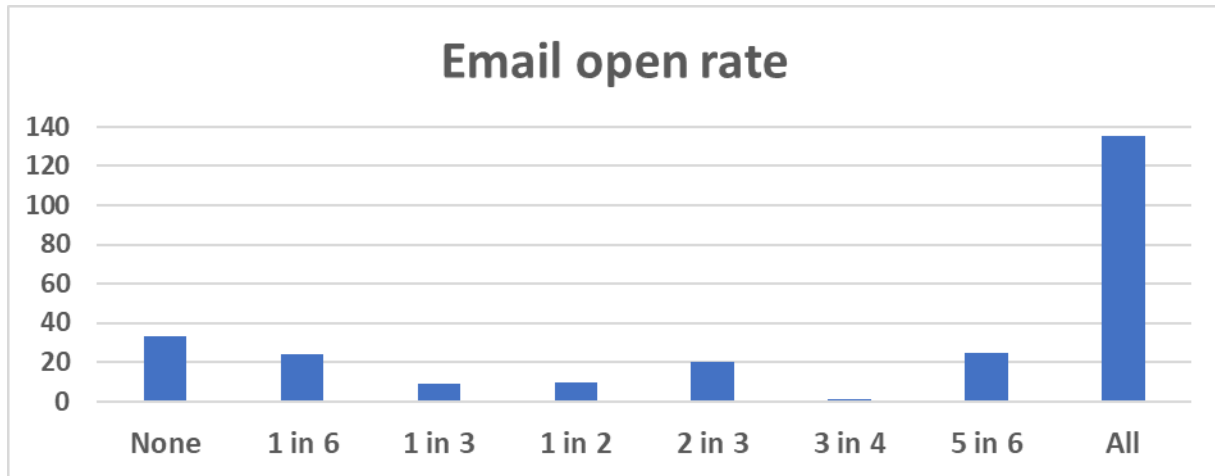


## REPORTS OF ALL OUR ACTIVITIES

### Communication

#### *Email*

Our weekly email subscriber count is currently 257 (last year 262). Mailchimp, our provider, has much reduced the amount of information we get on our (free) plan, so I have created my own performance summary:



A point to note (and this is not a complaint) is that some parishioners who are heavily involved receive, but do not open, e-news – as (eg) they pick up the pew leaflet etc when they attend a service.

#### *Social media*

We currently have accounts on Facebook, Instagram and X. Given the change in direction for X (more news and politics) this is now dormant.

We have 416 followers on our Facebook page (up from 391 last year) and 172 followers on Instagram (up from 158 last year).

We are using social media to reach more people; most crucially, social media is a good way to communicate with younger people and those who do not yet come to church.

If you aren't already following us, you can find us at the following locations:

Facebook: @stjohnsal5

Instagram: @stjohnsal5

## ***Website***

The St John's website has continued to be one of our key 'shop windows' as St John's seeks to demonstrate how we are Living God's Love.

2025 was a maintenance year for the website; we are considering a design refresh later in 2026.

We are currently without statistics as the website provider has discontinued these and we need to enable Google analytics.

## ***Live streaming***

We have continued to routinely live stream our services since first starting this activity in November 2020.

During the last 12 months we've had 5,800 views (up from 4,300 views), and of more relevance, 725 hours of viewing (from 616 hours of viewing). We have 289 subscribers (March 2025: 237).

Our live stream serves two audiences:

- for our regular services, members of the congregation that cannot make it to church on this particular occasion
- for funerals, those who live away from Harpenden, including the frail..

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow live streaming crew for their support in delivering our live streams ~ if you are interested in joining us, please do get in contact.

***Neil Middleton***

## Eco Church

### *Highlights from 2025-26*

- We observed '**No mow May**' on the grass area opposite the west end.
- We held **Litter Picks** on Sunday April 6<sup>th</sup> 2025 and Sunday May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2026. We are investigating getting our own litter pickers, which can be left in the porch for anyone to use.
- Many of us attended the **Watershed exhibition** at St Albans Cathedral, and the Debate 'What does the future hold for the state of our waterways' with St Albans MP Daisy Cooper, and others.
- We have renewed our status as a **Fairtrade Place of Worship**, which means we are committed to serving Fairtrade tea, coffee and sugar, and promoting Fairtrade. We held a very successful **Fairtrade stall** on Sunday Oct 5th, highlighting tea production, with information, a petition to sign, and examples of Fairtrade tea that can be bought in local supermarkets. We now have a sign displayed at coffee time, explaining that we are a Fairtrade church, and proudly serving Fairtrade tea and coffee. Sales of Fairtrade tea in the UK increased by 40% over Fairtrade fortnight, and there were over 1000 community events promoting Fairtrade.
- **Pill blister packs** are now being collected by Boots in Harpenden. We are no longer collecting candles for recycling.
- We installed signs in the hall reminding people to **turn off lights**.
- We continue to provide '**Eco tips**' in the pew sheet, and an article for the magazine with suggestions on how to live more sustainably.
- Two **swift nest boxes** were installed on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2026 on the North side of the church, in memory of Liz Neville. Thanks to Graham Knight and Gavin Vicary, part of the North East Herts Swift group, who were very helpful applying for diocesan approval, and sourcing and arranging installation. Several other members of the congregation also had nest boxes installed.
- We hosted a very successful illustrated talk on '**Gardening for Wildlife**', given by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust on April 25<sup>th</sup>, attended by members of the congregation, other churches and members of the local community. We plan to hold other talks.
- We are forging links with the Eco church group at the **Quaker Meeting House**, and some of us will be attending a meeting on May 8<sup>th</sup> for Harpenden churches about Eco church and working more closely together.

## **Upcoming events:**

**Repair Fair, Saturday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2-5pm, Church Hall.**

We said thank you and goodbye to Nic and Ella who moved to Fiji after Christmas. We would welcome anyone else who would like to join us.

***Anne Edwards, Debbie Knight, Andrew Harbord, Margaret Charlston, Sally Hart***

## **Faith and Light**

We continue to meet monthly for Bible-related crafts, worship and tea. Each session brings joy and often surprises, as we meet God in unexpected ways. The planning group is creative and faithful - but we need some new leadership as we are an ageing group!

We had a sad loss this year with the sudden and unexpected death of a longstanding member, Daniel Lagden. Daniel's funeral was held at St John's and was - as is typical of Faith and Light - a joy-filled service as we celebrated Daniel's life, his love of all things Manchester United, music, and Daniel's many friends.

***Lauryn Awbrey, Chaplain***

## **Flower Guild**



The Flower Guild's year starts at Easter and ends on Shrove Tuesday. In Lent we have no flowers or greenery in church as we wait. Decorating the church for Easter is therefore a joyous occasion. This year we have had the addition of the garden of repose for Maundy Thursday and this then became the Easter garden, with the empty tomb, on Easter morning. This has given added meaning to our worship through the Easter period.

Throughout the year the Flower Guild members ensure that there are displays in the Lady Chapel, Sanctuary and Porch to ensure that the church looks its best. This is then enhanced for festivals. We can also undertake more personal memorials and celebrations on request. Weddings and funerals are by arrangement.

If anyone would like to join the team they would be most welcome. We can teach a willing novice!

I am sure that the congregation would like to say a big Thank You to the team for their continued flower ministry.

***Mary Hoare***



## **Little Acorns**

We have had another busy and successful year!

Little Acorns meets on a Tuesday morning from 10.00 - 11.30 in the church hall. Over the past year we have had 46 sessions with an average attendance of:

- Summer 33 children and 34 children
- Autumn 30 children and 31 adults
- Spring 27 children and 29 adults.

We have had donations of £ 2,200 and expenditure of £1,300. There are more donations through a QR code, but I don't have any figures for this.

I would like to thank all the volunteers for their support as without them the group could not run. A special thanks to Steve Whiting for handling the money, Alison Gardner for producing our tick sheets, and Di Borthwick for keeping the rota up to date and tending our flowerbed.

Our homemade cakes are our USP plus the delicious coffee. We have a core number of adults who have supported us over the years and return with different children. This has meant our community is becoming closer. The children learn the routines of our sessions so are used to sitting for a short story when they move on. The group this year are particularly loyal and supportive.



We have done a wide variety of activities, including biscuit icing, making flowers out of cupcake cases and we had our very popular but chaotic pancake races! At Easter we made cards and had an Easter egg hunt. Revd Tim led a story and singing session in the church which was greatly enjoyed.

It has become our custom for the volunteers plus Tim to meet at the Plough and Harrow for lunch after the last meeting of the term. This is a great way to catch up on everyone's activities which are not about Little Acorns



We now look forward to another year, It is always sad to say goodbye to children who have been with us for some time, it has been a pleasure to watch them grown and develop. We look forward to welcoming new children in September.

## ***Christine Kenyon***

### **Junior Church**

Junior and Mini Church continue to play an important role in welcoming children and young families into the life of St John's. Held weekly during term-time in the church hall, the sessions begin at 9.25am, shortly before the main service starts. Designed for children aged 5 and over, Junior Church offers a lively and engaging programme of movement, games, stories, arts and crafts, and discussion in a safe and supportive environment. Children may attend independently or with a parent or carer, and all sessions are led by DBS-checked volunteers, including qualified teachers.

The focus of Junior Church is to help children explore and understand the Christian faith in ways that are accessible, enjoyable, and relevant to their everyday lives. Weekly themes generally follow the lectionary and aim to build children's confidence in participating in worship and understanding church traditions, prayers, and Bible stories.

Throughout the year, the children have taken part in a wide range of activities linked to the church calendar and key elements of Christian teaching. These have included exploring the structure and meaning of



the Bible, learning about the season of Lent through creative projects, and using actions and interactive activities to help learn prayers such as the Lord's Prayer. The children's artwork and displays have continued to contribute to the welcoming atmosphere of the church hall and celebrate the themes explored during sessions.

Mini Church plans alongside Junior Church for continuity and use a repetitive framework, which is similar to the Toddler Service on Thursdays, which is appreciated by the children. We have an average attendance of 8 adults and 7 children. We are very grateful to Sophie Bygrave for her support every week and for the other leaders.

Since the transition to weekly Junior and Mini Church sessions during term-time at the end of 2024, participation has remained strong and encouraging. The increased frequency has helped establish greater continuity for families and has welcomed several new families into the St John's community. Monthly All-Age services, held in church on the first Sunday of each month, continue to provide an important opportunity for children and families to worship alongside the wider congregation.

Please pray for our leaders and children.

***Sophie Crowley and Christine Kenyon***

## **Magazine**

The Parish Magazine this year continues colourful and informative. The distinctive stylised cover art ranged from lush garden to layered autumn leaves, snowy stars and spring pinks. In Spring 2025, urged by a devoted reader, we added a creative interaction page to engage children of all ages. The magazine's purpose is to inform and celebrate St John's congregation and serve the Southdown community. Harpenden Trust, Grove School, Southdown Performing Arts Centre and local businesses have had features or free advertising space. Readers continue to express appreciation for the magazine.

Susan Kerr continues as Editor, and Martyn Wainwright as designer. The Ministry Team checks contents before the layout goes to the printer. Distribution Manager Sarah McKie maintains contact with the printers to achieve timely delivery by some 70 volunteers to 4,000 Southdown homes and businesses. The delivery volunteers are vital to the magazine and St John's, a precious link within the parish. The magazine is also posted on St John's website.

Parish Administrator Amanda Knights has worked hard to pursue new advertisers, and to advise them and invoice efficiently. Design and printing are the only financial expenditure in producing the magazine, and the advertising revenue is getting near to covering these costs for the first time in five years (if not longer!). Even though the gap is not quite bridged yet, the conclusion

is that the spend provides a valuable representation of St John's Church in Southdown, our presence and service.

***Susan Kerr, Editor***

## **Mothers' Union**

We are delighted to retain a membership of 24, and all meetings were well attended.

The stimulating programme of speakers, arranged by Andrew Ballard, included Lewis Cox from High Street Methodist, Captain Kenneth Guest from the Salvation Army, Charlotte Scott, a family solicitor, Mary Hoare, who shared her expertise in flower arranging and Liz Sergeant, who opened our eyes to the beauty of modern art.

In March we made 100 Mothering Sunday posies, and in December we produced 120 Christingles.

In June we enjoyed a visit to Tring Garden Centre with afternoon tea, and in August we invited friends from St Mary's, Redbourn to join us for a summer party in the beautiful garden of one of our members. In December, following an Advent Service in the Lady Chapel, we gathered for a festive tea party in the hall with the traditional quiz organised by Di Borthwick.

This has been a very enjoyable year when we have worked, prayed and laughed together, and the Christian fellowship and spiritual support which is so evident at all our meetings binds us together.

We raise money during the year for MU work in this country as well as overseas, we give practical support to children in three local refuges, and we send Christmas cards to the inmates of local prisons.

We are blessed with a shared faith and the desire to make a difference in the world. Our wonderful charity and our supportive church give us the opportunity to do that.

***Carol Cooke, Branch Leader***

## **Music**

It has been a rewarding and encouraging year in the life of music at St John's. The Junior Choir has brought great enthusiasm and made a noticeable and welcome contribution to our choral sound. We have also been pleased to welcome local musicians through our concert series, both enriching our musical life and helping to raise funds for our musical provision. The Come and Sing Evensong last May was a particular highlight, attracting over 40 singers from within the parish and beyond, and we look forward to a similar event this September. "Pimm's and Hymns" offered a relaxed and informal opportunity to share music and explore favourite hymns. Liturgically, the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols and Cross of Christ on Palm Sunday were significant choral highlights, in which the choir excelled.

I am very grateful to all who have supported music in any way over the past year, in particular to each member of the Parish Choir; to the Junior Choir singers and their parents; to Sophie for accompanying junior choir anthems; to Terry, who accompanies on the organ for special services and so ably covers in my absence; and to Tim and the PCC for their unwavering support.

***Matt Harrison, Director of Music***

## **St Luke's Cell**

St Luke's Cell is a prayer group dedicated to praying for people in any kind of need. It has members both at St John's and High Street Methodist Church. The St Luke's Cell list is of people in the parish or relatives or friends of those living in the parish who are in particular need, and for whom our prayers have been asked. St Luke's Cell Prayer Group are always happy to pray for you (confidentially if needed). The group is named after the disciple and physician Luke, who is the patron saint of doctors. A request can be as simple as a name, if preferred. We don't need to know details in order to pray. Each of us prays for a small number of people on the list, moving to a further group each month. We also meet together on the second Wednesday of each month in St John's Church at 2.30 pm when we pray for all those on the list in a short service. Would you like us to pray for you? You can get in touch with the parish office, a member of the ministry team or with Michael Hughes (01582 765576) from the group.

***Michael Hughes***

## **Outside giving**

We are committed at St John's to give 10% of our income to charity each year. This process is managed by a small team comprised of Nick Lockett and Keith Slinn. Each year we ask the congregation to recommend charities for these awards. This year we have asked for nominations in the categories: charities in Harpenden, in Hertfordshire and in the UK. We feel

that with the modest payments that we are able to make, the smaller charities would benefit more. The charities that we have selected this year for consideration are:

#### Harpenden

- ◇ Harpenden Music Foundation
- ◇ Harpenden Mencap
- ◇ Harpenden Trust

#### Hertfordshire

- ◇ St Albans Foodbank
- ◇ Hectors House
- ◇ Carers in Herts

#### National

- ◇ The Ollie Foundation
- ◇ Human Milk Foundation
- ◇ Inclusive Church Network
- ◇ Make a Wish UK
- ◇ Little Princess

Voting took place from Sunday May 3rd to Sunday May 17th. The results will be announced during the APCM at 11.00 on May 17th

***Nick Luckett and Keith Slinn, Charitable Giving team***

## **Servers**

St John's currently has a dedicated team of 14 servers to help at services, with an age range from 8 years old, to some getting onto, let's just say, their later years! The newest server joined the team a month ago, and some have been serving for 20 years, or more.

We have had two servers step down during the year and two new recruits have stepped forward.

This year we have undertaken a systematic repair and cleaning of all the albs that we wear. I would also like to thank Dorcas (Anne Edwards in particular) for all the hard work in cleaning and restitching the hoods.

Serving is all about assisting the ministerial team at services by ensuring that the altar is properly set and prepared for the service. It also includes supporting the ministry team to ensure that the service runs smoothly. It is a great privilege to be involved in the services at St John's and can be very satisfying; also, believe it or not, it can be great fun!

We are always looking for new members of the team and if you think this might be something for you, please do not hesitate to come and have a chat with me, or any member of the ministry team. Just for the record, you do not need to be baptised or confirmed to become a server, serving is simply part of our commitment to our Christian faith.

As always, a very big THANK YOU to all on the serving team for their continued commitment and support.

***Matt Barter, Head Server***

## **Sunday plant scheme**

The Sunday Plant Scheme has been running at St John's for over forty years now and was set up to show care and comfort to members of St John's congregation and the parish who deserve our best wishes and support. They may be ill, bereaved, caring for someone or in a few cases celebrating a landmark occasion. It really does mean an awful lot to the recipient to know that they are remembered.

I have on my computer at least 52 kind people who I can call upon once a year to donate a small flowering plant for the cause and they leave this on the bookcase at the back of church for distribution.

Then one of the 12 (currently only 9) special souls whose help I have will deliver this to someone nominated by the clergy or churchwardens, with a kind, friendly word, usually in their home. The distributor will do this for the 4/5 Sundays in that month. There is no need for spiritual involvement although not discouraged, but a nice smile and a good word to let the recipient know they are in our hearts and our prayers is the order of the day.

It is uplifting to learn from recipients that the pleasure this gives is huge and the knowledge that people care is immense.

***Briony Linsell***

## Tea at 3 (T@3)

T@3 has been running in the Church Hall here at St John's for nearly 13 years now, and it has enjoyed much success and, for the most part, strong attendance. Numbers inevitably fluctuate but we always lay at least 5 tables of 6 and work on around 30 people attending. Sometimes the tables are sparsely filled but there are just as many occasions when extra chairs are added to the already full tables!

For those unfamiliar with this event, we (a team of St John's volunteers) hold an afternoon tea in the hall at three o'clock on the last Friday of every month for those in the parish seeking company and succour. Our bone-china crockery and home-made cakes and sandwiches are much appreciated and the amount of tea that is consumed is impressive. It is a most friendly and happy occasion.

At the beginning of this venture most of those attending were members of the church congregation but over the years those without a connection to St John's have joined us also. The Harpenden Trust has been supporting the teas and have brought or directed people to join us. Everyone is welcome and their company enjoyed.

No charge is made for these teas but a well-placed dish by the door receives kind donations, and our guests are always most generous and greatly appreciative. When necessary, we can give lifts to those in need.

It is a pleasure be involved in this event and the stories and anecdotes that we hear from these senior members of our society are inspirational and uplifting.

***Briony Linsell***



*Junior Choir sing for our Christmas T@3*

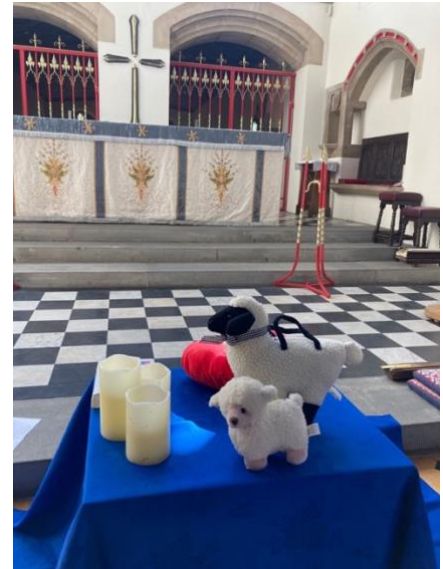
## **Toddler service**

We meet every Thursday in term time from 10.15 – 11.15. We start off with coffee, tea, and homemade cake, snacks for the toddlers.

We then have a repetitive framework for our service based a simplified version of the Eucharist followed by an interactive, age-appropriate story based on a half termly theme – eg, parables, women in the Bible. The children soon learn the pattern of the service and join in the refrain.



This is an excellent way to introduce the children to church as they are free to explore the church and become familiar with it. We find children who have experienced toddler church are able to fit in on a Sunday much more easily.



***Christine Kenyon***