



**Belfast: Mount Merrion / The Church of The Pentecost /
Down & Dromore / Church of Ireland**

**TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
AND STATEMENTS OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS
AND ASSETS AND LIABILITIES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023**

Charities Number: NIC 102093

MOUNT MERRION PARISH CHURCH

Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2023

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MOUNT MERRION PARISH CHURCH

References and Administrative Details:

Charity Name: **Mount Merrion Parish Church** Registration Number: **NIC 102093**

Contact Address: **122 Mount Merrion Avenue, Belfast, BT6 0FS**

Trustees who acted during year ended 31 December 2023

The incumbent (Rev Lucy Burden during 2023) is Chair of the Trustees. Other trustees are appointed annually for a term of one year. Elections to appoint for 2023/2024 were held on 30 March 2023.

- Sharon Stinson – Hon. Secretary
- Sharon Brown – Hon. Treasurer
- Phyllis Jackson – Church Warden (Rector's)
- Yvonne Summerville – Church Warden (People's)
- Jim Garland – Glebe Warden (Rector's)
- Danny Graham – Glebe Warden (People's)
- Ella Blakely
- Dennis Campbell
- Heather Green
- Alison Moore
- Jim Moore
- Janine Ogilby
- Anne Ringland
- Iain Slater
- Joanne Stewart
- William Stinson
- Yvonne Summerville

The following acted during the period:

1 January to 31 March 2023

- Jim Garland – Hon. Secretary
- Phyllis Jackson – Church Warden (People's)
- Dennis Campbell – Glebe Warden (People's)
- Hollyanne Boyce
- Davy McAuley
- Rebekah Ogilby

PRINCIPAL OFFICE BEARERS

Clergy and Chair: Rev. Lucy Burden

Hon. Treasurer: Sharon Brown

Hon. Secretary: Sharon Stinson

Rector's Church Warden: Phyllis Jackson

People's Church Warden: Yvonne Summerville

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Nicola Robinson

31 Jellicoe Avenue, BT15 3GA

BANKERS

Danske Bank, P.O. Box 183

Donegall Square West, Belfast, BT1 6JS

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT

for the year ending 31 December 2023

1. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The principal function of Mount Merrion Parish Church is to support the advancement of the Christian religion by promoting, through the work of Mount Merrion Parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. Being open to and engaging with society as a whole and offering support for those needing help are fundamental to the practical delivery of the benefits of Christianity.

As a result of activity in the pursuit of the advancement of the Christian religion, Mount Merrion Parish Church has custody of property and of records, materials and artefacts of significance to the cultural and religious heritage and maintenance of which is undertaken by the Select Vestry of Mount Merrion Parish.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS, PERFORMANCE & PUBLIC BENEFIT

During 2023, the church has continued to see growth and has endeavoured to respond to the needs of both church members and the local community. All our normal church and community activities are up and running. This report includes an account of the church's ongoing activity throughout the past year.

2.1 Worship

Throughout 2023, we have been committed to our core values of being a praying, resourcing, sending, and growing church; a church that facilitates encounters with Jesus in worship, who believes in miracles, and who contends for the transformation of our community. We have seen an increased hunger for the return of activities within the life of the church and are delighted that we have leaders and volunteers to facilitate these different aspects of ministry.

Our goal is to ensure that everything we do is intentional and creates meaningful opportunities for connection within our church and the wider community. Above all, we are dedicated to guiding people towards Jesus, so that they may experience transformation and grow to become more like Him.

We have continued to experience growth and have seen an increase in attendance at our church services, particularly among individuals aged 19 to 30. This demographic shift has been particularly encouraging, as it reflects a vibrant engagement from younger members of our community. We are excited about the potential for deeper connections and involvement amongst this age group, which is essential for the vitality of our church moving forward. We have also seen growth in our Kids and Toddler church.

In addition to traditional Sunday morning services, we held worship evenings, team nights, and prayer gatherings, all attended by and benefiting a diverse range of age groups. We continued our SOAK sessions, a time dedicated to worshipping God, listening to what God wants to say to us corporately and individually through his word, and a time to receive prayer ministry.

We deeply appreciate the efforts of our teams and volunteers who work diligently to ensure that our Sunday services and special events are not only a reality but also a reflection of our reverence for the name of Jesus. We have seen a rise in individuals capable of leading worship, which has greatly enriched our church community.

2.2 Prayer

Prayer is fundamental to the Christian faith and therefore we seek to be a praying church. We pray together weekly as a group before our main service and these times are important as we pray for the world, the needs of our community and ourselves. Prayer is also weaved throughout our other weekly gatherings, especially in our Lifegroups, where we take time to receive prayer requests and pray over one another over an extended period of time. During Holy week in 2023, our Young Adults opened their home for weekly prayer beginning at 7.15am each week in the run up to Easter.

We have seen people healed, both from physical, mental and emotional pain, new leaders have been resourced for many of our ministries in church, and we have released and equipped people as well as watching many of our members encountering Jesus in new and fresh ways. Under God, we have sought to encourage our church and community to love each other as Jesus did.

2.3 Discipleship

Discipleship is at the heart of what we do in Mount Merrion. We seek to equip the saints and encourage people to step into their giftings for the glory of God. Our discipleship efforts are multifaceted, aimed at empowering individuals to grow in their faith and become more effective witnesses for Christ. We have implemented various initiatives to achieve this goal, including:

- One-to-one intentional discipleship, where we draw alongside those who need support and encouragement and spend some time encouraging them to grow in their walk with God.
- Lifegroups
- Mens group
- Womens group
- Alpha
- Lectio Divina prayer course

Lifegroups are an important part of our discipleship programme. They are an extension of what we do on Sunday mornings seeking to be a source of encouragement, a space to go deeper into God's word and a place where we can receive a level of accountability in our walk with God. We also encourage missional outreach in our Lifegroups, where we encourage our groups to think about how they can serve each other and our community.

In January 23 we ran an 8-week Alpha course introducing people to the Christian faith. The format allows people to explore the Christian faith in small groups in an open and honest way, with support and encouragement for individuals to find their own answers. This resulted in a number of people coming to faith and attending church regularly.

In addition, various individuals attended events and conferences throughout the year that helped them along their faith journey. These included:

- Bishop's Bible Week
- New Wine leaders conference
- New Wine Ireland summer conference
- Alpha Leadership conference
- Arrow Leadership

2.4 Pastoral

Pastoral care by clergy and staff continues to be a priority. The church and community can avail of pastoral care as and when needed. We seek to provide comfort and encouragement to anyone who finds themselves or those they love in need of help and support.

The church holds a silver category award as a 'Safe Place' for those who are victims of domestic abuse.

2.5 Mission

As a congregation we tithe 10% of our income to mission. We seek to support at least one charity that has a global reach, one more national and one local. In 2023 we continued to support the work of Open Doors, Casa Reom, Christians Against Poverty, the National Churches Trust, New Wine Ireland, and our own local outreach activities.

As is our usual custom, members of the congregation donated 33 shoeboxes filled with goodies to the Operation Christmas Child appeal which are then sent to disadvantaged children around the world.

We are committed to partnering with others in Mission and are part of the Cregagh Churches Together group.

2.6 Community & Outreach

The church buildings are used extensively throughout the week for activities and events open to the wider community including:

Regular weekly activities such as Mount Merrion Tots, music tuition (now ended), ladies craft class, a community drop-in on Thursdays, fitness classes

Occasional activities such as the Christmas craft fair, men's breakfasts, special events for children/families and around Holy Week/Christmas, hosting for Ulster Rugby matches

2.6.1 Special events

During Holy Week 2023, we opened our church doors for two days of dedicated prayer, inviting both our congregation and the wider community to participate. We created an immersive experience, where we transformed the inside of the church into a symbolic roadway, guiding people on a poignant journey to the cross. This innovative setup not only fostered engagement but also provided a reflective space for individuals to deepen their connection with the significance of the Easter season. The response from both church members and community residents was heartening, as many came together to pray, reflect, and engage in meaningful conversations about faith and hope.

In December 2023, we celebrated Christmas together by reaching out to the community and inviting them to be part of all that we were doing over the Christmas season. Alongside the usual gathering for a Nativity service, a Carol service, a Christmas Eve service and a Christmas Day service we also had a 'Messy Christmas' an event for families in the community to come along to.

We also ventured into the streets holding a carol-singing event outside the local shops. This joyful activity brought together both members of our church and members of the community. We also gave away selection boxes to members of the public as they passed us by.

2.6.2 Children and Families

The addition of a Children/Families Worker in August 2022 (part funded by Hinchley Charitable Trust) has increased both the capacity and quality of our work with children and families. We have been able to increase the support and training offered to our volunteers. This has included providing resources, and opportunities that empower our leaders to create a more engaging and spiritually enriching environment for our children. We have focused on fostering a sense of community among families, organising opportunities for families to come together both within and outside the church buildings.

We consider our Mums and Tots program to be a vital community resource, as demonstrated by the steady growth in attendance we have witnessed from local families. This increasing participation highlights how much this space is need for the community. Our dedicated leaders and volunteers have worked tirelessly to create a warm, welcoming environment that ensures parents and caregivers feel safe and appreciated. In this nurturing space, participants have the opportunity to connect with others, share experiences, and foster friendships, all while enjoying engaging activities designed for young children.

One of the most well attended children/family events in 2023 was our light party (alternative Halloween party) which saw over 100 people come in. This event served not only as a fun gathering but also as a meaningful opportunity to reach beyond our church walls and engage with the community. We provided a hot meal during this event and activities for children to engage with.

Our Summer Holiday Bible Club in August 2023 was another highlight with 30 children attending over the course of 3 days. This was held in the local community centre as it was recognized that families who were unfamiliar with church might feel more comfortable sending their children into an environment they used daily. Feedback was very positive with numbers growing each day as word spread and led to some children/families starting to attend church regularly.

2.6.3 Schools Work

The church enjoys a positive and mutually supportive relationship with the local primacy school, Cregagh Primary. Our Rector sits on the board of governors and takes part in school assemblies. At Christmas, the church hosted the Key Stage 1 Nativity, an important community event for families and friends.

During 2023, our children/families worker had the opportunity to deliver R.E classes to the Primary one children as well as teach part-time in the school supporting children with their Maths and English. This enabled good relationships to be built with both staff and children.

One of our church members is the school's main STEM Ambassador, giving technical support to teachers and inspiring children in STEM subjects through attendance at school technical events. He also heads up the Connect with Tech initiative, launched in 2021 through funding from The Allchurches Trust. During 2023 this project provided coding lessons to P7 classes and trained P6 children in camera and production skills culminating in these children producing the video recording of the Key Stage 1 Nativity service. In addition, school teaching staff were supported in learning coding teaching skills at the W5 centre.

2.6.4 Anthem Project

Anthem was designed to cultivate new songs and sounds from every corner of the community, empowering children and young people to thrive as the next generation of creatives. Throughout the duration of the project, participants benefited from weekly music lessons, with many students receiving free lessons. The project provided all necessary materials and equipment at no extra cost to the parents or students, thereby ensuring that financial barriers did not hinder access to quality music education. Several students successfully passed their music exams, further demonstrating the project's positive impact on their creative development and growth.

This project reached its completion in July 2023, but before its conclusion, the church hosted a celebration evening that brought together students, parents, tutors and supporters. It was a joyful occasion filled with stories highlighting the transformative impact of music on many lives.

2.6.5 Fitness and Mental Health initiatives

The church's Fitness Hub is viewed as an important aspect of caring for people's physical needs. It is part of the East Belfast community health initiative and registered as such on a community app. The friendly informal nature of the classes is preferred by many of the participants over a traditional gym environment because it also provides a social aspect.

During 2023, the Fitness Hub offered a variety of classes led by trained coaches including: Spin, Pilates, Kettlebells, Legs-Bums-Tums and Zumba. The fee structure was altered so that more people would be attracted, and this resulted in 144 classes with an average attendance of 10 in each class.

The church is also one of seven 'Take 5' centres in East Belfast seeking to deliver initiatives that enhance positive mental health. In partnership with East Belfast Community Development Association (EBCDA), the church focussed on addressing issues around men's mental health, with EBCDA speakers organising activities at the Men's Breakfast.

2.6.6 Practical Support

During 2023, we brought to a close our community larder table. While this served as a valuable resource, we realised that it lacked the personal engagement necessary to truly connect with those who utilised it as it wasn't consistently manned. This limited our ability to offer a more holistic approach to supporting those in need.

As a positive outcome of this transition, the church is now partnered with both South Belfast and East Belfast foodbanks. We are a referring agency for the South Belfast Trussell Trust Foodbank, issuing food vouchers to individuals in need. This shift not only addresses the immediate concerns of food poverty but also aims to tackle the root causes of poverty in our community by connecting individuals with the comprehensive services they need

During our 2023 harvest service, the church collected food and household products to support the foodbanks and at Christmas, the church collected toys and vouchers on behalf on a local charity, Team Dot, for onward distribution to needy families.

2.6.7 Training & Development

Development of our staff and volunteer team continued through on-the-job training and attendance at courses which included:

- IT and GDPR training
- Safeguarding training
- First aid training
- Food Hygiene training
- Fire Warden training
- Arrow leadership training

2.6.8 Acknowledgements

The church are grateful to the following funders for their financial support for community/outreach activities during 2023:

- Arts Council Northern Ireland (Anthem Fund))
- The Halifax Foundation (Anthem Fund)
- Hinchley Charitable Trust (Outreach Fund – children/families work)

With the closure of the Anthem project in July 2023, the unspent grant of £664 was returned to the Arts Council Northern Ireland. In addition, a grant of £3,000 awarded by Hubbub Foundation UK (The Co-op) in 2022 was returned during 2023 as it was decided not to proceed with this project.

The church are also grateful to the parishioners for their ongoing financial support for both church and community outreach activities and local businesses and individuals who contributed to specific projects in 2023.

2.7 Social Media

As a church, we believe it's essential to maintain a presence across all our social media platforms, as many people today rely on social media to connect and access information. We are very active on our Facebook and Instagram pages, keeping everyone informed about our ongoing activities.

We continue to upload sermons to our YouTube channel, allowing people to stay connected and giving those who missed Sunday services the chance to catch up later in the week. We are also able to offer live streaming of weddings and funerals, should that be requested by family members.

2.8 Facilities

The church has continued to follow its Maintenance Plan, produced in 2017, to ensure routine and periodic tasks are completed at appropriate points in the year. This included professional inspection, servicing and testing of the gas boilers, lightning protection system, fire alarm system, fire extinguishers and the emergency lights.

During the year the rectory bathroom was refurbished completing the extensive upgrade work on the rectory commenced in 2021.

2.9 Safeguarding

The Select Vestry has sought to mitigate any potential harm arising from its activities by adhering to the Church of Ireland's child protection policy, Safeguarding Trust, and the Church of Ireland's Adult Safeguarding policy, by taking out adequate insurance cover and by undertaking health and safety and fire risk assessments at regular intervals.

The church has the top Food Hygiene rating of five, awarded by Belfast City Council's Environmental Health Department.

2.10 Public Benefit

The Parish has given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities entered into during the year have helped to achieve the Parish's objectives and activities, as well as providing public benefit.

3. FINANCIAL REVIEW

Financial Reports are reviewed on an ongoing basis by the Select Vestry (Trustees) and also reviewed on completion of the Annual Accounts.

- Over the year ended 31 December 2023, total payments (£116,027) exceeded total receipts (£104,635) by £11,392 decreasing the total cash funds held from £45,194 (31 December 2022) to £33,802 (31 December 2023). The decrease can largely be attributed to the spend/return in 2023 of grants received in 2022 as outlined further below.
- The General Fund balance (unrestricted monies) decreased by £2,601 from £16,542 (31 December 2022) to £13,941 (31 December 2023). However, this was after 'one-off' spend of £7,288 on refurbishment work to the Rectory.
- The Anthem project ended in July 2023. Restricted / designated funds for Anthem / other music projects decreased by £9,611 from £12,110 (31 December 2022) to £2,499 (31 December 2023) as remaining grant amounts for the Anthem project were spent/returned.
- Restricted /designated funds for outreach projects decreased overall by £2,754 from £16,542 (31 December 2022) to £13,788 (31 December 2023). This is largely due to the return of a grant of £3,000.
- The Building Fund was reinstated in 2023 with the balance at year end of restricted/designated funds being £3,574. This is in anticipation of major work to address the heating situation commencing in 2025 (subject to sufficient funds being secured).
- In March 2021, the Select Vestry adopted a reserves policy which can be summarised as follows:

The Select Vestry aims to achieve a position where free reserves in the general fund (the unrestricted fund) equate to approximately two months' normal general fund expenditure. The Select Vestry recognises that the Church has been operating with less than one month's reserves for many years and therefore a target of 4 years has been set to achieve this policy position.

The free reserves in the general fund (the unrestricted fund) at 31 December 2023 were £13,941 which represents about 1.8 months normal general fund expenditure.

4. GOING CONCERN

The Trustees have reviewed the anticipated receipts and payments for the year ahead and are satisfied that the Church can continue its activities and that the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023 can be signed off as a going concern.

5. STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 Governing Document and Constitution

Chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland governs parishes and parochial organisations. The Select Vestry are the Charity Trustees.

5.2 Recruitment and Appointment of Select Vestry (Trustees)

All members of the Church of Ireland who are over the age of 18 and are either resident within the Parish or live elsewhere but have been accustomed members of the congregation for at least three months, may register as members of the General Vestry of the Parish, allowing them to attend and vote at meetings of the General Vestry and to stand for election to the Select Vestry. Meetings of the General Vestry are held at least once a year. The Select Vestry is selected as part of the General Vestry. The Select Vestry will hold their positions for a period of one year. Select Vestry members may be re-elected annually and there is no limit on the number of terms which may be served.

5.3 Pay and Remuneration

The incumbent of the Parish is paid directly by the Parish and receives a stipend (salary) in accordance with the figures approved annually by the General Synod of the Church of Ireland. In addition, Locomotory Expenses Allowance, Pension Contributions and Office Allowance are paid at the approved rates issued by the Representative Church Body (R.C.B.) (see Note 4 to the Financial Statements).

Other staff are paid at rates linked to the National Joint Council (NJC) pay scales.

5.4 Organisational Structure

The Select Vestry is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Parish. The Select Vestry consists of the incumbent serving in the Parish, the church wardens, the glebe wardens and generally not more than twelve other members of the General Vestry elected at the General Vestry Meeting/Easter Vestry.

The Select Vestry is chaired by the incumbent or other member of the clergy officiating in the Parish. Select Vestry members are responsible for making decisions on matters of general concern and importance to the Parish including deciding how Parish funds are to be applied.

The Select Vestry meets at times fixed by the members or the Diocesan Synod. Special meetings may be convened at any time by the chairperson or the church wardens. The Select Vestry met 6 times during 2023, with an average attendance of 80%.

5.5 Statement of Trustee's Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the Statements of Receipts and Payments and Assets and Liabilities in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities in Northern Ireland with Income of less than £250,000 requires the Trustees to prepare a Statement of Receipts and Payments and a Statement of Assets and Liabilities for each financial year.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping accounting records that are sufficient to record and explain the Parish's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the assets and liabilities of the Parish. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Parish and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and irregularities.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees:

Sharon Braw

4.9.24



4.9.24