

The Parish Church of St George, Belfast

Report of the Select Vestry

Report for 2022



NI registered Charity Number NIC 101556 since January 2015

Administrative Details: Who we are

Saint George's is a Church of Ireland parish within the Diocese of Connor and the Rural Deanery of Central Belfast. Its address is 105 High Street, Belfast BT1 2AG. It was opened for public worship in 1816 on a site which had already been consecrated as a place of Christian worship for many hundreds of years.

The responsibility for the management of the parish lies with the Select Vestry (SV) which is elected at our Easter General Vestry (EGV) meeting. This is held no later than the 2nd week after Easter each year. Those members of the congregation who are eligible to vote at the EGV or to stand for election are those who have chosen to become members of the General Vestry.

The Rector – the Reverend Brian Stewart – is an ex officio member of the Select Vestry and presides at its meetings. The non-stipendiary curate, the Reverend William Odling-Smee, is also an ex officio member as are the two Church Wardens and the two Glebe Wardens. One Glebe Warden and one Church Warden are nominated by the Rector. The other two wardens are elected from among the members of the General Vestry as are the parish's representatives at the Diocesan Synod and the parochial nominators who represent the parishioners on a Board of nomination should the incumbent retire, move or die in post.

In addition to the ex officio members up to twelve parishioners are elected to serve on the SV. The SV elects such other officers as it requires to fill specific functions such as secretary and treasurer and also appoints a charity co-ordinator and members of the Safeguarding Committee. The SV meets monthly apart from July and August when a caretaker committee consisting of the officers looks after day to day issues which require decisions.

Those who have served on the Select Vestry in addition to the Rector and the Curate in the calendar year 2022 (elected at the Easter Vestry in 2021 and / or 2022) are as follows: Michael Clendinning , Tony Merrick, Archdeacon Scott Harte, Douglas McIlldoon, Pam Tilson, , Eleanor Maynard, Fr Graeme Pollock, George Storey, Madeline Welch, Peter Hunter, Chris Jenkins, Michael McGlade, Matty Jeffrey, Agape Lowry, Lyn McGlade, Janet Sandikli and Janice Carruthers.

No trustee other than the Rector receives any payment from the parish. The payment to the Rector is his stipend and locomotory expenses paid in accordance with the scales set each year by the Church

of Ireland. In addition to the payment of the Rector's stipend, the Church employs a sexton on a part time basis and funds the cost of a Director of Music, organists and singing teacher.

In addition to the Rector, Rev'd Brian Stewart and the honorary Curate, Rev'd William Odling Smee, there are a number of other clergy who assist in a variety of ways in Parish life. Rev'd Graeme Pollock facilitates our Walsingham group and has been instrumental in preparing new members of the congregation particularly from Iran who have presented themselves candidates for baptism and confirmation.

Others who assisted over the course of the year include Archdeacon Scott Harte, Rev Dr Keith Suckling, Rev'd Colin Young, Rev'd Terence Dunlop and Rev'd Ian Frazer. Meisam Khalili continued to assist at services in his role as a Parish Reader.

Charitable Purpose and Public Benefit: what we do

The statements of public benefit and charitable purpose, which were declared in 2015 on being recognised by and registered as a charity by the Northern Ireland Charity Commission, have not been amended or changed in any way in 2021. The charitable purpose is the advancement of religion. The parish seeks to do this by its presence, and by what it does, in the city centre. The beneficiary is the general public. We aspire to being "an open door in the heart of the city; a place of prayer and peace". To this end the church is open, with few exceptions, six or seven days a week in the morning and until three o'clock in the afternoon. Outside these hours additional services are held on Sundays and on certain days of the year.

Public worship is in the Anglican tradition in the form of the Eucharist, Morning and Evening Prayers. On Sundays evening prayer normally takes the form of Choral Evensong. Public worship takes place every Sunday at an early service at 9.30am, a Eucharist at 11am and Evensong at 5pm. A mid week eucharist continued to be celebrated at 10.30am each Wednesday. In addition the church is open and welcoming most days to those who wish to pray or to pause for a few moments from the activities of the day.

Christian worship takes a variety of forms. Part of the vocation of Saint George's is to add to that rich diversity the welcoming presence of liturgy and music in the Anglican tradition and to offer it where it is accessible to the greatest number of people - in the heart of the city.

We have continued to livestream our services online via the church Facebook page. Online streaming allowed our regular attendees to continue to partake of worship (even if not in a public context). It allowed those with connections with the Parish but who have moved away to reconnect with St George's. Regularly we had (and continue to have) people joining in from across the island of Ireland, from the rest of the UK and from further afield. People from the USA, France, Australia and the Philippines have all joined our online services at some point, and some continue to do so regularly.

There was one baptism, one wedding and eight funerals conducted during the year and five candidates were confirmed by the Bishop at the Easter Eve ceremony as had long been the tradition in the Parish. There were a total of 266 households registered in the Parish.

How we do it

Our Choir

The parish choir is a robed choir of men and boys. We support also the Chamber Choir of mixed voices. We regard, as part of our vocation, the provision of a good quality musical education, training and apprenticeship for young people. The far reaching results of this are reflected in the number of young men who, having started their musical formation as choristers in Saint George's, now occupy positions as organists or choir masters throughout the wider Anglican Communion. Many young men have progressed to undertake Choral and Organ scholarships while pursuing third level education.

The choir began to rebuild in 2022 with the freedom to sing full services and to rehearse in closer proximity. The parish choir continued to flourish and the new recruits settled in well. The choir numbered 22 trebles and 19 gentlemen. Voices began to break, and the alto line gained Ben Falconer, Edward Quinn, Stuart Knox, Eoghan McInerney, Vincent Havlin and Billy Whitten. The treble line was quite bereft by June, although there were no upper 6th students to leave in June 22.

The choir sang the weekly services and began to explore new repertoire, performing at the summer concert in June 22.

In September 22, the parish launched the SSA choir, for girls aged between 11 and 18 years. They met on Tuesday evenings and sang one evensong per month. Initially there were 8 singers, 5 of whom received choral scholarship lessons. The girls sang their first evensong on the third Sunday in September.

The chamber choir continued to sing on the second Sunday evening of the month.

Regular concerts were held to showcase the work of the choir, including recitals by the Choral Scholars and our annual concerts at both Christmas at the end of the Choir year in June.

Outreach

Saint George's provides – with the consent of the Bishop - a home for a small Russian Orthodox community in Belfast.

This is in addition to the work we undertake with organisations such as the Welcome Organisation to support those who are homeless, as well financial support for Storehouse to continue its work in providing a foodbank for those in need. The impact of the global pandemic meant that the Divine Healing Ministry and the Russian Orthodox community also had to cease their public worship. As a result of the pandemic the foodstore which the parish supports ceased to do weekly collections of food, but the generosity of some parishoners ensured that we were able to make significant financial contributions to foodstore to allow them to continue to help those most in need.

In association with organisations such as Changing Attitude Ireland a service is held on IDAHOT Sunday (International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia) in May each year. The 2022 service welcomed Rev Karen Setheuraman as our preacher. The Parish also usually joins alongside Changing Attitude and churches from other denominations to support 'Christians at Pride' – a group affirming LGBT inclusion – to support Belfast Pride and walk as a group in the Parade in August.

Mission and support

We continued to support, financially and in our prayers, our linked diocese of Northern Zambia and our partners in mission in Zambia as well as other church and secular charities which are listed in our accounts.

Parish Organisations

The Walsingham Group meets on the last Thursday of each month for a celebration of the Eucharist and to enjoy fellowship over lunch. The Group is open to anyone from any Christian denomination who is interested in promoting the work of the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk England which includes the aim of bringing together the various Christian Churches to a greater understanding

of each other and ultimately Unity. In late September 2022, and after a two year break due to covid restrictions, eight pilgrims made the journey to Walsingham from Belfast. The journey was broken with a stop for two nights with the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield, West Yorkshire. After a stay of five days in Walsingham, sharing in the worship and life at the Shrine we returned to Belfast, breaking our journey in Co. Durham, where we stopped for two nights. During our time there we visited Durham Cathedral amongst other local parish churches in the area where the group received very generous hospitality.

Safeguarding Trust

The Safeguarding Trust Panel in 2022 consisted of the Rector, Carolyn Rhodes, Pam Tilson, Peter Hunter and Geoff Newell. The panel ensured that all relevant Access NI applications and annual declarations were completed. The members of the panel also undertook training as required by the Diocese which was held online and updated the Vestry at their meeting each month as required.

Maintaining the Buildings

The Parish is responsible for meeting all the running costs of the glebe, its repair and upkeep to provide a home and office for the Rector. The Quinquennial Inspection report carried out by the Diocese in July 2022 indicated that the standard of maintenance at the Rectory was very good

The total cost of the Glebe in 2022 was £5,156.12. This represented the cost of insurance, telephone, rates and ground rent and some minor repairs and decoration.

The Glebe is in effect endowed using the profit from the sale of the house which previously served as the Rectory. If the cost of the rectory exceeds the income the gap is bridged by Parish funds. In recent years the income from the glebe has exceeded the expenditure needed so that in a modest way the Glebe is helping to finance the church. In 2022 Glebe income was £5254.04, indicating a surplus of £97.92.

In addition, there were £7965.91 of repairs and maintenance on the church itself over the spring and summer of 2022. Work was carried out to paint external windows, update some electrics and prune trees in the church yard.

Parish Finances in 2022.

This was the year when financially the parish began to recover from the two years of Covid with all the associated inhibitions and restrictions on parish life.

One of life's surprises had been that Covid's principal financial effect was to suppress parish costs by a greater amount than parish income. We were greatly helped by the willingness of so many parishioners to continue or to begin to contribute to the parish by standing order. So while income dropped we did get by with respectable surpluses.

As we came out of Covid our running cost rose towards its former level but income did not. A major factor was the financial impact of the loss of a large number of the parish veterans as older parishioners' mortality caught up with them. During Covid it was not to be expected that our losses would be offset by new joiners. Also the cost of gas and electricity increased but also the basics such as the bread and wine for communion.

Parish income did grow slightly in 2022 to £230,623.56pp. This was an increase of £12,277.90p from the total of £218,345.66 in 2021. In 2022 however parish expenditure grew by an even larger amount from £185,652.42p to £240,412.62. This was an increase £54,760.20p and shows how parish costs - but also the parish's giving - shot up as we came out of Covid and its associated restrictions. ,

The effect of the escalation in costs and – and giving - in 2022 was an excess of expenditure over income of £9,789.06p.

This is our first loss making year in over a decade.

In the course of 2022 we added £49,000 to our investments and this should lead to income growth in 2023 and in future years. We also - in part motivated by our commitment as a parish enrolled in Ecocongregation to combat climate change - bought a house. It has poor insulation and heating is by an old inefficient system. Getting this house's CO2 emissions down to the low or zero level of emissions which all houses will need to move to in future is an appropriate part of the commitment we have made as a parish. This is a journey which combines financial prudence and environmental integrity and is a logical development of an approach which we have tried to honour within the church both with our photovoltaic array/energy efficiency measures and our investments in green energy producers.

Our expenditure did include £47,021.10p which parishioners raised for various charities. Some of this was raised through one-off appeals or retiring collections. Like many parishes we too have been drawn into supporting foodbanks. Thanks to a special arrangement every pound our Storehouse supporters subscribe resulted this year in two pounds fifty pence going to Storehouse. In 2022 this enabled us to contribute £17,200 going to Storehouse. Unfortunately for those who have had to turn to food banks there was as yet little sign of light at the end of the tunnel.

Our fund raising for those other than ourselves also included the church charities and missionary societies and the contribution to the diocese all of which came out of normal parish income. In total about a third of the parish's income was spent supporting church and charitable activities outside the parish and the remaining two thirds of our income was sufficient for meeting the cost of running the parish.

Our total income for the year included a number of bequests which came to £224,658.56p. These bequests had the effect of converting the loss of £9,789.06p into a surplus £214,869.50p. The income stream in future years which these bequests generate more or less matches what we have lost in regular income formerly contributed by those who are no longer physically present with us. For that reason if for no other these bequests should not be regarded as some sort of "free money" to be spent on whatever takes our fancy. On the contrary we try to ensure that they are managed with care, reverence and gratitude and extend the journey in faith we continue to walk with our most life long and committed parishioners.

Although we endeavour to manage our costs carefully we cannot escape the financial consequences of the choices we have made as a parish. Occupying a centuries old Listed building in a prominent city centre position imposes - over the long term - high maintenance costs. Our determination – a determination which we re-affirmed as we came out of Covid - to be open every morning of the working week for public worship and private prayer, meditation and peace also comes with a price – most noticeably the need to employ a sexton. Our musical standards and the musical growth and engagement opportunities we seek to provide, particularly to boys and girls, are an abnormally high cost for a small parish but this we have willingly shouldered for many generations. It is not just Belfast that has benefitted but the Anglican tradition throughout these islands.

Our ability to manage these costs which are additional to the costs borne by most parishes imposes on us the obligation to think and act long term. Over the years we have been able to build up an income from the bequests left to us by former parishioners. Without the growing income from the

investments which these bequests have generated we would not be able finance our current range of activities or seek the support of our parishioners for the charities we support.

The above report is signed on behalf of the Select Vestry by

Reverend Brian Stewart (Rector)

Lyn McGlade (Secretary to the Select Vestry)