



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What a year 2024 has been! Amidst the challenges we faced, we have so much for which to be thankful to God. Hence, I look back on the year with a huge smile, which has only widened as a result of sitting down and writing this report. The benefit of doing this report is that, instead of dealing with all the things that pop up in a busy parish and its concomitant demands, I can pause and look back.

2024 had some important highlights. For one, Archdeacon Catherine joined us for Holy Week and Easter. In that week she both preached and celebrated at Mass. This was an important moment in the life of St Martin's and helped re-enforced the integrity and motivation for Eucharistic provision here, which flows from a love for the other, always seeking the best for our brothers and sisters.

Over this year I spoke of St Thomas Aquinas' vision, who wrote from his monastic community of love being an act of will resulting in peace as its 'fruit'. He observes that, when we choose to will what God wills, and love our neighbours as ourselves, 'we wish to fulfil our neighbours' will, as though it were ours' [*Summa Theologiae* II.II Q29, A3].

That vision of the uniting of wills, though not necessarily a meeting of minds, was and is the commitment to action that brings us together. Hence, the provision we agreed as a PCC¹ was lovingly played out throughout 2024. It has been a joy to see this in action, so thank you.

Another, important moment was the PCC Away Day on 28th September at St Andrew's Acre.

The aim of the day was to produce a *Mission Action Plan* (MAP). The day began, deliberately, with a Mass as a reminder that any mission flows from the altar. We then reviewed the Parish Survey and highlighted the following key themes from the responses:

1. Importance of St Martin's role as the local parish church
2. Importance of the friendly parish community
3. Significance of our pattern and style of worship
4. Desire for more events, particularly bible study
5. Need for better means of communication

¹ a. On Sundays and Holy Days of the Church there will be a celebration of Mass offered by a male priest.
b. If someone attends a mass celebrated by a woman priest they will have the option of receiving a prayer of blessing from her, or
c. sacrament in one kind (bread) set aside at an earlier Eucharistic celebration offered by a man.

From this came the elements for the content of our MAP. This was ultimately refined to:

1. Renew methods of communication
2. Revive the Holiday Club
3. Revise PCC committee structure

Much of the background to the MAP and analysis of the surveys was done by Rowland Linder who joined us on 2nd September. She has done amazing work with the young people, schools work, communications, and Young Church at the 11.15 Mass. She has also helped out in many other ways and has been a huge asset to me and St Martin's. She will be much missed when she leaves at the end of July 2025 to continue her vocational discernment elsewhere.

Consequently, it came as a huge blessing to hear from Bishop Lusa of Willesden that we will be having a curate in July 2025. After seeing a couple of candidates, Joe Grogan, currently at the College of the Resurrection, Mirfield, agreed to serve his title with us. Joe comes with many gifts, particularly musically, and we look forward to welcoming him soon.

Through 2024 numbers gently climbed. This was noticeable at the major festivals but also at other times. This is very encouraging as this growth feels more integrated within the wider life of St Martin's (I am always weary of things ballooning, as balloons tend to pop!).

Again, this is an important reminder of the significance of understanding and celebrating who we are. Interestingly, our Thursday Mass always feels to me like a microcosm of St Martin's welcome and hospitality. I say microcosm, but I can't help but recall the comments of the Archdeacon who observed that this Mass was better attended than half the Sunday congregations in the Willesden Area!

Another hugely encouraging sign has been the increased number of socials and attendees to these events. Of course, this does also highlight the need for more and new volunteers, if we are to consolidate and grow this part of our parish life. With this in mind, it has been an encouragement to see some of those Confirmed by Bishop Lusa on Ascension Day helping out in various roles, from serving to the Social Committee.

There are, of course, things we need to address. The Chancel Roof is in urgent need of repair and a small group is working to see how we can raise the possible £100k plus needed. We will be needing everyone's help and support.

Also, financially, even after an increase in giving post our Giving Campaign, we are still a parish supported by others. We are a way off covering our ministry costs so this will need to be addressed. We are immensely grateful for all those who do give, but please do consider how 'sacrificial giving' applies to you.

As I draw this report to an end, can I re-iterate how much of a joy our open church is. The pleasure of hearing people's response to this beautiful space, and seeing the lit candles of prayers offered, shows what a valuable resource St Martin's Church is to this community.

This is a small glimpse of the profundity of the worshipping rhythm of life founded upon being rooted in the catholic tradition of the Church of England. Therefore, I would especially like to

express my deep gratitude to all those who work so hard to ensure the worshipping life of the parish continues. Particularly I want to thank Viktoria and the choir, along with Alan and the serving and sacristy team. Echoing what I said last year, I continue to feel like a kid in a liturgical candy shop!

Mentioning people is angels-fear-to-tread territory; I would hate to miss anyone out, because you all add to the life of this amazing place. So thank you, for all the faithful prayers offered, for the upkeep of the building and lands, for clocks wound and drinks served. For toddlers welcomed and the vulnerable helped. Again to echo last year's observation, like the bread broken at the altar here, new life, renewal and care is a seven day a week force for good at St Martin's.

We need to rejoice in this loving activity and I want to thank all who work to ensure the various groups happen, which so enrich our life together.

I would, however, like to say a thank you to Gill who works so hard in the office, and is a wonderful colleague and does so much to help me and the parish, thus guaranteeing the facilities of St Martin's are available to so many in our community.

Finally, I would like to thank Jacqueline and Pete for their amazing work as church wardens. It has been a hard year for them in terms of health and workload, but they serve as a constant reminder of all that is best here. We are very blessed to have such excellent and generous wardens. I am indebted to them for their support and care.

Personally, and on behalf of Sarah, Izzy and Alex, I am so, so grateful for all you do for us as the people of God. Please realise how much that means to us, so:

Thank you!