



# Annual General Meeting Report 2025



*A vibrant international English-speaking Anglican church  
serving the Leiden area, offering a spiritual home  
to people of all ages and from all over the world.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>Leadership &amp; Governance</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<i>Chaplain's Report (Matt Thijs)</i> .....	3
<i>Churchwarden's Report (Peter Stretton &amp; Fredrik Knoeff)</i> .....	5
<i>Diocesan Synod Report (Liesbeth Kanis)</i> .....	5
<i>Archdeaconry Synod Report (Fulco Jongasma, Sue Kirby, Boaz van der Velden)</i> .....	5
<i>Church Council Report (Matt Thijs)</i> .....	6
<i>Electoral Roll (Stephan Hinderer)</i> .....	7
<i>Safeguarding (Sue Kirby)</i> .....	7
<b>Finance</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<i>Treasurer's Report (Boaz Kuiper)</i> .....	8
<i>Financial Statements</i> .....	9
Income and Expenditure Year to Date Jan-Dec 2024.....	9
Balance Sheet 2024.....	10
Budget 2025 .....	11
<i>Independent Examiner's Report (Brian Routledge)</i> .....	12
<b>Other Reports</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<i>Ministry to children and youth</i> .....	13
Lizelle Thijs (First Steps; ages 0-3) .....	13
Rebekka Gelders (St Js Club; ages 4-10).....	13
Kwinten & Julia Vanwijnsberghe-Bolt (Youth; ages 11+).....	13
<i>Rachel Kurian (Evergreens)</i> .....	14
<i>Matthew Payne (Discernment Process)</i> .....	15
<i>Marcos Vieira &amp; Liesbeth Kanis (Racial Justice)</i> .....	15
<i>Poornima Whomsley (Mission Support Team)</i> .....	16

### Chaplain's Report (Matt Thijs)

Everyone knows that the best sermons have three points, so I'd like to offer three things to celebrate from 2024 and three things to pray for as we look ahead.

#### **We celebrate that...**

##### **We are a Growing Church**

Our average Sunday congregation grew from 68 to 77 people and has continued to rise in 2025. As has long been the case at St James, we welcome newcomers and visitors nearly every Sunday. A particular highlight was our Christingle service, which drew almost 200 people.

Naturally, we've also seen people leave, often returning to their home countries. At the end of the year, we said farewell to our Youth Worker, Javellah. We recently received the good news that her husband, Daniel, has secured a visa, which will hopefully enable him to work with Mission to Seafarers in Rotterdam.

Beyond numerical growth, we've also seen spiritual growth through the Alpha Course, the Church Weekend, and the joy of baptisms and confirmations. There has even been growth in love (!), with Kwinten and Julia, and Robert and Nadine celebrating their weddings.

Growth is a crude and sometimes misleading way to measure success, but I believe that the faithful ministry of St James through the challenging post-COVID years is now bearing fruit, and for that, we give thanks.

##### **We are a Partnering Church**

In 2024, we deepened our relationships with other churches. We partnered with local Dutch churches to host an ecumenical service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Our connection with the International Church of Leiden (ICL) also grew—we co-hosted the Difference Course during Lent and held several joint services at Easter and Christmas.

Currently, we are running an Alpha Course together, with around 30 participants, including guests, leaders, and people from outside both churches.

On a broader level, I remain involved in partnerships as a member of the International Church Leaders network and the Deanery of the Netherlands, and as the Anglican representative on the Faith and Order Commission of the Dutch Council of Churches. Collaborating with other churches and organisations is a powerful way to demonstrate Christian unity and amplify our impact. We hope to continue strengthening these relationships in the years ahead.

##### **We are a Visionary Church**

2024 was a year of vision discernment, prompted initially by discussions about the future of our church property at Ambachtspad. A prayer and strategy group was commissioned, producing a report with initial recommendations. Their primary conclusion was that vision discernment needed to extend beyond the question of Ambachtspad—we first needed clarity on the future of St James as a whole.

This led to the formation of the Future Focus Group, which invited the entire church into a prayerful, creative, and collaborative process of discerning God's calling for us. The process culminated in a Church Council Vision Morning in early 2025, where the following vision statement was affirmed:

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*St James is called to be a Christ-centred community  
that invites people on a journey  
of faith, growth, and action.*

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This vision reflects the themes that arose most frequently in our discussions: the centrality of Christ in worship, prayer, and Scripture; a warm, welcoming, and diverse community; and a commitment to active discipleship, equipping everyone to live out their faith.

No vision statement can capture the full scope of what the church is called to be. Instead, we see this as the foundation for our journey forward. My hope is that our progress in these areas will strengthen our outreach and witness, preparing us for growth, mission, evangelism, serving our local area, or even church planting—wherever the Lord may lead.

## **Prayer Requests**

### **1. Prayer for the Implementation of Our Vision**

We believe that God has led us to this vision, and we trust Him not only for the ideas but also for the implementation. Psalm 127:1 reminds us: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.”* Your prayers are essential as we seek to put this vision into practice.

### **2. Prayer for How We Implement the Vision**

As we move forward, we may face challenges—discouragement, internal conflicts, over-reliance on our own wisdom, or fear. Over the past year, I have been praying three words over St James: that we might be *faithful, courageous, and compassionate*. Please join me in praying that *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion”* (Phil. 1:6).

### **3. Prayer for Our Children and Youth**

Ministry to children and youth is both uniquely important and uniquely challenging. We want to remain a church where young people flourish, but we recognise the pressures they face in the wider world. Maintaining and strengthening our children’s and youth ministry requires commitment, resources, and volunteers. Please pray for the fantastic team who serve in this area and for Church Council as they consider how to develop this ministry further.

Finally, I want to give thanks for the wonderful church community that St James is. A special mention must go to our churchwardens, Fredrik Knoeff and Peter Stretton, who have wholeheartedly dedicated themselves to their roles. There are many more people I could name, but this report is already quite long! The reality is that St James is blessed with many committed and skilled volunteers—and you are probably one of them. Thank you so much! It is my absolute honour and pleasure to serve as your chaplain.

## Churchwarden's Report (Peter Stretton & Fredrik Knoeff)

I would like to start this report by mentioning the fact that both us wardens are stepping down after 3.5 and 4 years in this position at St James. It has been an honour and a privilege to support the church in this role over the past few years.

The church has seen a lot of change over this period, emerging from the pandemic and related lock down, and with a new vicar at the helm. It has been rewarding to see the church grow over the past two years and there is no doubt this will continue into the future.

It seems like an appropriate moment to hand over the warden roles to a new team.

I would like to thank the Standing Committee, the Council, the Future Focus team, and the individual office holders for all the work they have put in to, not only the daily operations of the church, but also to look to the future to see where the church needs to go to best serve its members and the wider community.

## Diocesan Synod Report (Liesbeth Kanis)

*The Diocesan Synod is the representative governing body of the diocese responsible for advising the Bishop and considering matters placed before it by the General Synod of the Church of England or by archdeaconry synods within the diocese. The Diocesan Synod is made up of clergy, lay members and ex officio members including the bishops. Elections are held every three years.*

Last year November I was elected as a lay member in the House of Laity, representing the Archdeaconry of North-West Europe, which is part of Diocese of Europe. In total, four lay members from our Archdeaconry and three clergy members, each serve a three-year term. The Diocesan Synod will take place in Cologne on 9-12 June this year.

Being part of the Diocesan Synod means you can directly input, provide feedback and vote on matters ranging from budget and finances to societal issues, such as climate justice, racial justice and gender and diversity in the Church of England. You are encouraged to share your thoughts and ideas with me so that I can best represent our diocese. For more information on the Diocesan Synod check the [website](#).

## Archdeaconry Synod Report (Fulco Jongsma, Sue Kirby, Boaz van der Velden)

At its simplest, the Archdeaconry Synod is a gathering of enthusiastic people, both lay and clergy, enjoying the fellowship of belonging to the same archdeaconry of North West Europe, within the Diocese in Europe, which is part of the Church of England. This year Matt, Sue, Fulco and Boaz participated.

We usually meet in the beautiful setting of the Oude Abdij, Drongen near Ghent, which has a very historic and religious atmosphere. This year, our talks were on healthy ageing, young people's and youth work, safeguarding, racial justice and climate change. Ideas were aired and a few suggestions for action put forward for consideration. We also discuss the business side of the archdeaconry: financials, fund-raising, donations, etc, and our budget for next year.

In between the official activities quite a few services are held in the old chapel, an important part helping us to remember that it's the Church we are talking about and not just business.

There's always a lot to cover in two days and as this is an annual meeting, it can feel that little progress is being made on the most important issues. Therefore we thought it would be nice to have short reports on what progress has been made on last year's suggestions, but that needs to be put forward to the Synod.

- Healthy Aging & Youth Ministry Rejuvenation: Boaz was invited as youth representative for our deanery (youth is up to age 29 years) but was puzzled as to

why youth had not been consulted for the talk on youth work. In turn, Fulco wondered where the plan going forward for his group (the non-aging, non-youth) was. The idea is that we facilitate all different groups in our congregations.

- Safeguarding: We were told to get our necessary Safeguarding certificates. St James scores quite good in this area.
- Care for Creation, towards Net Zero: This was a repeat of last year's theme and a wake-up call to be a good example as a church engaging in environmental matters. The program focuses on buildings and carbon emissions. Maybe we should try to cycle to church.
- Racial Justice: We heard that some groups in the church might feel slightly ostracised because they speak a different language or have different customs. Still we should give thanks for the gifts and beauty of human diversity and commit to help ending racism and discrimination.

Anyway, it's quite entertaining, it's great to catch up with people you don't see a lot, and lovely to spend some quiet time with God's family.

## Church Council Report (Matt Thijs)

What is the role of the church council? In 2016, the council produced a statement summarising its role: *"The church council is an elected group that works with the chaplain to seek God's direction as we build a loving and healthy church together and reach out to others in mission. We do this by generating and implementing actions and policies that are grounded in prayerful reflection."*

In practice this means that the council takes responsibility (together with the chaplain) for co-leading the church. It does this by helping to make decisions, both large and small, regarding the direction and priorities of the church. It consists of a combination of ex-officio members and elected representatives, with a mixture of spiritual and legal responsibilities. The Church Council shares with the Chaplain in the decision-making process, and met eight times in 2024. A smaller Standing Committee consisting of the chaplain, the churchwardens, and two other council members meets in-between Council meetings to carry out the actions agreed by Council.

The Council is made up of the following members:

- Chaplain
- Two Churchwardens (elected annually)
- One Diocesan Synod Representative (ex-officio; elected tri-annually)
- Two Archdeaconry Synod Representatives (elected tri-annually)
- Ten elected lay members-one (one of which is usually treasurer and another secretary)
- In addition up to two members may be co-opted onto council

In 2024 the following members served on church council:

Matt Thijs (Chaplain), Peter Stretton and Fredrik Knoeff (Churchwardens), Liesbeth Kanis (Diocesan Synod Representative), Fulco Jongsma (also secretary) and Sue Kirby (Archdeaconry Synod Representatives), Stephan Hinderer, Anja de Reus, Simeon Wentink, Paul Leach, and Rhys Whomsley (Council members), and Kwinten Vanwijnsberge and Karen Martinez Meza (co-opted). The treasurer (Boaz Kuiper) opted not to be on council.

Warm thanks are extended to the outgoing council members for their devoted service. If you are interested in standing as council member, please visit [www.stjames.nl/agm](http://www.stjames.nl/agm) or speak to Matt.

## Electoral Roll (Stephan Hinderer)

The Electoral Roll of the Church of St James Voorschoten stands at 86 at the time of the Annual General Meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025. In 2024 the number on the Electoral Roll was 98. As per the Church of England Church Representation Rules, a new Electoral Roll was prepared this year.

## Safeguarding (Sue Kirby)

This year has been another busy year for safeguarding. With media focus on the Church's past mistakes, it is easy to miss that safeguarding, as Bishop Robert says, is 'a theological priority and integral to the mission of the church'. When done properly and with sensitivity, safeguarding can ensure that our community and church are both safe spaces and safe places for everybody.

Following diocesan guidelines and procedures for safeguarding is mandatory and, as the topic can be huge, we have developed at St James a policy with guidelines designed to help support all our activities. Our goal is to make safeguarding part of the fabric of everything we do; not to restrict anything but to encourage everyone to think, 'Is this safe for everybody, including myself, - physically, mentally and spiritually? We follow best practice as recognised by the Church of England, streamlining necessary admin to make things easier to manage. As ideas evolve and procedures change, we incorporate them into our working practices. St James currently has over 40 volunteers who have been safely recruited, cleared and have done some of the excellent training modules provided by the diocese. People now will openly ask what to do, how to proceed and whether action needs to be taken. It is heart-warming to see how our community cares for each other and for others. During the coming year, I expect to retire and Mattie van der Velden Kieviet is currently following the process for taking over this vital part of our church life.

### Treasurer's Report (Boaz Kuiper)

#### **Financial Accounts 2024**

- We roughly broke even, as we expected during the update to the congregation: extra income in Q4 made up for Q1-3.
- Drop in rental income at the end of the year was compensated by increased donations through PGS.
- Salaries and diocese contribution were a bit more than we expected up front, due to Diocesan increase.
- Stable financial situation, however we are a bit behind on our reserves. At the end of 2023 we used our reserves to pay off loans on Ambachtspad. As a result, our reserve levels are around 45.000-50.000 euros, which is below the preferred amount of 60.000 euros (6 months of church operating costs).

#### **Budget 2025**

- If we see the same trend in PGS and we have the same Diocese contributions as in 2024 we would hope to roughly break even.
- However, the estimated training costs for our reader (Marcos Vieira) and enquirer (Matthew Payne) are an additional 2000 euros. Church Council may want to organise a special Gift Day to cover these expenses.
- There will be a significant drop in rental income when the renters leave Ambachtspad in mid-April. The future of Ambachtspad will be discussed in Church Council.
- Decrease in salary costs as Javellah has left and we currently do not have a youth worker.
- We will probably spend almost 20.000 euros hiring the BSN hall. The rental costs of the BSN have steadily increased over the past few years so it may be worth considering whether there are alternative venues available for our Sunday services.
- Ideally we would aim for a surplus of 10-15k this year in order to replenish our reserves.



# Financial Statements

Income and Expenditure Year to Date Jan-Dec 2024

	2024 January - December		
	Budget	Actual	Variance
<b>Members Income</b>			
Planned Giving Scheme (pledged income)	119.067	127.407	8.340
Donations (non-pledged income)	0	7.105	7.105
Cash and Digital Collections	2.599	4.084	1.485
Rental Income (Ambachtspad)	25.400	18.600	(6.800)
Other income	0	447	447
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>147.066</b>	<b>157.643</b>	<b>10.577</b>
<b>Expenditure &amp; Outgoings</b>			
Rental BSN hall	16.911	19.743	2.832
Property operating costs	3.000	2.964	(36)
Other hall hire (Bondsgebouw, etc)	4.370	2.718	(1.652)
Bond Interest (Ambachtspad)	3.000	3.000	0
<b>Sub-total Buildings and Property</b>	<b>27.281</b>	<b>28.425</b>	<b>1.144</b>
Ministerial Salaries and on-costs	76.584	<u>82.270</u>	5.686
- Salaries and allowences		76.139	
- Internet / Telecommunication		9	
- Conferences fees and travel		3.394	
- Ministry utensils for services		292	
- Equipment ministry utensils - hardware		600	
- Reader training costs		1.337	
- Visiting priest costs		499	
Outreach, Literature, Conferences, Publicity	5.703	<u>3.191</u>	(2.512)
- Catering (lunches, visits, tea/coffee)		1.066	
- Children and Youth		885	
- Volunteer expenses (VOGs, gifts, etc)		250	
- Outreach		94	
- Church Weekend Away costs		706	
- Courses		190	
Office and Administration	1.718	<u>2.483</u>	765
- Administration		163	
- Printing costs		135	
- Licenses		2.185	
Professional Costs, Bank Fees and Insurance	2.581	<u>2.589</u>	8
- Professional costs		990	
- Insurances		2.000	
- Interest received		(401)	
<b>Sub-total ministry costs</b>	<b>86.586</b>	<b>90.533</b>	<b>3.947</b>
<b>Total Church Operating Outgoings</b>	<b>113.867</b>	<b>118.958</b>	<b>5.091</b>
<b>Total Operating Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>33.119</b>	<b>38.685</b>	<b>5.486</b>
<b>External Giving/Contributions</b>			
Diocese and Affiliation Contributions	16.000	18.465	2.465
Planned External Giving - Mission Partners	17.500	18.740	1.240
<b>Total External Giving</b>	<b>33.500</b>	<b>37.205</b>	<b>3.705</b>
<b>Net Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>(301)</b>	<b>1.480</b>	<b>1.781</b>
<b>External Giving/Contributions</b>			
Diocese and Affiliation Contributions	11%	12%	
Planned External Giving - Mission Partners	12%	12%	
Total external giving	23%	24%	

Balance Sheet 2024

	December 2023	December 2024	Variance
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Bank and Cash	56.388	49.044	(7.344)
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>56.388</b>	<b>49.044</b>	<b>(7.344)</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			
Creditors	(14.484)	0	14.484
Appeal/donation to be paid	(3.185)	(6.820)	(3.635)
Rent deposit	(2.500)	(1.500)	1.000
Rent accrual	(1.900)	(4.500)	(2.600)
Sundry accruals	(65)	0	65
Costs accruals	0	(490)	(490)
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>(22.135)</b>	<b>(13.310)</b>	<b>8.824</b>
<b>Current Assets less Liabilities</b>	<b>34.254</b>	<b>35.734</b>	<b>1.480</b>
<b>Fixed Assets</b>			
Buildings	750.000	750.000	0
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<b>750.000</b>	<b>750.000</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Long Term Liabilities</b>			
Ambachtspad bonds (due Dec 2028)	(75.000)	(75.000)	0
<b>Total Long Term Liabilities</b>	<b>(75.000)</b>	<b>(75.000)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>709.254</b>	<b>710.734</b>	<b>1.480</b>
Represented by:			
<b>General Reserves</b>			
• General Reserve b/fwd		709.254	
• Building revaluation			
• Change in provisions			
• Surplus (Deficit) for Current Year		<u>1.480</u>	
• Balance c/fwd	709.254	710.734	
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>709.254</b>	<b>710.734</b>	<b>1.480</b>

## Budgets 2025 - The Church of St James Voorschoten, The Netherlands

	2025 2025 Jan-Mar	2025 April-June	2025 2025 July-Sep	2025 2025 Oct-Dec	2025 2025 total
<b>Members Income</b>					
PGS - Pledged income	32.820	24.818	28.493	41.277	127.407
Gift / donations - not pledged	385	5.470	1.250	0	7.105
Cash collections and digital collections	990	1.178	1.161	755	4.084
Rental income	4.500				4.500
Other income		0	0	447	447
				0	0
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>38.695</b>	<b>31.466</b>	<b>30.904</b>	<b>42.479</b>	<b>143.543</b>
<b>Expenditure &amp; Outgoings</b>					0
					0
					0
Rental BSN hall	5.460	7.213	2.020	5.050	19.743
Property operating costs	300	300	300	300	1.200
Other Hall hire	361	300	995	1.062	2.718
Bond Interest (Ambachtspad)	750	750	750	750	3.000
<b>Sub-total Buildings and Property</b>	<b>6.871</b>	<b>8.563</b>	<b>4.064</b>	<b>7.162</b>	<b>26.661</b>
					0
Ministerial Salaries and on-costs	16.907	21.660	17.888	18.015	74.470
Salaries and allowances					0
Internet / Telecommunication					0
Conferences fees and travels					0
Ministry utensils for services					0
Equipment ministry utensils - hardware					0
Reader training cost	500	500	500	500	2.000
Visiting priest cost					0
Outreach, Literature, Conferences, Publicity	1.154	66	1.133	838	3.190
Catering - senior, lunch, visits, tea/coffee					0
Children and Youth					0
Costs volunteers - VOG, gifts, ...					0
Outreach					0
Weekend away cost					0
Courses					0
Office and Administration	505	300	1.397	282	2.483
Printing costs					0
Licenses					0
Professional Costs, Bank Fees & Insurance	951	663	480	495	2.589
Insurances					0
Interest received		0	0	0	0
<b>Sub-total ministry costs</b>	<b>20.017</b>	<b>23.189</b>	<b>21.397</b>	<b>20.130</b>	<b>84.733</b>
					0
<b>Total Church Operating Outgoings</b>	<b>26.888</b>	<b>31.752</b>	<b>25.462</b>	<b>27.292</b>	<b>111.394</b>
					0
<b>Total Operating Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>11.807</b>	<b>-286</b>	<b>5.442</b>	<b>15.187</b>	<b>32.149</b>
					0
<b>External Giving/Contributions</b>					0
Diocese and Affiliation Contributions	4.583	4.606	4.606	4.669	18.465
Planned External Giving - Mission Partners	3.925	3.925	3.925	3.925	15.700
Local Social Welfare	0	0	0	0	0
Special Collections paid	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total External Giving</b>	<b>8.508</b>	<b>8.531</b>	<b>8.531</b>	<b>8.594</b>	<b>34.165</b>
					0
<b>Net Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>3.299</b>	<b>-8.818</b>	<b>-3.090</b>	<b>6.592</b>	<b>-2.016</b>

## Independent Examiner's Report (Brian Routledge)

To the Wardens of St James, Voorschoten

Dear Peter and Fredrik,

As requested, I have reviewed and examined the 2024 accounts of St James Voorschoten. The analysis is not a full professional audit and therefore has a limited scope and has been carried out to the best of my knowledge and my abilities. I consider the accounts and supporting files to represent a true and fair disclosure of the financial situation of St James and of its income and expenditure for the year 2024.

Many thanks, especially to Thérèse Jongsma for her clear and organised maintenance and preparation of the accounts, and to Boaz Kuiper for his significant contributions to presenting the documents in a professional manner.

Brian Routledge

*Received by email on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025*

### Ministry to children and youth

*Lizelle Thijs (First Steps; ages 0-3)*

First Steps has had another fantastic year! It's been so wonderful seeing the group grow and learn more about Jesus. Having the library to ourselves has been a real game-changer! All the space allows the kids to really run around and make some happy noise!

We usually start off with some calmer activities like puzzles, Duplo, and playdough, which helps everyone settle in nicely. Then we sing some songs – we get together on the carpet, sometimes with instruments and dancing – definitely a highlight! After the singing, we share a Bible story, using lots of pictures and props to make it easy for the little ones to understand.

We finish up with a simple prayer, and it's lovely when some of the children join in.

We also play some more active games, which the children absolutely love! One of the highlights this year was playing hide-and-seek with bike lights in the dark after our lesson about shining our Jesus light. It was so much fun!

After that, we do a simple craft related to the story. It's a great chance to chat with the kids about the story and how much Jesus loves them.

We're so blessed to have such a brilliant team of volunteers. They're amazing at bringing God's love to the littlest members of St. James. We really appreciate all they do!

*Rebekka Gelders (St Js Club; ages 4-10)*

This past year we had approximately 8 children between the ages of 5-11 regularly attending St Js Club. The club consists of 7 volunteers trying to divide the sessions per Sunday. We are following the guidelines of a syllabus and currently having Bible characters as the theme to follow. The age gap is rather a challenge for the volunteers to divide the attention properly and get the best lesson in a very short time for all ages. It had been decided that to give the older children some more challenge during the lesson that they receive an additional questionnaire adjusted to each lesson while the younger ones do a craft. There they must read a Bible passage and try to find answers to the questions given. It has been received well by some children. The lessons are usually 20 minutes long in which we try to cover a Bible story, game, craft and prayer/song.

We are planning to have a moment in one of the services to give a bit of attention to the children that are moving to the next group (from First Steps to St Js Club and then to Youth).

*Kwinten & Julia Vanwijnsberghe-Bolt (Youth; ages 11+)*

The St James Youth ministry aims to support our youth in the age of 11 to 18. Currently, we count 17 young people that join the youth program that consist of three main focus areas: Sunday sessions during the service, periodic social events on Friday evening, and participation of youth in the worship through music.

The Sunday sessions are held 2 to 3 times per month depending on the availability of sufficient youth volunteers. During the session we take time to connect, pray and discuss a theme or topic making use of materials from Energize, Youth Alpha, different books or material developed by the youth leader/volunteer. We might also try biblebasics.nl in the future. Examples of topics covered are for example different parables, prayer, healing and being a Christian at school and such with non-Christians. Usually, between 3 and 6 youth participate.

On a periodic basis social events are organized; we feel this as an important part of the program to better get to know the youth and allow for connections to be made among the youth. The social events take place on Friday evening and are hosted at someone's home or

at an event. Examples of social events that took place are bowling, ice skating, game night, movie night. New in the past year is the collaboration with the youth ministry of ICL; several joined sessions were organized that were well appreciated by the youth and the volunteers.

In the past year we have encouraged participation of the youth in the service through music. The initial focus was to form an all age band. A group of youth and children practiced together and performed about 3 times in the service. After the Christmas holidays, the format was further evolved and the youth is now being included as part of the regular worship team instead of a separate all-age band.

In the past year the organization and leadership of the Youth ministry has been supported by our youth worker Javellah with vital support of a group of youth volunteers. Javellah was on maternity leave from June to October 2024. During this period Julia and Kwinten stepped in to coordinate the program. At the end of 2024 Javellah has completed her assignment as youth worker. While deeply appreciating her contributions the council found that the language barrier has posed barriers to connect with the youth as most of the sessions are held in Dutch. The replacement of the youth worker position is subject to discussion and decision by the new council, following the AGM.

For the coming time the youth program will continue to be coordinated by Julia and Kwinten together with the volunteers. In total there are now 6 youth volunteers. More volunteers are very welcome to allow for more flexibility to plan the Sunday and social sessions (especially now that there is no youth worker).

### Rachel Kurian (Evergreens)

The Evergreens is a somewhat organic St James Church group initiated in 2014 in response to concerns raised by the pastoral team that some 'senior' members of St James felt 'hidden' in the priorities and activities of the church. The Evergreens lunch and discussion provided a space where their spiritual and practical concerns could be given attention and where their friends could also be invited. The format included a warm lunch, Bible readings/thought of the day/hymns/sharing of experiences/ideas. They were also asked their opinions on what they felt was important to support them. The first 'Senior' meal was a 'summer lunch' in June 2014 at De Ontmoeting which fell under the Protestant Church of Voorschoten. This lunch was highly appreciated by the group, and assumed a more structural form, once a season, the most elaborate being the Christmas meal (turkey/ham, Christmas pudding, mince pies, etc). The dates were proposed and agreed in advance, and emphasis was given on having home-made food as much as possible- even home-made jams as takeaway presents. We also welcomed people outside the group, including beyond the St. James Church the church, and many did come. We were basically a group of some four volunteers, including the Youth Minister. Shortly thereafter the name "Evergreens" was adopted for this group.

There was a break in these get-togethers during the COVID 19 pandemic. There was a tea event organised at the Dorpskerk Voorschoten and the Evergreens lunches started up shortly after. Again these meetings were stimulated by the expressed demand of members of the group. These lunches took and continue to take place at De Boschbloem, a local neighbourhood centre near the British School, which allows St James to use their facilities. The format remains more or less the same, and it has also become a welcome space for any St James members and others who have the time and who would like to join. We have therefore referred to these events as the Evergreens and St James community lunch and try to do them four times a year in line with the seasons and the Biblical events surrounding them. The numbers have since increased, and in December 2024, we had around 24 persons for the meal. The main challenges include getting sufficient volunteers/helpers (some members are leaving or travelling) and transport for the more vulnerable.

## Matthew Payne (Discernment Process)

In summer 2024 I began the process of discerning a vocation to ordination in the Church of England.

Since November 2024 I have been participating in a series of training sessions given by the Diocese of Europe covering a wide range of topics including vocation, theological education, the parish system, order in the church and ecumenism. These have been conducted via Zoom as the 'enquirers', as those who are taking part in the discernment process are called, are spread across the Diocese of Europe.

At the end of January, I went to London for a 3-day conference where I met the Director of Ordinands and my fellow enquirers in person for the first time. We had a very comfortable stay at the Anglican Communion Office on the north side of Notting Hill. This weekend focused more on personal spirituality and the history of the Church of England, including a fun quiz on key dates in British history. Perhaps the highlights of the weekend were celebrating the Eucharist at St Pauls Cathedral on January 25<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, and a visit to Emmanuel Church, West Hampstead. There, alongside a traditional Sung Eucharist, we also enjoyed the earlier 'Joyful Noise Eucharist', where we couldn't move for small children: singing the 'Gloria in excelsis Deo' involved lots of clapping, stamping of feet and jumping!

The next phase of the discernment process involves preparing various paperwork, including essays on priesthood, the Anglican tradition, mission and biblical authority. My upcoming sermons will also form part of the portfolio. And I am even writing my own obituary.

It is exciting, interesting and rewarding to be going through this process. I am enjoying exploring the breadth of the Anglican church and deepening my spiritual life. As I continue to consider what God is calling me to, please keep praying for me and for my wife Karen as well, as we see what this vocation might mean for our family. I am extremely grateful to everyone in St James for all your support and encouragement.

## Marcos Vieira & Liesbeth Kanis (Racial Justice)

Last year 4-8 December, Marcos and Liesbeth attended the **Racial Justice Conference**, which was held in Bad Boll, Germany. The theme was: "**All of Us or None of Us**" voicing the urgency that is being felt to address the issue. Marcos sat on the young people's panel to give his feedback and input. While Liesbeth facilitated and reported back on one of the discussion groups that fed into the Conference statement. A report was given to council and an update given on Sunday morning in church.

Following on from the conference we held **Racial Justice Sunday** on 9 February to call attention to discrimination and racism that still permeates our societies and our churches. Guest speaker pastor Austin Osazuwa preached about Jesus being the "Light of Justice" and talked about The Acts of the Migrants, the topic on which he has written a book. As an outcome, some concrete initiatives, in terms of training and safeguarding, are put forward to be held later this year in Autumn.

As Marcos stressed in his report, Racial Justice, is not only a moral imperative, but it is also a theological one.

## Poornima Whomsley (Mission Support Team)

We are thankful to the Lord for the blessings we have seen in the last year as we seek to encourage all our Church members in mission, with a focus on three main areas:

1. Mission Partners: We have three close partnerships with missionaries whom we support financially and mutually encourage in mission, through prayer (with updates in the Church App), visits to St James, and partnership on specific projects. In June, we welcomed Phil and Linda Gottschalk to our church weekend. Based in Bucharest, they work with Ukrainian refugees and teach in Bible Seminary. Rahman and Nelleke Yakubu visited and shared about their work in Tyndale Theological Seminary & Ghana (where Liz and Walter joined them on a mission trip) and also preached. Betty Sari of IFES also preached and shared about her work with international students locally. We sponsored a café project pilot she is leading in The Hague, where members of SJ extended friendship to international students and answered their questions on our faith. SJ also provided one off gifts through our partners to fund specific missional needs including Ukrainian refugees in Romania, Schiphol Airport chaplaincy, Ugandan children and Church planting in the Diocese.
2. Church Based Missional activities: SJ are currently running the Alpha course in collaboration with ICL and have been privileged to welcome around 24 guests, seeking to deepen or discover more about our faith in a friendly, weekly get together. It is a blessing to all those involved whether as guest, helper, intercessor or leader as we witness the Lord at work in individual lives. Additionally, the annual Shoebox appeal provided Christmas presents to children in poverty across the world.
3. Everyday mission: Being a scattered church, where our everyday encounters are not focused on a single location but may extend far and wide, we have felt a call to do more to equip and encourage the church in everyday mission wherever we are. This year we started a Faith in the Workplace initiative to provide an opportunity for everyone interested to learn, share and support each other as we live out our faith in our day to day lives. We have also launched This Time Tomorrow, to bring our weekday experiences into the Sunday services and encourage one another.

If you would like to learn more or seeking support to explore a missional activity, feel free to reach out to any member of our team: Matt, Steve H, Diana, Liz W, Walter, Rina, Fulco, Liesbeth or Poornima.