

St Paul's Parish Church, New Beckenham

**ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS
Sunday 24th April 2022**

Rev Simon Couper, Chairman of the Parochial Church Council, was in the chair. He welcomed everyone and opened the meeting in prayer.

Appointment of Clerk

From the chair Rev Simon Couper appointed Anne Howick as Clerk to the Annual Meeting. He thanked her for all the work that she had done in preparation for the Annual report.

Minutes of the meeting of the Parishioners held on 24th May 2021. Ian Rodgers proposed, seconded Keith Howick, that the minutes, having been available on the church website, be taken as read, approved and signed. **Agreed.**

Election of churchwardens. Rev Simon Couper thanked Richard Bradley and Hazel Koungoue for their work as churchwardens during the past year. To serve as a churchwarden, particularly during the pandemic, had been demanding and he was very appreciative of their support and all they had done as churchwardens.

The PCC Secretary reported that two nominations had been received for the posts of churchwarden. Richard Bradley had been proposed by Keith Howick, seconded by Marion Blakely. Hazel Koungoue had been proposed by Keith Howick, seconded by Marion Blakely. In the absence of any other nominations Mr Bradley and Mrs Koungoue were declared elected for the following year.

**ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING
Sunday 24th April 2022**

Rev Simon Couper, Chairman of the Parochial Church Council, was in the chair and forty two members were in attendance.

Apologies for absence had been received from Adelaide Adade, Andrew Griffiths, Paul Lashmar, Barbara Saunders, David Sewell, Marian Sewell and Liz Ward.

The minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on 24th May 2021 had been available to read on the church website and some hard copies had been distributed to members of the congregation. Lindsey Lamb proposed, seconded Hazel Koungoue, that the minutes be taken as read, approved and signed. **Agreed.**

Electoral Roll. Rufus Ballaster, Electoral Roll Officer, reported that there were 130 members on the Electoral Roll at the end of 2021, of which 56 were resident within the Parish and 74 were not resident within the Parish. Rufus Ballaster commented that it costs nothing to be on the Electoral Roll and encouraged members to point people in his direction. He felt being on the Electoral Roll was an important part of being part of the fellowship at St Paul's.

Election of five representatives to the Parochial Church Council. The PCC Secretary reported that she had received two nominations in advance of the meeting for Adelaide Adade and Anne Howick. There being no further nominations the vicar confirmed that each candidate was now elected and he welcomed them on to the PCC. There were still three vacancies on the PCC and the vicar reminded members that it would be possible for people to be co-opted to serve on the PCC for the remainder of the year. Anyone who felt a sense of calling to serve on the PCC should speak to the vicar.

Appointment of a Licensed Reader to serve as an *ex officio* member of the PCC. Sarah Butler had indicated that she was willing to continue to serve in this capacity. The vicar proposed from the chair that Sarah Butler should serve as the Licensed Reader on the PCC. He expressed his huge thanks to Sarah for all her work. He reported that Tara Kunert had recently been approved to serve as Licensed Reader at St Paul's.

Safeguarding and Clergy discipline Measure 2016

As required by Section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016, the PCC had the Parish Policy Statement for Safeguarding Adults when they are vulnerable and the Parish Policy Statement for Safeguarding Children. Copies of these statements are displayed on the noticeboards in the main entrance porch and in the church hall. Anne Howick had been appointed as the Parish Safeguarding Officer.

DBS Lead Recruiter

The PCC had appointed Richard Bradley as the Lead Recruiter and the Vicar as the Deputy Recruiter Officer.

Vicar's report. This Easter had marked a significant milestone, both for us and many parishes in England. At St Paul's, our Good Friday service marked a full year of in-person-services back in the church building. Moreover, it was the first Easter to be fully observed and celebrated in the church building since 2019. As the vicar reflected on this, a remarkable point for prayer and thanksgiving was that we were in a relatively stable position. As much as this was a blessing, we would hardly say that "stability" was our shared vision or grand strategy for church growth pre-pandemic. Nonetheless, this was where we are. We had learned how to flex and respond quickly to the changing circumstances around us, and as proof of this, we had more than one contingency plan in place had Christmas been cancelled at the last minute. Rev Simon reiterated again just how proud he was of this Parish's response to the dreadful suffering of the pandemic. We had been swift to respond because everyone played their part. We had openly acknowledged that what was happening was beyond the control of any one individual but required the tender care of an entire community simply to cope.

He commented on how the national rhetoric had moved away from talking about "life *after* COVID" to speak simply of "learning to live *with* COVID." He felt we would be in this uncertain space for quite some time, if not indefinitely. As a result, there had been a price to pay. Living *with* COVID - being poised to change plans at a moment's notice, had meant that we were perhaps more tired as a community than before. This was not to be downcast, but a simple statement of our situation. This had been a hard time for everyone. This had been reflected in the Church of England's national strategy, which, reflecting on the pandemic suggests the way forward must be "*Simpler, Humbler, and Bolder.*" More locally, Rev Simon wanted to remind everyone of our vision here at St Paul's, which is simply this: *growing together in Christ, one step at a time.* We are to walk beside one another in the journey of faith. We all move at

different speeds, and none of us makes steady, uninterrupted progress. There are times when we will be helping others along the way, and other times when we must accept the help of others as we pursue Christ. As St Paul says, “*Those of us who are strong have an obligation to support those who are weak.*” The problem is, everyone of us, at some time or other, is both strong and weak. What would this mean going forward? This would mean we have to be realistic about our energy levels. As an example, the reason the vicar had not resumed a regular Sunday afternoon/evening service, was that he did not have the energy for it. He was neither embarrassed nor disappointed about this. This was just how he is in this particular season. He had mentioned this example, not in a spirit of defensiveness, but to give a sense of license to those who he knew felt the same, those who are struggling to adjust to the new routines and rhythms of living *with* COVID. This meant we must be selective about the initiatives and ministries we rally behind. Remember our stream-lining principle from when we launched our vision two years ago: If an activity, course, or event, doesn’t in some way pertain to our vision, if it doesn’t help us to walk faithfully beside one another for Christ, then we pull the plug. This, then, should be where we pivot toward something more joyful. This “simpler, humbler, bolder” approach, which is open and honest about the bumps and bruises we bear, means that when we rally behind something it is both exciting and life-giving. It means we offer something that is costly and precious - a real sacrifice of praise.

The vicar mentioned the Babies and Toddler group, which was now bigger than it was before the pandemic. He reflected on the number of baptisms there had been in recent months. St Paul’s had renewed its relationship with the school, where over 200 children earlier in April had heard the Easter story in full. He commented on the Friendship group and the encouragement and support it had provided. He also commented on the enormous efforts of the 150th anniversary organising team were doing to make sure this milestone in our common life did not slip away unnoticed. Rev Simon felt St Paul’s had been *pruned* in the past two years. And what was left was tender, fragile, but in its own way beautiful. He believed that was a form of church-growth now happening in our midst that was organic, surprising, and different to what we had seen before. Our “fringe” was bigger than it had ever been. By that he meant that there was a greater number of people than ever who were gathering at the edges of church life. Previously, we would have tried to move such people to the centre by asking them to do certain jobs, to populate various rotas, and to prop up our historic ways of doing things. But that cannot be how churches learn to live with COVID. Going forward, he encouraged everyone to concentrate their energies on the fringe and ask humbly, simply, boldly, “What gifts can you offer?” This of course would mean some areas of church life would continue to look vulnerable, or rather, fluid and without concrete form. This would be hard for us. What people can offer may not fit naturally or easily into former patterns and ways of doing things. We must have grace therefore, to come back to that vision, and remember our wish to walk with and beside one another. This did not mean everything had to change. We should ensure that we are a people of the word and sacrament, who gather to hear God’s word read and preached, and to receive the tokens of faith Christ himself gave to us. We should ensure that our Sunday services are times of refreshment and fellowship; times of gathering that genuinely equip us for mission, that genuinely enthuse and empower our walk with Christ. May God guide us in this organic and authentic space; where church growth cannot be controlled but protected, where we do not direct, but give space to let the Spirit breathe and work and bless.

Annual report on proceedings of the PCC and activities of the Parish for the year ended 31 December 2021.

The full PCC had met eleven times in 2021 to deal with church matters, with an average attendance of 85%. During the early part of the year it had been necessary to hold meetings by Zoom, due to the Covid-19 pandemic but with effect from April 2021 it had been possible to hold meetings in the Church hall and via Zoom. In 2020 the full PCC met seven times with an average attendance of 82%.

Due to the pandemic it had been decided that, when it was possible to meet in person, services would be held at 8.00 am (BCP), 10.00 am (Morning Worship or Holy Communion) and 11.15 am (Family Service). For many weeks when the church had been closed the services had been pre-recorded and were available to watch on the St Paul's website. Following the re-opening of the church for services the 10.00 am services and the 11.15 am services had been livestreamed and available on the website. Later in the year it had been possible to return to holding services at 8.00 am (BCP) and 10.30 am (Morning Worship or Holy Communion), with a creche and Sunday School during the 10.30 am services. The 10.30 am services had continued to be livestreamed and available on the website.

The Prayer Ministry Group had not been able to meet during the year, and it had not been possible to offer prayer in the Chapel during the 10.30 am Service of Holy Communion. The group had been kept informed by email of any urgent requests, and a time of prayer had continued to be held on a Thursday evening, by Zoom, which anyone was welcome to attend.

The vicar, two wardens, Readers, the Pastoral Assistant, the Evangelist and the Church Administrator had continued to meet each week during 2021, either in person or via Zoom, to review the previous Sunday services and to share thoughts and requests.

Some of the Home Groups had continued to meet via Zoom, and as always this had been an important time for study, discussion and nurture outside Sunday worship. Due to requests for the use of the hall on a Wednesday, the Wednesday Friendship Support Group had agreed to meet on a Thursday afternoon and had been re-named the Friendship Support Group. The Group had continued to meet weekly for friendship and chats, either outside in the Church garden or inside in the church hall. In 2021 there had been four weddings at St Paul's and six baptisms. After an absence of 18 months the Babies and Toddler Group had been able to re-start at the beginning of September. Due to the pandemic there had been, by necessity, a more rigorous regime of registration and attendance week by week but this had seemed to work well. In October there were 29 adults and 33 children registered. The organisers felt it had been really gratifying to see new friendships being made by adults and children and they hoped to see this continue as the group grows.

The Church website had continued to be a source of information for church members, visitors and local residents. The Communications Group, which was established in 2020, had played an important part in sorting out the requirements for enhanced membership emailing, streaming of virtual services and the live streaming of services which had necessitated improvements to the church internet and provision of a camera. As a result of lockdown the website, streaming and social media had become the most important general communications and promotional link to the wider community. The use of these media by the church generally had been limited in terms of awareness of opportunity, the provision of information and the PCC was grateful to those who had continued to support the use of the technology at the Morning services. This

area had become part of the 'new normal' for church and had required greater involvement and the equipment had been updated.

The church had continued to be extremely well served by its many volunteers who clean the church and the brass, operate the worship presentation software and sound system during services, arrange the flowers, serve on the Welcome Team, maintain the gardens, wind the clock, serve as sidesmen at services, lead services and thanks had been recorded for all their work. The PCC was also grateful to the musicians who play the organ or piano at each service, and to those who, during lockdown, had pre-recorded hymns to be played at the online and actual services.

The PCC had several teams responsible for particular areas of the life of the church at St Paul's. All members of the teams were required to complete a Conflict of Interest form. The following team reports summarise activity in those areas.

Buildings Team

No major repairs or improvements had been carried out during the year, but a number of smaller works had been completed. These included:-

- replacement of the boiler-house gate
- minor repairs to the central heating system in the halls
- laying of a new vinyl floor in the halls kitchen
- replacement of the front door of 3 Ashford House
- removal of a tree growing close to the South church wall, in the Pre-School play area
- replacement of defective strip lights in the vestry and Pre-School storage cupboard with modern, low energy light fittings.

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The PCC had approved the installation of an external power socket on the North wall near the main entrance, which had been used to good effect for the crib and Christmas tree lights in December. The Buildings Team had met in November to discuss two matters: commissioning of the next Quinquennial Inspection (QI) and action to follow up an inspection of the church and church halls electrical installations, carried out by CES in July. The Buildings Team had supported the proposed appointment of an architect from the Diocese's approved list to carry out the next QI. The Team had also recommended seeking the PCC's approval of a budget of up to £1,000 to carry out electrical work as recommended by CES. The PCC had approved the recommended action, which was being followed up at the time of writing this report.

The **Communications team** had met occasionally over the course of the past 12 months. As with 2020/21, the work of this team had been principally concerned with responding to the pandemic. Much effort had been put into the various communication channels which had enabled the parish to stay in touch during this time of social dislocation. The team had thanked everyone who had regularly visited neighbours, made phone calls, delivered newsheets, and performed those small acts of human kindness which keep us feeling connected and cared for.

As the COVID restrictions lifted, we had been able to review our communications strategy. It had been decided that, with the recommencement of Sunday services in the building (Palm Sunday 2021), and the merging of the 10:00am and 11:15am services back into the 10:30am, we could reasonably lessen the frequency of St Paul's emails, dropping from three email campaigns a week to two. In conjunction with this, the team felt that the *TFTD* (Thought for

the Day) series had run its course, and these too were brought to a close this past year. The communications team thanked everyone who contributed a thought, anecdote, or prayer over the past two years. The written *PFTDs* (Prayer for the Day) had continued, and renewed thanks had been expressed to Gilbert Safarian for his endeavours to supply quotes and prayers from across the broad sweep of church history, which had so enriched the Monday mailing.

During the past year, the communications team had said goodbye to Simon Dalwood, as he and Suzy had moved away from the parish after many years' exemplary service. The regular mailings were now managed between Stephanie Fox in the office, and Sarah Butler, who between them had done an excellent job in keeping us all up to speed. Simon's absence had had an impact on our ability to stream our Sunday services, an important channel in our regular communications. The team was grateful to those volunteers who had helped to cover this vital line, but the team had acknowledged that more volunteers would be most welcome.

The chief area of concern raised by the team this past year was making sure we are just as attentive in our efforts to communicate with those outside of our regular fellowship, as we are with staying in touch with those "in-house." We had known for some time about the enormous potential of our website, and social media platforms as a means of outreach, engaging with those on, and beyond, "the fringes" of church life. We had slowly begun to post more regularly on our church Facebook page, and with less success, on our Instagram profile. This was an area where we needed to remain vigilant. As ever, the team was grateful to David Charlesworth for all he had done as web-master. One key success in the past year, largely driven by the website, was Christmas 2021. Many had anticipated last minute changes to the festive season as COVID numbers rose dramatically ahead of Christmas. David's work on the website meant that we had been able to clearly communicate the reduced seating capacity for the Christingle service, which in turn meant that nobody turned up without a ticket, and thus had to be turned away.

Although, formally speaking, the work of the prayer cordon fell outside this team's remit, the team thanked Ian Rodgers for his hard work in keeping us connected in prayer, and for helping us to pray directly into the needs of our parish family.

The **Mission Partners** team had met four times during the year on Zoom. The following organisations had been nominated for the year and were approved by the PCC and the following donations had been made: £1,647.74 each to CMS for Ben and Katy Ray, to Wycliffe Bible Translators for Julian and Catherine, and to Crosslinks for Nick and Harriet Algeo. £1,505.37 was given to OMF for Julia Birkett, to Christians Against Poverty, and to Welcare in Bromley. St Paul's had supported home and foreign charities. In addition out of Contingency money, set aside for emergencies, St Paul's had donated to the following organisations: £400 to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, £398.16 to Living Well, £400 to SAT-7 UK, £400 to Tear Fund Crisis Appeal Afghanistan, £400 to Action Aid, Haiti Emergency Appeal, £400 to the Diocesan Welcome Churches Emergency Afghan Fund, and £250 to St Francis' Home in Zimbabwe, a contact of Herbert and Ethel Mafohla.

Worship Team

The Team had met on Zoom in Autumn 2021 to plan the shape of Christmas services in the light of the ongoing pandemic and had suggested a theme for Christmas: "Where is the stable now?". There had been much discussion about how best to ensure that people felt safe in attending services. The Christingle service had been a particular concern where decisions about numbers had to be flexible until very near the day. The suggestion of hosting community

carols outside the church with the Crystal Palace brass band had been taken forward and proved to be very successful. This had been followed by a carol service in church.

Richard Bradley proposed, seconded David Gillman, that the Annual report on proceedings of the PCC and activities of the Parish for the year ended 31st December 2021 be accepted.

Agreed.

Independently examined financial statements of the PCC for the year ended 31 December 2021

INCOME OVERVIEW

While the 2021 total for 'voluntary income' had been closely similar to that for 2020, the mix was different in the following key ways:

- Gift Aid donations were down (£76,380 compared to £95,785 in 2020), similar to 2019 levels
- Increase in 'Other giving (including collections)' to £21,306 from £11,172 in 2020
- Tax recoverable was £32,446, up from £17,800 in 2020, a reflection of increased donations in 2020 and, in particular, a substantial VAT reclaim in respect of repair works carried out in 2020
- Increased use of the halls and other activities, with income up to £17,748 from £9,938 in 2020

The number of regular givers was stable (64 in 2021 compared to 65 in 2020) but these included six new regular givers and the loss of seven regular givers who had died or moved away. The Finance Team had commented that they could not stress highly enough how important regular giving is to enable St. Paul's to thrive, plan and grow in commitment to God's work here.

EXPENDITURE OVERVIEW

The Parish Share (what St Paul's contributes to the Diocese in return for the Vicar and for Diocesan support) had been the same in 2021 as it was in 2020, at £66,447, and this had been paid in full. There had been some ups and downs in general expenditure, but the absence of major repairs in 2021 had accounted almost exactly for the reduction in total expenditure from £192,971 in 2020 to £117,490 in 2021.

LOOKING AHEAD

While the St. Paul's financial position was currently stable, God's Kingdom was about growth and spreading the Gospel rather than sitting back; about multiplying talents, not sitting on them. St Paul's had a stable platform, but needed to increase income to enable us to:

- Increase paid staff, notably to be able to appoint a fulltime family/youth worker.
- Be able to deal with the inevitable cost of maintaining our church buildings (the next Quinquennial Inspection was overdue).
- Ensure that we are well equipped and able to keep pace with technology to support and enable access to worship.
- Improve our general communications.

The PCC would only commit to expenditure if two tests had been passed:

1. That the expenditure contributes to our vision of engaging with and helping people on their journey of faith, at whatever stage that might be.
2. That every decision passed specific ecological scrutiny.

The vicar thanked the Finance team, Rosemary Dear and Ernest Kabera, the Independent Examiner for the report. Hazel Koungoue proposed, seconded Rosemary Dear, that the Independently examined financial statements of the PCC for the year ended 31 December 2021 be accepted. **Agreed.**

Church fabric, good and ornaments

There had been no major changes or additions to the buildings and fittings in 2021, but a number of minor repairs and replacements had been carried out, as recorded in this year's Annual Report (Buildings Team section). During the year the Pre-School Group had alerted the Wardens to the need for a minor repair to the south porch, next to the large gate between the Pre-School play area and the church garden. One of the facing stones had been dislodged, risking further damage to the stonework through ingress of water. The delay in finding a skilled mason to carry out the work had been frustrating and the Wardens were relieved when the repair had finally been done in January 2022.

In May the equipment for live streaming of services had been upgraded by the acquisition of a dedicated video mixer. Later in the year the defibrillator battery and pads had been replaced (which needed be done at least every 4 years) and it was now generally checked weekly. Plans were underway for St Paul's to become an accredited defibrillator site working closely and supported by the London Ambulance Service. The first aid kits were kept up to date by Judith Freeborn and many thanks were due to her for committing to doing this.

This had been a year when Covid precautions had been gradually scaled down, reflecting improvements in the public health situation. As part of this, from September the kitchenette and water heater at the back of the church had been brought back into use to serve refreshments after the 10.30 service. The Wardens thanked the sidespersons for helping with this task, morphing seamlessly from their earlier role in name-ticking for Test and Trace, whilst keeping the primary role of welcoming all comers.

Whilst the Wardens had a particular responsibility for regular maintenance tasks, many people had contributed to keeping St Paul's fit for purpose as a house of prayer and worship. Ron and Pauline Barrett had continued to keep the church buildings clean and beautiful, a place of welcome and encouragement for those attending the services and for the many visitors who had come into the church during the week. They also thanked the flower team, David and Daphne Bryan for preparing the altar table for Holy Communion and to others who had joined in decorating the church for Christmas and other special days.

The church garden had continued to be a wonderful resource enjoyed equally by church members and neighbours from the local community. As ever, thanks were due to the gardening team for all their hard work in good and bad weather!

Keith Howick proposed, seconded Rufus Ballaster, that the report on the church fabric, goods and ornaments be accepted. **Agreed.**

Ian Rodgers commented on the equipment for live streaming, which when it worked was great but when it didn't work well was confusing. The vicar agreed that the equipment was not as consistent as it should be, and since Simon Dalwood and Andy Galpin had moved away we did need more volunteers to help man the equipment. Ian Rodgers also commented on the font size, which sometimes was small and difficult to see. He wondered if everyone could see the screens. The vicar confirmed that it would be possible to alter the font size and he would mention this at his next meeting with the Church Administrator. Keith Howick commented that training is available for those using the streaming kit. In answer to a question the vicar confirmed that copies of the notice sheet were available at the back of church.

Deanery Synod proceedings

The Deanery Synod had met twice in 2021; Covid had compromised a meeting which should have taken place in the middle of the year.

The first meeting had taken place on Zoom on 20th April 2021 and the main topic had been a presentation by Rev Jane Winter, Diocesan lead Diocesan advocate for the 'Living in Love and Faith' programme. LLF was an extensive resource produced by the Church of England and intended to facilitate conversations about faith, relationships and sexuality in a deeply respectful way. The presentation had been an encouragement to individual churches to engage with the LLF resources and programme, and to give feedback. There had been a Q&A afterwards, and concerns had been expressed honestly about how difficult this issue was, particularly for evangelical churches with orthodox views. Rev Winter had described herself as a progressive, inclusive liberal priest.

The second meeting had taken place in person on 17th November 2021, and the main focus had been a presentation by Claire Boxall on 'Called Together', the Rochester Diocese strategic framework for growth. 'Called Together' had been through various iterations, and had had a major rework and simplification, ensuring that the five marks of mission were embraced. This had resulted in five sections, each starting with E: Evangelism, Everyday Faith, Engagement with Community, Equity and Environment. There had been an interesting and engaging presentation; as always, the challenge had been to translate a strategy presented at a high level into work and progress on the ground to help grow God's Kingdom where we are.

Anthea Prendergast proposed, seconded Hazel Koungoue, that the report on Deanery Synod proceedings be accepted. **Agreed.** It was noted that Rev Simon Couper was the deputy chair of the Deanery Synod. He requested that members pray for those churches in the Deanery who are in interregnum.

Appointment of Independent Examiner

The vicar commented that Ernest Kabera had been the Independent Examiner for the last three years and St Paul's was very grateful to him for his work. The vicar proposed from the chair that in principle Ernest Kabera should be appointed to act as Independent Examiner for 2022. **Agreed.**

Open Forum

Liz Spencer thanked St Paul's for allowing the Pre-School to meet on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The vicar thanked Liz for her work with Pre-School.

Ian Rodgers commented that a number of people were not aware of when the Annual Meetings were taking place, and he felt that paper copies of the reports would be helpful, e.g. how many people had looked at the Ecology report. The vicar agreed that communication was important and Ian hoped the Communications Team could think about what would work for everyone. Members were reminded that the agenda for the Annual meetings was on the church noticeboards. Ian thanked Simon and Anna Couper for all their work for St Paul's.

Marion Blakely hoped it would be possible to have posters on the noticeboards indicating what services were happening. She knew lots of people appreciated having the notice sheet each week but not everyone had a printed copy. The vicar hoped people would not hesitate to ask.

Members were reminded that St Paul's would be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2022. It was hoped that current members would inform former parishioners of the events during the year, and in particular invite them to the celebrations on 15th May.

It was noted that there had been problems regarding delivery of the Parish magazine as some people did not want to deliver the magazine any more. Some members felt door knocking was really important. Some people were not happy with the constant use of social media and hoped there could be a compromise between paper and social media.

Biddy Gillman recorded her appreciation for the musicians who lead the services, and also thanked Paul and Tara Kunert for their ecology work.

The vicar thanked everyone for all the various acts of kindness and service which make St Paul's the place it is.

There being no further business the vicar closed the meeting with the Grace.