

St Mary's Church, Fowlmere



Annual Report and Financial statements of
The Parochial Church Council
For the Year ended 31st December 2024

Incumbent

The Revd. David Lee

Independent Examiner:

Mr Christopher Neild ACA

Rector's Introduction

"2024 will almost certainly be another eventful and transitory year." That was a line I included in what was my Associate Priest's introduction to the 2023 Annual Report, and gosh, wasn't it just! As we went through our transition period after Angela's retirement at the end of 2023, what was vital, and the Archdeacon certainly made sure we did this, was that we went through a thorough and proper process in deciding who the next rector should be. This led to us reviewing our Benefice profile, asking the bishop permission to consider me as a single candidate for the post, and then a full interview which, believe you me, was anything but a formality! All this led to my service of Induction and Institution on 7th August which was one of the most memorable and uplifting evenings of my life. All I can say is another thank you to everyone involved in the arrangements for my appointment and that evening, and for giving me the opportunity to serve you as your rector.

And then we got moving! One of the advantages of having served as curate, and then associate priest, here is that as I started as rector I already had ideas about how we could work together to grow our church – and I deliberately say 'our church' because that is the most significant change that we have made. Whilst the 4 churches still exist legally as 4 separate parishes, and so there are 4 PCCs (even though they now often meet together) and 4 Annual Reports, we are more and more working together as 1 church serving 4 villages with 4 church buildings. And much of the second half of 2024 was spent working out what first steps we should take to achieve that set up.

And what better place to start was there than with the activity which is the centre of our very existence as a church – and that is our Sunday Morning worship. That is why we exist: to worship the God who created us, and so it is vital that we make that worship as good as we can. When looking at the options we had we considered what we currently did, and that was to hold either 2 or 3 services each Sunday in different churches meaning we had 2 or 3 small congregations. But then when we did meet to worship together, in January and over the Summer holidays, everyone seemed to enjoy it more. So we took the decision that from the start of 2025, we would worship together every Sunday, whilst giving ourselves the option to hold some separate services on feast days. That looks like a good decision as early in 2025, we have more people gathering to worship God in a single place each Sunday than we had in total worshipping in separate churches.

At the same time we now have the ability to offer children's church each Sunday, wherever the service is held, and the St Mary's Fowlmere choir has in effect become the Benefice choir as it helps lead our music wherever the service is held. So thank you to our children's team, all our musicians, and to you for being willing to accept change and travel to a different church from, 'your' church on a Sunday morning.

The other major thing we did in 2024 was to hold a stewardship campaign, or a Giving campaign as we called it. We contacted everyone on our electoral roles, and others in our church family who were not then on the electoral roles, and asked them to consider how they could give to the 4 Churches, both financially and in terms of time and talents. The results financially were very encouraging, but I have to say the offers of help in terms of time and talents were disappointing. And that very much leads me on to the biggest challenge we face as a church in 2025.

When I talk about growing our church to the churchwardens and to the PCCs we seem to have lots of really good ideas, but somehow very few of them get put into action. We seem to be running at capacity in terms of what we can introduce, and somehow we have to increase that capacity. Yes, we are hoping to open a public facing 4 church office at St Mary's Fowlmere run by an employed administrator, initially two mornings a week, which will help, but there are many other things that we could introduce if only we had people who would put up their hands and say – yes, I could lead that, or I could help with that. Could one of those people be you? Perhaps as you read this you are

thinking, “but what could I do?”. Believe you me, if you have some time, and the desire to help, it is simply a question of finding which is the most appropriate project for you to help with. Have a think. Pray about it. And if you then think, even maybe, you could help more then let me know and we can have a chat.

2024 was a great year for our church, but also a year of challenges. 2025, I believe, could be a really exciting year. So as I conclude the introduction to this report I say a huge thank you to everyone who already contributes in any way to the life of our church, the 4 Church Benefice. When we count up we are always surprised by the number of people who are involved in some way in operating our church, so for whatever it is that you do, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, for what you did in 2024, and what you are continuing to do in 2025.

Every blessing,
Rev'd David Lee, Rector, the 4 Churches, April 2025.

Introduction

St Mary's Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent, the Reverend David Lee, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. We aim to promote the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England.

Aims and purposes

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at our church and to become part of our parish community. In association with the Four Church Benefice, the PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and makes suggestions on how our services can involve the many groups that live within our parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In particular, we try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the gospel; and developing their knowledge and trust in Jesus.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and outreach work.

To facilitate this work it is important that we maintain the fabric of St Mary's Church.

Objectives and activities

Regular activities include:

- Sunday church services in person, Morning Prayer once a week and a four-church service at least once a month
- The website has maintained our communication link to everyone with updates of all the activities and events. The Facebook page also acts as a link through social media.
- The church has been open every day for prayer and reflection.

Achievements and performance

Interregnum

We began 2024 interregnum as Rev Angela Melaniphy retired at the end of 2023. We had the benefit of our associate priest still in post and so all services were still covered. We held a Section 11 meeting and the churchwardens of the four churches reported that all four PCCs were very keen to

keep Rev David Lee as our spiritual leader. He was willing to consider himself for the role of Rector and so the Archdeacon was approached to request that our Associate Priest be interviewed for the post of Rector of the Four Church Benefice. This process was followed through, and David was installed as Rector on August 7th 2024. A reception followed in Thriplow School Hall and our PCCs and congregations were joined by many local community leaders to celebrate this fabulous occasion.

Worship and prayer

The PCC aims to offer a range of services during the month and over the course of the year that our community find both beneficial and spiritually fulfilling. This year at St Mary's we started the year with a month of four church services in January. This was well received. Then in February we reverted to our usual pattern of a Holy Communion Service on the Second Sunday, All Age Worship on the third Sunday led by our ALM, Mrs Liz Nottage and a holy communion service on the fourth Sunday alternating between Thriplow and Fowlmere. The fifth Sunday became a four church Benefice Communion Service. Then in the summer we followed a summer pattern of joint four church services before reverting back to our usual pattern. The services during the summer were so well attended that we discussed a major change in the pattern of our services to consider only worshipping as a benefice and therefore just one service a month in each church. Festivals and commemoration services would still be in individual parishes. We prepared the new pattern to take effect at the end of 2024.

All are welcome to attend our regular services. The average weekly attendance was 35 but this number increased at festivals. As well as our regular services, we enable our community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of the journey through life. Through baptism we thank God for the gift of life, in marriage public vows are exchanged with God's blessing and through funeral services friends and family express their grief and give thanks for the life which is now complete in this world and to commend the person into God's keeping.

Children's Work

Children's Church continued to meet throughout the year whenever there was a service in St Mary's, with All Age services taking place once a month. There was a Nativity service at Christmas.

Messy Church met in St Mary's after school on a Wednesday afternoon each month. Sessions were well attended and led by a wonderful team of volunteers.

At Easter a children's Easter crafts morning was held in St Mary's. This was followed by a Christmas crafts afternoon at the beginning of Advent.

We welcomed children from Fowlmere Primary School into church for a Christmas Service in December and children and families from the Flying Start Nursery came to the church for their Christmas performance.

Deanery Synod

Two members of the PCC sit on the deanery synod. This provides the PCC with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church. This year the deanery synod met in March and in October. The business of the Deanery has been focussed on financial and pastoral planning.

Pastoral care

Some members of our parish are unable to attend church due to sickness or age. Dr Sheila Andren has visited all church members who have requested it and is authorised to take communion to patients in Addenbrooke's hospital who are unable to visit the chapel there. Her work is highly valued as supporting the Rector in visiting around the Parish. Lady Anne Coles has supported Dr Andren in this role this year.

Social Awareness

The guilt free foodbank is held in the porch of St Marys. This had been halted due to misuse and St Marys has been in discussions with the Parish Council to find alternative sources. A mobile Foodbank was being trialled in the village and this continued for much of 2024 but the PCC is now considering ways to reestablish the foodbank in the porch.

Mission and evangelism

Helping those in need is a demonstration of our faith. We continue to support the work of Helen Tremeneere in Leeds through Interserve and the charity 'Hands of Mercy' in the Philippines. The income from a cake sale and the church Christmas card delivery service was given to the Hands of Mercy charity and towards our support of Aura in Guatemala. Mrs Barbara Coates coordinates the annual Shoebox appeal in November and the door to door collections during Christian Aid Week in May.

Community and Ecumenical relationships

Café@St Mary's is open on Tuesday mornings from 10.00-11.30 and has become the weekly social gathering for its regular 'customers'. It is run by members of the PCC and congregation and it is supported well.

Remembrance Day was marked by a joint service in St Marys. The ceremony at the memorial in the village accompanied by the laying of wreaths involved children from Fowlmere School.

The village news (Fowlmere and Thriplow News) is also produced by St Marys in liaison with St Georges and the many other village groups in Fowlmere and Thriplow.

Church Buildings

This year we have carried out cleaning of the gutters and the roof tops and the drains around the building. We are also still working towards improving the path up to the church and a notice board and we are waiting to hear from a consultant structural engineer about the buttress in the DPR. Following a summer storm, there were a number of small leaks in the nave and chancel roof. The roof was inspected by a roofing contractor who reported that whilst there were no visible holes in the lead, he reported that it was 'weak' in areas and some areas were beaten down where they had lifted.

A full electrical inspection was carried out and there are items to be worked upon including the cabling to the lights in the nave and the heaters in the Dorothy Pluck Room. All moveable electrical items have been tested, the church roof alarm and the fire extinguishers have been serviced. An Heating was used sparingly throughout the winter months.

There is a need for the sound system to be upgraded and this is planned for next year.

There are plans for an office area to be developed in the Dorothy Pluck Room and the PCC have agreed that this will be the site of the Benefice Office. It has been agreed that a Benefice Administrator will be appointed to work within the benefice for two mornings a week to assist The Rector.

Financial review

We remain extremely grateful to all our church donors, large and small, regular and occasional. Yet again, we have been able to meet our full ministry share, against all expectations. This would not have been possible without the additional support of the Friends of St Mary's (FoSM), whose grant towards the cost of our electrical inspection and light repairs freed up the necessary funds to meet our share payment, so grateful thanks are also due to the committee and many donors to FoSM.

Income: Planned giving (£13492) was around £650 less than last year, mainly due to changed circumstances from 3 donors. Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) donations were increasing at year end, thanks to Revd David's stewardship campaign. Overall, we ended the year with 4 donors giving by standing order, and 19 on PGS. Income from collections (£3386) has increased a little since last year, with around 55% via contactless giving. The internet connection for the card reader is now generally stable. With fewer services and still not passing the plate, this is a positive result. Other giving to the general fund was £3506. This was mainly from voluntary donations at the weekly café, the summer fete, and for refreshments at services (sometimes exceeding the cash in the plate). It also includes some one-off donations from parishioners, £300 for the 2023 Christmas post, etc.

There were no donations to restricted/designated funds.

Donations to the wall safe remain minimal.

The Tuesday Café continues to provide a vital community outreach, thanks to all who help with that. Total Gift aid (£5049) was received on all eligible donations, including £150 for a donation to the Winter Fuel Fund made at the end of 2023. Gift aid on donations for specific purposes are applied to those funds. It should be noted there is always a mismatch between donations and Gift Aid received, as the final quarter donations are not processed for gift aid until the next financial year. Statutory fee income was £990, from one wedding and sadly 5 funerals and a memorial service. Grant income of £4122 (general and restricted) included grants from DCMS £780 (for eligible VAT charges), FoSM £2269 (towards costs for Electrical work), Ecclesiastical insurance £130 (for a parishioner taking out a policy) and The Church & Town Estate £943 (to the Fabric Fund). No Deanery Rebate has been granted since 2019. Interest payments to the Fabric and Restoration funds were £137 and £1011 respectively.

Expenditure: Our main expense is Parish share, £17809 in 2024. As in 2023, we started the year by making reduced monthly payments, increased this mid-year (and made a lump sum payment) and then a final payment in December to clear the balance, once the financial picture was clearer. As ever, this is an enormous sum to find and increases year on year. Thank you to all our donors in helping us meet this huge challenge.

Our other outgoings (£14251) were:

- Mission giving, £1430. Final payments were made from the Ukraine fund (now closed). Other payments included our regular donation to Interserve, and one-off donations to charities from collections at Christmas Eve (2023), Harvest and Remembrance Day services, and from the Christmas Post (2023).
- Utilities were thankfully a bit less than last year, at £1750. We only needed one oil delivery, £422. Water and sewage total £167, internet £130, electric £1031. (The internet cost included the end of 2023, a cheaper source was found early 2024, and costs should reduce further in 2025.)
- All other costs were for insurance (£2726), admin and clergy costs and expenses (£1238), general church supplies, maintenance etc (£4152), mission and evangelism (£100), electrical inspection/lights (£2723). A miscellaneous expense of £132 was transferring donations made at benefice craft events held in church.
- Included within this total is £1294, which was our share of the Benefice expenses. This covers the admin and clergy, mission & evangelism, and general running costs incurred by the benefice, split between the four parishes.

Our General Fund Balance at year end was £3079 and restricted/designated funds £23772.

Reserves policy

It is PCC policy to try to maintain a balance on free reserves of about £2000. Share is paid to the benefice treasurer and the benefice account maintains a balance of one month's payment of benefice share. This is held to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies.

It is our policy to invest the short-term investment fund balances with the CCLA Church of England Deposit Fund, and the remainder in the CCLA Church of England Investment Fund. The helmets that are currently on loan to the Royal Armouries are now part of a new display on Church Armour.

Structure, governance and management

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is a Registered Charity. The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. At St Mary's the membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent (our rector), churchwarden, the LLM's and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the electoral roll of the church. All those who attend our services / members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. The PCC met three times during the year with an average level of attendance of 80%.

The inventory has been carried out and the terrier and Logbook of the church are in the process of being updated. The allotment lands (Poor's Allotments Charity no: 239008) had many vacant allotments and the few allotment holders were complaining of the invasive nature of the local deer and rabbit population and wanting to hand the allotments back. It was decided that the best use of the land was to revert it to agricultural use and the current tenant of the largest section was willing to consider extending his tenancy to the whole field. With advice from Land Agents, this land is now rented out in full to the local farmer and the income raised is held by the trustees. Grants are offered to families in need in the parish and funds are distributed to the elderly at Christmas.

The committee of Church and Town Estate (Charity no:201504) have met and inspected the land at the end of Lynch Lane.

The Articles of Enquiry are in the process of being completed and sent to the Archdeacon and the church continues to be insured by Ecclesiastical Insurance.

Volunteers

We would like to thank all the volunteers who work so hard to make our church the lively and vibrant community it is. In particular we want to thank Mrs Caro Hollway who organises the rota of volunteers who clean the church and the rota of volunteers who ensure that we have beautiful fresh flowers in our church throughout the year.

We are very fortunate to have an excellent choir which helps to lead the worship at St Mary's. The choir is ably managed by Mrs Ivorna Moss and Mrs Maxine Pymer and supported by the organist Mr Colin Fuller along with Mrs Liz Moore, all of whom are volunteers. Mr Martin Atkinson has also become an intrinsic member of this group and regularly supports our worship by playing the keyboard and guitar.

We also wish to thank the members of our congregation who provide refreshments after every service in St Mary's.

St Mary's Church is indebted to The Friends' of St Mary's who work tirelessly to raise funds for the maintenance and conservation of the church building. Their support is greatly appreciated and invaluable to the PCC.

