



Serving the community in Camp Hill, Briar Hill, East & West
Hunsbury, and Hunsbury Meadows

Annual Report for the year 2024

**Annual meeting to be held on Sunday
2ND March 2025 at 11:45am**

Our mission: *to encourage the people of the parish to
worship God in a loving, caring environment and help
them to find faith and fulfilment in Jesus*



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Minutes of the Annual Parish Church Meeting and Meeting of the Parishioners Sunday 25th February 2024

Present

Marion Angus (MA), Geoffrey Brown, Trish Coniff, Julie Creasey, Norman Critchlow (NC), Peter Davie, Keith Dunkley (KD), Juliette Dunkley, Rowena Griffiths, Liz Hodges, Jacqueline Hughes, Angie Kennedy, Fiona Murphy, Alison Marlow (AM), Rosemary Morgan, Carolyn Runc (CR), Janet Selling, Constance Thomas, Richard Warr (RW), Linda Warr, Paula White (PW)

Apologies:

Catherine Galvin, Julia Rodgers, Des and Jenny Peasland, Phil and Mary Laraman, Mike Grant.

Annual Meeting of Parishioners

Rev Griff opened the meeting with a prayer and a reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

Election of churchwardens:

Marion Angus and Alison Marlow were nominated and seconded for the roles.

There was a show of hands – all were in favour.

Rev. Griff wanted to formally record a massive vote of thanks to Keith Dunkley for continuing in the role of churchwarden on his own for a year. He will still continue to support the smooth running of the church and keep on top of everything required to ensure the fabric is maintained. Griff said we were blessed to have him in this role and there was general positive approval regarding this from the assembled parishioners.

This meeting closed at 11.55am.

Annual Parochial Church meeting 12 noon

1. Minutes of the previous meeting on February 22, 2023

Rev Griff asked if everyone had had sight of the minutes for this meeting. There were no outstanding issues. The majority were in favour of approving the minutes as an accurate record.

2. Matters arising – none

3. Financial Report for January to December 2023

Rev Griff explained that the financial reports had been scrutinised by the PCC and said that when they had been externally audited they would be circulated.

He called for any questions over finances. PW asked what the situation was with the money for the porch. Rev G said that roughly £5k was left over and out of that carpeting, stencils, three-year maintenance contract would be covered. The remainder would be used to re-do the path, beds.

RW did stress that volunteers would be needed to help clear the path etc as there wouldn't be the money to pay for this to be done. Rev Griff agreed and stressed that volunteer help was always welcome, even if people couldn't make specific days or times. MA added that there were always jobs for everyone, even for those who couldn't do things like heavy lifting and digging.

Rev Griff said that on the subject of finance, the church was in a good position and has put more towards the parish share. However, he did point out that there will be quite a lot of expenditure required concerning electrical safety and the roof. He said the PCC would be making some big decisions about and said that might mean cutting back in other areas. He did stress that the porch money was ringfenced.

RW recommended we thank CR for all her hard work this year, as her efforts have made banking much more straightforward. On that note, Rev Griff and CR have been talking about someone new taking finances on board, ready for when CR decides to take a step back.

The majority were happy with everything discussed regarding finance.

4. Consideration of Reports for 2023

a. APCM report

AM wanted to thank everyone who had submitted reports for such a timely response. There were no points raised about the content of the report. Rev Griff stressed that things were building up nicely post-Covid and last year's report shows how many inside and outside activities there have been. He said that would continue to grow with the support and involvement of the congregation.

He said more people were getting involved and that the church was getting recognised both within the community and by the diocese. He said he has been vicar here for almost three years and that he felt the welcome, the strength and the encouragement from the majority of people here. He said this was a blessing and that the church has an excellent presence but that there were still some areas we could work on, e.g. East Hunsbury, Hunsbury Meadows. He thanked everyone for their hard work and suggested the congregation continued prayerfully to see where God is giving us these opportunities.

b. Electoral Roll report

NC says we have 100 people on the electoral roll, but that approximately half of those people attend church regularly.

Next year (every five years) we have to all re-sign up for it, and build up to it, making sure people understand the potential knock-on effects of smaller numbers, e.g. for PCC representatives.

c. Churchwarden's report

KD had nothing to add from his written report.

d. Financial Report & Accounts for year to 31 Dec 2023

CR had nothing further to add.

e. Other reports

None to be discussed.

Policies and Procedures

Rev G explained that we normally sign off our new policies from the year coming and as this meeting is early in the year, it will be at the first PCC in April that new policies will be disseminated and checked. He did stress that a volunteer was still needed to take on the role of church bookings clerk.

- **Safeguarding** – no policy changes. Rev Griff thanked Paula for all her hard work in the role of Safeguarding officer and welcomed Janet Selling to the role. He stressed that

the church would support Janet in the role. He said there would be a busy period this year as training needed to be renewed for many.

- **Other policies**

To be discussed at first PCC meeting in April.

5. Election and continuation of PCC members.

Those already on the PCC agreed they were all happy to continue

Keith Dunkley, Jacqueline Hughes and Peter Davie were all nominated and seconded.

Rev Griff explained that new members had a three-month period during which they would apply for DBS, complete the safeguarding training course and two forms to sign. He said he would offer every support but did stress that due to Diocesan rules, that if the required actions were not completed in this period they would not be allowed to vote on PCC matters.

6. Working Groups

Worship, Events, Eco, Grounds etc. Rev Griff did say that these groups don't need to be officially voted on but stressed that it was good to have PCC members involved with many of them.

a. Deanery Synod representatives

Norman, Richard and Onyi are our representatives and happy to continue.

b. SNPC representatives

CG and Liz are happy to continue in this role.

c. Independent Examiner

Our accounts are with the auditor & will be circulated later in the year, once confirmed by external auditor.

d. Treasurer

CR happy to continue.

e. PCC Secretary

Alison is now churchwarden, so we are on the lookout for a new one. Rev Griff stressed that the more we can share the responsibilities the more we can do.

7. Any other business

Nothing was raised.

8. Closing Prayer

Rev Griff said that before he said a prayer, he wanted to highlight that he feels that since he has been with the church he has seen a lot of growth community-wise, personally and spiritually. However, he still feels there is a lot to do as God calls us to proclaim the Gospel, His salvation – that the focus continues to remain on Him.

Rev. Griff closed with a prayer and everyone said the Grace.

The meeting closed at 12.25pm.

Signed.....

Date /..... /.....

St Benedict's Church, Hunsbury, Northampton

Annual Report of the Parochial Church Council for the year ended 31st December 2024

Administrative information

St. Benedict's Church is situated in West Hunsbury, Northampton. For administration purposes the ecclesiastical parish includes West Hunsbury [which incorporates Camp Hill], most of East Hunsbury and Hunsbury Meadows, each of which is served by a parish council with limited powers delegated to them from Northampton Borough Council (NBC)], Briar Hill and Hunsbury Fields who are still within NBC's control.

We are also part of the Diocese of Peterborough within the Church of England.

The correspondence address is The Vicarage, 16 Sentinel Road, Northampton, NN4 9UF.

Vicar: The Revd Jason 'Griff' Griffiths - PCC Chair

Wardens: Alison Marlow (term finishes 2024)

Marion Angus (term finishes 2026)

Licensed Lay Ministers:

Paula White [co-opted to PCC - Deputy Chair]

Representatives on the Deanery Synod:

Richard Warr [ex officio to PCC],

Norman Critchlow [ex officio to PCC]

Onyinye Ndefo [ex officio to PCC]

Elected members of PCC:

Alison Marlow (Secretary/Churchwarden)

Carolyn Runc (Treasurer)

Catherine Galvin

Constance Thomas

Dawn Bolt (ECO rep to Sept 2024)

Julie Creasey

Juliette Dunkley

Mike Grant

Marion Angus

Other Ordained ministers:

Revd Paul Hunt [retired]

Representatives outside of St Benedict's (Non-voting PCC members) SNPC:

Catherine Galvin

Liz Hodges

Structure, governance, and management

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All eligible Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and are welcome to stand for election to the PCC. It is worth noting that we will asking all regular members to resign the Electoral roll as per the 5-year rule, ready for the APCC of 2025.

Objectives and activities St Benedict's

The PCC has the responsibility of cooperating with the Vicar, in promoting, throughout the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the St Benedict Church buildings and grounds, including the Hall, at St Benedict's Mount, Northampton NN4 9UG.

Opening remarks

2024 has been a year of building and progression. Our worshipping community's Sunday 10am service and 4pm service, have seen attendances rise and fall, with the occasional very busy service. Seeing the church being full to the rafters, with people coming before God, is definitely happening more often, particularly at special moments in the year.

Our community presence again is flourishing, with help from all the PCC members. In particular I'd like to say thanks to Peter D, who in his liaison role with Barclay's bank, has enabled in excess of 40 volunteers to descend on our church and grounds twice a year to support us in our Christian effort to be part of the community and parish.

St Benedict's church can be proud to say that it is a church with a continuing future to show God's light in the whole of the parish and the communities it serves. So, let's continue to hold to the following passage of scripture that builds upon all that has gone before: Titus 2:7 *'And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of 'his' teaching.'* (This is an amended version to ensure we keep the focus upon Jesus Christ.) **Rev Griff**

Review of the year

How have we done? I always find it exciting to put down on paper a review of previous year and this year is no different. However, if I was going to try to summarise the year in three words, it would be progression, enthusiasm with tears along the way.

Firstly (progression): our links within the communities we all live in are blossoming into much more than we have ever expected. Thank you Lord. We continue to develop our brilliant links with local parish *West Hunsbury* through our joint efforts with community work, but also we are also establishing and growing further links to East Hunsbury, Briar Hill and the now established Hunsbury Meadows community.

Our worship has also seen progression through, the wealth of liturgy the Church of England has to offer, allowing us to embrace and remain fresh with the excitement of meeting with God every day of our lives.

We have seen our worship numbers swell to bursting with certain events like the Thinking Day service, Remembrance Sunday, and also funerals, when, if I may say, some of our regular worshippers have struggled to find a seat.

This, I believe, has become more of a norm than an occasional one-off, and that I put down to God's outpouring through you all and the enthusiasm that you have shown when tackling roles in the church.

We are seeing increasing numbers helping out at the Family Fun events, so that real relational conversations are starting and those who attend find that they as well as the volunteers are recognising and remembering families and children from previous visits to our church.

'How do you build the body of Christ? One conversation at a time' We have been continuing to build on the excellent relationships we have with the four out of five primary

schools in our *extended* parish. We have seen so many school visits to the church this year, more than ever before, which of course allows for more interaction with members of the church being available to interact and show hospitality to teachers and support staff.

One staff member from our nearest school 'Hunsbury Park Primary School' commented, how 'we love coming here, we know the children are always excited to see Rowena and Rev. Griff deliver the lesson, but also know that we are treated that bit special with the church's hospitality.'

This enthusiasm is not solely for schools - this year has seen lots more interaction from **our** Girl Guides sections and the two local scout groups. This interaction with our young people and with through our growing numbers in the St Bens@4 service, saw St Benedict's hosting Bishop Debbie in December for the confirmation service of seven of our young people, which is definitely bucking a trend that believes that churches, specifically the Church of England, are slowly dying out because congregations are getting older and it has lost touch with the younger generations.

That said, it shows that we can't just sit on our laurels and expect people to come to us! We are a church in the community, for the community and with the community. Adaptable, fresh and always seeking ways to bring God's love to all the people. **John 15:12** Jesus said, 'My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.'

I will be the first to admit that 2024 has been a rollercoaster of a year and with its ups and downs. We cannot forget some of the tears we have all cried together. This year saw the loss of one of our youngest members of the church, little Felicity, as the tragedy of her illness finally took its toll. I'd personally like to thank everyone for their prayers and their support for the whole family. Through this period of darkness, there was always Christ's light shining through. We came together as a body of Christ in such a situation could, with a huge outpouring of love, on the run up to that foreseen day, farewell service and as we continue to support for the family. Through prayer, through meals and as always, a continuing physical presence.

Though many tears were shed, we continued to see the light in the darkness, through Christ our Saviour.

On a different note, entirely, we have also had tears of frustration, having spent the better part of £35,000 on roof repairs only to enter the main worship area at the beginning of December to find various leaks and the biggest ever Baptism 'pond' near the font that St Benedict's, has ever seen! Yet we see progression, that a problem that has blighted the church for many years now has finally been rectified and, in conjunction with the roofers and architect, should remain that way.

But to finish, we mustn't forget to mention the *tears of joy* we have continued to see, especially around the lead-up to Christmas, when time after time, individuals, young and old, family and friends have walked into St Benedict's and commented on how they feel drawn to their church at such a special occasion. The *tears of joy*, when out in the community, children see you and immediately start telling their parents, that Rev. Griff comes into their school.

So let us, as a worshipping community and representative of the Body of Christ hold all of these things that have gone before in prayer and continue to strive to do our utmost in the future years. Acts 2:41 '*So those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*'

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR APCM 2024, held on March 2nd 2025

The accounts are prepared on the 'Receipts and Payments' basis, and show a surplus for the year of £30,514 on the General Fund. The reason for this large surplus is:

- We received two legacies during the year totalling £34,617;
- We only paid £10,500 Parish Share – the amount requested was £72,111.

However, we have substantial ongoing work in respect of the roof, and until we have a final figure for this work, we cannot identify spare funds to pay a contribution to the 2025 Parish Share. The PCC have agreed that we should retain:

- £10,000 to further enhance the Memorial Garden by landscaping and seating in memory of Malcolm Shepherd, Yvonne Chapman and Felicity Butler;
- £1,000 for electrical work identified in the last Quinquennial report;
- £10,000 for general running of the church.

We will also transfer £500 per month into a Designated Fabric Fund to meet further repair work on the church in future – these funds will be held in a CCLA Deposit account.

The Co-operative bank account was closed during the year, and a Deposit account was opened with Metro Bank.

During the year funds were collected for various charities, and these were all paid over by the end of December. The amounts were as follows:

Christian Aid	£ 100
D-Day Revisited	£ 120
Children's Society - Boxes	£ 182
Children's Society – Christingle collections	£ 485
MacMillan Cancer Support	£ 370
Hope Centre	£ 200
PASIC	£ 200
Rainbows Hospice	£ 200
SSAFA	£ 285
Manna House (Bishop's Charity)	£ 100
Cynthia Spencer	£ 350

In addition, £315 was collected at the SSAFA concert (this did not go through our bank account).

Income from the rent of the church, hall and facilities has remained about the same this year, and the arrangement with St Dionysius IOC continues.

The one-year fixed contract with Octopus continued until October 2024 with no standing charges for gas or electricity, and lower unit rates than we had been paying with our previous supplier under 'Parish Buying'. The deposit of just over £1,000 which was paid to Octopus in October 2023, was repaid by them, and we have renewed our contract with Octopus on a two-year fix with moderate standing charges but lower unit rates for both gas and electricity.

Carolyn Runc, Treasurer

Financial Statements 2024
Receipts and Payments Accounts
For the 12 months to 31 December 2024

Note	Unrestricted Fund	Unrestricted Designated Funds	Restricted Funds	Totals 2024	Totals 2023
	£	£	£	£	£
Receipts					
Voluntary Receipts:					
Planned giving	35,120	0	0	35,120	38,377
Collections at services	1,349	0	0	1,349	1,632
All other giving / voluntary receipts	4,771	0	1,850	6,621	4,276
Grants	0	0	2,000	2,000	0
Gift Aid recovered	9,564	0	0	9,564	8,766
	<u>50,804</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3,850</u>	<u>54,654</u>	<u>53,071</u>
Activities for generating funds	2,608	0	0	2,608	2,600
Investment income	1	0	272	273	984
Legacies	34,617	0	0	34,617	0
Church activities	6,840	0	0	6,840	8,361
Total Receipts	<u>94,870</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4,122</u>	<u>98,992</u>	<u>65,016</u>
Payments					
Parish Share	<u>10,500</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>10,500</u>	<u>46,000</u>
Church activities:					
Clergy and Staffing costs	1,042	0	0	1,042	1,447
Church running expenses	51,791	0	10,551	62,342	32,537
Mission & evangelism	998	0	0	998	1,003
	<u>53,831</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>10,551</u>	<u>64,382</u>	<u>34,987</u>
Cost of generating funds	25	0	0	25	247
Total payments	<u>64,356</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>10,551</u>	<u>74,907</u>	<u>81,234</u>
Excess of receipts over payments / (payments over receipts)	30,514	0	(6,429)	24,085	(16,218)
Transfers between funds	0	0	0	0	0
	<u>30,514</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>(6,429)</u>	<u>24,085</u>	<u>(16,218)</u>
Cash at bank and in hand at 1 January 2024	17,306	763	9,804	27,873	44,091
Cash at bank and in hand at 31 December 2024	<u>47,820</u>	<u>763</u>	<u>3,375</u>	<u>51,958</u>	<u>27,873</u>

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

Note	Unrestricted Fund	Designated Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 2024	Total 2023
	£	£	£	£	£
Cash Funds					
Cash in hand	579	0	0	579	384
Bank current account - HSBC	296	0	0	296	146
Bank current account - Co-op	0	0	0	0	82
Bank current account - Metro	31,257	0	0	31,257	26,832
Bank deposit account - Metro	15,863	763	3,374	20,000	0
CBF Deposit funds	273	0	0	273	0
Deposit with Octopus Energy	0	0	0	0	1,038
Fees paid to PDBF not yet received	0	0	0	0	0
Of which monies held as Agent (see below)	(449)	0	0	(449)	(609)
	<u>47,819</u>	<u>763</u>	<u>3,374</u>	<u>51,956</u>	<u>27,873</u>
Other Monetary Assets					
Gift Aid (3 months /October to December - estimated)	2,500	0	0	2,500	2,000
Funeral fees and expenses etc receivable	0	0	0	0	0
Hall rental (including energy charges) outstanding	500	0	0	500	0
	<u>3,000</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3,000</u>	<u>2,000</u>
Liabilities					
Amounts due as Agent re charitable collections	0	0	0	0	10
Amounts due as Agent re St Benedict's Mothers' Union	449	0	0	449	599
	<u>449</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>449</u>	<u>609</u>
Quinquennial inspection	0	0	0	1,020	1,020
Gas and electric (December)	464	0	0	464	90
	<u>913</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1,933</u>	<u>1,719</u>
Parish Share unpaid	<u>£61,611</u>				<u>£23,036</u>
Total Parish Share	<u>£72,111</u>				

Financial Statements 2024

For the 12 months to 31 December 2024

Notes

- The financial statements of the PCC have been prepared in accordance with the Church Accounting Regulations 2006 using the 'Receipts and Payments' basis.
- Designated and Restricted Funds

	Balance 1 Jan 2024 £	Receipts £	Payments £	Transfers £	Balance 31 Dec 2024 £
Designated					
Bell Ringers	763	0	0	0	763
	<u>763</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>763</u>
Restricted					
Organ Fund	1,384	0	0	0	1,384
Porch Fund	6,010	1,772	(7,782)	0	0
Play Area Maintenance Fund	1,636	0	(1,636)	0	0
Media Fund	123	0	(123)	0	0
Pastoral Gift	650	350	(103)	0	897
Gen2Grant	0	2,000	(907)	0	1,093
	<u>9,803</u>	<u>4,122</u>	<u>(10,551)</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3,374</u>

The Organ fund represents the residual balance of the donations and appeals accumulated to replace the original church organ after the installation of the Tickell organ in 2009. This balance can be spent to improve and maintain the replacement organ, as required.

The Play Area Maintenance Fund represents accumulated contributions from St. Benedict's Church and the (now ceased) St. Benedict's Pre-School which can be used to repair and maintain the outdoor play area alongside the church. During the year considerable work has been undertaken to improve this area and so the fund has now all been used.

The Media fund was set up after the last interregnum. Expenditure in respect of the broadband connection and website has been charged to this fund, which has therefore now all been used.

- Further Analysis of Receipts and Payments

	Unrestricted Fund £	Unrestricted Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Totals 2024 £	Totals 2023 £
Receipts					
a) Church activities					
Fees paid to PCC (incl extras for heating etc)	729	0	0	729	1,949
Hall lettings	5,643	0	0	5,643	5,792
Surplus from Cafe	468	0	0	468	620
	<u>6,840</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6,840</u>	<u>8,361</u>
Payments					
b) Church running expenses					
Church building running expenses	4,682	0	0	4,682	7,518
Church repairs and maintenance (incl insurance)	41,569	0	9,418	50,987	3,301
Cost of Services	764	0	0	764	627
Children & Young People	0	0	907	907	0
Office/ Printing and stationery	553	0	0	553	555
Training	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous	3,192	0	0	3,192	1,061
Broadband	0	0	123	123	0
Discretionary expenditure	0	0	103	103	0
Flowers	499	0	0	499	271
CCU Licences	532	0	0	532	508
	<u>51,791</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>10,551</u>	<u>62,342</u>	<u>13,841</u>

Churchwardens' Fabric and Contents Report (2024)

A requirement of the Care of Churches and Jurisdiction Measure 1991 is that churchwardens inspect the church's fabric and contents on behalf of the PCC and provide a report of findings to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM).

During 2024, the usual maintenance of buildings and contents continued. We have continued to carry out the works highlighted by the 2023 Quinquennial Inspection. Improvements have been made to the grounds and gardens by the volunteers from Barclaycard and our own parishioners. The front path was re-laid to enable more inclusive access, with the addition of handrails and lighting. A new sound system has been installed. It gives greater flexibility during church services and social events, whilst providing better quality sound and a more effective hearing loop.

The roof has leaked for many years, almost during its entire history of 40-plus years. The PCC decided to go ahead with substantial, essential repairs and these were carried out during the autumn. However, there are still major leaks which have now been identified as coming from the walls at the sides of the roofs. These will require 'capping' and we have agreed for this to be put in place in three areas to check that this resolves the problem before continuing to apply for a faculty for all of them to be done.

Cleaning parties were held on a number of occasions throughout the year to ensure the church interior was looking its best. It has been pleasing to see our church members giving their time and effort to care for St. Benedict's. In particular, a major overhaul of the organ loft space has been carried out, making it much more accessible and greatly improving storage. Due to the dwindling number of volunteers for the cleaning rota, and the need for the toilets, hall, passageway and kitchen to be cleaned, we have now hired a cleaning company to do the work on a monthly basis. Our volunteers still support with church cleaning in between.

The grounds continued to be maintained by members of the congregation, and thanks to Richard Warr in particular for his regular grass cutting and additional work in the garden areas. Thanks also to Mike Grant who continues to maintain our memorial garden and who has sourced suitable shrubs for the area.

Health and safety

Risk assessments have been routinely done for a variety of events in Church. Services are still streamed for those who are unable to attend services on a Sunday morning.

General Maintenance

The annual boilers' servicing did not give rise to any issues, and fire extinguisher and Church alarm system checks did not reveal any problems.

Marion Angus and Alison Marlow (Churchwardens)

OTHER ACTIVITY REPORTS

Bellringers Report

St Benedict's church is blessed to have its own peal of *bells* and with it, its own ringers to ensure that the call to worship is heard throughout the parish and on special occasions. We also appreciate and are indebted to those ringers who come in to support our ringers due to lack of numbers.

We are always looking out for others to join them so do please speak with any of the ringers if you are interested – or know someone who is. During 2024, our bells/ringers hosted various events throughout the year. This includes welcoming the Riversmeet Benefice group of ringers for when they toured Northampton. We have another Scout group booked to come in and next year we have already offered to host the Northampton Branch of the Peterborough Guild AGM. ***Geoffrey Brown on behalf of the bellringers***

Bible Study Group

On average, 6 members of our church attended the joint churches Lent study group, which this year focused upon the 5 Marks of Mission. It was very interesting to listen to the viewpoints of people from the other churches as well as our own.

Rev. Griff

Six or seven members of the congregation meet regularly on a Thursday morning at Julie's house to pray for each other, study the Bible and drink tea or coffee together, not forgetting the biscuits! Many thanks to her for the warm welcome we receive each week. This year we have studied the Fruit of the Spirit and some Psalms amongst other passages from the Bible. We are a very friendly group and always happy for new people to join us.

Rowena Griffiths

Church Cleaning Report

Thank you to all who contributed to cleaning the church this year. The volunteers we have do a wonderful job but numbers still remain low and it is getting more difficult to keep the church clean. The PCC have looked at other alternatives, hiring a monthly cleaning company to clean areas other than the worship area. A big thank you to the guides for their regular cleaning of the toilets on a Tuesday evening.

In September due to increased family commitments, I stepped down from my role as rota coordinator. I'd like to thank everyone who has helped keep the church clean over the past six years.

Dawn Bolt

Café Report

Our monthly cafe always gives a warm welcome to those who come, including new as well as regular attendees. Helped by Carolyn Runc, Jill Enstone and 'tea boy' Keith, we have provided a variety of freshly made sandwiches, assorted cakes (many home-made) and limitless tea or coffee.

We have had an average of 28 customers whose donations have raised £100 for Christian Aid and £78.50 for The Royal British Legion. In other months the donations cover food costs; any surplus is paid to the Church in £100 increments, so in 2024 £300 was given to the Church. There were also further donations on the card machine. In addition, the Cafe has been instrumental in advertising forthcoming Church events.

The attendees form the backbone of the Cafe and some help make cakes, clear tables, wash up or return the Church to normal. Many thanks to all for their help and support without which we could not operate.

Juliette Dunkley

Children's Society

We have continued to support the Children's Society through contributions to house boxes and through the annual Christingle Service. Many thanks to those who have contributed in any way.

The Children's Society carries out excellent work in supporting children and their families through all sorts of difficulties. Amongst others, these include children who have been abused, those struggling with mental or physical health issues, those who have run away from home, and those at risk of being groomed by criminal groups.

If you would like to have a house box (somewhere to get rid of your small change!), please speak to me as I have plenty of new ones waiting for a home. I collect them twice a year and it doesn't matter how little or how much you put in because, to The Children's Society, every penny counts.

Marion Angus

Deanery Synod Report for 2024

St Benedict's church has been represented at the Deanery Synod during the year 2024 following the triennial elections at the 2023 APCM, by Norman Critchlow, Onyi Ndefo and Richard Warr with Rev Griff being the parish's clergy representative.

The Northampton Deanery Synod is a representative body that makes decisions for our deanery, or local group of parishes about mission action planning and how to allocate funds from the deanery to the parishes and is part of the national synodical structure. You can see how this is achieved by the range of topics covered over the year, with the main ones covered in this report.

Meetings of our Deanery Synod normally take place four times during the year under the guidance of the Rural Dean, the Reverend Oliver Coss at various locations around Northampton Deanery.

The February Deanery Synod discussed prison ministry with a presentation by the Rev Canon Helen Dearnley who is the Anglican faith advisor for the 122 UK prisons in the HMPS and an advisor on chaplaincy in Peterborough.

In June, a presentation was made by Alex Copeland and Melissa Smith of the Northampton Hope centre which was celebrating its 50-year anniversary in 2024 and then issues of the approaches of some churches in the Deanery on 'Living in Love and Faith' were discussed. In September, Bishop Debbie attended the synod meeting and reminded all gathered that discipleship is not an easy path, it involves things beyond your control. She then laid out some of her goals and aspirations for the diocese.

The final Deanery Synod meeting of the year saw Helen Lynett (MU Diocesan President) and Revd Deborah Marsh (MU Chaplain) presenting an overview of the work of the Mothers' Union in this Diocese and Worldwide. Bishop Andrew Proud then discussed Implementing the MU Metamorphosis Programme in this Deanery and beyond.

Norman, Richard & Onyi

Environmental Group Report

This year the environmental group worked really hard on improving our outside spaces and we are pleased to announce we were rewarded with a bronze award from the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust.

Having achieved the Church of England/A Rocha Eco church bronze award last year we continue working towards silver.

Due to increased family commitments, I have stepped down as eco lead. If you are interested in joining us please speak to a member of the group.

Dawn Bolt

Events Committee

The Events Committee has met many times during 2024. The group has organised some of the larger fundraising events, including the May Fair, Soiree and Christmas Tree Festival.

However, the main task is to coordinate monthly social and fundraising events organised by members of the congregation. We are happy to help with any events but really depend on you all to suggest and run individual events. These can be purely social or fundraising. Please speak to any of us if you would like to plan an event, Juliette and Keith Dunkley, Chris Hunt, Rev Griff or Marion Angus.

We have also been involved in organising refreshments for many other church events (such as concerts, singing round the Christmas Tree, the service of lessons and carols). We would like to thank you for supporting our efforts during 2024, whether by practical help, donations, attendance or prayer.

Marion Angus

StBen's@4 = All age Service

Our weekly 4 o'clock family service has now been running for more than two years with an average attendance of 16 – 20 people. We have seen a number of different families attend including six regular families with young people between the ages of 2 – 18. Our service entails lively songs, a talk on a passage from the Bible (often using puppets or God Story clips), and a variety of craft activities, with a discussion group for the young people. We ask for prayer that this ministry will continue to grow and that those who have regularly been attending worship feel the call to be and do more within in the service and following Jesus's explain, disciple to those around them.

Rowena Griffiths

Flower Report

The Flower Arranging team of Carolyn, Sylvia and myself have continued with our policy of using a mixture of garden and responsibly sourced flowers. This is obviously easier to achieve in the Spring and summer months although the last two mild Autumn seasons have prolonged the availability of garden flowers.

We continue to avoid using Oasis and have found that wrapping the blocks of biodegradable material in wire makes it a little easier to use, but rather fiddly. Arrangements for the festivals of Easter, Harvest and Christmas have become simpler and often include the use of carefully placed pot plants, which last a lot longer than cut flowers and are easier to move as required. We look forward to decorating the church during the coming year, and would welcome assistance from anyone else who is interested.

Chris Hunt

Food Bank Report

We have collected tinned/packeted food in Church throughout the year and have distributed it to Food Banks at St. Mary's in Towcester Road as well as the Community Hub, Foodbank in Briar Hill. It is always gratefully received and shows that our congregation has thought of those less fortunate. We will continue with this for as long as there is a need. ***Keith Dunkley***

Home Alone Lunch 2024

Home Alone usually meets on the third Sunday of each month, after church, to eat lunch together at a local venue. There are occasionally changes to the date when it clashes with other events, for example Mothering Sunday, Easter Sunday or Father's Day.

The group is open to anyone who attends St Benedict's or lives within the parish who would otherwise be eating at home alone, including those who live with others but would be at home alone on that particular Sunday. Diners can be of any age. There is no need to book in advance, if you would like to come just tell me on the day. A number of us have cars and are able to transport people to The Queen Eleanor from church and back to their own homes afterwards.

We usually have 10 to 12 people attending but it has been as many as fifteen. With lots of company and conversation as well as the food, you would be more than welcome to join us.

Marion Angus

Junior Church

On average we have between 2 - 4 children per session (although on occasion we have had up to 7 children) and our regular families have settled into attending on the second and fourth Sundays of the month. Although this is not great for continuity it does mean the families are more likely to attend and we rarely do not have any children. We currently have two helpers, thank you to Fiona and Titi for their commitment and many thanks to the teachers and helpers who work hard to provide children's church. We are very grateful to the Diocese for their gift of money towards our children's work to help buy new resources.

Constance Thomas and Rowena Griffiths

Licensed Lay Minister

I continue in my role as Licensed Lay Minister for St Benedict's church, and I have been able to reach out to you all in a pastoral way, reflecting the love of Christ and my commitment to serve you all and the parish.

In the summer of 2024, I took a sabbatical and visited other churches, this has given me useful insight into the pastoral work that is offered in our diocese. It is something I will be investigating further, with one of the areas I am interested in developing is the prayer space. I would embrace any suggestions and ideas that would help us at St Benedict's to feel the love of Christ, please chat with me about this.

Your Sister in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mrs Paula White.

Mothers' Union Report

Our Branch meets on the 1st and 3rd Mondays in the month from 10a.m. to noon. We support St. Benedict's both in events in Church and helping by mending Service booklets and making poppies for display during Remembrance. We have had speakers from RNLI, Hearing Dogs, Air Ambulance etc. Most of these meetings are open to non-members. We have also visited Cliftonville Care Home to sing to bedridden residents. We actively support MU projects in the UK and overseas since we are part of a worldwide organisation.

If you would like to know more, please contact Catherine Galvin or Juliette Dunkley – or better still drop in to one of our meetings.

Juliette Dunkley

Outreach - Church Activities

Family, fun and fellowship (FFF) continues on a Sunday afternoon every half term with crafts, stories, songs and food for primary aged, and younger children. Topics covered this year have been Love, Easter, Creation, Summertime, Harvest, light fair, and Christmas. The light fair being held at Briar Hill community centre. On the whole these have been well attended with between 30-60 people attending each one and some of the families then coming along to St Ben's@4. The summer FFF sessions were less well attended this year (probably thanks to some lovely sunny days and people going to the many other events that were on). Next year we will not be holding the ones in the summer term but will work on alternative events.

The light fair was very successful this year with over 60 people attending. Thank you to all the volunteers helped to run the crafts and helped with serving cake and drinks. This year we planned to hold a Christingle service in Briar Hill but unfortunately the centre was double booked. However, the one held in church on Christmas Eve was very well attended. Thank you to Chris for the puppet show which was a big success.

Our involvement with the Guides and Scouts continues to grow. Rev Griff regularly visits the guide and ranger sections and has spent a few evenings discussing the Christian religion. The rainbows, brownies, guides and rangers meet in the church on a Tuesday evening and have taken part in a number of services including Thinking Day and Remembrance. They also took part in the Bishop's visit, many thanks to Naomi who played beautifully.

The cubs have visited and helped to build bug hotels and learnt about looking after the environment. Also, Griff and Rowena went to visit the Squirrels (4–5-year-old scouts) and talked about Remembrance. The Remembrance service was very well attended and the scouts and guides paraded into church and participated in much of the service.

Outreach - Schools

The work in primary schools is still growing and as a result of lower church attendance many teachers are happy for us to teach the children about Jesus and stories from the Bible. We currently have direct contact with 5 primary schools. During the year we have been into the schools for assemblies, specifically for Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas, Lent and Easter. A number of classes have come to the church to learn about aspects of Christianity, and we have taken RE sessions in the schools.

Prayer Spaces continue to be a well-loved resource and two of the schools took part in the 'transition prayer space' in the summer term where the children were provided with time to think and pray about some of the 'bigger issues' in their lives and thought about moving on to secondary school. The staff were pleasantly surprised at the children's thoughtfulness and the inclusiveness of a prayer space.

Thanks to the diocese's gift of money, we are currently working with other churches to design a new prayer space based on school values to take into our schools next year.

Rowena Griffiths

Parish Safeguarding Officer

St Benedict's church continues to follow the National & Diocesan guidelines around safeguarding, including the training and vetting of all volunteers. Janet Selling kindly stepped into the role on a temporary basis supported by the vicar during 2024.

As a Church, we pray that we provide a safe and nurturing place to worship God, where all are welcomed and protected, reflecting God's love for everyone. Thank you for your commitment to making our church a safe and nurturing place to be.

Rev. Griff

Parish Planned Giving Officer (for year ending December 2024)

Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who gives to St Benedict's by means of the planned giving schemes whether weekly, monthly, or quarterly.

Without your ongoing generosity our church and our work in the Parish at large would not be able to continue.

At year ending December 31st 2024 there were 45 members of the congregation taking part in the regular giving scheme using a bank standing order (32), weekly envelopes (13) or by planned contributions over the year. Of these 30 were able to gift aid their donations

The number using bank standing order and weekly envelopes has remained steady with the vast majority having switched from the HSBC account to the Metro bank account

Where an individual meets the HMRC requirements we can, with the donor's permission reclaim gift aid on their donations.

The Gift aid reclaimed from HMRC during 2024 was approximately £6059 plus The GASDS (Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme) which allows us to claim Gift Aid on the loose change collections and small donations made at our church services and social events in 2024 which increased our Gift Aid claim by £1752.

Why participate in our Planned Giving scheme?

Planned giving using weekly envelopes or bank standing order enables the treasurer and PCC to budget realistically for the coming year.

The money donated regularly through Planned Giving has this year been our church's main source of income; it helps pay our Parish Share, day to day church running costs, heating, lighting and maintenance costs and materials for our services and work in the community.

If we know what our income will be, then, just like at home, it enables a budget for the year to be arrived at so that as a church we can live within our means and not have to rely on continuous fundraising events to pay our regular outgoings.

The Planned Giving scheme is also open to individuals who, although they do not regularly attend the church would like to play their part in supporting its work.

Please also consider writing a legacy in favour of St Benedict's in your Will. If you would like more information on this please ask or take one of the leaflets in church.

If you do not yet participate in the Planned Giving scheme using weekly envelopes or monthly standing order please do consider doing so and just contact me for information.

Richard Warr, Parish Planned Giving Officer

South Northampton Partnership of Churches (SNPC)

Our representatives are Liz Hodges and Catherine Galvin; Liz is also SNPC secretary. Rev. Griff attends as our priest.

The committee meet three times a year with ministers and reps from Towcester Road Methodist church, Abbey Centre Baptist Church and St. Benedict's Anglican Church; and St. Francis and Therese Catholic Church. We are all one church, all brothers and sisters of the one true God.

We come together for three joint services throughout the year and at the service in October, held at the Abbey Centre Baptist Church on the 20th, the following worshipping communities, Towcester Road Methodist, Abbey Centre Baptist and St Benedict's once again signed a formal covenant to continue in this ecumenical partnership. It was lovely to see so many people from each of the churches mentioned above.

We shared a Lent course, which was based around the 5 Marks of Mission during 2024 and continue to look forward to what the future brings.

We shared in the Walk of Witness and a Hunger Lunch on Good Friday. In the summer there was an enjoyable picnic in the grounds of St Francis and St Therese, with games, a quiz and food.

Pat from the Abbey Centre organised the Christmas leaflets with details of services at each of the churches.

We had a very successful carol singing in December outside Tesco, at which we raised more than £150 for charity.

Catherine Galvin and Liz Hodges

Tots and Toddlers Group

St. Benedict's Tots and Toddlers meets in the church hall on Tuesdays in term time from 10 – 11.30 am for children from birth to starting school although many leave to go to nursery once they are three. The attendance has remained good with 16 children on the register, (although we did have 23 children on one day, thankfully it was sunny and we could use our outside area). Of these, nine to twelve children, with their parents, grandparents or childminder, attend on a regular basis.

We follow a routine of offering the adults a drink on their arrival, a time for the children to play, a healthy snack and drink for the children at the table in church preceded by grace, then more time to play. The adults and children then join in 'tidy up time before moving into church for a 10-15 minute story from the Bible, worship and singing time.

At our Christmas party the children all received a Christian book from Santa and sang Away in a Manger to him. If you have friends or neighbours with young children, please invite them to join us. We make a small charge of £1 per child per session which covers costs.

Marion Angus and Rowena Griffiths

Website

The St Benedict's website had a faltering start using another host and provider's software. Mike Grant offered to take over the design and production of the site in July 2023 using the existing data and software. It was concluded that a far superior result could be obtained using a different suite of website software. Detailed discussions and meetings between Mike and Griff produced a framework and a design strategy for the new site. This begun in earnest during the summer of 2023. It was completed in September and just required populating with data: pictures and information. This process took a little longer than expected, but with perseverance, many helped in the completion of this task. Interestingly, the simple logo/banner proved to be a contentious matter!

We continued with finding a host and were ready for going live at end of 2023. The chosen host was trusted with the hosting of our small site - this was at a cost that was more competitive than the previous host was offering. The web address name of our site also had to be changed, due to other difficulties/issues, hence the addition of the word 'Northampton' in our web address.

The site was uploaded and live in the last week of January 2024. I believe we produced a clean, simple, modern and stylish (bespoke - no templates used) site, designed by Mike Grant and based upon specific meetings had with Mike and Griff to hone and develop its look and function. I hope you will agree we have achieved this.

The website is not static, and has grown and changed through 2024. But it can only remain as an attractive resource for our church, St Ben's, if we all help to ensure this. So, I would like to make the following requests to my fellow members:

If you are a member of a committee or other church group that organises events, and produce posters/flyers, could you please pass an electronic version of it to one of the following people: Mike Grant, Griff or Richard, this can then find its way to me and be included on the Events' page. Thank you, Richard, for including many of these in our electronic newsletter already.

The same please applies to the 'Breaking News' button - please pass a picture(s) and a paragraph or two to explain what happened or other interesting information - it will stay on for up to 4 weeks before being removed. (E.g. our current Warm Spaces invitation is on there at the moment).

Lastly, can I take this opportunity to thank all who have helped in the production, development and management of this great resource for our church, may it continue.

Mike Grant

Welcome Spaces

'Welcome Spaces' or what started out as 'Warm Spaces' is an initiative that Northampton Borough Council invited local communities help set up to support those who might be struggling with the cost-of-living crisis BUT also those who, for various reasons, don't have as many opportunities to get out and mix with others, tackling loneliness and mental health.

St Benedict's, in conjunction with local community groups, has been hosting these drop-in session for the last two years, every Thursday. This has grown from strength to strength with numbers varying from 20 (one of the local walking groups happily popping in) to an average of 10 most weeks.

Through this scheme, the church has also managed to acquire a loan to further improve the sessions for those who are able to attend. These sessions normally start at the beginning of January through to April – however, there are plans afoot to potentially extend the timeframe, if the need is still there.

Rev. Griff

Youth Fellowship Report 2024

Our church youth group restarted this summer on a new day and time (Sunday 5pm), with average membership of nine young people attending; this happens at present on the first Sunday of every month, due to volunteers' availability. Generally, there are lots of games, food and plenty of fun for all. Occasionally, we head to the Northampton Youth gathering, for worship and more games and fun. From this group seven of our young people wanted to know more about confirmation and this led to a separate group meeting. These young people came before Bishop Debbie to be confirmed at the service on the 15th December.

Constance Thomas & Rowena Griffiths