

FINAL DRAFT AWAITING CONFIRMATION OF FINANCIALS BY INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

St Stephen's Ealing

THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PARISH OF
ST STEPHEN, CASTLE HILL, EALING
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

Administrative information

St Stephen's Church is situated on the corner of St Stephen's Road and the Avenue, West Ealing. It is part of the Diocese of London within the Church of England. The correspondence address is:
St Stephen's Church, St Stephen's Road, West Ealing, London W13 8HB.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is registered with the Charity Commission (No. 1133772).

PCC members who have served in the period 1 January until 31 December 2023:

<i>Incumbent</i>	The Revd Steve Newbold (Chair)	
<i>Curate</i>	The Revd Ruth Robinson	
<i>Churchwardens</i>	Mary Ann Auckland (Vice Chair)	
	Ann Toley	
<i>Representatives on the Deanery Synod:</i>	Liz Cooper	
	David Gillingham	
	James Morrow	from 21 May 2023
	Linda Rivans	to 21 May 2023
<i>Elected members:</i>	Alice Zhang	to 25 Sep 2023
	John Anniss	to 21 May 2023
	James Morrow	to 21 May 2023
	Sue Charlton	
	Jon Yarrall	
	Janet Sehgal	
	Xiaoe Li	
	Jen Whadcoat (also Safeguarding Officer)	
	Ewen McKinnon	from 21 May 2023
	Linda Rivans	from 21 May 2023
<i>Secretary (co-opted)</i>	Jane Maffett	
<i>Treasurer (co-opted)</i>	Sanjay Joshi	

*And the following who is not a member
of the PCC*

Associate Vicar The Revd Caroline Newbold

Structure, governance and management

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

The PCC also appoints Trustees to the St Luke's Hall Trust, a separate charity with the stated aim of managing the assets of the Trust 'for use for the religious and other charitable purposes of the Church of England in the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Stephen, Ealing.' The Vicar is an ex-officio Trustee and Chair.

The Vicar is also, ex-officio, a Trustee of the Gurnell Grove Community Trust, active in the parish.

Objectives and activities

The PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Vicar in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish the whole mission of the Church – pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. Our Vision Statement is:

Community growing in the love of Jesus

The PCC has maintenance responsibilities for the Church buildings which include the hall and a cottage for residential use. The PCC also owns and maintains a separate house at 26 Drayton Gardens, currently occupied by our curate.

General statistics

Church membership

The Electoral Roll saw a small decrease so that on 31 December 2023 there were 180 people on the Roll. Of these 50% were resident in the parish, 63% were female and 37% were male.

Occasional offices

During 2023, there were eight baptisms but no confirmations. There were no marriages at Church. The clergy conducted the funerals of four parishioners (one of these services was at St Stephen's).

Review of the year

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting (at which two new PCC members were elected) and the Annual Meeting of Parishioners (at which two churchwardens were elected) were held on Sunday 21 May 2023 in accordance with the Church Representation Rules and The Churchwardens Measure. The full PCC met seven times during 2023 with an average level of attendance of 80% of members.

In the autumn, a Connect Group ran Alpha. Six guests undertook the course and were committed attenders. We enjoyed lively discussions with guests who were not afraid to ask searching, deep and challenging questions! Our Holy Spirit Day was a particular highlight as we took a mini road trip to Acton and learned more about the Spirit and enjoyed delicious Lebanese food. It was a great opportunity for the members of the Connect Group to serve together as well as being a safe space for the guests to explore the Christian faith in a deeper way. All the guests continue to attend St Stephens regularly and we look forward to accompanying them further in their faith journey.

Mid-week Connect Groups continued with almost 50% of active church members attending a group. In addition the People and Planet Group and weekly TeaTimers group gathered a wider range of people, some of whom are not yet church members.

Our Pastoral Care Team, Connect Group Leaders and the Leadership Team continued to support church members through a variety of means.

There were several staffing changes during the year. Our curate Ruth Robinson was ordained as a priest in June and as a result could share in leading services of Holy Communion. In the summer, we were able to appoint Stephen Turner as our new Worship Pastor. We continued to have a vacancy for a Youth Leader, but Caroline Newbold retained responsibility for this work and led attempts to try to recruit a replacement.

Throughout the year, we continued to livestream our 10.30am Sunday morning service and there is a steady number watching the service within 24 hours of its broadcast.

A large part of our local mission is actively to support The Grove Community Church (*The Grove*) on the Gurnell Grove Estate in the Parish. This is overseen by a separate charitable trust (Gurnell Grove Community Trust). As well as direct giving by the PCC, several people have been involved in the running the weekly Sunday afternoon service. Mark Tate (leader of The Grove) continues to serve as a member of the St Stephen's Leadership Team although because of increasing demands on The Grove attends less frequently.

St Stephen's is committed to the Eco Church award process and gained a silver award in 2020. We continue to pursue an eco-agenda in the wider decisions and actions that we take. However, achievement of the gold Eco Church award is likely to be some way off as the standard is rightly demanding.

In November 2023 it was announced that after 15 years in post, Steve Newbold (Vicar) would be leaving to take up a new role in the Diocese of Oxford. As a result, work began to mark his departure and to start to plan towards the appointment of a new Vicar, hopefully in 2024.

The PCC continues to be grateful to the St Luke's Hall Trust for their ongoing and generous financial support.

Much of the work of the PCC is conducted in its formal subcommittee structure. The four subcommittees or teams continued: Finance, Buildings, Mission and the Children and Youth Teams.

Key activities are described in the individual reports below.

Leadership Team

The Leadership Team met regularly to support the Vicar in the day-to-day management of Church life. Most of its time was spent focusing on issues of discipleship, outreach in the local community and resourcing the Church for future growth. The Leadership Team shares with the Vicar in pastoral responsibility for the Church and regularly discusses and responds to individual situations.

Finance Team

The Finance Team – comprising the Vicar, Treasurer, a Churchwarden, Giving Coordinator, and two other PCC nominees – and the Standing Committee oversaw the financial position throughout the year. Their work included review and discussion of the annual accounts, the forecast versus actual results, and levels of planned giving income. The latter was particularly important during the pandemic when we expected – and saw – drops in giving and hall rental income. We continued to manage budgets carefully, in order to monitor more closely the Church's finances and plan for the future. More detailed information is given below.

Buildings Team

2023 has been an eventful year. We have not made as much progress on the Entrance Improvement Project as we had hoped but we did secure a Section 106 order to remove the tree leading to granting of planning permission from the Council as well as a faculty from the Diocese to start the work. By the end of the year we were working towards Building Regulations permission. Our plan is to lay the foundations and then proceed with the much-needed relaying of the car park before the main construction of the entrance. Meanwhile some brickwork on the east side of the apex of the worship area roof fell down during a 9:00am Sunday service. The repair and replacement took longer than anticipated being a specialist bricklaying task. A main branch of one of the mature oak trees on west side of the Church Centre also fell, resulting in the tree having to be removed. This will be replaced by three small new trees in the grounds, as requested by the Council (as the old oak tree had a Tree Preservation Order). During the year we organised two 'Sleeves Up Saturday' events, in April and November, with many members of the Church community coming, with great enthusiasm, to help with repairs, cleaning and redecorating jobs around the Church Centre.

Mission Team

The Team managed St Stephen's relationship with the wider world at local, national and international levels aiming to increase awareness and understanding of issues as well as providing practical and financial help. Four guest speakers from our Mission Partners were invited to speak at services through the year. The Team reviewed our six core Mission Partners, suggesting that Ealing Soup Kitchen (ESK) had good financial support from other sources. The PCC agreed we advise ESK that we end regular funds from our tithe but continue to support them with practical help. The PCC also agreed to add new Mission Partners: A Rocha UK (who manage Eco Church) and Ellie Maffett, (former member of St. Stephen's, who is working with a church in Athens through UFM). The policy of the PCC is to give 10% of our regular giving to Christian mission charities and this was divided between these core partners. Additional monies were raised by events and special appeals for other specific causes. Programmes of social action were led by members of this Team and involved people from St Stephen's. Following the Pandemic, Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter (ECWNS) was able to return to churches hosting homeless people. So, from mid-February to end of March we ran the Shelter for 10 men on Friday evenings/Saturday mornings with over 40 members of church volunteering. Our Christmas Fair raised £4,400 for the work of ECWNS. Money was raised in Lent for the London Diocesan Appeal for ALMA, and 78 boxed Easter eggs were donated to the Marylebone Project for Homeless Women. Christian Aid Week fundraising included a successful outdoor Fair, a Concert, delivery-only distribution of envelopes, a sponsored Freedom Walk in Central London and a Sunday service featuring the work of Christian Aid. Nine Hampers of Christmas goods were assembled by Connect Groups and delivered to individuals and families living in the Borough and engaging with Christians against Poverty. Ealing Foodbank benefitted from donations of food and money at Harvest. With the demise of Traidcraft in February 2023, the Mission Team agreed to change Fairtrade Sales from monthly to seasonal occasions and organised stalls for Fairtrade Fortnight in March, Christian Aid Fair in May, and Christmas cards and Advent Calendars at the Christmas Fair.

Children and Youth Teams

These Teams seek to ensure that the needs of children, young people and their families are met within the life of the Church and that the Church vision is enacted. The Leadership Team ensures that our activities are in line with the 'children' element of our Safeguarding Policy and that we follow the best practice processes of the Diocese and Church of England (including the identification of a 'Children's Champion').

Children's activities continue to be focused on four strands: our junior Church (known as JAM); Youth group; Shining Stars midweek toddler group; and children's activities at outreach events.

JAM (Jesus and Me) – Throughout 2023 the number of children attending JAM continued to build and sessions are both exciting and engaging. We now have six leaders running two age related groups and are looking to expand our team to eventually have three age groups. Children continue to participate in church services with readings, and our children have led two full services which involved the children leading, reading, writing and delivering prayers and this year filming aspects for a service. More engagement is planned in 2024.

Our youth – Caroline Newbold has continued to cover the Youth Leader post since the last report and we are currently in contact with 18 young people in the 11-18 age group (though not all attend Sunday services at St Stephen's).

In the past year, thanks to a committed team of volunteers, we have been able to increase the number of sessions that we offer and there is a youth session during the 10:30 service most weeks as well as regular social events at St Stephen's and elsewhere. Attendance is variable at our Sunday morning sessions as family events, sporting fixtures and schoolwork sometimes take priority, but we persevere because it's so important to encourage and inspire our young people as they grow into their own personal faith in Jesus and play their part in the life of the church. It's certainly been encouraging to see young people serving in ministries such as Music and Welcome and playing a role in services in different ways and we were delighted when three young people were baptised over the past year. We hope that a Confirmation service with our Bishop can be arranged in the near future.

Shining Stars – is a Tuesday morning Christian group led by members of our staff and congregation for toddlers and their parents/carers. Each session begins with free-play and the children have a variety of toys, ride-ons or craft to entertain them. We charge £1 per child to cover over-head costs enabling the replacement of broken toys, end of term/year parties and purchase small gifts at Easter and Christmas. Fresh tea and coffee are provided for the adults giving adults a time to relax and chat with each other as well as the team. A Bible Story and action songs finish each session, and this ensures a strong Christian focus. Parents and carers are regularly invited to events or services at church and the team prays weekly for those who attend. Shining Stars continues to be a very popular toddler group with many commenting how friendly the team is and how clean and tidy the toys and venue are.

Other events – in the spring we again ran a Children's Party with 23 attendees. We did not run a Light Party in 2023 as we had a shortage of volunteers and there were several other local churches running similar events at the same time. On Christmas Eve we held our popular Carols, Nativity and Christingle service with almost 200 people in attendance.

Safeguarding

The PCC has complied with the duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016, in relation to having due regard to the House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. We have also adopted the Diocesan safeguarding policy, and continue to review, and where necessary strengthen, our processes to ensure the safeguarding of vulnerable people (children, young people and vulnerable adults) whilst at the same time trying to avoid too much bureaucracy in our various ministries. Key to all decisions is the assessment of risk and the core adherence to our policy.

Outreach

Outreach and mission are integral to all aspects of Church life throughout the year. We participated in a prayer stall at Light up the Lane but sadly have not re-established our Community Fete in Cleveland Park (last run six years ago), as we are rebuilding our core church base from which we draw volunteers and need to think how this fits our mission plan. Outreach also includes the streaming of services, enabling a wider audience to join with us from home and from overseas.

TeaTimers, our Friday afternoon drop-in café aimed at the over 60s continues and is much appreciated by those both inside and outside church membership.

Deanery Synod

The Ealing Deanery and its Synod met three times in the year. The first meeting was in-person with an online option and subsequent ones were in-person only. In February the focus was on school governors with Penny Roberts Director of Education at the London Diocesan Board of Schools speaking about the Board's purpose, vision & challenges. The Chair of Governors from Ada Lovelace School spoke of her experience in the role & emphasised that governors are critical friends. At the July meeting Deanery Mission bids from nine churches were announced and the Synod voted to grant money to all. Most of the October meeting concerned the Bishop of Willesden's Roadshow where he and other senior leaders in the Area presented the 2030 Diocese of London's Vision.

Financial review

A formal budget process was again followed during the year to assist with financial planning. Full details of the accounts are provided in the independently examined and signed-off Financial Statements.

Total receipts on ordinary unrestricted funds were £246,443, similar to last year; a small 2% reduction in Stewardship and regular giving (including Gift Aid) was offset by an increase in one-off donations; and Hall rentals up nearly £4,000 compensated for £5,000 loss of rental income due to the fact that the house in Drayton Garden's is now occupied by our curate.

In the autumn, as usual, the Church asked all donors to review and update their giving pledges and encouraged new givers. And the ability to donate by card or on the website has been increasingly helpful.

Total unrestricted expenditure amounted to £223,079 was marginally higher than last year. This provided the Christian ministry of St Stephen's Church, including the contribution to the Diocesan parish share which largely provides the stipends and other clergy overheads (including housing for the clergy). And in our share we contribute a higher % than the amount requested in order to support less 'well-off' parishes. It includes the costs of two employee roles: Premises Manager and Communications Manager.

The St Luke's Hall Trust continued with their very welcome annual donation into the St Luke's Restricted Fund (SLRF) – the expected £40,000. This Fund had expenditure of £35,172 including:

- a grant of £7,500 pa to The Grove Missional Community.
- the costs of our Children's Worker and our Worship Pastor from August
- the costs of our Associate Vicar, covering the youth worker vacancy for the whole year

The Worship Pastor (8 months) and Youth Pastor (all year) roles were partially / fully vacant leading to lower than expected salary costs in the SLRF so the PCC has agreed that £15,000 of the year-end balance is still earmarked for the planned car park repair project.

A new restricted fund was opened for the special donations from St Luke's Hall Trust for the Entrance Improvement Project.

Lent, Harvest and Christmas Appeals continued and were generously supported, as was the Christmas Fair raising charity funds. And we made it a priority to continue to tithe 10% of regular giving to our Mission Partners. Together these led to the church giving over £41,000 in missionary and charitable giving to other organisations, exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

Overall expenditure during 2022 was £290,379 almost the same as the previous year, with circa £20,000 project costs replacing the essential spend in 2022 of £22,000 on the cottage (so the Premises manager could move in) and 26 Drayton Gardens (so the Curate could move in).

The loan raised for our 2018 buildings project was finally paid off during the year, plus a loan from a congregation member of £5,000.

Overall we report a net surplus for the year, across all accounts, of £28,462 (£23,363 unrestricted surplus and £5,098 on restricted). Income has held up well during a cost of living crisis and with well managed expenditure resulted in a surplus that will enable us once again to start 'saving' for essential building work ahead – a real blessing.

After adding reserves brought forward at the beginning of the year, the balances carried forward at 31st December totalled £308,122 (£252,046 Unrestricted and £56,076 Restricted).

The PCC reports that we continue to operate as an ongoing concern:

- **We also continue to be prudent in our expenditure**
- **Our reserves position is strong, although we will need to use some of these for essential building work**
- **We continue to monitor finances closely on an ongoing basis**
- **The PCC is confident that we can continue to meet our critical commitments.**

Reserves policy

The PCC aims to maintain a balance on free reserves of around two months' worth of average unrestricted expenditure, which is currently equivalent to £37,179 and with our general reserve at £157,269, (of which £94,368 is not designated for specific future spend) we are comfortably in excess of this. Appropriate reserves will continue to be set aside in anticipation of future spending on the Church buildings, through the Maintenance Reserve.

Conclusion

For the first time since the Covid pandemic, 2023 provided a full year without any social restrictions or particular concerns about the virus. Throughout the year church life looked like it had before March 2020 although like most churches St Stephen's had a slightly smaller congregation, and a weakened volunteer base. Our aim is that in 2024 we will see new opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with our community and to enable our Vision Statement to be enacted as fully as possible.

Mary Ann Auckland
Acting Chair (Lay)
May 2024