

THE PARISH OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH, OTFORD  
**Minutes of a meeting of the Parochial Church Council**  
**Held on Monday 8 December 2025 at 7.45 pm in the Church Centre**

**Action**  
**owners**

**1. Reading from Scripture & opening prayer**

1.1.1 KP opened with a verse from scripture (Romans 15:7-13, the day's reading from the Advent Course) and the corresponding prayer.

**2. Apologies for absence**

2.1.1 Apologies had been received from Nancy, George, Joan and Derek Shilling.

**3. Minutes of previous meeting on 15 October 2025**

**3.1 Approval as correct record**

3.1.1 Para 9.1.4: "every other month" should read "three times a year". There were no other comments on the minutes

MH

**3.2 Matters arising not covered on the agenda**

3.2.1 Para 3.2.3 (Independent Examiner) – KP had not yet followed up with Tony Young but planned to do so in the coming week.

KP

3.2.2 Para 5.3.12 (budget for churchyard maintenance) – Given the challenge with non-church waste ending up in the compost area, there was a query about whether a bigger fence might be needed. The conclusion was that the proposed scheme outlined in the minutes represented an adequate proposal for now.

3.2.3 The new PayAz terminal (section 5.2) was now installed and working, although the facility to prompt donors about Gift Aid (para 5.2.4) had not yet been explored.

HS

3.2.4 It was proposed that an additional tablet should be bought from PayAz, matching the one in the machine, for only £100 + VAT. As well as providing resilience, this would work as a stand-alone tablet, with an existing SumUp machine, to take card payments in the Church Centre etc. This was unanimously agreed.

HS

**4. Safeguarding**

**4.1 Safeguarding Sunday**

4.1.1 MS had used resources from the Church of England website for preaching on the day, and found them very useful. The only feedback had been that it was important to talk about safeguarding. MS noted that there was also a hymn available on the website (to a well-known tune).

4.1.2 NH reported that iKnowChurch had now been used for a disclosure (on which no further action was needed at this point), which had also served to test the system.

4.1.3 NH also mentioned that emails would be coming shortly to those who needed to complete safeguarding training. There was a planned date in January for face-to-face training for anyone who was due to train and preferred not to do it online.

As advised  
by email

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

### **5.1 Finances for year to date**

5.1.1 Income for the year to the end of November was more than £5,000 higher than budget. Money due to be passed back to St. Bart's from Friends of Kent Churches for the September Ride & Stride money had not yet arrived and was expected in December. The payment of some £7,000 to the Diocese (as agreed by the PCC – see para 8.1.7 of September minutes and subsequent email exchanges) had now gone through, so St. Bart's had met its 2025 Indicative Offer in full. This explained the spike in the expenditure graph for October, and why finances for the year to date were now only slightly ahead of budget.

5.1.2 The Church Hall account was ahead of budget because expenditure on maintenance was behind schedule – owing to the challenge of organisation and securing permissions. A specific donation had also been promised for half of the cost of the joinery works.

5.1.3 HS reported that the energy contract with Yu Energy was up and running, and that customer service was so far proving excellent. Parish Buying had belatedly come back with offers on gas contracts which would have been £1000 cheaper over three years, unfortunately, but had still provided no offers for electricity.

5.1.4 HS also noted that a potential bill of around £200 for altar wine had not yet been received.

5.1.5 HS noted that the Statement of Financial Affairs for the year to date showed the parish's general reserve at £53,000 – which was £18,000 above the PCC's policy.

### **5.2 Approval of budget for 2026**

5.2.1 HS explained the significant updates in the latest version of the budget for 2026. The budget for Gift Aid donations was lower because one or more donors had recently passed away. Total budgeted income was accordingly also lower.

5.2.2 Salary increases had been left at 5% in the latest budget because the increase in the National Minimum Wage was just over 4%. (See para 5.3.1 of October minutes.)

5.2.3 In line with the PCC's request (para 5.3.12 of October minutes) the budgeted expenditure on upkeep of churchyard had been increased, to £770 as a rough attempt to reflect identified needs.

- 5.2.4 HS reported that, since the PCC's decisions on mission giving for 2026 represented a break from the PCC's previous mission giving policy (para 5.3.4 of October minutes), the Mission & Ministry committee had been asked to develop a proposed new policy for review by the PCC. Mission & Ministry
- 5.2.5 To balance the budget, the parish's diocesan contribution in the updated draft budget had been reduced – so now stood £5,659 below the Indicative Offer. The Finance Committee had proposed, for the PCC to consider, that the difference should be made up from the general reserve, since it stood so far above policy.
- 5.2.6 In response to a question, HS clarified that the reserve had been accumulated (and maintained) over many years, and recent contributions had come from legacies, and from 25% of some in-year surpluses (in line with the PCC's policy at the time). There was support for a review of the reserve policy. Remit to Finance Committee
- 5.2.7 In response to questions about the latest draft budget, HS clarified that:
- a) The budget for council tax was significantly higher in 2026 because none had been payable on the vicarage while it was unoccupied.
  - b) No contribution was budgeted to the cyclical maintenance fund in 2026 in line with the PCC's steer in October (para 5.3.7 of minutes).
  - c) The reason for higher expenditure on "internet & website" (in 2025 as well as in the draft 2026 budget) was payment for two parallel services while the new website was being developed.
  - d) The reason for higher expenditure on "print, stationery, postage" (reflecting higher expenditure in 2025 too) was that it included published course notes for discipleship courses, generally balanced by income in the "other funds generated" line since parishioners paid for their copies.
  - e) Church Hall cleaning was budgeted at zero because the nursery now paid for cleaning.
- 5.2.8 In discussion about using part of the general reserve to top up the diocesan contribution in 2026, it was suggested that other potential uses of the general reserve might be discussed at the upcoming PCC awayday. KP for agenda
- 5.2.9 The proposal from the Finance Committee to use funds from the general reserve to top up the diocesan contribution for 2026 to the full Indicative Offer was unanimously approved. HS
- 5.2.10 HS noted that St. Bart's was increasingly reliant on a surplus generated by the Church Hall to balance the parish's budget. The fact that the hall was used by a single organisation for 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, almost every week of the year, meant that the parish's finances were vulnerable to an exit or failure of the nursery company. She proposed, and it was agreed, that the notice period in the nursery's rental agreement should be increased from one to three months. JH

- 5.2.11 HS also recommended, and the Finance Committee agreed to consider:
- a) An assessment of the parish’s vulnerability to that risk, distinguishing likelihood from impact (HS offered to prepare an assessment)
  - b) Implications for the PCC’s reserve policy
- Remit to  
Finance  
Committee
- 5.2.12 A motion to approve the draft budget for 2026 was proposed by HS, seconded by CA and passed unanimously.

### **5.3 *Donation to pursue***

- 5.3.1 HS referred to KP’s email to PCC members of 3 December, attaching the agenda for the meeting, in which the proposal had been made to bring forward three payments to Pursue (one of the parish’s ten mission partners) so that they were eligible to be doubled by another donor as part of ‘The Big Give Christmas Challenge’ from 2 to 9 December. These payments were:
- a) SumUp payments taken at Christmas Market: £23.50
  - b) Collection at Patronal service (one tenth of £190.48): £19.05
  - c) Budgeted Mission Giving (one tenth of £11,050): £1,105
- 5.3.2 PCC members had replied with agreement so this had gone ahead. In fact the donation from St. Bart’s had taken Pursue just over the available match funding under the scheme, so £1,032 had been paid as part of the scheme (via HS’ personal card because this proved necessary to make the payment in the time window). A further £115.29 would be paid from the church’s account, outside the scheme, on the day after the meeting.

## **6. Ministry and outreach**

### **6.1 *The Bible Course***

- 6.1.1 KP referred to the feedback that had been circulated with the papers for the meeting. 13 responses had been received; the number participating in the course had peaked at 35 but was often in the 20s. The general consensus was that people had enjoyed the course.
- 6.1.2 Given that the Bible course had been fairly intense, KP had adopted a different approach for the Advent Course, which was self-guided from a book, or from content shared daily on Facebook (permitted in copyright terms during Advent).
- 6.1.3 In a brief discussion of the feedback received, there were reflections on the value of the ‘mixed mode’ option (face-to-face or Zoom), on the way that break-out groups had been put together, and on the accompanying WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group for the Advent Course was so far rather small.

## **7. Committee reports**

### **7.1 Finance Committee**

7.1.1 The PCC's attention was drawn to paragraph 11 in the Finance Committee minutes, which provided a table of proposed changes (in the right-hand column) to fees for weddings, baptisms and so on. JH had since discussed with Kevin Grafton, who was happy with the proposals in the right-hand column.

7.1.2 The proposed lower charge of £50 for church heating for external events reflected the simple experiment conducted in early 2025 to find out how much it cost to heat the church for a day. Although the Church Centre heating cost was higher on paper, the Centre was usually hired for more hours at a time so the heating charge was lower per hour than for the church.

7.1.3 It was clarified that "Ditto (winter)" in the bottom line of the table meant "...plus heating in winter if needed", referring to the preceding row. "Weekday rehearsal in church" did not include wedding rehearsals: there was no additional fee for a rehearsal on top of the wedding fee. It was also clarified that some fees were waived for regular members of the congregation.

7.1.4 The proposal from the Finance Committee of the updated schedule of fees was agreed unanimously with one abstention owing to conflict of interest.

KP for  
Clive

### **7.2 Fabric**

#### *i. Chandelier alarm sensor*

7.2.1 The alarm maintenance company had attended to look at a chandelier alarm that was triggering false alarms. As a first step the battery had been changed but that sensor had also been left disconnected from the alarm at the moment, while monitoring for false alarms, because the provider advised that all of the chandelier sensors were now regarded as obsolete and could be on the point of failure. They had suggested that monitoring for false alarms should enable a better view to be taken as to whether replacement was needed.

7.2.2 So the PCC was invited to consider whether the chandelier sensors should be replaced, or whether it should be reconsidered at the next regular alarm service based on the results of several months of monitoring the suspect sensor. It was not clear whether replacement sensors would have a guarantee period or would look more subtle than the current ones. It was agreed that the Fabric Committee should look into and confirm the appearance and longevity of the proposed replacement fittings.

Fabric  
Committee

7.2.3 In discussion, the risk was considered of having one chandelier unprotected for the time being. It was regarded as acceptable, since it would have no immediate impact on insurance coverage, only a few people knew which chandelier was unprotected, and in fact for several months the practice had been not to set the

chandelier alarms. Now that the false alarm problem had been addressed, normal practice was being resumed of alarming the chandeliers when the church was open but not in use.

- 7.2.4 On balance, the PCC was that it was not essential to replace the sensors immediately, and it was better to wait for monitoring report – but then be prepared to use part of the cyclical maintenance fund on replacing the sensors. Fabric Committee

ii. Audio-visual cabinet

- 7.2.5 It was reported that repair was needed to the AV cabinet. A joint had come loose in part of the hinged lid, perhaps because the attached monitor screens made the lid very heavy. The joint was coming apart and the lid was fragile in the meantime. Unfortunately the cabinet maker appeared to be uncontactable. HS planned that if that persisted, she would arrange a DIY repair with a batten inside the lid. HS

**7.3 Cornerstone**

- 7.3.1 MS reported that the *Cornerstone* resources and ideas (on how to foster a culture and attitude of generous giving) continued to be very practical and useful, including those for the Christmas season.
- 7.3.2 As one such measure, half of the money raised over the Christmas Tree Festival weekend would be going to Loaves & Fishes, the local food bank.
- 7.3.3 Work was still needed on the recommended steps 3 and 4 under “Communicate your impact”.
- 7.3.4 One of the *Cornerstone* recommendations was a clear church mission statement. The plan was to formulate this at the upcoming PCC awayday in January/February. KP
- 7.3.5 Clive Southgate was also working on a QR code on a notice in the church porch to enable visitors to give online more easily. There were plans for a second contactless giving station to be available by the south door of the church during services. Giving at baptisms had also been reviewed.
- 7.3.6 There were also plans for something akin to an Advent calendar in Lent, that was not all to do with financial donations but encouraged generosity more widely.
- 7.3.7 The intention was also to maintain the profile of the theme of generosity and giving in Sunday services by interviewing people during Lent about the volunteering that they undertake – possibly including a live link to Rich and Harri Bell at Pursue Kenya.
- 7.3.8 A particular plan was for a Lent appeal for Pursue. DH reported that its mobile library needs more books in Swahili. During her visit, DH had taken pictures of Swahili children’s books that Pursue would like to be able to buy, noting the prices. The appeal would allow people to ‘buy’ a picture of a Swahili book in church, passing the money to Pursue to buy the real thing locally in Kenya. This would also enable Pursue to purchase of a set of books, which was educationally valuable.

- 7.3.9 HS noted that a disclaimer would be needed about exchange rate volatility, since donors sometimes expected *all* of their donation to be put to the specific purpose for which they understood their donation was due to be used.
- 7.3.10 HS reported that, while giving packets of money to the congregation to encourage generosity at Stewardship Sunday may have been the right decision, it had not resulted in any noticeable increase in giving to the church. Another day before the APCM needed to be identified to provide the congregation with an update on the church's finances.

JH / HS

#### **7.4 Fundraising and events**

- 7.4.1 JH thanked all those involved in the Christmas market for their participation. Gross takings on the day had been £3,846 but more revenue was still coming through. Expenditure was expected to be only about £150, so the net funds raised were likely to be ahead of budget. Many of the leftovers were successfully sold at the Christmas Tree Festival, which helped both events.
- 7.4.2 The Christmas Tree Festival had welcomed about 340 adults and 115 children in 2½ days, far exceeding expectations. (There had been fewer children on the Sunday.) 40-50 people had attended 'carols & cake'. The festival had raised £1400 against a budget of £400, and half of the proceeds would go to Loaves and Fishes. A few of the families attending the festival had then attended Sunday services the same weekend. The festival had generated a tremendous positive atmosphere, and numerous compliments had been received from people around the village. A review meeting was due to be held the following week, including a review of the comments invited in 'thank you' emails to contributors.
- 7.4.3 The soup lunch in November had also gone well.
- 7.4.4 The only remaining 'event' in 2025 in the purview of the events team was the wine & nibbles at Nine Lessons & Carols.

### **8. Correspondence**

#### *i. Young Vocations Champion*

- 8.1.1 KP reported that Bishop Simon had written to her suggesting that she might act as Young Vocations Champion for the Diocese: in this context "young" meant under 32. It would involve working with schools, chaplaincy and so on, helping young people to discern what God might be calling them to do. The role was estimated to take up no more than one day a week. She was planning to respond in the New Year but was keen to consult the PCC first – since, if she accepted, it would affect the amount of time she had available for the parish.
- 8.1.2 There was a brief discussion, including of the potential impact on options for reorganising the provision of ministry in Otford and nearby parishes. The sentiment from most PCC members was one of being keen to ensure KP had space to reach

her own decision, and also, to the degree that she was keen to take on the responsibility, clear support.

ii. Little Treacles nursery

8.1.3 DH noted with delight the receipt of a Christmas card from Little Treacles nursery to “curch” with thanks for their invitation to join the Christmas tree festival.

iii. Licensed Lay Ministry student placement

8.1.4 KP referred to her email to the PCC of 28 November, forwarding a proposal from Rev Canon Jane Winter (Assistant Director of Mission and Ministry Development at the Diocese) that a student preparing for Licensed Lay Ministry Placement might undertake a ‘congregational studies’ placement at St. Bart’s over 2-3 months between February and May 2026. PCC members had replied with support, so KP had replied positively to Jane Winter and was waiting to hear further details in the New Year.

**9. Dates of future meetings**

9.1.1 Provisional PCC dates for 2026: 27<sup>th</sup> Jan, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep, 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. APCM planned for 19<sup>th</sup> April.

**10. Any other urgent business, then Closing prayer**

10.1.1 There was no other urgent business. The meeting closed with a prayer and the Grace at 9.31 pm.

**Attending:**

Members	Present
Rev. Kelly Parsons (chairing)	✓
Janet Hunt	✓
Joan Beacom (JB)	A
Mark Holmes (minutes)	✓
Colin Anderson	✓
Jonathan Batchelor (JBa)	✓
Chris Bishop	✓
Cindy Davies	✓

Members	Present
Dawn Hallam	✓
Naomi Hunt	✓
Nancy Jonsson	A
Margaret Lidbetter	✓
Derek Shilling	A
Mags Southgate	✓
Heather Stanley	✓
George Young	A