

**Anglican Diocese of Chester – Middlewich Deanery
Mid Cheshire Circuit of the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District of the Methodist Church**

St Mary's Church, Weaverham



**Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Ecumenical Church Council
for the year ended 31 December 2024**

Incumbent

Reverend Paul Withington, The Vicarage, Church Street, Weaverham, NORTHWICH.
CW8 3NJ

Minister

Reverend Janet Aspey, 38 Earls Way, Kingsmead, Northwich. CW9 8GQ

Secretary

Pam Thomson, 4 Barley Castle Close, Appleton Thorn, WARRINGTON. WA4 4SA

Treasurer

John J C Freeman, Stable Court, 20a Leigh Way, Weaverham, NORTHWICH. CW8 3PR

Banks

Santander, Bridle Road, BOOTLE. L30 4GB
CCLA Investment Management Ltd., POBox 12892, Dunmow, Essex. CM6 9DL

Honorary Independent Examiner

Kevin D Pickering, 5 Withens Close, Weaverham, NORTHWICH. CW8 3JJ

Registered Charity Number: 1135093

**ST. MARY'S CHURCH, WEAVERHAM ANNUAL REPORT FOR
THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH COUNCIL [ECC] FOR THE YEAR ENDED
31st DECEMBER 2024**

St. Mary's Church is situated in Church Street, Weaverham. It is a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) between the parish church of the Church of England in the parish of St Mary in the Middlewich Deanery and Chester Diocese and the Methodist Church within the Mid Cheshire Circuit of the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District. The partnership looks for support, encouragement, advice and overview to the relevant denominations, the Diocese and the Methodist District. The correspondence address is St Mary's Lighthouse Centre, Church Lane, Weaverham, NORTHWICH, CW8 3NN.

ECC members who have served in the year are: -

<i>Incumbent:</i>	Revd. Paul Withington	Chairman
<i>Methodist Minister:</i>	Revd. Janet Aspey	
<i>Wardens:</i>	Robert Hough Colin Weeks	Elected 2024 ACM
<i>Representatives on the Deanery Synod:</i>	Pam Thomson John Freeman	Secretary Treasurer
	David Whitfield John Freeman	Elected 2023 ACM Elected 2023 ACM 1 vacancy
<i>Methodist Stewards:</i>	David Whitfield Mike Hornby	
<i>Representatives from lay church roles:</i>	Gilly Latham Linda Jones Jules Sanders Mike Sanders	
<i>Elected members:</i>		
Jerry Marshall (<i>elected 2022</i>) Pam Thomson (<i>elected 2022</i>) Gillian Horth (née Edwards <i>re-elected 2023</i>) Lindsay Hough (<i>elected 2024</i>) Christine Weeks (<i>elected 2024</i>) Sue Winnington (<i>re-elected 2023</i>) 11 current members 1 vacancy	Jonathan Gore (<i>re-elected 2024</i>) Mike Hornby (<i>re-elected 2024</i>) Vicky Rushton (<i>re-elected 2024</i>) Denise Mitchell (<i>elected 2024</i>) Sue Cameron (<i>elected 2024</i>)	

Structure, governance and management

The method of appointment of ECC members (trustees) is set out in the Constitution of the Local Ecumenical Partnership signed in November 2009. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the ECC.

Objectives and activities

St Mary's ECC has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, the Revd. Paul Withington and Methodist Minister the Revd. Janet Aspey in promoting the whole mission of the Church: pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical in the ecclesiastical parish. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the buildings associated with the church.

St Mary's is fully integrated as an LEP between the Anglican and Methodist Churches in Weaverham. We worship at the Anglican Church building with our services varied between Anglican and Methodist styles and leadership.

The vision statement for St Mary's Ecumenical Church, Weaverham is as follows:

St Mary's Church Weaverham, sharing the light and hope of Jesus in our community.

Achievements and performance

Church attendance

The current electoral roll has 128 members. We have a duality of Anglican and Methodist members; members can be either or both. Attendance varied during the year, with an average attendance on a usual Sunday at 84 [76 adults and 8 children].

18 Funerals and 2 weddings were conducted and 3 baptisms took place during the year.

Safeguarding

The safeguarding committee has met in the last 12 months to ensure our Safeguarding Policy remains up to date and complies with the Church of England Requirements, and those of the Methodist Church. As an Ecumenical Church we must follow the policies of one of the denominations and at St Marys we follow the policies of the Church of England. This includes displaying posters which include relevant information and contact details which we do. A copy of our policy is available to anyone who may want to see it. The policy has been approved by the ECC which has complied with the duty imposed under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults).

23 members of the parish attended a Basic Awareness safeguarding training course in October 2024.

Review of the year

The ECC met nine times during the year with Standing Committee meetings between when needed. The ACM was held on the 29th April 2024.

Café Church, held in The Lighthouse, has become a regular feature on the first Sunday of the month. This is a more informal service aimed mainly at young families and an average of 75 adults and 12 children attend every month. The service pattern for other services remains the same (average attendance of 76 adults and 7 children), and a "United Service" held on the four Sundays during the year which include a fifth Sunday, (average attendance of 52 adults and 6 children). The Lent Course this year utilised the Home Group meeting times plus an extra session. There is always difficulty finding a time which suits most people. Using existing times did have the advantage that people were available but possibly prevented many discussions which are possible with larger groups. There was a Sunrise Service at Easter, held jointly with The Stronghold Church, which was well supported. The Easter celebration at St Mary's was attended by 129 people with 75 taking Holy Communion.

Harvest was celebrated in October with the harvest gifts donated to the Northwich Foodbank which we continued to support throughout the year. We were back to a normal format for our

Remembrance Day services held in November, with uniformed groups filling the church in the afternoon.

The services at Christmas were very well attended with 397 people attending the Christmas services and 61 taking Holy Communion. The Carol Service was again very well attended with the music being provided by Weaverham Community Choir and a brass ensemble. "Experience Christmas" was repeated in 2024 and it was as successful as it had been the previous year. Children from Weaverham Forest Primary School and Weaverham Primary Academy came to St Mary's during the first week of December to visit different "stations" depicting the Christmas Story. Older students from Weaverham High School came to help. School Carol Services were also held at St Mary's.

John Freeman, our long-standing treasurer was made a Lay Canon of Chester Cathedral for his work on Diocesan and General Synod. John was Instituted by the Bishop and Installed into his seat by the Dean on Sunday 28th July 2024.

The Lighthouse Café on Tuesdays continues to be very well attended by both church members and a significant number of people who don't come to church but find a warm welcome.

The Wednesday food distribution continues in the Lighthouse in partnership with Northwich Community Support.

We supported the community playscheme in the summer holidays providing crafts activities, games and stories.

During the year several faithful members of the congregation died and they will be greatly missed.

ADDENDUM

The following are our church groups and some have submitted reports.

Sticky Fingers - Toddlers group that runs every Monday during term time.

YPF - Young People's Fellowship [YPF] met on Sunday evenings and is aimed at children in school years 7 to 11. Unfortunately this is currently not meeting in 2025.

Home Groups are rightly recognised as an important aspect of St Mary's Church. They are places where fellowship, pastoral care, bible study, and prayer take place in an informal and small group setting. Sadly, the number of groups has dropped from 5 to four during the year, mainly due to health issues. The total membership of remaining groups is 32. Each group has a different flavour and meets at different times, locations, and frequencies, as follows:

Vicky Rushton is nominally the leader of a women-only group which has seven members. They meet on Monday mornings 9:30 – 11am at various locations but most often in Long Meadow. Any member is free to lead a session of bible study, but the dominant flavour is fellowship, pastoral support and prayer.

Jerry Marshall leads a men-only group that meets alternate Thursday evenings, 8 to 9:30pm in Sandy Lane. It has a strong missional flavour with plenty of socials, in addition to bible study and prayer. Of its six members, two do not yet attend church regularly and another is a member of another church.

Stephen Wilson leads a group every Tuesday afternoons from 2:00 to 4:00pm on Green Park. Of its ten members, one attends another church. A distinctive flavour of the group is that members can attend via Zoom – at least two do so regularly (from Watford and even Amsterdam!) It is noteworthy that one member is a regular at our 8:30am HC service. The emphasis is on bible study and application. For much of the year we looked at the lectionary readings of upcoming Sunday services – going deeper and discussing application more than is possible in the context of Sunday worship. We also tackle difficult scriptures or those unvisited in Sunday worship.

Jules Sanders leads a group of nine that meets weekly on a Tuesday evening. They have enjoyed great fellowship with both laughter, tears and plenty of cake. They have studied and wrestled with many questions while engaging with a broad range of scriptures during the year, culminating in the letters of John. Their focus is how they live out their faith in their everyday lives.

All groups use some of the many published bible study guides. We have accumulated quite a range. They are stored on the shelves of two bookcases in the PCSO office in the Lighthouse. All credit and thanks to Jules, our great Administrator, they are catalogued and can be used by anyone – but please sign them out if you do so.

Finally, we believe everyone who attends a home group would say "Amen" to this statement from Jules. "Knowing that you have the support of the group as you go out into the world to live your Christian life can be a great encouragement, whether that's work, family, home or neighbourhood."

The Mothers Union Branch of St Marys has had a fruitful and inspiring year, filled with fellowship, service, and spiritual growth. Guided by our motto, "Family Life at the Heart of the Church," we have continued to support our church community, strengthen families, and engage in outreach activities that reflect our faith and values.

This year, we are grateful to have 8 active members who have faithfully attended our now quarterly meetings. Our gatherings have been a time for prayer, Bible study, and discussion on topics relevant to family life and faith. Our prayer chain has been a cornerstone of our ministry, offering intercessory prayers for families, the church, and the wider community.

Each year, we put together bunches of daffodils for all females to receive at all services on Mothering Sunday. For the second year running, we have arranged a successful library lunch bag collaboration with Weaverham Library in both the Easter and Summer holidays which has been

well received by residents. We organised the teas following the Annual Remembrance Service in Church, an opportunity for fellowship. We supported the Church activities including the steam rally and harvest supper. We have enjoyed visiting other Branches in the deanery for their events and also the deanery festival. Our annual Summer Outing was a canal boat trip – with lots of entertainment! We have supported and promoted the Mothers Union “Away From It All” Holiday scheme. Members visited the sick and elderly in hospitals and care homes, offering comfort and companionship.

We organised our annual Strawberry Tea and also a Rainbow Fair both of which were very successful and have raised funds to help support Mothers Union projects.

We participated in the global Mothers Union Day of Prayer, joining with members worldwide to pray for families and communities. We also contributed to the Mothers Union global projects, such as supporting literacy programs.

While we have faced challenges such as low membership, we have been sustained by God’s grace and the support of our church family. We are especially grateful to Paul, Janet and all the leadership team and all the congregations for your encouragement and assistance.

In the coming year, we aim to:

- Expand our outreach programs to reach more families in need.
- Strengthen our partnerships with other community groups.
- Continue to grow spiritually through prayer, study, and fellowship

The Mothers Union remains committed to serving God, our church, and our community. We are thankful for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of families and to witness God’s love in action. As we move forward, we ask for your continued prayers and support as we strive to uphold our mission and values.

St Mary’s Choir continue to lead congregational singing at the Sunday 6.30pm evening service, enhancing the worship experience and encouraging the congregation to lift their voices in praise. We sang at Christmas Eve Midnight Communion where the choir presented a moving selection of carols which helped usher in the celebration of Christ’s birth.

We have welcomed 1 new member to the choir this year, enriching our sound and bringing fresh energy to our group, we aspire to return to pre-Covid numbers.

Like many ministries, we faced challenges such as attendance which has sadly impacted on our ability to participate in special services and festivals within the church which we previously would have done. However, these challenges also provided opportunities for growth, teamwork, and reliance on God’s grace.

We have condensed our 2 robe cupboards in the Choir Vestry into 1 to enable the children’s group to utilise it for storage.

We currently are not holding regular choir practises and therefore are unable to learn new anthems. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Margaret, Bob, Henry and Marion who play our magnificent organ each week for their dedication, leadership, and musical expertise. We are grateful to the church leadership and congregation for their ongoing support, encouragement, and prayers. A special thank you to all choir members for their commitment, hard work, and willingness to serve through their gifts.

As we look to the coming year, we are excited to:

- Continue growing musically and spiritually as a choir
- Explore new ways to enhance worship through music.
- Strengthen our outreach efforts to share God’s love through song.
- Encourage more members of the congregation to join our ministry.

Rambling Group - Meets for occasional Saturday morning walks of 3-4 miles.

Upcycling Shed and Crafts - Meets on Thursdays in the Lighthouse Annexe.

Bell Ringing – we have a thriving band of all ages who ring regularly for Sunday services, weddings and other special services and national events. We practice on a Tuesday evening. During 2024 work has been done on our clappers, the clapper hangs inside the bell, swinging back and forth to make it ring. The clappers were removed and taken to the bell foundry in Loughborough to have some work done on them. They were then refitted and will last for many more years. Work was also done on the oak louvres, some were renewed and some repaired and again hopefully, these will last for many more years. Most of the work was done by the ringers with help from Bob Hough and a Little Budworth ringer, thus keeping the costs down.

Fund Raising - The fund raising campaign “Raising the Roof” was started in the last quarter of 2022 to undertake a programme to pay for necessary repairs to the fabric of the building. The work on the roof and stonework has been completed and paid for. Since the start of the project approximately £43,000 has been raised from donations, grants and events and £35,648 has been paid out for the work. We also made donations of approximately £1,000 to the groups and their charities who performed in the concerts which we have hosted. During 2024 we held several concerts in church and the Lighthouse, we had a barn dance, an evening with Adrian Plas and helped with the catering for the History Society’s World War 1 book launch event and they kindly donated the proceeds to the fund. But the highlight of the year was the steam event in September. Thanks to contacts of some of our congregation and the power of social media advertising, several steam engines, a fairground organ and several old vehicles arrived on St Mary’s car park. Inside church, several model railways were set up alongside a giant Scalextric track where children (and grown-ups) could test their driving skills. Not satisfied with all this, the bellringers ran a Teddy Bear Zip Wire challenge from the tower roof. These different attractions together with cakes and refreshments provided by the Mothers Union attracted many villagers to St Mary’s and helped us raise over £1,000.

“Raising the Roof” has now become “Building the Future”. We are still raising money to improve our green credentials by reducing our carbon footprint. This essentially means changing our old gas boiler for a greener alternative for heating.

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH
COUNCIL OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, WEAVERHAM**

This report on the accounts for the year ending 31 December 2024 is in respect of an examination carried out in accordance with the Accounting Regulations (the Regulations) and the Charities Act 1993 (the Act) As members of the ECC you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts; you consider that the audit requirements of the Regulations and Section 43(2) of the Act do not apply. It is my responsibility to issue this report on those accounts in accordance with the terms of the Regulations.

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general directions given by the Charity Commission under Section 43(7)(b) and to be found in the Church of England Guidance 2006 edition. That examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the ECC and a comparison of the accounts with those records. It also includes considering any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given on the accounts.

In accordance with my examination, no matter has come to my attention which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements to keep accounting records in accordance with Section 41 of the Act, to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the Act and the Regulations have not been met; or to which in my opinion attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Kevin D Pickering – Hon Independent Examiner – January 2025

FINANCIAL REVIEW

There was an overall excess of expenditure over income of £7412 due to expenditure on the church roof and pointing. Expenditure was helped by 2 grants, one from the Diocese of Chester for £7000 and the other a conditional grant from the National Churches Trust of £4496. These were part of the “Raise the Roof” campaign which is continuing to raise funds towards making the church carbon neutral.

Looking ahead there is a need to increase our levels of regular giving as costs have followed the general national inflation trends. This will enable us to keep the church in a good state of repair over the coming years.

Energy usage for the year was as follows, 2023 figures in brackets gas Church 82 106 kWh (58 229 kWh) Lighthouse 14 194 kWh (20 563 kWh) and electricity Church 3783 kWh (4027 kWh) Lighthouse 9410 kWh (7183 kWh).

RESERVES POLICY

The policy is to hold at least £25 000 to cover the next three months of normal expenditure and £10 000 in the case of any emergencies. The policy will need reviewing as there is a need to build funds up to achieve carbon neutrality as some funding will be needed towards any projects. There are likely to be some funds available, but we need to determine what will be necessary from our resources.

ACCOUNTING POLICY

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Church of England Accounting Regulations taking into account the SORP 2005 revisions on a receipts and payments basis including as far as possible most Church activities being reported on a gross basis. Movable church furnishings are held on trust for the Council by the Churchwardens and would require faculty approval before removal.

ACCOUNTS FOR THE 12 MONTHS ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2024

	Notes	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total £	2023 £
RECEIPTS					
Voluntary income	A	117680		117680	146383
Church activities	B	17414		17414	16836
Fund raising		7139		7139	19779
Investment income	C	<u>4437</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>4542</u>	<u>1701</u>
TOTAL		146670	105	146775	184699
PAYMENTS					
Church activities	D	151129		151129	125734
Fund raising		1652		1652	1842
Salaries		<u>1406</u>		<u>1406</u>	<u>1816</u>
TOTAL		154187		154187	129392
NET INCOMING FUNDS		-7517	105	-7412	55307
Gains on investments			<u>46</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>137</u>
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS		-7517	151	-7366	55444
BALANCES AT 1 JANUARY		<u>802584</u>	<u>2757</u>	<u>805341</u>	<u>749849</u>
BALANCES AT 31 DECEMBER		795067	2908	797975	805293

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 DECEMBER

FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible asset- Lighthouse		684440		684440	684440
Investment assets			1711	1711	1665
CURRENT ASSETS					
Short term deposits		87641	1196	88837	84316
Cash at banks		<u>22986</u>		<u>22986</u>	<u>34870</u>
TOTAL		795067	2907	797974	805291

The notes A to E form part of the accounts

A Voluntary income					
Gift aid		68109		68109	68801
Tax recovered		25339		25339	40730
Other		7602		7602	6259
Collections		2840		2840	4364
Donations	general	1294		1294	2519
	Curate				410
Grants	Diocese	7000		7000	2300
National Churches Trust		4496		4496	3000
Legacy		<u>1000</u>		<u>1000</u>	<u>18000</u>
		117680		117680	146383
B Church activities					
Lighthouse		12752		12752	9244
Food sales					1233
Fees		<u>4662</u>		<u>4662</u>	<u>6359</u>
		17414		17414	16836

C Income from investments

Deposit account	4417		4417	1602
Wayleave	20		20	20
War Memorial		<u>105</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>79</u>
	<u>4437</u>	105	4542	1701

D Church activities**Giving**

Overseas missions	1100		1100	1000
Overseas development	2500		2500	3000
Home missions	2500		2500	3025

Ministry

Parish share	68169		68169	64923
Circuit fee	5970		5970	5834
Other ministries costs	6857		6857	7051
Curate				3426
Church heat, light and water	6747		6747	5757
Church running and maint.	13819		13819	11723
Lighthouse	11172		11172	7588
Major projects	29803		29803	10206
Training	349		349	
Administration	<u>2143</u>		<u>2143</u>	<u>2201</u>
	151129		151129	125734

During the year the Council employed a verger and relied on casual organists. The organists deal with their own tax liabilities and the payments to the verger are too small to attract social security payments. Reimbursement of out of pocket expenses were made to some members of the Council, all supported by the necessary receipts

E Cash balances at 31 December

Current account	3454		3454	18529
Deposit account	87641		87641	83224
Lighthouse	19532		19532	16341
War Memorial deposit		1196	1196	1092
War Memorial 74 CBF shares		<u>1711</u>	<u>1711</u>	<u>1665</u>
	<u>110627</u>	2907	113534	120851

Approved by the Ecumenical Church Council at its meeting held on 17th February 2025.



Reverend Paul M Withington
Incumbent



Canon John J C Freeman
Hon treasurer