



Parish Church of St George, Jesmond

Annual Meetings 2026

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

Present: 78 members of the Parish community

Apologies: David Cullingford, Hilary Cullingford, Roy Large, Alison Mattinson, Mike Oswald, Ian Spencer.

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners held on Sunday 10 May 2026

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. There are two vacancies. One nomination was received for the role of Churchwarden: Janet Wilson (proposed: Alan Loughran, seconded: Donald Gaze). They were appointed unopposed. There remains a vacancy.
4. The meeting closed.

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on Sunday 10 May 2026

as part of the Parish Eucharist at 9.30 am

1. The Minutes of the meetings held on 11 May 2025 were approved (proposed: Kay Plumley; seconded: Tom Klenka).

2. Election to Deanery Synod: there are three positions vacant. Five valid nominations were received:

Nominee	Proposer	Seconded
Kay Plumley	Mike de la Hunt	Graham Rutt
James Parkin	Joan Grenfell	Lana Liu
Mike de la Hunt	Hazel Jones Lee	Jim Lowe
Donald Gaze	Malcolm Toft	Susan Kilroy
Luke Hill	Barbara Peacock	Enid Pearson

An election was held. The meeting appointed Margaret Baron and Tom Klenka as tellers. The following were appointed to Deanery Synod for a period of three years:

Kay Plumley

James Parkin

Luke Hill

Each will also sit on the PCC.

3. The Deputy Parish Safeguarding Officer, Sophie Leach, introduced the Parish Safeguarding Policy, which was affirmed (proposed: James Parkin; seconded: Samuel Parker). Sophie Leach and Graham Rutt were thanked for their work as Safeguarding Officers.
4. Tom Klenka, Honorary Treasurer, thanked John Oswald of Stephenson Coates for his support in examining the accounts over recent years. He is no longer able to act in this role. Proposed that Stephenson Coates provide an Independent Examiner (proposed: Rhona Watts; seconded: Izzy McDonald-Booth; all in favour with three abstentions).
5. Election to the Parochial Church Council: there are three vacancies on the PCC. Three valid nominations were received:

Nominee	Proposer	Seconded
Nigel Russell-Sewell	Barbara Peacock	Janet Wilson
Mike de la Hunt	Barbara Peacock	Jean Davies
Donald Gaze	Joan Grenfell	Derek Nicholson

The nominees were appointed, unopposed, with Nigel and Donald for a period of three years, and Mike for two years.

6. Questions submitted in advance:

Q1: It has been for some time a condition of PCC membership that members must undertake mandatory safeguarding training. What is your position on those who through either incompetence or disinclination fail to comply with national PCC member safeguarding training requirements?

A1(a): [Sophie Leach, Deputy Parish Safeguarding Officer] On 18 March 2026 the PCC formalised that safeguarding training must be undertaken within set timescales on beginning any role in church, including being member of the PCC. The level of training depends on the role you are fulfilling. With regards to PCC, this included leadership and domestic violence modules. A DBS check is also required. It was agreed that any failure to comply with the schedule set out would mean that person would be removed from the role until the requirement was met. This training can be done online but we have arranged in person training. The Safeguarding Team are more than willing support anyone who needs guidance on how to complete it as it is essential to fulfilling the role at St George's.

A1(b): [The Reverend Debbie Loughran, Vicar and Chair of PCC] The questioner asks for my position on this, which is why I am going to answer as well as Sophie and I want to say quite categorically that I fully support the decisions of National Church, our Diocese, our Parish Safeguarding Officers and our PCC in ensuring that St George's is fully compliant in the area of safeguarding. From this APCM where we have just affirmed the parish safeguarding agreement, no-one will be permitted to continue in roll until they are safeguarding compliant, which includes PCC members – so, specifically to answer the question – if a PCC member does not have a DBS check or the required level of safeguarding training required by the Diocese for their roll then they cannot attend PCC meetings until they are compliant.

Q2: How many people have studied and fully understood the proposed changes to the church hall and the effect they will have?

A2: [Kay Plumley, PCC Member] Over the past few years, a great deal of effort has gone into ensuring that as many people as possible have had the opportunity to study, understand, and comment on the proposed changes to the Church Hall and the effect those changes may have.

It is not possible to put an exact number on “full understanding,” since different people engage at different levels of detail. What is clear is that a very substantial number of people have engaged meaningfully with the proposals and understand both the practical changes and the benefits they are intended to bring. I'll explain how:

The Hall serves hundreds of users every week. Alongside members of the congregation, there are choirs, bell ringers, and perhaps 400–500 regular community users through groups such as Cubs, Beavers,

Scouts, the Women's Institute, NHS Meet and Move, Newcastle Concert Band, U3A Line Dancing, Tai Chi, Little Kickers, Friday Café, Tyneside Fiddle Alliance, and many others. The Hall is also used regularly for parties, concerts, talks, and fundraising events.

Because so many people are affected by the future of the Hall, considerable work has been undertaken to communicate the proposals openly and repeatedly. There have been formal presentations where the designs were displayed and explained, including the fundraising launch in March 2023 to which all regular Hall user groups were invited. The plans have also been displayed publicly in the Hall for over a year, together with ways to give input and a physical model has been available on several occasions to help people visualise the proposals more clearly.

Members of the fundraising steering group have met individually with stakeholders, users and potential donors to discuss the plans directly and encourage feedback. In addition, the Buildings & Grounds group, have been intimately involved from the earliest idea stage onwards, helping to shape and refine the proposals throughout the process.

The plans have already evolved in response to consultation. Storage, shared facilities, and the kitchen have been changed. We have recently received input on access between the shared areas and the main hall, and on the location of doors from the kitchen. You may be aware that two proposals for much smaller projects have been reviewed. Smaller is not automatically better. Neither proposal met the vision for the Hall, neither has Planning Permission, neither has addressed the legal question of how much donor money would need to be refunded if we changed direction, and neither has a strong volunteer team behind it ready to do the work.

The PCC remains open to further input and will continue to make changes within the bounds of good governance.

There is strong support for the benefits of the new design, in line with our long-term vision for the Hall: improved sound insulation so several groups can use the rooms at the same time with less disruption; shared facilities accessible from each room; modern IT infrastructure; and fully refurbished, modern facilities.

While not everyone will know every technical detail of the project, it is clear that a very large number of stakeholders and regular users have had repeated opportunities to engage with the proposals and understand the practical effects and intended benefits of the changes. The plans have therefore been developed through broad consultation, extensive visibility, and ongoing dialogue with the many people who use and value the Hall every week. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the many dedicated volunteers who have given so generously of their time to get the project to this point. Hundreds of thousands of

pounds have already been committed by our wonderful donors. These donations were all based on the vision for the Community Hub, the detailed plans, planning permission and user input. I would encourage everyone to throw our combined weight, as one body, behind making this work.

Members of the PCC remain happy to listen to input and to answer questions.

Q3: In the name of God the Father are we stepping in the right direction as far as the finances for the building works, the whole site plan goes?

A3: [Janet Wilson, Churchwarden] This week I had the pleasure of showing round BBC production crew - watching the team stare up in awe at the height of the gilded ceiling, so painstakingly cleaned by many of you here today. They lingered in the Baptistry. Studied Frampton's monument to Mitchell. The location manager crouched down beneath the pulpit, literally caressing the central marble pillar, admiring its colour and strength.

Later the design manager arrived for a look round. She took in our busy back shelf. "Of course," she said "we'll have to clear all this stuff."

The BBC visits brought back the first site visit by our fundraiser Paul Baird in 2022. I watched him walk round slowly, absorbing all the interior features. Afterwards he asked us, "You know what excites me most about this whole church? - that back shelf. All the things you do. All your activities. Your charity support. Your engagement."

The same shelf which to a production designer represented stuff to be moved was to Paul Baird our very essence.

Right at the outset he told us unequivocally that money was not the problem.

That the money was out there and trusts and grant giving bodies suited to all the varied aspects of the Whole Site Plan were waiting for our applications.

The only thing that risked holding us back was if we failed to unite behind a shared vision.

So - In the name of God the Father are we stepping in the right direction as far as the finances in terms of the project building works?

In the episode which Stephen read for us this morning. St Paul is typically uncompromising with the poor Athenians –

'the Lord of heaven and earth does not live in temples built by human hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything.'

God does not need our handiwork. That's not how it works. God does not need us to make him a sandwich.

As Debbie has so clearly highlighted this morning if we are to fulfil our Christian calling then we need to be out there looking for the people who might greatly appreciate a sandwich, or a shower, or a quiet study place, or a meeting room or simply some human encounter in what might otherwise be a day of great loneliness.

Much more perhaps than for any other reason it is in the name of God the Father that we aspire to achieve these things.

Q4: Can we justify a cost, exceeding £1 million, to alter and ruin the church hall?

A4: [Janet Wilson, Churchwarden] Those of you who have long memories will be able to remember 2023 – the public consultation and launch that Kay referenced.

One of the first queries at the meeting was from a member of the public. “Is it really correct that the work to renovate the Hall is more expensive than the new build behind the church? To which of course the answer is yes because to maintain the fabric of a Grade 2 listed building while completely modernising and reconfiguring the interior is a costly business.

To people of my parents’ generation £1 million was an enormous amount of money. Today an estimated 1 in 45 UK domestic residences is now worth over £1 million and in parts of London it would scarcely buy you a tiny studio flat.

What justifies the present Hall budget has nothing to do with the absolute cost, but everything to do with the shared vision.

Much as I love St George’s I remain forever grateful to my upbringing in the Church of Scotland. A favourite maxim of my mother’s being “He who, having put his hand to the plough, turneth back is not fit for the kingdom of God.”

But, being a Scot the rider was always added “Of course, Janet – it has to be the right plough.” Everyone in the hub steering group has deeply and sincerely questioned: Is this challenging and time demanding project the right plough for me?

When we do question, what keeps us going is not the beauty of the Baptistry or the magnificence of the marble but the people out there.

Our fellow human beings who, unlike God, **can** be helped by the work of our hands.

7. Tom Klenka was thanked for his service on PCC and as Honorary Treasurer for the last 12 months. Although Tom has moved away from the parish, he will remain Honorary Treasurer until a successor has been appointed.
8. Lana Liu was thanked for her service on PCC over the past three years.
9. Everybody was thanked for all they have contributed to the life of the Parish, and for all they will continue to contribute in the future.
10. There being no other business notified, the meeting closed.

Sermon: The Reverend Debbie Loughran

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus tells us, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

You will keep my commandments, the greatest one of which is, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus is reinforcing his message, if you say you believe in me and love me then you have to love others, you have to live as I have encouraged you to live and if you do this then I will give you the Holy Spirit to help you to continue to live in my ways, to bring you peace, to be with you always. He continues, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

So, the message across the passages we heard last week and this week put simply is - you are known, you have a place prepared for you in God's presence, you are called to love God, love your fellow humans and do something to make God's love known in the world, the Holy Spirit is with you always and God loves you – and that message is for all people

God loves you and calls you to love others and make God's love known in the world – that brings me nicely to the APCM charge – that moment of looking not back but forward to what could be..... And I will keep it very short – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. That is the key message for the Church, for you and for me – that is our calling and our responsibility.....

And so how are we going to do that? Well, not on our own – we do it with God, in the footsteps of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit and together with our fellow Christians. And who do we do it for? The Biblical answer is EVERYONE.

As a Parish Church we are not here solely for the people who come here to worship each Sunday, although of course we are here for them – we are here for every single person who lives in our parish, every single person who uses our facilities, our church, our hall and our green. We are here for far more people than those whom we can name or those who we know, we are here for those who live amongst us now and for those who will come after us

and we have to continue to understand this and own it if we are not to turn into a Holy huddle, an insular group, who looks out only for our own interests.

We have many opportunities here in St George's to love our neighbours and to make God's love known in our world, I want to share just three of them this morning.

Firstly, we are an Inclusive Church. That means that we are here for everyone, and yes, I know all parish churches are here for everyone – but by being an Inclusive Church we have signed up to be here for everyone in very specific ways, this is what we signed up to all those years ago:

To be a church which **celebrates and affirms every person** and does not discriminate.

We will continue to challenge the church where it continues to discriminate against people on grounds of **disability, economic power, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality**.

We believe in a Church which **welcomes and serves all people** in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.”

This means that all people are welcomed into our services and the life of this Parish Church – all people; we are not gatekeepers, we are gateways as I mentioned a few weeks ago from this very pulpit – we rejoice when people want to join us for worship, onsite or online, and for events; and we never put up barriers, we never turn people away. We are called to love in an inclusive way.

Secondly, we are a Church connected to the Church of England and so we have the privilege of being guided by our Bishop and her Senior team, a team which is actively seeking to love all people and make God's love known in the world both through their vision for the Diocese 'to turn outward in mission, enabling more and different people to experience the love of God' and through their commitment to Safeguarding, from their website, 'The Diocese of Newcastle is committed to keeping children, young people, and adults safe. We want everyone, especially those who are vulnerable, to have a safe and supportive place to grow in faith and worship.' St George's, being a Church within the Diocese of Newcastle is also committed to safeguarding and as we move forward together this year we will be fully implementing the Diocesan and National policies and procedures to ensure that we are as compliant as we can be; which in turn ensures that all people who come onto our site for whatever reason, which includes you and me, are loved and protected and kept safe. We will hear more about this later in the service from Sophie one of our Parish Safeguarding Officers.

Thirdly, we have an amazing site. A very beautiful church, a wonderful green space outside and the facility of a Church Hall which is a privilege that not many Churches across our country still have. This site brings people from afar, it always has and pray God it always will. Charles Mitchell had a dream to build one church and to make it the best church he possibly could, he strived to bring the very best into this place and he did that, yes for himself, for his satisfaction, as a display of his wealth and power and influence, but also because of his love for God and for future generations. He enjoyed what he built and he left us an amazing legacy to use and to pass on to future generations. The world which Charles Mitchell knew

was different to the world as we know it today and it will be different again in the future when we are no longer here. The world's view of religion has shifted, the world's view of worship has shifted and both will continue to shift – not always away from, but not always towards either. The needs of the 21st century are different to the needs of the 19th and 20th centuries and the needs of the 22nd century will be different again – and like Charles Mitchell we need to also be looking forward in all we do; because it is only by doing that that this place will remain relevant.

In short we need to be Church and to do Church just as Jesus expects us to. That is the message of the New testament – all the readings tell us how to be disciples and how to be church, how to love God and how to love one another.

And we don't do it on our own, or in our own strength because in everything we do we know that God knows us, loves us, has prepared a place for us and calls us to do his work here on earth before he draws us back to himself for all eternity – it is because of his love for us and our love for him that we gather in church – and it is this love that calls us over and over again to meet to worship and to go out in mission – so, today let us commit once again to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself'. Amen.