



**ST. BOTOLPH'S**  
CHEVENING CHURCH

**Church Annual Review 2023**



St. Botolph's Church, Chevening  
The Chapel of the Good Shepherd, Chipstead  
Chevening Church Hall, Chipstead

**Rector: Rev Hannah Adams**

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## Who's who?

### PCC:

Hannah Adams		Rector
Joseph Devine	2023	Churchwarden
Lela Weavers	2021	Deanery & Diocesan Synod ex-officio
Graham Higgs	2023	Deanery Synod ex-officio; Treasurer for PCC/CCC
Fiona Jordan	2023	Parish Safeguarding Officer; Hall Manager
Donna Hill	2023	
Sally Munro	2023	
Andrew Taylor	2023	
Hannah Williams	2023	
Christopher Austen	2023	
Peter Wilson	2023	PCC Secretary
James Gale	2021	
Jess Lewis	2021	
Thomas Geldard	2021	
Rebecca Pilcher	2021	
Sophie Osbourne	2021	
Susan Wandless	2021	

### Ministry and Group Leaders:

Safeguarding	Fiona Jordan
Prayer Ministry	Sally Munro
Pastoral Visiting Team	Marjorie Jones
Worship	James Gale
Tower Captain	Tony Creswell
Church Fabric	Joseph Devine
Church Hall Manager	Fiona Jordan
Play Café	Hannah Adams, Jo Baxter and Amy Donovan
Mpendo Parish Link	Sandra Tolhurst
Communications	Nathan Adams
Electoral Roll Secretaries	Clare & Richard Marriott
Church Key holder	<i>Vacant</i>
Treasurer	Graham Higgs
Small Groups	Hannah Adams
Children & Young People	<i>Vacant</i>

## Rector's Report

2023 was another year of transition for us as a Church community as I came back from Maternity Leave mid-year. I am grateful for all who gave so much of their time during my leave and whilst I returned to work. A special thanks goes to Marcia Barton and Rob Hubbard who were Church Wardens during that time as well as our new Warden, Joseph Devine (along with many others!).

This past year, the PCC have been working hard towards our set priorities on: Unity across our services and people's sense of belonging; Welcome (from the moment someone looks on our website, steps through our doors and all the way through to getting into a small group and serving on team); Growing our families and youth work; and finally building on our relationship with our local school, Chevening (St. Botolph's) Primary.

In addition to this we have decided on 4 values that we believe define what our culture is as a church, summed up in this sentence: "We are a **loving family, rooted** in scripture and prayer and willing to be **courageous** to see God's kingdom grow."

We had some amazing 'high' moments last year, with our Community BBQ, our new Summer church services held in the hall, our now weekly play café is seeing roughly 10 children each week (with new people coming most weeks) and adult baptisms in November at our 5pm service seeing two members of our church be baptised in an inflatable hot tub! I remain thankful to everyone who voluntarily gives their time, energy and practically to enable our church to *be* the church.

We do face challenges: volunteers and finances have been hit particularly hard from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – this is not just applicable to us but to all churches. As we look forward, the Church (institutionally and locally) faces unknown territory where many (for a variety of reasons) do not have a faith, let alone come to church whilst also the younger generation face an epidemic of mental health issues. There are wars, a cost of living crisis and much division in and outside of the church. This at times feels bleak and heavy yet our faith is founded upon what Jesus Christ did on the cross – taking a bleak, hopeless situation and bringing new life. In all of this our vision remains the same: To be a Christ centred, Jesus shaped Church. We are a beacon of hope, where we have a dream to see God's transformational love at work in our own lives and our local community. We will do this by being a community where everyone can belong, and can grow in knowledge and love of God inspiring a desire to serve. This echoes the wider Rochester Diocesan vision: Change (to be more and more Christ like), Serve (God, each other and our community) and Grow (younger & more diverse).

As Rector, I remain hopeful for the future of this church because I have the privilege of seeing where God is at work in everyone's lives. There will be things that need working out along the way, there will be celebrations and trials, but as a family united in the love of Christ we share those moments together and I look forward to serving with you.

**Rev Hannah Adams, Rector**

## Church Warden Report

2023 was a new chapter for Chevening St Botolph's as Marcia, Rob and Richard all stood down from their warden and deputy warden roles. I was pleased to put myself forward as warden and have appreciated the support of the church family throughout the year. We are thankful that Marcia, Rob and Richard all still take an active part in helping with church life which has been invaluable especially to me! It has also been great to have Hannah back from the transition from maternity leave, with her leading us throughout the year. It is a source of blessing and joy to me, to pray with her each week before the services.

We have focused on continuing to rebuild our services after the various challenges over the past 3 years, and it is pleasing to see all congregations supporting one another and reflecting God's love. We are blessed with 3 distinct congregations, which welcome all to worship God as best reflects their faith and liturgy.

- The 9 is our weekly communion service, offering a contemplative format for those seeking tranquillity and formality of service. We are really pleased that Tom, our new organist, is settling in well, plays beautifully and his dedication means we can worship with our lovely organ every week.
- The 10.30 is more informal, with praise and activities to keep all ages engaged, the recorded worship songs work well taking pressure off the band. This service has grown in numbers throughout the year, with more young families coming along which is a real source of thanks.
- The 5 is our monthly community focused service in the hall, offering a different format to attract those who are often returning to church. We are delighted that some members travel from further afield for this unique service. Family and support of one another is a key theme of the 5 which really comes through in the meeting format.

We are blessed that numbers are holding steady, with growth through the second half of the year which we hope to see continue in 2024.

2023 has been a challenging year for me personally as my dear father Viv was diagnosed with lung cancer in April, which meant I was away in Yorkshire every few weekends to visit him - throughout this time the church family were always supportive of me, not putting pressure on my time which was a real act of kindness to a fledgling warden. I sadly lost my Dad in November, so the prayers of the church family throughout his illness and passing carried Kathryn, Bridget, Gregor, Sofia and myself through a very difficult time.

I must say a huge thank you to everyone who helps at Chevening, we are a family who pull together to support one another and our church - so I think this is a true expression of what we believe in the love of God. The PCC, Standing Committee and all the team in the office do an amazing job for the smooth running of the church.

As I look to 2024 I am looking forward to my second year as warden, and hope another stands to work with me so that we can continue to deepen our church family here in Chevening. We are blessed to have a young energetic vicar who isn't afraid to speak God's truths in love, so we are excited to see what God has planned for us in 2024 as we share the good news of the love of Jesus - Amen.

**Joseph Devine, Churchwarden**

## **Secretary Report**

Chevening PCC meets approximately once a month (minus August and December). It has the responsibility of co-operating with the Incumbent in promoting the whole mission of the Church: pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It also has responsibility for the maintenance of St. Botolph's Church and the Chevening Church Hall complex, incorporating the Chapel of the Good Shepherd and Homedean House.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules 2020. All church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC where there are vacancies.

Across 2023 The PCC met 10 times (excluding August and December), the Standing Committee met in between PCC meetings, minutes of which were presented and approved by PCC. The PCC also met for a team building and strategy day in September which has solidified and strengthened the team enabling us to decide on a common vision and action plan, with set priorities for our Church.

**Peter Wilson, PCC Secretary**

## **Treasurer's Report – including summary of accounts**

2023 has been a very challenging year with unrestricted income significantly reduced from £116,908 in 2022 to £106,509 in 2023. Regular donations have declined from £72,846 in 2022 to £63,522 in 2023.

Additional means of making donations such as QR codes and electronic 'smart' facilities have been introduced and should make a positive contribution in the coming months. Early indications are positive but they have not been in place long enough as yet to show a material impact.

The income shown by our financial statements for 2022 of £217,547 included restricted grants of £65,639 and some £46,000 of this was provided by a significant and very generous grant from the National Churches Trust Heritage Fund to enable us to re-roof the Nave as required by the recent Diocesan Quinquennial Inspection. This has been successfully completed and our thanks go to the Trust for their support.

Our total unrestricted expenditure in 2023 was £131,357 and this is in line with the previous year when it was £129,464.

So, to summarise:

Funds b/f 2022	unrestricted	£64,973
Deficit for 2023	unrestricted	£25,265
Funds c/f 2023	unrestricted	£39,708
Funds b/f 2022	restricted	£68,220
Deficit for 2023	restricted	£12,984
Funds c/f 2023	restricted	£55,236

We also have an endowment fund of valued at £24,436 which can be made available for emergency or major repairs to the fabric of the church.

The coming months will again be challenging but we now have a Finance Working Group tasked with examining all our financial activities to scrutinise our expenditure and find ways to maximise our income going forward.

**Graham Higgs, Treasurer**

### **Safeguarding and Safer Recruitment Report**

#### Safeguarding

The Church takes very seriously, its responsibility to safeguarding and safer recruitment of both paid employees and volunteers. We continue to uphold the recommendations from the Diocese through training, DBS checks and accountability through regular reporting to the PCC.

We all have a shared responsibility to make sure our Church is a safe place to be for children, young people and adults who may be considered vulnerable.

The PCC and the Incumbent have a shared obligation to:

- Ensure the Church has a Parish Safeguarding Officer
- Ensure the Church has a Lead Recruiter
- Uphold the requirement to carry out DBS checks for those who are required to have one.
- Formally adopt and uphold the recommendations made by the House of Bishops' Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidelines.  
(This formal statement is put to the PCC and agreed upon on the first meeting following the APCM)
- Ensure that safeguarding training has been carried out by PCC members and those in role leadership.
- Display 'Promoting a Safer Church' Poster with safeguarding contact details.
- Keep 'Safeguarding' as a topic on the agenda of PCC meetings as recommended by the Diocese and at the APCM.

In 2022 all members of the PCC went through their online safeguarding training during the year and completed their Basic Awareness (C0 - v2022) training. Certificates of completion were shared and are held in the Parish Office. In addition to the basic training, some members of the PCC were required to complete Safeguarding Foundations (C1 - v2021) and others the Leadership training (C2).

The training of Basic, Foundation and Leadership Awareness must be renewed every three years and therefore will be redone in 2025.

### Safer Recruitment

This is a vital element of providing information through disclosure, for those involved in paid or voluntary work within the church. The PCC has an obligation to find out, by the process of applying for a DBS certificate (Disclosure and Barring Service) if an individual has any criminal convictions that make them unsuitable to work with children, youth or adults who may be considered vulnerable.

All members of the PCC are required to have a DBS certificate as well as those who lead certain activities and ministries within the church.

### Safeguarding and Safer Recruitment Church Policies

The PCC have reviewed and adopted the following policies, and these can be made available on request.

1. Lone Working Policy
2. The Safer Recruitment Policy
3. The Safer Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy
4. The Reporting of Safeguarding Concerns or Allegations

Rev Hannah and Fiona continue to work on a recommended framework document 'Safer Recruitment and People Management' to ensure all volunteers and paid employees are recruited and checked to the same standard, following all Diocese guidelines, and that the recruitment of both paid employees and volunteers are as safe and robust as each other. We also make use of the Rochester Diocese Safeguarding dashboard which is an online tool, that enables us to keep track on our progress and timelines on safe guarding responsibilities.

If anyone has any concern about a person who is at risk of, or is being abused, or presents a risk to others, child or vulnerable adult, they should seek advice from the Parish Safeguarding Officer, the Incumbent, the Diocese Safeguarding Advisors, or the Police in an emergency.

Contact details for these individuals are displayed on the church notice boards and at the Church hall or can be obtained via the email address below.

[safeguarding@cheveningchurch.org](mailto:safeguarding@cheveningchurch.org)

**Fiona Jordan, Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) and Lead Recruiter**



## **Electoral Roll**

At the time of the 2024 APCM there are 257 (2023 - 265) parishioners registered on the Church's Electoral Roll.

Of the 257 parishioners 133 (2023 - 137) are resident in the Parish.

Of the 257 parishioners 124 (2023 - 128) are resident outside of the Parish.

If anybody is unsure if they are on the Electoral Roll please contact either the Parish Office or ourselves.

**Clare and Richard Marriott**

## **Prayer Ministry Report**

I feel very privileged to have been able to lead the prayer ministry here at St. Botolph's over the past year. As with every Christian organisation, prayer is the lifeblood of the community, and sustains every aspect of our life together. 'A church that prays together, stays together'. At all 3 of our services on a Sunday, we have a solid team of people willing to lead the intercessions, and after both the 10.30am and 5pm services, there are always opportunities to have individual prayer. We would very much like to grow this aspect of our church life.

2023 saw the start of a weekly prayer meeting, initially held in the church hall on a Wednesday evening at 8pm for 45 minutes. This has been attended throughout the year by a few faithful parishioners. During the winter months it was moved onto zoom, partly to prevent the older folk from venturing out in the cold, and also to encourage more to attend. At the moment, numbers remain low, but we feel this a vital part of our ministry here and we would love to see more of our congregation join us on a Wednesday evening. 'More things are wrought by prayer, than this world dreams of'.

**Sally Munro, Prayer Ministry Lead**

## **Pastoral Visiting Team**

I joined the pastoral team about 2013 when I retired from my District Nursing job. Jean Westacott was a member of the team and she provided invaluable advice and knowledge, sent out cards for birthdays, Easter and Christmas and knew everybody in the congregation. She was so loved by everybody and we owe her a debt of gratitude for her service to the team.

The team of Hannah, Lela, Simon, Lyn and myself have continued to stay in touch by phone or in person to all those who cannot get to church regularly or anymore. We try and make them feel part of the congregation still and Hannah takes them communion which is appreciated. If anyone would like a visit from us or know somebody who would then please contact me (07790597733).

**Marjorie Jones, Pastoral Team Lead**

## **Small Groups**

Being in a Small Group is vitally important. It was a space in which one is able build a community of friends, growing deeper in faith and relationship with God, a place to grapple with real and daily trials, where you can be encouraged and challenged, where you can be cared for and where you too can care for others. In other words, this is where discipleship happens. If you want to get to know God more, make friends or feel like you belong here at St. Botolph's joining one of our Small Groups is the best thing to do. We currently have 4 groups that meet regularly. Each meet at different times, locations and regularity. If you haven't yet joined one or would like to know more then please do get in touch with me.

**Rev Hannah, Rector**

## **Worship**

We continue to offer a range of different music styles to suit our different services:

- 9am hymns led by organist - It has been a joy to welcome our new organist, Tom.
- 10:30am mix of hymns and contemporary worship music led by band or lyric videos on screens
- 5pm contemporary worship music led by band

This mix of style is also reflected for specific dates like Christmas, Easter, Beer and Carols, Carols by candlelight, Confirmation etc. We choose the method and songs to best suit the occasion, while always aiming to lead songs of meaning that enable true worship/praise.

We have a good group of musicians and singers (all except the organists are volunteers) to whom I am extremely grateful for their time, commitment and fun attitude. That said, we always welcome new people who are willing to sing or play and love having a range of ages represented if possible. If you would like to find out more about joining the band, please speak to Jimi Gale or anyone you see playing/singing. It's a brilliant way to serve our church family.

If you're a regular at St B's, you will have noticed that our sound system is on its last legs - hissing and squeaking most Sundays! This does impact our sung worship and other parts of our services. It also makes the hire of our church for weddings or funerals much less appealing. Quotes for a new system have been sourced but we will need to raise funds to proceed. If you feel able to give to this project, please let Graham Higgs know the details. We would hugely value any support you can give.

All involved in the church music and worship consider it a privilege and blessing to serve in this way.

**Jimi Gale, Worship Lead**

## Church Fabric

In 2023 we continued to enjoy Maurice's window which the previous wardens put so much hard work into organising, it is a true blessing to the church. The departing wardens also organised for the large brass cross from the hall to be silvered as a gift for the church and to mark the Coronation, it looks great with the platinum candle sticks which we got to mark the late Queen's platinum jubilee. The smaller brass cross has been moved to the hall, which fits nicely in the chapel to provide a sensitive space.

The Chancel and Stanhope Chapel had their ceilings painted in 2023, with the work carried out through the summer months. Significant scaffolding was required, with the work organised by Nigel Hill and Richard Mais with 'Chalky' the painter carrying out the work to a high standard - a big thank you goes out to them all.

Richard Mais has continued to organise many of the fabric jobs and the church yard team, all who work tirelessly through the year to keep our church looking beautiful. They have put up the new rectors board and tidied up the layout of the memorial boards, all which look lovely.

Christopher Austin has offered to help with fabric tasks which is appreciated, he has organised for the Stanhope Chapel window to be repaired by a stained glass specialist as it was broken by a vandal.

There was a problem with the heating in the run up to Christmas which was especially stressful as the church was cold in the run into some of our busiest services. We were thankful that a boiler engineer from the school parent body offered to help and worked with Rob Hubbard to resolve the problem. Fortunately we only needed a new control board and the boiler itself was ok, so the problem was fixed by the 18th December - thank you Lord. We have moved the 2 priests' stalls to either side of the altar, which has created valuable space on the Chancel step for the rector, band and school services all who were squeezed in before. The priests' stalls look balanced either side of the altar so we suggest keeping them in that position for the time being.

Special thanks must go out to Marcia who has done a huge amount of work to record all our significant artifacts in the log book. We are blessed with a historic grade 1 church so there is lots to record.

Looking forward it feels it is not the right time for us to take on a large reordering, so we want to focus on small improvements to our beautiful church building, enabling us to offer flexibility to our different services whilst reflecting the sanctity of St Botolph's. The sound system continues to be an issue, with the crackle getting worse and the coffee area at the rear of the church not really fit for purpose, so God willing both can be improved through 2024. In the hall we would like to develop the chapel, to provide a prayer space in the village which can be used on a more regular basis.

We are also conscious our next Quinquennial Inspection is in 2025, so we need to keep building on the amazing work the previous warden team did in this area. Thank you to all who help with the fabric of our beautiful church, it is appreciated and we are committed to preserving it to praise God and be a sacred space for generations to come.

**Joseph Devine, Church Warden**

## **Tower Captain's Report**

We saw a pleasing improvement in ringing for Sunday services in 2023, when (thanks to the dogged determination of the ringers to overcome our various physical challenges) we were almost always able to ring at least 3 bells, more often 4 or 5 and occasionally, with outside help, we have had as many as 6 ringers. Sadly, we have not been able to resume our Tuesday evening practices. On 3 Sundays in August, when there were no services at St Botolph's, we were able to meet at 10:30 am so that ringers from other churches could join in and we managed some more ambitious ringing than our usual rounds and call changes. We also rang for 4 weddings and tolled the half-muffled tenor for 2 funerals; our thanks go to Fraser and Dee Clift of Kemsing whose willing help made much of this possible. Half-muffled tolling of the tenor preceded the Final Hour Service on Good Friday and we were pleased to be able to ring continuously for 30 minutes of call changes after the 10:30 service on 7th May in honour of the Coronation of King Charles and Queen Camilla.

Other local ringers have been enjoying our fine bells with a peal attempt (sadly unsuccessful) for the Chevening Garden opening and 6 quarter peal attempts (3 successful). The bells were also rung by bands visiting from Merstham, Wimbledon, Putney and Rochester and by the Essex County Association and we opened the tower to visitors following the KCACR AGM in April. Hopefully we will see even more use of the bells in the coming year.

This report would not be complete without thanking Carole, who stepped down at the 2023 Band AGM after her third (and very much the longest and most challenging) stint as Tower Captain - we all owe her a great debt of gratitude for her leadership and her insistence on safety and quality in all we do, a legacy which is keeping us going in Chevening style!

**Tony Cresswell, Tower Captain**

## **Chipstead Chapel Charity- Complex**

The PCC members are the Managing Trustees of the Chipstead Chapel Charity, which is responsible for the Hall Complex including the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, the Hall and its facilities as well as the Church Office and Homedean.

It is managed by the 'Chipstead Chapel Charity (CCC) Management Team' which is comprised of the following: The Rector (Chair), The Churchwarden Joseph Devine, Caretaker Ian Glen, Treasurer Graham Higgs, Parish Administrator Donna Hill and Hall and Events Manager Fiona Jordan.

The committee meets typically each quarter to review and to update the running and the care of the complex.

### Chapel of the Good Shepherd

The consecrated Chapel of the Good Shepherd is positioned at one end of the Parish Hall and is a beautiful space in which small groups can meet for Services of communion and worship. If the large doors are opened fully, it allows the hall to become an extension of the chapel, where many more people can be accommodated. This is the case when the informal evening service takes place once a month on a Sunday at the 5pm Service.

The Chapel continues to be in good order and repair.

### Church Hall

The Church Hall provides a wonderful space for community groups and fitness classes to take place during the week. The hall is available to hire every day excluding some Sundays, when we meet for the 5pm Informal Service.

The hall has benefitted from good income in 2023. We have received income from the rent collected from Homedean, from 16 weekend parties held (down from last year) and we also had income from our regular hall users and from some one off bookings.

Our regular users for 2023 include The Brownies, The Guides, Chipstead WI, Carolyn Atkins Pilates, Jane Rossi Yoga, Paracise Class, Victoria Johnson Dance Class, Claire Beaumont Pilates and Chipstead Badminton Club. We have lost one regular booking but continue to get new enquiries and a couple of new users.

The church has had use the hall for events such as The Maundy Thursday Meal and the Harvest Supper. These events have been well supported by our congregation and everyone has enjoyed the opportunity to mark these special occasions together.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all those who help set up and provide food for the church focused events.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Ian Glen, our Hall Caretaker for being a wonderfully willing hall caretaker and cleaner.

Our thanks also to Pauline Blundell for taking care of bookings during part of 2023, although during this year she also decided to retire from this role.

Thank you all for your hard work. It's so appreciated.

### The Church Office

The small room off to one end of the hall, formerly known as the Committee Room, now houses the church office and essentially has become the hub for parish business. Part of the office adjoins Homedean. The Church office is manned by the Parish Administrator, Donna Hill who started in November 2023 and the Hall Manager, Fiona Jordan.

### Homedean

There has been a continuation of the same family as tenants in the property during 2023. The house is let through Leaders, Sevenoaks. There have been no issues during the tenancy,

**Fiona Jordan, Hall Manager**

### **Play Café**

Our Play Café returned in June 2022. This time it meets every week during Term time and we have seen a considerable growth in guests. We have many regulars and it's been great getting to know them by providing a space in which the children can play and their respective adults (whether a parent, grand parent or carer). We also continue to welcome new faces (usually at least 1 each week) and it's amazing that guests who do come tell their friends. Our team is small but dedicated, and I am so thankful to Jo and Amy who give their time. We would love to grow our team, so we'd love to hear from you - you don't have to have children to qualify!

**Rev Hannah, Play Café lead**

### **Mpendo Link Report**

Following a request from Rev Canon Mussa Mzuri in Mpendo to communicate with someone in our congregation and a request from our churchwardens to me Rev Mussa and I have been sending and receiving messages since February 2023 when the internet allows! Rev Mussa is Pastor of St. Andrew's church in Mpendo, a very remote Parish that we are linked with in the Diocese of Kondoa in Tanzania. The link is at the request of Rochester Diocese. Mussa is supported by his wife Kerosi. Our messages consist of prayer requests for both parishes and words of encouragement. It is a rewarding task seeing God's hand at work. The parishes are very different in some ways. Our brothers and sisters in Mpendo have very few, if any, material possessions but spiritually both parishes are striving to spread the Christian gospel.

If anyone would like to be kept up to date with prayer requests from Mpendo please do say. All decisions related to our support for Mpendo are made by our PCC.

Our friends in Mpendo love receiving visitors. If anyone from the church family is interested in going to Mpendo you will be very warmly welcomed in the Parish.

To learn more about Mpendo please go to the following website [www.kondoa.anglican.org](http://www.kondoa.anglican.org)

**Sandra Tolhurst, Mission Link Coordinator**

### Deanery Synod

There is currently no Deanery Secretary. There were two Synod meetings; one in May at Chevening Church, the guest speaker was Karen Senior, Warden of Lay Ministry for Rochester Diocese and the first Warden of Lay Ministry to be appointed in the UK. The C of E estimates that 30,000 new Lay Ministry trained people need to be found. Rev Tim Edwards had already presented a report on General Synod and then updated Synod about subsequent developments, especially about Living in Love and Faith, Pastoral Guidance and Pastoral Reassurance. Brig Ian Dobbie commented that he thinks the Church is in a crisis – some churches delaying payment of Parish Share pending the outcome of the Living in Love and Faith debate, some ordinands have delayed completion of their training and some people have already left the C of E.

Pastoral matters were reported – Rev Lynette Leithead had been appointed Priest in Charge for both Sundridge with Ide Hill and Toys Hill, and Brasted. Synod members appointed in 2023 will serve for 3 years.

Rev Mark Bridgen welcomed the November Synod at Kippington Church and spoke about the new Ukrainian congregation beginning there. Report from General Synod was given by Rev Tim Edwards and Jane Rosam. Both agreed that Synod was very divided about Love and Faith. The meeting had been exhausting and at times toxic. The Bishop of Newcastle has taken over steering the LLF process. Synod spent time in small groups discussing their hope fears and thoughts on the LLF process.

Rev Tim Edwards was appointed to the Standing Committee of the Deanery Synod. Anne le Bas is retiring as Area Dean and Tim Edwards will be the new Dean.

### Lela Weavers Diocesan Synod Member and Diocesan Advisory Committee Member

### Diocesan Synod

In March reports were received from General Synod. Environment & Sustainability, Children & Young People's Fund, Safeguarding, Generous Giving during the Cost-of-living Crisis and a presentation was given about 'Sharing Good News'.

Many Churches have faced major challenges, the fall in church attendance since the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The CofE is dealing with a number of difficult issues including the disbanding of the Independent Safeguarding Board by the Archbishops' Council. The Bishop emphasised; **Change** is about God changing us so that he can bless us and use us to bless others. **Serve** is about an attitude of heart and mind that affects how we relate to one another. **Grow** is about learning how to be more intentional about making disciples and bringing more people, including younger diverse people to faith in Jesus Christ. The Bishop spoke about major challenges our world is facing; wars in Gaza and Ukraine, the climate crisis and potential threats posed by Artificial Intelligence.

The Bishop said his statement on Living in love and Faith had been met with dismay and anger by many people, as well as a significant number of positive messages from others. He regretted the hurt and pain caused and was grateful to representatives from the LGBTQI+ communities for meeting with his request to work together. The House of Bishops' proposals have upset everyone – some for not going far enough and for others going too far. He explained that there are two fundamentally incompatible visions of human life before God. One is rooted in marriage as a lifelong union between a man and a woman,

with this a God's intended place for sexual relations. The other is rooted in an understanding that human beings, regardless of their gender, should be able to enter into life-long, faithful relationships, which can have the same character as has been traditionally seen in heterosexual marriage. After six long years of study, these two groups may understand each other better, but are no nearer to finding common ground or being able to agree on a consensus; they fail to do what was promised, which was to bring together in one package the three elements of the Prayers of Love and Faith, the Pastoral Guidance (including whether clergy can enter into same-sex marriage) and accept some aspect of what is being proposed. The Bishop is committed to the Church of England and the Diocese of Rochester and making a place for all.

He believes that structures should be provided to enable people to remain and flourish within the CofE because otherwise the Church will split, produce internal schism, and bring an end to the CofE as single Church. Collectively the Bishops have a responsibility to bridge the gap between the differences among us. The Bishop said that there is a need to find new ways of doing things – new models of ministry especially of an apostolic (planting new church communities), prophetic (engaging with people that the Church has not previously reached) and evangelistic (identifying people who have the gift of being able to communicate the Christian faith in ways that people can engage with). To focus more on going out to people rather than on people coming to us.

**Lela Weavers Diocesan Synod Member and Diocesan Advisory Committee Member**