

St Giles Church Northampton

Minutes of the Annual Vestry Meeting for the Election of Churchwardens held 12th May 2024 in church

1. The meeting began at 10.35am. David Lidbetter opened the meeting with prayer.
2. David Lidbetter and Stephen Hewitson were proposed and seconded to continue as our churchwardens. There being no other nominations, David and Stephen were therefore duly appointed and there was no need for an election. We prayed for them as they continue in their roles.
3. There was no other vestry business.

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on 12th May 2024 in church

1. Apologies were received from Daniel Blight, Paul Dawes, Keith Davidson, Jess Davdison, Angela Garrod, Dave Hunter, Jacqui Hunter, Abi Hunter, Liz Kitwood, Gill Walker, Tim Walker, Grace Deacon, Richard Deacon, Steve Pentland, Nicola Aylett, Graham Aylett, Peter Day, Sarah Day, Judith Cooper, Julie Parsons, Cathy Chew, Margaret West, Paul West, Dot Perry, Ben Finnemore, Sue Spear, Neil Richards, Karolin Richards, Ali Dekenah, Claire Van der Plaetse, Corneel Van der Plaetse.

2. Electoral Roll

The electoral roll stands at 174 of whom 9 are resident in the parish.

3. Average Sunday Attendance

Average Sunday attendance increased from 125 in 2022, to 145 in 2023.

4. Minutes of the Annual Meeting 30th April 2023

It was proposed by Diane York that the minutes, as previously made available in the church and on the website, be accepted as a true record. This was seconded by Renee Dixon and the minutes were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.

5. Thanks

Thanks was given to Ben Taylor and Chris Davison who are stepping down as deputy wardens and to all of the deputy wardens who continue to serve our church in this way. There continues to be vacancies if anyone else would like to serve as deputy warden.

Thanks was given to Duncan Halliday for stepping into the role of treasurer and to Derek Bish for all of his assistance.

Thanks was also given to Sine Cookman, Karolin Richards, Chris Davison, and Rachel White, who are stepping down from PCC this year.

6. Elections

Nomination of PCC Representatives

4 people were nominated for 4 vacancies: 3 for 3 years, and 1 for 2 years. There being no other nominations, there was therefore no need for an election.

The following people were therefore duly elected:

Sarah Alexander, Sarah Day, and Pete Summerside – 3 years.

Craig MacPherson- 2 years.

Nomination of Deanery Synod Representatives

There being only 2 nominations for 3 (2 year) vacancies, Neil Richards and David Smith were duly elected. By virtue of their position on Deanery Synod, Deanery Synod Representatives also get a seat on the PCC.

Thanks was given to Stephen Hewitson and Peter Day who continue to serve our church on the Deanery Synod.

PCC members, new and existing, were asked to see Helen Goff after the service to complete a trustee declaration form.

7. Annual Financial Accounts for 2023 and Budget for 2024

Duncan Halliday, treasurer, presented the slides regarding our 2023 end of year accounts and this year's budget.

At the end of 2023 we ran a deficit of £27,567.

Our expenditure was £344,250 which breaks down as follows: parish share (our contribution to the diocese) 32%; staff employment 35%; stats etc (running costs) 12%; overseas mission 9%; home mission 4%; office costs 5%; and ministry resources 3%.

It costs approximately £1,000 a day to run the church (notional operating cost).

We keep five months' worth of operating costs in the bank as our 'reserves' at any one time; we are required to hold reserves, which will cover us in the case of an emergency, by the charity commission.

Although our total income was £316,683, which is an increase on our 2022 income which totalled £305,967, this included a sizeable legacy (gift left in a will) of £31,189. Excluding the legacy, our 2023 income was £20,473 less than our income in 2022. Regular and one off donations, gift aid recovery, grants income, wedding and funeral fees, and lettings income all decreased. Investment interest was considerably more than in 2022 due to the economic situation in the country meaning interest rates were set very high.

A number of schemes have been considered and implemented by the PCC to try and increase our income. This has included the introduction of the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) as our preferred method of receiving regular donations; reintroduction of taking up of the offering during Sunday services; and a Sunday teaching series which included the topic 'When You Give'. A Stewardship committee has been put together with a particular focus on how we increase our income and steward our resources well. In terms of expenditure; quinquennial works, required to maintain and upkeep the fabric of the church building, were pushed back again.

Based on the above, the PCC had to make some very tough decisions when setting the budget for 2024. A budget income of £292,310 has been set, and a budget expenditure of £324,537. This is a deficit of £32,227 and will mean our likely reserves at the end of 2024 will be £182,500. The expenditure budget does not include one third of our Parish Share. Although St Giles has historically placed importance on paying the Parish Share in full, it is not something our PCC could agree to do this year based on income trends in the last few years. There was a question raised as to whether we would pay the Parish Share in full should there be an unexpected boost to our income; this would be a decision for the PCC but the general consensus when discussing this scenario was that yes we would.

Our current position as at 31st March 2024 is an income figure of £69,200, against a budgeted figure of £73,000; and an expenditure figure of £78,100, against a budgeted figure of £81,100.

It was proposed by Chris Davison that Shaw Gibbs accountants be appointed as auditors. They are the same auditors as we used last year (DNG Dove Naish) however under a new name. This was seconded by Sue Alcock and there were no objections.

Thanks is recorded to Duncan.

8. Safeguarding

St Giles adopts and supports the safeguarding policy employed by Peterborough Diocese and the Church of England. The recruitment policy at St Giles follows Safer Recruitment Guidelines for both paid and voluntary roles. All volunteers and church officers are required to undertake the appropriate safeguarding training. Our safeguarding officer is Louise Whaites and she can be contacted with any concern over the safety of children or vulnerable adults. We take safeguarding very seriously at St Giles because it matters that everyone can thrive in this place. More information on safeguarding can be found in the annual report.

9. Students' and Young Adults' Ministry Update

Ruth Alexander delivered an update on all the encouragements from the past year in the students and young adults ministry. These can be read about in the annual report. Thanks were recorded to Josh Richards and Cat Nichol for all of the support they have given Ruth in leading in this ministry area.

10. Children and Youth Ministry Update

Beth Whaites delivered an update on all the encouragements from the past year in our children and youth ministry. These can be read about in the annual report. Beth challenged the congregation to reflect on all of the ways that they or someone they know have been affected by children and youth ministry in their lives, and consider the ways in which they may be able to serve in this ministry area.

11. Questions on Church Matters

Q. Can we have more times of quiet in church, without music, to listen to God and hear from God for what he is saying to us as a church?

A. We want to be a church where we listen to God for ourselves, each other, the whole church, and for our community. We are aware that everyone has different perspectives for how they best hear from God and we will look to add more variety to this aspect of our services in the future including times of quiet. There is more space to be creative with this in the evening service however we will look at ways to do this in both of our Sunday services.

Q. What is the vicar's and St Giles' stance on blessing same-sex marriages?

A. The CofE, led by General Synod, has been on a journey since 2017 in looking at how it can best welcome and include those in the LGBTQI+ community. In 2020, it published some resources for listening and learning through discussion in local churches called Living in Love and Faith (LLF). This was followed, in February 2023, with the House of Bishops commending draft prayers to General Synod which could be used in a variety of different ways, but particularly to bless couples in same-sex relationships. The prayers were voted in favour of by a very slim majority in General Synod. Since then, the prayers were redrafted and their use was voted in favour of in November 2023 to be used within regular services and the first version of some pastoral guidance was published in December 2023 to go alongside them. It has also been clearly stated throughout this process that the doctrine of the Church of England with regard to holy matrimony has not changed.

Josh expressed that he and the wardens are aware that this is a difficult topic and one that there may be a wide range of views on in the church. We want this church to be a place where everyone feels welcome, loved, and valued, without judgment, whatever their gender or sexuality, and we hope that this is everyone's experience so far. We also want this to be a church where we uphold the Bible as our primary authority in all matters of faith, ministry, and mission.

Since arriving in post, Josh has not sought to use the prayers, and the leadership team have been thinking about how we can have a conversation about this topic and come to a decision on how we move forward. The Exec committee have had a couple of initial conversations and this is a topic for the PCC for the year ahead. It will be important to hear from the whole church on their views on this topic so thought will be given as to how we can do this over the next year. There is an awareness that there will be those in our church family for whom this is personal, it is important we hear from those people particularly, with any thoughts or concerns. Josh encouraged anyone who would like to discuss this topic with him to get in contact, this can be written and/ or anonymous if preferred. Everything shared will be kept confidential.

The final decision on whether the Prayers of Love and Faith are used in a parish is down to the minister, but at the same time the guidance strongly suggests that, if possible, PCCs along with the minister should discuss the prayers and together agree on a simple policy on whether and how to use them and that, in doing that, they are to respect the tradition and sensitivities of the local church.

Q. Can we have some bible teaching on the end times and on key matters today so that people can be informed? (This is a summary of a longer query and question which raised current topics such as the conflict in Israel and Gaza and how we relate to Palestinians and Israelis, as well as topics such as gay marriage and transgender issues.)

A. It is really encouraging that people in our church are wanting to grapple with some of the current issues of our day as Christians and to pray and think through what the Bible says on these topics, this shows a desire to walk closely with Jesus and to live out his teaching. Scripture has something to say on these issues and we are happy to make time for teaching and discussion on these topics. Thought and prayer will be given to how these can be included in our teaching plans going forward, recognising that these are sensitive topics.

12. Vicar's message and prayer for the year ahead

Josh's message for the year ahead focussed on God's faithfulness over the years with the question 'God, will you do it again?'. Three words that have come to mind for Josh as he has started in his post at St Giles are Stability, Sustainability, and Mission. There have been changes at St Giles in recent years, not least the decreased staff team, Josh acknowledged this and thanked the congregation for the ways in which members have continued to serve faithfully. Josh believes we are in a season of building back up again. As we build up we need to build up and out, not just focussing inwards. We need to be 'greedy' for the kingdom! There have been so many encouragements over the last year as highlighted in the annual report. Josh shared his heart for St Giles to be an 'intergenerational and intercultural Jesus-shaped community where all experience grace, and belonging, and grow as his followers in sharing the good news with others'.

13. The meeting closed in prayer for our new church representatives on the PCC and Deanery Synod.