

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting and Annual Parochial Meeting of St Leonard's Church Lexden
held on

Sunday 18th May 2025 at 11.45 a.m.

Present – Rev'd Matthew Simpkins, Chair and 41 attendees.

Easter Vestry Meeting

1. Apologies (for both meetings) had been received from David Watkins, David Burrows and Susan Eavery.

2. Minutes of the meeting of 28th April 2024 were agreed and signed.

3. Election of Churchwardens

Two nominations had been received, Mr Nick Allston and Mr Michael Firth. It was unanimously agreed that they be duly appointed.

David Watkins stood down, Rev'd Matthew Simpkins thanked him for all his hard work. He read out "What is a Churchwarden" They are officers of the Bishop and foremost in representing the laity. He said David had a great warmth and was unflappable, putting others before himself even during some very difficult times. He is a man of God.

Annual Parochial Meeting

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 28th April 2024 were agreed and signed.

2. The Annual Report on the proceedings of the PCC and the activities of the Parish in general, circulated previously, was approved.

There were no matters arising from the report.

3. The Financial Statement (Adrian Steward) The Statement had been independently examined by Peyton Tyler Mears and copies had been made available previously to the congregation.

Adrian reported on the annual financial statement and was available to take questions. Clare Cleverdon has announced her intention to step back from the Treasury Team at the end of this year. Adrian Steward has also indicated that he will be stepping down at the same time.

Our income is steady in comparison to previous year, the hall and rooms hire had increased. We have had the insurance claim completed from the previous year. There will be some gift aid accounted for in 2025. Overall our expenditure has reduced but our income still does not cover our expenditure.

Rev'd Matthew Simpkins said it is a complicated organisation and offered his profound thanks to the Treasury Team.

4. Acceptance of the Financial Statement was unanimously accepted and approved.

5. Report on the Electoral

In 2024, the number on roll was 200. Two names were deleted after the 2024 revision. One new

application was received after the 2024 revision: The number on roll at December 2024 was 199. 55% of those on the Electoral Roll live in the parish of St Leonard, Lexden Following the complete revision of the Electoral Roll in April 2025 the number on the roll stands at 120.101 of those on the roll were existing on the 2019 roll, 19 are new additions to the roll. 45% of those on the Electoral Roll at April 2025 live in the parish of St Leonard, Lexden.

Electoral Roll application forms and storage of information comply with requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. The 'notes' section of the application form includes details of permitted uses of personal data.

Applicants are given a choice of application formats: an accessible electronic form or the paper version.

Thanks were expressed to Esther Hepstonstall for all her work in keeping the Electoral Roll updated,

6. Fabric Report

A report had been prepared by Peter Hinchcliffe and circulated.

7. Report of proceedings of the Deanery Synod

A report had been prepared and circulated. Linda Firth, Maureen Watkins, and Julie Hinchcliffe were our parish Deanery Synod reps at the beginning of the year. Tribute was paid to Maureen Watkins who pass away in April 2025.

8. Election of Representatives of the Laity to the Deanery Synod

Julie Hinchcliffe, and Linda Firth remain as our Deanery Synod Representatives. There is still one application for the Deanery Synod from Deidre Fordham. She was duly elected.

9. Election of Representatives of the Laity to the Parochial Church Council

One nomination was received from Judith – She were duly elected.

10. The appointment of Independent Examiners

Peyton Tyler Mears were proposed and unanimously appointed.

11. Appointment of Child Protection Officer and Adult Safeguarding Officer

Julie Hinchcliffe is our Parish Safeguarding Officer and Mandy Allston our Deputy Safeguarding Officer. They were both thanked for all their hard work during the year.

12. Churchwardens Assistants

Peter Hinchcliffe, and Esther Heptonstall were thanked for their help in making the roll of the churchwardens more manageable. They had both agreed to remain as Churchwardens Assistants. They were thanked for all their help during the year

13. Any Other Business

Nick Allston gave thanks on behalf of himself and all the congregation to Matt, Sian and their wonderful family for everything they have done during their time at St Ledonard's.

14. Priest in Charge Address

*I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

“Since the founding of the Church discerning God’s will has always been a crucial but difficult matter. Yet the New Testament teaches God’s will is discerned together in community rather than by individuals in isolation. Paul admonished the early church at Corinth for its infighting and individualistic approach to the gifts of the spirit by reminding them – and us - that discernment is collective: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the *common* good.” In the same chapter, Paul uses the image of the body to describe the beautiful relationship between our God-given individuality and our Spirit-inspired community.

So when you look to discern God’s will for St Leonard’s future, do in the knowledge that you are each part of the body that is the Parish of Lexden, and that the Parish is part of the Body that is the Diocese, and so on and so on – all of this forming the Body of Christ.

With the coming vacancy, I hope that the talk of pastoral reorganisation which has been around for a decade and a half will bear fruit in a new formal relationship between parishes. This is not something St Leonard’s need fear, rather it is an opportunity to dream dreams collectively– to discern God’s will together with our neighbours.

To inform those dreams, I want to remind you of the wonderful things I see God already doing here.

I urge you to get dreaming - in a spirit of collaboration, in holiness and prayer, and with a mind to need and practicality - and to be bold in sharing your dreams into whatever process comes next.

And so to the wonderful things God is already doing through you:

We are all aware that, like most churches, attendance at our main service have not recovered to pre-pandemic numbers. We also mourn and miss many people who were once with us each week. There is numerical as well as spiritual growth here, however. In 2024, 36 people joined our regular worshipping community: more than three times the previous year and the largest number on record. Just look around you on Sunday morning and at our other acts of worship. Those who have joined us tell me that they value the sense of community and welcome that you have established here, the preaching and the style of worship. Both our churchwardens are people who have been confirmed during my time here. The deepening of people’s callings and faith in

this community is obvious. These things are easily overlooked, but they are extremely precious and we must cherish them and seek more!

Messy church continues to grow (with almost 70 people on average at each service in 2024), the Brick Club continues to boom, the Baby and Toddler Group has two full sessions each week, the breakfasts thrive, friendship lunch welcomes more and more people from beyond the church, our friendship line has grown as we seek to respond to the needs of those who are unable to be with us physically. This growth is presently concentrated in age groups that are a foundation for future growth across *all* age groups. By “joining up the dots” - providing opportunities for further engagement - our youth group now has 11 members; and children that came to Messy Church now sing in the choir as Sixth Formers. I encourage you to go with the flow of where God brings growth – treat it as God’s gift and discover how best to nurture it.

There are many God-given opportunities to keep St Leonard’s growing. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of funding have been poured into other churches to undertake the work that St Leonard’s does daily. Through the gifts among us here and our staffing, we have been able to simply get on with it. St Leonard’s has always been a place of pioneering, of service and mission, that seeks to resource others through financial and human resource.

St Leonard’s culture, mission, and worship is confidently Anglican. We strive to make our services accessible while honouring tradition in an inclusive way. Just because we do not put a few qualifying nouns before our tradition does not mean that we have no identity. Anglicanism is a great and rich tradition in itself, and St Leonard’s is – from my experience – very happy to be an Anglican parish church.

It remains a problem, however, that our “central” tradition is often reticent to express itself while others express themselves vociferously. We have conducted ourselves in this manner for laudable reasons, *however* now that views from the extreme wings of the church are *always* at the table, we need to be confident in respectfully expressing our theology and position. If our voice is not at the table, then our silence is. This is why engagement with the deanery and diocesan synod are so important to the future of this place *and* the Church of England.

Here we have simply got on with things peaceably and faithfully, building and maintaining a culture which is inclusive by deed rather than simply by word: a culture shaped by the Biblical ministry of Jesus who showed love to those considered outcasts or untouchable according to the social and religious traditions of his time.

Generosity is also a precious charism of St Leonard’s. We have as a church - particularly my fellow priests Maggie, Jacquie, and Viv and our wardens - given great time and effort to support the populous Parish of Shrub End during a sustained period of difficulty. The future will likely offer

an opportunity to simply formalise what God is already doing with Shrub End and Lexden, and to consider how other neighbours may be part of this.

St Leonard's has remained a steadfast and loving presence for its people, and beacon of authentic, compassionate, Biblically-rooted and engaged Anglicanism.

We are flawed and we shall stumble - we are a work in progress - but nevertheless, St Leonard's tradition and approach to mission is a precious gift to this city. I hope that all here can take confidence in it.

As a parish, we have faithfully practised sacrificial stewardship – self-giving at cost to ourselves – by over-paying our Parish Share for many years including 2024. We are among the top two financial givers in the deanery, and we have done so at the expense of our reserves. Our reserves are large and they are intended to be used for the mission of the Church, but in the coming years – leaving capital investment in our facilities to one side - stability needs to be sought for our regular income and expenditure *solely* in order that sacrificial giving and mission can continue. While we need to attend constantly to all forms of giving: making sure we tithe to charities as a PCC, giving our individual gifts of personality, skills and money; we should also recognise that our largest expenditure, Parish Share, will be re-calculated if there is a change in the deployment of any stipendiary Priest associated with Lexden.

Lexden is a pioneering, compassionate, collegial, welcoming, faithful community that gives sacrificially, and in this parish God is very evidently at work. As you discern God's will for the future of this place dream on these things. Value what God has given you and dedicate yourselves to his service. Look for the need around you and continue to give in hope. And be willing to push out into the depths as the first disciples did! God will not let you down.

I do not offer this speech to influence you, it is for *you* to seek to discern God's will for what is next for Lexden. I offer this speech to reflect back to you your gifts and what God is doing with and through and for you, so that - rooted in humility — with those around you, you may dream and discern the wonderful future that God intends for this community

The meeting concluded with prayers.