

Parish Priest Report – APCM 2024

Dear Friends,

I would like to begin my report with a heartfelt thank you to each and every one of you. Beatrice and our family truly feel the warmth of your love and support, and I cannot express enough how much of a blessing you all are to my ministry. Your friendship, encouragement, and most importantly, your prayers, form the bedrock of my work alongside you. We are incredibly fortunate at St. Andrew's to be part of such a caring and nurturing community. My hope and prayer are that we continue to experience God's abundant blessings as we deepen our understanding of what it means to be members of the Body of Christ.

Though 2023 may feel like a distant memory, it has been a year of significant growth for St. Andrew's Church across various aspects of our communal life. It's impossible to capture every detail in this report, but I am deeply grateful to God for the abundance of blessings we've experienced. Allow me to highlight a few key moments from the past year.

Firstly, we had the PCC Away Day which was held at the Living Well. This gave the PCC an opportunity to review our Mission Action Plan, and to plan for the future. We were able to explore our strength, challenges and opportunities for growth at St Andrew's. Please pray for God's blessing as we seek to implement our Mission Plan. We need to continue being a church that is responding to the call of Christ in every part of our lives; a church whose focus is on making new disciples, and helping them to encounter the Lord Jesus and his transforming power.

Secondly, Messy Church met a number of times and was well supported by our local schools. It was a joy to see so many children with their parents attend every time it was held. We have a lot of activities including Bible stories with plenty of participation, and conclude with a family tea. It is a blessing to have a team of volunteers that is committed and make the afternoon a success. Thank you to every one for your support and especially Hilary & Julian who did all the organising and producing the teaching material. Thank you for your time and dedication to this wonderful outreach initiative. However, I am sorry to say that we haven't had a Messy Church meeting this year, due to the lack of enough volunteers. We need more volunteers for this important mission initiative to flourish. Please pray and if you feel moved to help – then it will be lovely to hear from you.

Thirdly, we held a Gift Day which was well supported not only by regular members of our church but by our local community. The Bible teaches that, "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (Corinthians 9:7). This is exactly what we witnessed on the 23rd September, people gave generously to God's Church. A sum of over £7000 was raised. A big thank you to everyone for your generosity.

We also held our annual Open Gardens event in which people in our local community opened their gardens to the public. Thank you to Linda Owen and her team of volunteers for organising this wonderful event. It was a great pleasure, enjoying many different designs of gardens with beautiful plants. Following this event, we invited the gardeners to a "Thank you high tea with entertainment" in the community hall. This strengthened the bond between St Andrew's and the local community, especially seeing everyone enjoying getting together with us.

Another highlight of the year was the witnessing of first ever Coronation of a King in 70 years. On Sunday 7th May, we commemorated this historic event with a special Thanksgiving service held in the church; and a Street party. What a brilliant occasion. It was wonderful to see the Reading Street local community gathering to sing, dance and eat together. I was greatly encouraged to hear so many

positive comments about St Andrew's Church from people in the community whom we don't normally see.

The devotional life of the church is blessed as we continue with our witness and service, and we are all extremely encouraged by so many parents bringing their children to church for holy baptism. The greater blessing is the families who continue to join us and offer worship with us.

It is encouraging to see our Junior church grow in numbers, through the dedication of Sharon, Fiona Maxine and all the helpers who teach these children.

It has been a real joy for me over my time here to build relationships with our local schools St Peter's Junior and Callis Grange schools as a governor but also as a visitor to the schools through assemblies and other invitations. Having these schools visit the church regularly is also a real blessing and pleasure and the services we have shared together have been wonderful times of celebration. I very much hope these relationships continue to develop and my prayer is that with time some of you will feel confident and able to join me in this work in and with the schools.

The refurbishment of the Community hall has made a big difference to the witness of the church at St Andrew's. The local community is impressed to know that it has a home at St Andrew's. And now the work of fitting a new kitchen is well and truly underway. We are all thankful to those who have generously given towards this project. I'm fully aware of all the effort that has been put in towards us achieving our goal. None of these projects can be successful without the tremendous work and support of everyone in our church family. We take this opportunity to give special thanks Graham and his team of volunteers for the wonderful work they have done and continues to do. We could not have done it without your expertise and passion for the project.

We thank God that new members have joined us and it is our hope that as we welcome them and encourage them they will enjoy everything St Andrew's has to offer as a fellowship.

Undoubtedly, there will be other things that crop up over the coming months and God will want to show us new people to minister to and new things to be involved with. Above everything, and whilst we focus our minds on our Mission Plan we have to fully rely on God in everything and submit everything to him for approval. God who has started this good work in Reading Street wants to complete it and our main task is to be obedient and faithful to him.

Human life inevitably involves challenges and sorrows: in the past year, our church has mourned the loss of three devoted members. Though they have found peace with the Lord, their absence is keenly felt, and we hold Anne Pearse, Olive Deed, and Joy Johnson in fond remembrance, filled with love and gratitude. We pray for God's strength to uphold those who remain in grief, and for our church community to offer support during this difficult time.

The Parochial Church Council has been a source of blessing to St Andrew's, with its dedicated members showing exceptional commitment and diligence. Their efforts have not gone unnoticed. Thank you too to all the various sub committees. Please know that when I tell other clergy that I look forward to our meetings, they look back at me with awe and envy. Thank you.

To our Church Officers—Jenny, Janet, and Richard—we extend heartfelt appreciation for their loyal service and passionate dedication to God's work at St. Andrew's. Their selfless contributions of time, talent, and energy are truly commendable.

This Vestry Meeting sadly marks the resignation of Janet as PCC secretary and I cannot sufficiently express my thanks and deep gratitude for her tireless work and unwavering support to me in my ministry. Your support and encouragement has been a blessing to everyone at St Andrew's. Thank you very much Janet.

We must acknowledge and express our appreciation of Michael as our Reader. Michael's ministry is a true gift of Christ to the church. He has been a rock to my own ministry for many years, and he blesses us all as he leads us in worship into a deeper fellowship with our Lord. Michael Thank you.

I am speaking for us all in saying we recognise the debt of thanks that is owed to all who contribute to worship at St Andrew's. Our sacristans, our intercessors, the pastoral team, as well as those who administer home communion led by Di; the ladies who arrange the flowers, Phil who keeps our church building tidy-, and our thanks to the Verger & his Assistant for their service to God's church. Our thanks to the Janet Porter and the Women's Group. We have a wonderful team of helpers who clean the community hall; their humble unsung generous work is a true offering to God. Thank you.

We all thank Susan our gifted organist, and Sean music director and our choir for the music that enlivens our church services, and brings beauty in worship.

Annual reports will always find some unintentional failing to commend someone's service. As God so freely forgives our failures, forgive me if I have failed to acknowledge someone. We know that God himself has seen what everyone has done in His service.

As we continue on our Christian journey, let us look to the past with gratitude, but also to the future with confidence and anticipation and great hope and let us pray that God will continue to pour out His Holy Spirit on us over the coming months as we seek to make Him known in this community and draw near to him through our life together in this place.

As I close, I profoundly wish to express our gratefulness as a family for the love and friendship we share with you; with my warmest thanks for standing beside me in the faith of the Gospel of Christ.

With Christian love.

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