

THE PARISH OF CENTRAL EXETER

Minutes for the ANNUAL MEETING OF PARISHIONERS Minutes for the ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING

Held in St Stephen's Church on Sunday 19th April 2026 at 12noon

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Parishioners:

Chair: Revd Sheila Swarbrick

Sec: Mary Keaney

Attendance: Keith Walton, Sandie Walton, Claire Mayer, Celia Smith, Yuezhao Xie, Doreen Hatt, Betsy Allen, Richard Skinner, Jim Pilkington, Margaret Peirce, Sarah Branton, Viv Asher, Jessica Claridge, Jill Grainger and Sean Swarbrick

1. **Apologies:** Bee Harley, Bethany Watts
2. **Minutes of the 2025 meeting:** The minutes of the meeting held on Sunday 6th April 2025 were accepted and signed by Sheila as an accurate record.
3. **Election of Churchwardens for 2026/27:** Keith Walton and Betsy Allen were re-elected as churchwardens for the coming year.

Keith Walton: Proposed by Claire Mayer and Seconded by Sandie Walton

Betsy Allen: Proposed by Keith Walton and Seconded by Claire Mayer

Minutes of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting:

1. **Apologies:** Bee Harley & Bethany Watts
2. **Minutes of the 2025 meeting:** The minutes of the meeting held on Sunday 6th April 2025 were accepted and signed by Sheila as an accurate record.
3. **Annual Report and Financial Statement of the PCC for the year ended 31st December 2025:** The Annual Report & Financial Statement which is forwarded to the Charity Commission was circulated prior to the meeting. Sheila added the Bible study group to the list of parish activities in the report on page 4. She thanked Doreen for hosting this group at her house and for Sarah who organises it. Daphne Smith, who died in March, and Ann Hall began the Bible Study Group many years ago.
Sheila highlighted an inaccurate statement on page 6 which said that the parish is relatively secure financially when it is not as healthy as has been reported in previous years. Sean Swarbrick, treasurer, explained how our expenditure is exceeding income. At the beginning of 2025 the balance was £41,000 but as the year ended it was £25,000. However, the balance continues to reduce in 2026. This is mainly due to the usual expenses such as utilities, Diocesan share etc but also the high number of maintenance jobs which have needed to be done. A cluster of bills have resulted in the reduction of a healthy balance. Some of the larger bills have been covered by the Trusts but Sean advised we now need to think carefully about the maintenance priorities.
Betsy thanked Sean for explaining the current position of the parish finances.
A meeting of the Trusts is soon and where finances can be discussed.
The meeting accepted the Annual Report and Financial Statement.

4. **Nomination of an Independent Examiner for 2026:** The meeting agreed Clare Lillington to continue as the Independent Examiner for 2026. Clare makes a small charge of £200 for this service.
5. **Report on the Fabric and Furnishings of the churches:** This report, written by Bethany Watts, was circulated prior to the meeting. Bethany was sad not to be able to attend the meeting. However, Sheila reported that Bethany, since in post, has been catching up on a back log of repairs and maintenance tasks including gutter clearance, repair to the servery floor in St Stephen's and the restoration work to improve the outer walls of St Olave's which sustained water ingress. Bethany now works solely for the parish after relinquishing her role for UNLTD.
Richard noted how impressed he was by Bethany's reports and how she is able to triage each church on a regular basis. Sheila mentioned that the St Mary Arches Quinquennial Inspection will take place later in the year.
The meeting accepted the Fabric Report
6. **Health and Safety Report:** Bethany's report was circulated prior to the meeting. She carries out monthly checks on each building and made reference to the Critical Incident in September. Most of the damage following this incident has been repaired. The report was accepted.
7. **Safeguarding Report:** Mary's report was circulated prior to the meeting. The main outcome from 2025 is the Lone Working Policy which was generated as a result of the Critical Incident. All parties have been consulted and the policy circulated. It has raised awareness of what to do if faced by an unwelcome visitor. Jill Grainger thought it was a useful document for those working alone in any of our buildings. The report was accepted.
8. **Greeter's Report:** Sheila noted the decline in bookings but thanked the Greeting team. Exeter Safe Space may return to St Stephen's in 2026 with the offer from a medical charity to organise the opening up during Friday and Saturday nights. However, we are waiting a consultation meeting with Cllr Laura Wright and EZMed. The report was accepted.
9. **Flower Arranging Report:** Sheila commented Claire's circulated report that the team has welcomed a couple of new arrangers in 2025 including Maggie Lambert and Chris Burn. The two flower arranging teams for St Stephen's and St Pancras were thanked for their wonderful work. The report was accepted.
10. **Inner Room Report:** Richard's report was circulated before the meeting. Sheila acknowledged Helen's move to Yorkshire for family reasons and said that National Poetry day was marked with a new anthology 'The Attentive Heart'. Richard was thanked for his work in compiling the report which was accepted.
11. **Report on the proceedings of the Deanery Synod:** Sheila reported that there had been two meetings of the Deanery Synod in May and October 2025. Over the two meetings a number of parishes gave updates on their work. At the October meeting Bishop Mike

spoke of the Five Strategic Priorities for the diocese. Revd Ed Hodges from Co-Church has been appointed as the new Area or City Dean while Revd Mike Clark is in a new role as Assistant City Dean. (Sheila mentioned that St Michael's Mt Dinham will become an independent parish on 1st May 2026. The meeting to be held on Tuesday 21st April is the last in this three year cycle). The report was accepted.

12. **CTaX/CTCE Report:** Sheila's report was circulated prior to the meeting. In 2025 the ecumenical events including pulpit exchange, Lent groups and the Maundy Thursday Agapé took place. Sheila noted that Sidwell Street Methodist church is for sale and likely to be purchased by a circus. The meeting accepted the report.

13. **Exeter City Centre Chaplaincy:** Sheila's letter about the future of the ECCC was circulated prior to the meeting. In 2014 the ECCC was launched to provide support to the retailers of the city. However, over the last few years the number of chaplains has dwindled with only 2 or 3 remaining prompting the decision to formally dissolve ECCC as a charity but for its ministry to continue under the Mint Methodist Church. The Revd Paul Collings, as lead chaplain, will continue in post. Sheila thanked Sandie Walton for her training module helping chaplains navigate working with different stores. Sandie explained that the ECCC approach of walking around stores didn't suit some of the larger shops for a variety of reasons. Prior to the Covid lockdown of 2020 the ECCC had permission to pop into the M&S staffroom but this is no longer an option as it has been closed. However, independent stores appreciate visits from the chaplaincy team so there is hope that this service may flourish again.

14. **Election of Representatives for the PCC:**

Celia Smith Proposed by: Sandie Walton

Seconded by: Claire Mayer

Viv Asher Proposed by: Sandie Walton

Seconded by: Yuezhaio Xie

Both Celia and Viv were duly elected.

15. **Election of Representatives to the Deanery Synod:**

Jessica Claridge Proposed by: Viv Asher

Seconded by: Sandie Walton

Claire Mayer Proposed by: Keith Walton

Seconded by: Sandie Walton

Both Jessica and Claire were duly elected.

Mary to inform the Christianity Deanery Synod Secretary of our two lay members by Tuesday 2nd June.

16. **Adoption of the Electoral Roll:**

The new Electoral Roll is 31 for 2026. One person was added to the Electoral Roll and one person did not renew their membership due to relocation. The new ER was accepted. Mary to send the certificate to the Old Deanery.

17. **Report of the Rector:** Sheila's report had been previously circulated. Sheila looked back at last year: St Stephen's to host the World Day of Prayer for the city on an annual basis and our visiting preachers and hosting the annual civic service for the Lord Mayor. She also spoke of the future as the archdeacon visited the parish in June to talk of using our churches as a shared resource for ministry. This is a work in progress. Sheila highlighted the appointment of Bethany as our Building Officer who works alongside our

administrator, architect, caretakers, cleaner and main contractors. She offered thanks to all parish employees and as always to the whole congregation of the parish.

Chair's report: Sheila presented her report as chair which will be circulated after the meeting. Sheila spoke of looking forward as she has an upcoming meeting on Thursday 23rd April with Matt Clayton from UNLTD, Mike Clark from St David's, Bob Wallington from ENC and Ed Hodges, the new City Dean. They are tasked with thinking about a vision for the City Centre to present to Bishop Mike and Bishop Moira in June. How will the parish evolve? Fr Radu and the Romanians have been shown St Olave's as a future 'home' instead of St Stephen's. The Russian Orthodox community will come under the care of Bishop Matthew of Sourozh which will make it easier to have a formal agreement with our diocese as it is already a member of Churches Together in England. We have a new support group using St Pancras fortnightly. And Liz Dunbar, a pioneer Lay Minister, wants to begin a new discussion group which will connect around ideas of spirituality and culture. We have a couple of dates booked in with St Stephen's. Finally, the focus for the diocese is Pray, Grow, Serve 2035: Inspiring Faith in Devon.

18. Election of the PCC chair for 2026/27: Revd Sheila Swarbrick

19. Election of Sidespeople: Everyone re-elected

20. Date of next PCC meeting: Wednesday 3rd June 2026 at 2.30pm in St Petrock's

21. A.O.B:

21a: QR codes Betsy talked us through the new QR codes in each church for visitors to use to access the Prayer Pilgrimage and histories of individual churches. We will possibly get a QR code for donations. Thanks to Betsy for organising this feature.

21b: Foodbank posters Jill asked for donations of spare Bags For Life as often people collecting food don't have a bag to take goods home.

21c: Christians coming together Sandie reiterated the power of us coming together as Christians.

Sheila gave thanks for the food we are to share post meeting and thank you to everyone for bringing contributions. She closed the meeting with the following prayer...

God of Mission
Who alone brings growth to your Church
Send your Holy Spirit to help your Church here in Devon
To grow deeper in faith and prayer
To grow new disciples
To grow leaders
To grow younger and
To grow in joyful service
Through Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen

The meeting closed at 1pm