



American
International
Church

At the Whitefield Memorial Church
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A Congregation of the United Reformed Church

2024 Annual Report



President's Report

Dear AIC members,

Over the past years, we made the conscious decision as a Council to invest further in growing our community and outreach. The pandemic had impacted us, of course, but we also felt strongly that our church could do more in London. So we planted seeds to grow by developing new opportunities, such as our Jazz Vespers and Eco Church program, but also worked to maintain existing programs such as our Cold Weather Shelter.

These seeds are now bearing fruit. We have regular sponsorship for our Refugee Befriending program, many volunteers signed up to support our Cold Weather Shelter, we grew new partnerships with two historic African American sororities and so much more.

And yes, I am aware as I write this brief message that it will be followed by about 10 pages of detailed reports—probably not your favourite read for a week. But I would strongly recommend you take a few minutes to read these reports. Our AGM will highlight key events, but these reports will show you all the fruits our church is bringing to our community.

I also would like to thank our Council members for sharing their gifts and time with AIC. All these long discussions to make sure we are doing what is best for AIC and reflecting the will of our congregation have been very much appreciated.

In Christ,

Elodie Lasserre, Council President



Senior Minister's Report



Psalms 1 says those who delight in the Lord are “like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.” (Psalm 1:3)

Looking back over 2024, nourishing God’s thriving trees feels like an apt metaphor for our work.

The life cycle of a tree goes from seed to seedling to sapling to mature tree, and our ministries together find themselves in various stages of development.

🌱 **Seeds:** Potential new life waiting to be born, when the conditions are right.

🌱 **Seedlings:** Tiny trees that are brand new and emerging from the ground, with baby leaves and fragile roots, needing food, water and care to grow.

🌱 **Saplings:** Though they may already be larger than a person, these trees are not yet bearing full fruit and blossom. They are growing steadily with basic attention to their care, as their roots get deeper and their leaf canopy expands.

🌳 **Flourishing:** Mature trees bloom and bear fruit, with deep roots and strong trunks, who nourish those around them and send seeds out to multiply.

As I approach a summary of our work this year, I will highlight stages of growth—seedling, sapling or flourishing—with a word at the end about seeds for the future.

Growing in Faith

🌱 The **Open to All art exhibit** this summer, featuring the paintings of Elizabeth Gray-King, opened the doors of the sanctuary with our message of welcome. The exhibit was well received, but it took a significant effort. We may want to partner with artists in the future, but know that, at this stage, a lot of care and nurture will be required.

🌱 **Jazz Vespers** is taking hold. Thanks to the care and nurture of Scott and Jared, Jazz Vespers has consistent attendance that nearly equals Sunday mornings, a growing group of regulars, and a community of musicians whose commitment is deepening.

🌱 **Bible Study** on Zoom, organised and predominately led by Jared, has drawn a unique and dedicated group from countries around the world.

🌳 **Sunday morning worship** has steadily grown in attendance in 2024. Our Sunday services bear fruit in reaching new members and providing nourishment both in person and online. The choir and musicians, thanks to Scott’s leadership, have deep roots along with outstanding music to share every week. Our sermon series in 2024 on Luke, Psalms and James have generated ongoing conversation about how we understand God and live by faith.

Growing with our Neighbours

🌱 When the tent encampment emerged next door to the church, I spoke to residents and businesses who shared our concern about problematic behaviour as well as our desire to show compassion. In May, I worked to join our AIC efforts with the **Fitzrovia Partnership** business improvement district. We assembled a group that included charities (including the Soup Kitchen), law enforcement, local residents, elected officials, businesses, and public service providers. I served as moderator of the group, which continues to meet every 2-3 weeks into 2025. In July, we hosted a community meeting drawing more than 50 people to AIC for a conversation about how to address anti-social behaviour and how to support rough sleepers. When a fire erupted on the site in November, we engaged together to respond to the immediate situation, and we remain in conversation about how to improve the site in the future. These relationships continue to grow even after the critical situation resolves.

🌱 Our relationship with the **theatre community** in our building started to take root and grow. I wrote and delivered blessings for seven shows, and people in multiple companies knew me from previous visits to AIC or had heard about our warm welcome from others. Rehearsal clients have attended Jazz Vespers and Sunday services for the first time. After seven years waiting, I was officially given the opportunity to serve as a Theatre Chaplain, visiting @Sohoplace Theatre twice a month to offer support to the staff there. This helps AIC communicate that we are a place who welcomes those in the theatre community, with intent and understanding.

🌳 Our new Fitzrovia relationships began because we are already known to be a good neighbour to those who are rough sleeping, through the **Soup Kitchen** and **Cold Weather Shelter**, both of which are stable and thriving—though, unfortunately, ever more need emerges in the community

🌳 Brooke has built a solid ground for our **Refugee Befriending Supper Club** with Host Nation, even as the original grant expired.

♣ After two years, Jared and I have built a consistent and active **social media** presence, generating new engagement.

Growing in Partnership

✚ Thanks to Tangy Morgan, we have begun partnerships with two historic African American sororities: **Delta Sigma Theta** and **Alpha Kappa Alpha**. Tangy is a member of DST, and directed them to AIC for meeting space. In July, they hosted their international conference, and a signature event was attendance in worship at AIC on Sunday morning, with 70+ sorors joining the congregation. This led to a connection with AKA for service opportunities. Through Brooke, they sponsored a picnic for our Host Nation refugee friends in June. Both AKA and DST worked together to provide and host a reception at the Equiano unveiling event in June.

✚ We first connected with the **Equiano Society** in 2018, when they discovered that Olaudah Equiano's original burial site in the Whitefield Church grounds (now AIC). In 2024, founder Arthur Torrington fulfilled a long-held dream to install a memorial plaque, now housed on AIC's south boundary wall facing Whitefield Gardens. We hosted an unveiling event in June that packed the church, including leading figures in Black British history and the arts. We look forward to continuing this partnership.

♣ Our relationship with our denomination, the **United Reformed Church**, has grown much closer. The Taiwanese Christian Fellowship of the URC has become a regular volunteer presence at the Cold Weather Shelter. Jake Penny represented AIC as a delegate to the national General Assembly, and Council officially named them as our delegate to the Thames North Synod (the first we have ever had, besides clergy). More plans are taking shape for 2025.



Growing Leaders

✚ Thanks to leadership by Brooke and Jared, we hosted two young people for weeklong **student work experience**. Ryan, a member of AIC, shadowed Jared and I to understand how the church works. Ailish, student at the American School in London, worked with Brooke on Cold Weather Shelter, Refugee Befriending and grants research. We hope to host another student this year.

✚ This year took further steps to professionalise AIC as an employer, with complete revision of the **employee policies** created in 2017. We organised our first in-house staff training in February, with an all-day meeting that included a review of policies, safeguarding, emergency preparedness and de-escalation training, led by Monty, Jared and I, plus a psychologist from the Soup Kitchen on de-escalation. We again employed the services of Lexie Sims, who ensured we are up to date with all relevant laws. Lexie died unexpectedly in early 2025, and I feel her loss, not only for her sage advice, but her bright and caring spirit.

♣ After completion of the staff-wide policies, I began the work of revising **job descriptions** (eight of them) for our team. This involved multiple individual meetings to learn how roles have evolved and the skills required. The process generated a deeper appreciation for our staff, for our reliance on them, and for how to better support each person. In 2025, these new job descriptions will result in a more meaningful performance management process.

♣ Leadership at AIC goes well beyond staff. Our **Council** this year has been outstanding, navigating complicated issues and considering how to help AIC grow and thrive. Since becoming official with the Charity Commission in 2021, the governance responsibilities have increased, and the Council has learned to manage them well in 2024.

Growing Capacity and Sustainability

✚ Thanks to Brooke's leadership, we are moving toward becoming net zero. She registered us as an **EcoChurch**, and we were awarded Bronze status. Her report details several small and informational projects. I am grateful that Will Jungman has come forward to help us consider some larger scale building works in the coming years. We want our church to lead with our values, including care for creation.

✚ After five years of work, we have created all the **policies** required by the Charity Commission, and arranged our Council schedule to maintain regular reviews. This has been a huge effort, if largely invisible. Also noteworthy in 2024: we successfully turned the flat in Stuart Tower into a rental property, as it does not currently suit staff needs, and we established a platform for online giving. All these measures build us as a sustainable institution.

♣ **Latchcourt**, the trading arm of AIC that oversees the international food market and room hire, continues to thrive. Monty's leadership keeps everything running smoothly, with great expertise on how to manage the many competing demands on our building. This year, we completed the upgrade to the fire doors on the Main Hall, and the recent quinquennial inspection revealed no surprises or cause for alarm.

♣ Chris Omaweng's work as our Church Administrator, joined up with Serge Ramin as Treasurer, has improved our

financial management for Latchcourt and provided key insight into trends and forecasts for this important revenue source. Though we will say farewell in 2025, Munish Khanna provided bookkeeping and accountancy for 2024 pro bono to AIC.

♣ The **AIC Foundation**, a separate charity set up to facilitate giving from US taxpayers, has matured into a working system and very important source of giving income for the church, thanks to the leadership of Melissa Janssen and Stuart Brown.

♣ I am deeply grateful for the work of Robin and Michael Brantley, who not only served as **IT support**, but upgraded our office computers for free by rebuilding machines once used by Michael's employer.

Growing Community

✝ Our congregation has changed a lot in the last five years. We needed a way to understand what binds us to AIC, so that we can hear how God might be calling us forward. In the autumn, the Council supported Jared and I in hosting **Listening Groups** across the congregation. There were eight small groups where nearly 50 individuals engaged in deeper conversations about how AIC connects to their personal stories. The insights from the Listening Groups will be shared in a separate report, but there is a noticeable difference already in how people are relating to one another in the community, with new friendships forming across the congregation.

✝ Maintaining an active series of **fellowship** events is critical to integrating the steady stream of newcomers to AIC, and it takes a great deal of effort. Following the departure of Nicole Joffe in 2023, Jared has picked up this work and shaped monthly activities after worship to simply bring people together. These simple events bear abundant fruit in growing a sense of community and belonging at AIC.

♣ In my ninth year at AIC, **pastoral relationships** are both broader and deeper than ever before. This is evidenced by the way I am invited, on behalf of AIC, to be a part of people's lives in moments of joy and sorrow. This year saw more pastoral visits, weddings and memorials than ever before. I officiated a vow renewal for a couple I married at AIC a few years ago, and a wedding in Sweden for a former member. I also officiated at memorial services for our long-time creche worker Monica Watson, for Millicent Jarrett Smith (sister of Rivers Smith) and Sir James Duncan, part of the American Society in London.

Seeds for the Future 🌱

When asked about AIC, I spent most of the year saying, "The Holy Spirit is up to so much right now, we're all just running around trying to keep up." This Annual Report shows that work—the seedlings begun, saplings growing strong, mature trees flourishing and bearing fruit.

In the year ahead, I believe God will continue to help us grow. The world is hungry for our witness of welcome, belonging, community and compassion.

Seeds are being planted to increase our financial sustainability, to thicken ties of community so that newcomers become leaders, to engage more boldly in inviting others to attend worship and events at AIC, and to engage in the work of justice and community—all guided by what we have heard and learned in the Listening Groups.

As always, I am honoured to serve as Senior Minister at AIC, and give thanks to be doing this work together.

Faithfully,
Pastor Jennifer



Associate Minister's Report



In our autumn 2024 Listening Groups, we reflected together on the significance and values of our church and how that connects with our own life stories. I shared with the groups I facilitated that I am so glad to minister at a church where we are all trying to reach out a bit farther and a bit wider to those who need God's love the most. And 2024 was a year of expanding that reach in many ways.

Jazz Vespers continued to grow throughout 2024, increasing our average attendance to 54 and reaching a new record high with 115 people attending December's Jazz Carols. We welcomed some phenomenal musicians, several who also joined in the reflective aspect of the service through an interview. Beyond the numbers, we are genuinely creating a community around the monthly service with a greater number of people who are regularly attending and

finding connections with other people at the service. There are also more connections being drawn between the Jazz Vespers community and both our Sunday congregation and volunteer ministries. People are impressed by AIC and the values we display and they decide to try worshipping with us or they hear that we can facilitate their desire to give back through serving others and they have volunteered at the Cold Weather Shelter or helped with Refugee Support ministries. The growth of the service is certainly exciting, and even more so because it does not exist in isolation from the rest of AIC and our efforts are contributing to other areas of our ministry.



Our online presence has continued to be a significant expansion of our reach as well.

We have continued to update our website and carry out a consistent social media approach, and we hear from a lot of visitors that they have watched online before attending in person, or at least that they appreciated finding our values and beliefs clearly and openly stated online. I would say that these are ways that we are bearing witness to the Good News of Jesus in our time, allowing people to clearly hear God's love for them. We have even had a few people whose journey with AIC has been primarily online, worshipping with us because they don't have a familiar community wherever they are or joining our Bible study for a personal engagement with other Christians that they don't have in their circumstances.

Alongside these exciting developments in how we reach out to our neighbourhood beyond the church walls, we have also continued our faithful ministry to each other and our spiritual development. Our ministry to children and families continued with our professionally staffed crèche always ready to receive our youngest members and allow their parents to worship and fellowship while their children are cared for. Children's Church had a strong year with some new teachers added to the rotation and a consistent group of children ages 4-10 who worshipped and learned about God's love for them through lessons, activities, and a relationship with our wonderful teachers. Many thanks to all our teachers. We pioneered a children's choir program for all ages, singing together on Palm Sunday and again at the Nativity Play in Advent. Our youth are experiencing a shift with some of our students entering the busy time ahead of university and a much younger cohort incoming. The youth gathered occasionally throughout the year to serve – including an outreach walk in partnership with the Soup Kitchen and preparing a meal for the Cold Weather Shelter. Adults continued to grow in their faith through a consistent online Bible study group and two museum outings with discussions about faith and the topics conveyed through art.



As our ministry and faith grows, our relationships are deepening as well. Our consistent gathering to check in with each other at coffee hour has helped us to care for each other and ensure that AIC is a place where everyone experiences robust welcome and true belonging. We also had monthly lunch gatherings following worship – from picnics in the park and simple pizza lunch, to our largest Thanksgiving luncheon since the pandemic. Our autumn Listening Groups gathered 41 individuals – a significant number of our active members – and collected profound stories that had not been shared before and will be a key to moving us forward in the direction God is calling us to go together. These stories will be told and the insights from them discerned in 2025.

My own work allows me to represent AIC in campaigning for the good of our city through the alliance we have joined with Citizens UK. We have been a key organisation advocating for the rights and support for refugees and asylum seekers in London, specifically working on a motion at the Greater London Authority for free bus travel. I have also had many

wonderful opportunities to represent our community at interfaith events and gatherings which are building momentum ahead of our hosting an interfaith conference in June 2025.

It is my continued honour to simply facilitate these opportunities for our church to reach out in love and to reach out to God together. We have shared a good year and it is clear that God is at work in this place.

Rev. Jared Jagers

Associate Minister of Faith Formation



Community Engagement and Volunteer Coordinator's Report

The past year has been one of meaningful connections and real growth within our community based initiatives. My heart is truly full of gratitude for the incredible people in our community, working side-by-side for our local area and for one another. At AIC, we hope to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, and I'm so glad to hear from our volunteers and guests that they feel that warmth and invitation when they enter our building. Reflecting on the year, I'm excited to share some of the highlights with you all.

Cold Weather Shelter

This past shelter season, we regularly saw upwards of 14 guests each week. We've again had quite the diverse group, with guests of varying ages from Eritrea, Poland,

Chile, Sudan, Uganda, the UK, Colombia, Algeria, Bahrain, Palestine, etc. The season has been a demonstration of the dedication, compassion, and kindness all of our volunteers embody to help cultivate a welcoming and caring environment for guests. There are many people to thank for all of their time, effort, and service.

Russell Black and Tina Patel once again served as integral volunteers for the season, with Tina providing valuable leadership to volunteer teams and Russell leading room set-up for teams week after week. Abi Stacey and Michele Copeland consistently provided invaluable support during the breakfast shift, ensuring our guests began their day on a positive note. Jorge Sabine and Malina Metodieva were constant staff supports during the morning hours, helping to specifically oversee shelter clean-up. Preethi John and Stephen Howard provided essential overnight support, providing the necessary oversight for a safe and secure shelter environment. Familiar volunteers Holly Howard, Elodie Lasserre, Stuart Brown, Julian Templeton, Serge Ramin, Christian Janssen, Victoria Hu, and Kathleen Pearson contributed their time and care, forming yet again a reliable foundation for our shelter operations. Newcomers Chiao Chung, Traci Brewer, Peter Rousmaniere, Abigail Weir, Garima Seth, Benjamin Mills-Knutsen, Anny Yang, Francesca Al Toun, Éli Chen, and Jacob Boswall added their unique talents to CWS, and their motivation to serve made a valuable difference in our volunteer efforts.

We also had a whole host of teams or groups who joined along this last year! Fresh Fitness Food has previously provided groups of skilled volunteers, and they again have been fundamental at providing exceptional groups who create truly special meals for our guests to enjoy. This year we had the wonderful Multiplex, guided by Patrick Brooker and Lucy Wainwright, provide numerous teams that worked with great efficiency and capability during the breakfast shift. Jared Jagers coordinated a lovely team of youth from AIC to prepare the meal, dessert, and accommodations for our guests. Yufen Chen and numerous volunteers from the Taiwanese Fellowship brought an abundance of joy and warmth to our guests again this season. A remarkable show of community solidarity came from All Saints', Margaret Street, led by Father Alan and Father Peter, who organized members from their parish to fill every volunteer slot for two weeks. Shirley Reyes and her team prepared an amazing Filipino meal for guests while Michelle Miller's book club again brought their delicious chili and homemade cakes - all the while creating an environment of genuine care and connection as they always do. Ethan Wang and his friends from UCL brought enthusiastic support and a desire to give back to their local community. London Business School, under the coordination of the brilliant Tina Clark, came along again this year to help make beds and sponsor a delightful dinner for our guests. GoodGym, led by Area Activator for Camden Alex Murtough, came along multiple evenings throughout the season to ensure



rooms were well prepared with both care and precision. As evidenced, a successful shelter season depends on the combined efforts and collaborative teamwork of many!

We are also deeply appreciative to the volunteers who contributed other forms of support for CWS. A massive thank you to those who took on the vital, yet often unseen, task of routinely laundering items so our guests had clean and comfortable bedding each evening they stayed at AIC. Thank you to those who made donations toward laundry services as well. We also had a few general donations to CWS this year that were very appreciated and hugely beneficial. Thank you to David Aisa Miller for his donation of essential shelter items in November - the donation allowed us to have a consistent supply of hygiene supplies and pantry staples throughout the season. A thank you to Dr. Pooja Basnett and her students, Aisha and Mehseen, from the University of Westminster for their kind donation of pantry essentials and snacks to our shelter in December of 2025. We are also extremely appreciative to Social Bite for their generous donation of hygiene items and gift packages to our shelter during their Festival of Kindness at Christmastime.



Lastly, I want to extend a special sense of gratitude to those from C4WS. A heartfelt thank you to Mary Mansago, whose consistent presence and support were invaluable to both guests and volunteers. We are grateful to Sian Smith for all of her support behind the scenes and for her efforts coordinating shelter at each church day after day. Lastly, a massive thank you to Nikki Barnett for her exceptional leadership across all areas related to shelter - we are thankful for the ways she helps unite and support AIC and other C4WS churches in this shared work.

Refugee Befriending Programme

The Refugee Befriending Programme has kept its aim of fostering integration and cultural exchange, with our Supper Clubs in partnership with HostNation serving as spaces for continued connection and community. Each supper club hosted around 50 guests each, and were put on through the collective efforts of Pastor Jennifer, HostNation staff, AIC volunteers, and hired caterers or sponsors. Our March event featured the culinary talents of Chef Belitha, a refugee chef trained through Migrateful who has previously received befriending through HostNation. Belitha made a trio of dishes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, offering a taste of her home to the larger group. The evening would not have gone as smoothly without our incredible volunteers: Matenyeh Kaba, Natalie Tikhonovsky, and Preethi John. The event in May was Italian themed and was sponsored by the kindness of Fresh Fitness Food. They not only crafted a memorable Italian meal for the evening, but also supplied a whole team of amazing volunteers to help with set-up, hosting and clean-up as well. June brought a fantastic picnic event to celebrate Refugee Week, hosted by the incredible women of AKA's Royal Pearl Society. AKA sponsored all of the food and also brought games and music to help create an atmosphere of fun for guests. The July event was again catered by Fresh Fitness Food and their team of volunteers supplied a summer evening of bespoke menu items they had recently crafted. We also were able to enjoy live music from Kathleen Pearson's band, Kat & Co! It was a great way to spend a summer evening. October's event showcased the culinary talents of our neighbors, Hiba Express, with their authentic Lebanese cuisine. A dedicated team from London Business School provided a wonderful team of volunteers to help ensure the evening flowed smoothly. Finally, our December Supper Club, thanks to Social Bite's Festival of Kindness, showcased a classic British Christmas - complete with all the traditional trimmings. We once again had a team from London Business School come out to volunteer. They not only prepared the entire donated meal, but also helped create a truly special and memorable evening for all. Finally, all of these events could not be possible without the continued partnership with our friends at HostNation. I am grateful to Anneke Elwes and Rossana Horsley specifically for their collaboration in planning all of these memorable events.

Beyond the Supper Clubs, we have been engaging in community oriented work with others who also work with refugees and asylum seekers. I was able to receive training from Google, made possible through Camden Giving's Community Leadership Programme, related to our Refugee Befriending Programme. It was a great experience that provided opportunities to learn, network, and tap into the expertise of Googlers and community experts. It opened doors to a vibrant network of local charities and businesses, and allowed us to create a new partnership with Sam Eccles from local Camden based charity Engage Here. Thanks to a grant from Camden Giving, we are actually working on offering art workshops with Engage Here to local refugees and asylum seekers in 2025. I also have been able to meet other local charities through the Camden Borough of Sanctuary VCS Forum and through monthly Westminster Outreach & Coordination meetings hosted by the charity Unfold. We also have collaborated with Udai AbuLteaf from the American School in London to provide Arabic and English language exchange classes! These areas



of expansion have already opened new avenues for connection and we look forward to the ways in which they continue to foster opportunities to broaden the programme's reach and impact.

Eco Church

This past year has been a period of significant progress in our journey towards greater sustainability. We were thrilled to achieve Bronze Eco Church Status from A Rocha UK in April 2024, a milestone that reflects AIC's commitment to environmental stewardship. This achievement is a public declaration of our desire to prioritise the earth's well-being in all we do, specifically in the five areas of church life: worship and teaching; buildings and energy; land and nature; community and global engagement; lifestyle. AIC also became part of the Camden and Brent Business Climate Challenge programme. We received an eco audit from a team of engineers at Turner & Townsend in the summer of 2024

through the programme. The report from the audit included practical ways AIC can move forward in our eco goals to reduce our footprint and eventually become a carbon neutral building. Through participation in this programme, we were able to track our electric, gas, water, and oil usage through their IO-Gen platform. Reductions in all areas were noted for 2024! In November of 2024, we took another important step in our goals by implementing a comprehensive recycling and compost system throughout the building. This initiative not only provides essential recycling bins, but also encourages everyone who uses our space to participate in adopting more sustainable habits.

We were also able to grow community connections in relation to our environmental efforts. Thanks to the coordination from the National Churches Trust, we welcomed the talented team from Art Machine to revitalize our market garden. A team of roughly 13 came along on a warm July day to help weed existing plants around the building and bring creative vision to our small garden area by constructing a small greenhouse for fresh herbs and plants, building a tiny water reserve, laying some fresh pebbling in the area, and generally creating a more inviting and productive space for building users. Also in the summer, we had a team from GoodGym come along to help us with a recycling project. The volunteers came on site to help load a van up with materials needing recycled and ran to the Camden Recycling Centre to help us properly recycle it all! Yet another area of growing partnership is with the University of Westminster's Cavendish Living Lab. AIC and the Living Lab are exploring ways we may be able to collaborate to cultivate our own herbs, fruits, and vegetables on site. These examples represent a significant step towards not only expanding our partnerships, but also creating a network of community support for our environmental efforts as well.

Looking Ahead

This year's journey has been one marked by programmatic progress and expansion, as well as deepening of community connections. We've witnessed the power of collaboration through our dedicated volunteers, fellow charities, local businesses, and even the Council. Looking ahead, we are committed to deepening these partnerships and further expanding AIC's reach. Our shared dedication will drive us to enhance existing initiatives and explore new opportunities, ensuring our work continues to create positive, lasting change.

Thank you for all of the ways you have supported this work, and I look forward to the ways in which we will continue to work together.

With gratitude,

Brooke Rowan

Community Engagement and Volunteer Coordinator



People and Staffing Report

Introduction

A total of 6 key staff with 9 part time staff constitute the staffing that is responsible for AIC's smooth functioning. The majority of the work they do is invisible but so crucial for the effective functioning of our Ministry and showcasing that beauty, peace, inclusion, diversity can be co-created and can co-exist. The church is committed to nurturing a culture of growth, accountability, and excellence.

Key Developments in 2024

Co-Production of a Collaborative Performance Development System

The large focus has been to establish a Performance Development System (PDS). The goal of AIC is to build a supportive, collaborative, and empowering environment where staff and volunteers can grow in their roles, contribute effectively to the mission, and align their work with the church's values and objectives.

The next step is putting in place a more robust and structured performance appraisal system. This system when completed will provide clear expectations for roles, opportunities for professional and personal growth, and a consistent structure for feedback and performance assessment. This process include evaluating individual performance, providing constructive feedback, and setting goals for the upcoming year. The appraisals aimed to recognize achievements and identify areas for improvement.

Training and development where needed is also being put in place.

Collaborative Exercise of Crafting Job Descriptions

This process was done as a participatory approach, involving staff, and led by the Senior Minister. The process was inclusive, collaborative and led to buy in of the job descriptions. The Council reviewed and approved the revised job descriptions of the Pastors.

Staff Retention

There have been no hires during this period, which is a testament to loyalty and retention. The newest member is Brooke and she has dived into her role and settled in during the year that she has been with the church.

Volunteer expansion

There are several committees which exist to make the different activities function. Several committees have expanded like the outreach advisory group, the volunteer group for refugee programme as well as winter shelter programme. The time and effort every one puts in appreciated. Pastor Jared also uses volunteers to deliver the activities such as coffee hour, Sunday School, AIC hosted fellowship or events.

Internship Program

Over the summer, we had a work experience student who contributed significantly to our work.

In Memoriam

Lexie Sims, who worked to revise AIC's Staff Handbook, passed away suddenly. Her death was shocking news to those who knew her. We pray for her soul to rest in peace and for her family to gain strength during this time of grieving.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve God and our congregation in this way.

Gratefully,

Preethi John, People and Staffing



Treasurer's Report



Reading through this annual report I am amazed at the extent of good work that AIC is doing on Tottenham Court Road in the heart of London. Whether it is the refugee befriending programme, the cold weather shelter, the support we give to neighbours and friends who use our building, the ministry to regulars and newcomers alike and the diverse ways we seek to reach new audiences, I am proud to be part of this organisation and the work we are doing here.

In many ways AIC therefore is thriving, growing, developing. I am thankful for what we have and what we are able to do with it. I am thankful too to all those who care enough about it to give with generosity. The work that we do wouldn't be possible without your gifts. So, thank you.

We are lucky to have a strong financial base, and this is what we will continue to strengthen so that we can continue operating, growing and serving in 2025 and beyond. My thanks go to Serge Ramin who has served the congregation as treasurer in recent years and who recently handed over to me.

As has been alluded to by Jennifer, Munish Khanna, accountant for over 15 years who provided his services pro-bono since 2020, has become unwell. As such our 2024 accounts are unfinished and this has caused us issues in finalising the 2024 accounts and preparing the 2025 budget.

Since late February when the situation became critical, Jennifer and I have made the decision to find a new accounting partner going forward. We have held interviews with prospective firms and are confident we have found a suitable new partner going forward. West and Berry currently handle the accounts of the Soup Kitchen and came with their recommendation. We are hopeful that we can build positive working relationships with them quickly as they help to finalise the 2024 accounts and support us through 2025.



We will plan to hold an additional congregational meeting to present those accounts once they are finalised.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Munish for all his hard work for AIC over many years and wish him a swift recovery back to full health very soon.

And so, to the future, and the preparation of the 2025 budget. This is a budget that looks to build our base such that the fantastic work that we are doing and that is bearing fruit can continue and indeed mature.

Given the context, preparation has not been easy. We have good figures, but where there are gaps in 2024 I have used estimates and averages to support the process. I have done this for both income and expenditure. I have also budgeted for increased income in 2025. This is made up of:

- Increased giving
- Grant income

New Income Streams

I have budgeted for:

An increase in giving of 20% versus the estimated actual giving figures for 2024. With general giving increasing by inflation, we will undertake a new drive asking those who can, to give to AIC to support the work that is happening here. I am looking for this workstream to raise an additional £12,500 this year. I believe this to be an ambitious but reasonable target and would hope that this can be exceeded.

Much of our financial stability is based on the continued strong performance of Latchcourt – we are grateful to Monty for his hard work and leadership in this area. Notwithstanding that, we are looking for Latchcourt to increase income by 10%. Income from rooms and market stalls are projected to grow in line with inflation, and I am budgeting for **c.30K** additional income from new income streams. How can we diversify what we do, could we do more and different events, could AIC be a filming location? We will seek creative thinkers and those with energy and an entrepreneurial spirit to support Monty to explore these opportunities.



Finally, grants. We know that the URC are keen to fund the sort of work we are doing, and other funders seem willing to offer potential support for our community and eco efforts. We project that c.50% of the community engagement and volunteer co-ordinator role could be covered and I would be hopeful we can find other sources of grant income to make up the shortfall and increase our income by **£20,000** overall in this stream.

These proposed revenue increases are based on more than hope—we are organising to do the work together. Council has created a Revenue Task Force to bring attention and energy to these efforts, and we are currently recruiting additional members. Please consider if you would like to be a part of it!

Expenditure is anticipated to rise by 4% in line with inflation with the exception of personnel expenditure. This is projected to increase by an overall of 3.5%. All staff will receive an increase, with lowest paid staff receiving a greater uplift. This leaves us with a slight deficit projected for 2025 of circa £30,000.

Faithfully,

Oliver Lewis, Treasurer



Investment, Use of Investment and Cash Reserves Policy

Last Review and Update November 2024

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The Congregation of the American International Church (hereinafter referred to as the "AIC" or the "Church") delegates the responsibility for managing its financial affairs to the council of the AIC (the "Council"). This includes investing AIC funds (the invested funds, the "Investment Portfolio"), managing the Investment Portfolio, and setting out the minimum level of cash to be held by the AIC in the form of bank deposits (the "Cash Reserves") to provide the AIC with enough liquidity to support its daily operations.
- 1.2 This document sets out how the AIC invests, how the AIC uses the funds in the Investment Portfolio, and what minimum level of Cash Reserves the AIC should maintain (together, the Investment, Use of Investment and Cash Reserves Policy, hereinafter referred as the "Policy").
- 1.3 The Policy also sets out the AIC guidelines on conflicts of interest, as they relate to members of the Council with regard to the Policy.
- 1.4 The Council delegates the monitoring and oversight of the Investment Portfolio, and the making of investment recommendations regarding the Investment Portfolio to a newly established committee of the AIC, the investment committee (the "Investment Committee"). This document sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Investment Committee.
- 1.5 The Policy incorporates by reference the guidance for trustees from the Charities Commission for England and Wales regarding (A) Charities and Investment Matters; updated as of 1 August 2023; and (B) [Managing a charity's finances: planning, managing difficulties and insolvency, updated on 23 September 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-financial-difficulties-insolvency-in-charities-cc12/managing-financial-difficulties-insolvency-in-charities).
(A): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-investment-matters-a-guide-for-trustees-cc14/charities-and-investment-matters-a-guide-for-trustees>
(B): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-financial-difficulties-insolvency-in-charities-cc12/managing-financial-difficulties-insolvency-in-charities>
- 1.6 The Council will review the Policy on an annual basis. Changes to the Policy can be made only by affirmation of a majority of the members of the Council.

2 Investment Principles

- 2.1 The investment principles contained herein take into consideration the AIC's anticipated financial needs and its tolerance for investment and financial risk, as recommended by the Investment Committee and approved by the Council.
They are intended to provide guidelines, where necessary, for ensuring that the Investment Portfolio is managed in a manner consistent with the financial goals of the AIC, whilst providing sufficient investment flexibility to address changes in capital market conditions and or in the financial circumstances of the AIC.
- 2.2 Return considerations
The AIC is committed to a long-term, balanced approach to i) preserve and enhance the real purchasing power of the Investment Portfolio, and ii) provide a stable stream of cash current income to the AIC, available, if necessary, to fund the AIC operations.
- 2.3 Social responsibility
In making investment decisions, the Investment Committee takes into account environmental, social and governance considerations, and strives to act as a responsible investor.
The AIC does not wish directly to profit from, or provide capital to, activities that are materially inconsistent with Christian values, and are also mindful of the danger of undermining the credibility, effectiveness and unity of the AIC's witness, were they to do so.
The AIC adheres to the ethical [investment policy of the United Reformed Church](#), unless the AIC decides to develop its own ethical investment policy.
- 2.4 Investment allocations
If the Investment Committee determines at any time that certain AIC Cash Reserves are not required to cover annual operating expenses (the "Surplus Reserves"), it shall make a recommendation to the Council that these Surplus Reserves be allocated to the Investment Portfolio. Upon approval from the Council, the Investment Committee will be responsible for investing these Surplus Reserves in line with the Policy.

3 Investment Committee

3.1 Purpose

The Investment Committee is responsible for the management and oversight of the Investment Portfolio. The Investment Committee is responsible for i) making investment recommendations to the Council for approval, ii) recommending investment managers for the Investment Portfolio for appointment and or removal; and iii) implementing the decisions made by the Council regarding the Investment Portfolio.

The Council is responsible for i) the approval of the investment recommendations of the Investment Committee, and ii) the appointment and or removal of investment managers for the Investment Portfolio.

3.2. Selection of Investment Managers

The Investment Committee selects investment managers for recommendation to the Council to manage the Investment Portfolio. Given the current size of the Investment Portfolio, the Council prefers low-cost fund management solutions, such as investing in pooled investment vehicles and managed funds, and or indexed fund solutions, vs. appointing investment managers with discretionary power over investment decisions.

3.3 As of November 2024, the AIC is invested in 4 socially responsible funds managed by the Bank of Montreal ("BMO"):

[BMO Responsible Global Equity 2 Inc](#)

93863.53889 Shares

[BMO Responsible Sterling Corporate Bond 2 Inc](#)

124368.4209 Shares

[BMO Responsible UK Equity 2 Inc](#)

208708.5257 Shares

[BMO Responsible UK Income 2 Inc](#)

132396.4601 Shares

3.4 Investment Committee Membership

The Investment Committee consists of the Council President, the Treasurer, and at least one other member of the AIC appointed by the Council.

3.5 Term of appointment

The members of the Committee are appointed for a 2-year term.

Members of the Investment Committee shall hold office until the end of their respective terms. Any vacancy occurring in the membership of the Investment Committee may be filled by the Council at any meeting.

3.6 Periodicity of meetings

The Investment Committee meets at least once a year.

3.7 Performance review

The Investment Committee monitors the performance of the Investment Portfolio against its stated investment objectives.

At least once a year, the Investment Committee formally assesses the performance of the Investment Portfolio and reports to Council, covering following four elements:

Investment performance: How does performance compare against return objectives and appropriate equity and fixed income benchmarks?

Asset allocation: Is the current asset allocation appropriate, or should it be revised?

Environmental, Social and Governance considerations: is the Investment Committee comfortable that the Investment Portfolio meets the AIC's social responsibility requirements?

Investment manager(s) selection: is the Investment Committee comfortable with the Managers appointed to manage the Investment Portfolio?

4 Asset allocation guidelines

4.1 The Investment Portfolio will be allocated across two major components: an equity portion and a fixed income portion. The expected role of the equity portion is to deliver long-term real growth, while the role of fixed income portion is to generate current income, with stable, periodic returns, and offer some protection against a prolonged decline in the market value of the equity portion of the Investment Portfolio.

4.2 Cash investments will, under normal circumstances, only be considered as temporary holdings of the Investment Portfolio.

4.3 The Investment Committee recognizes that the strategic allocation of the Investment Portfolio across broadly-defined financial asset and sub-asset categories with varying degrees of risk, return, and return correlation is the most significant determinant of

long-term investment returns and Portfolio asset value stability.

- 4.4 The Investment Committee expects that actual returns and return volatility may vary from expectations and return objectives across short periods of time. With respect to making recommendations for changes to the Investment Portfolio's asset allocation, the Investment Committee expects to do so only in the event of material changes to i) the Investment Portfolio, ii) the assumptions underlying the use of funds in the Investment Portfolio, and/or iii) the capital markets and asset classes in which the AIC invests.

4.5 Diversification guidelines

Diversification across and within asset classes is the primary means by which the Council expects the Investment Portfolio to avoid undue risk of large losses over long time periods, and the Council will take reasonable precautions to avoid excessive investment concentrations.

As actual asset allocation will vary over time as a result of the varying periodic returns earned on the different asset and sub-asset classes in the Investment Portfolio, the Investment Portfolio may be rebalanced under the procedure set out in section 4.6.

- 4.6 Based on the review of investment performance, incoming cash flow (contributions) or outgoing money movements (disbursements) of the Investment Portfolio, the Investment Committee will make a rebalancing recommendation to Council (the "Balancing Recommendation"). The Investment Committee may make a Balancing Recommendation to the Council at any time.

The Council is responsible for approving the Balancing Recommendation, and the Investment Committee is responsible for implementing the Balancing Recommendation approved by the Council.

5 Investment exclusions

Unless expressly authorised by the Council and the Congregation, the Committee will not recommend any of the following:

Purchasing securities on margin, or executing short sales.

Pledging or hypothecating securities, except for loans of securities that are fully collateralized.

Purchasing or selling derivative securities for speculation or leverage.

Engaging in investment strategies that have the potential to amplify or distort the risk of loss beyond a level that is reasonably expected, given the objectives of their portfolios.

Purchasing individual stocks and bonds.

Investing in hedge funds.

6 Use of the Investment Portfolio

- 6.1 The use of the Investment Portfolio is governed by the Council.
- 6.2 The use of the Investment Portfolio is subject to the guidelines from the UK Charity Commission on managing a charity's finances: [planning, managing difficulties and insolvency, published on 23 September 2024](#).
- 6.3 The Investment Portfolio is available to fund planned capital outlays and expenditures reviewed and approved by the AIC Council as part of the Annual AIC budget.
The Council should review and approve the use of the Investment Portfolio for that year, and explain any planned use of the Investment Portfolio to the AIC congregation at the AIC AGM.
- 6.4 The Investment Portfolio is also available to cover exceptional, unplanned cash shortfalls, subject to 6.2.
- 6.5 The cash income generated from the Investment Portfolio is to be paid into the AIC current account, to cover operating expenses relating to the ministry of the AIC.
- 6.6 Up to 15% of capital can be used annually for approved capital and/or special projects, grant matching, emergency repairs, and unforeseen expenses, unless otherwise authorised by the AIC Council. Alternatively, income may be accrued over multiple years toward larger projects.
- 6.7 Amounts not taken the prior year may be taken in the current year subject to AIC Council approval, and with a target balance of the AIC Investment Account remaining above the original amount of GBP 750,000.

7 Cash Reserves

- 7.1 AIC should maintain at all times minimum Cash Reserves of GBP 50,000, set to represent roughly two months of working capital, throughout the year. At least two people, usually the Treasurer and Senior Minister, will maintain visibility and responsibility for monitoring the Cash Reserves.
- 7.2 The Cash Reserves should be kept with highly reputable and creditworthy banks. As of November 2024, the AIC keeps its Cash Reserves with Barclays Bank and HSBC.
- 7.3 If the Cash Reserves drop below GBP 50,000, the Church Administrator will notify the Treasurer and Senior Minister immediately, who will attend weekly to expected income and expenses. Council should be notified immediately if the balance dips below GBP 35,000 to agree steps to restore the Cash Reserves, as soon as practically feasible. Such steps may include the selling of investments held in the Investment Portfolio.

- 7.4 The Cash Reserves should be adjusted to reflect the payment schedule of capital projects or exceptional expenditure previously approved by the Council as part of the annual AIC budget process (the "Annual AIC Budget") and approved in the AIC AGM, typically held in March.
- 7.5 Surplus Reserves may be swept into the Investment Portfolio, annually, upon approval by the Council, as part of the Annual AC Budget.
- 7.6 The Committee shall review the Reserve policy annually, and report its findings to the Council.

8 Conflicts of interest

The members of the Committee (hereinafter referred to as "Members") stand in a fiduciary relationship to the AIC. As such, Members must adhere to a duty of loyalty to the AIC in all matters involving the AIC's business and other affairs. Members must avoid any appearance of self-interest, including personal gain, in connection with any contract or transaction to which the AIC is a party.

Without limiting the scope of potential duality or conflicts of interest, Members shall be guided by the following:

A Member may not accept compensation for services, a gift or favour, or other thing of value, directly or indirectly, in relation to a matter in which the AIC has an actual or potential financial or other business interest. Receipt of any such thing by a person or entity with or in whom the director has a material identity of interest shall be attributed to the Member for this purpose.

A Member must not use his or her position as a Member to influence the AIC's decisions in matters in which the Member possesses a personal interest.

A Member must use his or her best judgment to determine whether the AIC's best interests are being served by a particular transaction or course of action without regard to the Member's personal interests.

The interests of any person or entity with or in whom a Member has a material identity of interest shall be attributed to the Member.

Whenever a Member believes that there is a matter which may implicate this Conflict of Interest Policy he or she must consult with the President of the Council and disclose the nature and extent of the potential conflict. If the interest of the Member which creates the conflict is of such a confidential nature that disclosure would be improper the Member must nevertheless advise the President that a conflict may exist in the particular matter and shall recuse themselves in any consideration of the matter.

The President shall exercise discretion in taking action in relation to any matter involving this Conflict of Interest Policy. The President may decide to refer the matter to the Congregation, or to a special committee, whose decision shall be final. Information disclosed to, or otherwise coming to the attention of, the President or any such committee shall be treated in confidence and disclosed to other members of the Trustees or the Congregation, or others, only as necessary to serve the AIC's best interests.



Annual General Meeting

Sunday, 17 March 2024

The meeting was quorate as at least 20 members were in attendance.

I. Call to Order

- A. Council President Elodie Lasserre called the meeting to order at 12:16 pm.

II. Financial Matters

A. 2023 Results

1. Council Treasurer Serge Ramin took the congregation through a 2023 review. He provided context to the ongoing economic downturn by showing the steep fall in two prominent UK charities' fundraising amounts (seen on page 14 of the 2023 Annual Report). In contrast AIC's donations have increased from 2022 to 2023 and he expressed gratitude for the sacrifices people have made to support AIC.
2. 2023 actual results were a shortfall of 105K vs a 2023 break-even forecast. The 2024 forecast shows that we are making meaningful steps to close this gap to a shortfall of 42K.
3. Serge referred to the chart that shows how we moved from 2023 budget to 2023 estimated results with detailed commentary (seen on page 14 of the 2023 Annual Report). The unexpected negatives included Gift Aid timing, slightly over-optimistic Latchcourt rentals, legal/support costs and maintenance one-offs.

B. 2024 Budget

1. Serge then took the congregation through the details of moving from the 2023 estimated results to 2024 budget (seen on page 16 of the 2023 Annual Report). The anticipated positives include reduction in legal/marketing and URC rent, an increase in Latchcourt revenue and Giving in line with inflation and having Stuart Tower property rental income. Our investment portfolio is at a comfortable level at 800K.
2. Serge highlighted the work of Latchcourt and AIC teams which continue to work to improve the visibility of Latchcourt financials. This is demonstrated by the Forward Booking Calendar and Activity Trend tracker (seen on page 18 of the 2023 Annual Report). Latchcourt is highlighted as their bookings are a significant source of AIC income (450K) but yet a volatile business so we remain cautiously optimistic.

C. Comments/Questions

1. A concern was raised that we are forecasting a shortfall for 2024 and year/year negative trends. A: Serge replied that 2023 was a year to purposefully invest in AIC to grow attendance and eventually Giving. As we haven't seen Giving (unlike other charities) or congregation numbers decreasing, this strategy is working. We are in a strong financial position even with a shortfall which is amply covered by AIC's reserves.
2. Question also raised whether we are spending dividends or principal as the original intent was to not spend the principal. A: Some clarity may be required in this regard.
3. Question asked if the performance report on the endowment, as well as AIC's Investment Policy can be shared. A: It was agreed that both can be shared.
4. Question asked about who is on the AIC Investment Committee. A: Serge Ramin (current Treasurer), and Rob Thomas and Stephen Howard (former Presidents).
5. Question asked for more colour on the legal fees and property numbers. A: It was not straight-forward to reclaim the Stuart Tower property and took a long time to resolve.

- D. Elodie asked the congregation to vote to approve the 2024 Budget and this was approved by a congregational show of hands vote. One member abstained.

III. Acceptance of Annual Report

- A. Elodie referred to the 2023 Annual Report which was emailed to the congregation and also provided hard copies to anyone who wanted.

IV. Election of Council and Nominating Committee Members

- A. Nominating Committee member Stephen Howard referred the congregation to the hand-out "2024 Slate of Nominees" that lists the council changes that the committee including Shirley Reyes, Oliver Lewis, Pastor Jennifer and himself have managed. This includes two departures, Nicole and Emily, and two new council members - Oliver Lewis who will join as Assistant Treasurer and Helene Donnelly who will take over Membership and Outreach. In addition, Elodie, Michelle and Tangy are renewing their appointments.

- B. Elodie asked the congregation to vote to approve the Slate of Nominees and this was approved by a congregational show of hands vote.

V. Updates on AIC's plans and ministries - Jennifer, Jared, Brooke

- A. Jennifer referred to the Annual Report which gives you a good overview of the impact AIC made in 2023. But what happens on Sundays or even the more churchy aspects (jazz vespers, bible study, choir, etc.) does not show the full impact of AIC. We have purposefully created thick solid lines of relationships with the large numbers of groups and individuals that we come into contact with.
- B. Jennifer, Jared, and Brooke shared stories to demonstrate the wide range of AIC's impact. These included stories from our food market, Cold Weather Shelter, bible study, jazz vespers and Latchcourt customers. All of these examples demonstrated the outreach that AIC is having beyond the Sunday congregation.

VI. Any other Business

- A. Thanks was given to AIC staff - the impact of their outreach cannot be underestimated, and also to everyone on Council for their service.

VII. Closing Prayer and Adjournment

- A. JMK closed the meeting in thankful prayer at 1:05pm.

Submitted by Michelle Miller, Secretary



2024 Leadership Team

Ministry Team

Jennifer Mills-Knutsen, *Senior Minister*
Jared Jagers, *Associate Minister*
Scott Stroman, *Director of Worship and Music*

Church Staff

Monty Strikes, *Business Manager*
Chris Omaweng, *Office Manager*
Alex Brown, *Soup Kitchen Director*
Brooke Rowan, *Community Engagement and Volunteer Coordinator*
Munish Khanna, *Accountant*
Gul Erdogan and Fatima Kammiri, *Crèche*
Clive Munro, *Security*
Malina Metodieva, *Cleaning*

Receptionists

Rosie Armstrong
Amanda Bellamy
Orlando Brooke
KD Choi
Sabine Jorge
Rachel Rowland
Anthony Singh

Church Council

Elodie Lasserre, *President*
Michelle Miller, *Secretary*
Serge Ramin, *Treasurer*
Tangy Morgan, *At Large*
Preethi John, *People and Staffing*
Helene Donnelly, *Membership & Outreach*
Oliver Lewis, *Assistant Treasurer*
Jake Penny, *Welcome & Inclusion*

Nominating Committee

Jan Bagby
Kathleen Pearson
Shirley Reyes
Stephen Howard



American International Church

You are welcome here.

You can belong here, without exception or condition.
Your whole self matters to God and to us.

The American International Church is a community of many races, languages, cultures, faith traditions, nationalities, ages, genders, abilities, financial circumstances, and sexual identities.

Following Jesus, we work to be inclusive, accessible, and open to all.

Here, you can

- form friendships
- serve others
- search for truth and meaning
- work for justice
- cultivate compassion
- find forgiveness
- share grace
- grow in faith
- and in all things, discover God's love.

You can join in a little or a lot,
for a day or a lifetime,
with abundant faith and abundant doubt.

You are welcome here.

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A Congregation of the United Reformed Church