

Sunday 27th April 2025 - APCM - Treasurer's & Vicar's Reports

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Date: 27 April 2025

Preachers: J Haywood, Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] This is where it gets good. This is the Treasurer's Report. This is where Jay is going to come forward. Jay was gigging last night up in York and got back about 2 in the morning. So we're very grateful for him being with us today. And he's off after this for another gig at lunchtime. So it's going to be a flying visit for him this morning. But Jay is going to bring us the financial ins and outs of all that we are.

Thanks. Yeah, that is what I'm not wearing black because finances are something to mourn. I've got to go and sit in a theatre pit. So hi, I'm Jay, if you don't know me. I am officially the Treasurer for the Church. So what does a Treasurer do? It's my job to ensure that as a charity, we're meeting all of our legal financial obligations, such as filling in financial returns. And as a Treasurer, it's also my job to help the PCC understand the financial implications.

of any decisions they're making, keeping an eye on finances, probably over a longer timescale, just to ensure that the Church remains financially secure and stable. What I would say is, although I'm the person standing up here, it's very much a team effort. And I'm very lucky to have people like Marie and Lisa doing a lot of the regular heavy lifting, as well as people like Sarah, Marg, and Nigel, counting donations, taking it to the bank and all that kind of stuff.

So if you're involved in any of the work or have touched any of the finances at any point over the last year, just a big thank you from me, because you make my life very easy. So thank you very much for that.

So this morning, I'm going to give you a quick tour of our finances in 2024. So first of all, quick summary. If you don't remember anything else, just remember this.

[1 : 41] Another solid year. Church remains in a long-term, financially secure and stable position. We spent a little bit less than our income, meaning we've added five grand to our savings. So no bad thing.

Our income is reduced, but so is our running costs. And I think overall, the outlook remains stable-ish, with some extra costs coming in. So that's the short version. Here's the longer version. Yes. Charts. This is what we like.

New chart this year. This one's especially for anyone who likes Sankey charts. That's what that is. I'll talk you through it. So this is a summary of our income and expenditure for 2024.

If you start on the left-hand side, all of those bits are our income. Regular giving, gift aid, all that kind of stuff. And if you move to the right, that means that our total income was £152,144.

If you move a little bit to the right again, it says our expenditure was £146,963. And then you can see how all of those categories are broken down in grey.

[2 : 46] And then just under expenditure, the leftover income is our savings, our unspent money, of £5,181. So that's the quick breakdown of it. Hopefully that kind of makes sense.

I'll give you a little bit of detail as to what's behind those numbers. So the majority of our income is from people giving to the church. So regular giving, service collections, other giving and fundraising, which is actually the majority of that fundraising and grants line, is our Christmas fair.

Plus the reclaimed tax from gift aid, which is the orange bit. That makes up about 80% of all our income. So thank you to you if you've given to the church this year, or this last year, sorry.

And a reminder that if you don't give regularly and you think you might want to do so, speak to me or Matt or one of the wardens, or you can find the paperwork out in the foyer. Or if you're a taxpayer and you're eligible for gift aid, please fill in a form and let us know.

That gift aid is really important in terms of our overall income. And if you're a taxpayer but you prefer to give when you can, use a contactless pay point. Do speak to us because there's a slightly convoluted way that we can probably reclaim your tax as well, which I've been thinking about.

[4 : 01] So do let us know if that's something you're interested in. So our total income year on year has dropped. So it was \$152,000. It's dropped about \$30,000, which is quite a substantial amount.

But the majority of that is due to a legacy that we received in 2023 that some of you might remember. And then giving across, giving categories of regular service collections and other, they've all reduced a little bit as well.

So they've reduced by about \$10,000 in total. We did receive a couple of large one-off donations in 2023 as well. So, yeah, dropping, not good, obviously. But actually, 2023 was quite a high income year for us, which you'll see on the next slide.

We've seen our income from room hire and groups increased by about nearly \$4,000, which is good. Most of that is from room hires. If you're here in the week or here on an evening, the church is very busy with lots of different community activities going on.

So good for the room hire part of that too. So although we had a lower income, we also had a lower expenditure, meaning we were able to flex our spend and live within our means.

[5 : 14] So switching to look at the grey bits, our expenditure, and starting from the top, common fund. So common fund, that is the money we pay to Litchfield Diocese.

This pot pays for things like vicar's wages, housing, pensions, as well as the training and wages of future curates, which are vicars in trainings, like Ruth Edmonds, who was with us last year, and Laura Edwards, who will be joining us from late June.

And it pays for training of people like ordinands, who are people training to be curates. So that's people like Hayley Bourne, who you might have seen around the church. And it also helps to fund the work of various central departments in the diocese and supports the work of the general synod.

So that's common fund. That's what that is. Wages is now our second largest expense. The church employs four part-time roles, cleaner, caretaker, little friends coordinator, and an office administrator.

Wages also saw the largest increase year on year. We added the little friends coordinator role in the summer. So that's why that's gone up. Operating and running costs are split into two categories here and cover a whole host of things that add up very quickly.

[6 : 28] Everything from the professional cleaning of the cenotaph that was done to servicing and repairs of almost everything in the building. Fridge drinks to cleaning products.

You know, there's just a whole host of a million different bits and bobs. And all of that totals up to about 24 grand. We've actually seen a reduction of that by around 9,000 year on year.

And largely because last year we refitted the kitchen, if you remember, which was quite a big expense. So, overall, if you took a sort of long-term view of income and expenditure.

So, income is the green line. So, you see I've gone back 8 or 9 years there. And expenditure is the grey line. 2024 being on the right-hand side. This chart, I'm really showing this just to re-emphasise how we've been pretty good at living within our means.

So, I thought I'd just sort of show that. And probably a couple of points to point out. One is that you can see how closely the income line and the expenditure line match each year. In fact, if you total up all of the income and all of the expenditure over the last 9 years.

[7 : 33] Because I'm that boring and I do those kind of things. We're within about 1,000 pounds of each other. So, across those 9 years we are good. We're a good church at making sure that we live to the money that we've got.

Which is pretty good considering we've replaced things like the windows, the kitchen, the boiler, the electrics. And a bunch of other things as well. So, another way of thinking about that is our provision has matched our purpose.

Which is really positive to see. One of the other things you might have spotted on the income and expenditure chart is tithe and giving.

So, as a church, St. John's donates 10% of our previous year's income. And this is mainly through regular charitable giving. Ensuring charities can plan their income accordingly. And as a PCC, we have always tried to give to charities working locally, nationally and internationally.

And these are the organisations that we gave to in 2024. So, starting from the left, they're sort of the most local. And then sort of go to county, national and international as you go further to the right.

[8 : 36] So, just a quick view of who they are. So, starting locally, you probably know these groups. But Burnt would be a friend. Playing the Parks and Food Bank. And then maybe two organisations that you might be a little bit less familiar with.

That operate in Staffordshire. We've got Pathway Project, who are a domestic and sexual abuse service. Supporting anyone in need based in Litchfield and Tamworth. Period Power, who partner with organisations who support vulnerable people across Staffordshire and the West Midlands.

Providing period products. And the YouthNet, which is a Christian-based children and youth charity working in and out of schools and organisations in and around Stafford. And then nationally, we supported Acts 435, which is a charitable donations website that puts people who want to help in touch with people who are in need.

Through a network of churches and local charities. And UCB Radio. The last one is Light for Children, which is at an international level. That is a charity supporting young people and families in need in Romania.

It's a charity that's deep roots at St. John's. And we've supported that charity since its inception. So, I've talked about income and expenditure and the organisations we've been able to support.

[9 : 47] So, the last thing to do really is to look at what do our overall accounts look like. And they look a bit like this. So, short version of this is we're £5,000 better off.

That's the bit in the bottom right-hand corner, 5181, that I mentioned earlier. And then you can see above that we have fixed assets, net current assets, total assets.

So, fixed assets. That's normally where you'd put your buildings and contents. We don't own this building. It's owned by Litchfield Diocese. So, we don't have a big sort of amount of money that's in this building that we sort of own.

What we do have is some assets like chairs and sound equipment and some stuff over here that's worth about £4,908. That's that top bit in fixed assets that if we needed to, we could sell it all and sit on the floor.

But we'd be £5,000 better off. So, that's what we could do if times get really hard. In our net current assets, so this is £152,000. This is money in the bank, in theory.

[10 : 51] So, about £93,000 of that is what's called restricted funds, meaning we can't just spend it on anything we want. It's generally for large capital projects, such as replacing the windows and stuff like that.

That's in two parts. It's mostly from when we sold a church that we did own over there somewhere. Other people would be better to talk to you about that than me. So, yeah, that is our main pot of money.

And overall, when you add all of that together, our total assets are £157,000. So, all in all, financially strong and stable. We've been financially strong and stable and been lucky to be like that for a number of years now.

And that means that the PCC are able to invest, think for the future and invest in things like an extra paid employee, which obviously we did this year, or building upgrades or whatever else might come to the conversation at the PCC.

So, just lastly, looking ahead to 2025, I think one of my main jobs is to make sure that we're thinking about what's coming, particularly from a cost perspective.

[11 : 55] So, there's a few things here that are on my mind. So, first is we'll have higher wages in 2025 because we'll have a full year of a fourth employee.

So, that would be hitting our expenditure. The common fund goes up every year. It's going to go up by a little bit more than normal in 2026. Forecasted to be about £3,000.

It's normally about half that. So, that's on my mind as well. Now, there's some energy options that we've been discussing at PCC, potential for things like solar panels, which would be obviously a big capital expense.

And then also repairs to fascias and soffits, which is on the list of things to do and could be quite costly because there's quite a lot of fascias and soffits to this building.

So, there's a few things that are on the list that may come to pass over the next 12 to 18 months. But overall, pretty solid. That's it.

[13 : 00] Thanks ever so much, Jay. I know we've just applauded him, but very much appreciate all of Jay's hard work over the years, as he says. Cheers, mate. He's ably assisted by Lisa in putting the annual accounts together.

And Marie, where are you, Marie? Yeah, day by day, week by week. Marie is the kind of the one who oversees our finances on a daily basis, aren't you? We're doing all the ins and outs, banking and so on. I know Sarah helps with banking as well.

Between them all, it's a very strong financial team, but very grateful for them all. The accounts that have been put together have already been sent off to be externally examined and eventually signed off.

And then the PCC will accept those approved accounts in due course and submit them to the Charity Commission and so on. But I know he's gone. But in terms of Marie and Lisa, Sarah Clark in as well, Marg and Nigel, can we just show our appreciation to all those who look after our money?

Great stuff. In terms of finances, and I'll mention this in a moment, but I'm just very grateful indeed for our giving.

[14 : 06] We're a charity. We operate and we run. And we can only do what we do. And being self-funded, really, we get a little bit of money in with the room higher, but the vast majority comes from our giving. So many thanks indeed for all of your generosity over the past year and currently and more, because without that, we can't operate.

So very grateful to God for giving us the ability to give. I'm very grateful to you and to each of us for the way in which we support, hopefully, God's ministry and mission in this place.

All right. So item four on the agenda is the Vicar's Report. Sounds a bit grand. It's really a few words from me in which I'm going to try and share where I think probably we're at after the year we've had, and just briefly consider what might be in store for us in the year to come.

Partly looking back, partly looking forward, I know. But if we go looking back in 2024, I do want to say really from the top both how grateful I am to God and to you for the year that we've had.

If you were here last week, I said then it's a privilege, genuine privilege to be the Vicar here of St. John's. And I want to echo that again because I genuinely mean it.

[15 : 24] You know, I'm not... Thank you. As you may gather from my accent and so on, I'm not originally from around these parts. But Burnwood, and in particular this church community, has become my adopted home, you know, our home as a family.

And we love it here. We love being part of this church. We love doing life with you. And we are very grateful as a family. I'm very grateful for the opportunity that we have to continue to be here. That's something I try not to take for granted.

And on the rare occasions when I slip into that, and I do, it doesn't take much to remind me of how special this place is, this community is, and most of all how special you are as a church, as my church, as our church.

For example, if I think perhaps of some of the more memorable things for me that stick in my mind over this past year, they would include, for example, the way in which we said goodbye to our curate Ruth and James and Amara there.

We had that coach trip, jolly boys out in down to Cheltenham to see her into a new job as vicar there down in Cheltenham. And that was a good day, a good positive day of sort of sending Ruth off without our blessing.

[16 : 34] Not so good that I had to dress up and look like a vicar for a change. But every silver lining has its cloud. But that was a good day all around. There's other days like the Play in the Parks day.

I love those in the summer. Great community days of togetherness. And we're able to do a barbecue and children's crafts and dropping and so on. Things like the evening of songs we had, the fundraiser that Mark and John and family put together.

That was a really good night. And then there's days more recently, perhaps like the Hong Kong style afternoon tea we had. And that was a very special, at times quite moving day to be a part of as well.

That's the kind of, some of the events I suppose that stick in my mind. But I think most of all, I think for me it's the far more everyday and far less public, but I want to say far more numerous kind of conversations and the daily life stuff that I have with people who have wanted to share with me the ways in which their faith has grown or their understanding of Jesus' love for them has blossomed and developed over the past year.

You know, of everything that we do, that for me is up there with the most encouraging of things. Those one-to-one conversations where someone says, actually, I feel God is doing this in my life.

[17 : 56] And that is the privilege to be privy to and be a part of. Because seeing God at work in people's lives is one of the best things imaginable.

And so, however that comes, whether that's through some of the teaching that's helped people, perhaps with our Sunday and Monday talks, again, there's a good team of people up here.

So it's Ian, Ruth, Dave, Kim, Helen, Hayley, Linda, Annette and Trish on a Sunday and a Monday. Whether that's the way services are led by those folks, as well as over the past year by Marie and Lisa and Alex.

Whether it's our song worship, which is led by various truly talented, gifted musicians that we have. Whether that's through our prayer life as a church, the prayer that people receive from the team here on a Sunday from each other.

It was offered in the new prayer hour on a Saturday as well, which Karen's heading up. Whether that's by the encouraging words and testimonies that are sometimes shared from the front here.

[18 : 59] Whether that's the care and the friendship that house groups offer. Whether it's the warmth and the well-being that comes from regular groups like Drop In and Little Friends and Singing for Health and Well-Being, Talking Point that Cathy offers on a Monday too.

Whether it's the fellowship and the friendship that's present through groups like Creating Space and Watercolour Dabblers and Book Club and Pub Club and Games Club, Curry Club. Understanding English Classes, Mother's Union, all sorts of groups that take place regularly.

Whether it's the fun and the faith building and the food that comes with our FNF groups and our Sunday morning groups. The combining little stars and shooting stars has been a good thing.

I think Superstars continues to be popular. The Mess is a great new addition to what we're able to offer on a Sunday morning too. All of those things help to contribute to people's journeys with God.

But it's more than these as well. There's the welcome that folks receive when they walk in to a service or the welcome that Marie gives them when they come in to the office day by day.

[20 : 05] And she's such a blessing to me and to us. I know in a way that the office is a haven for a number of folks who just know that you're going to get a decent cup of coffee and a listening ear with Marie.

And the combination of both is great. So we're very grateful to Marie and the space and the welcome that she provides each day. But also just the hospitality that we can offer through the teams on a Sunday.

The drinks that are served the way our building is cleaned and set up and tidied and looked after. That's all part of our hospitality. Very grateful for Nigel as caretaker. Barry as our cleaner as well.

Both keeping the building looking great. And then it's a statement when people walk in that if we're caring for the building and our grounds. It means that hopefully it's a way of saying we care for you as well.

The way we look after what God's given us is how we would hope people feel that we can look after them as well. There's the way in which families are cared for and looked after through weddings and the baptisms that take place.

[21 : 06] The funerals here too. And Marg is a big part of that funeral ministry that goes on as well. There's the way to PCC. You know, for a committee, it's a good one.

You know, they lovingly work out each meeting how to be church under God. And there's the financial and the practical support we can give to other charities for the good work that they do as well.

You know, all of these ways and more, when put together, they're all contributing, I would say, to the goal of helping people to encounter the God who loves them and to understand what that love might look like in their lives.

You know, however we serve, whatever we offer, from a smile to a sermon, from paper craft to pastoral care and all things in between, I'd suggest there's no distinction between something being spiritual and something being practical.

Because everything as a church comes under this theme of holistic hospitality. We might say encompassing encouragement. You know, the lived out love, the day-to-day practical slash spiritual lived out love of Jesus.

[22 : 23] That's our hope and our prayer. And so within that, as I said, I'm very grateful indeed to everyone who gives and serves in whatever way.

Because that giving and that service ensures that our church life is always greater than the sum of its parts. Indeed, that's where, at its best, at our best, I think we do catch a glimpse of truly what it means to be the body of Christ in this place, in this community.

And God, in his goodness, I would suggest, blesses us most abundantly when we're genuinely seeking to first be a blessing to others.

And I see that happening all the time. You know, if you were here in years gone by, particularly as we came back after lockdown, you might recall a few years ago that we did these, these 90 ways to serve questionnaires, in which a load of us filled in a form highlighting which ways of serving we might be willing to get involved with as we came back as a church after lockdown.

And some people have said to me, you know, what happened to these forms? What went on with these? Yes. Well, it's happened. Church life has happened.

[23 : 40] Because, I don't know, Dave, how many people are now DBS checked for us involved? Yeah, it's about 80 of us are DBS checked, which shows the amount of people who are involved in serving and ministering in different areas that require DBS checked.

But on the whole, this has worked. Pretty much all of us, I think, are involved in one way or another in serving. Indeed, the vast majority of us in small or large ways.

Yes, we've got some ways and some perhaps fresh opportunities or needs that we might want to meet. So, for example, more folks helping with Sunday refreshments would be great. I know superstars could do with a few more leaders and helpers.

Perhaps more musicians would be nice as well to be in addition to who we already have. And maybe, I wonder if given the new folks who've been joining us over recent months, it may be time to revisit something like this, to just refresh and offer ways for people to get involved with various aspects of church life, should they wish.

But I know for me, and really from countless conversations I have with people, it's actually through service, through turning up, through the everyday conversations and talking to people, through getting involved, that our corporate church life and our individual sense of belonging to it flourishes.

[25 : 08] Because we have the privilege of contributing to what God is already up to in this place, in drawing people to himself. So, if there are things you might be able to offer, ways you fancy getting involved, perhaps different things you might want to try, do please come and have a chat with me, because being involved leads to feeling involved.

And when we feel involved in a church, that again, in my experience, is when we come to services, when we come to worship God, we have expectation, because this is our church, we're investing in it and our lives, and we want God's help to do that.

So, we're expecting God to speak to us and work through us when we gather together as his people. Now, alongside that reality of being an active, growing church, we've also been, and no doubt, will continue to be a changing, evolving church.

Indeed, change, I guess, is one of the constants in life, but particularly in evolving church life. As we know, change can be exciting, can be invigorating, but it can also be unsettling and at times upsetting.

And I know over the past year, there's been a mixed bag, we could say, of changes that we've needed to try and navigate. So, one of the positives that Jay mentioned over the past year has been the appointment of Gemma to be our little friend's coordinator, which is a paid part-time job of 15 hours a week, in which she oversees our Wednesday and Thursday little friend's baby and toddler group.

[26 : 52] If you're not aware, little friend's is a big part of what we do and who we are as a church. Two sessions with around 150 children on the books.

So, we're their parents and carers, plus two fine teams of helpers. We're looking at around 300 adults and children who connect to this church through little friends.

That's a significant part of who we are. So, that's why the PCC felt, in the course of last year, that the oversight of little friends needed to become a paid role, since in our economic times, it's no longer feasible, perhaps, to expect a volunteer to be able to devote the time and energy and skills it needs to keep little friends going.

And Gemma on the screen here, I know I'm biased because Gemma's my wife, but Gemma's great. And having been leading little friends on a voluntary basis for six years, she got the job on merit without any involvement in what was a tough interview process.

No involvement from me in that, done on merit, as I say. But alongside two fantastic teams of helpers, little friends is one of those ministries which really matters to the people who come.

[28 : 07] Because parents are supported, families are welcomed, children are loved. And perhaps above all, the pastoral care, connections made, again, we hope, give that glimpse of the love that is ultimately on offer from God.

Other changes that we've gone through in the past year would include saying goodbye to these three. Ruth, in her role as curate, finished when she was appointed as vicar of two churches down in Cheltenham.

Ruth was with us for just over three years. She was good news for us here, brought her own unique gifts and charm to us. I enjoyed working alongside her.

And whilst I'm glad she was here with her family, I'm also glad that she's not here now. And I mean that in the nicest way, because I'm glad that she's leading her own churches, because that was always the deal, always the plan with her temporary training role with us.

Ruth and James and Amara left us in the course of the year. At the same time, there'll be other folks who have decided over the past year that St. John's and the direction that we're generally going is no longer the church.

[29 : 15] For them, I shared this earlier this year, for example, about Jane and Phil Tennant leaving us after many decades here. And I know many of us miss them, but would continue to wish them well.

Other folks have chosen to leave, or more often, despite, you know, best efforts perhaps to follow them up, tend to drift away from church life. I guess such is life in any church community.

Although I know some of the reasons for their drifting or their leaving stem from what I, and sometimes others up here, might suggest are ways of seeing the Bible and relating to God that are perhaps different to the previous ways people might have been taught or raised with.

Indeed, just as some folks come to me expressing, as I say, their excitement, perhaps new things that they're learning. Others, I know, will disagree with some of the things that are set up here.

And I do occasionally get some stick from certain quarters. And that can hurt. That's part of the story of my past year. It takes its toll. There are certain comments that are hard to shake.

[30 : 27] But that's part of the story of change, as I say. Some things are great. Some things are more painful. But I think in all of that, if there's two things that I think and I hope I'm learning over this past year, it's firstly, I guess, about leadership.

And I don't often use this word because I'm intrinsically quite a shy person. And I kind of balk at the idea of being a leader. But I know I am, for better or worse, of this church.

But I do feel that I need to lead us in a direction that has integrity for me and for us, I hope. But also that aligns with what I feel I'm learning about the nature of God's love.

And I kind of feel compelled to share that with us. I don't do this kind of reflection and sharing solo, though. I talk and I share a lot with Marie, with Nigel, with Marg, various other leaders and folks in this church about the direction we might be taking.

And collectively, and I'm very grateful for their wisdom and guidance and encouragement and steering sometimes with what's wise or not wise. Directions to take.

[31 : 45] Draw a lot of wisdom from Gemma, too. Saturday nights, for example, in our house. She's often corralled by me into reading through the sermon I might be giving the next morning just to sort of check it through.

Sometimes she'll suggest toning things down a little bit or rewording some things that I've written just to ensure they're hopefully heard correctly. So she's my sort of editor, I guess, in chief in that one.

But equally, the PCC is an open and honest committee. It's not a rubber stamping exercise, you know, far from it. But there's usually a unity which emerges from those meetings about where we're going and who we want to be as a church.

So firstly, I guess in terms of leadership, I hope, and I hope you know, it's not a my way or the highway kind of approach, but rather a shared sense of direction that we're trying to take under God.

A way that's hopefully characterized by openness and vulnerability, honesty, and ultimately a simple but profound desire to know God and God's ways better. But then secondly, I guess with the inevitable changes that time and perhaps some teaching brings, I'm hugely encouraged, I think as we look back over the past year, by those who have and seem to be continuing to join us.

[33 : 04] Yes, some folks leave, but more are joining us. Some are already getting involved in various ways, which is great. But I'm also looking forward to getting to know other newer folks better and seeing how we can be mutually enriched by that relationship, you know.

And if you want to message me or call or email or meet up with me, I'm seeing a couple of people this week, for example, who are on the newer end of things. Please do get in touch. I'm always up for a chat or a pint.

The Vicar's reopened again. That's a nice place to go if you wish. Or a coffee or a walk, whatever. And my details are on the newsletter. So do please say, can we just get together for an hour and talk something through if you'd like to?

That's one of the key things that I enjoy about my role. Equally, though, I have good news coming. I'm excited that Laura is going to be joining us as a new curate. I think you'll like her.

And she's coming as our new curate for three or four years, along with her two daughters, Saran and Claudia. She's coming in a couple of months. She brings a lot of life experience and learning with her.

[34 : 08] But I hope as well she'll be learning from all of us as well as she continues her journey of training to be a vicar long term as well. I guess in all of this, and I won't go on much longer.

I guess in all of this, what I'm trying to say is that overall, despite the fact or even because of the fact that change is a constant. I think we're in pretty good shape as a church, good heart.

Ultimately, that's down to God. But it's also down to you. So thank you for making St. John's what it is. That's not to be complacent or unaware of ways God might be calling us to go deeper in our faith or our discipleship.

And if you know me at all, that desire for depth and understanding and growth is a pretty constant kind of daily driver for me and I hope for us as a church. But given the change, given the uncertainty of our times, given the complexity, being people of faith in a society such as ours, I think my sense, if I can offer anything, is that God is calling us in the year ahead to be confident in him, to be steadfast in him, to be rooted and anchored in him.

And to trust that God's got us, God is leading us, that there's a gentleness to God's guidance of us in changing times. Yes, I suspect we'll continue to expand and explore the ways in which perhaps some of our inherited understandings might need to be unpicked.

[35 : 41] But we'll also, I suspect, be on a journey of rediscovering the worth of perhaps ancient or past ways of seeing God that remain relevant and fruitful for our faith today.

Underpinning it all, my sense, I think, is that we probably would do well to have a renewed focus on prayer. As a church, we pray, but more prayer is always good. And so with Pentecost on the horizon, we're going to soon be starting a Sunday series on prayer, exploring the ways we might hear from, relate to, and move in the loving power of God in our lives.

I think in all of this, my intention is for us to be as open as possible to the direction in which the Spirit of God might be taking us. And that's a discernment that involves all of us, not just turning up or tuning in when we can, but each, as we have been doing, but continuing to play our part, to give our part to what our church life becomes in the year ahead.

So once again, thank you. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this church. Thank you for your love, your encouragement, your support. Thank you for the ways in which your loving service is teaching me about the nature and the character of God.

And above all, thanks to God for his faithful, loving kindness to us. All of which means we have time, if you wish, for questions.

[37 : 14] Don will kick us off. Thank you. Which would you say is true of St. John's? That it's a corporate organisation or a democratic organisation?

Don asks, what would I say is true of St. John's? Is it a corporate organisation or a democratic organisation? Probably both, largely.

I think corporate is the nature of church. Obviously, we are the body of Christ, so we can't be individual. You can't do church on your own, doesn't exist. We're a corporate entity under God.

In terms of democratic, it's tricky trying to align democracy, which is the sort of shared majority rule kind of thing, with discerning what God might sometimes want us to do in ways that might not be popular.

So we're not a populist. I'm not a populist leader. I don't go for low-hanging fruit. So, you know, we do things that are controversial sometimes, that would be easier if we didn't.

[38 : 15] But the PCC is very much a democracy, and they are the governance of the church. So I think it is both. I'm glad that we've got a PCC that is democratic, and if I don't agree with it, the PCC can overrule me, no problem.

They can vote in ways that I wouldn't agree with. And that's happened before. It happened with previous Vickers, I know. And that's always the option with the PCC. But I hope in the conversations and the shared kind of approach that we take to being honest about where we're at, the corporate drives it, if that makes sense.

We don't need to have the kind of conflicts without having first had the prayerful conversations that might lead to unity within that. Is that all right? Okay.

You never know what you're going to get as a question, you see. Other questions? Anyone else want to say something? Barbara? Get my steps in. Marathon day. Are you posted here?

Will you be told you've got to leave us? You know, I'm thinking the service. Or will you and the family stay forever and a day? Am I posted here?

[39 : 22] So, as far as I understand it, like the Catholic Church, if you're a priest in the Catholic Church, you're posted and then you can be moved on at very short notice to a different parish. Church of England is different in that it's a competitive process where you're appointed by interview.

And I basically can be here as long as you want me to be here. You can complain to the bishop if you wish and then we'll have a conversation with the bishop who would say, actually, Matt, it's probably time you moved on.

I think people have sort of, you know, had enough of you by then. It's also partly my decision, our decision as a family, how long we might think is right to be here.

But it's open-ended on both sides. If you're happy me being here and I'm happy being here and we as a family are happy being here, it can go on for, you know, years and years and years.

Been here 10 years as vicar this summer, a decade, and I was curate here before that. So, another four years, so 14 years, which is quite a long time in some ways.

[40 : 24] The average, I think, of vicar staying in post is about eight years. So, I'm past that. But I don't, for me personally, I don't feel the merit in simply moving church for moving church sake.

I feel if vicar's run out of ideas, that's their problem, not the church's. It's up to the vicar to get some freshness in them, to come up with new things. And while I've got ideas and while I've got, I'll use this word loosely, a vision perhaps for where I feel God might be calling us to be, I'm happy to stay here.

But most importantly, I love being here. This is my church as much as it is ours. So, yeah. Who knows? God knows best.

God will nudge me and nudge you, I'm sure, when the time comes for change. But that's not in the near future at all on my understanding or agenda. So, yeah. Nigel. Lots of words from Matt, but they are all genuine.

Me and Mark working for Matt and Marie, he's a very, very genuine person. And I don't know if you noticed, but he seamlessly moved on to the questions so that we couldn't say thank you to Matt.

[41 : 34] So, I know he doesn't like it, but for today, just thank you for your encouragement to us and for your just genuine person that you are.

And it's been a tough year. And I think to try and please 204 people that are on the electoral roll all the time is a difficult job, but you do it very, very well.

So, just want to say thank you, Matt. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.