



**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 2024**

Charities Number: NIC 102093

MOUNT MERRION PARISH CHURCH

Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024

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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 2024 and until approval of the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements on 3 April 2025

The incumbent (Rev. Lucy Burden) is Chair of the Trustees. Other trustees are appointed annually for a term of one year. Elections to appoint for 2024/2025 were held on 14 March 2024.

- Sharon Stinson
- Sharon Brown
- Phyllis Jackson
- Yvonne Summerville
- Jim Garland
- Danny Graham
- Ella Blakely
- Heather Green
- Alison Moore
- Jim Moore
- Anne Ringland
- Joanne Stewart
- Matt Blair (appointed 14 March 2024)
- Erin Galway (appointed 14 March 2024)
- Jackie Moates (appointed 14 March 2024)
- Brenda Smith (appointed 14 March 2024)
- Dennis Campbell (until 14 March 2024)
- Janine Ogilby (until 14 March 2024)
- Iain Slater (until 14 March 2024)
- William Stinson (until 14 March 2024)

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 ended 31 December 2024

1. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The charitable purpose of the Church of Ireland is the advancement of religion.

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 Church, 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 Church.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS, PERFORMANCE & PUBLIC BENEFIT

This section summaries the main activities undertaken during 2024 to deliver the vision, charitable purpose and objectives of Mount Merrion Parish Church; what has been achieved as a result of these activities; and the ensuing benefits to church members, the local community and others.

2.1 Vision

Mount Merrion Parish Church is committed to continue growing as a church that is:

- Grounded in Scripture
- Fuelled by prayer
- Evangelistic in mission
- Open to the Holy Spirit's leading
- Dedicated to service and outreach
- Generous in giving
- Inclusive of all ages

This vision reflects not only our spiritual priorities but also our desire to serve and impact our local community in a meaningful way.

2.2 Worship and Prayer

During 2024, the church saw measurable growth in attendance and the level/depth of engagement with church activities signalling a church that is not only increasing in numbers but also thriving in relationships and maturing spiritually.

Attendance at our main Sunday worship service increased by 11% (to an average of 81) with a noticeable rise in the number of young adults and new families joining the church family. The number of children in kids and tots church doubled.

Various other worship events were held during 2024 including our Sunday evening 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.

All that we do as a church is fuelled by prayer. We set aside time to pray together weekly before our Sunday service and prayer is woven into various church activities that take place throughout the week including the Bible Study and Lifegroups. During Lent 2024, we met in a family home for weekly prayer beginning at 7.15am.

2.3 Discipleship

Discipleship seeks to help individuals grow in their faith and become more effective followers and witnesses for Christ. Discipleship activities within the church during 2024 included:

- Lifegroups, the Men's Group and Monday Bible Study
- Short courses
- One-to-one intentional discipleship, drawing alongside individuals to support and encourage them to grow in their walk with God

Lifegroups (and other small group) gatherings offer a space to go deeper into God's word and to encourage and pray for each other. In addition to the spiritual benefits of these groups, they enable deeper connections and friendships to be formed, evidenced in the practical help and emotional support members provide to each other in times of need. Lifegroups met fortnightly, the Monday Bible Study weekly and the Men's Group monthly during 2024 with 45 people attending at least one of these groups.

The church holds at least one Alpha course each year with 12 people attending the 2024 course held in January – March 2024. The Alpha course allows attendees to learn and ask questions about the Christian faith in a relaxed and informal setting.

During Autumn, the church held an 8-week discipleship course (entitled Practicing the Way) which explored various spiritual disciplines that can be helpful as an 'apprentice' of Jesus. This was attended by 25 people. The format of video followed by small group discussion enabled attendees to get to know each other at a deeper level and encourage each other in their faith journey.

2.4 Pastoral Care and Practical Support

At Mount Merrion, our heart is to serve God by serving people. As well as caring for church members, we believe in being a visible, caring presence in the local community offering prayer, practical support, and hope in everyday life and significant moments

2.4.1 Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is ongoing, responding to needs as they arise, being shaped by compassion and a desire to walk alongside people through all seasons of life. This includes:

- Conducting baptisms, weddings and funerals and providing support before and after these significant life events
- Being present in times of illness, loss, personal difficulty, or unexpected change
- Visiting those who may be experiencing isolation including the elderly and housebound
- Celebrating with people in good times, recognising that laughter and love are part of spiritual care too

2.4.2 Practical Support

During 2024, the church continued to partner with both the South Belfast and East Belfast Foodbanks. As a referring agency for both of these Trussell Trust Foodbanks, we issue food vouchers to individuals in need. This approach not only addresses the immediate concerns of food poverty but also aims to tackle the root causes of poverty by connecting individuals with the comprehensive services they need.

2.5 Giving to Others

As a church we tithe 10% of our regular income from church members to mission. We seek to spread our support across charities that have a global, national and local reach. In 2024, we supported the work of Open Doors, Casa Reom, SAMS, the National Churches Trust, Christians Against Poverty (local branch), the Bishop's 'Bikes for Maridi' Appeal, New Wine Ireland, the Rumble Network and our own local outreach activities.

In June, four church members undertook the 4 peaks challenge raising over £8,500 which was split equally between Team Dot (a local community charity), the NI Hospice (in memory of Poppy Ogle) and the church Outreach Fund.

During the harvest service, the church collected food and household products to support the local foodbanks with the total donated being 218kg which the South Belfast Foodbank told us will provide 518 meals.

At Christmas, church members filled 35 shoeboxes for the Operation Christmas Child appeal which were then sent to disadvantaged children around the world. Toys and vouchers were also collected on behalf of Team Dot for onward distribution to needy families in the local community.

2.6 Community Engagement

The church is physically located at the heart of the Cregagh estate with a significant number of church members drawn from the local area. As a church we are committed to engaging with and serving the local community as an expression of the love of Jesus.

2.6.1 Regular activities

Regular activities open to and attended by the wider community include: Mount Merrion Tots on Tuesdays, ladies craft class on Wednesdays, a community drop-in on Thursdays, and fitness classes on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

2.6.2 Special events

Easter and Christmas are important seasons for the church and particular efforts are made around these times to encourage the wider community to join with us through personal invitation, distribution of 'calendar of event' cards and social media promotion.

During Holy Week, we opened our church doors for two days of dedicated prayer and reflection. We created an immersive experience whereby 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 we hosted a well-attended Christmas market with 20 craft stalls and refreshments available. Children were able to visit Santa in his inflatable grotto (with a gift provided to each child), have their face painted, post a letter to Santa and do some Christmas crafts. In addition, we held a Christmas wreath-making evening attended by 18 women which provided an opportunity for fun and fellowship around a practical activity.

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

2.6.3 Children and Families

The addition of a Children/Families Worker in August 2022 has increased both the capacity and quality of our ongoing work with children and families. Our heart is to foster a sense of community among families, providing opportunities for families to come together both within and outside the church buildings.

Mount Merrion Tots is held weekly and is attended by both church families and families from the wider community. A total of 73 parents and 88 children were registered during 2024. The leaders are committed to providing a warm, welcoming environment where children and parents feel safe and valued. While the tots engage in fun and stimulating activities, parents have the opportunity to connect with each other, share experiences and foster friendships.

One of the most well attended children/family events in 2024 was our light party (alternative Halloween party) which saw over 80 people come in. This free event which included music, arts and crafts, games, face-painting and refreshments served not only as a fun gathering but also as a meaningful opportunity to reach beyond our church walls and engage with the community.

Another highlight was the Summer Holiday Bible Club in August with 30 children attending over the course of 4 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.

2.6.4 School Links

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.

In June, the church collaborated with the school to host the P7 prizegiving assembly in the church and at Christmas, the Key Stage 1 Nativity, an important community event for families and friends, was held in the church

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 2024 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 the recording and editing of the P7 prizegiving assembly.

2.6.5 Fitness Hub

The church's Fitness Hub is part of the East Belfast community health initiative and registered as such on a community app. During 2024, the Fitness Hub offered a variety of classes led by trained coaches including: Spin, Pilates, Kettlebells, Legs-Bums-Tums and Zumba. A new Mums and Babies fitness class began, which was fully booked from the beginning of the classes, demonstrating a need for these kinds of facilities. In total during 2024 there were 122 classes with an average attendance of 10 in each class.

The friendly informal nature of the classes is preferred by many of the participants over a traditional gym environment as the classes not only provide physical fitness benefits but also a space for social interaction where friendships can be formed.

2.6.6 Partnerships

Mount Merrion recognises the value of partnership working in enabling the church to extend its reach and impact. Links have been made with statutory agencies and charities working within the area including two local foodbanks and Team Dot, a well-known local family-based charity that provides grass roots support to those in need within the community.

The church has regular contact with other local churches with mutual support for activities/ events hosted by other churches in the area. During 2024, the Mount Merrion men's group joined with the men's group from St Andrews Presbyterian church to jointly host a series of events for Dads looking at Christian parenting skills for fathers. The men's groups from both churches also joined with other men from East Belfast to hold a prayer walk around the Cregagh Estate.

The church also has links with local businesses and are thankful for the funding and other support provided by these businesses for special events and community activities.

2.7 Resources

2.7.1 Staff and Volunteers

The church has two paid staff, the Rector and part-time Children/Families Worker (part funded by Hinchley Charitable Trust).

The staff are supported by a volunteer team of over 45 church members who work in many different roles to ensure that Sunday services, regular church and community activities, and special events are not only a reality but also a reflection of our vision to be a church marked by service and outreach.

Development of our staff and volunteer team continued in 2024 through on-the-job training and attendance at courses which included:

- Safeguarding training
- Diocesan Governance and Finance training
- Lifegroup Leader training
- Pastoral Visiting training

The Rector completed the Arrow leadership training course and will be re-investing what she has learnt as part the leadership team for future cohorts.

2.7.2 Facilities

During 2024, the church continued to follow its Maintenance Plan 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.

For some years, the church has recognised a problem with the heating situation in the church as the internal temperature of the building struggled to rise more than 4°C above the outside temperature, making it particularly uncomfortable during the colder months. A temporary solution was put in place.

During 2024, an architect was appointed and a schedule of works drawn up to address the heating situation. Proposed works include installing new roof insulation, where none previously existed, and replacing the existing heating system with a more energy efficient solution, together with associated works. Additionally, there is potential to further improve the thermal performance by replacing the existing glazed wall with new triple glazing.

These improvement works will result in a much more stable and comfortable environment for worship gatherings, and community events which is vital not only for the well-being of the current congregation but also to support the ongoing growth the church has experienced in recent years.

Fundraising for this work was ongoing during 2024 with a projected start date for the work in 2026 (subject to funding being secured).

2.8 Social Media and Promoting Access

The church maintains a presence across all our social media platforms recognising that many people today rely on social media to connect and access information. Our Facebook and Instagram pages are updated regularly keeping everyone informed about ongoing activities and special events.

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.

Most activities of the church are free of charge. Where there are charges, these are kept to a minimum with the aim of ensuring that cost is not a barrier to access.

2.9 Safeguarding and Mitigating Harm

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.

Access to the church is restricted to named key holders. Adequate insurance is maintained, and health and safety and fire risk assessments are undertaken 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 2024, total receipts (£137,953) exceeded total payments (£103,475) by £34,478 increasing the total cash funds held from £33,802 (31 December 2023) to £68,280 (31 December 2024).

This is the strongest financial position that the church has been in for many years reflecting both an increase in numbers but also a growing sense of ownership and commitment amongst church members. This position enables us to invest more confidently in ongoing church and community outreach activities as well as move forward with the planned building improvement work to address the heating situation anticipated to commence in 2026 (subject to sufficient funds being secured).

At a Fund level:

- The General Fund balance (unrestricted monies) increased by £8,580 from £13,941 (31 December 2023) to £22,521 (31 December 2024) primarily due to an increase in regular giving by church members
- The Building Fund (restricted/designated) increased by £25,456 from £3,574 (31 December 2023) to £29,030 (31 December 2024) primarily as a result of targeted fundraising activities including the Building Fund Gift Day, Christmas Gift List, Barn Dance, Christmas Market, Quiz Nights and Coffee Mornings
- Restricted /designated funds for Outreach increased by £1,769 from £13,788 (31 December 2023) to £15,557 (31 December 2024) being bolstered by funds from the 4 peaks challenge while the Music Fund decreased by £1,327 from £2,499 (31 December 2023) to £1,172 (31 December 2024)

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 2024 were £22,521 which represents about three 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 there are adequate funds in place to ensure that the Church can continue its activities and that the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024 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 members 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 elected as part of this General Vestry meeting. 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 8 times during 2024, with an average attendance of 84%.

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 show 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 Brown

Date:

3/4/25