

## **PCC Secretary's Report**

This report describes and explains the PCC's activities in 2023.

### **Finance**

The parish began 2023 in a reasonably healthy financial position, with its parish share for 2022 fully paid. Advertising revenue from the Bridge magazine continued to be healthy and was fully paid into our account by early spring. With encouragement from the parish's financial overseers, take up for the Parish Giving Scheme continued to slowly increase, although some people continue to give regularly by monthly standing orders. David Bennison and David McCulloch continued to work together on the accounts as Treasurer and Ass Treasurer, with Helen Davison's occasional assistance, depending on her availability.

In the first part of the year, the dramatic increase in inflation, particularly in fuel, meant that a few thousand pounds more than had been budgeted for had to be paid to SSE to ensure that both our churches had at least minimal heating through the winter and early spring. This happened despite a grant coming from the diocese to support parishes to pay their fuel bills in a time of fuel poverty. A new contract was then negotiated to fix the gas and electricity prices at as low a cost as possible to the parish, but by the end of the year certain disputes about how much we should still be paying to SSE were outstanding and need resolution in 2024. Mainly due to thousands of pounds of fuel costs, the parish finished the year with a sizable deficit, and the PCC recognised that further attempts to improve the stewardship of our resources will need to be made.

David McCulloch was tasked by the PCC to work towards establishing cashless donations in our churches, and a machine was purchased in the late spring to be housed permanently at St Edmund's (since many casual visitors come past in the summer) and occasionally taken to St Mark's for special services. Unfortunately, the aim to get the machine running by the summer proved impossible due to a number of teething problems. Despite advisory visits by diocesan staff and technical input by Warwick Hammerton, the machine was still not in regular use at the end of 2023.

The PCC tried to offset the considerable increase in its fuel bills by increasing the charge to those who use our facilities i.e. the Barn, the coffee lounge and the church at St Mark's. The monthly Barn Hire went up less than the Skate Club's electricity payments. Generally speaking, the PCC approved an increase of 10% on our hire charges which was agreed to by the majority of those who used our spaces. A few regular users were unable to afford the increase, but they were replaced by others later in 2023. The year ended with the coffee lounge and church being regularly used throughout the week, and the diocese starting to use our hired spaces for Island Church training purposes, bringing in much needed additional income.

During the early summer, the PCC agreed to increase the wages of our cleaner by 10%. The PCC also agreed to increase David McCulloch's salary as organist and church musician according to recommended RSCM rates, as these had not been adjusted for a decade. This resulted in an increase in the organist's salary of about 20%.

## **Working Towards a New Plurality**

The PCC's representatives (Ann Capps, Harry Kirby and David Bennison) continued to attend regular meetings with members of the PCCs of East Cowes and Whippingham to discuss a way of working together. By around Easter, an understanding had been reached in conjunction with Archdeacon Steve Daughtery that Wootton would not remain in a plurality with Binstead and Havenstreet, nor would be part of the future Ryde area. The parishes of East Cowes, Whippingham and Wootton would eventually come together in an East Medina plurality. Although this was not yet officially formed by the end of 2023, the PCC has decided that this will be the way forward for our parish.

In the first half of the year, meetings between representatives of the East Medina parishes were convened by Stuart McKerracher from Whippingham. He moved away in the summer, but our parishes' churchwardens and representatives continued to make progress together. Wootton parish formally left the Binstead, Havenstreet and Wootton plurality in the autumn and, with the Archdeacon's help, East Medina plurality began the process of advertising for an incumbent before the end of the year. The first attempt was unsuccessful, but further attempts will be made early next year, and making an appointment for an incumbent for our new plurality is recognised by the PCC and the diocese as a priority for 2024. The PCC recognises that our interregnum of more than 3 years has led to additional strains on our parish and its lay leadership in a variety of ways.

## **Buildings, Land & Fabric**

The long-running saga of the grave that had been opened in St Edmund's churchyard finally came to an end when a faculty was granted to reseal a grave belonging to a member of the List family. No close living relatives were rediscovered, and Mike Broadsmith and Doreen Gazey were able to bring their dedicated work to a close researching the grave, searching for family members and applying for faculties. The grave was reconsecrated by Rev Len Fox in the summer in the presence of witnesses. By the end of the year, Mike Broadsmith had completed a grave plan of St Edmund's churchyard and its extension across the footpath. The PCC also addressed the need for appropriate but pastorally sensitive memorials for children's graves, noting in particular one that was not in keeping with others at St Edmund's but recognising that people's sensibilities today are different.

Two young people continued their work clearing and tidying the copse opposite St Edmund's as part of their work towards a Duke of Edinburgh's Award. One of these continued his work throughout the year lawnmowing, and generally tidying our green spaces. Concern continued to be expressed for occasional journeys by heavy vehicles in front of St Edmund's which damages the private road and could cause damage to the church due to vibration.

Stephen Capps, with the support of Steve Beynon, made ongoing repairs to the car park at St Mark's where their skills saved the PCC large sums of money. The PCC noted its ongoing thanks to both, but especially Stephen for everything he has done for us. The unusually wet weather in the autumn and early winter did cause some

concern with leaks particularly at St Mark's. However, this is an ongoing problem with the high dormer windows and requires regular monitoring.

## **Safeguarding**

Steve Beynon continued his work as Safeguarding Officer to ensure that PCC members were DBS checked. This was gradually achieved during the course of 2023. He was informed by the diocese that DBS checks for paid parish posts were likely to incur costs to the PCC, because the diocese was no longer willing to do DBS checks in these circumstances for free.

In the spring, the diocese began to direct PCC members and those playing leadership roles in the parish e.g. churchwardens, Lay Worship Leaders etc. to attend face-to-face training sessions. However, these did not always take place as scheduled.

In the summer, a request was made to the PCC about a man who wished to use one of our churches to pray regularly, particularly to recite a quasi-monastic Office when he was available in the parish. After some deliberation and concerns about safeguarding, this was permitted, as long as it was made clear that he would lock the door of St Edmund's while he was praying to avoid accusations that he was an official representative of the parish, to ensure that the public would not disturb him, and ensure the safety of all.

At the end of the year, Hilary Baldwin realised that her work as Anna Chaplain and other responsibilities would prevent her from continuing as the parish Safeguarding officer. However, Steve Beynon was willing to replace her with immediate effect, and his experience and competence has given the PCC much reassurance, while the training requirements of the diocese for those in leadership roles continues to increase. The PCC greatly appreciate the safeguarding work that Hilary Baldwin did on our behalf.

## **Pastoral Activities**

Hilary Baldwin continued her work as a licensed Anna Chaplain. A monthly service was set up at Solent Grange led by Hilary, David Bennison and Helen Hopper. Hilary's work gradually developed across Wootton through visits to individuals and to care homes in collaboration with the pastoral team. She has been in contact with the other parishes in the future East Medina plurality to encourage them to look for Anna Chaplains in their parishes, with the aim that they will work together for the good of the elderly across the plurality.

Café Communion continued on the first Wednesday of the month at 1115am at St Mark's and was consistently well supported. Rev Len Fox volunteered to be the regular priest at these services and lunch is always provided afterwards, with people pre-booking if they would like to eat. The PCC particularly recognises the hard work that Ann Capps and others have put in to enable this new form of ministry to be such a success.

Parish coffee mornings were occasionally held at St Mark's hosted by Steve and Sue Beynon. The delicious homemade cakes that are often provided have great impact

and numbers have been good when they have been able to be organised. The Mark's Brothers Men's Group continues to run successfully under the leadership of Harry Kirby, and this has developed into a cooked breakfast group due to popular demand!

It was recognised by the PCC early in 2023 that Little Lions was not being well supported, and changes were made. "Stay and Play" was launched when the summer holidays had ended on Thursdays at 915am and this has proved very popular. Some money was invested in providing new play equipment. Steve and Sue Beynon also attempted to start a Holiday Club during the summer holidays but this was not so well supported and has not been continued. Schools ministry, including a regular visit to the school to lead worship by a team of Harry Kirby, Steve and Sue Beynon and Hilary Baldwin, and visits from the school children for 3 services in the year including their own Christingle have gone very well, led by the parish's own lay ministers.

### **Miscellaneous Activities**

The parish continued to support the School's Hardship Fund to safeguard the accessibility of cheap school meals for disadvantaged children, and regular collections were taken at the new Café Communion service, which were generously supported. At the end of 2023, this was changed so that the collections would equally support the School's Hardship Fund and parish funds.

Services continued to adapt to the post-Covid situation with the introduction to some or all the Brunch service taking place in the coffee lounge, and Steve Beynon being asked to lead this important family focussed service. The Big Mac talk continued to take place after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month 930am Morning Worship service. There was some discussion throughout the year about how reception from the cup should be managed at Holy Communion services, with some preferring intinction of the wafer into the cup by the priest and others desiring that we return to the traditional practice of receiving from the cup separately. The PCC approved that drinking from the common cup should be permitted if a person wished, but intinction by the priest should be accommodated, and this is often the most common practice. The worship group continued to meet as required to discuss how certain special services should be arranged and ensure that good liaison in planning services between different lay leaders would take place. Rev Jonathan Hall joined our PTO priest team in supporting our leadership of Holy Communion services. With his, Len Fox's and Sandie Osborne's support, the parish has been able to continue to usually provide Holy Communion on Sundays twice a month, on most Wednesday's in the month at St Edmund's and Café Communion at St Mark's. The PCC expressed its ongoing gratitude to them for their time and ministry.

The PCC noted on several occasions throughout the year how expectations from the diocese about finding new officers for important positions to monitor health and safety, finance, taking bookings for the church and coffee lounge and safeguarding are proving harder than ever to find volunteers for. With the more rigorous expectations often made on parishes by the diocese in line with national

expectations and the demands on the time of volunteers has shown that filling these positions can very difficult.

The year ended on a highpoint with the service of Christingle, comfortably the best attended service of the year. The PCC noted how well planned, advertised and executed worship under the leadership of creative and committed lay ministers creates an enthusiasm for churchgoing that is still present despite the shock of Covid and was visible again after the death of Her Majesty the Queen, when both our churches were briefly open for prayer. The PCC continues to recognise that encouraging people's desire to seek and find God's presence wherever he comes to us is our prime motivation for the parish's ministry in our local community.