

St. Martin's Parish Church
Ashton on Mersey
Church Lane,
M33 5QQ



ANNUAL REPORT

2025

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1. Introduction and Worship

St Martin's Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish the mission of the church: pastoral, evangelistic, social & ecumenical. The PCC is committed to growing our church community and to widening our engagement with those in our parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament.

As you will see in the reports in this booklet, we have continued to strengthen our work with children and families through Messy Church, Explorers and REACH, as well as supporting others in our community with the wonderful Welcome Café, the Bereavement Group, The Friendship Group, Parish Lunch and Men's Breakfast.

As well as our regular services, activities and events, we enable our community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of the journey through life. Through baptism we thank God for the gift of life, in marriage public vows are exchanged with God's blessing and through funerals loved ones express their grief and give thanks for the life now complete in this world, and we commend the person into God's keeping.

It was a huge privilege to be made Rector of St Martin's in March 2023. In 2023 we continued to hold other special services that helped us to engage with the community in different ways, including a well-attended and joyful Pet Blessing Service, a moving Baby Loss Awareness Service, a Blue Christmas Service and several school services. In July we had two visits from Bishop Sam: a joyful confirmation service and the 50th anniversary of John Sutton's

Priesting. It was wonderful to welcome the Revd Professor David Law, together with his wife Claudia and mum Gwen to St Martin's. We are looking forward to a full summer of occasional offices, and I would like to thank everyone who contributes so much to our worship here; especially to Revd Canon John Sutton; Revd Professor David Law; Alison Corser our Trainee Reader; the churchwardens, vergers, cleaners, flower arrangers, servers, readers, intercessors and, of course, the wonderful Choir and visiting Organists.

Revd Catherine Cleghorn, Rector

2. Churchwardens

It was not until I began writing this report that I realised how much had been happening!

On two occasions this summer we were pleased to welcome the Bishop of Stockport, the Rt. Revd. Sam Corley. The first was to a special service to celebrate John Sutton's 50th anniversary of his Priesting. It was rather more memorable than intended as a printing error in the service booklet referred to John and Freda getting married in 1070! Bishop Sam was soon with us for another special service which was the confirmation of 4 adults and 1 child.

We held our annual summer and winter fairs and thanks go to Rose for organising the Wellfield choir to sing at these. It's a delight to see their enthusiasm and smiling faces.

Food always plays a part in life here: the Coronation Afternoon Tea; the Shrove supper; bacon butties or pies (with a vegetarian alternative!) at the Table Top sale and Craft Fair and a B.B.Q. and cake stall at the fairs, in fact at most of the events we hold people head for the kitchen hatch.

We had a popular war graves walk round the churchyard ably led by Michael Walker. Colin Paul entertained a full church with his Christmas Show and, yes you guessed, as soon as it finished we went over to the hall for cake.

Sadly Jan, our organist for many years, played at her last service in September before moving to Yorkshire. We welcomed Cathal as her replacement but due to work commitments this did not work out and we are still seeking his replacement. We are so grateful to Kevin and Harvey who have stepped in to help. As you will have noticed we have 2 new choir members, earlier in the year we had another who only stayed for one choir practise – it was a bat!

Along with his mum and wife we've welcomed back David Law, who was a curate here, and has now been given permission to officiate at St. Martin's.

Within a few months of each other 3 long standing members of the congregation died, they were Mary Heywood, Margaret Hindle and Pat Lucas. Gone but not forgotten.

I, personally, appreciate all the help and support I receive from you all, but especially from Audrey. Due to Catherine's undertaking Explorers, Messy Church, and REACH continue to grow as do the variety of church services. We take for granted much of the work Catherine does so I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank her.

Margaret Holt, Churchwarden

3. Fabric of Church Buildings

Church

Two traffic incidents on Church Lane accounted for work on and around the churchyard boundary wall. One meant the gas board

accessing the churchyard to replace part of a gas pipe and the other resulted in a 2 metre stretch of wall being rebuilt, after obtaining permission from Chester due to the type of brick required. Fortunately the insurance company agreed to pay.

Part of the render on the church tower fell off due to incorrect workmanship. Some of this fell onto the Rector's vestry roof resulting in broken tiles. Working out how best to replace the render is proving difficult, partly due to the problem of access and also finding a company able to do the work which is likely to be in the region of £30,000+. The insurance company will not pay and we are awaiting the result of a grant application which will cover some of this.

Unfortunately work to the external door and wooden panelling around the bottom of the porch, mentioned last year, has not been addressed.

Hall

Ridge and roof tiles on the single storey section of the hall, damaged during bad weather, have been replaced. Two of the wooden framed windows in the downstairs small room were rotten and have been replaced with 'wood effect UPVC double glazed units.

Margaret Holt, Churchwarden

4. Finance Report for year ending 31.12.24

The accounts for the year have been independently checked and approved by the P.C.C. There have been copies of these at the back of church but if you have not got one and would like a copy please let me know and I will provide one for you.

WE have made some amendments to our accounts and it was decided by the P.C.C. that the Magazine and Appeal fund accounts were no longer relevant.

Therefore the balances of these two accounts, some £14,900.00, were transferred to the main current account.

As usual our biggest outlay was the quota which we have again paid in full. The quota for 2025 is £50443.09 (£4203.59 per month).

The last report mentioned that new contracts for the gas and electricity were to be negotiated and these were done and will come into effect once the current contracts have expired. The insurance for the church and hall buildings has in the past been paid in one lump sum. However on renewal this year in September, we have been able to pay in monthly instalments at no extra cost.

All our other usual payments have been made on time and without any difficulty.

No major costs were incurred in respect of repairs. However, you will recall that last year there had been a problem with bits falling off the tower. This has still not been resolved. Also following the quinquennial report major defects were found with the church roof. This now needs replacing. Grants are to be applied for and hopefully received for both these projects.

Our planned giving income rose by some £2600 and plate collection were some £100 down on the previous year. Tax recovered from gift aid increased by some £3000. This was mainly because during the tax year to April 2024 we received generous donations on which we were able to claim. Receipts

following weddings, funerals etc continue to be a good source of income.

Once again fundraising helped our income although this year it was down by some £2200 on the previous year. The café, monthly lunch and coffee receipts also helped. The church hall also ran at a profit of some £2000.

I know I say this every year but we must try to increase our planned giving and not rely on fund raising, churchyard fees etc. especially in these times when things are so unpredictable and we need funds to complete the major works that are needed.

Finally a personal note. After 28 years I am retiring from the post as P.C.C. treasurer and I would like to thank all those people, too numerous to mention, who have assisted me in any way during my time. It has been a difficult end to the year with Margaret's illness and may I thank everybody for their kind thought which were very much appreciated.

Lastly may I wish Trevor who is taking over good luck, if that is the correct word, and I am sure that he will do an excellent job.
Ivan Holt (P.C.C. Treasurer)

5. REACH

In December 2023 we sadly said goodbye to Alex, as he took on full-time employment. In 2024 we welcomed Dave Atkinson, the Director of Trafford Youth for Christ, who is now running REACH with a wonderful team of volunteers. The young people play games, use the tuck shop and have the opportunity to explore and grow in faith through crafts and other activities, and through a short interactive talk each week. It has been wonderful to see them grow in

confidence and in faith and to build relationships. We're really grateful to the church volunteers who kindly give up their time to support this group.
Revd Catherine Cleghorn, Rector

6. Messy Church

Messy Church has continued to meet monthly throughout 2023 and into 2024. We have a wonderful large team of volunteers, who meet every month to plan the sessions and who all contribute and work together in a supportive and creative way.

Messy Church generally starts with an hour or so of freely moving between various activities and crafts that are based on a biblical theme. After that we have 20min of stories and songs whilst the kitchen team set up for tea, and then we all eat together. Huge thanks to Alison Corser for all the cooking!

We've had over 40 people attending Messy Church at any one time and it has certainly lived up to its name! The aim is to provide intergenerational worship that can be enjoyed by all, everyone is really welcome to come to experience it, and new volunteers are always very welcome!
Revd Catherine Cleghorn, Rector

7. Explorers

We launched a monthly "Sunday School – but not as you knew it" session at 10am on the first Sunday of the month in February 2023. This has continued with a group of children of mixed ages. All children and young people are really welcome to attend and we ask parents of pre-school aged children to stay with us. Huge thanks to Val for supporting this, and to Revd Canon John Sutton for taking the main service in church whilst this is on.
Revd Catherine Cleghorn Rector

8. Exciting Events Committee

We have a committee to plan and coordinate all the exciting events that happen throughout the year at St Martin's. Many of these are fundraising events for the church, as well as lovely opportunities for the community to come together, and to welcome new people.

Events in the past year have included: quizzes, summer and winter fairs, Shrove Supper, ladies' fashion shows, indoor car boot sales, amazing afternoon teas and, of course, the second ever annual St Martin's Christmas Tree Festival. This three-day event was a beautiful and meaningful way to start the season of Advent, and it was a pleasure to bring the community together and to welcome so many people into the church. *Revd Catherine Cleghorn, Rector*

9. Bereavement Support Group

This group was formed so that people who are bereaved in any way can come together in a safe space and support one another. We run this fortnightly, in conjunction with St Mary's Church who run theirs at the same time in the other weeks. There are normally about 12 of us there and people are welcome to attend regularly or to come when they can. The conversation flows freely and we talk about a huge range of things. In the summer we sometimes go for short walks as well.

Please contact me if you would like any more information, and thank you so much to Alison Corser and to everyone who attends.

Revd Catherine Cleghorn, Rector

10. Bible Study

We launched a weekly Zoom bible study in January 2022 to look at the material that the Church of England produced for *Living in Love and Faith*, and we never stopped meeting!

We have completed several courses on various aspects of church life, faith and discipleship, and have enjoyed the sense of fellowship and prayer – even on Zoom! Some people attend every week but most of us come when we can – and new folk are always really welcome.

Revd Catherine Cleghorn, Rector

11. Charitable Mission Giving

The mission of the church including supporting those in need through loving care and service.

We support various charities throughout the year at St Martin's, including Mustard Tree and the Children's Society. They were really grateful for our donations which support the vital work that they do.

Revd Catherine Cleghorn, Rector

12. Children's Society Report 2023

The number of people contributing to the Children's Society box collection has decreased again this year. We have sadly lost three of our members and others have moved away and no longer contribute. I was therefore amazed and delighted that I was able to send £994 to the Society this March.

I am very grateful for everyone's generous support. There are so many deserving charities now, so it is difficult to make a choice. However, it is good to know there are people who care for young people who are in difficulty. I find it a very rewarding charity to be involved with and I thank everyone again for all their support.

Penny Cain

13. Servers & Sacristy

We have a team of 9 servers between the 9am and 10:00am services. The 9am service & Wednesday service is currently covered by 3 servers, Sue H, Joan T and Graham W, the 10:00am service is currently covered by 6 servers: Susan who does every week, apart

from holidays, and 5 others on rotation. There is no age restriction for serving, so if anyone is willing to join the team it will spread the load.

As Sacristan I am responsible for ordering candles, and wafers for the Eucharist. We have recently changed our supplier to Charles Farris Ltd, as Hayes & Finch had discontinued some sizes of candles we use and their postage prices were slightly cheaper. Baptism candles are supplied by Eden.co.uk.

We buy Communion wine from a local supermarket which is lasting much longer as we are still intincting the wafers. I continue to launder the Altar linen apart from the large altar cloths which are dealt with by Pat Green and Joan Blackledge, for which I'm very grateful.

Susan Blain, Sacristan

14. Parochial Church Council

There are 12 lay members on the P.C.C. at present. 12 are elected and 5 are ex-officio: the Rector, 2 church-wardens and 2 Deanery Synod members. The number of elected members can vary depending on the number of people on the electoral roll.

There are usually 6 meetings a year where we discuss matters involving the Church and Hall and how we can resolve any problems. Ahead of the next PCC meeting, there is always a copy of the previous meeting's minutes at the back of church should you wish to know what has been discussed and what decisions have been made. If you have anything you would like to be discussed, please do let me or any of the PCC know, as we appreciate your input; it is everybody's Church, and the PCC are there as your representatives.

Susan Blain, PCC Secretary

15. Safeguarding

Safeguarding

At St. Martin's we take safeguarding seriously. We now have a deputy safeguarding officer who is Emma McBride. The PCC are required to have an enhanced DBS check and have done the Basic Awareness, Foundation and Domestic Abuse courses as advised by the Bishop of Birkenhead, most of the PCC have also completed enhanced DBS checks and also the required courses

Any issues raised are dealt with according to Diocesan Guidelines and reported to the relevant authorities. If you have any concerns, please speak to myself, Emma, or Revd. Catherine.

Susan Blain, Safeguarding Officer

16. Deanery Synod

The talks at the three meetings in the Synod since the last report have covered a wide range of topics relevant to the Church today. In May 2023, at St Elizabeth's Church Ashley we had a talk from Revd Vanessa Layfield, the Diocesan Engagement and Inclusion officer, who challenged us to look at our churches and see how we could improve access for all. Do we acknowledge the diversity of the congregation? Do we need to involve disabled, deaf or partially sighted people in our services? She left us with a lot of food for thought and challenges to take to our own churches and to consider.

At St Alban's Church Broadheath, in October, we had a short talk from The Vice-Dean of Emmanuel Theological College, the Revd Shemil Matthew, who explained how Emmanuel uses both practical as well as academic approaches to learning, aiming to accommodate all differences in learning styles for those who wish to follow some form of theological training.

Inaugurated two years ago, with centres that include Liverpool, Manchester and Chester, the college serves the six dioceses of the northwest of England. It is now the third biggest theological college in England having 18 staff supporting 160 students and facilitating “pop up” courses that are open to all, usually held on weekday evenings.

The last meeting was in February this year at Holy Cross Church Timperley where the Revd Mike Loach gave a talk on Eco-church, in which he explained the ethos of caring for the environment at National, Diocesan, and individual church levels. This is something we are working towards getting better at, as we have recently gained the Bronze Level of the Arocha “Eco-church” award.

These meetings were all chaired by the Rural Dean and the Lay Chair. Reports are received on news from National Synod as well as from in and around the Diocese. In-depth reports are available if anyone wishes to read them.

Penny Cain and Alison Corser

17. Christingle Services and “Candle” Collections 2023

In December, 5th Ashton on Mersey North Brownies and Guides helped to enact the Nativity story again in two (on the same day!) Nativity and Christingle services. Due to the number of girls and their assorted family members adding to the size of the congregation, both the Rector and Brown Owl/Captain were concerned over the potential for a conflagration instead of just beautiful flickering candles, as we sang “Away in A Manger” by candlelight. The services and the “candles” that the Brownies and Guides took home raised £281.13. If anyone would like a collection candle this year, please do ask Brown Owl/Captain (Alison Corser). I only wanted to order 100 candles, but they sent me 100 packs of 10!

18. Men’s Breakfast

Men’s Breakfast has been running for 18 months now! We meet at the Church Hall on the first Saturday of each month, with an 8 for 8:30 (ish) start. The bacon sandwiches, coffee, tea and chat are proving to be just the right amount of energy for a Saturday morning.

Huge thanks go to Len Yeadon and Ian Jolley who do an amazing job of keeping us fed and entertained. There have been some brilliant talks around local history, Chernobyl to Tommy Cooper! We also tried a few ‘show and tell’ sessions where obscure items from history or modern day were brought along for a little guessing game over their use!

We’re always open to more ideas and seeing if we can reach a wider appeal. With an average attendance around 12-14 through the winter, we’re hoping this summer will attract a few new people. Some of our regular attendees are not connected with the Church in any other way.

Carl Cleghorn

19. Welcome Cafe

We have had another very successful year and with all our friends who come most Thursdays, we average between 25-30 people. During the Christmas period we enjoyed a Carol Concert in which everyone took part and it got us into the Christmas spirit. A number have engaged with one another and have gone out together for lunch and this Summer have planned trips to the seaside. So we feel the Cafe has been instrumental in bringing people together. We continue to receive enough in donations to pay our way: a friend crafted some lovely greetings cards which sold well and the money raised boosted our funds. We are also grateful for the gifts given as prizes for our weekly free raffle.

I would like to thank all our volunteers for their continued help. We couldn't keep going without them:- Dave, who comes every week, loves making the toasted current bread and giving advice on gardening to anyone who needs it; Lily; Liz; Iris; Shirley; Heather; Pauline; John; Freda; Jill; Joan, who keeps everything ticking along nicely; and our founder member, Sue, who is available to cover when needed. Together with all the loyal friends who join us week by week we look forward to another happy year ahead – our fifth!

Ann Brazendale

20. 100+ Club

The 100+ is a monthly draw. Members pay £1 a month (£12 a year) and are entered into the draw which takes place usually on the third Sunday of the month during refreshments in the hall. The first prize is £30, second prize is £10 and third prize is £5. In the last year membership dropped below 100 but so far this year I have managed to recruit nine new members so we are back to living up to the name 100+. At present we have eight agents who each have a list of members and are responsible for collecting their money and giving it to me to pass on to the treasurer. If you have not joined the 100+ Club or would like more information then please talk to me. Last year the 100+ raised £672 for church funds. *Audrey Black*

21. Magazine

Magazine - The Ashtonian

The magazine is published monthly. Circulation is fairly stable at around 90 copies per month. More are needed when special services such as Christmas, Easter, Mothering Sunday and Harvest occur. The advertisers help to pay for the cost of producing the magazine and in return they get a free magazine each month. There is a wonderful team of volunteers who deliver and or post magazine to subscribers who don't attend church and this accounts for about half the

magazines printed. We accept articles for the magazine from anyone about anything they think our readers will be interested in eg. A good book, a place of interest, a report on church activities, a recipe etc. *Audrey Black*

22. HEALTH AND SAFETY

No major issues this year and any minor problems have been dealt with although there is still an issue with the flags on the West side of the church. Better lighting is needed around the church hall especially near the door. *Colin Smith*

23. ELECTORAL ROLL

This year we have had to completely renew the electoral roll, so everyone has had to reapply to join. This has resulted in the new total of 86, (57 of which are not resident in the parish) which is down from last year's total of 121. Notices were put on Facebook and the web site about the new roll, as well as in the magazine. I don't think the adverts on Facebook and the web site resulted in any extra applications. The previous paper copies of the electoral roll have been shredded, and a copy of the new roll (without addresses) is displayed at the back of Church. *Colin Smith*

24. WEB SITE

The web site is regularly updated with events and information.

Colin Smith

25. FACEBOOK

The Facebook group is still going from strength to strength. It is very useful for advertising events and functions and reporting on the things we have done.

We have 1022 members at the time of writing, and we get quite a few additions each time there is an event although there has recently been

some wanting to join that I feel are slightly dubious so having to be careful who to permit membership. It is a quick and easy way to get information out to a wide range of people. We have also been able to share funerals live which is useful for those who knew the deceased but are unable to attend.

Colin Smith

26. HALL BOOKINGS

We are fortunate to have gained additional income of £170 per week term-time from a number of new Regular Bookings, which are:

Hall: Sunday afternoon Dance & Drama;

Monday afternoon Stay & Play;

Friday morning Baby & Toddler Signing Class;

Upstairs: Tutorial Classes Tues/Wed afternoons.

Hire costs are unchanged:

Hall bookings £25 per hour for one off events; £150 full day (9-5);

£20 per hour for Regular weekly bookings;

Children's parties cost £60 for 3 hours.

Meeting rooms: £15 for a single hour; £10 p.h. for one+ hours.

The building continues to be very well used by numerous church groups.

Joan Tanner

27. Verger's Report

2023 was a standard year for our grounds - the fourteenth year that I have been responsible for managing them - my team and I are experienced and efficient at maintaining them by now!

Ivy still refuses to fully die off on one of the trees on the south boundary, but we keep persevering. Otherwise all trees, except on the west boundary, have had the ivy eradicated and kept under control over the last few years. This will greatly prolong their lives.

We had to allocate our time to a couple of other tasks during winter this year, but next winter we will tackle the trees on the West boundary, these are not as badly affected as the others were, particularly the South boundary. Some of the paths still need re-gravelling.

The ornamental tree on the memorial lawn that I thought we might have lost after it suffered so badly in the drought two years ago has sprouted from its base; although much smaller than its "twin", it is certainly recovering.

A spot has been chosen for the Coronation Tree at the end of the mowed walkway West of the war memorial. There is an historic issue with the row we are now using and it has become apparent to some extent the row we have just completed. In both cases a headstone has been installed very slightly askew which, over time, has sent the row out of line. I am working closely with the masons to resolve this over the next two years.

We have increased the "meadow" area in the South West corner as a result of the graves extending into it over the last few years. I will be working with the gravediggers to landscape the rough sections of this cleared area in order to eventually move the walkway right back to the boundary, as it is becoming too close to the graves.

There were 26 ashes burials last year which, from experience, is about what I would have expected, though quite a few were in existing or family graves. There were 11 burials (also what I would have expected) the majority of these being new graves, which will mean an income from memorials in the future. There were not as many headstones installed in 2023 as in 2022. I did have to make another slight increase (of £240) to the seasonal maintenance fee

due to rising wages, but the church yard still made a surplus of £5638.50 in 2023, this being about £594 down on 2022.

My duties as Verger were reduced at the end of the year; I had been arranging weddings and baptism bookings since Fr Shaun left, having done so in the previous interregnums too, and it was time to pass these duties on. Some of the work I used to do for families on behalf of the church, I now do on behalf of the funeral directors, and the new system is working well. It was also decided that the Verger should not be carrying out the Parish Clerk duties, which was a shame.

I proudly continue with my existing duties, paid and unpaid. Of course my passion has always been managing our grounds, but also assisting people with graves and ancestry searches and I enjoy taking care of our vestments and registers.

Nigel Black

28. ST. MARTIN'S CARERS' GROUP

This was an idea that had been thought about before I started to come to this church but as I have over twenty years' experience of working to support carers in both a professional and voluntary capacity this seemed a natural thing to get involved in.

Following discussions with Trafford Carers' Centre and Home Instead and information provided to the church it was decided to start this group in October 2024.

The group is open to any carer (or recent former carer) in the area but for it to be a success we needed volunteers and, of course, carers who would be interested in coming. Trafford Carers' Centre and Home Instead help us with the publicity but people from the church were also encouraged to spread the word to anyone they thought would benefit.

The first meeting was an opportunity for those who came along to tell us the type of information and support that would be most useful to them. Using that feedback a programme was planned which currently goes through until June this year.

So far there have been presentations by Trafford Carers' Centre (Nov) and the Fire Service (Feb). There was a Christmas Party (Dec) and Easter Activities (April). Unfortunately, due to the weather the January meeting had to be cancelled but this session on Relaxation techniques took place instead in March. We are expecting Age UK Trafford to talk in May and the Coop Financial planning service to come in June.

In terms of numbers attending this has varied; sadly two of the people who came initially lost the person they cared for over the Christmas period and the last meeting was affected by a funeral that a lot of people involved wanted to go to. Nevertheless, those who do come have found it very helpful and have commented on the lovely atmosphere – and the soup! Currently we have about twelve on the list.

We have some great volunteers but some of them have not always been available for a variety of reasons.

We would love to see more carers coming along (they can bring the person they care for if that would help) and we could also do with some more volunteers so please do think if you could help in any way. *Sue Gladden 07968 236 854* gladdengs@gmail.com