

## Rector's Letter 2025

*Deaths since APCM in 2024: Shirley Turner, Brian Patterson.*

Last year the APCM came just after I had returned from my sabbatical. Since then, much has happened in a place in which there is always much happening. Sometimes too much!

When we were awarded the twin prizes of UK Church of the Year and Best Church Open for Visitors in 2023, the judges said that St Marylebone Parish Church:

*"... epitomises everything that a successful, sustainable and open church should be...It provides worship, vital services, and us a place that is rooted in its location; available to all. They have an excellent music programme, a really cool arts space and such a breadth of activities that are there for local people and also for visitors."*

Well, that is, if anything, truer as we reach towards the half-way point of 2025, than it was back in 2023.

The second half of 2024 and the first half of 2025 and 2025 will be remembered for a great deal of team comings-and-goings, as the PCC was able to start implementing its structural reorganisation plans in the light of the completion of the Changing Lives Capital Works Project, the Covid pandemic and the urgent need to restructure our finances.

Already, this reorganisation has helped to reduce our costs and has been supported by the introduction of new finance, church management and HR software packages.

We have also engaged in a Stewardship Campaign to encourage regular givers to move from giving by Standing Order to the Direct Debit Parish Giving Scheme. If you have not yet done this, please consider moving. You can talk with Jane Bamber our Development and Community Manager, Pauline Harris, our Head of Finance and Operations, or any member of the PCC or clergy. A new contactless payment terminal is already in place in the Nave and more will follow. These new terminals will allow us to add Gift Aid at the point of giving.

Since the last AGM, we have said farewell to: Dr Stuart Page, Operations Manager, Yodry Vasquez, Finance Manager, Ginny Simmonds, Heritage Director, Ella O'Brien and Eva Dunn, Heritage Interns, Sumna Nota, HR Officer and Ashley Dixon, Director of Development and Community and Christopher Sardar has moved from being a part-time Building Assistant to being full-time. We were very sorry to say goodbye to our Assistant Director of Music who moved to Clifton College in Bristol but delighted to welcome Luke Mitchell as his replacement.

Last Sunday, we bade farewell to Frances Endres, one of our churchwardens, and tonight we welcome, I hope (subject to the PCC agreeing), James Farmer as our new Treasurer. At this point I wish to pay tribute to the work undertaken by our outgoing Treasurer, Tony Denby. Drawing on his experience in Cathedral, Diocesan and Parochial finance, Tony was nothing less than God-sent. He leaves the finances in possible the best shape they have ever been and has created a sound basis for accurate budgeting and forecasting. Tony, thank you!

On 8<sup>th</sup> June we shall say goodbye to Sean Perry, our Sunday Building Assistant, as he gives more time to his psychotherapy studies. It has been great to have Sean as a member of our Team.

It is also sad to bid farewell to Roger Lee, who has served on our Investment Committee and as Stewardship Coordinator for several years, following his move to Sussex.

Oh, we lost an Archbishop of Canterbury, and we now look forward to his successor being appointed.

We have welcomed Clara Pereira, in her new role as Heritage Activities Manager, and Emma Pritchard, as our Heritage Intern. I am pleased to say that Emma, will be staying for a second six-month paid internship. Dom Samsonas has moved from the Building Team to the new role of Technology and Operations Manager. Pauline Harris joined us in the new role of Head of Finance and Operations, Maya Shepherd joined us in

September as our new Organ Scholar, replacing Edward Carew who moved to Liverpool Cathedral. Jane Bamber who joined us as the Development and Community Manager in 2024 will be reducing her hours but staying in post to help us raise funds for major projects, assist with Stewardship and strengthen our relationships with the local Business Improvement Districts and other key local stakeholders.

We were really thrilled to welcome Liam O'Sullivan to the role of Children's and Families' Lead, the Revd Lydia McLean as a Deacon, and we look forward to Lydia being ordained priest on 26<sup>th</sup> June at St Stephen's Rochester Row.

We have also welcomed lots of new volunteers who have acted as Visitor Welcomers on weekdays, tour guides, gardeners and, latterly, as assistants in the St Marylebone HCC. Following the redundancy of our employed HR Officer, Rachel Bownbill has been contracted as an external HR Consultant.

Today, interviews were held for a new weekend Verger and Building Assistant and, in September, we shall welcome a new Organ Scholar, Barney Silverstone, who will come to us from the Chapel Royal at Hampton Court.

2024 and 2025 witnessed some wonderful musical performances, including the St John Passion, Handel's Messiah, Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time and we look forward to the Brandenburg Concertos for our summer concert on 7<sup>th</sup> June – it is not too late to book! Handel's Messiah will now join Stainer's Crucifixion as an annual event in the St Marylebone Calendar.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the costs of restoring our magnificent Rieger Organ. It now sounds better than it has for many years with a brighter, richer, fuller sound. Almost every moving part has been refurbished or renewed.

Our much-reduced Heritage and Events' Team have produced some great lectures, concerts, guided tours, and changing exhibitions in our St Marylebone in 100 Objects series. And the current series of lecture, the sights, sounds and smells of Marylebone really is worth coming to.

More recently, the PCC has fulfilled its promise to purchase a new property to house the Chaplain, having sold Church House in Nottingham Place to underwrite part of the Changing Lives' project's capital costs.

A generous donation of £200,000.00 has allowed us to rethink the Church Garden, given by the Rector and Vestry to the then newly established St Marylebone Metropolitan Borough Council in the 1890's but sorely neglected by Westminster City Council in more recent times.

Lord Paul of Marylebone's donation, through the Ambika and Aruna Paul Foundation, allowed us to complete the stonework repairs to the Portico and to reinstate the Georgian Torchères and replace the stone steps in the Church Garden. Disappointingly, we have still not received our most recent QIR from our Inspecting Architect.

Two welcome injections of cash came in 2024. We received the promised grant of £670,000.00 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, in recompense for the increased costs of the CL Project, and a kind gift of £250,000.00 from the beneficiary of the will of the late Dr George Brown, whose ashes, along with those of his mother, now rest here in the Columbarium. It is largely thanks to these two large receipts that the 2024 accounts look rather healthy, although they mask some systemic underlying problems.

The Archdeacon of Charing Cross carried out her first Visitation of the parish church in September 2024, the first since her appointment, and her report was received in September.

It was also very good to be awarded the A Rocha Silver environmental award, and we work now towards achieving the Gold Award. Huge thanks go to Fr Robert Titley and his Net Zero Team for the work they have done on this front. It will be a great sadness to bid farewell to Fr Robert in December this year.

Fr Stephen Hearn and Fr Robert Titley have taken the lead in revising our Mission Action Plan and our Response to the Diocese of London's Vision 2030. More of that as 2025 continues to unfold.

Under Mthr Katy's leadership, we have produced some splendid fundraising results for our linked Diocese of Kagera in Tanzania, focusing on improving women's health through helping to purchase equipment for the diocese's medical services. It was very good to have been able to welcome Bishop Darlington and members of his team to St Marylebone.

Both of our schools have produced tremendous results in 2025. Another 'Outstanding' grade in every category from OFSTED for The St Marylebone CE School, and what would have been an 'Outstanding' grading from OFSTED for The St Marylebone CE Bridge School, had the inspection not been carried out as a Section 8 Inspection. We look forward to the inspectors returning within the next two years.

This year, The St Marylebone CE School's Healthy School Project will, I hope, obtain both Planning Permission and a Faculty allowing the school to erect a new building in the Sports' Hall lightwell along with the conversion of the ground floor of the Victorian Howard de Walden Building into a much-needed and long-overdue kitchen and refectory.

The number of baptism, wedding, confirmation, funeral and memorial services has increased, as have the number of parish church bookings and the number of different agencies and charities who now use the parish church regularly. Out of many highlights, it was good to work with the charity SmartWorks in helping them to raise £80,000.00 for their charity through their first-ever Carol Service last Advent.

This year, in addition to carrying out the major replanting of the Church Garden, we hope to be able to restore the very fine Blue Vestments designed by Sir Ninian Comper and executed by the Sisters of Bethany in 1917, in time for Advent.

Along with every parish church we are very serious about keeping children and adults at risk of harm safe. I am extremely grateful to our Safeguarding Team, headed up by Kirsty Walker and I am very pleased to report that all concerns raised are not only presented to the Standing Committee and the PCC, but investigated thoroughly, often with reference to the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. To date, no concerns have resulted in any substantive action needing to be taken.

There will always be work to do in a building as architecturally important as St Marylebone and I encourage everyone not only to review their weekly or monthly giving to the parish church, but to consider remembering the parish church in their will, or making a donation to support building maintenance, the choir, our work with children, the work of our psychotherapy centre, which earlier this year saw their 1000<sup>th</sup> client as part of the discernment process prior to ordination, – well, the list runs on. Without God's help, and your support, we can achieve nothing.

St Marylebone Parish Church exists to offer worship to almighty God, and to express our love for God in our service of our neighbour. Thank you to everyone who is part of this extraordinary enterprise.

**The Revd Canon Dr Stephen Evans**  
**Rector of St Marylebone with Holy Trinity, St Marylebone**

**28<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

