finchley. The main item on the agenda was a presentation by the Fostering Team of Barnet, to inform us of how

fostering works in Barnet and how the team is encouraging as many as possible to offer themselves as foster carers.

In addition, the Synod decided that the annual contribution should be £50 per church per annum, and that surplus funds, mostly left over from the days of the Central Barnet Deanery Synod, should be given to the LDBS for distribution as they thought fit to church schools in need in Barnet.

Finally, at that meeting, Nigel Wildish reported on a conversation the Area Dean and he had had with the head of Barnet Homes for Ukraine. They reported to Mr A Patel that a lot of what Barnet was promising was not happening, including the provision of any help with regard to housing when the guests leave their hosts. Nigel reported that following the meeting there had been no feedback. However, he was able to say at a later meeting that the service of Barnet to Ukrainian refugees had improved.

On 26 July, the Synod met at All Saints, Childs Hill. The meeting dealt with a number of appointments and then the Area Dean introduced a report commissioned by our two Archbishops on Families and Households. This report had just been published under the title of Love Matters and the Area Dean herself was a member of the commission which wrote the report.

Finally, on 20 November, the Synod met at St John's Friern Barnet Road. At that meeting a full report was offered by the Area Dean on Love Matters, and then the delegates discussed the report and what could be done in Barnet in groups. A number of really good ideas came out of the discussions.

- Nigel Wildish

St Mary's Walking Group

The St Mary's Church walking group met for several walks in 2023.

We continued our project to walk the Capital Ring, a 78 mile circular London route through many of the city's green spaces. There were two Sunday afternoon walks in the first half of the year, from Falconwood to Grove Park, and from Grove Park to New Beckenham. There were all day Saturday walks for two longer sections later in the year, from New Beckenham to Balham, and from Balham to Richmond.

In October there was a Saturday walk along the Thames, from Staines to Windsor.



We plan to complete the Capital Ring project in 2024 – from Richmond to Finchley, back to where the project started in November 2021. A new project, to walk the Thames Path, is then planned.

Sunday walks take place after the 10am service, and are usually about five miles in length, the all day Saturday walks are a few miles longer.

Dates are being planned for walks in 2024 - if you are interested in taking part, please contact Nick Upton or the Rector for further details.

- Nick Upton

St Mary's Primary School

St Mary's Church of England Primary School is linked to both Finchley parishes of St Mary's and St Paul's. The School is a diverse and inclusive, two-form entry school with a nursery, situated in Finchley Central. The school has a strong Christian ethos, underpinned by the specific Christian values of Compassion, Endurance, Reverence, Hope, Service and Thankfulness.



The school bases its vision on Luke 2:52: 'Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and all people'.

Management

Stefan Roos is the Executive Head Teacher responsible for the management of both St Mary's school and Holy Trinity school in East Finchley. The partnership has been operating for over 2 years and provides significant benefits including continuing professional development for staff, developing the curriculum, sharing resources and importantly financial benefits.

Academic Results

The academic outcomes are measured with Year 6 tests in May (SATs). The 2023 SATs were some of the highest seen at St Mary's and continue to be above Barnet and National averages. A great testimony to all the hard work put in by pupils and staff. Staff monitor performance of all children aiming to ensure all pupils achieve their best outcomes and by year, these are reported to the Governors.

Links with St Mary's Church

St Mary's Church continues to maintain strong links with the school, and members of our congregation are parents, governors and teachers at the school. The clergy of St Mary and St Paul's regularly visit the school. The school carol service continues to be splendid occasion and the Church was completely full. Again this year, each school year produced a banner which were hung around the Church

during advent which focused on different countries. They looked fantastic and really added to the festive mood.

- Julian Trevelyan

Safeguarding

St Mary-at-Finchley acknowledges the duty of care to safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults. We are committed to ensuring safeguarding practice reflects statutory responsibilities, government guidance and complies with best practice and the Church of England requirements.

Safeguarding is a standing item on the agendas of both the PCC Meetings and the Children and Young People Committee. All PCC members and those working with children and young people have an up-to-date Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. St-Mary-at-Finchley is at Level 2 (of 3) on the Diocese's online Dashboard which supports parishes to try and stay up to date with good safeguarding practice.

This year a concern about a vulnerable adult was raised and appropriate measures were put in place to ensure both they and others remained safe.

- Karyn Ray

Green and Fair Annual Report

We have continued to honour our commitment to green and fair issues this past year.

As a designated Fairtrade Church, we generate hundreds of pounds worth of sales at our bi-annual stalls.

The stalls are particularly popular in the lead up to Easter when Fairly traded Easter eggs and cards are on sale. Sales on Mothering Sunday totalled £380.

Autumn sets the scene for Christmas with a full range of unusual seasonal cards and gifts suitable for all the family.

Part of our commitment as a Fairtrade Church means that only fairly traded tea and coffee should be served at any event for which we have responsibility.



On green issues, we are members of the Finchley Pollinators Group. In the autumn, the group generously supplied us with packets of spring bulbs. These were planted in the area just in front of the car park and should soon be coming into bloom.

- Lynn Radnedge

The Bell's of St Mary's

We ring regularly on Sunday mornings before the 10am Eucharist and practise on Friday evenings from 7.30–9pm. We have a core band of six ringers, but with 8 bells in the tower it would be great to have some new recruits. We have been occasionally helped out on practice nights by ringers from Hendon, Hampstead, and Holloway, which has enabled us to tackle some more ambitious ringing. We have also welcomed a couple of learners who started out at Hendon, as it helps to practise on a few different bells when learning to ring.

In May we rang to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, beforehand with five ringers, and in the evening with six, where we rang the 48-change “Coronation” call change sequence that was rung for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

In November we rang the bells half-muffled for Remembrance Sunday, and we were also finally able to start opening the sound control board again, having fitted some new mesh to keep the pigeons out of the tower, so the bells should be more audible outside the church on Sunday mornings now.

In March we rang at the service in celebration of the life of June Bell, who was a long-time member of our band and a key player in keeping the bell ringing community alive here at St Mary-at-Finchley.

- Daniel Griffith



The Chapter House Set

The Chapter House is a non religious meeting place in a large Church or Monastery, so it's a good name for our non religious social group, which started just after Easter last year with the Wednesday Coffee Mornings. Our coffee mornings, in the Blue Beetle wrap around the 11am Wednesday Communion Service, welcoming all people.

The ENJO Jazz Orchestra Dance in February was a great success, the 25 piece orchestra was great, a really joyful evening. Thank you to our great team who made the evening possible, preparing the halls, food and clearing up afterwards! We still await the final account, but we anticipate the funds raised for the Church & Churchyard Project to be in the region of £1000.

Other events & outings will be arranged, so watch out for details.

- Julie Dunbar



