

Ecclesiastes 1:9 reminds us, 'there is nothing new under the sun.' So in a sense, by God's grace, things at St John's have continued by and large the same as they've ever done. God's word has been taught across all ages and stages and people have been built up in Christ. But we don't want to take faithful ministry for granted and neither do we want to miss an opportunity to look back with thanksgiving for all that God has been doing in and through his people for his glory.

Our Sunday gatherings continue to be not only a focal point for us but also a tremendous source of encouragement. We have benefitted greatly as we've explored together Isaiah 49-55, Hebrews 5-7, John 16-17, 1 Thessalonians, Mark 1-8, Acts 1-2, Ruth, Matthew 24, 1 Peter 2, Genesis 37-50, and even had time to squeeze in a Bible overview and one series on guidance and another on sharing the gospel. Name badge Sundays, link-up lunches, and whole church lunches remain fun and effective ways to be growing in fellowship as we get to know one another better and share our lives as well as the gospel with each other. Looking back on our Sundays, a particular highlight has to be the baptism service we had last September where we witnessed seven of our church family publicly declare their faith in Jesus and were reminded of God's grace towards them.

Holiday Bible Clubs happen to fall just before APCM report writing so are fresh in my mind as I'm writing this. They've proven to be a wonderful opportunity both for many to serve within the church family and to be reaching out with the gospel to dozens of children and young people and their families.

We were sad to say farewell to Jonny and Ruth Pullar but delighted to see them begin to get settled in Modena. We continue to pray for them and all our mission partners that the Lord will strengthen them and use them in their service of him. Please do join us at our monthly prayer meetings as we pray for them and the many other people and ministries we need to bring to the Lord in prayer. We haven't just had departures though, and it's been a joy to welcome Brian Wong, Laura, and Linda to the staff team and to see Lucy transition to cover Helen Stone's maternity leave.

We continue to look forward to our church plant, God-willing, in 2027 so please do be praying for the Lord to bring the right man to St John's and also for us as a church to be ready, willing, and able to live cross-shaped, gospel-fuelled lives where we're all involved either as senders of go-ers.

Finally, I want to express my personal thanks to the PCC, ministry coordinators, and staff team as well as the wider church family since we're all called to be involved in gospel work. It is a genuine joy partnering in the gospel together and I continue to thank God we get to serve and proclaim the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ together as a church family. Let's pray the Lord delights to open many more eyes to his glory in the year ahead.

*'And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"' Luke 24:31-32*

**Tom Nash / April 2025**

### **Churchwardens' Report** *John McLernon & Stephen Rigby*

A year of contending and maintaining.

The Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) initiative within the Church of England continues to cause concern but has only strengthened our resolve to uphold our position on the authority of the Bible as the revealed Word of God. We are very grateful for the godly leadership of Tom and Stephen and the unity of the PCC as we contend within the CofE. We are also very grateful to Andrew Smith, who represents the diocese, but also St John's, on the General Synod. 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. During March this year the bishop came for a Q&A session with some members of the PCC and it was useful to hear him in person on this and other various topics.

Meanwhile, we continue to be grateful for God's provision at St John's and continue with our aim to support the ministry with careful investment in our facilities. We have in recent years upgraded our AV system in the church as well as the lighting, and last year we embarked on the once-every-thirty years organ cleaning exercise.

### **Treasurer's Report** *Steve Tunstead*

The PCC gives praise and thanks to our Heavenly Father for his provision over many years expressed through the generous giving of the church family. The annual accounts were approved by the PCC on 14th April and a copy has been made available on the church website prior to this meeting. 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.

The Vicarage extension was completed early in 2024 and now makes an important contribution to Tom's ministry and mission here at St. John's.

In these uncertain economic times, we are 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.

I want to thank Toby Chiu for all her hard work as Accounts Administrator and for Simon Curtis our former Treasurer and current Gift Aid secretary for his continuing advice and guidance.

### **Internationals** *Brian Wong*

Praise God that two men (S and T) came to faith at the end of the Cantonese men's Christianity Explored course last summer. T was baptised in the autumn whilst S plans to be baptised later this year. Both of them have been studying God's word with others and are being rooted and established in the faith. Since the end of the Christianity Explored course, the Cantonese men's group has evolved into a fortnightly men's Bible study group going through Mark's gospel together. Two of the more spiritually mature members of the group have been co-leading studies with Brian. We have been getting to know the Lord Jesus as well as each other better.

A weekly Cantonese women's group started in the autumn with around 12 ladies attending, some of whom are non-Christians. Following in the footsteps of the men's group, we went through the Christianity Explored course together before embarking on Mark's gospel. A trip to the British Museum to see biblical artefacts has been scheduled for mid-May.

Turning to Global Cafe, praise God that the Christmas and Lunar New Year events were very well-attended, with around 100 guests at each. For the regular events, we chose a different country to focus on each month e.g. Japan, Armenia and Romania. At each event, guests would have heard a 5-minute talk explaining Jesus' "I am" sayings in John's gospel. In terms of the Global Cafe team, three new families have joined since last year. It has been wonderful to see the enlarged team working together to welcome international guests and share the gospel with them.

### **Safeguarding** *Naomi Vallely*

We have been pleased to welcome James Akroyd to the Safeguarding Team in recent months. He joins Ann Keenan and me in helping to interpret national safeguarding guidance and to advise the PCC on its implementation at St John's.

A particular focus this year has been in encouraging people to do the required safeguarding training for their roles. Many of the courses are online, and we are hoping to be able to run some face-to-face sessions to help those who do not find it easy for whatever reason. In February, we ran a face-to-face Leadership training day here. This was attended by 40 delegates from across the archdeaconry and diocese, six of whom were leaders from St John's. It was part of the Local Training Partnerships initiative run by the Diocesan Safeguarding Training Officer, Ruth Campbell. Feedback from the delegates was overwhelmingly positive, and we are hoping to be able run a similar day in the next year.

### **Men's Ministry** *Andrew Smith*

Following many years under the excellent stewardship of Richard Watts, I took over the coordination of the men's ministry towards the end of 2024. We enjoyed an excellent curry evening in November, hearing from Richard Leadbeater who is a pastor at Dundonald Church in Raynes Park, about his career in football and Christian ministry. He gave an excellent gospel presentation which gave church members and their guests lots of challenging takeaways to reflect upon. Later on this year we are looking forward to a men's breakfast in the early summer and the annual curry dinner in November.

Men's Growth Group Bible studies continue to meet through the year, discipling and training Christian men at the church, and spending time thinking through how to live as men of Christ in the church, at home and, for many, in

workplaces too. We also have other men's growth groups which are more targeted at not-yet Christian men. This year, we hope to continue with this work, supporting men as they live for Jesus and share him with others.

### **Children's Ministry** *Ann Keenan*

The Ark, for school-aged children, meets every Sunday morning of the year except when there is a service for all ages. About 120 children are on our registers, and many additional children visit. We thank God for every child who comes, including many from Hong Kong and other countries, and several with additional needs. We pray that each would come to a saving faith in Jesus. Over the past year, we've learnt from the books of Genesis, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Luke and Acts. Our Year 6 children also had a 6-week series answering Big Questions.

We are thankful to God for our dedicated Ark and Holiday Ark teams (with 46 and 9 members respectively). They undertake all the necessary safeguarding requirements, prepare faithfully, and serve Jesus sacrificially on Sunday mornings. We also praise God for the Ark admin team who faithfully give practical help during the week.

In October 2024, we ran Light Parties for about 80 children, as a Christian alternative to Halloween. And in April 2025 we ran Easter Holiday Bible Clubs, this year called "The Great Rescue", with Bible teaching from the book of Exodus. About 110 Ark-age children attended and about 50 adult and teenage helpers enjoyed serving God together and helping the children to understand more about Jesus. We held Ark Families BBQs, and an Ark Families social, with the aim of building friendships among both parents and children. And this year we welcomed Michael Tinker to present his fun family show. We have also continued to seek to encourage parents to read the Bible with their children at home.

### **Young Families' Ministry** *Ann Keenan*

We continue to have many young families at St John's, with a large number of new babies born or expected this year.

On Sundays, we have 3 pre-school groups – Baby Ark, Toddler Ark and Mini Ark – with a total of about 50 children on the registers and many visitors joining us throughout the year. We teach simplified Bible stories, sing Christian songs, do craft and have free play. We continue to thank God for the faithful service of all our volunteers, allowing parents to be in the morning meetings. We held a Young Families BBQ in June 2024 to help young families to get to know each other.

Buttercup, our group for mums and babies under 1, is no longer meeting, with these mums and babies now being invited to Mummy & Me. In December 2024, the leaders of Daddy & Me stepped down, and the group has been put on hold. We praise God for those who have faithfully served in these ministries over a number of years.

### **Mummy & Me** *Ruth Bradshaw*

Mummy and Me is a group which runs in term time, for pre-school children and babies. We run two sessions on a Monday morning (9.15 to 10.30am and 10.45 to 12pm) with two distinct groups but with the same team members spanning both. We have around 60 mums who attend regularly and roughly half are non-Christians. We continue to have a growing waiting list for both sessions. Our aim is to build good relationships with each of the mums and to be intentional about our conversations which we pray will lead people to Jesus. The mums continue to be treated with homemade cakes and we are grateful to our team of bakers and kitchen helpers.

We have trialled using a mix of Faith in Kids material alongside St Helen's Bishopsgate toddler material and rearranged the way we teach it. This has been very successful and will continue next year. We have used more visual aids to help the teaching be clear for the little ones.

We have a social each term sometimes with a Christian talk. Sara Barker spoke at Christmas giving a clear gospel message to around 25 mums. We gave out gospel-focused books to the children at both Christmas and Easter. The mums received a copy 'The Prodigal God' by Tim Keller at Christmas, and 'Easter - The Greatest News' by Paul Williams at Easter.

As Buttercup came to an end, we created a special baby area in the corner of the room for those mums with young babies who are yet to walk. This provides safe space for the babies.

A new initiative was to run the Hope Explored course within the Mummy and Me sessions in January/February. We had 2 mums attend and it was very well received. This is something we will repeat at least yearly.

### **Baptisms, Thanksgivings, Confirmations, Marriages & Funerals** *Lucy Warriner*

We give thanks to God for the children born to members of the church family in the last year and give thanks for the way that he has been working in people's lives. One of the visible ways we see this is through thanksgivings, baptisms and confirmations.

There were a total of eight thanksgivings/baptisms for infants and 10 teenagers/adults who publicly declared their faith through baptism/confirmation service held in September. We pray that these infants would grow up to love and serve the Lord and that those who have declared their faith would keep walking faithfully with Jesus.

Since May 2024, we have also celebrated four weddings and the clergy have officiated at a small number of funerals of faithful members of our church family.

### **Marriage Ministry** *Al & Gill Simms*

We have lead one couple through marriage prep since the last APCM. Over a meal in our home, we have had some open and honest discussion whilst looking at what the Bible has to say about marriage as well as considering some practical subjects as they approach their married life together.

We have enjoyed some informal follow up sessions with some of our newlyweds who have previously participated in marriage prep with us. It has been a joy to see how they have settled into married life and chat about how things are going so far.

We have continued to walk alongside some of our church family couples who have needed a little encouragement and support at times. Whilst we make it clear that we are not counsellors, it is always a huge privilege to be able to share, pray and advise where we can in a relaxed way, often over a meal.

We were pleased to support Tom in the two recent marriage refresher sessions and participate on the Q&A panel.

As always, we maintain our commitment to supporting marriages in St John's and our desire is that couples should thrive in their marriage whilst pointing each other to their Saviour.

### **Mission** *Tony and Jane Whittome*

As a church we are committed to 'Knowing Jesus better and making Jesus better known' and through the support of our mission partners, this commitment extends way beyond our parish here in Tunbridge Wells. Our current mission partners are:

- Julia Birkett working with OMF in Thailand
- Al Simms working with People International
- Mark and Rebekah working with OMF in Thailand
- John McLernon working with Crosslinks in the UK
- Robin and Lorna working with People International in Istanbul
- Crossteach based in Tunbridge Wells
- Jonny and Ruth Pullar working with Crosslinks in Modena, Italy

We pray for them in turn during our Sunday morning services and also at our monthly Wednesday evening prayer meeting where we try and get some more in-depth news. At the Mission Weekend on 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> June Crossteach organised an excellent Mission event on the Friday evening where we all took part in the Easter experience that Katharine uses in the schools of Tunbridge Wells. On the Sunday we held a BYO lunch where Jonny and Ruth Pullar were the guest speakers sharing their plans to be our mission partners serving the Stupenda Grazia church in Modena. Jonny and Ruth left for Italy at the end of January.

Further information about our mission partners is available on the mission board in the atrium and on the church website.

### **Seniors' Fellowship** *Roger Lumley*

Our heartfelt thanks to God for his unfailing goodness through another year. He has provided us with a variety of speakers who have brought encouragement and challenge. Some by their testimony, some by their mission work, and some by opening God's word to us. We continue to get an average attendance of just over forty people, and it's lovely to see the networks of friendship and support between them growing, and to hear about the many ways that Seniors' Fellowship has helped them.

My thanks to all the leader-team who serve week by week and to Kim Wade who so faithfully visits and phones people on our behalf. Thanks too to Phil Jones who, on so many occasions, has solved our problems and offered his advice.

It is our desire that, like all of St John's Church, we share the good news of Christ with those who don't yet know him and strengthen the commitment of those who do. We wish to be an outward-facing group that serves others by lovingly taking the gospel to them and providing strength for their lives. Pray that we continue to serve the Lord by serving the seniors of our church family.

### Music *Craig Hudson*

The music team have continued to play their part this year in helping us to know Jesus better and to make Jesus better known. We continue week by week to address "one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:20, ESV). In this we all have a role to play in the music ministry, building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). Alongside the weekly task of building one another up, the musicians have supported the work of evangelism here at St John's. As well as singing and playing for Christmas and Easter outreach, this year saw a new jazz night format, theming the whole evening around the topic of hope, with music, reflections from the Bible and discussion around tables. It has been great to see many guests coming to guest services and events, and we pray for ongoing fruit from these opportunities to share the gospel in music and word.

Thanks as always go to those serving in the music, PA and projection teams to enable this ongoing ministry – and thanks to God for his generous provision. It's always encouraging seeing new people getting involved in this ministry, and others growing not just in their skills but in spiritual maturity too. My thanks as ever go to Pip Macdonald-Brown for all of her wonderful support organising the sheet music.

### Growth Groups and Care *Stephen Boon, Helen Hayward and Jon Knight*

#### **Those involved in Growth Groups**

351 men/women aged over 18 are in a small 'Growth Group', be it in a

- Home GG: 9 meet weekly; 11 meet fortnightly (2 of these groups meet on Zoom) (218)
- Men's GG: 7 (64)
- Women's GG: 11 (includes 1 Cantonese Women's group) - meet weekly in term-time; 1 meets on Zoom (116)
- Seniors 67
- 18-30s 10

Within the 351 figure:

- 116 people belong to more than 1 group but the numbers are adjusted to avoid double-counting
- 2 new home Growth Groups have begun meeting weekly (Ladies and Men's Cantonese Groups), with a combined membership of 18

#### **Growth Group leaders have:**

- Agreed role outlines and responsibilities (this is something we are looking to revisit in the next year)
- Been provided with study material and fortnightly resourcing for it
- Been supplied with an updated resources list
- Been invited to training/resourcing events April-July 2024 directed specifically at the needs of group leaders (these take place weekly on Wednesday am and bi-weekly Sunday pm)
- Received free copies of "Side by Side" are available to read together to develop group leaders' skills/wisdom (given to new GG Leaders)

#### **All Growth Groups have:**

- Helped each member to hear God speak and to speak that truth to one another
- Visited absentees
- Delivered meals to the sick/those with new babies
- Prayed carefully for members

In addition:

- 6 designated members have co-ordinated help for Seniors under Roger Lumley's leadership.
- 24 people have cooked many meals for the church freezer, to be given away to those in need.
- 11 groups (home/men's/women's) have met over 7 Link-up Lunches along with invited Bereans, Seniors and 4 Hong Kong families.
- The Church Family Support Fund has helped a number of our church family in need during the year. Since the APCM 2024 Report, the St John's Church Family Support Fund made ten payments, amounting to a total of £9,142 in financial assistance.

**a) Looking back & b) Looking ahead:**

a) Re. Care Facilitator's report. We are:

- equipping all group leaders with role outlines
- launching new groups
- reviewing & updating resources for group leaders
- Parenting event (June 2024) and Marriage Refresher (February 2025) were both run.
- We have run an experimental Newcomers' Course

b)

- Planning to write a Newcomers' Course for use at regular times during the year
- Hoping to launch new Growth Groups to follow on from Newcomer's Courses
- Continuing to provide bi-weekly resourcing sessions for GG Leaders which will include Bible Study preparation and other aspects of leading a Growth Group
- Revisit agreed role outlines and responsibilities with GG Leaders this year

**Bereans (18-30 Ministry) Pete and Natalie Brown, Josh and Katya Cassidy**

Bereans is a growth group generally aimed at people who are aged 18-30 and are new to either St John's Church, Christianity, or adult life. We meet every Wednesday evening at Pete and Natalie Brown's house to study the Bible together and think and chat through what it means and how it should shape our lives. Once a month we also share a meal together. Since last May, we have read through 'Love your Church' together and studied Colossians and Matthew 19-23. We also discussed the sermon series in Thessalonians last summer. We are looking forward to seeing how the story of the whole Bible fits together to fulfil God's rescuing purposes, as we look at the God's Big Picture course together over the next few months. We are also very grateful for Josh and Katya Cassidy who have stepped in to help Pete and Natalie lead the group.

**Women's Ministry Women's Steering Group**

We give thanks to God that across the church family women have been discipling one another and looking to make Jesus better known. We are grateful for 107 ladies in 10 Women's Growth Groups, of whom 17 are leaders, as well as the team of crèche helpers on Wednesdays. These groups have studied God's Big Picture, Matthew 19-22 and Colossians. A new venture has been the ladies' Bible Study in Cantonese. There are also 98 ladies in Home Growth Groups, of whom 12 are leaders (there is an overlap of 29). We have supported leaders with weekly/fortnightly Bible study resourcing sessions (including support for parents with children to attend); a new venture for lady Home Growth Group leaders; training for potential leaders.

There have been two women's Hope Explored courses and other women have helped follow up individuals. Book groups have been reading *The Gospel-centred Family*; *Age of Opportunity*; *Duties of Parents*; & *Scattering Seeds of Hope*. The Christmas craft event with an engaging talk from Nicole Ashton was well attended. The Women's Day on Habakkuk with Anja Schmidt was attended by 120 women of all ages and stages. It was an encouraging time spent in God's word and a great opportunity for women from across the church family to get to know one another better. We pray for fruit. The women's ministry steering group is Catherine Rigby, Clare Nash, Claudia Chambers, Kirkley Boon & Helen Hayward.

**Youth Ministry Jono Chalklin**

*Psalms 145:4-9 "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."*

We give thanks that families, supported by the church family, get to tell the next generation the glorious deeds of the LORD to the next generation in our homes and within our Church Family. Time in God's word includes series in the Psalms, Jesus' parables in Matthew, John's Gospel, Hosea, Daniel and Obadiah, whilst tackling topics like science, suffering, assisted dying as well as relationships, gender and identity.

We've enjoyed events like Easter Holiday Bible Clubs (Mark's gospel), Engage Camping (John 13) and Engage's annual trip to Sorted in London (Ecclesiastes), Romans in 1:2s and we're thrilled to have Rock Solid Fridays up and running once a month.

We give thanks for the young people who are actively seeking to reach their friends with the Gospel and for those reading the Bible with their peer group. The leadership team for both youth groups continue to be an ongoing encouragement to many, serving the young people with love, patience, prayerfulness and joy. Praise the

Lord for providing godly parents and leaders that faithfully and prayerfully teach God's word, pointing the younger generations to trust in the Lord who is full of steadfast love and faithfulness.

### **Diocesan & Deanery Synods** *Andrew Smith*

The **Diocesan Synod** met three times last year (March, June and December) and St John's has one member, Andrew Smith (ex officio by virtue of membership of General Synod).

Over the course of the meetings, Bishop Jonathan used his presidential address to speak of his desire to grow missional churches, missional leaders and missional disciples that are:

- growing younger and more diverse;
- growing numerically, spiritually, financially, and in impacting their communities;
- and in turn are planting and growing collectively new missional churches.

We also received safeguarding reports, updates from General Synod, diocesan vision and strategy updates, approving the budget, committee review, elections to committees and reports of initiatives from churches around the diocese. At each Synod meeting there is also the ability of members to ask pre-submitted questions and we heard responses to questions on the Archbishop's Commission for Racial Justice and support for clergy facing CDM (clergy disciplinary measures).

At the June meeting, a lot of time was given over to a presentation about the annual report and accounts for 2023 along with an opportunity for members to ask questions. The vast majority (c. 77%) of the diocese's income (which goes into the "Common Fund") comes from parish offers and fees, which are voluntary contributions requested from every church to pay towards clergy costs, clergy housing, central administrative costs (e.g. safeguarding) and donations to support parishes and projects. The amount requested from each church varies roughly in proportion to its size and the number of stipendiary clergy who are licensed there.

In recent years, the diocese has been running a budget deficit, although this is not uncommon in other dioceses around the country (there are 42 dioceses in England). The operating deficit on the Common Fund was -£1.3m in 2023 which is a slight improvement on the previous year. Tight cost control and external grants have helped to maintain this level and stop it deteriorating. However, parish offers have continued to fall which represents an ongoing challenge to diocesan finances. Between 2018 and 2023, the total amount collected from parishes has fallen by 20%. Despite this, there have been no cuts in clergy numbers in recent years while a rally in investment markets in 2023 and the sale of some properties helped the overall picture in 2023. Total assets held by the diocese continue to be healthy, consisting of property and market investments although in recent years some properties have been sold to support the deficit.

The **Deanery Synod** also meets three times a year and is made up of representatives from 15 Church of England churches in Tunbridge Wells and the surrounding area. St John's is allowed to have five elected lay representatives at Tunbridge Wells Deanery Synod meetings. The number of members each church can send is based on the size of its electoral roll and is tiered from one to five. Licensed clergy in the deanery are automatically members. 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.

One function of the Deanery Synod is to share news from activities happening in churches around the town as well as hear about clergy moving into or out of the deanery. On the latter point we heard towards the end of 2024 that Nick Cornell, previously vicar of Christ Church Southborough, would be appointed Archdeacon of Tonbridge in early 2025. An archdeacon oversees several deaneries and there are three such archdeaconries making up the diocese. 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. We are also pleased to report that Richard Thomas, Vicar of St Philip's Church in Tunbridge Wells, was appointed Area Dean during the year. This is a local role which has some leadership responsibility for the other clergy in the town.

Each Deanery Synod meeting tends to have a talk from an invited speaker. In November, we had a very stimulating evening given over to the topic of "Science and Faith" where Professor Richard Buggs (of St John's Church) and Professor Stephen Keevil (of St James' Church) gave presentations and took questions from the audience on their chosen topics of evolution and artificial intelligence, respectively. Over the course of the year, we also welcomed Philip Hesketh, Dean of Rochester, and John Constanti, representing the Diocesan Board of Education, as guest speakers.