

## **REVIEW OF CHURCH ACTIVITIES IN 2023** **(with updates to 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2024)**

The Annual Report for 2023 includes the whole of that calendar year and activities up to 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2024 with the **report being approved by the PCC on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2024** and is being presented to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) today.

### **CHURCH SCHOOLS:**

As part of our on-going commitment to our Church Schools, we continued to purchase sufficient **bibles to enable each child in year three, at both Howick and Cop Lane Schools, to have their own copy** to use for the remaining four years at their primary school and then to take with them when they move onto secondary education. Presentation of bibles to each school took place during the Autumn term. This continues to be very much appreciated by pupils, their parents and staff alike.

**At Howick Primary school**, there had been unanimous approval for the change of status from a community school to a **voluntary aided status**. In effect, very little changed as the school and has been in effect operating as church school for some time. Some funding changes with the Diocese supporting more but the main effect is that Foundation (church) Governors on the Governing Board now have a majority membership over all other governor's status. **Cop Lane school has been a voluntary aided school for some time.**

**A Statutory Inspection of Anglican & Methodists Schools (SIAMS) took place at Howick in 2023** was undertaken under the new format in which schools are no longer judged with gradings such as *"Outstanding;" "Good;" "Requires Improvement"*. Instead, inspectors now make one of two judgements only. The school was assessed with the better of the two gradings namely: -

**"The Inspection findings indicate that the school is living up to its foundation as a Church school and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish"**

The PCC passed a resolution unanimously that "congratulations should be recorded to the Headteacher, staff and pupils as well as the Governors on an excellent result" and this was conveyed to the Headteacher.

**At Cop Lane Primary School** they had achieved a number of quality marks for excellence including the Bishops Silver Award. Pupils from the Juniors that is Years 3- 6 have continued to visit church termly for a short "Ministry of The Word" service which had gone very well with both staff and pupils.

AS part of the community award, the school initiated a project between the school and the church parishioners whereby some parishioners knitted eight-inch squares. In January, 2024, a few ladies from the parish who had knitted the squares, together with Jill Howe (a churchwarden and former teacher at Cop Lane) took all the knitted squares up to school where some of Year 6 pupils were given instructions and assistance in sewing up these squares making three blankets. In February this year the Manager of the Foxton Centre in Preston, where homeless persons reside, attended school and in accepting the blankets explained what the Charity does to support the homeless in Preston.

### VOLUNTEERS:

The Church Regulations require that any “*substantial voluntary help*” must be recorded in their Annual Report. There is a small group of active parishioners who give of their services in financial management, general maintenance and administration. The Parish is very fortunate to have such people who are prepared to continue to give so much of their time and talents for the benefit of the Parish. Our Vicar continues to say this publicly on all occasions. We are required by the Church Regulations to state if any member of the PCC has received any payment for their services during the course of the year. We report that David and Rachel Tuke are members of the bell-ringing team and their fees are in accordance with those approved by the PCC. Our organist Rhoda Martin is also paid in accordance with the approved RSCM rates for weddings, funerals and the 10.15am service on Sundays.

We do not have an appointed vergers but when a wedding or funeral takes place, the Vicar asks if one of the churchwardens could act as a vergers. David Thornton and Jill Howe (Churchwardens) perform these duties but only infrequently and are paid the statutory fee in each case. This is not really defined as “*substantial voluntary help*” because only a small fee is paid but with the other substantial voluntary work each undertakes, it was felt this should be recorded in this report to demonstrate transparency.

### PARISH SHARE

**Parish Share** is a national scheme with each Diocese raising funds so they are able to pay the Vicar’s stipend and provide other diocesan services. Dioceses’ use different formulas and the Blackburn one means that St Mary’s were required to ‘donate’ in 2023 the sum of £77,000. In every year previously we have been able to pay in full the Parish Share.

The Standing Committee (consisting of the Vicar, the three churchwardens, the treasurer and one lay member of the PCC) discussed the 2023 Parish Share amount. The treasurer indicated that in 2023 **we would not be able to balance the books** particularly as the Quinquennial Inspection had identified that £55,000 worth of repairs would have to be spent to keep our Grade 2\* building safe and secure. We had insufficient reserves to be able to pay the full Parish Share. The matter was discussed at the next full PCC meeting and the Council unanimously voted in favour of a resolution that we could only afford to pay the Vicar Stipend. This resolution was sent to the Diocese.

After some considerable time, the Vicar, Churchwardens and our treasurer were able to meet face to face with the Archdeacon of Blackburn, the Diocesan Finance Officer and the Chairman of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF). We were able to put our case providing figures and evidence to support our application. The Diocesan representatives then retired and, on their return, they put the following compromise solution. **“For the next two years our Parish Share would be reduced to £62,000 (a reduction of £15,000) that is £30K support by the DBF over the 2 years. In addition, if our revised Parish Share was met for 3yrs, the arrears would be written off depending upon the amount of reserves held”.**

Subsequently the Standing Committee met and recommended acceptance by the full PCC which was unanimously approved and this is reflected in our accounts for 2023.

### PARISH FINANCES:

The Statement of Financial Practice (SOFP) 2015 and the subsequent changes to the Church Accounting Practices dictate how our accounts have to be prepared.

David Tuke is our treasurer, who has financial skills and he has prepared the accounts using specifically designed computer software for church accounting procedures and we have been able to show a true comparison with activity in 2022 alongside 2023.

The accounts, balance sheet and notes to the accounts forming part of the annual report are shown on pages 1 -10 including the Independent Examiners certificate giving us a clear bill of health (see page 11). These will be explained by our treasurer with a PowerPoint presentation at our Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) scheduled to take place in church about 11.30am on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2023 after the 10.15am service.

The Church Regulations state that both the Annual Report and Accounts have to be approved by the PCC as they are the Trustees and this was done on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2024. They are later presented at the APCM with a treasurer's power-point presentation for those present to receive and note. Details are then forwarded electronically to both the Church of England Statistics Branch and the Diocese before the deadline date.

### **ECUMENICAL MATTERS:**

All eight churches in Penwortham form the Ecumenical Group known as "***Churches Together in Penwortham***": – two are Church of England (St. Leonard's and ourselves), two are Methodist, two are Roman Catholic, one is the United Reform Church and the eighth is a free church which meets in Whitefield Road Primary School. Each church reports events to South Ribble Borough Council's (SRBC's) Community Liaison Officer, the various events and services which happen during Advent and over Christmas who then produce and distribute a leaflet highlighting all these events in Penwortham.

Members of our church are on the "***Churches Together in Penwortham***" and take an active role on this Group with our Rachel Tuke being the Deputy moderator and Sue Vendy being the treasurer. The group also arranges collections of food supplies from the various churches in Penwortham to stock up the town's Foodbank where goods are distributed every Friday. Similarly, both **Penwortham Live 23 in May** and **Penwortham Gala** in June, 2023 took place with active involvement of St Mary's at each event. These events will again take place in 2024.

To mark the **King Charles III Coronation**, the parish displayed an exhibition of more than 250 creatively decorated tops of weather vanes. Three animal templates made out of wood were distributed to both church primary schools as well as parishioners. The project was named "*Coronation Conservation*" with each animal attached to the top of a wooden poll by a single pin to become a weather vane.

The church was open leading up to the Coronation weekend at the beginning of May when members of the public came to see this spectacular exhibition. The exhibition remained in situ until the **Penwortham Live Music Festival 2023** which took place some two weeks later- the culmination of which was the parish hosting a "Vicars Tea Party" on the Saturday to which the community of Penwortham were invited. The whole event created both public and local press interest. We thank David Ryan, both Church schools and parishioners who took part as well as all those who helped in any way.

In December, 2022 the North West Air Ambulance (NWAS) held, in our Church, their Christmas Fayre and Carol Concert. They were very impressed with the facilities and the support from the church officials. It was open to the public at large and the church was packed. Some of the money raised was donated to the parish. Such was the success of this event, NWAS were eager to hold a similar event in December 2023 with even more stalls. Again, it was a rousing success and NWAS had now decided to make this an annual event in our church. The bonus was that a donation to church funds was made.

All these events raised the church profile and enhanced the links between the church schools, the Penwortham community and the public at large and the church.

**CHILDREN / VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION & SAFE FROM HARM POLICY:**

Gareth Allen, our Parish Safeguarding Officer updated our Policies and Appendices which were presented and re-affirmed by the PCC in July 2023. These documents continue to be displayed in Church and on our Church website. The forms in the appendices continue to be valid and there was also no change needed to the Vulnerable Adult Policy.

The Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) has become much more rigorous as the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), now called "Thirtyoneeight", have had to comply with the latest changes to the Data Protection Policy. This is now giving greater security to our applicants moving forward as the information provided is highly sensitive.

The Church of England issued new instructions on what information about safeguarding had to be clearly displayed in church as well as on our church website. We can report that we are totally compliant.

We continue to be committed to providing a safe environment for all children and vulnerable adults. We are now at level 1 on the safeguarding hub and we will be looking at progressing to further levels by completing additional activities on the safeguarding hub home page.

**THE CHURCH BUILDING:**

**QUINQUENNIAL (every 5 years) INSPECTION:**

Every five years a full report (quinquennial report) on the condition and fabric of our Grade II\* listed church has to be carried out by a diocesan approved qualified architect who for us is Stephen Fish. The Inspection report was received in 2023 and the cost of remedial work required to be undertaken was £55K.

**THE 1956 ANNEX AT THE NORTH WEST PART OF THE CHURCH:**

The money from the sale of Glebe land in 2017, upon which our former Church Hall on Cop Lane stood, was ring fenced to provide additional accommodation for community and church use. Considerable discussions and advice were sought as what kind of building we would want but just before COVID we were actively pursuing knocking down the 1956 extension and constructing a new purpose built two storey structure. This would have incorporated on the upper level (same level as the nave) a fitted kitchen, disabled toilets and a meeting room large enough for some 15 people to meet. On the lower level, where the current boilers are situated, there would have been storage, the parish office and a room large enough to accommodate 30 pupils and two members of staff where children from either Cop Lane and Howick Schools could spend a full day covering various aspects of the school syllabus relating to the church building and churchyard.

However, with COVID everything came to a halt and in 2022 we started to have costings done but with the considerable increase in building costs and materials, we quickly realized that we couldn't afford to fund this, so we asked the architect to come up with plans which would enable us still to have all the facilities. The plan was to retain the 1956 extension and remodel the upper floor and to extend outwards on the lower level so we could have a classroom size room as well as storage facilities and a Parish Office. Stairs would link the two levels and following consultation with parishioners, a lift was put on the plan to make it more disabled friendly.

The PCC agreed to this plan and the architect started to make all the arrangements including various surveys and consultation with pressure groups which the planning regulations require. It is hoped that we can put the plans out to tender in the near future after they had been approved by both South Ribble Borough Council and the Diocesan Advisory Committee.

### **CHURCH INSURANCE (ECCLESIASTICAL) VISIT & REPORT:**

In 2023 we were informed of this visit by our insurance company and the Churchwardens and Vicar met with their representative. They looked at all aspects of security and procedures as well as Health & Safety issues. One month later we received the assessor's written report which on the whole was very positive. There were a number of matters which needed to be addressed. These have now been dealt with and the insurance company has been informed and are now satisfied.

### **THE LONG-TERM EFFECT OF COVID ON THE RUNNING OF THE CHURCH**

Our monthly Parish Magazine, from the April 2020 edition onwards, has been compiled as usual but not printed as volunteer distributors to the 300 plus households and other premises in Penwortham were not allowed under COVID restrictions. However, the magazine continues to be put on our church website and circulated by email to all 105 households who had authorised church matters to be sent by this method. Hard copies on each publication are left at the back of church as are copies of this Annual Report. This was the first occasion in over 150 years that the Church Magazine has not been printed and delivered by hand.

There was a nucleus of about eight or nine members of the congregation one or two of whom enhance the Sunday service with their musical contribution particularly during and after the administration of the sacraments. Without the support of our organist Rhoda Martin this would not have happened. The group known as the St Mary's Singers have continued to thrive and now many of the congregational responses are now sung with the congregation now taking a more active part.

COVID restrictions were gradually eased in 2022 with many of the legal requirements changed to advisory including the wearing of masks, the provision of hand sanitisers, social distancing and track and trace. This included the taking of the sacraments. **The issue of not taking/being offered the wine element at Holy Communion** was reviewed throughout the year. From Easter Sunday in 2023 both elements of bread and wine were offered but there was no requirement to take the wine element if people were still concerned. The Vicar makes this clear adding that by taking the bread only, they were fulfilling the requirement of taking the sacrament.

Almost every parishioner involved in the **young people's ministry** continued to show reluctance to return to the youth work they were doing pre COVID.

### **THE CHURCH GROUNDS SURROUNDING THE CHURCH ITSELF (covering the church yard and Castle Hill – [the site of an ancient Monument].)**

#### **THE CHURCHYARD (covering all three graveyards and Crow Wood)**

The maintenance of the churchyard is the responsibility of the South Ribble Borough Council (SRBC) as we are a **'Closed Churchyard'** and subject of 'an order of the Privy Council' back in the year 2000 which has been documented in most of the previous annual reports over the last 23 years. Therefore, only what has happened during the last year will now be included.

Mention has been made previously of **the embankment on the eastern side of the front graveyard running from the Lynchgate to just past the end of the chancel**. This embankment was examined and thought to be unstable and with a number of old graves near the edge of the embankment in the graveyard, they were liable to be exposed or slide down the embankment. It was necessary that South Ribble Borough Council should take remedial action as it is legally their responsibility to maintain everything in the three graveyards around the church.

South Ribble had to obtain a faculty (approval to carry out the work) from the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) which would include estimates for the work to be completed and a plan for the work to be undertaken which would possibly involve in re-interring the old graves until the work was completed. This work was delayed by COVID and when estimates were obtained by SRBC the costs were far more expensive and had not budgeted such a large amount in the financial year 22/23 so the revised estimates were included in the 23/24 financial year. The faculty has been approved by the PCC and the application is with the DAC now for formal approval.

**THE FUTURE:**

The COVID pandemic may well be over for most of us but the ongoing effects have hit the church with delays and these have been exacerbated with the energy crisis and the considerable rise in building costs.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "C. Nelson".

The Revd Chris Nelson – Vicar & PCC Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Thornton".

David Thornton - PCC Secretary

DJT/PCCSec/04.24