



Stretton Parish

STRETTON PARISH
ST LAURENCE, CHURCH STRETTON
ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS, ALL STRETTON
ALL SAINTS', LITTLE STRETTON

Annual Report of the Parochial Church Council



ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023/24

STRETTON PARISH
ST LAURENCE, CHURCH STRETTON,
ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS, ALL STRETTON
ALL SAINTS', LITTLE STRETTON.

Independent Examiner
T Lunt MA FCCA MRPM
Whittingham Riddell LLP, Chartered Accountants
Shrewsbury

Bankers
CAF Bank
25 Kings Hill Avenue
West Malling

Barclays Bank
Shrewsbury

Churchwardens:
Steve King & Julie Lawton

Deputy Warden – St Laurence's
James Foster

Deputy Warden – St Michael's
Malcolm Forbes

Deputy Warden – All Saints
Moira Matthews

PCC Treasurer
Graham Vince

PCC Secretary
Jo Aze

The Parish Office
The Parish Centre
Church Street
Church Stretton
SY6 6DQ

BACKGROUND

The Parochial Church Council has the responsibility of co-operating with the Incumbent, in promoting the Mission of the Church. The PCC is also responsible for the care of the Church property and fabric. It is charged with framing an annual budget.

Membership

Members of the PCC are either ex-officio or elected in accordance with the Church Representation Rules under Synodical Government by those on the Electoral Roll at the time of the Annual Meeting. During the year the following served as members of the PCC:

Clergy: (*ex-officio*)

The Revd Steve Johnson, Rector

The Revd David Andrews, Curate

The Revd Christobel Hargraves, Associate Minister

LEP Minister (*non-voting*)

The Revd Hazel Allen

Churchwardens: (*ex-officio*)

Steve King

Julie Lawton

Deputy Churchwardens (*ex-officio*)

James Foster, St Laurence

Moira Matthews, All Saints'

Malcolm Forbes, St Michael's

Treasurer (*ex-officio*)

Graham Vince

Deanery Synod Representatives 3 year term expiring 2023 (*ex-officio*)

Andrea Graham (appointed 23/01/24)

PCC;

Elected for 3 year term expiring 2024

Daniel Wallis, St Laurence

Lorraine McCrohan, St Laurence

Elected for 3 year term expiring 2025

Cathy Watson (2nd term), St Laurence

Daniel Robinson, St Laurence

Anne Braddick, St Michael's

Pat Gregory, All Saints'

Elected for a 3 year term expiring 2026

Graham Shuttleworth, St Laurence

Finance Committee:

Rector

Julie Lawton

Steve King

Jenny Church

John Bennett

Christine King

Graham Vince

Dan Wallis

Standing Committee

Rector

Julie Lawton

Steve King

Chris Hargraves

Graham Vince

Graham Shuttleworth

The PCC met 6 times during the year and the average attendance was 13.

ELECTORAL ROLL REPORT

Church Electoral Roll Officer: Jo Aze

The numbers on the Electoral roll are:

St Laurence 207

St Michael's 31

All Saints' 38

Total on Roll 276

The number on roll has reduced from 277 in 2023 to 276 in 2024

RECTOR'S REPORT, Rev Steve Johnson

It's that time of year again, when we take time to see what the last year has held for us as a Parish and wow - what an amazing year! As we read all the different reports in this booklet from so many areas of ministries across the whole Parish, it's amazing to see that as we respond to God's call on us and walk in His ways, we have been privileged to see God at work in so many ways.

The different reports also remind us that We Are All Support Acts and that without people serving, not much would happen. So thank you to all those who serve in so many different ways. But finding people to serve is a constant challenge, especially as God calls us into different new mission areas, we always need people to step up and serve.

As we look back, we take stock and give thanks to God for his leading, but we also look forward expectantly to what He has in store. I am excited for all that has been and for what is to come. So as we look forward, let us each one continue to work together across our eight congregations, 'Making Jesus Known'.

CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT, Steve King and Julie Lawton

This year has been one of consolidating that which we started last year using our faith, skills, strengths, and trust in God, and extending those activities to become yet more community focused. We thank God for our Rector, Associate Minister, Curate, and the Ministry Team for leading us through this time and we are grateful for the support of our congregations.

We continue to reach out to our community and to those outside or on the edges of our church family. Not only do our Rector and Curate regularly lead assemblies in the Primary School, but this year the Secondary School have indicated a desire to work more closely with the church. This brings Christian teaching into the lives of more children, and we are grateful to God for this opportunity. This is enhanced by Messy Church, led by our Family and Children's Worker assisted by a talented team of volunteers from across the Parish. The Parents and Toddlers group continues to make contact with young families and there are many links from there to Messy Church. Further contacts are made through CAMEO, coffee mornings at All Saints', Flower Festivals and Lent Lunches at St. Michael's, Teas to Please and other such activities throughout the year. Alpha and Lifegroups give the opportunity to explore our faith – whether we are new to it or have been immersed in it all our lives – there is always something new to learn. We thank those who work with these groups and pray for God to bless and help those relationships to flourish.

Our weekly online service, which was established during Covid, has continued, with its own regular congregation and is also valued by those who are temporarily unable to get to church services. With the upgraded AV system in St. Laurence's in place, more of our services are livestreamed to enable those at home to be part of our worshipping congregation.

Making every attempt to be a good example in the world, and with the new AV in place and being used, the Parish has taken steps to document and follow policies on the use of copyrighted material and safeguarding when livestreaming.

At St. Laurence's, the youth have started playing a vital role in leading the occasional service, which has proved highly successful and a vehicle for their spiritual growth. We hold our Curate, David, and Jane Biggs, our Local Worship Leader, in our prayers, and we pray that God will provide more leaders to assist with this vital work.

Many elements of the Church Stretton Arts Festival were successfully hosted in St. Laurence's Church and the Parish Centre from July through August; the Stretton Feast took the form of a "Sausage Sizzle" in July and, despite the inclement weather, a good time was had by all who attended; 12 of our number successfully completed a First Aid course in July; Teas to Please was held in August, raising funds for the Foodbank and our wonderful Community Responders; the

parish held a holiday club – Landlubbers – in the last week of the school summer holidays with, at times, 40 children in attendance.

The yearly repeat of running an Alpha course, this year in the autumn, was very successful and those attending have requested a follow-up course to complete the sessions.

The Harvest events at the end of September across all three churches not only provided the chance to give thanks for God's generous gifts, but also enabled us to enjoy fellowship, to have fun, and to support those less fortunate through contributions to our Foodbank and to the Tearfund Harvest Appeal.

We were enthused and motivated by our visitors during October. First of all, our CMS Mission Partners, Chris and Anna Hembury, gave us a greater insight into their work in Hull and what had moved them to embark on their journey. The visit of our Diocesan Mission Enabler, Mark Melliush, was a resounding success and met with an overwhelmingly positive response.

The Parish continues to be a resourcing parish and answered the call to provide music worship at the licensing of Steve Alston as Pioneer Minister at Craven Arms, and to provide a venue and technical support for the Diocese at their Tim Hughes and Strategy events.

Once again, St. Laurence's was packed to capacity, with overspill into the Parish Centre, for the Remembrance Day service. The fact that so many people were able to participate, either in person or virtually, is thanks to those who contribute their time and expertise in all things technical to enable it to happen.

During Advent and Christmas an excellent Christmas card was produced and distributed to the Stretton community, and all three churches had very successful services during this period. Many thanks were expressed to Ru Trew and the choir who did brilliantly, singing at many services as well as leading the Carols in Carding Mill Valley. The Christmas wreath making workshop at St. Michael's was well attended, and the Christmas Tree Festival brought lots of visitors into St. Laurence's. Next Advent there is potential for doing something creative involving the community.



An excellent Christmas dinner was prepared and served to our community and very positive feedback received.

The Foodbank continues to serve the Stretton community, with a Foodbank Governance Sub-committee meeting being created to ensure good governance. The good folk of the Strettons have again shown their commitment to this cause by donating all but £30 of the expenditure for the year.

The "warm space" provided within St. Laurence's church has not only continued this year but, under the banner of our Bethel programme, a new venture was started. Named the Winter Warmer, this ran from January 2024 until Easter 2024 and aimed to provide a space for anyone to come and get a hot drink, a bacon sandwich, and meet others to chat or play board games. The first meeting was attended by about 30 people aged between 2 and 92. The second meeting was attended by about 60 people! Later meetings plateaued to around 50 people. Plans are already in place to continue beyond Easter.

Following the success of the Coronation Ceilidh last year, a Harvest Hoedown (Barn Dance) was held to great acclaim.



The number of people finding it difficult to get to church is increasing and there is a possibility of using the Ring and Ride service to transport people to church on Sundays. This has been discussed with Mayfair, who are very enthusiastic.

At all three churches we are blessed with many dedicated volunteers who look after the buildings and grounds and serve in many and diverse ways in our services. Special thanks must go to those who unlock and lock our buildings daily, making them available for any that wish or need to come to experience the peace of God. Finally, our thanks go to Jo in the Parish Office for her constant support and help.

Of course, with the increase in activity of the church, changes are necessary, and the PCC are planning to take on someone in the role of Operations Lead to help with the organisation of the new work. The PCC, via the Bethel programme, have identified the need for provision of accessible toilet facilities and the means of serving hot drinks at our community services (e.g. Carols & Tea) within the body of St. Laurence's church without recourse to carrying hot water across the road from the Parish Centre. The PCC have authorised the sale of the flat to provide some of the funding required.

Finally, several of the leadership team have been suffering from various serious conditions and illnesses that have taken them out of general circulation. While this is alarming, it has been encouraging to see how people have rallied around to make sure that, as far as possible, church life continues as usual with little in the way of interruptions. This makes it a time to take stock; to not take this for granted; to give thanks to God for his goodness and for the people who are willing to make things happen. This is a difficult, uncomfortable, time but we have much to give thanks for. We ask for your prayers of healing for them.

ST. LAURENCE'S CHURCH, CHURCH STRETTON, James Foster

It has been a joy to see the church building at St Laurence's used for so many different events in the last year. Highlights were the Coronation Ceilidh and Harvest Hoedown, and also the Messy Adventure held as part of the town Christmas lights turning on. For all these events it was fantastic to see the church full of all ages, including many families and many who are not regular church attendees. It was great to be able to host several music concerts during the Stretton Arts Festival, and again it was so pleasing to see the space we are blessed with being able to be used for the benefit of our community. Huge thank-yous need to go out to all who have coordinated events and those who have served by supporting them in so many ways.

The parish hosted more Diocese-led events this year, with a particular highlight being the Worship Conference where Tim Hughes led us in sung worship and spoke to those attending about the importance of worshipping God being central in our personal lives and the lives of a thriving church community.

At the end of 2023, I was amazed at the beauty of all the Christmas trees placed around the church, so brilliantly coordinated by Marion Shuttleworth. Lots of local groups joined in and produced very creative and thought-provoking tree displays.

We have continued to hold regular maintenance parties on Saturday mornings, to keep the church building, the Parish Centre and the churchyard as safe and pleasant places to be. We have received several comments from the community about how much they enjoy spending time in the churchyard and in particular the way the churchyard has been managed, brilliantly finding the balance between encouraging nature and keeping things in check! Special thanks here to the team who look after the churchyard, often working unnoticed but doing so with diligence, care and with a servant heart.

Finally, I personally want to thank the members of the St Laurence DCC for their efforts and commitment in the past year and am looking forward to the next year of working towards Making Jesus Known in our community.

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, ALL STRETTON, Rev Hazel Allen

This last year has seen a very positive attitude and vision from the congregation. They have provided good physical and spiritual support for one another. Attendance has been more consistent, and more people have been supporting services as Welcomers and Readers. We have also had more visitors attending services. Combined Parish services have been well attended by more than 75% of the active congregation.

We are investigating ways of improving the heating of the church and working through issues raised at our Quinquennial.

The Communion service held monthly at Stretton Hall Nursing Home is well attended and continues to be led by Gillian Taylor, assisted by David Willetts and Sheila Seal.

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, LITTLE STRETTON, Moira Matthews

The Choral Evensongs have continued to be very successful, attracting congregations in search of a traditional style of worship. We are very grateful to the Stretton Parish Choir under the excellent leadership of Ru Trew for bringing us such joyful contributions to our worship and we recognise how much work has gone into each service. The most recent Choral Evensong included beautiful new settings of the Nunc Dimittis and Magnificat composed by Kimee Cleaton, and we are looking forward to hearing them again. We were proud to host the atmospheric candlelit Parish Advent Carol Service and Epiphany Service and also to welcome the Churches Together Day of Prayer. A highlight of 2023 was the celebration in October of our 100th birthday, which we marked by a special Choral Evensong, complete with birthday cake and candles.



Our garden continues to bring joy to both our usual congregation and visitors. The decision to allow the lawn at the far end of the garden to grow without mowing revealed a carpet of wild flowers which had been lying dormant since 1903. We have been trying hard to cultivate wild flowers from seed but it was, in fact, God's love of nature which produced the most successful display! We introduced small blackboards with quotations, mowed some paths through the longer grass and set up a plant identification sign. The house martins were particularly active this summer, and their nest above the porch attracted a lot of interest. We know from their happy comments in our visitor book that this focus on the environment has brought in more visitors to the church, a simple piece of outreach.

Our catering team has excelled in providing refreshments for all of our special occasions, both services and coffee mornings. We tried a café style service for the Harvest Festival where the congregation sat around tables for the service before being served a lovely cooked lunch. This was so successful we hope to do the same for Christian Aid Week. The Coronation of King Charles III in May was marked by a very happy and well attended afternoon tea complete with many yards of bunting both inside and outside the church.



CONDOVERY DEANERY SYNOD, Rev Christobel Hargraves, Rural Dean

The Deanery Synod forms part of the governance of the Church of England, meeting as a minimum twice per year. During 2023 there were no representatives from Stretton Parish on

Deanery Synod. In early 2024 Andrea Graham was elected as a member, and two other people have shown interest since, and it is hoped they will be elected during the APCM in April 2024. There was only one meeting of the Deanery Synod held in 2023 – in June when the speaker was the Diocesan Director of Vocations the Revd Neil Patterson. He spoke of the process of discernment for calling to ministry.

At this meeting the outgoing Rural Dean, Revd Geoff Garrett, was thanked for his service to the Deanery, as was the outgoing lay Chair Janet Wilcoxon. Janet Dovey also stepped down as secretary after many years of service.

I was appointed as Rural Dean in December 2023, but there is still no lay chair or secretary appointed. Richard Rhodes remains Treasurer.

2023 Deanery Parish Offer. Of the offer of £307,166, the Deanery paid £303,652 – 98.86%. The offer for 2024 is £302,501.

If you are interested in representing the Parish on Deanery Synod please speak to the Rector Steve Johnson. There are five places for Stretton Parish.

SAFEGUARDING, Chrissie Pepler – 01694 771888

Our role in safeguarding across the Parish is to keep each other safe and particularly children and vulnerable adults. It is not possible to undertake this work without the cooperation and support of our parishioners. Safeguarding is everyone's business and I want to thank you for your help and support.

Over the last year we have implemented the national recommendations for Safer Recruitment for all volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults. This does mean that volunteer recruitment can take a little longer than it used to, so please bear this in mind if you volunteer for a new role with children or vulnerable adults. We also have to ensure that safeguarding training and DBS checks are renewed every three years, and we have a system in place to remind people when it is time to do this. Margaret Benson, our DBS administrator, is stepping back after 10 years in the role; Margaret has been fantastic to work with and we want to thank her for all her diligent work in this area. Margaret has worked with Jo Aze to hand over the role, and you will be hearing from Jo from now on about the need for a DBS and when you need to undertake some safeguarding training.

The Safeguarding processes are audited at every level; nationally, in each Diocese and in the future at Parish level too. We are not expecting this to happen in our Parish in the next year, but new National Standards have been issued to guide us, so we will be looking at these over the coming year to help ensure we are doing the best job we can.

BETHEL PROGRAMME, Cathy Watson

Over the past year, the Bethel programme team has completed the planned first phase, based on 'listening to learn'. This involved gathering information about what is already being done, by individuals, the church as a whole and by other organisations; interviewing Parish congregations and community members about their needs; and reviewing our current buildings and their use and challenges; all underpinned by prayer and Bible study. The results of these investigations are available in a report.

Based on these findings, a Strategic Plan is being developed for the next five years, outlining how we plan to work towards our vision of *serving our community in practical, social, and spiritual ways*, building on the current activities within the Parish and the needs and



gaps identified in the first phase. The plan will be finalised and presented to the next PCC meeting for approval.

In the meantime, the different working groups have been moving forward, as follows:

- Infrastructure group: as part of the search for an architect for the quinquennial inspection, options for adding a servery and toilet to St Laurence's are being considered.
- Grants and finance group: charitable trusts and other potential sources of funds are being researched to support both infrastructure and outreach work.
- Communications group: advertising and promoting the Winter Warmer project (see below) has been the key focus of the communications group in the last few months, as well as updates on Bethel in Contact.
- Projects team: the first pilot project was initiated in January, to run the Winter Warmer drop-in (see below).

Winter Warmer Drop-in

The drop-in was planned as a pilot project, and ran for 12 weeks, ending on Easter Saturday. Attendance was between 50 to 60 people each week, with a good mix of congregation and community members, aged between 2 and 92 years old.

As planned, a review of the pilot project was carried out in order to learn lessons and plan for the future, based on feedback from volunteers, attendees and the project team. The key benefits identified were as follows:

- Friendly and warm atmosphere, and warm welcome
- Opportunity to meet and talk to people, including to new people
- Safe place (for children, vulnerable people, those living with dementia etc.)
- Companionship/company
- Mixed age range, integrating children with older people
- Opportunity for Church family to engage and welcome
- Good food
- Low/no cost

There was broad consensus that the project should continue beyond Easter, building on the lessons learned so far. The PCC meeting on 26th March approved the extension of the project, renamed 'Warm Welcome' drop-in, to run from the end of April until June or July. We praise God for his guidance and support so far and trust he will continue to guide us as we go forward.

If you would like to know more about the Bethel programme, get involved in one of the working groups or join the volunteer team for the Warm Welcome, please get in touch: bethel@strettonparish.org.uk.

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG FAMILIES WORK, Sally Clilverd

During the past year we continued with all our well-established areas of Children's and Families Ministry but also had the joy of re-introducing a summer holiday club for children aged 4 – 11 years and devised an Experience Coronation event for the children of St. Lawrence Primary School.

Our Parents and Toddlers group continues to be very popular with parents and carers. They really appreciate the friendly atmosphere, wide variety of activities, the opportunity to build friendships, as well as the ability to talk to others in similar situations. Several of our families have attended Messy Church and Winter Warmer which has been encouraging to watch their journeys progress.

At Messy Church we continue to experience a lively atmosphere with 50+ people at most of our sessions, all exploring a Bible theme through crafts, games and activities. We have now completed our series on Old Testament Bible Heroes and have just started a series on Holy Habits. We are hoping these sessions will encourage children and adults in their discipleship journey and will develop their confidence to live out their faith day by day.

Steve, David and I continue to visit St. Lawrence Primary School each Monday and Wednesday to deliver an assembly. We have again been privileged to welcome the children into the church for Leavers, Harvest, Christmas and Easter services, as well as the Experience Coronation stations.

During the last week of August, 40 children joined our Landlubbers Holiday Club, exploring Paul's experiences of Jesus' transforming power in his life. We enjoyed Bible stories, crafts, games and time in our crews each day, plus a delicious packed lunch and everything was rounded off with a lot of fun.



At the end of November, we held a Messy ADVENTure as part of the Town's Light turning-on events. Around 150 people explored 10 different activities considering how, and why, we prepare for the Christmas season. We finished with a short Celebration time together.

We continue to be incredibly blessed each Sunday morning with a regular group of children attending our newly named 'Discoverers' group. Our strapline is 'finding out more about Jesus' and it is good to reflect each week on the new discoveries children, as well as the adults, have made during our time together. We have mainly followed the Bible readings being used in the service so families can discuss together things discovered and questions still to ponder.

Working with children demands a huge number of incredibly talented, generous and loving volunteers. None of these activities would be possible without them and many work behind the scenes, creating and preparing things in advance, as well as amazingly coming to clear the debris away!! My heartfelt thanks to each one of you and also to those of you who faithfully pray for the children, families and all of the events.

YOUTH WORK, David Andrews

The Youth Life Group has continued to be a source of joy and fruitful ministry during 2023 and 2024. The core group has grown from seven to ten young people that regularly attend since the last report.

Since last year the group has led two Altogether Services which were very well received by the congregation and the young people enjoyed the whole process. The group planned and created every aspect of the service with minimal input from the helpers and leaders of the group. The increase in their confidence from their first service to the second was marked. Thank you very much to Dan and Jane for coming to support with those sessions leading up to the services themselves. Going forward the group are happy with planning and leading two services a year.



The group also worked through Rooted, a Scripture Union resource that explores issues and topics such as: identity, purpose, self-worth, well-being and healthy choices, over ten evenings.

Chris Lear has also begun to help with the group and has been invaluable. He has built excellent relationships with the group very quickly and very naturally.

As the group continues into 2024, thought will need to be given as to who will lead the group once my curacy finishes and how we can recruit additional volunteers.

Please continue to pray for our young people and their continued journeys of faith and for the Youth Life Group going forward into 2024 and beyond.

Secondary School: Sally, Steve and David have begun visiting Church Stretton School on Monday lunch times. At the time of writing three sessions have taken place and each session has been well attended so far. Please pray for this ministry as it continues to develop and that it grows into what the young people of that school need it to be for them.

LIFE GROUPS, Neil Sanders

A year of consolidation has seen us grow in understanding of what it means to be a Stretton Parish Life Group. Particular thanks go to all the Group Co-ordinators who, as well as facilitating their own groups, have worked well together as we continue to develop a shared culture and governance which will keep us united, encourage healthy growth, and value our rich diversity.

In the coming year, we anticipate having new groups, and new group co-ordinators, as we welcome those new to the Parish, from Alpha, or simply new to Life Groups. If you want to be involved, or to know more, please speak with me, a Group Co-ordinator, or one of the clergy.

MUSIC, Ru Trew and Dan Robinson

We aim for the sung worship across the parish to glorify God. We can worship God through a wide range of different musical styles and fortunately He's not fussy!

The sung worship is intended to be an integral part of each service, drawing on the theme and readings, and providing a further opportunity to reflect on what God is teaching us and encouraging us about. And we were reminded by Tim Hughes when he spoke at St Laurence's in November 2023 that, in a broken world, our sung worship is an act of *defiance*, when we raise our eyes to Jesus and give him glory, regardless of what is going on around us - both personally and in the world as a whole.

We are blessed to have many gifted musicians who come together to help our church family to worship. We aim to have a mix of different styles of worship across our different services at St Laurence's, some led by the choir, and some led by music groups. The choir is thriving and growing and, as well as singing regularly on the first Sunday of each month, the choir has also led Choral Evensong at All Saints' each term, a Songs of Praise service and a 50th Anniversary service at St Michael's, as well as singing at other special events. December was very busy!

Our relatively new Deeper evening service has provided an opportunity to engage with more extended periods of sung worship, aiming to be flexible and responsive to the Spirit's leading. It has been great to welcome some of our young people to join the music group at some services, and also to "throw the kitchen sink" at some of our United Parish Services with full choir and music group all coming together.

We are always eager to hear if there are members of our church family who are interested in singing with the choir or joining a music group - please speak to either of us.

Finally, we would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who gives their time, energy and gifts to enhance our sung worship.

MISSION PARTNERS, Louise Jackson

Louise & Graham Jackson took on the role of Mission Link Coordinators in September 2023 to help to facilitate events when our Mission Partners, Lea and Petra Williams from Brno, Czech Republic, and Anna and Chris Hembury, from Hull, are visiting.

Building on the work of the World Mission Group, and many wonderful mission partnerships in previous years, as a parish we have been challenged to rethink how we 'do' mission. Many members of our parish are actively involved in mission, collecting for Christian Aid, hosting

refugees, linking with the schools in DRC and in Haiti, agricultural projects in Ethiopia, working in disaster relief around the world, with Tear Fund, Water Aid and so many more. We have often thought how much we could learn just by hearing about the many kinds of mission that God lays on our hearts and how each of us has felt called to respond locally and globally.

In October, Anna and Chris joined us at St Laurence's for an Altogether Service and lunch afterwards. We heard about how God has used groups like the sewing club, an exercise class and breakfast club to reach out to people living in their area. We were challenged to think beyond the church building and consider the role of all our communities and groups meeting across the parish. We learned that sometimes our mission field is right here, in the UK, in our town and amongst our own communities.

We also met up with Lea and Petra during a family visit to Shropshire. It was a good opportunity to invite them to share a meal with our Life Group and for the younger generation to make new friends. We heard more about their work with refugees and with students in Brno.

Unfortunately, our cards and gifts at Christmas to the Williams family didn't arrive because they were held at customs due to the new regulations. However, our cards and gifts arrived successfully in Hull and were much appreciated!

Newsletters from Hull and from the Czech Republic are distributed by CMS, and once registered you will be regularly updated on their work and any prayer needs. Donations can be made through the CMS website too.

We hope to meet up with our Mission Partners again in the coming year – perhaps visiting Anna and Chris in Hull and catching up with Lea and Petra when they are next in the UK.

STRETTON FOODBANK, Richard McCrohan

2023 was a step up in every way compared to 2022:

- Number of people using the foodbank increased – we supported 381 people during the year (174 were children)
- Donations increased - £32,854
- Expenditure increased t- £32,883
- Various special activities and initiatives took place – Client survey and Aldi trips
- A number of new volunteers joined the team – team of 29

People helped

During 2023 we helped a total of 381 people, of which 174 were children, this was up from 256 people (112 children) in 2022.

The number of visits to the Foodbank on Fridays in 2023 was 1823, indicating how busy the Foodbank has become.

Food donations

The community continues to support the Foodbank with physical donations of food, via the Coop and Mayfair donation bins. This works well on the back of the social media requests for specific items each week, ensuring the donations match what is needed. Unfortunately given the increase in client numbers, the volume of food donated accounts for about 25% to 30% of what is needed each week.

Financial summary

For the past 3 years, the level of donations has miraculously been very close to the significantly increasing expenditure, with the difference being just £29 in 2023, at £32,883 vs £32,854.

Special Activities and new initiatives

1. Each year a number of local schools run reverse Advent campaigns; this year these were provided by Church Stretton and Longnor primary schools.
2. Working with the Coop and Rotary the Foodbank also distributed donated toys at Christmas.
3. We worked with a number of agencies to help clients in solving underlying issues, including Marches Energy Agency, Community Resource, Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), Mental health support, SW Shropshire Primary Care Network.
4. A new trial was set up in October working with Mayfair/Ring 'n' Ride, started in November.
5. In March CAB undertook a comprehensive survey of our clients on our behalf. The results were encouraging, and a number of recommended changes were made.

A more detailed report is available on request.

ECO CHURCH, Isabel Carter

The new parish-wide Environmental Sub-committee is now up and running and looking at ways to ensure our buildings are as environmentally friendly as possible.

All three of our churchyards continue to be of increasing benefit for wildlife thanks to their sensitive management, and compliments are often received. A Bilberry Bumblebee, a priority species for the Stepping Stones area, was recorded last year in St Laurence's, and a young peregrine was regularly sighted roosting on the church tower late last summer.



Prayers for COP 28 were shared in Contact and a Prayer Vigil for COP28 was held in St Laurence's during the opening weekend of the conference.

Our route-map as a parish towards Net Zero in 2030 (as agreed by General Synod) has been mapped each year. St Michael's and All Saints' only use electricity and they already have a relatively low Carbon Footprint. Mike Carter has been monitoring St Laurence's and the Parish Centre and the latest report is on the notice board in St Laurence's. Both gas and electricity usage have increased during 2023 after years of gradual reduction, marking a slight increase in the Carbon Footprint. We will need to look into ways of reducing our gas consumption in particular. Agreement has been reached for St Laurence's and the Parish Centre to switch to a renewable energy supplier as soon as the current contracts expire.

A new Diocesan Environmental Officer, Revd Stephen Hollinghurst, has been appointed. The ecumenical group overseeing environmental issues, M-CENT, has restarted at his request. Two Diocesan Environmental conferences are planned for this year, one in [Hereford on 22nd June](#) and one in Church Stretton on 28th September. A sermon series focusing on Creation and care for the environment has been agreed for our parish this autumn. This seems an opportune time to reform the Eco-church parish group.

We remain in a global climate emergency and trust our parish can be part of responding to this.

MOTHERS' UNION, Marian Goulder

Speakers at our monthly meetings this year have included Moira Matthews who told us about The Royal Chapel at Windsor, David Baron,



our local Community Police Support Officer and Isabel Carter on the work which has been going on in our churchyard. Our Lent reflection was given by Revd Caroline Windley on the theme of Wilderness.

Revd Steve Johnson officiated at our annual service in September, and we are very grateful for all the support and encouragement he and the team give us on an ongoing basis.

We continue to put our faith into action through our projects and we have provided the primary school with ten more welcome bags, funded by the Crisis Intervention Fund based in Hereford. We have also been able to help various individuals with household items as and when they are needed. Our members donate items to the refuge on a regular basis, particularly gifts at Christmas, Easter and Mothering Sunday. Our Blessings Bags have been an encouragement to a number of people who are going through a tricky time.

We enjoyed being part of the Christmas tree festival and used the theme of the Mothers' Union "Rise Up" campaign against domestic violence. We are keen to raise awareness that Mothers' Union is a worldwide organisation and have provided a display in the Parish centre as well as speaking at all three of our churches on Mothering Sunday.

If you would like to join us, all are welcome at our meetings. To find out more do visit our website www.themothersunion.org

REPORT ON THE FABRIC OF OUR BUILDINGS, Steve King and Julie Lawton

St Laurence's Church, Church Stretton

Architect

There was a need to appoint a new architect for Quinquennial Inspections and for assistance on future projects. Following extensive research and a robust interview process, the Churchwardens made a recommendation to the PCC, which was accepted. The Hereford DAC approved this selection, and Candida Pino has been appointed, and we look forward to working with her.

Storm Damage

Although the wooden louvres in the Tower were repaired last year there have been occasions during heavy rain when water has entered the church building and run down the walls. This is being monitored.

AV equipment

Following an unstable start that caused some distress, the new AV equipment, installed in the Spring of 2023, has become an asset to the church. It is regularly used for Sunday services as well as providing a great benefit for visiting speakers and musicians (being used by Tim Hughes).

Notice board

There is a desire to review the notice boards at St Laurence's and the DCC will look closely at the new All Saints' one before looking at options, probably with the same company.

Energy Usage & Carbon footprint

Work on this is ongoing, with a desire to move provider but having to overcome some hurdles to do this. Work to look at longer term options in regard to reducing carbon impact is running along in the background.

Tree Planting

A Sorbus 'Wisley Gold' tree has been planted under faculty within the churchyard of St. Laurence's church to mark the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

General Maintenance

The fixed electrical wiring test and inspection have been carried out, as has PAT testing of electrical equipment in the church.

The annual gas service and safety inspection for the church heating has been carried out.

The Tower clock has had its annual service by Smiths of Derby.

A team of valued volunteers have undertaken various small maintenance tasks to keep the building in good repair, and regular monthly working parties are continuing for which we thank God.

Accessible Toilets and Servery

The church building is now being used with more of a community focus e.g. the Coronation Ceilidh, and our congregation is becoming more aged. It is now less acceptable to suffer the discomfort of having to access toilets in the Parish Centre when in church and to incur the risk of carrying hot water across the road from the Parish Centre to the church when serving hot drinks. As part of the Bethel programme the Churchwardens are investigating installing accessible toilets and a servery within the church building.

Churchyard

A dedicated team of volunteers keep the churchyard well maintained throughout the year, including a good display of wildflowers and informative signboards.

The Douglas fir has started to become a problem with neighbours concerned about the possibility of damage from dropping branches. Surveys have been obtained but Shropshire Council consider the tree to be "*an asset to the town.*" The Churchwardens and their deputy continue to monitor the situation.

Health & Safety

As a number of tasks require the use of ladders and high-level work platforms, it was agreed that all those who work at high levels should undergo the 'Working at Height' training course, available online.

All Saints' Church, Little Stretton

Wall damage

The wall is now fully rebuilt apart from some pointing of the coping stones which needed to be postponed until after the cold spell. The gate has been rehung and the debris cleared away. Alex Stave of Staves Stonemasons has done an excellent job and is highly recommended. He is very knowledgeable about conservation work and would be excellent for any church repair. The wall was first damaged on February 6, 2023, so it has been repaired just in time for its first anniversary!

Notice board

The new notice board is now in place. The cost of the board and delivery came to £1014, of which £1000 has been covered by kind donation. The erecting of the board under faculty was estimated to be £120 and was also covered by donation. It stands in the same position as the previous board.

Repairs to the church

Phillips and Curry have commenced work on the remaining repairs recommended by the quinquennial report. In the event, these repairs have not proved extensive, and the new cost will be £1,300 plus VAT, about £2000 less than anticipated.

Church Garden

This has been a great success, attracting in visitors who enjoy following the small blackboard signs. There have also been lots of visitors to the church itself, a number of them commenting in the visitors' book on the lovely garden. This is definitely a very positive outcome of our Eco church activities and, hopefully, will send a strong message about making space for nature. The arrival of the house martins in the porch has certainly been popular with groups of ramblers! One member

of our congregation has been so pleased with our new approach to the All Saints' garden that she has made a very generous donation of £1000 to be used for gardening projects.

Various domestic improvements

Extra crockery and cutlery for the kitchen is being purchased to facilitate catering activities such as the Harvest Lunch and the coffee mornings. The cost will be covered by the money raised at the last coffee morning. An extra wall cupboard will also be needed to house these additions and to tidy up the kitchen. The vestry will also be tidied up and better storage solutions found.

Pew replacement

After many delays due to COVID and supply issues, the new wooden chairs to replace the pews were installed.

External Repairs

The repairs to the external rendering and paintwork, specified by the Quinquennial of 2019, have been undertaken by a specialist historic building contractor,

Electricity Supplier

All Saints' Church has moved to a 100% renewable electricity contract.

Tree surgery

Following storm damage, some emergency tree surgery was undertaken to remove damaged and weak branches.

General Maintenance

Annual testing and servicing have been carried out. We are grateful to the volunteers who care for the building and the grounds.

Quinquennial

The inspection for All Saints' Church was last carried out in July 2019 and so needs to be done again this year.

St Michael & All Angels Church, All Stretton

Roadside wall

Work and reparations continue to address items in the Quinquennial report i.e. roadside wall and roof leak.

Notice board

A new notice board has been erected under faculty.

Snow damage

The lychgate was damaged by falling branches following heavy snow and this has been repaired under faculty.

Water heater

A replacement filter for the water heater would be susceptible to the same blockage problem so the preferred option is to replace the water heater with one which does not require a filter.

Heating system

The heating system has been inspected, and options are being considered.

General Maintenance

Annual testing and servicing have been carried out. We are grateful to the volunteers who care for the building and the grounds.

Parish Centre, Church Stretton

Purchases

A replacement water heater has been installed in the kitchen to replace the one that had become unreliable.

General Maintenance

The fixed electrical wiring test and inspection have been carried out, as has PAT testing of electrical equipment in the Parish Centre.

The annual gas service and safety inspection for the water heater and cooker have been carried out.

A team of valued volunteers have undertaken various small maintenance tasks to keep the building in good repair, and regular monthly working parties are continuing.

5 Sandford Avenue, 'The Flat'

This flat was purchased in 2015 originally to provide housing for a church youth worker. As it is no longer needed for that purpose, it is rented out privately. However, the maintenance fees for the flat are high and absorb most of the rental income. As it is no longer economical to keep the flat, the PCC has agreed to sell it at the appropriate time with the monies being used for our work on Bethel.

FINANCE REPORT, Graham Vince

For full financial statements, see separate document

Stretton Parish

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES for the year ended 31 December 2023

	Unrestricted Funds			Restricted	Endowment	2023	2022	
	St Laurence £	All Saints £	St Michael's £	Funds £	Funds £	Total £	Total £	
INCOME AND ENDOWMENT FROM								
<i>Donations and legacies</i>								
<i>Incoming resources from donors</i>	2a	171,257	16,580	18,907	53,070	0	259,813	231,162
<i>Other donations and legacies</i>	2b	5,000	8,859	361	0	0	14,220	8,778
<i>Income from charitable activities</i>	2c	16,801	484	152	0	0	17,437	12,614
<i>Income from investments</i>	2d	12,324	119	803	156	2,080	15,481	10,158
TOTAL INCOME RESOURCES		205,382	26,041	20,222	53,226	2,080	306,951	262,713
EXPENDITURE ON								
<i>Charitable activities</i>								
<i>- Grants, Donations & gifts</i>	3a	18,569	4,388	1,800	12,480	0	37,236	30,551
<i>- Activities directly relating to the work of the church</i>	3b	195,243	22,856	18,028	58,322	110	294,558	271,680
<i>- Governance costs</i>	3c	1,781	214	214	0	0	2,209	1,989
TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED		215,592	27,458	20,042	70,802	110	334,004	304,221
NET INCOME / EXPENDITURE BEFORE OTHER RECOGNISED GAINS AND LOSSES		-10,210	-1,417	180	-17,576	1,970	-27,053	-41,508
GAINS/LOSSES ON INVESTMENTS	5b		0	389	0	3,251	3,640	-8,076
TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS		2,400	-1,200	-1,200	0	0	0	0
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS		-7,810	-2,617	-631	-17,576	5,221	-23,413	-49,583
Balances brought forward at 1 January 2023		379,245	31,234	23,612	42,053	68,120	544,264	593,847
BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 DECEMBER 2023	8	371,436	28,617	22,981	24,477	73,341	520,851	544,264

Stretton Parish

BALANCE SHEET as at 31 December 2023

	Note	2023 £	2023 Total £	2022 Total £
FIXED ASSETS				
Tangible fixed assets	5a	229,267		234,167
Investment assets	5b	<u>61,051</u>		<u>57,411</u>
		<u>290,318</u>		<u>291,578</u>
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors & prepayments	6	8,047		3,906
Short term deposits		202,983		234,538
Cash at bank and in hand		<u>44,092</u>		<u>47,517</u>
		<u>255,122</u>		<u>285,961</u>
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
Amounts falling due within one year				
Accruals & creditors	7	<u>24,589</u>		33,275
		<u>24,589</u>		
NET CURRENT ASSETS			230,533	252,686
NET ASSETS LESS LIABILITIES			<u>520,851</u>	<u>544,264</u>
Represented by				
ACCUMULATED FUNDS				
Unrestricted	12		337,571	353,688
Designated	9		85,462	80,403
Restricted	10		24,477	42,053
Endowment	11		<u>73,341</u>	<u>68,120</u>
	8		<u>520,851</u>	<u>544,264</u>

Signed on behalf of Stretton Parish

on

Julie Lawton
(Church Warden)

Steve King
(Church Warden)

Stretton Parish

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of Stretton Parish

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts for the year ended 31 December 2023 which are set out on pages 7-17.

Responsibilities and basis of the report

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the charity as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

T Lunt BA FCCA MIRPM

WR Partners

Chartered Accountants
Belmont House
Shrewsbury Business Park
Shrewsbury
SY2 6LG



MINUTES

THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

1.	Opening Prayers The Rector opened in prayer and read from Isaiah 61.
2.	Elections of Churchwardens The nominees were Steve King and Julie Lawton. They were duly elected with everyone in favour. Steve was thanked for continuing in the role for another year and Julie was welcomed.

THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

1.	Apologies for Absence Simon & Ginny Baldock, Barbara and Keith Bell, Malcolm & Helen Loft, Marian Goulder, Gillian Taylor, John and Jan Bennett, Pat and Barrie Oxtoby. Chris King, Helga Holden, Alan Robinson. There were approximately 70 people present.
2.	Minutes of previous APCM held 25th April 2022 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 th April 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Rector.
3.	Matters Arising None.
4.	Electoral Roll The numbers on the Electoral roll are: St Laurence's 204 St Michael's 34 All Saints 39 Total on Roll 277 The number on roll has reduced from 284 in 2022 to 277 in 2023
5.	Annual report on the proceedings of the PCC Details were recorded in the Annual Report.
6.	Rector's Report & Churchwardens' report detailing the activities of the Parish The full Rector's report is in the annual report previously distributed. The Rector is so thankful for what God is doing amongst us and is expectant for what He will do in the future. The Ministry Team are very conscious of and thankful for the work of so many people in the Parish. Thanks were expressed to Marion and Steve, the churchwardens, for all their hard work in some difficult circumstances over the last year. As Marion steps down she was thanked for her work as churchwarden over the last three years and presented with a gift. The Rector also thanked the Deputy Wardens, the PCC, the Ministry Team, our Reader, remembering Robert Rayner and continue to pray for Helen; members of the Deanery Synod, giving particular thanks to Janet Wilcoxon for her faithful service for the deanery

and the diocese; and the retired clergy. Three of the retired clergy have decided not to continue with their PTO going forward, being Haigh Etches, John Hughes and Valerie Morris. This means that they will join the rest of the congregation as members of the church and we can no longer expect them nor can they legally continue to take Sunday services, funerals, baptisms, weddings, preach, give home communions or undertake pastoral visits. They were thanked for their many years of faithful ministry. The meeting was asked to respect their decision and channel all church ministry requests through the church office.

Cathy Watson was invited to share progress on the Bethel programme.

The Programme's vision is to "serve families and young people in practical, social and spiritual ways."

Phase one is a Listening exercise to see how we can serve the community. Questions asked include: What are we already doing in the parish? How are our facilities being used? What are we as individuals already doing in the community? What are other organisations already doing? What can we learn from what other organisations are doing across the country? What do those in the community need?

Much of this information has already been compiled, and interviews and a questionnaire are currently being carried out with a range of church groups and the wider community. The results will be compiled and analysed by the Bethel team and a draft Phase 2 plan will be presented to the PCC in July.

There are still challenges as we seek to follow God including the challenge of finances. Our ministry must be based on firm financial foundations, but we must balance this with the need to be stepping out in faith where God calls us.

The future of what the Church of England looks like following General Synod's vote on same sex blessings, is a challenge to some. We are now in a period of waiting for further information on the processes involved for our Parish, from the Diocese and the wider Church of England. The Rector feels it is unhelpful for him to say where he stands on the issue, as this might potentially skew any decision that we may have to come to as a PCC in due course. He encouraged us to pray that in all that is said and done locally, nationally and globally we will bring honour to God and it will not divide us.

In the meantime, we continue to affirm our Patrons – CPAS, who have released a statement saying "Recognising that the Prayers are still in draft form, and that important new Pastoral Guidance is being produced, our team will be working to support parishes and ministers during this season of uncertainty. We remain committed to playing our part to support the mission of the Church of England."

The Rector concluded by saying his prayer is that we will continue to move forward as an authentic, vibrant community, centered around Jesus, grounded in His word and moving in the power of the Spirit.

7. Finance

The treasurer presented the accounts for the last financial year ending 31 December 2022.

St Laurence's general income has increased as a result of the Gift Month appeal in October. Both standing orders and one off gifts increased and total income was £169,532 St Laurence's expenditure was £192,226. It was noted the church running costs have increased mostly due to the high energy costs.

For 2022:

St Laurence's showed a deficit of £22,694

St Michaels's showed a deficit of £3,521

All Saints showed a deficit of £9,727

All deficits have been covered by unrestricted reserves made possible from past gifts.

Unrestricted reserves at the 3 churches are as follows:

St Laurence's – £119,521

All Saints £31,234

St Michael's £23,612

These figures are down on previous years. This is our "rainy day monies", which are needed for

- ongoing General Fund deficits – St Laurence's is currently running at £26k per year and St Michael's at £4k per year;
- ongoing maintenance for church building repairs;
- periodic extra costs such as the recent AV upgrade in St Laurence's and anything else unexpected.

General funds budgets for 2023

All Saints £352 surplus – no effect on existing reserves

St Michael's £3,834 deficit – enough existing reserves to cover 6 years of deficits

St L's £25,708 deficit – enough existing reserves to cover 4 years of deficits, but would be less if there are extra maintenance costs.

The finance committee has looked very hard at our expenditure and there really isn't any way of making any meaningful cuts that wouldn't severely affect the ministry of the church.

The treasurer reminded us that there are a variety of ways of giving, which are all detailed on our parish website.

The auditors have written that they have no concerns in connection with the examination of the accounts.

Proposal of acceptance of the accounts: Proposed Graham Vince, seconded by Dan Wallis, all in favour.

Proposed reappointment of Whittingham Riddel as the independent examiners. Proposed Graham Vince, seconded Steve King, all in favour.

The treasurer concluded by thanking the treasurers of All Saints and St Michael's, the Money Counters, the Finance Committee and the auditors.

The Rector thanked Graham Vince, the treasurer, for all his hard work.

8. Annual Fabric Report

The full written report is in the annual report booklet.

9. Deanery Synod Report

The full written report is in the annual report booklet.

10. Safeguarding

Chrissie Pepler introduced herself as the Parish Safeguarding Officer. She reminded the meeting that it is everybody's duty to look out for safeguarding issues.

She thanked Margaret Benson who works processing the DBS checks with people, and this process has moved online this year. .

She also thanked Julie Lawton who has been our PCC link this year. Safeguarding is integral in all we do.

She confirmed that Safer Recruitment is for those who apply to work with children, but it is not done retrospectively.

11. Elections

a) To the Deanery Synod. There were no nominations received.

b) To the Parochial Church Council for Stretton Parish:

- There was one nomination to represent St Laurence's, from Graham Shuttleworth. He was duly elected
- There were no nominations to represent All Saints.
- There were no nominations to represent St Michael's.

c) To the roles of Deputy Church Warden for each of St Laurence's and All Saints for three years.

- For St Laurence, James Foster
- For All Saints, Moira Matthews

They were duly elected

e) To the District Church Council of All Saints:

- There was one nomination, from Chris Jones.

She was duly elected.

The election of Deputy Churchwarden at St Michael's and appointments to St Michael's ECC will be made at their AGM on 2nd May.

12 Parish Governance Scheme - confirmation of scheme agreed APCM 2021, now including reference to LEP.

The Parish Governance Scheme which was proposed in 2021 allows the PCC to concentrate on wider parish matters, and day to day details of each church will be dealt with by the DCCs and ECC.

The Parish Governance Scheme was presented, which now includes reference to the renewed LEP at St Michael's.

An amendment to the presented document was proposed. Under point 3b "Membership of the PCC", the following addition was proposed:

"In the event that insufficient nominations for these places are received from the respective churches, nominations from members of any of the other churches would be accepted, with such members to be elected for a one-year term and may serve such a position for up to two consecutive terms."

Marion Shuttleworth proposed acceptance of the Scheme with the above amendment.

Seconded: Daniel Robinson

Abstentions: 3

Against: 0

In favour – everyone else was in favour.

13 Questions /Matters to be referred to the PCC.

Fane Conant asked if there are any ideas for planned intentional evangelism which would feed into Alpha, eg guest services. The Rector referred to the five-year plan.

There was a request to include a report on the music in next year's annual report.

14. Closing Prayer

The meeting closed in prayer.