

## **Report to the SJP Congregation on recent PCC meetings**

### **Awayday in the parish**

The PCC has been busy in July recently on your behalf tackling a wide range of issues. On July we had an Awayday at the Army & Navy Club (they donated the room and hospitality to St James's for the meeting) which received a detailed update on the Wren Project from its origins to the present time, given by both Ross Ingham of our Principal Project Consultant (responsible for the co-ordination of the whole project) and our Chief Operating Officer Nick Thasarathar, who is the Wren Project Sponsor. It is truly amazing how in the space of just a few years this major project has progressed.

### **The Wren Project Update**

After a run through of the history of the project, Ross Ingham then described the current project. The project is one that is focused on accessibility, the drive towards net zero by 2030 (the Church of England target) and the opening up of the whole site, securing the future for St James's. By ensuring that there are sufficient support facilities and mission-aligned income generation, the project amplifies the values for which St James's stands. For the Church itself: a restored south door, new organ, extensive repair, improved setting, new heating system (Air Source Heat Pump) and services, transformed accessibility and many more new toilets. For the courtyard, removal of the 1954 link building and creation of pedestrian route to Church Place. For the Jermyn St building: removal of café & creation of pedestrian link, addition of a further story and conversion to rectory. For the Piccadilly building: transformation of church facilities, meeting rooms, 'green room' facilities for concerts and events, incorporation of new larger F&B facility on the ground floor, a new lift, addition of top floor community hall/hireable space, new heating system (ASHP). For the green churchyard: fully accessible re-landscaping + new stepped access, (currently the pavilion omitted). For the paved churchyard: repairs, selective planting, new links. The Wren Project was described as 'a £20m transformation project', embedding St James's values for the future.

Thanks to securing Heritage Funding Phase One (the 'Development Phase') there has been a huge amount of work done on business planning and activity planning. The Heritage Fund, in collaboration with SJP congregational groups, has put together a community activity programme (participatory engagement including co-creation and wellbeing focused activities), a public programme and resources (onsite events and exhibitions, plus onsite and online resources for self-guided discovery), a people development programme (growing skills and confidence to enable people to deliver good and best practice development (building infrastructure, ways of working and best practice sharing).

One key milestone has been when the Julia Rausing Trust granted £1.3m which covers the whole cost of the new organ (hopefully ready by 2027) as well as other associated restoration work and ten years of organ scholars.

**Wren Project Fundraising: have we raised enough yet for the capital project?**

Nick, our Chief Operating Officer, took the PCC through the usual fundraising forecasting tool, and Brian and he explained that a large amount of funding is being discussed with donors now who have been on a journey with St James's over the last 2 or 3 years in order to secure written agreements of pledges to be able to submit the Round 2 Heritage Fund bid. This includes forecast pledges at 25% and 50% (either verbal pledges or with some written indication of pledge). This number can go up or down over time. It is the funds judged at 75% and 100% that will be pertinent to the Heritage Fund application. Ross Ingham confirmed, from experience with other capital projects, that the SJP Development Team has achieved a huge amount in very challenging circumstances for fundraising. It was reported that some 60% so far (including funding for the south door reinstatement) has come through our American Friends (of which I am honoured to be the Secretary/Treasurer).

We need to have raised our £16m 'match funding' by November in order to be able to put in our final bid to the Heritage Fund to secure their contribution. The decision on the grant will be communicated to SJP in March 2026.

The PCC discussed the timetable and noted that this period now; August, September, October into November is a crucial phase for this capital project fundraising. If anyone in our congregation, or someone you know, could help get us over the line now, however large or small the pledge, this could make the difference between success or not. Every pledge matters at this stage, whatever the size or timetable. No funds are needed immediately, but pledges of support over 2026, 27, 28 (the duration of the project) that the Heritage Fund can see are evidenced in writing. Please be in direct touch with Brian Willetts [development@sjp.org.uk](mailto:development@sjp.org.uk) or if you prefer, be in touch with Lucy, for more detail or ideas or offers of help.

The PCC received a detailed report on the week in New York and how this had not only helped fundraising but most importantly strengthened the links between SJP and our partner church St Barts in Park Avenue. Both St Barts and the American Friends of St James's are keen to welcome us back. The PCC accepted that the relationship building within this partnership is important, and that a further visit would be an indication that St James's is committed to this relationship and not just seeing the trip as a one-off fundraiser, which might seem somewhat extractive. The PCC endorsed a trip in 2026, with fundraising as part of it. The direction given was that, as this year, the fundraising was held within the liturgical, pastoral and creative aspects of the relationship. In the lead up to the 2026 trip (which for carbon footprint reasons should remain a small team, not a large congregational trip), the existing online events and discussions led by Ayla from St James's and Peter from St Bart's, should be built upon. The PCC wanted to ensure that the two congregations felt close to one another and got to know each other as far as possible. Any ideas for joint

events (a joint pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has been suggested) will be gratefully received!

Also at the Awayday we had a lively session with Steven Overman who has run the focus groups as part of the Season of Listening to improve communications and understanding so that you know more about the PCC and the way in which it works and makes decisions on your behalf. It was agreed that the PCC Lay Vice Chair Ros Fane and the Churchwardens should form a group to take this forward. A discussion was also held about clergy capacity at a demanding time for the church. The PCC has endorsed the recruitment of an SSM (self supporting minister) who would be available during the week to share some of the workload with the two full time stipendiary priests (Lucy and Ayla). Lucy has begun discussions with the Archdeacon about the recruitment process which will begin in September.

There is now a **vacancy on our PCC** as a result of the resignation of Alison Beck who is moving to Scotland. Nominations should be lodged with me by 8 September. The process for this is set out in the weekly newsletter.

At our PCC meeting the following Monday we re-visited some of these themes, endorsed decisions taken as well as undertook a thorough examination of our finances through the latest Management Accounts. This included, as always, looking at our different programmes through the monthly dashboards and Risk Register which highlights what mitigating action is being taken to reduce the impact of certain risks. The most challenging risks at the moment are in the area of staff and clergy capacity to undertake all we need to do. The second risk was financial. Savings have been identified and income generation is a focus. Earlier in the year, due to some unforeseen essential expenditure, the PCC accepted a revised business plan for 2025 that includes a deficit for up to £98k. Current projections are a deficit of £128k. With cost savings, income generation targets and fundraising, the plan is to reduce this deficit to £50k. The running costs of St James's remain at £5k per day. The Management Accounts show month by month that cost control overall is good. But it is in the area of income generation that the challenges come, including voluntary donations which are under budget. The churchwardens and new Head of Fundraising Sarah Boud are meeting with Lucy to discuss this aspect in August with a view to running a campaign in the autumn to encourage more congregation to sign up for, or review their planned giving.

Keith Best  
PCC Secretary

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