

**Minutes of the Annual Joint Meeting of Parishioners, and the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, held on Wednesday 7 May, 2025 at 8pm in the Church and online via Zoom.**



**Present:** Nick Prideaux (Vice Chair), Rev Tom Nash, John McLernon (Church Warden), Stephen Rigby (Church Warden), Steve Tunstead (Treasurer), Phil Jones (Electoral Roll Officer) and 74 parishioners (list available) and others via Zoom.

**Apologies:** Sue Taylor, James and Aimie Finlayson, Maddy Doherty, Jean Plumbridge, Nigel and Louise Taylor, Gary Thompson, Carmen Yu, Helen Stone, Sarah Bailey, Paul Sperring, Marlene Honeysett, Simon Curtis, Arsen and Ruth Avanesov, Charissa Buggs, Ian and Sue Gates, Rev Stephen Boon, Jono Chalklin and Naomi Vallely

Rev Tom Nash warmly welcomed everyone and the congregation sang 'Awake, awake O Zion'.

Rev Tom Nash gave a short talk from 2 Kings 6:8-23 and reminded us of the context of the passage. Elisha has taken over from the prophet Elijah. In chapter 6 Syria is at war with Israel. For the King of Syria, it felt like every time he made a move the King of Israel was ready. Israel seemed to know all his plans. God tells Elisha all of the King of Syria's plans and when the King of Syria finds this out, they try to surround Elisha.

Rev Nash gave us three reminders from this Bible passage:

- We see a moment of helplessness (6:15). God's people will often feel humanly outnumbered.
- We get a word of reality (6:16). The word comes before sight. There is a command not to be afraid ("Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them").
- There is a vision of strength (6:17). Elisha prayed, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." When God opens our eyes we can see Jesus' death is the greatest display of glory, grace, wisdom and strength.

Right at the end of this passage we see how God triumphs through grace (vv20-23). We get a foretaste of how God overcame evil through the cross and he wins through his grace. This is where we see true strength.

The congregation prayed in groups.

### **Joint meeting of Parishioners**

Nick Prideaux (Vice Chair) added his welcome to everyone in attendance, both in the building and on Zoom.

#### **1. Apologies for absence**

Lucy Warriner (PCC Secretary) listed names of church members who presented their apologies in advance.

#### **2. Minutes**

The approval of the minutes was proposed by Jessica Tait and seconded by Andy Macdonald-Brown and duly adopted.

#### **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising to report.

#### **4. Election of Wardens**

Nick Prideaux thanked Stephen Rigby and John McLernon for their work as Church Wardens over the past year. Stephen has been a Warden for a number of years and John has completed his first year as Church Warden. The two nominations received for Church Wardens were for Stephen Rigby and John McLernon; both were duly elected for another year.

### **Annual Parochial Church Meeting**

#### **1. Minutes of the previous Annual Parochial Church Meeting**

The minutes were proposed by Jessica Tait and seconded by Andy Macdonald-Brown and duly adopted.

#### **2. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising to report.

#### **3. Election of PCC and Deanery Synod**

No nominations were received on the night. Nick told us that there are five Deanery Synod places, four of which are already filled. As no-one was nominated for the final Deanery Synod place, the remaining vacancy will be co-opted from the PCC. The four nominations for the PCC are Tony Whittome, Hayley Watts, James Finlayson and Al Simms. James and

All are new to the PCC and Tony and Hayley would continue to serve on the PCC. They were all duly elected and will serve for a three-year term of office.

Nick thanked Andy Bradshaw (also previously a Warden and a member of the Standing Committee), Simon Curtis (previously the Treasurer and a member of the Standing Committee), Pete Brown (who remains on the Church Family Support Fund) and Ali Scoble for their service (Ali finished early); they have all recently stepped down from the PCC.

The congregation prayed in groups for those in leadership within St John's Church and in particular for the PCC.

#### **4. Electoral Roll**

Phil Jones presented the electoral roll. He explained that we have had to start the electoral roll all over again this year. This happens every six years. The new list has been compiled and we now have 335 (2024: 329) on the electoral roll of St John's Church. Phil explained that 98 of those are people are on the electoral roll for the first time.

#### **5. Treasurer's report + appointment of independent examiner**

Steve Tunstead (PCC Treasurer) acknowledged the continued blessing from our Heavenly Father for his provision over many years, expressed through the generous giving of the church family and thanked the congregation on behalf of the PCC.

The annual accounts were approved by the PCC on 14 April 2025. Spending in 2024 decreased by 4.25% mostly due to a decrease in other property costs. In 2024 income increased by 14.95%. We are grateful for the commitment of the church family to the Gospel Ministry here at St John's. As a result, the audited accounts show a small operating surplus of £1822 in 2024.

Steve reported that the vicarage extension was completed early in 2024 and now makes an important contribution to Tom's ministry here at St John's.

Steve is grateful for the Church Family Support Fund which continues to make timely grants, and we hope that we will be able to continue this important part of ministry in 2025.

Steve thanked Toby Chiu for all her hard work as Accounts Administrator and Simon Curtis, our former Treasurer and current Gift Aid secretary, for his continuing advice and guidance.

The work of the Independent Examiner – Perrys – went well and Steve proposed that they be reappointed for a further year; this was agreed by those present at the meeting.

#### **6. Safeguarding**

Nick thanked Naomi Vallely (Parish Safeguarding Officer) for all that she does for the church in her safeguarding role. Ann Keenan read Naomi's report on her behalf.

Ann reminded us of what the roles of the safeguarding team are and how they work within the church. Naomi is the Parish Safeguarding Officer and also Lead Recruiter. The role of the Parish Safeguarding Officer is to have an overview of all church activities involving children, young people, and vulnerable adults and to make sure records are kept of those activities.

This involves:

- Liaising with the Vicar and with the diocesan safeguarding advisers, when necessary, over safeguarding issues.
- Reporting regularly to the PCC, via the safeguarding leads, and displaying safeguarding posters and information on the noticeboard and on the website.
- Offering advice and support over safeguarding matters to leaders of activities and advise on good safeguarding practice and training requirements according to national guidance.

Naomi is wonderfully supported by James Akroyd and Ann Keenan, who are also on the Safeguarding Team. Ann and James help Naomi to interpret national safeguarding guidance and to advise the PCC on its implementation at St John's.

The job of the Lead Recruiter is mainly to do the admin around DBS applications as part of the safer recruitment and people management programme.

As safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, those who hold any role within the church – paid or unpaid – are required to do safeguarding training to help them in their activities. Many of these safeguarding courses can be accessed online; Naomi hopes that we will be able to run some courses face to face as well.

Last year Naomi reported that we were joining with the Local Training Partnerships initiative run by the diocesan safeguarding trainer, Ruth Campbell, to host face to face leadership training. This came to fruition in February when

40 delegates came to St John's for a one-day session. Six leaders attended the course from St John's, and a seventh has recently done the same course on Zoom. This was the first of its kind in the diocese, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Naomi hopes that we will be able to run a similar day in the next year.

## **7. Church Warden's Report**

John McLernon confirmed that all of the buildings are generally in good repair. The PCC continues to discern the direction of travel the Church of England is taking in relation to the Prayers of Love and Faith (PFL) initiative, the impact of this and how St John's responds to this. We continue to have an ongoing dialogue with the Bishop of Rochester (our diocese) to ensure he knows the PCC's views, which are similar to those held in other orthodox churches in the diocese. We are grateful that the Bishop of Rochester is taking a leading role in the House of Bishops. John and Stephen are grateful to Andrew Smith who represents the diocese, but also St John's, on the General Synod.

John referred to the possibility of using the Ephesian Fund as payment to the diocese, mainly as a way of responding and showing our dissatisfaction to the direction that the House of Bishops is taking.

John referred to Stephen Boon's departure from the staff team at the end of August, as he returns to teaching full-time with the Proclamation Trust from September onwards. This move has resulted in a re-evaluation of staffing plans. In order to replace Stephen, John explained that there is a demand to make a larger contribution to the diocese funds.

It is a great encouragement to have a large number of young people and children entrusted to our care. We need to do all we can to keep our children and young people safe. It takes a huge team to teach our children faithfully from the Bible, and appropriately for their age. John is very grateful to all those involved. John ended by giving thanks to God for his provision and the way so many serve in different ministry areas in selfless acts of service.

The congregation prayed in groups. John encouraged us to give thanks for the following: the 98 new people on the electoral roll, the increase in giving, the Church Family Support Fund, and for our Safeguarding Team. He also encouraged us to give thanks for Nick Cornell and his ministry (Archdeacon of Tonbridge), for the PCC, the staff team and for Stephen Boon as he returns to Cornhill full-time.

## **8. Deanery Synod Report**

Andrew Smith presented the Deanery Synod report. He has been on the Deanery Synod for the past year. Andrew explained that the Deanery Synod is made up of representatives from 15 Church of England churches in Tunbridge Wells and the surrounding area. The number of members each church can send is based on the size of its electoral roll. As we have over 300 people on the electoral roll, we can send the maximum of five lay representatives at Tunbridge Wells Deanery Synod meetings. Licensed clergy in the deanery are automatically members.

The Deanery Synod meets three times a year, hosted by different churches. We hosted one in March. Andrew explained that they share news about activities, gospel work, ministries happening in churches around the town and surrounding areas and things going on in and around town, as well as hear about clergy moving into or out of the deanery. The Deanery Synod also hears from guest speakers. Andrew mentioned that Nick Cornell has recently become the Archdeacon of Tonbridge. In the hierarchy of the Church of England, an archdeacon roughly sits between parish clergy and bishops. We are grateful to God for Nick's appointment and his clear evangelical convictions.

Aside from attending the regular meetings, lay and clergy members of Deanery Synod have an important role to play in General Synod elections. Once every five years, they form the electorate and vote for our diocesan representatives at General Synod.

### **Submitted questions from Church Members**

One written question was submitted in advance.

**Q1.** Please, could and/or would the church consider some more provision/support for singles? I know, obviously, that we are blessed with a lot of families, but there is also a not insignificant proportion of singles within the church family, and we can sometimes feel a bit overlooked. Although there are plenty of individual couples/families who do really look out for and include singles, I feel the church "policy" overall doesn't achieve this as much as it could.

**And some suggestions:** e.g. more balance in the monthly prayer diary (e.g. currently usually 7-8 things a month for families/marriage/children's work vs one for singles, and would be good if the entries for singles could be a little more specific about some of the challenges singles face); perhaps we could encourage more mixing across "groups" and sharing of life, i.e. singles having families/couples over more, and vice versa; maybe more awareness generally of challenges that singles face day-to-day; having some more regular meetings during school holidays – at the moment virtually everything stops apart from Sunday mornings; etc.

**A1. Tom Nash response:** This is a helpful issue to be raised. Whilst we give thanks for the many families, babies, young people and children, this can make it very difficult for those who are single. It is great that families are looking outside the demographic of people like them. There is a danger of gravitating to people like us. It would be

good to go out of our way to get to know people who are not like us and to encourage more mixing across the groups. Let's think of ideas on how to do this so that in a year's time we have made progress.

**The roving microphone was taken to church members wanting to ask questions.**

**Q2. If we are going to have a new Associate Vicar, we have to pay a significant sum to the diocese. If we have to pay for the costs of the Associate Vicar as a church, why would we have to give money to the diocese on top of this?**

**A2. Stephen Rigby response:** The diocese has a deficit: it is spending more money than it receives from churches. The parish share has been a voluntary payment by churches to the diocese and this covers things like admin fees, safeguarding costs, Vicar costs. As the parish share has been a voluntary payment there hasn't been a specified amount that churches should give to the diocese.

Over time, we reduced what we gave to the diocese and started giving to the Rochester Good Stewards Trust as we wanted to know what the money was being spent on. A recent development is that the Bishop has said that he will not license anybody to preach here unless we will pay more money, which is 10% of income each year (about £60,000). We have got to pay the extra money if we want to license anyone to replace Stephen or get a church planter.

**Q3. What would happen if we got an Associate Vicar without the Bishop's approval?**

**A3. Stephen Rigby response:** We think that Tom would get a CDM (clergy disciplinary measure). We don't think we can get another Associate Vicar or church planter without paying the extra money.

Andrew Smith added a point of clarity about the extra money the diocese is asking from us. Andrew believes that we do have some control of where the money is spent through using the Ephesian Fund. Stephen Rigby and Andrew Smith will talk about this further outside of this meeting.

**Q4. If we have to pay this extra 10% is there any way we can put this money elsewhere, for example in a Trust? Is this something that we can explore and do?**

**A4. Stephen Rigby response:** There is a process going on with a separate trust outside the C of E which would be a charity that would support the work of St John's. This is an initiative of individuals and not the PCC. This trust is not yet in operation; they are still waiting for charity approval. It is not clear how this trust would operate.

**Q5. How are Helen and Jon's roles going? Were they one-year appointments and what is happening going forward?**

**A5. Nick Prideaux response:** It has gone very well. We are very grateful for the support from Jon Knight and Helen Hayward, providing continuity for us over the last few months. We are going to ask them both to continue to the end of July next year in their roles. This will provide continuity for a replacement for Stephen as Stephen Boon oversees this area.

**Q6. Presumably this news with the diocese is tricky with the process of interviewing for a church planter.**

**A6. Stephen Rigby response:** It is not great timing with the process of recruiting a church planter. There will be full disclosure on our part and we haven't decided to change what we are doing necessarily.

**Q7. Could we have an update on the finances for 2025?**

**A7. Steve Tunstead:** The deficit that we have budgeted for is just over £60,000 and we pray that giving would continue.

### **Looking Forward**

Looking forward, Rev Tom Nash highlighted the following:

1. Church plant – we think there is a real need for a church plant and an opportunity for the gospel. We are still hoping to appoint a church planter this September. Tom reminded us of the plan: the church planter would join us for two years, so they can get to know the congregation, build relationships and establish a core group and a location for the church plant.
2. Staffing update – Stephen Boon will be returning full time to the Proclamation Trust and to Cornhill in September. We are delighted to have Jon and Helen stay on for another year. We hope to have a couple of ministry trainees join the staff team.
3. Not resting on our laurels. Many people are serving wholeheartedly at St John's in different areas. There's lots to give thanks to God for but we must not become complacent, self-satisfied or confident because of our activity or size. Our security and strength must be in God and our eyes must be fixed on Jesus.

Rev Nash ended by reading Proverbs 19:21 and then prayed.

The congregation sang 'By Faith' to finish the meeting.

