



*St Mary's
Prittlewell
Annual Report 2023*



Welcome to our Annual Reports for 2023



“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)

“Oh, my goodness!” That is BAD news... The 7th October 2023. The day Gaza/Israel erupted... Subsequently we have seen how humanity continues to show how inhumane we can be. I can only hope like 11th September 2001 it will be a day that we do not easily forget and find overtaken by yet other terrible examples of how it seems ‘we’ never learn. I have never visited Gaza but I have had the privilege of travelling to Israel and some of the Palestinian territories on a number of occasions.

Over the following weeks after the 7th October, I obsessively read updates about the situation, like many of us my heart ached for displaced families, and senseless casualties. I have been accused in the past of being biased with regard to the “Holy Land”, but I can assure you dear reader my sadness extends to “all sides”....

We are often it seems surrounded by bad news, not just “out there” but also, in our homes and in our own hearts and even in our local church/es.... That sadly is “real life”.

We live in a broken world, and try as we might, we can't hide from heartache under a blanket, in the contents of the fridge or television binge watching. Those coping mechanisms will never bring us peace because peace comes in the form of a Person: Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

That's the good news about bad news: It paves the way for us to run to Jesus. Simply put, when our world feels like it's falling apart, we get to fall into the arms of Christ, the One who welcomes us every single time. 2023 had its share of difficult times, but also some amazing times. Whilst we started the year still worshipping in St Mary's (what we now call the West Hall) Hall, we had an emotional and wonderful return to our church building on Easter Day.



As you may recall having commenced works to reorder the church near the chancel steps, the plan was that we would be able to return to the church early to mid-December 2022 but we ended the year unable to return to the church building, after some “sleepless” nights

worrying about having the church ready for the first weddings of the year, thanks be to God we shared communion together in the church building on Easter Day. It was not though until August that the floor was tiled and we could really appreciate what had been achieved.

Our first “big” service using the new space involved the whole of St Mary’s school children and adults, celebrating the coronation of our new King Charles, and we began to see its potential.



As part of this new development, we invested in removable staging which came into its own on a number of occasions, notably the play we hosted “Forever Mine” in November (the love story behind the world’s best loved hymn – Amazing Grace and its author and his wife – John and Polly Newton).

As this major project came to an end in the summer we commissioned the reordering

of the west end of St Mary’s centre, the “death ray” heaters (infra-red!) were removed and new radiators installed and the toilet areas completely renewed, the whole hall insulated and redecorated. None of this of course could be achieved without the incredible generosity of those who have gone before us to be welcomed home to be with our Lord.

We were able to celebrate the completion of the works in the church and church centre with a Grand Open Evening event at the end of November at which we were pleased to welcome the Mayor of Southend amongst other dignitaries to a wonderful evening of good news.



In September, we held our second Heritage Open Day weekend, joining in with this national event, which was a wonderful opportunity to showcase the history of our church and its place in our community,

and there were also wonderful displays of wedding dresses and baptismal robes along with some of the archaeological finds found during excavation works.



I am proud to continue in my role as Sin Bosun (Padre) for the RNA Southend Branch and involved with our own Scouting group.

In June of this year, two of our young people were confirmed by the Bishop of Chelmsford at St Nicholas Rawreth. The service was even streamed to family in South Africa! The wonders of modern technology...



The life of prayer continues to be hugely important within our church community and a small group of us continue to pray daily via Zoom and during Lent and Advent we studied and prayed together with God's word. We also held 24 hours of prayer in the church in the autumn which was well received. The ministry of what we refer to as "occasional offices", Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals, were sadly affected by the church closure, but we had through the summer and into the autumn some wonderful opportunities to celebrate with families and couples. We did lose some of our church family through the year and we give thanks for them, we must give thanks though that "new" people have decided to journey with us, some new to Christ and with this in mind we hope in early 2024 to offer an Alpha course to help them on their way.

As you read through the rest of our reflections / reports for 2023 I am sure you will see that the life of St Mary's is rarely dull, it is exciting to see that we have begun new initiatives which you will see as you read, but there have been both good and not so good times, and as we look to 2024 there will, without doubt be, both again, as we share in God's ministry and mission together.

So, if you can run, walk or crawl, in all that we do, may it be towards Christ together we go!

Finally, for now it is of course “traditional” in these introductions to thank folk for their support and encouragement during the year for our ministry here and the life of our church, which is everybody who considers St Mary’s to be their spiritual home! But personally, I do wish to thank Revd. Jacky, Lois Blakey, Keith Turner, John Tipping and Peter Sloman (the PCC Standing committee), and the PCC as a whole, Christina Turner, (our Administrator), Marie Searles (our cleaner) and as last year the amazing “crew” (you know who you were!) who helped set up “church” on Saturdays and other times in the west hall, from October 2022 for our services. And finally, last, and definitely not least, of course, my dear long suffering and wonderful wife who keeps me “together” and “my feet on the ground” Sue, a.k.a Mrs Vicarage!

Revd Paul Mackay

Churchwardens Report 2023

“In co-operation with the Vicar, Churchwardens are generally responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the parish. These responsibilities include various aspects of administration, plant operations, and personnel. Their work is not just the maintenance of the church building but helping the smooth running of the church.” (Extract taken from www.Churchwardens.com)

We want to begin by saying it is with heartfelt thanks to those who have helped in supporting us during 2023, Peter Sloman (Deputy Churchwarden), who has gone above and beyond by sharing his expert knowledge and time, taking on projects which are lengthy and complicated. We would like to thank Pat Johnson and the flower arranging team for all their efforts keeping the church and The Centre looking so welcoming especially as we move back into the church for services. We would like to thank Christina Turner and the volunteers who keep the churchyard looking alive with flowers and getting rid of the weeds. We also thank the ministry team who have been patient and understanding during the changes that have taken place this year and thank the PCC for supporting the proposals and projects.

2023 started pretty much like the year before with services being organised and planned, Lois preparing Schools and Family activities and ways to worship. Maintenance and servicing pencilled into the diary along with a sense of joy as we go forward. This was of course during a massive reordering programme, which has been a very successful project, giving the church more usable space to accommodate extra events and activities, which enhance the life of the church.

Let us pray that as we resume normal activities and continue to overcome problems which arise from time to time, we continue together to make St Mary's a place of great Christian Fellowship and worship.

Keith Turner and John Tipping Churchwardens

Fabric Report

Welcome to 2023! what an exciting and busy year. The church reordering which started at the end of 2022 and continued through right to the end of 2023 has (apart from some small snags) been finished. St Mary's Centre has been fully developed and now functioning. The church has come back into full use and is enjoying a full and healthy congregation. So, what's been happening this year? Below is a brief monthly breakdown, the full details can be obtained on request to the relevant people.

January/February - routine fire extinguisher maintenance and replacement. Extractor fans replaced in toilets.

March - Churchyard pathway maintenance repairing and replacing flag stones etc. Gas safety checks and boiler maintenance. CCTV Cameras roof gutters and gulleys cleaned and repaired.

April/May - Organ tuned. Church yard gates repaired and restored. Gable Seats added to churchyard (made from old floodlight covers)

June – Audio Video Equipment installed. Memorial bookcase recoloured and polished.

July – Flagpole maintenance inspection, vestry ceilings repaired and repainted.

August/September/October –Memorial Garden rails repaired replaced, Font cover repaired and restored. Electrical PAT testing carried out. External lighting replacement repairs. High windows cleaned in church. Wooden notice boards repainted repaired. New staging installed at front of church on newly created floor space. Pews repaired and polished. Gulleys and gutters cleaned and checked.

November – Floors steam cleaned and polished, Roof repairs to cement pointing and lead repositioning to stop water ingress. Churchyard pathways checked repaired due to weather damage. Nonfunctioning CCTV cameras replaced.

December – Outside drains cleared and cleaned shed alarms maintained and checked. Arboricultural Survey carried out in church grounds Tree survey and maintenance required to make safe.

I'm sure there are a few things I've missed so if you notice anything please as always let me know. As ever it's important to keep our church looking and feeling loved and cherished. The grounds are being looked after by gardeners and volunteers who tirelessly weed and plant. Thank you to all of you for helping keep this church alive.

Keith Turner (Fabric Lead)



Finance

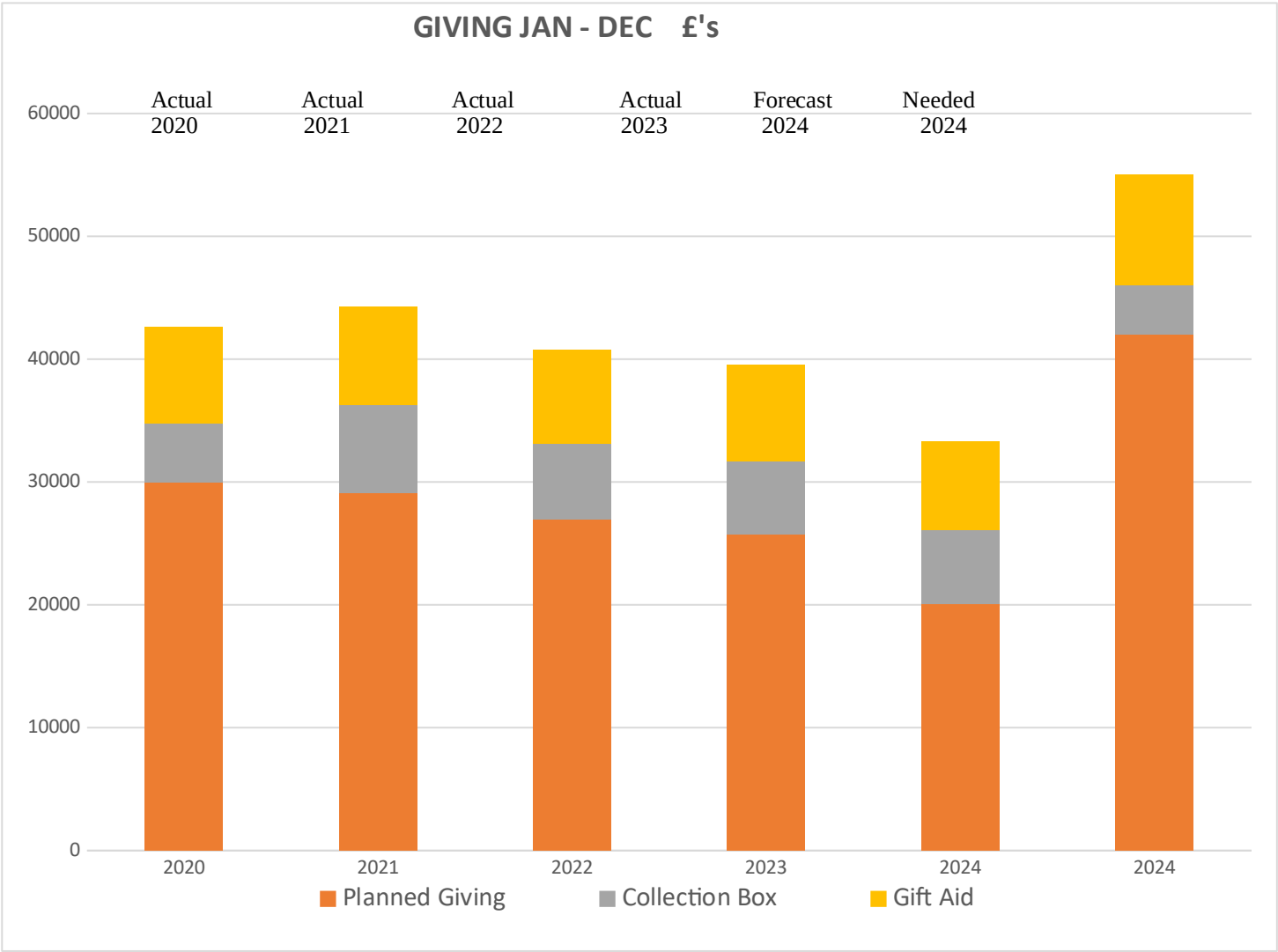
The day to day running costs of the Church are met from our “General Fund”. The 2023 figures are:

	£	£
Ordinary income		149,434
Expenditure		(257,828)
		<hr/>
Loss for year		(108,394)
<u>Extraordinary income</u>		
Grants	70,000	
Legacy	40,465	
	<hr/>	
		110,465
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Surplus for year after extraordinary income		2,071
		<hr/>

Had it not been for a legacy and some grants, the loss for the year would have been £108,394. We have been fortunate. It is unlikely that these sources of extraordinary income will be repeated in 2024. Further, the PCC approved a 2024 budget with a further loss of £56,560. At the moment we are without income from one of our commercial properties where the tenant has not paid any rent for over two years. The PCC (as charity trustees) has taken court action against the tenant and a third and final court hearing will be held this summer with an order of some sort from the court. Legal costs to date have amounted to £8,500. In the meantime, this makes balancing the books very challenging.

In addition to this challenge we are facing issues with the level of giving to the church. The following chart shows that giving is falling. The last column shows where we need to be if we are to be able to pay our bills including the Parish Share to the diocese of Chelmsford, which in turn pays for Revd Paul’s stipend, pension costs and housing.

In 2024 our annual church electricity costs are due to rise from their usual level of around £3,000 to £8,000. A new energy contract started in September 2023 which saw daytime prices trebling!



How can you help?

- If you give by monthly banker’s standing order, would you please increase your standing order by however much you can?
- If you do not give by standing order, please could you do this so that we have certainty of income which will help us plan accordingly? Please do speak with me about this;

- If you give and pay tax, please complete a gift aid form so that we can reclaim that tax for church funds.

There is a lot more detail in the PCC's full legal report and accounts for 2023 which runs to 28 pages and can be found at the following link to the Charity Commission website:

[Annual Report and Accounts 2023](#)

If you are reading a paper copy of this report, please go to the following link, click on "find a charity" and enter 1131704 as the charity number. You will then be able to access the report and accounts for 2023.

<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk>

In conclusion we continue to be blessed by God's love through the Holy Spirit who sustains us all.

If you have any questions on anything, please let me know.

John Tipping
Honorary Treasurer

PCC and Standing Committee Report

St Mary's PCC and Standing Committee meet on alternating months throughout the year, to discuss important issues and make decisions on behalf of the church.

The role of the Standing Committee is to transact the business of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) between its full meetings. The Committee act as a sounding-board for the incumbent in all matters temporal and spiritual as may be deemed appropriate.

Your current representatives are:

PCC

Revd Paul Mackay

Revd Jacky Lindoe

Philip Briant

Teresa Church (Deanery Synod Rep)

Marianne Fowle (Served 6 years – standing down 2024)

Daunelle Green

Bob Harvey

Lynne Hickie

Pat Johnson

Christiane Korsten

Wendy Perry (Served 6 years – standing down 2024)

Peter Sloman (Deanery Synod Rep)

John Tipping (Churchwarden/Deanery Synod Rep/Honorary Treasurer)

Keith Turner (Churchwarden)

Melanie Van Looy (Served 6 years – standing down 2024)

Lois Blakey (as Children & Families Worker – Co-Opted)

Sue Mackay (as PCC Secretary – Co-opted)

Standing Committee

Revd Paul Mackay

Revd Jacky Lindoe

Peter Sloman

Keith Turner – Churchwarden

John Tipping – Churchwarden & Treasurer

Lois Blakey – Children & Families Worker

Sue Mackay (as PCC Secretary)

During our meetings, important decisions are discussed and decided upon. With various refurbishment works being undertaken to the East Hall/West Hall (St Mary's Centre) and the works taking place in the church building itself, we continued in our task to remain good stewards of the church's finances as well as ensuring the general upkeep of the church was maintained and decisions made for our future work and mission in this place.

Pastoral concerns are an important part of our ministry and so we remain mindful of any issues that are known to us.

Once again it was lovely to be able to hold our PCC Away Day in September at St Michael's, Dawes Heath, and everyone appreciated the day and felt that it was well worth spending a few hours together on a Saturday praying, thinking, and discussing the needs and life of our church and how we might look to the future.

St Mary's PCC are committed to ensuring that the gospel of Christ is proclaimed in thought, word and deed and that all of us, as the body of Christ in this place play our part in ensuring that we remember all that has been done in the past, but looks ahead to the future, so that our church, God's church in Prittlewell, is still here in another 1000 years.

As PCC Secretary I look forward to more exciting times ahead. My prayer and I hope yours too, is that as the representatives for St Mary's we will remain unified and focussed on God's work in this place.

Sue Mackay - PCC Secretary

Bellringing

While the church building renovations were still causing issues into the start of this year and services had been suspended in the church, we were very pleased to be able to continue ringing every Sunday morning. What a joy it was for us to ring for Easter Sunday and to come down and see the church lit up with so many people attending. We were so glad to play our small part in that celebratory return service.

We were saddened to hear that on 9 February Kathryn Ash had passed away. Kathryn was a loyal member of the Prittlewell band, and regularly helped at the ringing school. She is very much missed by her fellow ringers.

Our regular annual bell ringing outing this year took us to Oxford where we were able to ring at some lovely towers including Oxford Cathedral and Magdalen College. It was a long and tiring day, but we all had a good time.

The Saturday Ringing School continues to be popular with Peter Sloman at the helm supported by a number of ringers. While we have many students attending from several surrounding towers (with one student regularly coming from Wanstead!), we have only had one student attending from PrITTLEWELL. I am pleased to announce that Penny Lowen is now a full member of the Essex Association of Change Ringers and a regular ringer for Sunday services as well Monday practice evenings. While our numbers are generally good, we will attempt to target more local ringers to ensure that ringing continues to thrive in the future.

The Southern District held two ringing competitions this year and I am pleased to say that PrITTLEWELL won both competitions, proudly bringing the shields to PrITTLEWELL. One of the competitions progressed to the finals which were held in St Osyth, where PrITTLEWELL came 5th out of 11 teams from all over Essex.

We had many bell ringing visitors over the year who either visited as part of an outing that included many of the surrounding towers or to come to us directly to have a chance to ring our bells. We had a band come to ring a successful peal attempt, ringing for over 3 hours. The band rang our bells well and we were pleased to host them. We had many attempts ourselves with some success throughout the year, including a first-time quarter peal success for one of our members, Carol Adams, and we will be attempting more quarter peals in the future to either commemorate/celebrate an occasion or as an opportunity to generally improve our ringing.

We were privileged to ring for the Coronation of King Charles III. It was an honour for our members to take part in general ringing for this event and have their names listed along with our church in the national records for the day and we had a successful quarter peal attempt in honour of the occasion.

And finally, we finished up the year with ringing for Christmas, a favourite among many of our members. It was a joy to have a full and active church again as we rang for many Christmas services, Christmas Eve and then again on Christmas Day.

Sarah Chin-a-Loy

Junior Church

Due to the services happening in the Church Halls the decision was made to hold Junior Church in the Guild Hall, however after returning to the church building at Easter we have continued to meet in the Guild Hall. Due to the growing age range in Junior Church we have been experimenting with different formats to try and keep the sessions engaging for all who attend.

Junior Church Trips and Events

In February Junior Church were invited to join 1st Prittlewell Scouting Group for a trip to the WB Studios the making of Harry Potter. The young people had a fantastic day out and enjoyed seeing behind the scenes of how the movies were made.

During Easter we held one of our first Junior Church Socials in the Centre the young people were treated to a takeaway, and we played some games together. Some of the young people have also continued to attend the Southend wide youth event Revitalize a fantastic opportunity to have fun, worship and receive teaching alongside their peers from across the city.



Junior Church safety talk before combat archery SOLID festival

combat archery, jet ski rides, mountain boarding and more. We had a fantastic weekend, and the weather was good for the majority of time.

In July we had our first Junior Church weekend away at SOLID festival, a Christian event held at Stubbers Adventure Centre. The weekend included 4 services, inflatables, sports, laser tag, rifle shooting, archery,

At the end of the weekend young people were already asking to go again next year.

School Services

We continue to lead two services a week for the school, one for East Street in the church building and one for Boston Avenue in the school hall onsite on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings respectively. This is a great opportunity to share stories from the Bible and the message of God's love with the children. This year we also had the whole school into the church twice once for the King's Coronation and again at Christmas. This year we also hosted a carol service for the school in the evening.

Prayer Spaces and School Visits

In June we hosted a Prayer Space in the Centre for St Mary's School, this also coincided with a visit to the church from Prince Avenue Academy who were visiting as part of their Religious Education learning about Christian Prayer. This means that over 650 children were able to visit the prayer space and had the opportunity to have some time to engage with interactive prayer. We had some



Prayer Space June 2023

We had some wonderful feedback from the children, parents and teachers and Prince Avenue have already booked in to return next year.

We also had visits from St Christopher's School as part of the Religious Education learning and Dolly and Bear Nursery who came just before Christmas to hear the Christmas Story and look around the church.

Make it Mondays and Family Events

This year we continued with Make it Mondays and by the end of the year had a fantastic team of helpers who were cutting, sticking and gluing to ensure all the preparation of the crafts was done so they were

ready to go at the event. Unfortunately, with a busy start to the year we did not manage to organise an event for February half term, so our first event was Pop in for Pancakes which saw many, many, pancakes cooked and enjoyed.



Make it Mondays kicked off the year with a Holy Week and Easter Special in the Centre because of continuing works in the church building. During our time together we explored the events leading up to Easter and Easter itself. We did not host a Easter Hunt this year because of uncertainty as to what stage the

works would be at and how safe the churchyard would be to accommodate this.

In May half-term we held our first post-pandemic Family Film Night, where we watched the film Jungle Beat. We paused the film halfway through to enjoy some jacket potatoes and ice cream before returning to the church for the second half and some making activities exploring the film's theme of friendship further.

In the summer at Make it Mondays we explored the parables. We hunted for the lost sheep, sowed hundreds and thousands (seeds) onto different types of biscuit (soil), welcomed home the prodigal son, cared like the Good Samaritan and built like the wise and the foolish builders. We finished the summer with a party to celebrate like we had heard in the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son. The celebrations included an epic water fight and inflatable assault course.

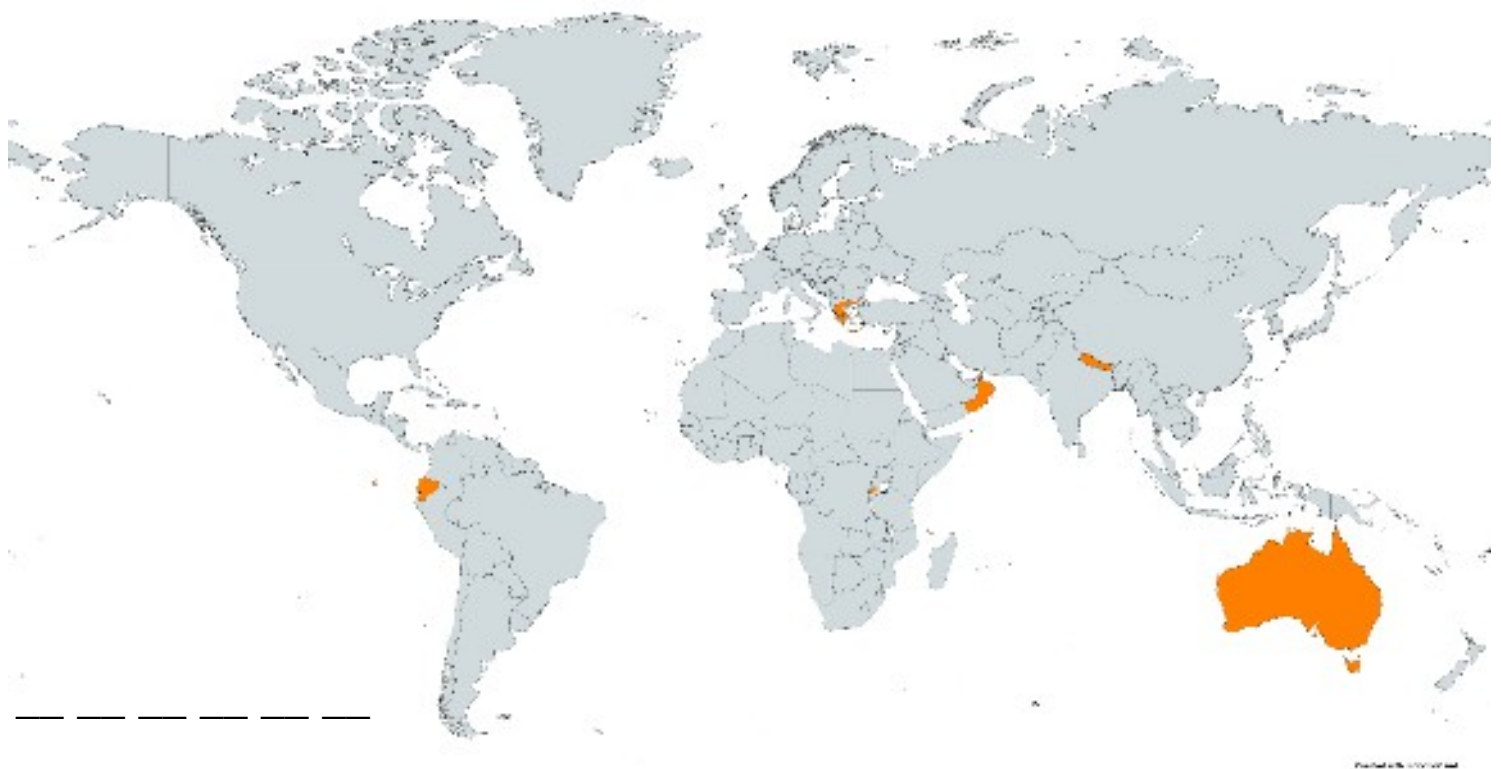
Our October Make it Monday used the book "Jesus is the Light?" from Scripture Union to explore what it means when Christians say this. This event was followed up by Make it Christingle, the events were

combined because there was not a Monday between the schools breaking up and Christmas Day. This event had children solving puzzles to collect all the parts of the Christingle and making activities to represent the different parts of the Christingle. The event concluded with a short Christingle Service.

It is wonderful to see familiar faces returning and getting to know some new ones too. We have continued with our priority booking list so our regulars have a chance to book in before opening it up to the school. Some of our older Junior Church members have joined our team of wonderful volunteers who make these events possible.



Jesus IS the light!



Can you solve this puzzle from Make it Christingle?

Lois Blakey Children and Families Worker

Children's Society

The Children's Society home boxes have raised a total of £1075 plus £38.94 in Gift Aid this year. Since I have been coordinating for this charity, this is the largest sum we have raised in one year, so thank you to everyone for your support.



We currently have 41 registered box holders, the majority being church members but also some are held by members of the local community.

Linda Corney

From the period of January to December 2023, our church groups and school continue to raise money for the Children's Society. As always, a co-ordinator from the Youth and Risk department wrote to the church expressing their gratitude and explained about the vital work that the society does and how the money we have raised contributes towards this.

As times are becoming more difficult of late and people are struggling to make ends meet, sadly there has been a decline in the amount of money we are collecting. Only around £20 was collected for the Smarties challenge this year. This is a considerable drop compared to previous years.



The Christingle donations, due to advanced technology are now mainly done online so hopefully people are giving generously that way if they can.

We celebrated together with a lovely Christingle Service on 17 December, with everyone having the opportunity to make their own Christingles.

Stephanie Stanley



Churchyard

We start our year weeding, pruning the roses and generally just tidying up.

In May Revd Jacky gave us a couple of flower mats one with wildflowers and the other was butterfly friendly. We planted them on the St Mary's Road border. Over the months we have had a lovely display.



Dove



Ducks

To hopefully help our meadow along we planted some more wildlife friendly plants—Cowslip, Greater Knapweed, Bird's Foot Trefoil—along with some seed mixes—Wildflower, Butterfly Mix and Honeybee mix. Later we also planted some wild daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*). We have our fingers crossed this will soon start looking like a meadow.

In the summer two rose bushes and a hebe were planted by the memorial garden in remembrance of Ray Mason by his family.

Eight gabions were put into the Churchyard along with new lampposts for flood lighting.



In July we put a hedgehog house in the wildlife garden on the left of the East Street entrance – no signs of a resident as yet but this can take a few years.



Squirrel

In October we planted mixed daffodil bulbs in the rose garden to finish off the edging that we started to plant last year.

While we are working away, we do receive a number of visitors; here are a few I have managed to catch on camera.

The Churchyard team is Richard Anderson, Sue Sullivan, Teresa Church and Christina Turner

Christina Turner

Coffee Mornings



With works having been completed in the church and our new St Mary's Centre East Hall, our coffee mornings started up again in September and although no longer offering fairly traded goods, keeping it simple our offering of tea, coffee ("fairly traded") and hot chocolate, accompanied with a biscuit or cake has been welcomed. It was decided to hold them on the second Wednesday of the month to begin with, in the East Hall, an opportunity to open up our bright new Centre.

An idea for a new identity for our coffee mornings was revealed and a small group of us came together to discuss the way forward and hopes for the new venture. Following meetings and times of prayer on 11 October "Taste & See Café" began.



"Taste & See Coffee Mornings" – are an opportunity to just come along enjoy a cup of tea or coffee, a slice of cake or a biscuit. As usual there is no charge but if you want to make a small donation you can. The important thing is enjoying the company of others and to feel you are in a safe environment where if wanted there is an opportunity for prayer which can take place with a member of the team who can pray with you or for you.

2024 COFFEE MORNINGS
AT OUR
"Taste & See Cafe"
IN THE EAST HALL
of St Mary's Centre East Hall
First and foremost we thank the Lord for those who have helped us in this
First and foremost we thank the Lord for those who have helped us in this
First and foremost we thank the Lord for those who have helped us in this

Why not come along, bring a friend,
take time out to relax
in our newly refurbished surroundings

Start your day off right
with a taste of coffee
and a slice of cake

Where are we?
St Mary's Centre East Hall

When are we open?
Wednesdays 10.30 - 12.30 PM
10th & 24th January
14th & 28th February
18th & 22nd March
15th & 19th April
19th & 23rd May
16th & 20th June
(more to follow)

www.stmaryspittville.co.uk

We have some reflective books to share that can be taken away to be read in your own time if this is helpful and other items available for a small donation. So come alone or bring a friend but do join us if you can..

It was so lovely to see the faces of those who supported us in Coffee Mornings past but sad that some are no longer able to be with us, our small band of happy helpers pray that we will see many new faces come along in 2024.

God Bless

Sue Mackay

Communications

We are Revd Paul Mackay, Revd Jacky Lindoe, Lois Blakey, Richard Anderson, John Tipping, Keith Turner, Christina Turner and Sue Mackay and we meet regularly to discuss ways to best keep “in touch” with those connected to St Mary’s and to make St Mary’s known generally. Amongst other things:

- Website
- Facebook
- Weekly News Booklets – printed and sent out by email
- Service sheets
- Posters
- Noticeboards
- Banners fixed to the churchyard wall
- Signage

The Heritage Open Day in September proved to be very successful, and we hope to repeat the event in 2024.

Richard Anderson

Deanery Synod

Meetings of the Deanery Standing Committee were held, via Zoom, on 9 January, 21 June and 18 October prior to the Synod meetings.

Synod Meetings:

31 January at St Mary’s Prittlewell

Matters discussed / arising

The General Synod was prayed for as this meeting could be divisive.

The forthcoming Deanery elections.

A general discussion on the Deanery and its functions

The away-day on 7 October.

4 July at St Andrew's Shoeburyness.

The meeting was attended by the Bishop of Chelmsford, Bishop Guli

Matters discussed / arising:

The House of Clergy elected The Revd Tom Loh as secretary, and standing committee Revd Tom Loh, Dave Willis and Nic Pucenot.

The House of Laity elected Margaret Henning as secretary, and standing committee Sandra Baines, Peter Sloman with one vacancy and no Lay Chair elected.

The Synod was given an interesting and moving address by Bishop Guli. A report on The General Synod was received.

9 November at St Alban's Westcliff

The meeting coincided with the visit to the deanery by Bishop Adam the Bishop of Bradwell which included – Morning Prayer at South Shoebury, Holy Communion at North Shoebury, lunch at St John's and Evening Prayer at St. Alban's. Bishop Adam also visited St Mary's Prittlewell. The meeting of the synod followed Evening Prayer.

Other activities

Throughout the year the Deanery Synod has produced a Deanery Prayer Letter to which all Parishes are invited to contribute.

An away-day was held on 7 October at St Michaels Daws Heath. Interesting discussions were held on parishes' activities. The day was a success despite a poor turnout of members.

A coronation celebration service was held at St Mary's Prittlewell on 7 May.

Peter Sloman

Flower Arrangers

2023 was a much better year for the Flower Arranging Team. The re-ordering of the church was completed, and services returned to the church, and we were able to decorate for Easter with lots of Spring flowers.

Mavis Mason joined the team and has become a much-valued member. We tried to keep the flowers relevant to the seasons and various festivals. This included Easter, Heritage Day, Harvest, Remembrance Sunday, and Christmas.

In September, we also remembered the late Queen Elizabeth II on the anniversary of her death.

For Christmas we purchased a new Garland for the South door. This replaced the one we had used for several years. It was taken apart and the silk flowers and greenery were included in our other Christmas arrangements.



People often ask us why we use silk rather than fresh. Sadly good quality fresh flowers are very expensive, so we mostly use silk as we have a good selection.

If anyone would like fresh flowers in memory of a departed loved one, or to celebrate a special family occasion, just ask Chris or myself and we would happily arrange your fresh flowers for you.

In December, we again enjoyed afternoon tea at Scotts.

Thank you to our flower arranging team, we have enjoyed another happy and successful year.

Patricia Johnson Flower Group Coordinator

Make It @ St Mary's

After the success of Make It Mondays with the children, Lois and I realised that the adults also seemed to enjoy crafting.

We had our first session on 20 November 2023 to see how it would work. We took



some card making equipment in so that we could make Christmas Cards. 12 ladies arrived and really seemed to enjoy making cards, some saying how they didn't have any crafting experience and were proud of the cards they made.



The idea is that if anyone has a craft, they show others how to do it.

So, on the second session on 18 December, Pat Johnson, the Church's flower arrangement co-ordinator, demonstrated

how to make a Christmas table decoration. The ladies were asked to



bring

their own container and the flowers and any candles/ornaments they wanted to use. Pat supplied the greenery and showed everyone how to arrange them. Again 12 ladies turned up and we had a very productive couple of hours.



We have tea, coffee and biscuits and have a very relaxed couple of hours. The idea is that each month we can either try something new or carry on with something we have already been taught. If this is something you might like to join in with, you will receive a warm welcome.



Next year we are hoping to have a day out in the summer at a pottery painting studio.

Christina Turner



What is it?

A group, for men to get together, once a month, and have a chat and a pie.

Sounds simple, is that it?

Of course not, we have a good go at putting the world to rights and generally having a good moan about everything from treading in dog poo to politicians' decisions (no correlation suggested). We also get to find out a bit more about each other, where we are from, what we have done etc.

Do "Chatham house" rules apply?

I can neither confirm nor deny!! What I can say, is that it is a safe space for people to share their views openly and honestly.

Do you ever moan about your partners?

Definitely not! Although any topic is up for discussion, we do try and keep it positive and away from personal attacks. Although we did once have a lively debate on how much 'helping out around the house' should activate a small medal awarding ceremony.

Do you speak about religion or faith?

If an individual wanted to speak about it or use this as a discussion topic, it would be most welcome, but this group is more about a general fellowship and broader conversation. Our faith has brought us together, and in that we are thankful.

Where did the idea come from?

A chance conversation over a pint in the pub between 'pie master' Paul and Gavin. We thought it would be good for other men to get together



and chat in a safe environment (the church centre). And so it began in October 2023.

How is it all going?

We regularly have between 6 and 8 pioneers. There is definitely a better relationship between us all. Saying hello to a new friend feels more comfortable and genuine. We are aiming to expand our membership to give more of the men a chance to get to know each other better.

How do I sign up?

Speak to Revd Paul or sign up on the sheet in Church.

Gavin Montella

St Mary's Centre



This has been a busy year for the St Mary's Centre. Although the works on the East end of the centre were finished last year there was still furnishing and installation to be done. In May through to July the West Hall (previously known as St Mary's Church Hall) was completely

refurbished. During this refurbishment the installation of the sensory and soft playrooms took place in rooms off of the East Hall. All works were completed for the Grand Opening of the St Mary's Centre on 22 November. The evening began with a thanksgiving service in church which also showcased the renovations and pew removals at the east end of the church. The service was followed by food in the West Hall and the opportunity to look around the Centre.

Before the grand opening and the installation in June we hosted a prayer space in the east end of the Hall (see Children's and Families Worker Report for more details on this). It was great to see the Centre being used and full of life and to have a glimpse as to what the future of the Centre might be.

In September the Taste and See Café was launched in the Centre for more information about this please see our Coffee Morning Report. October saw the start of "Pie'n'ears" night an opportunity for the "gents" to enjoy a good pie and some good company. And the following month saw the launch of "Make it @ St Mary's, a chance to have a go at a new craft or master an old one.

At the beginning of November our new hirers for the Centre, Cake Club, began to run weekly sessions. Cake Club is a parenting solidarity and support group, the session held in the Centre has a particular focus on those with additional needs. The sessions are going well, and we have had fantastic feedback from other organisations and service providers who have attended the sessions. One parent said,

"I have found Cake Club SEN session a real comfort and a place we really look forward to visiting weekly. Beautiful space with amazing crowd of people. Highly recommend."

In the new year we are looking forward to welcoming hirers who will be running Ante-Natal classes for expectant parents and Strollercize, a dance exercise class.

We have lots of exciting plans and ideas for the Centre moving forward, however are wanting to ensure that we do not run before we can walk so are going to take things slowly to ensure they are sustainable moving forward. We want to keep God the focus of all that we do in the Centre.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind or share with you the vision behind the Centre. We want to provide a safe space, a haven of refuge, a harbour that is also a beacon to the community and provides opportunities for individuals and families to thrive. We want those using the Centre to feel a sense of freedom, a feeling of home, to experience love, peace and security.

Our motivation for creating this space were the following Bible verses:

He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction. *Job 36:16*

He brought me out into a spacious place, he rescued me because he delighted in me. *2 Samuel 22:20*

These verses mention God drawing a person out into a spacious place. One translation of spacious place is from the Hebrew word *ravach*, which means to breathe freely, to revive, to have ample room, to be refreshed. We want to provide a place where individuals feel able to breathe freely, they are no longer constricted by the pressures of their lives, that they are leaving any distress or stress behind. An environment in which people can be revived and refreshed, they are able to take that time out to care for and share of their selves without fear of judgement and leave equipped and filled with hope. The motivation is to show the community through our provision God delights in them, they are loved, valued and significant.

So, what are we providing? What follows is further information about the Centre and specifics about facilities within including a short explanation as to why some of the names for the rooms have been chosen.

The East and West Halls

The halls are a multi-purpose and adaptable space which can facilitate a variety of uses. The space could be used for training events, workshops, classes and larger meetings. This makes it ideal for both church and community use.



The Office

We have now moved office for our Parish Administrator and Children and Families Worker into the Centre. The room includes a shared working space and small meeting area. It provides a hub from which the Centre is organised and run.

Joshua - The Meeting Room

The meeting room is a professional and fully equipped meeting space. Including a presentation screen, data points and electrical outputs. Easily accommodating ten people the space is ideal for small training events and meetings. The room is called Joshua because in the book of Exodus we read how Moses set a specific place outside the camp where anyone inquiring of the Lord could go. Moses would go into the tent to speak with the Lord and then return to camp, but his young aide Joshua would remain in the tent of meeting.

Ruth - The Therapy/Counselling Room

The therapy/counselling room is a relaxed environment with a homely seating area for talking therapies. The room also includes a variety of toys and materials to accommodate the play and art therapies. Additionally, the room provides a less formal setting for individuals to have consultations or meetings when the main meeting room is in use or would be a too formal or intimidating setting. It is also an appropriate space for individuals who may need to speak in privacy that the East Hall space does not provide. The room is named Ruth as the book of Ruth tells the story of two people Naomi and Ruth. Naomi's life has not gone as she had planned, and she is returning home. Ruth decides to go with her and together they journey from a place of sorrow and disappointment to blessing and joy.

St Mary's Centre will also include rooms with specialised equipment.

Jacob - The Soft Play Room

A room designed to be suitable and accessible to a wide age group. It will incorporate equipment that is safe and usable by babies beginning to walk and strong and durable enough to accommodate teenagers and even adults. The room provides an indoor space for children and young people to use and engage in big body movement; exercise balance and strength; manage their own risk and explore different types of in a safe environment. In Genesis we find the story of Jacob who has struggled with others from the womb through to his return to his family as an adult, on the way home he wrestles with an Angel of the Lord, a physical outworking and healing of his continuous struggles and an encounter that ends with him being blessed.

Bartimaeus - The Sensory Room

This is a calm environment in which those using the room can relax, the room contains several pieces of specialised equipment designed to be accessible to all ages and abilities. The room includes various equipment that creates atmosphere through the visual. There are also auditory elements provided by the interactive sound to sight panel that encourages vocalisation and includes a music player. The vibration pads bring a tactile element to the room. Although a small room it is our

intention to build a library of sensory resources to be used in the sensory room contributing to the overall experience. Named Bartimaeus after a blind man who meets Jesus in Mark's Gospel. Bartimaeus encounters Jesus through different senses: sound (hearing Jesus), sight (seeing Jesus), proprioception (throwing of his cloak) and vestibular (jumping up). This story also contains an important reminder about the purpose of this room. Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants Jesus to do for him. A reminder to listen and serve individuals rather than to do to or for them without consultation and to not hinder them from coming to Jesus like the crowd in the story.

We are very excited to see what will happen with the Centre in 2024. If you would like to know more about what happens in the Centre or have ideas for the Centre, please speak to Lois our Children and Families Worker.

Lois Blakey

Women's Fellowship

In 2023 we met twelve times – 11 in the St. Mary's Centre East Hall and once in the West Hall.

It was a difficult year as there was ill health right from the start and Vera Field and Margaret Dickinson sadly died early in 2023 and Wendy's Mum, Joyce, and Daphne's daughter, Julia, both died after some time in poor health.

We were very happy to receive the gift of a portable microphone in memory of Margaret Dickinson and we now have a small bell to bring everyone to "order" during our meetings!

Margaret J. and Phyllis have been admitted to Care Homes; some members have had more than one visit or stay in Hospital and others have been unable to leave their own homes because of ill health or inclement weather.

Our attendee numbers have noticeably dropped—hence we are welcoming anyone who would like to join us for a single meeting or more regularly.

We have had a few visitors at meetings and would like to encourage others (women and men) to join us regularly – or occasionally. Everyone is most welcome.

Following our AGM in February we were fortunate to have Dr. Christiane talk to us and answer any health-related questions. In March we welcomed Meg Davidson who told us about what led her to her role as a City Councillor.

In Holy Week we had a Meditation and our 61st Birthday Party with 13 members present on May Day Bank Holiday and a jolly Tea Party on 7 August.

Owing to the ill health of our June Speaker we filled the time with a Quiz and a Speaker from Southend InSight kindly changed her date in order to fill an unexpected Programme gap in July.

On 4 September Beverly and Ruth came to talk about their work in Occupational Health – most unusually we were all enthralled by their teamwork and the content so much so that the time flew by – the kettle for tea didn't go on until almost 3 p.m.!

On 2 October Richard Layzell, an Enforcement Officer with Southend City Council, told us of his wide-ranging work and how we should be alert to the many scams and cons (reasons for not doing something) which are in regular use these days against an unsuspecting public.

6 November was when Natasha Copus talked about Foodbanks and their absolutely necessary role in today's towns, cities and villages – today's Foodbank staff are often struggling to meet the needs of their clients.

4 December was our Christmas meal with John Smith entertaining us with his organ and violin accompaniments, Carol singing and Pass the Parcels, plus a General Knowledge Quiz.

It was an interesting year.

Suzanne Mattingley Chairman

Points of Contact

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Weekly News Booklet:

If you have any articles or items to include in our WNB send to Mrs S Mackay, St Mary's Vicarage, 489 Victoria Avenue, Southend SS2 6NL or email to suemac58@hotmail.co.uk

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