

Trustees' Annual Report for the year ended 31st December 2023

The trustees present the annual report and statements of Receipts and Payments and Assets and Liabilities for Clare Parish Church for the year ended 31st December 2023

Objectives and Activities

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

The principal function of Clare Parish Church is to support the advancement of the Christian religion by promoting, through the work of the 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, Clare 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 Clare Parish Church.

Achievements, Performance & Public Benefit

Clerical leadership

Rev Colin Darling was instituted as incumbent in March 2023, with the Rural Dean, Rev Elizabeth Cairns, Rector of Mullavilly, having spiritual and pastoral oversight up until that point.

The parish also called upon the experience of various retired clergy and lay readers, licenced to officiate in Armagh Diocese, to assist leading services.

Church Property

The Trustees are generally satisfied that all church properties and grounds are exceptionally well maintained by Glebe Wardens and assistants.

During 2022, much repair work was carried out to the adjacent church hall. It was pleasing to officially dedicate this to the glory of God in a Service of Thanksgiving in 2023.

Public Worship

Throughout 2023, Clare Parish Church provided weekly worship on a Sunday morning, occasionally on a Sunday afternoon or evening.

The Trustees record that the average congregation size in 2023 was 25% - 30% higher than 2022, although it is noted that this was a period still affected by COVID and without an incumbent.

Services were also held to mark special occasions, with members of the public warmly welcomed, such as at Harvest and Christmas, and including a gospel evening of music.

Other public community services included a Remembrance Day Commemoration and Festival of 9 Lessons and Carols. These public services allowed the church to open its doors to other community members and their families.

In addition to regular attendance on Sunday mornings being higher, attendance at major church services and festivals was considerably increased.

Safeguarding Trust

In relation to younger members under 18 and indeed to any members at risk or in need of protection, Clare Parish Church adheres to the Church of Ireland Safeguarding Trust policies for protection of children and adults. The Trustees believe that any potential harm from activities carried out on its premises, or under the auspices of its organisations, has been mitigated as far as is possible. There is a 3-person Safeguarding Trust panel, chaired by the Rector, all of whom have received Church of Ireland central training. The panel has responsibility for overseeing the Parish's adherence to the Safeguarding Trust policies and receiving notification about concerns anyone may have.

The Select Vestry, incumbent and volunteers are also committed to upholding good practice in the parish's ministry with all adults, but in particular with those in need of greater protection.

Community Leadership

Clare Parish Church members hold leadership positions in other Christian groups not directly associated with the church.

Services for lifetime 'Rites of passage'

Throughout 2023 Clare Parish Church provided or made available to its members, and additionally to other members of the community in appropriate circumstance, Christian services to mark various life events of significance, such as marriage, death and baptism.

In 2023, the Parish charged no fees for funeral services, though there are published fees for graveyard burials and the erection of tombstones.

As well as the church building itself, which has seen worship on its site and within its building since the 1800s, and which is cared for and maintained lovingly by dedicated members, Clare Parish Church maintains a working 185 year old graveyard in a tidy and respectful manner in an area of outstanding calm, peace and beauty. This is maintained, managed and presented to a high and commendable standard through the dedication, commitment and sheer hard work, on a voluntary basis, of Glebe Wardens and some other Parish members.

The graveyard is available and open to all members of the community to come and spend reflective time, or to come and be peaceful at the place where a loved one has been laid to rest. During 2023 the gates to the graveyard were unlocked or left open for the whole year. Local residents are aware they can enter it at any time. The Trustees are committed to maintain this sensitive support to local residents and those with loved ones interred within.

Moreover, the church building itself is available, on request, free of charge, to anyone to visit merely out of interest or for spiritual purposes and the Trustees Clare Parish Church welcome individuals and groups from the locality or further afield for tours, with a local historian available to provide tours, if requested.

Communications

The Parish communicates with its members and the wider community using a combination of traditional methods (church notices, posters, church magazines, and electronic methods (website (under construction), Facebook, WhatsApp, texts and email).

The Trustees acknowledge the efforts of those involved in publishing material on the web-site, and posting on FaceBook.

Trustees are satisfied that communication is appropriate and within general guidelines and that record-keeping of member's data meets requirements of GDPR legislation.

Financial Review

Clare Parish Church continues to be financially in a healthy state for a small parish. The parish has three accounts:

Account No 1 [charity account] had a closing balance of £37,867.17 an increase of £2851.95 from the previous year, which is explained by an increase in donations, Special Collection, RCB funds and one off payment of the NIE Allowance.

Account No 2 [repairs account] had a closing balance of £4,713.46 an increase of £3,030.00 which is explained by the collection received during the redemption service for the opening of the refurbished hall, special collections such as Harvest and Carol Service as well as Gifts and Donations.

Account No 3 [Sunday school account] had a closing balance of £390.06 which remains unchanged.

The Trustees are aware of some age-related wear and tear, repairs and improvements that could be made to both the church building, the parish hall and the small adjacent church house, both internally and externally.

To pay for this work, parishioners have chosen to raise funds, specifically for this purpose and certain projects.

With regard to the holding of Reserves, the Trustees believe that it is not within Christian principles or Biblical guidelines to retain funds, for some unforeseen, unknown, 'rainy day' occurrence, over and above what would be considered prudent to maintain the parish's current properties, or to meet its known ongoing liabilities and financial commitments. The Reserves held are restricted as per Financial Review. Should Clare Parish Church ever have non-earmarked funds in reserve, such reserve would be considered for use in mission and outreach.

The parish again is in the fortunate position of not having to deal with an issue of deficit following the end of the 2023 financial year. That said, the Trustees do not take lightly the fact that income does not comfortably exceed outgoings from the General operating account. The Trustees are fully aware of the need to ensure income is sufficient to meet liabilities going forward and will continue to carefully monitor the parish's financial position regularly.

Going Concern

The Trustees have considered the funds available and income sources and are satisfied that there are adequate funds in place to ensure that the Parish can continue its activities for the foreseeable future. Accordingly the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023 can be signed off as a going concern.

Structure, Governance and Management Governing Document and Constitution of the Charity

Chapter III of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland governs Parishes and Parochial Organisation. The Select Vestry members are the Charity Trustees.

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 normally 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.

Pay and remuneration

The current Incumbent of the Parish receives the stipend set by Armagh Diocese for the linked Parishes of Ballymore & Clare, with both parishes liable for an amount assessed upon them by the Diocese. The Rector also receives office and locomotory allowances in accordance with figures approved by the General Synod of the Church of Ireland.

Organisational Structure

The Select Vestry is responsible for the day to day management of the parish. The Select Vestry consists of the Rector serving in the parish, the churchwardens, the glebe wardens and generally not more than twelve other members of the general vestry elected at the Easter General Vestry Meeting.

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 by the diocesan synod. Special meetings may be convened at any time by the chairperson or the churchwardens. In 2023 the full Select Vestry met on 4 occasions. The average attendance was 100%.

Compliance with Public Benefit

The Trustees of Clare Parish Church have 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, many of which are referred to above, have helped to achieve the Parish's objectives and activities, as well as providing public benefit.

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the receipts and payments account and statement of assets and liabilities in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

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 other irregularities.

Signed on Behalf of the Trustees

Trustee 1:  Colin Parkin

Trustee 2: Leanne Corbett

Date: 10/10/21

