

## **St James Church, Blake Street, Barrow in Furness - Chairman's Report for 2024**

The year took a bit of an unexpected turn quite early when Fr Jack had to step away due to ill health before taking early retirement and leaving in the Summer. This left us floundering somewhat as we strived to fill in the gaps, ensure we had clergy cover for weekly services, obtain relevant paperwork and make sure that no wedding parties or baptism families were left disappointed. A lot of work went on behind the scenes to keep St James functioning, and whilst I don't want to name everyone who has stepped up to the plate I do have to thank Rev David Goss & Fr John Hodgkinson who have covered many of the services and especially to Janice Eadington who has sometimes stepped in at **very** short notice.

I know that Fr Jack & Clare leaving plus the rumours of closure concerned many of you. And despite my assurances these concerns persisted, not helped by the Deanery 'What Next For Barrow' report which suggested that St James was towards the bottom of the list when giving out the goody bags. However, the future for St James now looks positive and exciting, potentially with a new priest and major building maintenance works in the pipeline – however, that's for next year's report!

Due to the major expansion at the Shipyard it is more difficult than ever to garner the services of a builder or other tradesman. As such the much needed work on the clerestory window was not completed in a timely manner and our congregation was increased with the influx of a flock of pigeons. These were soon evicted and a temporary (but expensive) repair to the window has ensured that they don't return.

There is still a lot of work that needs to be done to the tower, the main body of the church, the rose window and to the organ floor to make the building fit for the future. Whilst I am sure each one of us sees 'our' particular area as being of most importance, the PCC has to view the building as a whole and prioritise both funds and personal time accordingly. We have been in touch with a local stonemason who seems very sympathetic to the work needed, and his quote for part of the work seemed quite reasonable. We have recently instructed our architects, Crosby Grainer, to make a start on itemising all of the work that will be a priority for the next few years.

In July we held our Teddy Bear's picnic, which, like all of our fairs and open days was well supported by the local community. The challenge is to get folks to see St James as part of their everyday life, not just somewhere for highdays and holidays. We also have the challenge of topping the teddy zip-wire in a future event!

In August we had a visit from a team of gravity surveyors from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in America who were carrying out measurements in conjunction with the British Geological Society. Now I'd always thought that gravity was pretty constant, but apparently it isn't. They like to use churches as a base for their equipment due to their strong foundations and longevity. Their very expensive and sensitive equipment took measurements every hour over a few days, with

results fluctuating during bell practice and also, just before they left, indicating an earthquake which turned out to be centred in Japan. Not everyone's area of interest, but I found it fascinating.

In September Firepit was launched, a new Sunday evening gathering rotating around the Barrow churches on the fourth Sunday of the month. With worship, testimonies, prayer, and a "toolbox" slot, it aims to inspire and unite the various churches as we work together in mission. It has been nice to see a few faces from St James at the various meetings (and there's one tonight at St Marks).

Rev Richard Goodfellow joined us towards the end of the year, and despite being a Carlisle United football supporter, has settled into his role across Barrow rather well. It is particularly encouraging that he and Fr John have renewed and forged strong links with the schools in our parish.

Our Warm Space continues to provide a warm and welcoming venue for a small, but growing, group of people who come not just for the tea & toast, but more importantly the fellowship and friendship.

Sadly, at Christmas 2024, our friends at St Francis held their last service in their church. When their parishoners are ready, we offer them a warm welcome to St James and we embrace the challenge of increasing our parish boundaries.

So that was 2024, looking to the future, how can you help? The prospects for St James are looking bright. But we still need your help. We need your prayers to discern the shape of our ministry, the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring a new priest to help us continue that ministry. And your help on a practical level to free up the PCC members to continue the back office work that doesn't get seen, but without which things will fall apart. That practical help doesn't have to be grand – bake a cake for the fairs (or bring some biscuits if you can't bake), hand out hymn books at a baptism, brew up at Warm Space, pull out a few weeds in the garden & keep showing up.

Now, at the start I said I wasn't going to name anyone in particular for going above and beyond. But there is one person I do have to mention. Not only for juggling so many plates without dropping them, but also for being my right hand man and reminding me of all the things I should be doing, and because he has been organist here at St James for 35 years! So Mark, on behalf of everyone at St James, congratulations on your 35 years and Thank You.