

ST MARY THE VIRGIN GREAT BENTLEY
Parochial Church Council Minutes
Wednesday 26 November 2025 Church Room at 7.30 pm

Opening prayer

- 1 **Minutes of the previous meeting from Wednesday 1 October 2025:** were agreed and signed by the vicar.
- 2 **Matters arising:** item 5, headstones will be stabilised by contractors in November. A tour of the churchyard has taken place to become familiar with the work outlined in the recent tree survey.
- 3 **Vicar's update:** a meeting has been arranged for members of all 4 PCCs. The focus will be on sustaining ministry. The church faces significant challenges as stipendiary clergy numbers decline. There is a need to grow leaders and preachers from within church communities to lead services, but for now, the current rota seemed to be working well.
At present, Little Clacton and Weeley churches formed one benefice and Great Bentley and St Osyth form another, but it was important that all four churches work as one. Soon all 4 PCCs would need to consider becoming one benefice. Any change to benefice structure would not alter parish share issues..
- 4 **Financial report:** (see attached) the PCC agreed to increase the secretary's hourly rate of pay to £14 from 1 January 2026. The secretary thanked the PCC for their decision.
- Christmas charitable donations: it was agreed that the following four charities would each receive £250:

The Mother's Union
Mercy Ships
St Helena Hospice
Embrace the Middle East

- regarding proposed extension of churchyard. The draft letter was adopted. Letters will be delivered to both landowners.
- parish share – there was a request to revisit the PCC's decision from the previous meeting (see minutes of the PCC meeting from 1 October 2025, item 6 on parish share) with the suggestion that money earmarked for charitable giving

at Christmas could be reduced so that parish share could be increased; however objections were raised at revisiting this matter (*ref: Church Representation Rules motion to rescind a decision within a 6 month period*) as the PCC made their decision on parish share for 2025 at the previous meeting. The position of the PCC had not changed.

- 5 **Deanery update:** the bishop will be holding an open question event in Brightlingsea for young people in May 2026. The rural dean is compiling leaflets to advertise church events around the deanery. Great Bentley's Christmas tree festival has been put forward. There was a discussion about the importance of information held on gravestones, particularly to the wider community (research). Churches can apply to the fund for children's ministry again next year. It was noted that attendance was dwindling and vacancies remained for chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The rural dean will be retiring in August. A church in Clacton had paid into a mutual fund that will go towards churches who cannot meet their parish share.
- 6 **Safeguarding:** the safeguarding officer was unable to attend the meeting; however she reported that with the help of the secretary, they had been able to have the safeguarding dashboard up and running. During the course of this, it had become apparent that the PCC played a big role in the background as most questions they had to answer were worded 'did the PCC agree to this?' She therefore thought it a good idea to give a brief presentation at the next PCC meeting.
With reference to Section 12 of The Parish Safeguarding Handbook. Those responsible for posting photos of children online will need written consent of their parent/guardian; in light of this information it was agreed that the church avoid using children's photos completely.
- 7 **Health and safety:** the electrician still needs to visit to show how to adjust the under pew heaters and look at the heaters in the church room. The collapsible tables have been moved to allow greater access to the loft.
- 8 **Bell Ringers:**
With the help of a consultant, funding has been sourced to undertake repairs to the bells, with the National Heritage Lottery Fund providing the majority of the funding (£68,000). Three quotes have been received and a preferred candidate has emerged. The PCC were happy to support the preferred choice of contractor when the HLF agree for the work to go ahead.
The HLF has requested that the PCC agree to underwrite the two other funding sources of around £6,000. The treasurer advised that the funds were available but

recommended that consent be granted on the understanding that if the PCC were required to step in, the bell ringers would reimburse the PCC back within 2 years. Based on this understanding the PCC agreed to guarantee the additional sum. The treasurer advised that it was unclear if VAT will continue to be reclaimable after the current tax year. It will be necessary to reapply to the Essex Association of Change Ringers for their part of the funding. It was hoped that everything would be in place by the end of January.

- 9 **Social events sub-committee:** The PCC welcomed the idea of a social events sub-committee. It was hoped support from outside the PCC would invigorate funding raising, share knowledge and offer new social events to the wider community.
- 10 **:Children's corner & progress on children's worker:** until a worker is appointed, members of the PCC should ensure the children's corner is clean and toys/activities are age appropriate before services begin. The volunteer is keen to start, but recruitment seems to have stalled. The volunteer will need to apply and provide two references, undertake a DBS check and safeguarding training.
- 11 **Lent course:** arrangements were discussed.
- 12 **Approval of draft Great Bentley PCC privacy notice:** the secretary advised that in order for the PCC to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations she would need to contact everyone on the church family email list for written consent. It was also her understanding that the PCC should approve a written privacy notice and a data protection policy. This will be discussed at the next PCC meeting. It was thought that contact details could be shared with members of the PCC.
- 13 **Any other business:** the church website and Facebook page continue to be kept up to date. The new shared diary now has 22 regular users. Those leading a service are encouraged to choose the hymns, but assistance is available. The new hymn spreadsheet records what has been sung recently, to avoid too much repetition. There was a request to have more uplifting hymns. Plans for the Christmas tree festival are progressing and 2 Christmas trees are due to arrive ahead of the festival. A few turkey squares were still available for purchase. Arrangements for setting up were discussed.
- 14 **The date for the next PCC meeting:** will be on Wednesday 28 January 2026 at 7.30 pm.

The meeting closed with The Grace at 9.10 pm.