



Parish Church of St George, Jesmond

Annual Meetings 2025

Chair: The Reverend Debbie Loughran, Vicar and Chair of PCC

Present: 85 members of the Parish community

Apologies: Roy Large, Derek Nicholson, Elizabeth Rhodes.

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners held on Sunday 11 May 2025 as part of the Parish Eucharist at 9.30 am

1. The Chair welcomed all to the meeting as part of the Parish Eucharist.
2. Nigel Russell-Sewell, Honorary Secretary to the Parochial Church Council, was appointed Clerk to the Annual Meetings.
3. One nomination was received for the role of Churchwarden: Janet Wilson (proposed: Christopher Stenton, seconded: Hazel Jones-Lee). They were appointed unopposed. There remains a vacancy.
4. Enid Pearson was thanked for her service as Churchwarden.
5. The meeting closed.

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on Sunday 11 May 2025 as part of the Parish Eucharist at 9.30 am

1. The Minutes of the meetings held on 28 April 2024 were approved (proposed: Graham Hatt; seconded: Louise Chapman).
2. Election to Deanery Synod due to vacancy: one valid nomination was received for James Parkin (proposed: Joan Grenfell, seconded: Janet Wilson). James was appointed unopposed.

3. Election to the Parochial Church Council: there are three vacancies on the PCC. Three valid nominations were received:

Libbie Wilson (proposed: Barbara Peacock; seconded: Enid Pearson)

Tom Klenka (proposed: Barbara Peacock; seconded: Enid Pearson)

Jonathan Booth (proposed: Janet Wilson; seconded: Mike Oswald)

All were approved unanimously and duly appointed to serve on the PCC for a period of three years.

4. Ian Ness, Hilary Cullingford and Margaret Vane were thanked for their service over the past three years.
5. John Oswald of Stephenson Coates was appointed Independent Examiner (proposed: Enid Pearson; seconded: Wendy Jones; approved unanimously).
6. Questions submitted in advance:

Q: We do not appear to have either a Sunday School or Junior Church at the moment. On the other hand, we have several small children using the back corner of church each week and a very healthy Little Saints group. What are the plans to continue to engage these groups as they grow older and also to attract more children? [Hazel Jones-Lee]

A: This was answered in the sermon (see below). Sunday School will be run in the extension when completed. There are plans for working with children and young people, including a joint project with the United Reformed Church to engage with university students. Little Saints is 'their own church' and may not become part of a Sunday congregation.

Q: How much has been spent to-date to redevelop the church hall, and how much has been spent on the extension in the memorial garden? [Brent Swinburne]

A: To date: Church Hall £10,700; work done for extension £8,244. Significantly more spent on fees across the whole church site. Full details are in the accounts.

7. Mike Ranson was thanked for his service as Honorary Treasurer.
8. Other Business: a certificate of thanks had been received from the Diocese for paying the Parish Share in full.
9. All those who contributed to the life of the Parish were thanked.
10. The meeting closed.

Sermon: The Reverend Debbie Loughran

Acts 9:36-end

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas.^[h] She was devoted to good works and acts of charity.³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs.³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.”³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.⁴⁰ Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

John 10:22-30

Jesus Is Rejected by the Jews

²² At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah,^[a] tell us plainly.”²⁵ Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me;²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.^[b]³⁰ The Father and I are one.”

So, I wonder how do you approach trying to understand passages of scripture?

There are many different ways – the reading of commentaries, discussing them with others in small groups, through prayerful reading – all excellent ways and one that I use regularly is trying to imagine my way into it.

I try to see myself as a member of the crowd walking through the story.

Who do I most identify with?

Who do I sympathise with?

Who irritates me?

What if I stood here or over by him? What would I see differently?

What if I couldn’t hear properly because of the crowd? What things can I see?

What if I didn’t actually trust this man Jesus? How would I feel?

What if I was a Pharisee or a Roman? How would this affect me?

If we were to get every little detail in the Gospel stories the Bible would be ridiculously long – but it was real life – real people – there was probably someone there who kept coughing, there were probably children playing nearby, smells of people cooking and maybe it had just rained and the smell of dry ground being watered once more hung in the air...

Of course, being products of our own time we can never truly enter into the experience, the sights, the sounds, the smells or, most importantly, the theological and social conventions of the first century. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

Just as today we should try to put ourselves into the shoes of others when we are confused by their actions or reactions because it is only by doing this that we may begin to understand....

So, this morning's Gospel reading: what was going on?

We are told that the occasion was the festival of the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem and so those around Jesus were probably thinking about freedom: freedom from the invader; freedom to live without fear; freedom from foreign domination and freedom from political musclemen and their taxes. A return to Jewish leadership was perhaps in the offing – maybe this filled the minds of some standing listening to Jesus – but uncertainty still hung in the air.

The architecture was breath-taking, the history with all the religious and worldly symbolism was tangible....

As I stand and watch I wonder what this Rabbi from Nazareth is up to – what part does he have to play in what may happen next?

Here in the Portico of Solomon I'm listening closely to the exchange between Jesus and the crowd....

"You do not belong to my sheep." He says... It makes me jump and glance around nervously, he was surrounded by the pious and the faithful, those who read the scriptures and upheld the laws but they were the theological thinkers of the time – some genuine seekers of the truth.

Some of the things this Rabbi said were far too hard to understand – how could He and the Father be one? Things turned nasty – I ducked down as they started to gather stones to stone him but there were people still listening....

People began to mutter and I picked up on some of what they said – 'well we' ve heard him say "I am the bread of life: he who comes to Me shall not hunger", "I am the light of the world: he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.", "I am the gate; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved" and "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep." If this is true then maybe he is the Messiah and if he is...'

And that' s were I leave this scene because that is where John leaves this scene – he leaves his readers pondering on that question – If He is the Messiah and he offers eternal life then what?

"The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me" says Jesus, or to put it another way, "Come on folks, you've seen me and what I do for long enough surely to know that what I do is from God"

So why are we here this morning?

Well, at the heart of why we are here is surely because we have heard Jesus' words and believed them. "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand", he tells the crowd. Well, the "them" and the "they" he refers to here includes us. We are the sheep of this shepherd and our presence here this morning is evidence of that.

But, what about tomorrow morning when we aren't here?

Where's the evidence of us belonging to Jesus then?

Is that a bit more challenging?

We, unlike many Christians in this world do not live in a time of persecution.

Our discipleship does not need to be hidden.

"The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me." Jesus says...

The works that **we** do in the Father's name testify to him.

So, what do we do: there's no list here as if there were some simplistic formula: Jesus isn't after copy cats – he wants us to be the individuals he created us to be – to use the gifts he gave to each of us – to think and reason and be true to ourselves and true to him whilst serving others...

Desmond Tutu once said, "God has chosen you for who you are."

God has chosen me for who I am and that's true for each one of you too.

We have a God given personality – and we can talk about the Gifts of the Spirit as part of that general conversation – but the point is you are who you are and God has called you to serve Him and others. Maybe on your own and definitely with your church family and what amazing words these are to hear at this service this morning – our APCM.

We are each called and equipped to serve God and to serve others. But we aren't called to or equipped for the same task – what a monochrome world that would be if we were eh? All of us called to serve tea – the coffee drinkers wouldn't be happy would they.... Each of us is unique and each of us has a dream of the perfect church – but few of us would agree on what it looked like! For some it would be quiet and peaceful, for others it would be full of noise and music.....

The truth is however that there is no such thing as a perfect church – there wasn't back in biblical times and there isn't today – because there is no such thing as the perfect person – apart from our Lord Jesus Christ – and the church is made of people..... We cannot and will not be perfect – not now – not ever.

But we can be the best version of us that we can possibly be and that means a number of things

It means treating each other with respect and kindness even when we disagree.

It means ensuring that people are safe when they are using our site.

It means not just including people who are different to ourselves but enabling equality for all.

It means intentionally seeing God in each person we meet and loving them as God loves us.

When I was interviewed I was given a list of things that people thought were important to be focusing on in the next few years at St George's, some these were pastoral care, occasional offices and worship, the Hub, Children, young people, students and families, developing lay ministry, building civic and community relationships, discipleship, stewardship, improving deanery and diocesan relationships..... At the last PCC I asked each person to give me 3 words that they wanted for St George's in the coming period, the answers I had back were cohesion, security, community, Children, Innovation, Accountability, Growing, Reaching Out, Welcoming, Organ, Families, Connected, Teaching, Music, Unity, Warmth, Aware, Recognised, Bigger, Young in outlook, engaged, energized and love, and I have been praying each day for God to show me the things which should be a focus for St George's – the list is now quite a long one..... And each thing mentioned is valid and important.

However, the thing which for me holds it all together is the concept of relationship.

Jesus in this passage and in many other passages calls us, invites us, implores us to come into a relationship with God through Him. It is once in this relationship that we discover who God is, who Jesus is and who the Holy Spirit is and then from this knowledge we discover who we are..... Precious children of God, made in the image of God, loved by God, called and equipped by God to love God and others as we are loved and to serve God and others, to nurture our faith and others in the faith and to grow the Kingdom of God here on earth.

And so, yes I agree we need all of those things I've already mentioned and probably more.

But we can only do it together..... I can be out and about and tell everyone to come and join us for worship, and they may come – but they need to find a warm welcome, a friendly smile, a comfortable seat, a warm church, a friend to take them for coffee, a leaflet telling them what's happening, an opportunity for them to get involved (if they want to), people like them to relate to, opportunities to be themselves and to have equality, to be valued, to have a toilet they can use without fear, to be able to sing out of tune or in tune if they can, to be able to run about and make a noise without being judged for being 2 or 3 or 4 or indeed 40 or 90, to be able to sit or stand as the Spirit or the body needs, to wear hats, shorts, trainers, dresses, sandals or suits – to be able to be the person God made them to be and to be welcomed fully for who they are here in this place.

It is when this happens that all the other things we long to happen will come about.....

Short term, I am working with many groups and many people to grow teams and ensure that people are trained for what it is they are doing. We have done a gift audit and I am working through ensuring that people are matched with roles that fit their skills. I am actively involved with the local schools and the Jesmond Partnership and Ryan (URC Leader) and I are working on a couple of very exciting projects to engage students. We have 3 people who have completed the ALM Core Module and 2 who are working further on this in Worship and Pastoral Care, I am helping to teach on the Worship module also. We have 3 people discerning Reader Training and Izzy will complete her training this year. The Hub is something which excites me greatly and we have managed to raise a really amazing amount in the last 6 months to push us to the point where larger grant awarding bodies should hopefully be interested in partnering with us. What this means is that I hope we will be able to start to build the extension to the Church in 2026 and I really can't wait. That space will give us the ability to have Sunday School every week with activities set up ready whether we get 1 child or 50; it will allow us to begin to run Messy Church for families, a youth group once we have a critical mass, an 18-30's group and discipleship opportunities for all and to hold a bereavement group. It will enable Baptism and Marriage Prep to be done on site and

for families to begin to use not just that space but also the church. It will of course provide space for people who need to stretch during the service and toilets for those who need them; and it will then enable us to close the church hall whilst that is then renovated. The Church Hall fundraising launch is happening at the Fete on 31st May and I am excited to think about how that will begin to build – hopefully quickly into enough to see the vision for the community hub to come to fruition; I was chatting just yesterday to a community outreach worker for the Percy Hedley Foundation who was excited to chat about the possibilities of partnering with us at this exciting time.

St George's is able to be seen from all over the area – I want it to be seen from close up to – I want people to see us as their church, their community hub, as a place that matters to them and where they know that they matter to us.

And so I was reliably informed that you would want to hear my vision for St George's in this service and I hope you have just heard it – but if that is too much to take away then maybe 3 words are all we really need – I long for St George's to be known for our loving, our serving and our giving for if we get these things right we will also be growing in numbers, in discipleship and in relationship with God and with one another.

May we always be able to hear the Shepherd's Voice and be ready to follow him.

Amen