

Parochial Church Council Meeting
Monday 3 August 2026 18:30-21.00
Congregational Report

As it was the first PCC meeting after the elections to the PCC at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting on 31 May there was a lively and welcoming atmosphere as new members to the PCC were greeted. At our APCM you may recall that for the Election of Deanery Synod Representatives after a secret ballot the following four were elected for the next three years until the APCM in 2029: Sarah Clark, Abigail Le Fevre, Tracy McKeever & Patrick Wood. For the Election of PCC members after a secret ballot the following new members were elected to the PCC: Audrey da Costa, Jen Veall and Paul Vickers to the APCM in 2029, Graeme Jones and Tom Gidman were re-elected for a further three years until the APCM in 2029 and Steven Overman was confirmed as elected on 15 September 2025 until the APCM in 2028.

The first task at the PCC meeting on 3 August was to appoint a Lay Vice Chair to assist the Rector in chairing PCC meetings (the two on Congregational Life in the year are usually chaired by the Lay Vice Chair while the Rector chairs the quarterly business meetings) and an Honorary Treasurer.

An experienced and previous member of the PCC Graeme Jones was elected as Lay Vice Chair and a new PCC member Sarah Clark as Treasurer (Tribute was paid to Audrey Sebatindira the previous Treasurer who had stayed on in that post until 3 August so as to provide continuity). Sarah had been elected in May as a Deanery Synod Representative but wished to relinquish that role so as to be able to concentrate on the finances so, in her place, another new PCC member Audrey da Costa was elected as the Deanery Synod Representative. We also welcomed Jen Veall and Paul Vickers as new PCC members and Abi Le Fevre and Patrick Wood as new Deanery Synod Representatives alongside Tracy McKeever as an existing one.

Members of the congregation may not realise the full and careful nature of the business that has to be transacted at our PCC meetings and this one was no exception with some thirteen separate papers to be read and considered in advance. Some, such as the examination of the Management Accounts and the receipt and endorsement of the Safeguarding Action Plan are required agenda items as they were on this occasion. The financial debate was dominated by the effect of us moving off-site after Easter next year to enable the Wren Project construction works to commence but, as was pointed out by our COO, Nick Thasarathar, in effect the Wren Project has already started. A huge amount of work is being done by design teams, project managers, overseen by the COO as RIBA stage 3 is being signed off before the more detailed design work of RIBA stage 4.

Once off-site we determined to continue our outreach work at SJP in some form, so there is in the budget some allowance for hiring premises nearby for food outreach and counselling. Consequently, although the congregation and its various groups will move to St Pancras while the church is being refurbished, we shall still keep some of our outreach work in the parish local to SJP.

One of the major impacts on us will be the loss of revenue from the hire of our site, the food market, our concerts programme café and flat rent etc. This is a huge loss of income. Nevertheless, there will be some compensation from the sale of advertising space on the hoardings that will surround the building works. This will be carefully procured in order to provide the income to St James's to keep going during construction and the advertising will obviously have parameters according to ethical considerations. What was stressed at the meeting was that we have stretched and limited capacity which is a major concern and means that we cannot take on any more activities, however desirable they may be. Our priorities for next year are [1] establish SJP on the road [2] undertake outreach by alternative means [3] decant and start of construction. All this will be enough for 2027!

Moreover, in order to be able to break even (perhaps) in 2026, SJP has reluctantly reduced the amount we pay to the Diocese in the Common Fund. The consequence of this, however, is that the Diocese will not allow us to appoint or replace any assistant clergy until we restore our full contribution – so if and when we get further funding this will be a priority. In the meantime we are trying to recruit some Self-Supporting Ministers (such as we have had in the past with Ivan Khovacs and Daniel Norris).

Another issue is that the shortage of funds for our everyday operations means that we have had to dip into our reserves (we need to keep about £500k for this) and several PCC members very responsibly have asked when we can restore these. The good news is that if everything goes according to plan then we should be able to do that over the coming 3 or 4 years. But currently our reserves are low and financially 2026 is a very challenging year.

I mentioned earlier the papers on Safeguarding which were considered in depth and there are still issues that we need to undertake to be fully compliant with the Diocesan requirements.

In order to monitor our performance and to enable the PCC to exercise their proper scrutinising role we have devised a new Dashboard which, in colour, sets out all the issues, identifies risks and action to be taken and those with high risk are coloured in red: our endeavour, of course, is to change these into amber or, preferably, green meaning that they are no longer a problem.

Finally, there was a long discussion about our Business Plan for the next few years on which our Chief Operating Officer Nick Thasarathar has worked so hard and continues to do so. There was also a paper and discussion about the new and innovative Cugoano Changemakers Programme which has attracted so much enthusiastic funding for changing young peoples' lives: already almost 90 applications have been received for the first cohort of 15 places. The Cugoano Changemakers is part funded by the Rothschild Foundation and the Heritage Fund. It has been advertised in targeted ways to reach underrepresented young people, utilising social media too such as Instagram. An Advisory Board oversees the development of the programme, consisting of St James's congregation members. A Youth Advisory Board also helps shape the programme, made up of external and St James's members. There is a shortlist of 30 candidates so all is going well so far. The first programme begins in September 2026.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish for any clarification on the above.

Keith Best PCC Secretary 05/08/2026