

## **St. James Annual Parochial Church Meeting: 25th May 2025: Secretary's report**

Eight PCC meetings were held between June 2024 and May 2025 inclusive

We met with the Archdeacon in church in June 2024 regarding the Barrow Mission Hubs Proposal, Bishop Rob and the Archdeacon agreeing there should be more than one flavour of ministry in Barrow. This was in response to our concerns that the Anglo-Catholic flavour is being marginalised. Future ministry in St. James was then to depend on the success of a bid to the Church Commissioners for Barrow deanery church planting funding. At the same time, the St. Francis PCC were resigned to closing their church due to falling congregations and the last service was held there on Christmas Day. We agreed we need to show that we have a sustainable forward-thinking plan of action to increase use of our large, expensive to maintain, church.

As a formality following the retirement of Fr. Jack, we then received a Suspension of Presentation from Anna Newlove, Diocese Pastoral Office, for the North Barrow Team Ministry. However, the Church Revitalisation and Planting meeting in December between the PCC, Duncan Podbury (Diocesan Church planting and revitalisation), Archdeacon Vernon and Robin was both positive and supportive. We were assured that the Diocese is right behind us as we move to the exciting challenges ahead.

The Deanery Synod in February carried this positivity forward with St. James being seen as an important beacon for Christianity in Barrow. The Diocese of Carlisle was then awarded £6.8 million by the Church of England to help Cumbrian churches grow missional, younger and more diverse faith communities over the next 5 years. In May we met with Duncan and Robin to discuss mapping out a profile/role description for a missional priest at St James to hold services in community buildings as well as in Church, with the PCC picking up the administrative tasks we are already performing. We will all pray for guidance through this next stage in the life of St. James Church.

Meanwhile, our musical tradition and the Wombel (one-bell) simulator continue to provide valuable services to the community, with team bell-ringing before most Sunday services and at special events. A Summer Fair Teddy Bear's Picnic and zip wire was held in the church ground in July, and a Christmas Craft Fair in November. In October there was a pie and peas Harvest Supper in the Carey Room, with warm space running again on Thursday afternoons from November until Easter. We received a grant of £1,000 from the Maurice & Hilda Laing Charitable Trust Warm Spaces Church Fund 2024/2025.

The Community Carol service was held on 18 December and Bishop Rob presided at a Confirmation Service in St. James on the morning of 12 January, attended by Fr. Tom Sample from St. Mary's Dalton who also ran the Adult Baptism/Confirmation preparatory sessions. Fr. John Hodgkinson ran preparation sessions in St. James School last Autumn with Enid assisting.

On a completely different note, a Gravity Measurement took place in St. James in 08 August by American representatives of the British Geological Survey, churches being used due to solid foundations and longevity. Across the Barrow deanery, monthly Sunday evening Firepit services are being held for all Churches to attend, each taking its turn to host, St. James holding a joint Evensong on 23 March.

The continued switch from planned giving envelopes to standing orders has again ensured a steady source of income. The details of how to pay- to PCC of St James Church Account, Barclays (Barrow) Sort Code 20-04-68, Account number 80522007- was again communicated in annual summaries issued to all planned givers in January. There was also drive to increase Planned Giving and take up of Gift Aid through posters and church announcements, this being moderately successful. We increased our post-Covid Parish Offer from £14,400/year to £16,000/year and are still slowly paying off a £5,000 debt from the Covid years. We have also acquired a machine to accept credit card payments, for example at Baptisms, as few people now carry cash.

The internet presence of St. James continues via the Facebook page, including the live streaming of services. The North Barrow Churches website at [www.northbarrowchurches.org.uk](http://www.northbarrowchurches.org.uk) is also kept up to date, as is the Bells of St. James website [www.barrowbells.org.uk](http://www.barrowbells.org.uk).

Two new school Governors were ratified by the PCC and by Fr. John Hodgkinson during the year, and processed by Lisa Pettifer, Diocese Governance and Admissions Officer, these being Jaqueline Birnie and Mark Sweeney. Richard Goodfellow has made good contact with the school and involved them in Church visits, including a very successful Easter experience session on 01 April.

We continue to move forward with the urgent building maintenance priorities in the Quinquennial Inspection Report published in March 2023. In May, Ocean Construction boarded up the missing clerestory window and evicted the last of the pigeons which had flown in through the gap, church cleaning then being carried out with the kind help of the Love Barrow Families Community Dads Group.

We tried to progress further pointing work with Ocean to no avail, We also contacted experienced stonemason David Lamb who provided a quote for scaffolding and the work on the west and south elevations of the tower. However, as we need to raise funds and apply for matching grants- as well as ensuring compliance with our listing requirements- the PCC decided in March to accept the recommendation of Crosby Granger Architects (who provide surveying and investigation services with realistic budget estimates) to inform our fundraising. They also have knowledge of grant-awarding bodies, legislation, and obtaining tenders from at least three suitable conservation contractors.

In February, after also taking advice from the Diocese Advisory Committee, the PCC agreed to engage Crosby Granger specifically to provide tower surveys, including the rose window and repairs to the organ loft floor. With regard to matching grants for the survey and main repair work, we contacted Matthew Maries at the National Churches Trust (NCT) to clarify the eligibility criteria for the Cherish grant, including the number of days we would need to open the church to the public and registration with the Charity Commissioners.

With regard to more urgent short-term maintenance, scaffolding was erected in January and February by Hudson and Johnson Ltd. to repair slates dislodged by the succession of storms. The flagpole has been repaired and the Ebony Cross we obtained from St. Luke's is now nailed on the wall to the left of the sanctuary.

The current PCC membership is Brenda Pearce, Shelagh Morrall, Bernice Dent, Joan Johnson, Mark Latimer, Joan McKenzie, Derek Walmsley, Enid Milligan, Alison MacMahon (co-opted in January) and Andy Pollock. Derek Walmsley and Enid Milligan are due to be re-elected at the 2025 APCM. Enid continued her role as Parish Safeguarding Officer, and we were the first church in Barrow to adopt the new Safeguarding Dashboard. Joan McKenzie and Brenda Pearce continue as Churchwardens with Shelagh our Deanery Synod representative, assisted by Enid. In April, the PCC updated the St. James open policy on baptisms, whereby candidates must have a qualifying connection with the Parish or be regular attenders at St. James.