2024 APCM REPORTS

These reports cover the time from the last APCM (which was on 26th March 2023) until this meeting.

**PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL**

The PCC is responsible, amongst other things, for the church’s finances and the care and maintenance of the church, its contents and its grounds. Because St Aidan’s is a registered charity, all members are automatically trustees. The PCC chairman is the Vicar, The Rev’d Michael Payne. Since the APCM, the PCC has met 7 times and the Standing Committee 4 times. We welcomed 4 new PCC members, Michael Butler, Jan Hollands, Rob Hollands and Steve Kench-Cannon. Sadly, Anne Welch (PCC member for almost 15 years) died on 21st January this year and the PCC acknowledges her contribution to the Council).

***Mike Welch***(PCC Secretary)

**DATA PROTECTION**

Our Data Protection Policy, was reissued on 19th May 2018 to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations enacted in May 2018. Copies are on the church noticeboard and on our web-site. As the result of having a CCTV installation we are registered with, the Information Commissioner (at a cost currently £40 p.a.).

Holders of personal data about individuals have been reminded that any such data held must be: **necessary, relevant, accurate, up to date**, **kept securely and can only be used for the purpose for which it was originally collected.** They have alsoreviewed and, where necessary, have updated the information they hold, and this opportunity is taken to remind everyone that requests received for information should be channelled through me so that they may be actioned within the legal timescale. Also, that notification of any data breaches (e.g. lost memory sticks or lap-tops containing personal data) must be reported to me as quickly as possible so that they may be channelled, via the Diocese, to the Information Commissioner within the extremely short timescale allowed by legislation.

Main Sunday services are ‘live-streamed’/recorded using a static camera focused on the altar (although, at time of writing, this has been temporarily halted because of the poor quality of streaming caused by the inadequacies of the present equipment. It is hoped to resume live-streaming with the purchase of a better camera.) Members of the congregation are asked to sign consent forms to ensure that i) they agree to live streaming or recording of services (in which they or their children could be identified) and ii) also agree to receive information from St Aidan’s. Arrangements are made for those who have not so consented to receive the sacrament ‘out of shot’.

All necessary copyright licences have been purchased allowing copying of words or music as required and also to ‘live-stream’/record music/lyrics still in copyright.

I confirm, to the best of my knowledge that data held by the Church and its officers etc is held in conformance with current legal requirements.

**Mike Welch** (Data Protection Officer)

**HEALTH & SAFETY OFFICER’S REPORT**

I undertook two formal safety inspections at during the Easter & Summer school holidays. The inspection results and my recommendations, were signed off by the Vicar. Regrettably,I was unable to undertake a Fire & Safety Risk Assessment of the Church/Powerhouse and Church grounds at the end of 2023.

The following were professionally maintained during the year: Powerhouse/Church intruder alarm, Powerhouse lift for the disabled and Hall & Powerhouse/Church fire extinguishers. As the Hall’s gas heaters have all been decommissioned there is no requirement for them to be checked yearly. The gas-fuelled water heater in the Hall was professionally serviced. The church and car park are covered by CCTV. In May 2023, the Church & Hall electrical installations were professionally and satisfactorily checked. During the year there was a gas leak in the Hall: the water boiler required repair and the yearly boiler inspection is now due a year after the repair. The emergency lighting in the church vestibule required professional attention. The electric water heater in the Church Hall Ladies’ toilet which had been leaking was replaced. Because of young people persistently gaining access to the flat roof via the Church & Powerhouse porch roofs, metal spiked strips (as approved by Kent Police) were glued onto the roof edges. This coincided with some hot weather and the glue melted! The strips were thereupon fixed down by a more secure means. In August a window was broken (vandalised) in the computer room needing the erection of scaffolding in order to effect a repair.

The only ‘Covid-19 restriction’ still in force at time of writing is the ban on handshaking etc during ‘The Peace’.

No accidents, notifiable by law, occurred during the year. (Any Nursery School accidents are reported according to Nursery School procedures and are not covered here).

Could I please ask that all near misses, injuries, or accidents of whatever description, however apparently trivial, be reported to the Churchwardens or to the Vicar so that prompt action can be taken to rectify matters, and steps taken to prevent a recurrence or something worse.

Sadly this is my last H&S Report as I am stepping down from this role which I feel would better be done by a someone more in touch with current H&S legislation. I estimate I have undertaken around 50 inspections and about 17 yearly Risk Assessments since taking on the role in 2006 and it is probably time for a fresh pair of eyes to look at health & safety matters.

Thanks to all who help to keep our premises healthy & safe.

***Mike Welch***(Health & Safety Officer)

**SUNDAY MORNING REFRESHMENT ROTA**

The provision of refreshments after each Sunday morning service continued. Towards the end of 2023, the rota was somewhat disrupted by sickness absence and I am very grateful to Jenny Rawlinson and others who stepped into the breach. Sadly this is my last report as I have handed the reins over to Jenny who is more than up to the challenge!

**Mike Welch**

**POWERHOUSE COMMUNITY CENTRE MANAGER’S REPORT**

The Computer Room opened for casual users under the supervision of Dave Rawlinson on Wednesday mornings. There were no computer courses run by outside providers during the period covered by this report.

As a result of there being no volunteers willing to close up as hirers depart, it is not possible to let the facility for evening events even if clients sought bookings.

The Powerhouse continued to make a loss (see Financial Report). The charge for hiring the Powerhouse was: Computer Room, or West Room or Lounge continues to be – £12/hour; West Room & Lounge, from £15/hour.

**Mike Welch** (Powerhouse Community Centre Manager)

**CHURCH FLOWERS**

I am pleased to report that floral arrangements have continued to be made in church throughout the year. During the hot summer months artificial flowers are used, and dried flower arrangements for the pedestals for Lent and Advent. Sadly, several of our loyal helpers, for various reasons, have had to ‘hang up their secateurs’. If you feel able to help, particularly at festivals (Christmas, Easter and Harvest) please have a word with me – any offers would be greatly appreciated. Thank you to those who have kindly given donations towards the cost of buying fresh flowers.

***Mavis Prater***

**ANNA CHAPLAINCY**

Since my last report I have continued to work with Fr Michael visiting those who are unable to attend church and taking them the Holy Sacrament. Many of my visits have been to those who have Dementia and other problems and just need a listening ear or the carers need some help with accessing services to help them.

During this time of hardship many older folk find it difficult to get out or have to make the choice of a hot meal or heating. It is great that the Church is providing a warm space for people once a week and that our local Councillors are still supporting this. However people still need to go out to get to us, with the bus services not always reliable and other restrictions about driving etc older folk are finding it difficult to get to appointments etc which is why I am asking members of the congregation to look out for their neighbours. At this time many older folk do not like to ask for help, so it is up to us all.

I have attended meetings and courses to enhance my work both locally and nationally and it is amazing how our Lord is working within others and to hear of projects they are working on to support our older generation in the area. Remember we all have different talents to share and whether we are older or younger we should all work together.

Thank you to all who have brought their stamps into church and to Anne Welch who has collected and cut them to size for Bone Cancer Research – the stamps raised over £12,000 last year and thank you to those who have bought their milk bottle tops in for Great Ormond Street Hospital project which Ken collects for at St Gregory’s Court. Every stamp and bottle top makes a difference.

I continue to work with our hospital chaplains when members of the parish are in hospital and I continue to visit when I can. I have also been taking people for treatments at the hospital and supporting them. Another part of my role has been to support those who have lost loved ones or received some bad news. Much of what I do is not seen or heard about but I am doing God’s work so only He knows.

As we move forward as a parish there will be other things going on for our older generation which I hope you will be able to support.

I have put leaflets at the back of the church for anyone to take re Dementia help, respite care and some information about Anna Chaplaincy and how to become an Anna Friend. If you would like to know more about becoming either please talk to me or Fr Michael.

Thank you for all the help and support you have given me.

Sylvia Munns

**CHURCHES TOGETHER IN GRAVESHAM**

Representatives from our churches meet regularly to pray and organise events together as well as provide vital services for our communities. This year has been a very busy one for our services from the Sanctuary for homeless people, to the hub – a day service for those who have no home or are in need of help, to our Street Pastors and School Pastors going out weekly at night to help those in need and helping those in school who are stressed and need a listening ear.

Many of our churches provide Food Banks and warm spaces during the winter months and these are used and some provide help and advice for those in need. At present our Food Banks are in need of more food so please pray for this. We are looking at ways in which each Food Bank can help another when stocks are low.

We also organised our Christmas Witness event in Gravesend which was very well received and our Easter Walk of Witness starting at St George’s, walking through the town for a service at the Civic Square and on to Windmill Hill, where the Cross is erected and a service is held. These events are well attended and bring the message of these Christian events to many people, We also published a welcome pack for people moving into the area with local churches’ contact details in and we are having a rerun of this to include more churches. We are having a different event this year – a Picnic at the Prom - please bring your own picnic and enjoy Christian worship with others.

Sylvia Munns

**CHOIR**

The choir has again performed very well during the year. We have been kept busy with the music for the many special occasions such as Easter Day, St Aidan’s Patronal Festival Sunday, the All Souls’ service in November, the Advent Sunday Carol Service and the Nine Lessons & Carols Service.

We were absolutely shocked and saddened by the sudden death of our choir member
Anne Welch. Anne had been a member of the choir for many years and enjoyed singing in the choir for the Sunday Services and on those occasions when we sang with other church choirs in the Diocese. We shall miss her very much

David Sisterson

**CHAIR’S REMARKS**

As ever, I would like to begin by thanking everyone for making St Aidan’s a great place to worship God, but also to meet others and feel at home. There really does seem to be ‘something in the air’ at St Aidan’s which affects visitors; we have had quite a few people visiting for various reasons over the year and each has said what a lovely atmosphere the church has-part of this is due to the space and light of the building itself, this gives a hopeful feel to the space I think , but it is also, and perhaps chiefly, the people who make St Aidan’s a genuinely friendly place to visit-thank you!

***Worship***

We are still offering a good range of worship including Morning Prayer, Night Prayer, Holy Rosary and of course our Eucharist services, which feature Common worship with periodic use of the BCP. We hope to resume live streaming again following the purchase of new equipment very recently which I hope will improve the experience for those joining us remotely.

Our choir is continuing to function, and as ever would be very pleased to receive some new members.

***Fellowship and Outreach***

We have had some bereavement in the congregation in recent months which has caused us to pull together ever more closely and I am grateful for the prayers and support the families have received from St Aidan’s people. We continue to receive new people who attend now and then and others who have made their spiritual home with us more regularly-this is all to the good, and I am pleased that we continue to reflect, so some extent, the diversity of our community within our congregation.

It is good that we now offer Sunday School twice a month and continue with our all-age worship.

I am grateful to those who organise the monthly cafe, and the Aidan Ladies groups, and to Barbara who continues to support the Little Rainbows parent and child group.

We have run Warm Spaces in the lounge thanks to funding from KCC and GBC, to enable folk to come somewhere warm for snacks and fellowship-this has been a good development but unfortunately we have not had the support of local Ward Councillors to the same level as previously which has impacted on attendance. We will need to look at what happens next in this area.

St Aidan’s is now affiliated to the Kent branch of the Black History Association. This is an organisation that celebrates and promotes the contribution of black and Global Majority Heritage people in British society. The Kent branch is particularly focussed on helping young black people with key skills. I am grateful to Dr Jellina Davies, the Chair, for enabling this affiliation to take place.

St Aidan’s continues to support the Anglican Diocese of Bo, Sierra Leone.

I am grateful to Mavis for her excellent work in co-ordination our Christian Aid support each year, and to Jenny Rawlinson for her work supporting the Children’s Society, and also the Christmas Shoebox appeal for Romania.

***Education and Training***

Unfortunately the funding for computer courses ceased and the Grand and Pixel Training have both had to stop offering their courses at our computer suite. We hope that in time this may resume and certainly the trainers enjoyed using St Aidan’s very much. For now, there is a gap in the offer we are making locally in regard to learning and skills and I will be looking into this.

I am grateful to Dr Peter Harris who continues to offer his popular Saturday Seminars which enable us to engage with our faith and learn a lot!

***Ministry***

Peter Harris is now licensed as our Lay Minister and is preaching once a month as well as offering to help in Sunday School now and then. Sylvia Munns continues to minister as an Anna Chaplain. Sunday School is well-led by Ann Ashurst and Amy Payne and it has been good to introduce Young Volunteers into Sunday School-these are Secondary age children who support the leader in the session-we now need to look at further ways in which we further the faith of young people.

Let me finish with a thank you to the PCC, to the wardens Dennis and Robert and to Mike Welch for preparing and administering this meeting.

*Fr Michael*

**PASTORAL TEAM**

The team has continued to meet roughly every eight weeks. Our scope is to discuss any pastoral issues that require us to arrange visits to home or hospital as appropriate. We also keep a general eye on the well-being of the congregation and oversee the Welcomer team in terms of the rota, and recruiting new members. All discussions are confidential and all safeguarding procedures are kept in view. In reality, the team has a ‘light touch’ ministry, yet the members are available (contact details in vestibule) should folk wish to speak to someone, or to pray alongside another person.

*Fr Michael*

**EAST GRAVESEND GROUP OF CHURCHES**

Currently myself and the Vicar of Christ Church (Rev’d Andrew Davey) meet to pray on Tuesday mornings and are joined by Rev’d Jim Fletcher from St George’s. It has been good to revive the Ascension-tide service in the evening and this has been attended quite well from folk from the other EGG churches (Holy Family and Ifield)-I am grateful to Mavis Prater for offering to work with me on this; I am also grateful to Rev’d Nigel Bourne for his own attendance and support (Nigel is the Vicar of Chalk and our Area Dean).

Undoubtedly there will be more that we can be doing together, for now we will focus on the things we know we can do at the moment , and go from there.

I think we have an opportunity to re-think what the EGG does, but there are currently no plans from the Diocese to formalise things in any way-it remains a quite informal fellowship network, and this is most appropriate.

*Fr Michael*

**CHURCH HALL LETTINGS 2023**

1. Nursery School every morning during term times.
2. Dogs Trust. Every Tuesday evening until May
3. CAAK Church. Every Sunday morning.
4. Yoga. Monday and Wednesday evenings until July
5. Involve every Thursday Afternoon 2-3pm
6. Marlow Singers. Every Thursday evening during term time.
7. Little Rainbows every Wednesday 1-3pm during term time.

Also sundry lettings for Gravesham BC (election) and to members of the congregation.

**Barbara Potter**

**LITTLE RAINBOWS**

Attendance has been patchy again this year, but we have kept in touch with people via our Facebook page.

We hope that 2024 will be better, and that there will be an increase in children and their parents coming for a cup of tea and a chat.

**Barbara and Lesley Potter**

**FINANCE REPORT TO AGM FOR YEAR ENDING 31.12.2023**

The General Fund made a loss this year of £371 after a fund transfer of £5,700 from the Nursery School for the rent of the Hall and a transfer of £4,520 from the Stipend Fund. This leaves us with a balance of £3,197, a reserve of £732 in the Stipend Fund and £46,006 in the Legacy Fund. The budget for last year was to make a loss of £8,796 which, thankfully, did not happen.

Free Will Offerings were up by £1,206 and Cash Collections were up by £329. This figure includes the money paid through our card reader which amounted to £758. The PCC fees were down by £582 and Income Tax recovered (Gift Aid) was up by £20. I would ask anyone who pays tax, has a Freewill Envelope or pays by standing order and has not signed a Gift Aid form to contact the treasurer as soon as possible. The Church Hall made a net profit of £1,723 (£3,867 in 2022). The Powerhouse made a loss of £209.05 (£1,047 in 2022).

Total costs for the running of the church itself were £40,551 which equates to £780 per week. This figure does not include the cost of the new doors for the Vicars Vestry as this was paid for from the Building Fund.

The Nursery Schools made a profit of £21,826 this year which leaves their fund balance a healthy £68,993.

The budget for 2024 is to make a loss of £6,447. Payment to the Diocese is only £14,000, way below the requested amount. If hall lettings do not improve we are likely to have a cash flow problem which will mean drawing on the Legacy Fund. We lost 2 long term lettings this year and will lose another at the end of March 2024. This will leave just the Nursery School the CAAK Church and the Marlowe Singers.

**Barbara Potter**

**LAY MINISTER’S REPORT FOR THE APCM 2024**

I was licensed as a lay minister on 13 May 2023. This was a culmination of two years of training with the Diocese which included modular study and a placement at Christ Church Gravesend. I very much appreciated the attendance of members of St Aidan’s at my licensing. I have since started to wear the lay minister’s robes to let people know in what capacity I am there to serve God and them. I wish to thank Rev Canon Jane Winter, Rev Michael Payne and the congregation of St Aidan’s for encouraging me to finish the course and welcoming me into ministry.

My duties at St Aidan’s have expanded. I now preach once a month. I am on the Scripture reading and intercessors rotas. Every third week in the month I write a reflection for those who cannot make it to church. I assist from time to time with Sunday school as the second adult in the room for safeguarding purposes. Three times a year I organise what are called the ‘Saturday Seminars’ in which I explore with congregants the reasons why Christianity is true. These seminars are now with the endorsement of the Area Dean being advertised in other parish churches within the deanery. I am a member of the PCC, the deanery synod and the diocesan synod.

My aim is to ensure that I carry out my responsibilities in a Christlike fashion and that I protect the balance between my work as a minister with my work as a middle manager in a school, as a parent and husband and as a writer and journalist.

**Dr Peter Harris**

 **ELECTORAL ROLL OF THE PARISH OF ST.AIDAN GRAVESEND 2024**

During the past year 2 names were removed from the Electoral Roll:

 Ronald James Whitnell

 Anne Catherine Welch

And 1 name has been added:

 Lesley Carolyn Caswell

Leaving the total for 2024 at **62**

D. McIntosh

**SAFEGUARDING REPORT FOR 2023-2024**

Safeguarding procedures and requirements are constantly under review by Rochester Diocese and Thirtyone:eight (previously CCPAS). Safeguarding is always an item on the PCC agenda. Janet Trevor is Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) in addition to her role as Lead Recruiter for DBS applications. David Rawlinson is Recruiter.

In line with Church of England requirements, St Aidan’s has details of the PSO and other local and national agencies who may be contacted for help and advice displayed in the entrance vestibule and Hall. The PSO’s contact details are also published in the weekly News Sheet and on the parish website.

10 people currently have completed DBS checks with eight more waiting for clearance or in the process of completing applications, including all members of the PCC. A number of certificates will be due for renewal in the coming months. DBS certificates now have to be renewed every three years instead of every five years.

Janet Trevor, the Lead Recruiter, liaises with the Vicar to agree who is eligible to be receive a DBS check and to review training requirements. Thirtyone:eight provide the safeguarding service including DBS checks on behalf of the Diocese and also training. The Diocese also provides online safeguarding training and workshops and has a safeguarding team of advisers. Rochester Diocese now requires Basic Level training (formerly C0) for anyone who has any role in the church. There is a programme of safeguarding training, the level being dependent on the role undertaken.

Janet Trevor

**FRAPS REPORT FOR 2023-2024**

The main fund raising event last year was the Christmas Fair held on 25 November. The event was very successful raising about £800. It was well attended although apart from those helping few people from St Aidan’s came. Refreshments of tea, coffee and cakes were popular. As a result of Fr Michael mingling with folk his ‘chuck it in the bucket’ resulted in a family coming to him asking for Baptism.

The Quiz Evening held on 8 July was popular and raised £410. This will remain an annual event.

FRAPS members helped with refreshments throughout the year including the coffee mornings on the first Wednesday of the month, the Agape meal in April, the Coffee, Cake and Plant sale for Christian Aid in May, the Patronal Festival in September and the All Souls Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving in November. They have also provided buffet meals for wakes after funerals of church members.

On 31 October a Light Party organised by Fr Michael was held in the church as an alternative to Hallowe’en celebrations and some FRAPS members helped serve refreshments.

Janet Trevor

**SUNDAY SCHOOL REPORT**

Sunday School is held at St Aidan’s on the 2nd & 3rd Sundays of each month. I run the 2nd session and Amy Payne the 3rd. Sunday School is not held during August. Attendance varies throughout the year and we currently have about 10 children at each session. As well as the two leaders we have a member of the congregation sitting in with us: they come in on a rota system and all hold DBS certificates. We also have two young helpers of secondary school age at each session. They help the children with their crafts and update the Sunday School display board for members of the congregation to see what the children have been doing.

Children are mainly primary school age, some even younger. Parents are always welcome to join us. The children gather at the front of the church at the start of the service and a prayer is sent before they leave for Sunday School. The session finishes before the end of the service and the children join their parents for Communion. At the end of the service the children show the congregation what they have been doing.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to everyone who helps Amy and me with Sunday School

Ann Ashurst

**CHURCHWARDENS’ REPORT ON THE FABRIC OF THE CHURCH**

The Church’s fabric is generally good. All electrical tests have been carried out and certificates have been issued. Portable Appliance Tests are done regularly and are up to date. The Computer Room is still used frequently. The West Room is used occasionally for meetings. Spiked metal edging has been fixed on the porches to prevent vandals climbing on to the roof. It had earlier been discussed by the PCC for the removal of the porches to deter vandalism but at the moment it is being monitored hoping the climbing will stop. The ‘disabled’ toilet has been repainted. General maintenance is ongoing, mainly when the weather is better. The West Room window still leaks when rain blows in a certain direction. This year we have had a few windows broken around the church which is caused by vandals.

Dennis Ashurst

**CHURCHWARDENS’ REPORT ON THE FABRIC OF THE CHURCH HALL**

The Hall generally is not too bad. All electrical tests have been done and Portable Appliance Testing renewed. We have had a couple of quotes for the renewing of the Church Hall floor – these are being looked at due to the cost. Also the roof needs a couple of jobs to be done and quotes have been received for the work to be done properly instead of patching up, A couple of painting jobs are to be looked at.

Dennis Ashurst

**CHILDREN’S SOCIETY**

We have two box holders now. Since the pandemic, most people use debit cards and do not have loose change. One former box holder now makes a donation instead. If anyone would like a collecting box or wishes to make a donation, please speak to me.

The Crib & Christingle Service is always well supported. The Church was full again last year, which was lovely to see especially in candle light. We also made ‘do it yourself’ bags for the Nursery Schools.

 Boxes & Donation £ 48.43

 Christingle Service £165.00

 Nursery School bags £ 40.00

 £253.43 - Total sent to The Childrens’ Society

Many thanks to all who helped in making the Christingle Oranges and helping in any way.

Jenny Rawlinson

 **COMPUTER SUITE REPORT**

The Computer Suite has seen very little use since the pandemic, with only one fairly regular user.
I only open the Computer Suite one day a week (Wednesday mornings) at present. We bought 7 new laptops and a charging station last year and these were used by the Citizens’ Advice Bureau and The Gr@nd to run courses last year. I do not know if any further courses are planned. The original Dell tower computers are a model that dates from 1996. We obtained them second hand in 2006 (through First Byte, an off-shoot of ‘Church in Society’, a former Rochester Diocese charity). The wired internet connection is very slow by today’s standards.

Dave Rawlinson

**AIDAN LADIES**

Our Aidan Ladies Group is still going well. We have 18 ladies who attend regularly and also new ladies joining us. Unfortunately we have recently lost two of our members, Anne Welch (one of our founder members and our treasurer) and Pam Gagen. Both will be sadly missed. We have our meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 2.00pm. New members are always welcome. Last year we had a variety of speakers among which were First Aid, Scams, The Wild Life Trust and our Vicar. We went out twice for meals and had a couple of Quizes.

Jenny Rawlinson

**DEANERY SYNOD REPORT FOR THE APCM**

Dr Peter Harris, Deanery Synod member for St Aidan’s Parish Church, Gravesend.

Deanery Synod met on 13 June 2023 and 24 October 2023 at Chalk Church.

13 June 2023

The focus of this meeting was a presentation by Steve Carey about the Alethia Academies Trust. Carey is the CEO of the Trust. His presentation focused on the Christian ethos by which the schools in the Trust are managed. He spoke about the daily acts of worship, church services and extra-curricular activities that enable pupils to learn about the Christian faith and develop relationships that are Christian. Carey also acknowledged the challenges the Trust faces which are common to all educational trusts: problems with balancing budgets and filling staff vacancies. He described to the Synod the building for the Trust of a new school called Alkerden C of E Academy in Ebbsfleet Garden City. The school will provide a Christian-based education for the new City.

24 October 2023

The focus of this meeting was a presentation by Vicki Clarke, the Community Centre Manager of the Daytime Hub based at Gravesend’s Methodist Church. Synod learned that the Hub is a drop in hub for the homeless which is open Monday, Wednesday and Fridays from 10am to 12pm. The homeless are offered hot drinks and breakfast, showers, laundry and clothing. The presentation revealed to Synod the excellent Christian witness of this community project.

At this meeting Dr Peter Harris was elected to be the third representative from the Deanery to attend Diocesan Synod (see separate report).

**Dr Peter Harris**

**REPORT ON THE DIOCESAN SYNOD 4 NOVEMBER 2023 BY DR PETER HARRIS, DIOCESAN SYNOD MEMBER FOR THE EAST GRAVESEND DEANERY.**

This report is a summary of the minutes of the meeting.

1. Bishop Jonathan’s Presidential address. Bishop Jonathan began by asserting that three dangers existed: the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, the climate emergency and artificial intelligence. In response to Gaza, the house of Bishops has called for a cessation of hostilities on the part of all sides. He did not elaborate further on the conflict in Ukraine. On the matter of artificial intelligence, Bishop Jonathan noted what Elon Musk has said and that is that in the days to come, humans will need to consider deeply what it means to be human, a task for which the Church of England (henceforth referred to as the Church) is well-suited.

Bishop Jonathan then moved to the issue of the Living in Love and Faith process. He expressed the view that there is incompatibility between those who believe that marriage is a sacred union between a man and a woman and those who believe the Church ought to honour lifelong same sex relations as the equivalent to heterosexual marriage. Bishop Jonathan is of the view that the House of Bishops is now realising that further measures are needed to enable the Church to accommodate both views relationally and structurally. This is necessary to avoid schism and maintain the bond of unity in peace. It is the responsibility of all bishops to create support and oversight for people to remain within the Church in good conscience.

On the matter of the decline since the 1950s in the Church’s membership, Bishop Jonathan proposed that the Church must find new ways of reaching out to people and making disciples of them. It is his opinion that the Church has been very good at teaching the word of God and providing pastoral care, but the other roles that Paul refers to in Ephesians such as that of the apostle, prophet and evangelist have been neglected in the teacher-pastor model the Church has operated. The Bishop defined apostles as those who are church-planters, prophets as those who speak to the groups of people that the Church has traditionally not said much to and evangelists as those who are gifted at communicating Christianity’s message. Bishop Jonathan wishes to see people who are apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic identified, equipped and sent out to do their work. The Church will only grow, Bishop Jonathan warned, if we in the Church model the loving, gracious relationships that make Christianity attractive to those outside the Church.

1. Diocesan Registrar: Mrs Patti Russell was sworn in as the Diocesan Registrar.
2. Amendment to Canon 42: the Synod noted that there has been an amendment to Canon 42 in which each Diocese appoints not a Designated Safeguarding Adviser but a Designated Safeguarding Office who leads on safeguarding and works independently of the Bishop.
3. Budget and Finances: Mr Nigel Pope, Chair of the DBF, gave the good news that the budget deficit had been held at £1.46 million, despite inflation’s pressure. This was the consequence of a greater focus on cost control and the generation of income. To protect Diocesan income, wealthier parishes were being asked to pay more than the indicative amount to ensure that ministry flourished in less well-off parishes.
4. Sharing Good News: the Archdeacon of Tonbridge brought the good news that the Church was recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns. Numbers attending churches were slowly increasing. She shared stories of how church life was being restored through the increasing readiness of people to volunteer again.
5. Strategy vision update: the diocesan vision was affirmed as ‘change, serve and grow’ which meant making churches missional, growing churches and creating confident disciples. Preparation of the implementation of the vision is currently going on with the aim to implement it in May 2025 onwards.
6. The environment and sustainability: much progress has been made on Eco Church with nineteen churches receiving the bronze award and seven churches receiving the silver award in 2023. One church that year had managed to gain its gold award.
7. Safeguarding: Synod was reminded of the need to ensure that accurate and clear information about safeguarding was displayed in each parish church.
8. Bullying and Harassment Policy: The Archdeacon of Tonbridge presented this. As it covers all role holders within the diocese, it is not possible to produce a policy that fits everyone, and the policy is a framework that signposts people to the help they need.
9. General Synod Report: Rev Lindsay Llewellyn-MacDuff and Mr Andrew Smith (two of the Diocese’s representatives at General Synod) gave their report. Mr Smith said that safeguarding was a major discussion point. 150 million pounds had been set aside as a safeguarding redress scheme and a Code of Practice for safeguarding reviews was approved. With regards to the environment, Mr Smith said that the General Synod was encouraging churches to reduce their parsonage’s carbon footprint. On the matter of marriage fees which some in the General Synod regarded as a deterrent to people marrying in church, the Archbishops’ Council would for a trial period reduce fees and fund the reduction. He noted that a way had not been found to go forward on Living in Love and Faith and that in November 2023 the House of Bishops would be bringing new proposals to General Synod. Rev Llewellyn-MacDuff spoke next and lamented the sense of distrust in the General Synod for the House of Bishops which she saw as caused by the acceleration of the Living in Love and Faith process from discernment into decision. She noted, however, the positive things that had come out of General Synod such as encouraging younger participation in it, the determination to move to a zero carbon Church and the reemphasis on the parish as the vehicle of mission. She concluded by asking those present to pray for General Synod to show wisdom, charity, grace and a sensitive obedience to the Holy Spirit.

**Dr Peter Harris**

**ST AIDAN’S NURSERIES - MANAGER’S REPORT - APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024**

**April**: I start this report on a very sad note. In April last year during Easter holiday’s one of our children from the Church Hall, sadly passed away due to natural causes at home. This was sudden and unexpected; staff, parents and children were very upset. All staff attended Billy’s funeral. We are still collecting monies to purchase a special memory friendship Bench for our forest school for all the children and staff to remember Billy.

Last academic year we were fortunate to be full at both settings. We again have quite a lot of children with challenging and additional needs and for this reason, both settings had an additional member of supply staff to support the nurseries. We had a lovely summer term with 2 fund raising events, 2 lovely leavers concerts, a visit from Rivers Rodents and ended 2023 academic year with our end of term parties. The majority of the children transferred to Riverview Infant school, with few going to Tymberwood, Westcourt and Singlewell.

**Staff 2023**: Sadly, for us in June; Kelly Wells from the Church Hall handed in her notice to leave, due to her needing more money. We advertised locally and Kerry Riches, joined us in September 2023 as an Apprentice at the Church Hall replacing Kelly. Kerry is doing well and has settled in well to her new role.

**September 2023:** We started the new term with full nurseries at both ends, however, we had a lot of 2 year olds and also lots of children with additional needed again, some of which very challenging. Fortunately, we once again had the use of additional supply staff to support these children. We have children in the nurseries from all faiths and cultures. We continue to use and nurture the forest gardens and children benefit greatly from these areas.

**Training**: Staff have had training on Paediatric First Aid, The Autistic Spectrum, Communication and language, Makaton and Level 2 Health and Hygiene. We have lots of specialist teachers visiting due the amount of different needs we have at the nursery so are all learning lots regarding SEN.

**Staff 2024**: In February Sarah Howell from the Church Hall handed in her notice to leave stating that she felt her 30 years in childcare had come to an end and she would like to try something new, whilst she still can. This will be a big blow to the nursery and we will now have to advertise for a new member of staff for September. Sarah is leaving at the end of May, but we have supply staff to cover her till we find the correct staff member.

**Future**: It has been rather challenging recently and the government has not helped Early Years, by funding 2 year olds from working parents. We have had a lot of interest for this scheme; however, we don’t have the capacity or what looks like the correct funding from the government to fund this. Figures do look healthy for September 2024 but it will be interesting to see how things go.

On a more positive note, at the Church Hall, we would like to make more use of the Community Garden for the nursery children. However, to do this we need to look a securing the boundary fence. We would like to plant fruit and vegetables there and wonder what the PCC would feel about us using this space for growing things?

I end this report on another sad note. The passing of Anne Welch… this again was a shock to myself and staff. Anne was always a great support to me and the nursery. Anne will be missed greatly at our Nursery Committee meetings for her friendly smile, warmth and support for us. We plan to plant a Cherry tree in our Forest Garden to remember Anne by. Anne will be difficult to replace at our meetings.

Gayle Farquhar – Manager – St Aidan’s Nurseries March 2024