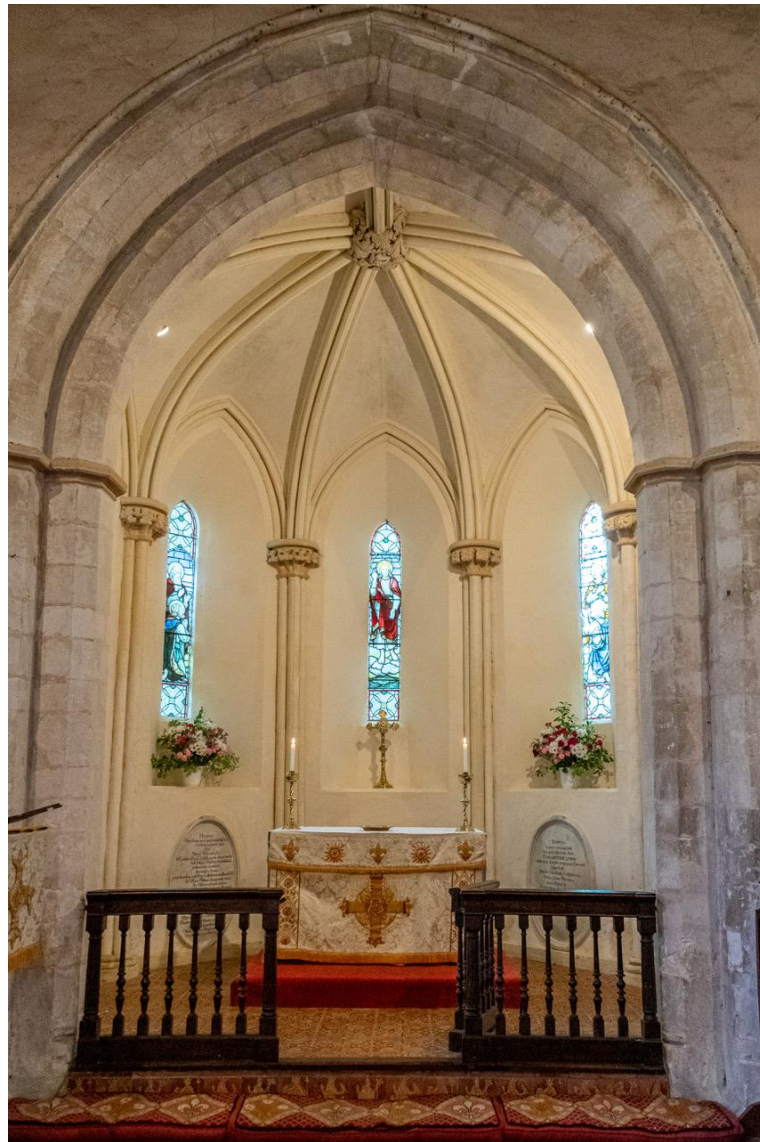




The Parish of Pangbourne with Tidmarsh and Sulham  
St James | St Laurence | St Nicholas

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS



St Laurence, Tidmarsh  
Photo credit: Mark Littledale

of the Parochial Church Council  
for the Parish of Pangbourne with Tidmarsh and Sulham

We have undertaken to share the  
Common Vision of Oxford Diocese  
*'To become more Christlike for the sake of God's world'*

## TOWARDS A COMMON VISION



## Patrons

St James the Less, Pangbourne  
St Laurence, Tidmarsh  
St Nicholas Sulham

Church Society Trust  
Bishop of Reading  
Henry Scutt

## PCC Membership and Objectives

The PCC is registered with the Charity Commission (No. 1127943), made up of elected and ex-officio PCC members of St James the Less, St Laurence and St Nicholas (in accordance with the Church Representation rules).

## Banks

- Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Delf House, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT (Changed from HSBC in January 2022)
- CCLA Investment Management Ltd, 85 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4ET

## Independent Examiner

- Mr D W Norris, The Grange, North Street, Theale, Reading, RG7 5EX

## Insurance

Ecclesiastical Insurance Office plc

## Statement of Intent

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Pangbourne with Tidmarsh and Sulham (PTS) consults and co-operates with the Incumbent **‘in promoting the whole mission of the Church in this parish, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.’**

## Parochial Church Council

<b>Chair</b>	Revd Mark Hopkins	<b>Elected Members</b>	Emma Barker	2023 – 2026
<b>Secretary</b>	Vanessa Saunders 2022 - 2026		Penny Billyeald	2022 – 2025
<b>Treasurer</b>	Stephen Billyeald 2023 - 2026		Wilma Grant (PCC Lay Chair and	
<b>Church Warden</b>	Julia Sheppard		Deanery Synod Rep)	2023 - 2026
	Jill Palfrey (Deanery Synod Rep)		Mark Littledale	2023- 2026
	2023 – 2026		Dilys Rogers	2023 – 2026

## Business of the Parochial Church Council 2024

The PCC met six times.

## A Report on Changes in the Electoral Roll

2025 is a six year complete revision of the Electoral Roll

In 2024 there were **130** Members on the electoral roll

The new roll has **82** Members

**60** names came off

**12** new names were added

*Vanessa Saunders, Electoral Roll Officer*

We thank all the committee and group members for all they have contributed, and continue to offer, to the life of the church community in PTS.

### PCC Policies in 2024

- Prevention and Safeguarding Policy Updated annually
- Pastoral Visiting Policy
- Health and Safety
- Food Hygiene
- Data Protection
- Safer Recruitment
- Payment of Staff
- Tithing and Charitable Giving
- Collections
- Reserves and Investments

No change to the above policies

## A Review of 2024

*Rector Rev Mark writes...*

***For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14.28)***

These words of Jesus were at the forefront of my mind in 2024 as we considered some costly projects at both St James the Less Pangbourne and St Nicholas Sulham. At St James, the PCC were forced to slow down focussing on planning for a new disabled-access toilet as we have first had to consider replacing our heating system with something future-proof and environmental, following the irrevocable failure of our old heating system in the autumn. At St Nicholas, persistent ongoing leaks to the roof and unsafe pinnacles meant we need to spend to rectify this before thinking about internal redecoration at the back of church. Thankfully, due to the generous donations of the church and community and dedicated fundraising, we have so far successfully undertaken significant works on these projects and the wheels are in motion to get the rest of our projects back on track in 2025 and 2026. (See fabric report for more detail).

Early in the year, I began a series of seminars entitled "Becoming More Inclusive" which were intended to help us as a church consider the less visible obstacles and boundaries which prevent some people from coming to church. We examined the Inclusive Church Statement, which includes a commitment to be "a church which celebrates and affirms every person and does not discriminate" and which "will continue to challenge the church where it continues to discriminate against people on grounds of disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality." As a PCC we formally adopted the Inclusive Church statement and I co-led seminars with Rev Rachel Jeremiah our curate on every category in the statement. Our Spring Seminars were on sexuality, disability, and mental health, our Autumn seminars were on neurodiversity, gender, and ethnicity, and we will hold our final seminar on economic power in February 2025.

There is much to give thanks for in 2024. I am particularly grateful to Rev Rachel for her tireless commitment to the monthly Oasis bereavement group. She has a compassionate heart for this ministry and it has been important for so many church and community members grieving the loss of loved ones. I am also thankful for her assistance to me as Rector in leading and preaching alongside me and for starting the new Joyful Noise breakfast service for families. We will continue as a church to prioritise ways to bring more families and young people into our church communities and to keep these vital projects going when Rev Rachel moves on to her first post in charge in a couple of years.

Jill Palfrey, one of our churchwardens, stepped down at the AGM in April 2024. I have been enormously grateful for the pastoral support she has offered me in my capacity as Rector and practical support for so many matters in our churches and churchyards. She has continued to offer valuable advice and support and has remained on as a duty warden, deanery synod rep, and safeguarding co-ordinator. I am also continually grateful to our churchwarden, Julia Sheppard, and to our clergy with permission to officiate, Rev Barry Ashdown and Rev Tony Naden, who support me in the week-in, week-out leading of worship and preaching. I am thankful too for our organist Wilma Grant for leading our musicians, and our administrator Vanessa Saunders for her practical support. I am grateful for our treasurer Stephen Billyeald for helping us balance the books, whilst also helping us prioritise essential spending to keep our buildings safe and open, and geared towards future mission. My appreciation goes also to Julia Bion who has been invaluable helping with bookkeeping for many years and who stepped down from this role at the end of 2024.

Although there are many, many, people to name who volunteer day in and day out for church, particular thanks go to duty wardens Jill Palfrey, Brian and Christine Tims, Heather and Cliff Thorne, and Stephen and Penny Billyeald for their assistance at Pangbourne; Mark Littledale for assistance with building matters across the churches, and Jennifer Nutt, Gillian Alderton and Gill Haggarty for their aid at Tidmarsh and Sulham churches. Sarah Rasmussen and her team have my thanks for beautiful flower arranging, Len Palfrey and the bellringers for their commitment to services and weddings, and I am also grateful to those who help with cleaning, green gym, welcoming, and in numerous other ways. Thanks too to the PCC for helping guide me through a complex year.

There were several community and church events in 2024 which were well attended and although most of our regular activities are listed below a few can be highlighted here. In February we had Spring flowers at Sulham and the annual church quiz at Pangbourne. We held Lent Lunches and a service in May to raise money for Christian Aid. In June, we had a stall at Pangbourne fete, D-Day commemorations on Tidmarsh green, concerts as part of the Berkshire Chamber Music Festival and Rachel's ordination as priest and celebrations. Autumn brought harvest festivals at Pangbourne and Sulham and Remembrance services in both these churches, and in Advent in addition to our regular services we hosted Pangbourne village carol singing when inclement weather meant it couldn't be held outside.

Here's hoping for a strong 2025, with a warmer (heated) church at Pangbourne by next Christmas. Let us also pray that across the parishes there will be a growing response to the hope Jesus Christ has to offer the world in the midst of these turbulent and unsettling times.

*Rev Mark Hopkins*

# A Report on the Activities of the Parish in 2024

## Parish Vision

A united parish with three churches reaching out to all in our community and beyond as a Christian witness.

## Parish Mission

To offer a warm welcome, fellowship and a caring environment to families and worshippers of all ages. To actively grow our church family by encouraging people to learn more about what it means to be a follower of Christ and to continue to serve those in our local and wider community through discipleship and love.

## Parish Action Plan

- Focus on ways to increase our engagement with children and families.
- Encourage and enable church members to grow their relationship with Christ through personal discipleship.
- Raise our profile in the community and strengthen our links with local schools, groups, organisations and individuals in all three villages.
- Develop our use of digital technology to further our mission.
- Improve access to our churches for all.

## Church Administrator

Vanessa Saunders is employed as the parish administrator.

## Safeguarding

### **Parish Safeguarding Officer - Jill Palfrey; Verifier - Vanessa Saunders**

Safeguarding in the Church of England was much in the national news in 2024 but within our parish it is good to report that no safeguarding concerns were raised.

Safeguarding is a standing item at every PCC meeting. The Safeguarding Policy is reviewed and approved annually by the PCC. A 'Promoting a Safer Church' poster is displayed, together with the Parish Safeguarding Policy, at each of our three churches. The poster gives contact details for our safeguarding officer and a contact at the diocese. Safeguarding arrangements are also clearly visible on the parish website.

Every three years all clergy and PCC members renew their training to the appropriate level and DBS checks also where required. The Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) is responsible for ensuring this is monitored for any lay members involved in parish activities, in particular those that may include children or vulnerable adults.

Alongside the role of PSO the remit of being responsible for health and safety has also been included. Our Health and Safety policies and Risk Assessments are reviewed as necessary and taken into account for any activity for which the parish is responsible

**Jill Palfrey**

## Health and Safety

The PCC is mindful of the risks associated with its various activities. The PCC has particular regard to the child protection and vulnerable adult's requirements at all times.

## Insurance

Our insurance provider is Ecclesiastical Insurance and all three churches are covered by one policy.

## Mission Partners and Charities Supported in 2024

The Charities we supported in 2024 were:

For our Tithe

- **Local** – CIRDIC
- **National** – Mission to Seafarers
- **International** – Miriam Dean Fund

We also donated to:

- Christian Aid
- Plan International
- Readifood (harvest food donations)
- Royal British Legion
- Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust
- All Churches Together

## Christian Aid

Lent lunches were held in aid of Christian Aid and raised £602

## Services and Worship in PTS

**Our heartfelt thanks go to the lay members of the Ministry Team:**

Julia Sheppard, Wilma Grant, Jill Palfrey and Heather Thorne, Mark Littledale, Vanessa Saunders **and to our retired priests with Permission to Officiate:**

*Rev Barry Ashdown and Rev Tony Naden.*

**Permission to administer the chalice in Communion in 2024 was held by:**

Len Palfrey, Hugh Richardson, Julia Sheppard, Heather Thorne, Jill Palfrey, Brian Tims, Christine Tims. **Thank you to those who have taken part in staffing our parish worship.**

## Occasional Offices

- **5 Infant Baptisms**  
Our thanks go to Penny and Stephen Billyeald for Baptism service ministry.
- **2 Weddings**
- **6 Funerals** took place in the parish and at the crematoria, **3 Memorial Services** and **7 Burials of Ashes**  
A special service for those recently bereaved was held at All Souls Tide in St James.

## Deanery Synod

Area Dean: Revd Grant Fensome

Lay Chair: Terry Webster

Parish Deanery Representatives: Wilma Grant and Jill Palfrey, one vacancy

Meetings were held on 14/3/24 at St Stephen's Upper Basildon 27/6/24 at St Mary's Burghfield and 17/10/24 at St James Pangbourne.

Discussions took place on the parish share, children and young people services and events across the Deanery and what was successful and working well. At every meeting there was a "5 minute in the life of" someone in the deanery, which has been very interesting.



## **Music and Singing**

There is currently no singing group practice at the moment but thank you to all the singers who continue to support services weekly and help to lead the hymns and music. This is very much appreciated.

A special thank you to Ellie Thorne who helped cover most Sunday services at St James, playing the piano, while Wilma Grant was recovering from a broken wrist during April and May.

**Wilma Grant, Music Co-ordinator**

## **Noah's Ark**

Our Pre-School service 'Noah's Ark' has continued throughout 2024-25 in a familiar format: we start with some craft, refreshments, toys, welcome and fellowship before entering the more structured part of the service. This part consists of a story, a prayer and two worship songs with shakers, before we celebrate the birthdays of those in attendance and finish with nursery rhymes. Themes we have covered this year include: Trees, Colours, Feelings, Creation and Love. During the October half-term, we had another joyous visit from Word Puppets during the half-term holidays.

It has proved a wonderful way to nurture links with our community, share the gospel message and support new mothers, in particular, at what can be a difficult time of life. The children seem to engage really very well with the entire session, and enjoy the routine and structure of the group. We often see new people join the group who have seen it advertised locally (online, in the magazine, or on notice boards) or who hear about it through word-of-mouth.

Despite the group growing during the spring and summer months, we saw a significant drop in numbers over the winter months when the heating in the church was broken. We are very grateful for the kind offer from St Bernadette's Roman Catholic Rooms for the free use of the Dorman Rooms until the heating situation has been resolved. Since moving to the Dorman Rooms, numbers have been restored and others have joined us seeing growth in the group once more. We have been donating the small collection we gather from this group to St Bernadette's to cover the heating bill for the rooms.

Rev'd Mark, Rev'd Rachel and Jill Palfrey lead this service each week, and we continue to be extremely grateful to the small yet reliable team of volunteers that serve this group. We are always looking for volunteers to join in, so please do let us know if you'd like to be involved in this fantastic way to serve the local community and build relationships with those who attend this service.

**Rev Rachel Jeremiah, Curate**

## **Joyful Noise**

In September 2024 we launched the Joyful Noise 30-minute Breakfast Service at St James, aimed to be a missional, inclusive Sunday morning service that strives to remove some of the barriers to traditional church-attendance that some families with younger children (children under 10 years old in particular) might encounter.

At PTS Churches we are blessed with a thriving group of families on the fringes of our church community. Joyful Noise – a reference to Psalm 98 – aims to provide a place of belonging and nurture to these families as we 'sing to the Lord a new song' (also a reference to Psalm 98!) and branch into unfamiliar territory with this service. Psalm 98 reminds us of the joy of worship our living God, and encourages us to keep on praising his name in all sorts of new ways and new forms. Joyful Noise builds on this idea of prioritising and valuing a style of church that might meet in other ways, even if it might be slightly more chaotic than a traditional setting! Its purpose has been to support the faith journeys of young families in the parish, build on already existing relationships found elsewhere in church life, build on connections with baptism families, and create a place where parents and grandparents can worship easily alongside their children. A



light 'no frills' breakfast is offered afterwards during which the 10am congregation are invited to join in, in order to draw connections between different groups in the church community.

During the services so far, we have been following the theme of Christ's 'I Am' statements from John's gospel. The service includes games, videos, talks, music, crafts and activities, which are tailored to the modern ways that children are taught. Attendance has been variable: some sessions have been rather full but the service after Christmas was more sparsely attended (possibly due to heating problems). Looking ahead, we have a Pentecost picnic arranged for June, and we have agreed to evaluate the success of the year and make any necessary changes over the summer.

There has been great support from our usual congregation, and it has been wonderfully refreshing to think about new ways of worshipping in our community. We are very grateful for the team of volunteers who have been hugely helpful and enthusiastic about this project and very supportive of its activities. If you feel you would like to be a part of this team – do please get in touch.

**Rev Rachel Jeremiah, Curate**

## **Bell Ringing**

We continue to maintain a faithful band of eight Sunday services ringers and hope that one of our improvers will soon have the confidence to join us on Sunday. Currently we are teaching three learners who are making steady progress. Our youngest learner is just about to embark on the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award and has chosen bell ringing as his specialist skill.

Having installed a peal board to commemorate the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, last year, we looked at notable ringing achievements of the past and decided to commission and instal two more peal boards.

As in previous years we took part in the annual schools open day, where pupils from Pangbourne and Englefield Primary schools come to church to learn about church life. We demonstrated how bells are rung and all of the children, under close supervision, had a go at ringing a bell at backstroke.

We frequently welcome visiting ringers on practice night and with their help all of the band is making progress, learning new things and improving what they already know. We are always on the lookout for new recruits, if you want to have a go, or just find out a bit more about bell ringing, our door is always open, just come in when the bells are not ringing.

**Len Palfrey, Tower Captain**

## **St James Café**

In 2024, St James Café continued to meet in St James the Less on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month. At the start of the year, new tablecloths were purchased to give the café a fresh feel. In terms of numbers, we have around 10-15 attend each café, and in addition, the Wednesday morning church congregation is consistently slightly larger on the weeks when the café meets.

Towards the end of the year the decision was made to review the hours of the café, which in 2025 will meet from 11am-12noon, rather than 11am-12.30. This was due to the feeling that very few people were attending after 12 noon and it placed an extra challenge upon volunteers running the café to keep it open for the extra half an hour.

The café has not been without its challenges. The loss of heating meant the café struggled to meet in December and has been suspended for January and February 2025, to resume in March. We are working hard to redress the heating situation at the back of church in time for the end of 2025 when the Winter months resume. We are also struggling to find enough volunteers to assist with leading the café on the rota.

I am grateful for everyone who has assisted with serving in the café this year. It is vitally important that we continue to resource the café in terms of volunteer help and providing the warmth for it to continue. Without it, the ongoing mission of the church and outreach into the community would suffer, as it is one of very few regular mid-week events for our churches.

**Rev Mark Hopkins, Rector**

## **Oasis Bereavement Group**

In April 2024, the self-help, meet-up Oasis Bereavement Group was formed to support those in the congregation and beyond who were bereaved and, as such, may be going through a lonely and isolating

time. The group has been open to anyone in our local community who has suffered any sort of bereavement at any time and finds themselves still coming to terms with the impact this is having on their life. The group is small, unstructured, and consists of free-flowing conversation and fellowship, underpinned by a shared experience of loss and the knowledge everyone in attendance is going through a similar experience. Although our Christian faith and desire to help others underpins the purpose of the group, there is no explicit religious content so the group has been designed to be suitable and accessible for people of all faiths, or none. As such, some individuals from the wider community beyond the church congregation have joined the group, referrals have been made from the social prescriber at The Boat House Surgery, and it has become part of the funeral after-care pastoral support we offer families after holding a funeral for a loved-one at the church.

Oasis meets on the fourth Thursday of each month from 2-3.30pm in the Trunk Room at The Elephant Hotel in Pangbourne. The Elephant is extremely supportive of this endeavour and have offered the room for free, as well as providing hot drinks to everyone in the group free of charge. We are very grateful for this support. The group is led and facilitated by Rev'd Rachel Jeremiah, with additional support and expertise offered by Gillian Alderton.

**Rev Rachel Jeremiah, Curate**

## **Flower Arranging**

Flower arranging team - Pauline Jones, Beverly Hughes, Dilys Rogers, Jayne Davidson, Pam Killender, Lorraine Ashdown, Pat Coyle, Jill Palfrey, Margaret Rhodes, Fiona Hope, Alyson Ebbrell, Sarah Rasmussen. We are still majoring on using faux flowers (in rotation) for the large altar pedestal. This makes the table a simple display to do every 2 weeks. However, the loss of heating in church has increased the longevity of the displays through Christmas and Spring.

Throughout the year and at special services and festivals- Mothering Sunday, Easter, Rev Rachel's ordination, Harvest, All Souls, Remembrance, Advent and Christmas the flower team prepared wonderful and season appropriate floral arrangements for St James. Particular highlights were Rev Rachel's ordination when we celebrated her special day with orange and purple - her favourite colours and themed arrangements around her hobbies of music, reading; baking. For Remembrance Sunday we re-engineered the crochet poppies into pillar collars and used the large bumper plastic poppies for pew ends. The Faux poppies were used for a striking altar pedestal. With some athletics and coordination, a dramatic three panel canvas of a poppy head was placed above the altar.

Sulham church continues to create beautiful displays and continued their wreath course this Christmas. All arrangements continue to be pared back due to manpower.

Our thanks to Mark Littledale for his frequent Facebook posts highlighting seasonal floral arrangements.

**Sarah Rasmussen**

## **Fabrics Goods and Ornaments**

This year has been an eventful one for our three churches, with urgent roofing works required at St Nicholas' Sulham and our heating system failing at St James' Pangbourne. I am grateful for the fundraising efforts of the whole church and community, the PCC, and the dedicated time of Stephen Billyeald, Mark Littledale, Len and Jill Palfrey and Julia Sheppard in helping us manage these large fabric challenges and helping us keep our churches safe and beautiful.

Routine maintenance in 2024 continued across all the churches, including organ tuning, electrical checks, and service of fire extinguishers. Matters specific to the churches are detailed below with fuller reports on the heating system at St James the Less and the roofing works at St Nicholas Sulham.

### **St James the Less, Pangbourne**

#### ***General matters***

Early in 2024 Penny Billyeald donated the first three of a set of 6 cushions which she is cross-stitching to depict the days of creation – these are currently at the front of church near the high altar.

Persistent electrical issues in January and February 2024 required Bracknell Electrix to attend and update systems. These were partially caused by the problems with the boiler which was later removed (see below).

Due to flints and mortar falling out of the east boundary wall and the wall bordering The Elephant becoming unsafe, the east wall was repaired and the wall bordering the elephant was rebuilt in Spring 2024. Unfortunately, in May the tower was broken into via the main door, and the locks were forced on the connecting doors between the tower and main church. A small amount of cash was stolen from the wall safe which was broken into. Repairs were made to locks and doors, with a new lock on the wall safe.

All light bulbs were changed in the nave and changed to LED lights in June for a 'warm' white.

In August new microphones were installed and tested to enable us to have two working radio microphones and a third roving microphone in church for public worship.

A memorial bench was installed in memory of Cherry East in September 2024.

There is growing concern that unauthorised artificial flowers, ornaments, and even stone flower holders have been introduced to graves in the churchyard without permission, and in breach of the Diocese of Oxford regulations. It will be necessary to remove objects and return them to families if they have been introduced without permission. Please note that churchyard regulations prohibit the addition of pictures and artificial flowers to graves or ledger stones, and prohibit the planting of any kind of flower or shrub around them. Additional stonework requires permission from the Rector and may be removed, especially if it is not of an approved type of stone or colour lettering.

We are grateful for the Green Gym team for their ongoing and regular work in the churchyard to keep things orderly and tidy.

Initial plans have been drawn up to redevelop the toilet at the rear of St James' church and replace it with a larger, accessible toilet with a baby changing facility. The work of consultation and raising funds for this will continue in 2025.

### **Heating system**

It had become apparent during the course of the past few years that the heating system in St James was unlikely to last much longer, as the aging boilers were likely to fail beyond repair. A replacement system of heating the church would be needed which would be reliable, cost-effective, future-proof and in keeping with our church and diocesan commitments to the environment.

Matters came to a head when the 30+ year old gas-fired heating system failed in November 2024 and was beyond economical repair. In 2023 in anticipation of this failure we had taken advice from a specialist in modern methods of heating churches who recommended a combination of under-pew heating with overhead infrared heaters for the open spaces. We carried out a successful trial of under-pew heaters in February 2024.

We launched an appeal to fund the installation of under-pew heaters for the main body of the church in November 2024 and raised £11,000 from members of the congregation, visitors to the church and the local community. The necessary electrical work is due to be completed and the pew heaters fitted to the nave and chancel pews in February 2025. We aim to install heaters under the north aisle pews and infrared heaters in the open space at the west end of the nave during 2025, subject to raising the necessary funds.

### **St Laurence, Tidmarsh**

Things have been quieter with regards to necessary fabric works at St Laurence this year. The new oak gateposts were reinstalled and plaques reaffixed following on from works to repair the walls of the churchyard at the end of 2023.

We continue to be grateful to the Friends of St Laurence who help maintain the churchyard at St Laurence.

### **St Nicholas, Sulham**

#### **Tower Roof Works**

There has been a history of leaks at the east and west ends of St Nicholas church. Repairs were carried out in January / February at a cost of £2,910 which cured the leaks at the east end but failed to completely cure those at the west end. It was then discovered that earlier repairs to the tower roof had failed.

Repairs to the tower roof were completed in July at a cost of £7,140 which was very generously covered by a donation from a parishioner. We shall apply for a grant of £1,675 to recover the VAT from these costs.

The Quinquennial Inspection reported a piece of broken stonework on the St Nicholas tower which had destabilised one of the pinnacles. The roofing contractor tried to carry out a repair or remove the pinnacle but was unable to carry out this work from the tower roof; the contractor made the pinnacle safe with securing straps pending the installation of scaffolding. A stonemasonry contractor is due to carry out the repair to the stonework, and to secure the pinnacle, in January 2025.

### **Quinquennial Inspection and other matters**

In March, it was necessary to repair the organ blower at a cost of £3777 inc. VAT which could be reclaimed. The cost of this was met through the St Nicholas Organ fund and the restricted St Nicholas fund. These funds are formed through dedicated fundraising and organ maintenance charges levied when the organ is used for occasional offices. The August Quinquennial Inspection also identified other areas of concern including investigating the decay to the organ chamber floor, repairing the covering to the North porch roof, inspecting the electrics and clearing out the guttering. We have been able to undertake much of the work on St Nicholas church through the generosity of the villagers of Sulham and their fundraising endeavours. Looking forwards to 2025, we are seeking to obtain quotes for internal redecoration and repair, primarily focussed around the rear of the church where water ingress has damaged the wallpaper and plastering. We have already received donations and pledges towards this work.

**Revd Mark Hopkins, with assistance in compiling this report from Stephen Billyeald, Mark Littledale, Jill Palfrey and Julia Sheppard.**

### **Green Gym**

Our regular group of volunteers continued to cut the grass and maintain the churchyard throughout 2024. Not all of our volunteers are church goers but are only too willing to help, frequently coming between Green Gym sessions to work on their own. They were also instrumental in the setting up of the Christmas trees and lights, both inside and out, and in their removal.

The wet weather last year made grass cutting very difficult and we struggled to keep up with the rate of growth and did not manage to cut some areas.

We were very pleased to welcome a couple of new Green Gym members, especially as they have reduced the average age to nearer 60 rather than 70!! As always, we are on the lookout for anyone who is willing to give of their time and help maintain our church yard.

We are grateful to those in the Green Gym team who dedicate their time to weeding and maintaining the borders of the churchyard and the flowering areas, much enhancing the beauty of this quiet, peaceful place.

As is now usual, a team of students from Pangbourne College came in the summer and worked very hard in the churchyard as part of their community service.

A list of Green Gym dates for 2025 can be found on the church porch notice board.

**Len Palfrey**

## **Treasurer's Report on 2024 Statement of Financial Activities**

### **Headline Figures**

**Unrestricted funds** representing day-to-day operations of the parish showed an operating deficit of £20k. This was only partly off-set by a gain of £3.5k on funds held in investments.

Income was £5k higher than in 2023 as a result of a generous donation to the roof repairs at St Nicholas (£7k) and a return of funds from Bradfield Deanery (£5k); these were off-set by a reduction in regular giving (-£7k).

Expenditure was £21k higher than 2023. The main increases were on the organ repair and roof repairs St Nicholas (£13k) and parish share (7k).

Unrestricted Funds in the bank and invested at the end of the year are £26.5k (down by £18k on last year). This is the minimum which we should hold under Charity Commission guidelines.

**Restricted Funds** which are funds donated for specific purposes, showed a surplus of £7.5k which was mainly donations to the St James Heating Appeal which will be spent in 2025.

We have a total of £54k in Restricted Funds, an increase of £8k on last year.

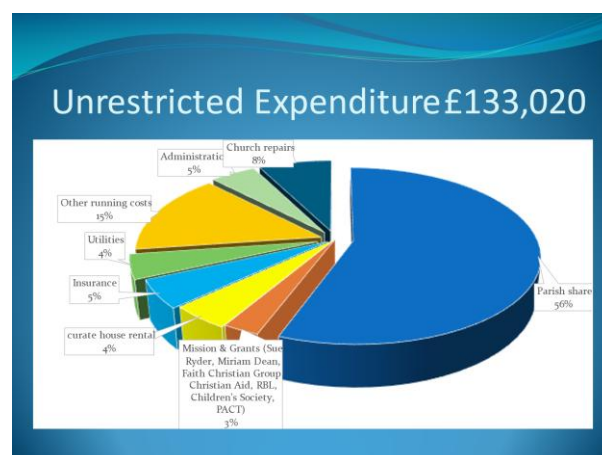
Reserves of Unrestricted and Restricted Funds are invested in Church of England investment funds; the value of our investments rose during the year by £3.5k. These funds have shown investment gains of more than £52k over the past seven years.

The investment gain on Endowment funds during the year was £2.5k.

## Unrestricted Income and Expenditure

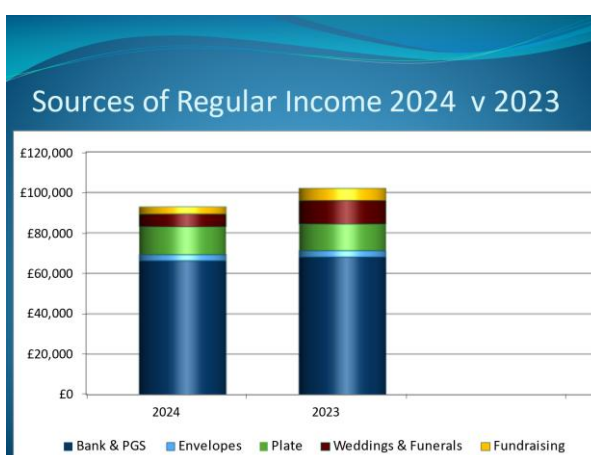
# Unrestricted Income £112,873

Category	Percentage
Regular income	49%
Gift-aid	14%
Other incomes	9%
Weddings & funerals	6%
Collections	9%
Community events	3%
Unlabeled	10%



## Regular Income & Expenditure

Category	Planned Giving	Plate	Events	Running Costs	Gift Aid	Weddings & Funerals	Parish Share
Income	£55,000	£10,000	£5,000	£5,000	£0	£0	£0
Expenditure	£0	£0	£0	£0	£75,000	£35,000	£0



It is our aim that planned giving including gift-aid covers the cost of parish share. The running costs and charitable giving are then covered by other sources of income including plate collections, weddings & funerals, community events and other donations.

Planned giving has dropped slightly as a result of deaths and donors leaving the parish; plate collections (especially by card) have held up well; income from weddings & funerals and other sources such as one-off donations and legacies cannot be forecast or relied upon. We have become more reliant on community events in order to raise funds and these take considerable time and energy from volunteers.

The PCC is ever mindful of keeping running costs under tight control. Investment in the new heating system at St James is expected to reduce the energy bill; we have changed supplier to keep insurance cost down; we use endowment fund income where possible to cover church and churchyard maintenance and repair costs; we are now looking at ways in which we might limit the cost of our major expense of parish share.

**Stephen Billyeald**  
**Treasurer to the PCC**