

**The Parish of Ludlow St Laurence**  
**Annual Parochial Church Meeting**  
**9.40am Saturday 20 May 2024 in St Laurence's Church**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Revd Preb Kelvin Price (Rector, Chair), Dick Franks (Churchwarden), Lesley Harling (Churchwarden), 4 (four) members of the PCC, 12 (twelve) members of the congregation, 1 (one) member of clergy

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from: Wendy Griffiths, Eric Griffiths, Claire Wilcox. Caroline Culley, Carole Perrett, Garry Oram, Christine Nicholson

**2. Minutes of Annual Parochial Church Meeting 20233 (20 May 202)**

The minutes were scrutinised and agreed to be a true record of proceedings. Resolution: That the minutes be adopted; proposed – Ewart Carson; seconded – Jean Ferguson-Davie; agreed unanimously by show of hands. The Rector signed the minutes.

**3. Matters arising from minutes of Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2023 (20 May 2023)**

No matters were raised.

**4. Clergy report**

**a. Rector's report**

Speaking to his report the Rector thanked the churchwardens of both St Laurence's and St John's all of whom were very active both inside and outside the church. It had been an interesting year, not least because staff and wardens had been 'homeless' since July. The ongoing building works at No 2 College Street meant that a lot of work was being carried out remotely. The experience gained during Covid had been useful and the weekly meeting between Rector, wardens, the Parish Administrator and the Director of Strategy and Finance had continued enabling issues to be thrashed out and good communications maintained.

The Rector reminded the meeting that his report related to January-December 2023 ie before Revd Wayne Davies (Pioneer Curate) had moved on to his own parish.

Attendances at weekly services continued to increase slowly, now nearing pre-Covid numbers. While attendance at Nine Lessons and Carols had dropped from c500 to c300, Carols in the Castle now attracted c300 people (c80 before Covid). This might be a reflection of changing family dynamics. Those attending the new house group were significantly younger than the Sunday congregation.

There were no questions on the report.

**b. Intergenerational Mission Work report**

In the absence of Revd Wayne Davies (now Vicar of Holmer benefice) the Rector spoke to the Pioneer Curate/Intergeneration Missioner report. He noted that Wayne's work had been very varied and much of it on the model of social work, involving schools including work with non-attenders, homeless people, Tea and Toast and the Living Room. Wayne had been an excellent fit for the role and he thanked him for all this hard work and for its achievements.

John Burley asked whether Wayne would be replaced. The Rector explained that there would be no funding for an additional ordained clergy post until Easter 2025 at the earliest. The PCC was looking at funding a Lay Pastoral Worker based at Stephen House (No 2 College Street) to carry out work of this kind. This would depend on how much money was left at the end of the building work to cover HR costs.

The Rector spoke about the pressures on clergy. Before he took up the post there had been 19 active retired clergy in the Team Ministry. There were now three, two of them planning to leave Ludlow. One result had been the reduction of the midweek evening communion from weekly to monthly. He was aware that he would sometimes have to say 'no' to some things and asked that the congregation be gracious and would pray about the situation.

There were no further questions on the report.

## **5. Officers' reports**

### **a. Churchwardens**

The Rector thanked the churchwardens, Dick Franks and Lesley Harling and assistant warden Michael Davies for their dedication and hard work. He had been impressed by the collective commitment of the 200 wardens who had been admitted by the Bishop at the Visitation service at St Laurence's.

As the 'go-to' parish church for the diocese outside of the cathedral St Laurence's presented wardens with a lot of work but the Statistics for Mission showed that the church was in a healthy position. It was also occupying an important place in the life of the town and community eg Civic Services, May Day service.

There were no questions on the report.

### **b. Electoral Roll Officer**

The Rector commended the ERO, Dick Franks, who kept abreast of the electoral roll, including noting those who were no longer attending services. The pattern of roughly 50% resident : non-resident status was consistent, and a compliment to St Laurence's that so many from outlying areas wished to attend.

There were no questions on the report.

The Rector thanked Dick for his report.

### **c. PCC Secretary**

The Rector stressed that remote (electronic) voting was only used to take decisions which were either very urgent or of low-level importance with formal ratification at the next in-person meeting.

There were no questions on the report.

The Rector thanked Lesley for her report.

### **d. Safeguarding Officer**

The Rector noted that the diocese regarded Ludlow as an exemplary benefice as regards safeguarding and DBS checks. As PSO for both parishes Dick Franks was often ahead of the diocese in noting that a DBS was due for renewal.

Safeguarding was a standing point on the agenda for PCC meetings. There was a Safeguarding Action Plan in place, the dashboard was reviewed for every PCC meeting and all CofE requirements were being met.

There were no questions on the report.

The Rector thanked Dick for his report.

## **6. Mission**

### **a. Arts @ St Laurence report**

The Rector commented that the Arts events were a huge part of what was being done in the parish for God. The immense programme was akin to that found in a cathedral or other major church.

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There were no questions on the report.

The Rector thanked Ewart and the Arts @ StLaurence team for their fine work.

**b. Bell ringing report**

The Rector commented that he loved church bells and enjoyed hearing them from his home

There were no questions on the report.

The Rector thanked the Tower Captain, Richard Bracher for his report and for the ringing.

**c. Celtic Prayer report**

The Rector described the lay-led, contemplative monthly early-evening Celtic Prayer as the most ecumenical service in Ludlow with members of many churches and none attending regularly.

Helen Blyth commented that those attending appreciated the lovely space. She said that it was a gentle service and people left with soul lightened.

There were no questions on the report.

The Rector thanked Pat Helm who had been leading Celtic Prayer. It was a tribute to her that it was continuing after she had moved away

**d. Children and Young People's Group report**

The Rector was grateful that, even without formal 'Sunday School-type' provision during services Sandi Burley was on hand to help families. There were more children involved in the Living Room service, about half of those who attended.

He was very glad to have the 'Life events board' in the north aisle with photographs of baptisms and weddings.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Sandi Burley.

**e. Christian Aid report**

; The Rector commended Claire Wilcox, a fiercely passionate advocated for Christian Aid, for all the hard work that went into the Lent Lunches and Christian Aid coffee morning, working closely with Broadmill. The group's efforts raised a huge amount of money on top of other forms of giving. He and the Finance Director had agreed to hold special collections up to four times a year for emergencies eg DEC appeals. Lesley Harling passed on to the meeting thanks from Claire Wilcox for the continuing support of the congregation. There were no further questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Claire

**f. Conservation Trust for St Laurence Ludlow report**

The Rector described the work of conserving and maintaining the fabric of St Laurence's as a 'Forth Bridge' task which would never be completed. Fortunately the Conservation Trust, headed by Ian Marshall, was constantly raising money for church. The Trust agreed with the PCC which works should be carried out. Much of the work was out of sight but the building as a whole was very well maintained and repaired. It would be impossible to carry out the church's mission work without the Trust.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Ian and the tr

**g. Contemplation Group report**

The Rector commented that the small, ecumenical, group of 6-15 people which met weekly at Helen Blyth's home ran to some extent parallel with Celtic Prayer and with a similar ethos – the still, quiet voice.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Helen and Pat and thanked Helen for hosting the group.

**h. Fairtrade report**

The Rector commended Penny Bridstrup for her passion for and commitment to Fairtrade and its regular Sunday stalls in St Laurence's.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Penny.

**i. Handbells report**

The Rector said that the highlight of the handbell group's year was the service of Nine Lessons and Carols but the group met regularly under the leadership of Sally Newman-Kidd. New ringers would be very welcome.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Sally.

**j. Langwasser**

The Rector had enjoyed a solid relationship with the Paul Gerhard church in Langwasser and its Pfarrer Jörg Gunsenheimer so he had been delighted to attend Jörg's retirement service. The church was now in interregnum. He hoped that the new pastor would be as enthusiastic about maintaining the link but it had to be recognised that time has moved on. The mood now was less a question of reconciliation and more that of living in post-Brexit times. Many people, especially the Westons, Bridstrups and Frenches, had had a huge input in the past. The challenge would be to make it relevant to the world now. The Rector noted parallels between the modern Lutheran and Anglican churches – both were faced with a shortage of clergy and the creation of multi-church groups.

Penny Bridstrup urged the Rector to keep talking to the congregation about the link.

There were no further questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Colin and Andrea Weston.

**k. Liturgy Committee report**

The Rector explained that the Liturgy Committee was looking constantly three months ahead. Services had to be planned carefully in high-level detail as regards music, choreography etc. Doing what St Laurence's did so well took a lot of work from the choir, organists and servers, those responsible for producing the pew sheets and the hospitality team. He was especially appreciative of the work of Dick Franks as Secretary and Revd Andrew Body and Sandi Burley for the wealth of faith and experience they brought to the group. There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Dick.

**l. Music**

The Rector commented that people assume that St Laurence's is 'High-Church' which he refuted although 'we are very choral'. The choir sets the tone and makes a strong impression. The Director of Music, Michael Oakley, and the choir were very dedicated. Half of the choir members are retired but half are working or studying. St Laurence's, along with Tewkesbury Abbey and Malvern Priory, is one of the few places which are not cathedrals but have such a high standard music not. The level of delivery is exceptional.

The choir did struggle to involve children, perhaps due to a modern reluctance to make such a big commitment. Michael would be very glad to hear from any potential new choir members.

Juliet Marshall commented that it would be nice for congregation members to have a chance to express their appreciation after service. The Rector undertook to invite the Director of Music to join the coffee group but encouraged people not to keep him for too long. Colin Weston encouraged them to pass on comments on the music to him, Michael, or any choir member who would pass on the message.

There were no further questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Michael.

**m. Outward Concern Group report**

The Rector explained that Outward Concern was a sub-group which also covered Fairtrade. It decided on the annual external giving to named charities. It generated the largest contribution to the Tanzanian Train-a-Priest fund from any parish and had promised the diocese that St Laurence's would pick up the tab in the event of a shortfall to the diocesan commitment. The PCC had been working on an application for an A Rocha Eco Church award and were nearly up to the bronze level. There were no further questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Penny Bridstrup.

**n. Local Pastoral Visitors report**

The Rector expressed profound thanks to Pat Helm who had worked very hard over the previous six years to organise pastoral work at St Laurence's. Lots of pastoral work had been happening but it had not been clear how it was delivered and communications were not ideal. Pat had systematised the DBS procedures and set up a system for recording visits, now taking place to the five local care homes and hospitals and doing home visits. The group now met termly with the group leader and Rector meeting in the interim. Inevitably he had to rely heavily on the lay group to do much of the work. Everyone had gifts but this ministry needed to have the right people, offering a deeper level of care.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Pat.

**o. Volunteers report**

The Rector commented that even people from the cathedral could not believe the operations St Laurence's was able to pull off with so few clergy. He was aware that it was only possible because of all the number and quality of those members of the congregation and others in the town who v.l DRAFT committed to support the church in such large numbers. He urged everyone to encourage anyone they knew who was newly retired to Ludlow to join one or more of the teams. He was especially grateful to the team leaders. There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Lesley.

**p. Broadmill report**

The Rector suggested that, like the volunteers, the staff working in the Shop and Icon Coffee were another 'selling point'. He had noted a change in the entries in the visitors' book since the west end of the church had been used for the businesses, creating a community in the church. It was no longer seen as a museum but as a living body of the church, providing an opportunity to speak God into lives. The non-profit businesses were feeding nearly £50,000 a year into the church.

He was very grateful to Broadmill directors, Janet and Anthony Shuster.

Juliet Marshall asked how the money was used. The Rector explained that the Shop had been set up before Covid as part of the programme of recovery from financial difficulties. It was not so much a new venture as a revamped version of the old shop so the money was allocated as per the classic scheme ie the income went to the church for use where needed eg on the fabric. The Icon, however, was a new venture designed to serve the community, much like Stephen House, so the money was directed towards mission-type work. This ensured that the money could be tracked as going into the community not towards 'traditional' church work. Discussions had been held with the diocese in relation to whether this kind of money could be used under a future staffing scheme to help finance roles, ordained or lay posts, working in this area.

There were no further questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Anthony.

**7. Fabric**

**a. Fabric committee report**

The Rector commented that it had been a quieter year for the Fabric committee. The church building was in a good state and the focus had been on the refurbishment of No 2 College Street, which was nearly complete. There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Stuart McLaren.

**b. Friends of St Leonard's Churchyard report**

The Rector stated that, apart from St Leonard's Press which was privately owned, everything inside walls belonged to St Laurence's. The churchyard remained the responsibility of the church because it had never been closed, because five requests remained open, although they were very unlikely ever to be activated. Councils would no longer close churchyards because of the cost implications. He was very grateful to the Friends who kept the churchyard beautifully, making it a pleasant place for picnics and walks, although opening it up meant exposing crypts which could be a risk hazard. The Diocesan Advisory Committee had visited the Churchyard as part of a review of possible future problems. Repairing a major wall collapse could cost £30-40k which St Laurence's did not have so alternative funding approaches would have to be found. The PCC helps when asked but the Friends do sometimes feel under-supported. Liz Gardner wondered whether it would be feasible to limit maintenance work to the immediate area round the Commonwealth War Graves Commission graves.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Nick Ford.

**c. National Lottery Heritage Fund Working Group**

The Rector acknowledged the immense amount of work undertaken by Ewart Carson, Chris Deaves and Peter Nield over the years. They had prepared two applications since 2018 only to see the criteria changed as they neared the end of the process. It was now recognised that it would be necessary to pay a professional company in the early stages of bid preparation eg to find match funding (restoration of the Great East Window and the Decalogue Window would require £200k match funding). The cost of hiring a company would be around £40k.

Most of the recent big developments at St Laurence's had been funded by private individuals who loved the church and/or the town but they were more interested in helping people than in repairing stained glass.

There were no questions on the report, for which the Rector thanked Ewart.

**8. Finance**

**a. Finance report**

The Rector thanked Finance Director Peter Nield for the report and invited questions. Mark Turner queried the presentation of some of the figures which did not appear to add up eg running costs were £120k but less than £60k was coming from planned giving leaving a £60k shortfall on utilities alone. The Rector undertook to ensure that in future figures were presented as all-inclusive.

There were no questions on the report.

**b. Parish Giving Scheme**

There were no questions on the report for which the Rector thanked Richard Wilkins.

**c. 2022 Financial Accounts**

The Rector stated that the accounts had been accepted by the PCC and signed off by the independent examiners. The PCC's aim was to have enough reserves in bank to cover three months of normal operation. This had been nearly achieved before the recent drastic rise in utility costs.

Weston asked about the Parish Offer, which paid for the Rector's post. The Rector confirmed that St Laurence's had met its regular commitment (£53k profiled across the year to reflect lower income streams in the early months of the year, plus a £4 bonus payment at the end of the year, which was offered 'if the financial position permits'. With St John's paying £17,500 the benefice had paid £73-74k. The PCC had agreed to increase the offer by 4% this year and expected to be able to pay it in full. The Rector undertook to ensure that the Parish Offer was highlighted in future reports.

The Rector noted that when he had arrived as Rector St Laurence's had been £230k in the red. Now the accounts were £10k in the black, £750k had been spent and the financial position

continued to improve, however slowly. The Finance Director operated a system which produced a 6-week forecast every week to make sure the finances remained on track.

There were no further questions on the accounts.

**d. Appointment of Independent Examiners for 2024**

The Rector stated that St Laurence's had used Wittingham Riddell as independent examiners for 10 years and had been satisfied with their work and with the good working relationship.

The Rector invited the meeting to vote on Finance Manager Peter Nield's proposal, supported by the PCC, that Whittingham Riddell be reappointed as independent examiners for a further year. Proposed – Michael Davies, seconded – Colin Weston, agreed unanimously by show of hands.

**9. Deanery Synod report**

a. No report had been received from the deanery.

**b. Nomination for Deanery Synod representative**

The Rector pointed out St Laurence's currently had one deanery synod representative, John Stocker, which left vacancies for three further representatives. There were no nominations.

**10. Election of Lay Members of PCC**

The Rector reported that nominations for election to the PCC had been received from

- One serving PCC members for a second 3-year term of office:
  - Stuart McLaren: proposed – Lesley Harling; seconded – Richard Franks
- Two new members:
  - Richard Franks: proposed – Pamela Latchford; seconded – Judith Ashford
  - Eric Griffiths: proposed – Anthony Colmans; seconded – Ann Stocker
- In addition six serving members were continuing in post:
  - Ewart Carson
  - Jean Ferguson Davie
  - Michael Davies
  - Paul Kemp
  - Hilary Walters
  - Richard Wilkins

The Rector commented that these elections produced a well-balanced PCC with strong numbers (nine elected members) although St Laurence's could have up to 12 members.

**11. Open Forum**

There were no questions from the floor.

In summary the Rector stated that with the hard work, much of it behind the scenes, the reordering of the church was complete and Stephen House was nearing completion. He urged a focus now on mission, telling people why choosing Jesus was the best thing they could do and taking every opportunity to build our own faith - faith grows more in house groups, than in services. Together we make an amazing team for Ludlow and for Christ.

**12. Closing prayer**

The Rector thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 11.05am with the Grace.