

ST MARY'S ELY

Review of the Year 2025



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Team Rector's Overview

We are in a good season. God has been patiently shaping us as a church through worship, discernment, and our shared life towards a direction that I believe is becoming clear. We are called to live more fully into God's call on us to become a more outward-looking church, and that will require two things of us. First, we will need to grow in attentiveness to what God is doing beyond the walls of the church. Second, we will need to go, with obedience and openness, to engage with the people and places to which God leads us. We are beginning to learn, in practice and not just in principle, what our vision actually requires of us. That learning will be slow and deliberate as we work out together what it looks like to reach every home in Ely, not simply as a slogan, but as something we truly do. There are real financial pressures that require our honest attention and faithful response. But the foundations are firm, the staff team is strong and settled, and there is a genuine momentum among us. There is much to be thankful for, and a clear sense that we are being called to take further steps forward together as a church.

The sections that follow reflect different aspects of our life together. They are not separate strands, but aspects of a shared direction that is slowly becoming clearer among us. I hope they are read in that spirit.

- WHAT GOD HAS BEEN DOING -

A Year of Growing Clarity

Dear friends,

As we once again approach our Annual Parochial Church Meeting, I am giving thanks, as ever, for all that our generous God has been doing among us. This year through worship, teaching, conversations around pastoral care, PCC conversations, and our shared discernment, a picture is continuing to emerge of who we are and who we are becoming.

I often make use of the phrase 'We are here now' as a way of not only locating us in, and naming, present realities, but also to affirm that where we are is right where God is! Right where God has us even! At the head of this reflection therefore I want to articulate where I think we currently are, because I often think we can downplay this sort of thing, and that is that we are actually in a good season. That is not a casual observation, and I'm not offering it as some kind of spin. My honest assessment is that things are good. God has been good to us. There is so much health in this church, in our worship, in the quality of our relationships, in the willingness of so many people to serve, desire to grow, and to engage. We have a strong staff team and a significant raft of support from many, many others, and also, I sense, a genuine openness across our congregations to where God might be leading us next. Yes, we carry some real challenges, of budgets, the normative challenges of growth, and the ongoing work of becoming more than we currently are, but our foundations are firm. We know and trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, and there is a sense of movement, gentle perhaps, but definitely there. I do not say this to encourage us into some sort of complacency, nor to blow anyone's trumpet, but I say it because I think it is important to clearly state where we are now, and to honour God's hand at work among us and for us. What is true right now is that God has been good to us, and we are well placed to respond to however God chooses to call us forward.

That picture is not primarily about our programmes or activity. It is really about the direction we have discerned. And that direction is outward, attentive, and responsive, to be a church learning not only to gather well, but also what it means to be sent.

This sense of calling has not arrived overnight but has grown over time. From our past congregational discernment, a clear sense emerged that God was calling us to learn how to connect outwardly with the communities around us. In last year's APCM I spoke of the need for us to listen more carefully, not only to

what God was doing among us, but to what might be happening beyond our walls. This year that conviction has begun to take a more definite shape. What was previously a discerned sense of direction has now taken shape as a conscious commitment: how do we actively lean into that calling, rather than simply remaining as a church that gathers?

At our PCC away day in autumn 2025, we found ourselves returning to a seemingly simple question: why does the Church exist? The answer we came to was that we are to be a church orientated upward in worship, inward in fellowship, and outward in mission. Up, In and Out. That framework is more than a leadership tool for the PCC. It is an invitation to the whole church.

Our preaching and teaching have also played their part in this. Across our series on prayer, the Five Marks of Mission, Living in Grace, Generous Living, Dangerous Prayers, Questions Jesus asked, and the recent Resurrection Life material, there has been a consistent thread: faith that is not only believed but lived, not only gathered but sent. These are not separate sermon series that happened to share a theme. I believe they reflect the Spirit's patient, formative work among us — shaping us, slowly and together, into a people who carry their faith beyond these walls.

For some years now, our vision as a church has been to reach every home in Ely with the love of Jesus, and to be a community where, whoever you are and wherever you are from, you are genuinely welcomed. That vision has not changed. But this year, something has shifted in how we are beginning to learn to inhabit it. We are moving, slowly and deliberately, from holding a vision to actively learning what it looks like in practice, personally, street by street, relationship by relationship, one conversation and one partnership at a time. The work of the MEG, the deepening of our school relationships, the new community connections forming around us, none of them are separate activities, but they are the early signs that as we shift our focus outward, the community meeting us. They are the beginnings of transforming a vision we have long declared into something we inhabit and live. There is more discernment ahead, for sure, and the vision will sharpen further as we go, but the direction is clear, and we are moving in it together.

The question that naturally follows from all of this is: how do we all begin to carry this same life outward towards the wider community and communities of which we are a part.

The Mission Engagement Group

It is in answer to that question that the Mission Engagement Group, or MEG, has begun to take shape.

The MEG is not simply a new programme, nor is it another item to add to an already busy church calendar. It is a response to our earlier discernment, a practical expression of what we believe God has already been saying to us over recent years, to the question of how we, as a whole church, learn to connect with our community. At its heart are two simple but searching questions: who is God sending us to, and how is God sending us?

The first stage has been modest and deliberate: stepping out into the parish, praying in different places, noticing what is around us, and reflecting together on what we are learning and the experience of visibly acting in public with our faith. This is not dramatic work, but it is significant, because it represents a deliberate shift in posture. From a church that primarily attracts people in, to a church that is learning to go out and pay attention to the world God loves. The point has not been to run events for their own sake, but to begin forming new habits of attention, prayer, listening, giving and receiving hospitality, and reflection. This is formative work as much as practical work, and that kind of change takes time.

Participation so far has been modest, and I think it is right to honestly name that. People often need space to observe, reflect, and grow in confidence. We are at the beginning of this, not the end.

And yet there are already encouraging signs. Visit Ely partnered with us on a new 'Carols around the Beacon' at Christmas, with around 300 people from the local community joining us. Eco Ely approached us to explore environmental projects within the churchyard. Neither of these was our initiative alone. Both affirm that we have discerned rightly, and remind us that God is already at work in our community, ahead

of us, inviting us to join in. Where else might that be the case? The fact that new openings and partnership opportunities have begun to emerge in ways we have not initiated ourselves underlines that part of our task is simply to notice, receive, and join in.

As we move forward, the MEG will serve to encourage this culture of attentiveness to what God is doing in the community around us across the whole church as something that shapes how we understand mission together. Think of it, perhaps, as the church's research and development department, learning what it looks like to live out our faith deliberately missionally, so that in time it becomes second nature to the whole church. Therefore, over time, this will not remain the work of a few. It will become part of the missional life of us all. That is what the MEG is for, not to be a team that does mission on behalf of the church, but to help the whole church learn to live in this way together, and at every stage along the way there will be opportunity to join in.

One Church, Many Congregations

Across our congregations, I think there is cause for much encouragement. New people have gradually joined us across the past year and the welcome and openness that so many experience at St Mary's is not accidental, but it is the fruit of many people choosing, as part of their Sunday worship, to make space for others and to welcome warmly. It has been a particular delight to see members of each congregation keeping an eye out and paying attention to those arriving for the first time over coffee. This is an encouragement, and a reminder that our structures of belonging and care need to grow with that reality of growth and new folk joining.

The eight¹⁵ continues to offer a steady, and deeply valued expression of worship. Its rhythm and depth are a gift to us the wider church as the most stable of our congregations in format, and that provides a base that has enabled us to explore and advance our other forms of worship and service. The nine⁴⁵ has grown in confidence, warm, creative, and now seeking to be intentional about helping people build relationships beyond the service itself. The eleven¹⁵ has seen its eleven¹⁵Kids ministry flourishing and a growing sense of contemporary worship continuing to evolve.

Our Thursday Market Day Communion and Market Day Coffee, under Stephen Leeke's pastoral leadership, draws together a mix of regular congregation, visitors, young people from Highfield Academy, and those who simply find themselves drawn in. That service and coffee afterwards captures something of who we aspire to be, a church with open doors, a table set for all, and a genuine welcome for whoever comes.

ChristChurch deserves a particular word here. Under Graham and Yvonne's leadership, who recently passed the baton to Matthew, ChristChurch has for some time been seeking to explore exactly the kind of community-facing presence and engagement that the wider church is now beginning to explore. Their community picnics, their relationships with local residents, their presence at the Orchards care home, their attentiveness to what God is doing in North Ely, all of this is instructive for us at St Mary's. As we grow in our own sense of what it means to be a sent church, ChristChurch is not just a congregation we support, but a congregation we have something to learn from.

Taken together, these congregations reflect both the richness and complexity of our shared life. They are not separate churches. They are different expressions of one church, held together in Christ. One of our continuing tasks is to deepen that sense of shared identity and mutual belonging.

This year we also took a small but symbolic step towards holding that unity visibly. Since Easter 2025, a large Paschal candle has been lit at all our Sunday morning services, a simple, weekly reminder that though we worship differently and in different places, we all belong to one church, gathered around the one Christ. We have made use of that symbol well beyond its traditional season and usage, and it has become a constant visual thread connecting our congregations together at the start of every Sunday morning service.

This is also the first full year in which we have been a Benefice of three parishes rather than six, and it has been good to see the staff team able to extend greater support to Holy Cross Stuntney and St Michael and

All Angels Chettisham. I want to encourage us to think of ourselves not as three parishes but as a church of eight congregations: the eight¹⁵, nine⁴⁵, and eleven¹⁵ at St Mary's; our Thursday Market Day Communion; ChristChurch; the congregations at Stuntney and Chettisham; and our online community, which serves around 30 people who are unable to attend in person. Each of these is a unique picture of our shared life in Christ, and our task, a continuing one, is to ensure that growth in our congregations deepens, rather than distances, our belonging to one another.

- THE LIFE WE SHARE -

Growing in Faith

Alongside growth in numbers, we have seen encouraging signs of growth in faith. Since the last APCM, we have had the joy of marking significant moments of faith across many people's lives.

Eight people were baptised as adults, making a personal commitment of faith: Leah Mason, Craig Langley, Masie Silverman, Corrina Langley, Paula Langley, Lucy Morgan, Maddie George, and Robert Lowe. Xander Stone was baptised as a young person expressing his own faith. Four people have renewed their baptism vows this year: Eden Hardy, Cherry Lenaghan, Gemma Hardy, and Beccy Cox.

We welcomed eight children in infant baptism, as their families brought them to God and made promises on their behalf: Isabelle Greenwood, Edolie Jewiss, Wilbur Drewery, Roman Auker, Amelia Langley, Carter Langley, Adrian Bulboaca, and Poppy Martin. We thank God for each of these families and their decision to raise their little ones to know the love of God and pray that these children grow into that faith that has been declared over them.

Eleven people were confirmed: Craig Langley, Masie Silverman, Corrina Langley, Paula Langley, Lucy Morgan, Maddie George, Lucy Jewiss, Jennifer Hamilton, Charlotte Lupson, Claire Foster, and Annabelle Smith, several of whom, you will notice, were also baptised this year.

In total then, eighteen people have marked a significant step in their own journey of faith since our last APCM, with six of them celebrating both baptism and confirmation in the same season and alongside them, eight families have brought their children to God in infant baptism, making promises on their behalf.

Beyond these milestone moments, and indeed as a contributing factor, Paul Foster's development of an ongoing cycle of courses is becoming an important part of our shared life, creating space both for those exploring faith and for those seeking to grow deeper. And as part of that we also bless our home group leaders, who week by week open their homes, nurture faith, and sustain much of the relational culture of this church.

Holy Communion: The Common Cup

This year we worked carefully and prayerfully through the question of how we receive Holy Communion together, specifically whether and how to reintroduce the Common Cup following the disruption of recent years.

Responses were gathered across the congregations, and the range of views, theological, pastoral, and practical, were thoughtfully handled by the PCC. The outcome sought to honour both unity and conscience for all involved. In most services, both the common cup and intinction are now offered, while different congregations are responding in slightly different ways according to their own context. Great care has been taken to ensure that no one feels singled out or diminished by whichever way they choose to receive. I am grateful for the thoughtful and gracious way in which this has been handled across the church. The genuine care and concern for one another that this process revealed is something that has delighted my heart and I have given thanks for on numerous occasions.

Developing Our Buildings

The completion of Building Transformation Project 2.0, the transformation of our toilet facilities and the creation of fully accessible spaces between the church and hall, is a significant moment in the advancement of the resource that is our building. The project has taken considerable time, skill, fundraising effort, and perseverance, and the result will serve the life of this church well into the future.

A special thank you to Piers, Jeremy, Derek, and Keith, who have been pivotal in steering BTP 2.0. Your dedication and faithful stewarding of this work have been a remarkable gift of loving service to the church. To all who have contributed financially, both within the congregation and through the grants received, thank you. This was a community effort in the fullest sense, and we look forward to commissioning the space properly once it is complete. I doubt we will cut a ribbon, but prayers of thanksgiving and praise will definitely feature!

We are also conscious that these works form part of a wider desire that our building should be hospitable, accessible, and genuinely fit for the worship and mission God has entrusted to us. The building is never the point in itself, but it matters because it serves the people and purposes of God and that conviction has shaped our building work from the outset.

Finance: Honesty and Discipleship

We really do give thanks, sincerely, and seriously for the extraordinary generosity of this congregation. In 2025, personal giving totalled over £171,000, and we also benefited from Gift Aid, building fund donations, and a number of one-off gifts that helped our everyday accounts reach a very small surplus. That is a remarkable expression of generosity and trust in God.

We also need to be honest about our finances. The 2026 budget carries a projected deficit of around £30,000, reflecting a combination of factors: rising parish share, energy cost pressures, some reduced letting income during the building works, and the loss of a number of regular donors through death or moving away. That last point is particularly poignant for these are real people, real losses, known by us, and we hold their families with love and prayer.

And yet, even as we name that deficit honestly, I want to draw something else alongside it, for in the first three months of this year, the monthly shortfall has been met through one-off gifts, unexpected generosity, and provision we did not engineer ourselves. That is entirely down to the faithfulness of God and the loving hearts of our congregation. It does not make the deficit disappear, and we are not complacent about it. But it is a reminder that the God who calls us is the God who provides, and that he has done so before and will do so again.

With that confidence behind us, and not from anxiety, I invite each of us to reflect prayerfully on our giving, as, and only as, we are able, whether that means increasing a regular gift, ticking the inflation-increase box on the Parish Giving Scheme, or making a one-off contribution. The ministry and mission of this church is sustained by the generosity of its people, and your giving enables every aspect of our mission and ministry as a church.

Thanksgiving

There is so much to give thanks for, and I will inevitably miss significant things! Over 100 volunteers serve across the full range of ministry teams and opportunities for service at St Mary's. Much of that service happens quietly and without fanfare, but it is absolutely foundational. This church is what it is because of the hearts of so many people offering themselves in loving response to the work of God in their lives and in loving service of the mission and ministry of the church, and I thank God for all of you whenever I think of you. Your giving of yourselves in turn inspires my own sense of service.

Churchwardens and PCC

I want to offer particular thanks to Liz as she steps down from her churchwarden role this year. Liz has served this church with care, faithfulness, and great generosity over her time as church warden, and her contribution has made a difference to the mission and ministry of St Mary's, not least in her work on accessibility. I am glad to say she will continue to lead on that going forward. We thank God for her and honour her generous service with affection and pray for some well-deserved rest and space.

Keith too deserves warm thanks for his faithful service as churchwarden alongside Liz. And the whole PCC has worked hard this year in shaping how we govern and share oversight of the church's life. To those stepping down from PCC this year, thank you for your service and dedication.

Staff and Ministry Team

I also want to thank the whole ministry team, ordained and lay, for their energy, creativity, friendship, fellowship in the Gospel and commitment. Matthew, Luke, Rob, and the wider team of lay team pastors bring a range of gifts that enrich us all. Our retired ministers, Karen, Marian, Stephen, Jeremy, Richard, and Paul, not only serve with generosity and grace, but also bring a backdrop of wisdom and experience that quietly but significantly shapes who we are as a church and team. We have also recently welcomed Georgina Anson who joins us with permission to officiate and brings a fresh dynamic to our shared ministry, and it is fabulous to be able to add her voice to our team. And behind all of this, Kirsty and Elizabeth, our Operations Manager and Office Administrator, hold so much together behind the scenes. Their roles are often unseen but absolutely vital, and I am so enormously thankful for them both, without whom I'd be totally lost!

Rob Henderson joined us as curate in June last year and has settled into the team really well, bringing a gentle and gracious spirit to his leading and preaching. He has superbly adapted to the variety and variation of our services across the benefice and has been an absolute joy to work with and see thrive. With Rob's arrival, our staff team is now at full strength, and it has been such a blessing to settle into a season of having a settled team. We find ourselves in a strong position, working with a shared heart and mind and we are now looking forward to welcoming Archie Coates this July as a second curate, bringing yet further gifts, perspective and energy into our shared ministry.

Finally I would like to celebrate and draw attention to James Hickish's role. James has taken the decision to lay down his permission to officiate, but he has taken up a role as my prayer partner and something of a personal chaplain, keeping your Team Rector grounded, lovingly supported, and offering a quiet source of wisdom and support not only to me, but to others as well. His ministry may be less visible than that of others, but it is still a gift in the humble offering of himself in love and service.

Those Stepping Forward in Ministry

We also want to honour those stepping further into ministry. Chris Tomkies is progressing through his LLM training; Fiona Stern has begun ALM pastoral ministry training; Chelle George has completed hers; and Leo Georgiou has finished training as an ALM Music Minister. Each of them enriches our shared calling.

Those Stepping Back from Formal Roles

At the same time, we honour those who are stepping back from formal roles: Katie Coutts from overseeing the pastoral team, Margaret Graves laying down her ALM in pastoral care, and Maria Parnell from her Anna Chaplaincy role. Each continues to serve pastorally in other ways. Of course I also need to draw attention to Graham and Yvonne Biss' change of role. For a number of years they have led our ChristChurch congregation and after a prayerful year of personal discernment have laid that down and have returned to St Mary's morning congregations, where they had originally been sent from. Graham and Yvonne will continue to exercise their LLM and ALM roles and the exact nature of what that will look like is yet to be seen, but we are assured that God will surely lead them in discovering that as he has led them in their service at ChristChurch. One of the joys I have as Team Rector of St Mary's is accompanying people

on their journeys of faith and making space for people to grow in their sense of vocation and respond to God's call and guiding Spirit in each and any given season.

Beth Georgiou has also sensed God's call to join the Cathedral congregation, where she hopes to continue her Anna Chaplaincy and LLM training. We bless her on that journey and remain grateful for all she has given us.

- WHERE WE ARE GOING -

Looking Ahead: Direction, Not Just Activity

As we look ahead, I am less concerned with listing new initiatives than with naming our direction of travel, and as you will have picked up throughout this missive, I believe that direction is clear.

For most of our life together, St Mary's has been primarily a gathered expression of church, and has been deeply loved, as a place to come to, and as a place of welcome, of worship, and of belonging. That is a gift, and it is not something to move away from. The welcome remains. The worship remains. The belonging remains. And these will of course be invested in and enhanced yet further, but I believe God has been extending the invitation to us to not only to be a community that receives people well, but to become a community that goes, that learns to move outward with the same warmth and attentiveness we offer to those who walk through our doors. To be a people who notices the street, the school, the neighbour, the overlooked corner of the city, and asks "is God already here? How might we join in?" This is no criticism of what we have been but rather it is a deepening and widening of it, and that will take time, patience, and a willingness to be learners. But I believe it is where we are being led, and I believe we are all more ready for it than we might think.

And that calling is not a calling for a small group of enthusiasts, or for those who feel particularly missionally minded. It is a calling for all of us. Every one of us is part of what God is doing in and through this church, whether you pray, serve, give, welcome, notice your neighbour, or simply show up faithfully, you are part of this. The question each of us might sit with is simply this, "where is God inviting me to take one step outward?"

We are being called to become a church that is more attentive to God, to one another, and attentive to the community around us that we might, in that attentiveness, discern the particular leading and direction of the Holy Spirit. That attentiveness is not passive, but is prayerful, responsive to God's leading, experimental, and expectant. It means noticing where God is already at work and being willing to join in, rather than always initiating from our own strength or planning. There is something important that I have detected emerging in our preaching, a call to attend to who we are becoming, not only what we are doing.

All this will mean continuing to deepen our life as a worshipping community. It will mean strengthening our care for one another, and for those who are new so that growth does not mean people slipping through the gaps. And it will mean continuing to advance our outward engagement and presence across the parish, through schools, partnerships, the MEG, and the everyday faithful witness of individuals who carry Christ into their neighbourhoods and workplaces every day.

St Mary's is not yet, I am sure, all that we are supposed to be, but we are a church that is willing, willing to worship, to serve, to give, to question, to grow, and increasingly, to go. I do not know exactly what the next twelve months will hold, but I know that the God who has been patient with us, generous to us, and faithful through every season of this church's life goes ahead of us and continues to lead us onward into his promised and preferred future for us. There are homes in this city that have not yet heard his name spoken with love. There are people not far from where you are sitting who are lonely, searching, or quietly wondering whether anyone cares. And there is a church, this church, our church, that is being shaped, slowly and seriously, into something fit to reach them.

This is not something we are observing from a distance. This is something we are committing ourselves to together.

This movement and call is worth our prayers, worthy of our giving, worthy of our presence, our friendship, our open doors, and our willingness to be sent as well as to be gathered. I delight in the gift of being able to lead this church and I am so grateful, more than I can ever fully say, for your service and to be able to serve alongside you.

I am genuinely expectant about what God will do among us and through us in the year ahead. I imagine that we will not necessarily do it perfectly, but we will do it together, and we will do it with faith, and God's grace will be with us.



Phil Marsh

Team Rector, St Mary's Ely

April 2026

Market Day Community

Stephen Leeke

We have a relatively simple and straight-forward seated Communion Service. This year the Bible Readings and Meditations are all based on St John's Gospel. We will cover the whole book by the end of the year. Between 25 and 35 people attend each week.

About that number join us from home using an emailed service, with the same readings and meditation.

About 15 people stay for coffee after the service and are joined by a similar number of visitors. Some are regulars some just drop in as they are passing.

A couple of tables are reserved for young people from Highfield Academy special school and their carers who often drop in as an outing from school.

Up to 10 people join the popular 'Knitting Table' working together on shared or personal projects, sharing ideas and news.

A lovely team of volunteers help with the service and the catering for which we are very grateful.

It is the highlight of my week

ChristChurch

Matthew Creber

ChristChurch continued to gather under the leadership of Graham and Yvonne Biss throughout 2025, with support from Matthew Creber. Attendance at our Sunday gatherings has varied, but we have regularly been joined by 10-15 people, with numbers occasionally reaching 20. In the course of the year, we have been joined by several additional families and couples, some of whom are part of other Ely congregations on a Sunday morning and are seeking something 'local' on Sunday evenings. Our homegroup gathers on alternate Wednesday evenings.

We remain committed to seeking missional partnerships within our community. Over the summer Chris Tomkies (training for LLM ministry) worked with members of ChristChurch and our community to arrange two well-attended Community Picnics, and outdoor Carol singing at Christmas which drew a large crowd

from across the community. These have helped establish some strong relationships in the community, and we are working to build wider partnership as we engage with local developments. Matthew has been working to build relationships with developers and stakeholders as North Ely keeps on expanding.

We also maintain an ongoing presence in the Orchards Care Home, largely thanks to Michelle George, who has recently completed her ALM in Pastoral Care. She volunteers regularly and now leads our monthly services. Michelle has engaged residents these services and strengthened the connection between our communities. The Orchards recently extended their hospitality to families from St Mary's Under-5s on Mothering Sunday, even making space for an impromptu craft activity!

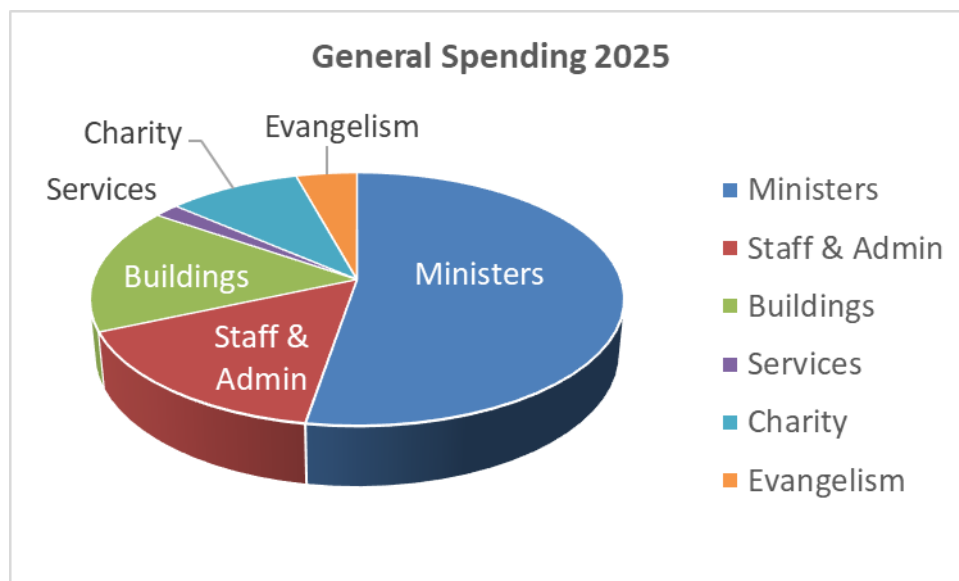
In June, we said farewell to Paul and Annie Newns, who had been greatly valued part of the church family since its beginning. Their departure provoked us to reconsider how we structure our worship gatherings, and we decided to adjust to a pattern of hosting a larger Holy Communion service once a month, with simpler gatherings in the intervening weeks. This has allowed us to experiment with a mixture of outward looking, devotional and social activities, including 'Songs of Praise' evenings, Bible Studies, prayer activities, local litter picks, prayer walks, and social events. More recently, Michelle Larchet has organised several 'Forest Church' gatherings, which have been well received, she has recently been recommended by the PCC for ALM preaching training.

At the start of 2025, Graham took an extended break to work in Sports Ministry at a nearby school. Later in the year, both Graham and Yvonne took some time out to discern their next move. In December, they shared that they would be stepping down from leadership and moving on from ChristChurch. We celebrated their enormous contribution with a farewell service and meal in January, joined by members of ChristChurch past and present. As a tribute, Chris Hill memorably listed all those who have been nurtured and sent out as ministers from ChristChurch. Graham and Yvonne are deeply missed, and we are indebted to them for all that they have given to nurture and shape the ChristChurch community.

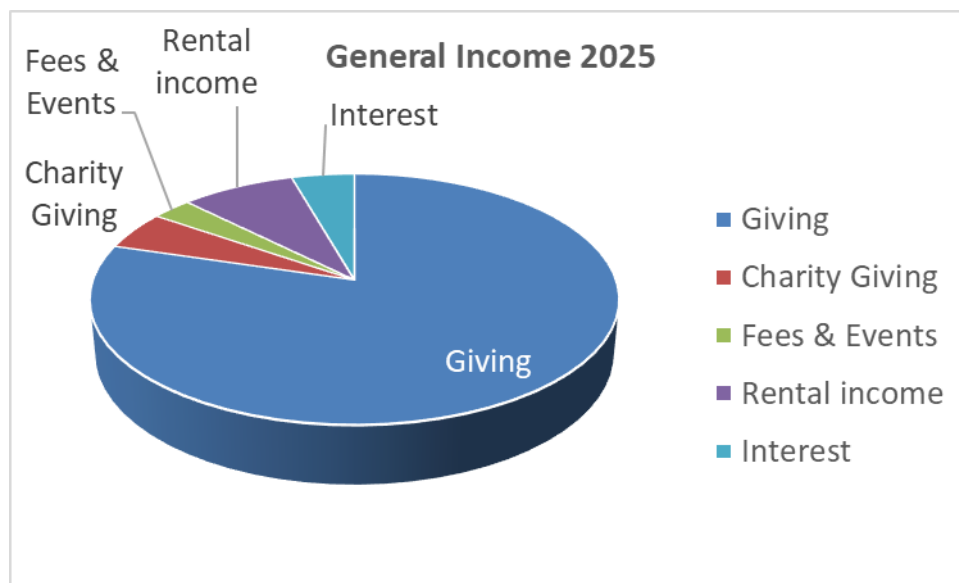
Since their departure in January, Matthew has taken on the leadership role, and we have been revisiting aspects of our missional calling, with a particular emphasis on hospitality. Pastoral challenges are felt acutely in such a small worshipping community, but we are learning to support one another and continue to trust in God's call as we seek his flourishing in North Ely.

Finance Highlights 2025

Piers Coutts, Treasurer



- Total **General Spending** in 2025 was **£257,843**, of which:
 - **£135,757** was spent on paying and resourcing **our Ministers**. This was mainly in our 'Ministry Share' of 113,407 which is used to cover the pay, housing, training, pensions and support of clergy and pioneers within the diocese; we benefitted by receiving our Rector Phil Marsh and our Team Vicar Matthew Creber. The remaining £22,350 covered our Families Missioner Luke Davies' salary and the Ministers' expenses.
 - **£40,736** covered the pay and pensions for our **Administrative Staff**, plus the other costs of running the church office.
 - **£41,597** was allocated to the maintenance, insurance, heating and lighting for our **Buildings**. This includes £10,000 placed into building reserves towards the cost of any major repairs required in our 5-yearly inspection.
 - **£4,585** on **Services** is what we spend on materials, copyright, music, AV system etc. used in the worship services in the Parish.
 - **£24,141** given to **Charities** included **£5,762** to 'Open Doors', **£2,870** to The Children's Society, **£4,559** to Tree Aid, **£4,638** to the CAP Debt Centre, **£4,616** to Wycliffe Bible Translators, **£453** to Christian Aid and **£1,244** to other charities. This represents **10.13%** of unrestricted income being allocated to charitable giving.
 - **£11,027** was spent on **Evangelism**, covering our outreach work (for example with teenagers and children), Hospitality and the costs of ChristChurch North Ely.
- In addition to the above the **£6,433** of Designated Building Reserves were spent on the church fabric, and the following 'Restricted' funds were spent: on the three building projects, **£9,075** on BTP1, **£16,098** on BTP2.0 and **£4,505** on BTP2.5; **£534** from the 'Elderberries' fund used to support older people; and **£100** on the Mothers' Union.



- Total **General Income** was **£258,523** in 2025; **£245,674** of this was 'Unrestricted', of which:
 - **£171,470** came from personal **Giving** by our members
 - **£34,401** was **Gift Aid** on these donations
 - **£20,960** came from **Hire of Church Facilities**
 - **£7,338** was raised from wedding and funeral **Fees**, and other **Events**
 - **£11,505** came from interest and other unrestricted sources
- The remainder **£12,849** was 'Restricted' income for Charity causes
- **£481** of VAT was recovered **Designated for Building Repairs**
- In addition to the above some other Restricted income was received:

- **£457** of VAT was recovered for the **Building Transformation Project 1 (BTP1)**
- **£131,763** was received for **Building Transformation Project 2.0 (BTP2.0)**
- **£50,788** was received for **Building Transformation Project 2.5 (BTP2.5)**
- **£789** was received for the Mothers Union
- **£310** was received for work 'Elderberries' work with elderly people
- **£176** was received for replacement of work on the church bells
- **The CAP Debt Centre project** is administered by St Mary's but is reported separately to a panel from the participating churches. During 2025 £14,521 was received from other churches and individuals, £800 from trusts and other organisations, £4,638 donated through St Mary's, and £1,824 from interest, which together made an income of £21,783. A balance of £56,346 was brought forward from 2025, and £28,389 was spent during the year, so £48,739 is therefore carried forward to 2026.

Overall:

Our everyday finances had a surplus of **£680** this year (compared to surpluses of **£6,671** in 2024 and **£9,686** in 2023). However in 2025 we lost 12 regular donors through death or moving, which reduced our regular income by over £1,200 per month, and our books only balanced because we received £8,500 more than expected in one-off donations.

Balances

At 31 December 2025 the church held the following balances:

Unrestricted:	£45,611	Working Capital & General Reserves
Designated:	£90,744	Buildings repairs
Restricted:	£11,227	Money given for BTP1
Restricted:	£151,426	Money given for BTP2.0
Restricted:	£96,323	Money given BTP2.5
Restricted:	£2,869	'Elderberries' fund
Restricted:	£689	Mothers Union
Restricted:	£176	Bell repairs
Restricted:	£49,739	Money given for CAP Debt Centre
Total Funds	£448,804	

Types of Giving

In December 2025:

- 126 households (three fewer than in 2024) had regular (weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual) standing orders, or Parish Giving Scheme (PGS) DDs
- 98 of the 126 regular donors used PGS. This is the best method from our point of view by far as:
 - We don't have to count and pay in cash
 - It saves bank charges (1% on cash, 95p per cheque)
 - It saves checking 98 donations from the bank statement each month
 - Gift Aid claim is all handled for us and paid to us each month
 - Donors (if they wish) you can tick an 'inflation-increase' box.
 - You can sign up with PGS online (there's a link on the church website) or I can give you a form to complete and return to PGS if you prefer.

- But of course we're very grateful for your gifts, however they're delivered!

Looking Ahead:

- 2026 budget has a deficit of **£30,000** compared to small surplus in 2025. This is due to:
 - +£8.4k on Parish Share (+£4.4k inflation +£4k on agreed 'deal' with diocese)
 - +£3.6k Staff pay rises and other inflation
 - -£8k lower giving income (donors died or moved)
 - -£5k lower letting income (BTP 2.0 project)
 - -£5k lower interest (money spent on BTP2.0)
- SO: if you can increase your regular giving, or tick the 'inflation increases' box on PGS, or make a one-off gift, that would be really helpful.
- There are always challenges, but God always seems to supply what we need

OVERALL - thank you to everyone for your financial support going forward!

Charities in 2026

- We aim to give 10% of our unrestricted income to charities each year:
 - Half our support is committed, budgeted from our general income
 - 1/12 of the money we have committed transferred each month to all 5 causes
 - And we aim to raise the other half of our charity giving
 - Funds raised are transferred monthly as they are given; every pound raised is extra money given directly to these causes
- For 2026 the PCC has continued with same 5 main charities as last year, selected to ensure we covered all the 5 'Marks of Mission':
 1. Open Doors – support for those persecuted for their Christian faith
 2. Children's Society – support for children and young people in need
 3. Tree Aid – tackling climate crisis and poverty in Africa via the 'Great Green Wall'
 4. CAP Debt Centre – supporting local people in becoming free of debt
 5. Wycliffe Bible Translators – providing bibles in people's local languages

Appointment of Independent Examiner of Accounts

- Since 2020 our accounts have been examined by Whittings LLP , who do a great job; their fee in 2025 was £912.
- Our contact there is Katharine Bebbington – daughter-in-law of Walter and Barbara Bebbington – who attended St Mary's with her family when she was a child.
- I would like to recommend we continue to use Whittings to examine our 2026 accounts.

Green Ambassadors

Irene Dewsbury, Isobel Smyth, Paul Smyth, Lindsay Frost

During 2025 the members of the former 'Green Team' were commissioned as 'Green Ambassadors' for St. Mary's Church. We have continued to highlight the church's environmental initiatives, sustainability efforts, and eco-friendly projects by focusing on reducing the church's carbon footprint, maintaining the church grounds for biodiversity, and promoting ecological awareness within the St. Mary's parish through:

- **Eco-Friendly Initiatives:** e.g. Promoting waste reduction and recycling efforts – ensuring church soft plastics are regularly recycled at supermarkets

- **Grounds Management:** e.g. Maintaining areas of the churchyard for local wildlife by providing food and water for birds, small mammals and insects. We have recently been approached by EcoEly who are keen to be involved in providing a suitable environment for native wildlife in the church grounds.
- **Educational Outreach:** e.g. Efforts to encourage the congregation to engage with environmental issues through the monthly green tip in the church notices.
- **Sustainability Goals:** e.g. Support for our 2025-6 Eco-charity within our charitable giving – Tree Aid who have helped 3.8 million people develop sustainable ways for their communities to grow food, earn incomes & restore ecosystems.
- **Progress towards targets:** e.g. achieving Eco Church awards. We are looking to build on our Bronze Award and, like many other local churches, take practical action on caring for God’s earth, through the Eco Church survey.

As always, if anyone has a passion for our planet please speak to one of our Green Ambassadors, we would love to talk with you about your ideas.

Discipleship *Paul Foster*

Two years ago, Phil invited me to oversee the Discipleship aspect of life at St Mary’s and over that time we have met regularly to discuss and listen to where God is leading St Mary’s. It became clear very early on that what some churches call discipleship is actually “knowledge”, but that God is calling us to make discipleship at St Mary’s what it really is – “the lifelong process of learning to **love, follow** and **become** more like Jesus, while also **helping others** to do the same”.

Over the past two years, discipleship at St Mary’s has grown through a combination of structured courses, small-group learning, and relational pastoral support. Our aim has been to help people explore faith, deepen their understanding of Scripture, and find a place of belonging within the church community where they can learn to love, follow and become more like Jesus, while always looking to help others do the same.

1. Small-Group Discipleship and Teaching

Small Groups

Small groups remain central to discipleship at St Mary’s. We currently have **nine groups**, meeting weekly or fortnightly, with **almost 100 people** involved. Most groups use sermon-based notes produced by Phil or watch the online sermon together, which has helped embed Sunday teaching into the life of the church. Visiting the groups over the last few months has seen strengthened relationships and given a clearer picture of how people are growing in faith and discipleship as they are fed more deeply and challenged by the sermon materials to live out the life we are all called to.

The Pilgrim Course

The Church of England’s *Pilgrim Course* has provided a structured pathway for learning and exploration.

- **“Turning to Christ”** is run annually for those exploring faith or preparing for baptism or confirmation.
- Additional modules have included **“The Lord’s Prayer”** (linked with a sermon series) and **“The Commandments”**, with further modules planned over the next two to three years: *The Beatitudes*, *The Creeds*, *The Eucharist*, and *Church & Kingdom*.

Each course has drawn **15–20 participants**, ranging from complete beginners to long-standing Christians seeking renewal. “Hard Questions” sessions tagged on at the end of the course has provided space to explore topics such as suffering, violence in Scripture, living your faith in real life and miracles.

The Bible Course (Lent 2026)

This Lent we ran *The Bible Course* by Dr Andrew Ollerton, with sessions on Tuesday evenings and Thursday afternoons. Around **80 people** attended part or all of the course, including several small groups who joined together for the duration.

Feedback highlighted increased confidence in reading Scripture, a clearer grasp of the Bible's overarching story, and a desire to continue exploring the Bible in small groups or personal study. The course created a shared foundation across the church and strengthened our sense of learning together through the Sunday sermon materials.

2. One-to-One Discipleship and Pastoral Accompaniment

Alongside the structured programme, a significant part of my ministry has been meeting with those new to Christianity, new to St Mary's, or exploring faith for the first time. I have met with around a dozen people regularly, usually over coffee, offering space for honest conversation, questions, and gentle guidance.

Many are navigating busy lives and feel time-poor, while others are carrying grief, fear, or uncertainty. These conversations have helped people take meaningful steps in faith — joining a small group, beginning to pray, attending a course, or reconnecting with church life. This relational work has complemented our structured discipleship pathway and helped individuals feel welcomed and supported.

3. Preaching and Spiritual Formation

Preaching at St Mary's has continued to play a key role in discipleship, offering biblically rooted teaching that connects faith with everyday life. Themes explored in recent sermon series — particularly around the kind of people and church God is calling us to be — have been reinforced through small-group discussion and personal reflection.

The integration of Sunday teaching into small groups has helped create a rhythm where sermons are not only heard but revisited and applied. Feedback has shown that people value preaching that is both theologically grounded and pastorally honest, helping them navigate questions of identity, fear, forgiveness, and hope.

4. Challenges and Opportunities

As discipleship has grown, several challenges have emerged:

- **Time constraints:** Many who want to grow in faith struggle to commit regularly due to work and family pressures.
- **Pastoral need:** A number of people are carrying grief, fear, or significant life transitions, requiring time and careful support.
- **Supporting small groups:** With almost 100 people involved, group leaders need ongoing encouragement and resources and we probably need more as the church grows.
- **Growing attendance:** Courses such as Pilgrim and The Bible Course attract strong numbers, which is encouraging but increases the need for facilitators and pastoral oversight.
- **Theological curiosity:** The appetite for deeper engagement with Scripture and difficult questions is rising, requiring thoughtful preparation and space for discussion.
- **Capacity:** There is enthusiasm for further courses and events, but delivering these well requires careful planning and sustainable resourcing, not least time and space.

These challenges also represent opportunities for deeper growth, wider participation, and continued strengthening of our discipleship life.

5. Looking Ahead

The coming year offers several opportunities to build on the foundations laid:

- Continuing the Pilgrim pathway with further modules.
- Supporting and resourcing small-group leaders as groups grow and evolve.
- Offering whole-church learning opportunities such as a **Walk Thru the Bible** day and short “pop-up” courses on discipleship and Christian living.
- Encouraging personal engagement with Scripture through tools, resources, and group study.
- Providing safe spaces for people to explore difficult questions and deepen their understanding of faith.
- Continuing relational accompaniment for newcomers, enquirers, and those seeking guidance.

Our hope is that St Mary’s continues to grow as a community where people encounter Christ, deepen their faith, and are equipped to **love, follow and become** more like Jesus, while also **helping others** to do the same.

Developing our Buildings – BTP 2.0

Keith Rawson

The church building continues to fulfil many different aspects of worship and events for our congregation and outside hires. The church building itself is admired by all those who visit and is an important stop for those visiting Ely with many positive compliments on the warm welcome they receive from all our wonderful volunteers that keep the church Open from May to October.

The Church currently hosts four services each week: the eight15 Communion Service, the nine45 Intergenerational Service for everyone, the eleven15 Contemporary Worship Service with Children’s ministry each Sunday and market day Communion Service each Thursday followed by a community coffee morning. During Lent, we also held a weekly Sunday evening service.

The Church building is used most days of the week for Open Space, Under 5s, CAP, Bereavement Cafe and weekly prayer meetings. We have also introduced Pilgrim and Lent Bible Courses, held the 80th Anniversary VJ Service and lighting of the Beacon and an outside Carol Service in collaboration with VisitEly.





80th Anniversary VJ Service

In the period since the last APCM, there were 8 weddings, 13 funerals, 8 infant baptism services, 7 immersion baptisms using the baptistry and a number of thanksgiving services. The annual CSI Easter event was attended by all primary schools in Ely (10 events in total).

Many other Events were hosted in the Church building covering a diverse range from author events by Topping & Company, the local book shop, Ely Arts Festival events, King's School, St Mary's School and other musical events and conference meetings which fill the space available in the church and is a valuable source of income.



Toppings Food Event

Ely Music Collective held a number of lunchtime concerts in the summer and autumn with donations going to the Church. These were well attended by around 60 people each time.

The church rooms are also in constant use morning, afternoon, and evening each week.

During the week, we have two parent and toddler groups (Under 1s and Bumbly Bees) and are looking to enhance our special needs provision around the sessions we host for Highfields school on Thursday mornings, where they join our Thursday congregation and visitors for coffee. Elderberries, Mother's Union, DEMAT and the Diocesan Synod regularly use the church and hall buildings. Ely Youth Choir, Ely Community Choir are weekly hires of the hall. This year we also held Messy Church and BBQ events as social gatherings bring our church families together.

Last year we had our first Archdeacon's Visitation (rebranded as Church Visits), the start of a 3-year cycle where our records, visions and practices are reviewed. Our Church Visit with Eleanor Whalley, Rural Dean took place on 17th June. Eleanor reported "It was so encouraging to meet with you, and to hear about just some of the vast amount you are doing - and God is doing through you - as individuals and as a whole PCC and wider church community to make St Mary's such a thriving and welcoming hub."

At the time of reading this report, BTP 2.0 should have been completed. You will see from the accounts section that we have been blessed with the generosity of donations from our congregation and the grants that we have also received. This has transformed the space from the church to the hall making it fully accessible, increased the number of WCs and able to cope with a growing church. We give thanks to Ashco Construction Ltd and Archangel Architects for the design and implementation of this project.

Plans are being developed to replace the lights in the hall to LED lighting which will improve the lighting in the hall, be more energy efficient and robust for the activities that take place in the hall. Faculty and Planning Applications are still being pursued for a storage building next the wooden hall so that it frees the space in the wooden hall. Funds are available in BTP 2.5 for this work.

This year we will also have our quinquennial inspection. A quinquennial inspection is a thorough evaluation of a church building that occurs every five years to assess its condition, identify any necessary repairs, and ensure proper maintenance. This will be performed by our Architects at Archangel.

A collaboration is beginning with EcoEly to possible develop a community garden area in the south-east corner of the churchyard. This will create a nature friendly garden increasing our biodiversity with bug hotels, planting herbs and flowers that can be opened for children to learn and explore.

We have a wonderful team of staff and volunteers at St Mary's that make the building welcoming, accessible, and safe to enhance our worship and seek God's presence. We give a big thank you to everyone who helps in any way with life at St Mary's. With prayer, commitment and listening, we will continue to develop our buildings for God's work in Ely.

Prayer

Sue Morley

Prayer ministry continues to be offered after all services on a Sunday morning. There have been 2 new members joining the eleven15 team, but we are still looking for new people to join. There has been some training on prayer and sermon series about prayer and praying for each other. Harp and Bowl last year encouraged us to pray for others in a relaxed environment enabling those attending to gain confidence.

Other ways of praying include the prayer chain (prayerchain@stmarysely.org) with 20 members who can offer prayer immediately a message is sent.

The WhatsApp morning prayer continues Monday to Friday at 8.15 am which is led by Paul Smyth. This includes a worship song, a confession, bible readings and prayers. As this is on WhatsApp it can be accessed at any time during the day not just live in the morning.

Home Prayer Warriors is a termly resource for those who wish to pray at home and for members of our congregation who find getting to church difficult but still want to contribute to the life of St. Marys in a way they feel able.

Charities Team

Lindsay Frost

In choosing the charities we support, we remain particularly mindful of the Anglican Communion's 'Five Marks of Mission':

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to that end we support Ely CAP Debt Centre and Wycliffe Bible Translators.
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; Open Doors and Wycliffe Bible Translators are our designated charities for this mark.
- To respond to human need by loving service; Ely CAP Debt Centre, The Children's Society, Tree Aid and Open Doors all benefit from our support.
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation; our support for Ely CAP Debt Centre, The Children's Society and Open Doors support this important initiative.
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Tree Aid (our A Rocha Green Charity) provides a focus for the Treasure mark of mission.

In addition, we continue to support Christian Aid with its annual envelope appeal and other charity appeals as appropriate.

Just over £24,000 has been given to our charities in the last financial year; with nearly £13,000 from specific gifts and fundraising and just above £11,000 from general income. This represents slightly more than 10% of our unrestricted income.

By focusing in this way, we do not only support the breadth of what God is doing, but we are also reminded of the mission(s) to which we are all called.

Youth

Mandy Marsh

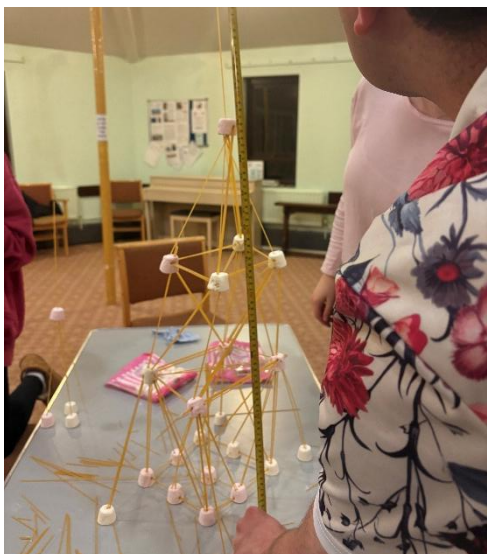
Our fabulous Pathfinder group continued to meet on Sunday evenings 6-8pm in the hall, with food cooked by our wonderful hospitality team, organised by Adella. We have 12+ regulars from year 7 to year 13.

Some of our highlights since last AGM:

- Welcomed our new year 6 visitors and had some join us in September.
- Hosted several fun craft events over the last year for some of the year 7's to join who had been part of the St Marys After School Club in year 6.
- The beach trip to Sheringham was enjoyed by all leaders and Pathfinders - even though it was cooler this year!
- In the Autumn Term we changed our programme to follow the church sermon series and cover the homegroup material- so now you can ask your young person what we have covered and be all sharing together on same topics.
- Hosted socials over the year of Movie night, Photo treasure hunt, Domino's Pizza and board games night and craft evening
- We are looking forward to being back outside with the lighter nights and more outdoor activities.

We are still looking to recruit people for our hospitality team and our youth leadership team - so do feel free to speak to one of us. But please continue to pray for us as a team, for health, for time and continued encouragement. Please also continue to pray for our fabulous pathfinders and their families.

Thank you- Mandy Marsh, Dan Brown, Adella Charlton, Dan Morley.



Christmas Crafts

Tower competition!

Children's Ministry

Luke Davies

Under1's

Under1's happens every Monday from 10am until 11:30am, but we tend to have our families staying on a bit later so they are not rushed out. We still continue through school term times and holidays where possible. This year we have again had a steady group of around 15 families each week. It is a good mix of regulars and also new and returning families (not always just mums!) We meet in the church hall, and have seen our group really enjoy using the space, from both the tiny ones who are held most of the time to the ones just learning to walk and finding it a soft, safe place to learn in. We have great fun in our sessions, with all the adults being given biscuits and hot drinks and, on a few times, even some cakes. We like to finish our sessions with a time of singing and we have noticed the parents are happy to help pack the toys away with us, as well as making sure their little ones are happy before they head home / outside. The team is currently Lindsay, Ruth, Heather, Jean B, and Jean W. Linda has left the team this year and will be missed by the team and the families! With this we would love to have others join us growing with this amazing community. All the Mums, Dads, Grandparents and Carers love joining us (from what they've told us!) and we love being able to support, chat and love them too!

Under5's

We meet every Tuesday from 9:30-11am, term time, and since coming back after half term have 40 families prebooked in. Each session they join us for 30 minutes of free activities, biscuits, hot drinks and everything in between. At 10am we start the crafts for any of the children who want to join in, and then at 10:40am everyone joins in tidying up before sitting by the front and singing some songs and reading a story together! We love that our families are all involved with this, and we have some great conversations during the whole sessions. Our team has grown this year with David, Judy and Maryann joining us which has been brilliant. We have noticed in recent months that more of the new walkers are joining both under1's and under5's and this adds a good connection between the two groups. We end the half term with a bring and share, and in the summer are looking at a possible picnic too.

JAM Packed: Nurturing Young Faith

Throughout the past year, Jam Packed has continued to be a nurturing space for our young people, operating very much as a Home Group for the children of the church and their friends. The group starts from 4pm with the first 20 minutes being for just eating toast and chatting. We then start with games, or a challenge which at times is connected to the main bible stories, or at others is just to help burn off some of their energy. We will then dig deeper into our bible theme. As a team we each lead a different area every week to help keep a good variety when looking at the topics and studying their bibles together. This all happens up to 5:30pm when we'll finish with a prayer and hand them back to their parents. We have had a good core group and a good few children join us throughout the term. The sense of community within our group is growing each time we meet, and it has been a joy to see them welcome in each other's friends as if they had always known them. As we continue to grow as a group, we are also needing to grow as a team, especially with the new St Mary's School's After School Club and possible growth through that! Our group has some brilliant chats as we eat toast together and also as we look through the bible (we are starting a new series looking at Christian Living).

Eleven15Kids

We are loving being a three Sundays group and the team has been amazing at keeping this going. We can have as little as 10 and as many as 20 each week but you never really know who is joining us! We have a strong team of 4 each Sunday and are now bringing in another youth member to join us, which is always encouraging.

We start with sitting together, lighting a candle and singing our two welcoming songs, we'll then either introduce the theme or a game (which is related) before really getting into the subject. We split and the older group (usually school year 3+) will go do a further study while the younger group will have a chat while crafting. We then are back together for some singing and prayer and possibly more games if the service is still happening. It has been great to see how the children's understanding of God is growing and the questions they have (both groups) always encourage or even challenge us as leaders! It is blessing to have a team who love, care and support these children every Sunday and are brilliant at reacting to the varying degrees of busyness we have each week!

Uniformed Groups - Scouts / Cubs

We have had a couple of visits from the local groups, especially over Christmas but are wanting to develop this area more especially as a few in our congregation are involved in the differing groups. It is always a joy to connect with both the children and their parents when they attend any activity we have at St Mary's and have always had some engaging conversations outside of the main reason they are joining us.

Schools Ministry

School Chaplaincy

Zoe Cutter

I have been going into Ely St Mary's Junior School in a chaplaincy role for around 18 months. In this time I have completed the Authorised Chaplaincy Assistant course, run by the Diocese of Ely and Ridley Hall.

ESM have welcomed me in to hang out in the playground at lunch on a weekly basis chatting to kids and staff, and generally being present in a 'playground pastor' role. Many children make a special effort to come and see me and say hi every time I'm there. Recently during a lunch break, two children each drew a fantastic portrait of me, (below). I think they both captured something of my essence and dress sense!

I've been included on the collective worship rota along with others from St Mary's church. I also help Luke with a weekly after school club which has a bible focus, and we welcome children of all faiths and none. A big part of chaplaincy is being present and visible, so I have also accompanied the CAP team to help deliver the CAP Money for Kids course to Year 6 children both last academic year and this year.



In future I hope that the church can have a presence at special events being run by the school, the upcoming summer fair is one event I hope to be there for and would welcome any additional people who want to represent St Marys to our school families.

The school is already a place where regular Christian worship and prayer takes place, the children are familiar with bible stories and know who Jesus is. I hope by being there and getting to know them, it helps them make the connection between the God of the bible, and God who is here with us now and wants to be their friend. Thank you for your continued prayers for the staff, children, and parents in our school community.

Ephesians 6:18 Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.

Ely St John's *Matthew Creber*

We have continued to contribute to the life of St John's school through support of their RE Curriculum. Over the course of the year, they have visited multiple times across the full range of age groups. Topics include: Making and Understanding Christingles, "Who is Jesus", "Is Christmas really About Jesus?" as well as CSI, Easter & Harvest Assemblies and a Christmas Visit. These have been well received, and students are now accustomed to seeing Luke and Matthew in school.

The school has been extremely welcoming, and we are grateful for the support of Rebecca Fretwell - a member of our congregation and the lead teacher for RE. She has been working with Matthew to develop some of the opportunities for engagement, including a 'Church Crawl' around Ely! In the coming year, we hope to explore establishing a Parish-School covenant.

Isle of Ely *Matthew Creber*

As in previous years, our connection with Isle of Ely School has been primarily through the ChristChurch congregation. Matthew has visited to offer a Harvest Assembly, and we have welcomed a group of Yr1 students to see the church and discover what takes place here. They also brought their year 3 classes to take part in CSI Easter. The school has recently changed its RE curriculum, and Matthew is working to explore additional opportunities for engagement.

St Mary's School *Phil Marsh*

Our relationship with St Mary's School continues to grow in warmth, trust, and practical significance.

This is not simply a link between two local institutions that share a name. It continues as a genuine partnership, and one of the most significant areas of our presence in the community. Over the past year,

this has included developing our engagement with collective worship, chaplaincy presence, increased opportunities within the school, and stronger collaboration around areas such as family life, wellbeing, and support for children and households. Recent developments include renewed school invitations to be involved in parenting classes for Dads, increased chaplaincy connection via Zoe, and new opportunities to contribute more deeply to the school's life and thinking.

Initiatives such as CAP Schools Money Coaching and the "Time Out for Dads" course have created meaningful points of connection with families who may not otherwise have much contact with church. These are not just useful activities; they are signs of trust, and of the church increasingly being seen as a constructive and caring presence alongside the school community.

Looking ahead, our hope is not simply to maintain what we already do, but to remain attentive to where the school itself is inviting connection. The most fruitful opportunities are often those that grow from trust, consistency, and service rather than from our own attempts to engineer them. We are grateful for what is developing here, and hopeful for what may yet grow.

It has been good to welcome Oliver Graves as the new Head of the school, and our Parish School Covenant has been instrumental in enabling that ongoing relationship between church and school to be seamless. Our Parish School Covenant underpins all this which is a formal expression of the shared foundation on which our partnership rests. At its heart is a common Christian ethos and a shared commitment to the flourishing of every individual we serve, whoever they are and wherever they come from. The covenant names hope as our guiding value: hope for all that is yet to come, and hope for every child, family, and member of staff within our school community. It commits us together to being both excellent and distinctive, welcoming all, serving our community in love, and creating environments where every person is known, valued, and encouraged to grow. It provides a great framework for developing our work together and I am looking forward to seeing how we and Oliver develop our engagement with the school even further in time to come.

St Mary's After School Club

(named by the kids – The Super Cool Club for Super Cool Kids)

Luke Davies

Our St Mary's after school club has been going from strength to strength. We still get around 12 kids every week, with currently our year 6's stepping back as they prep for the end of their school year! We opened it to all in year 4, 5 & 6 which is a great mix, and we have found that they really manage to connect and encourage each other across the classes. We have Leah and Zoe and Luke as the main team with Phil and Matthew as back up. It takes place every Wednesday from 3:20-4:30pm. It has been a really encouraging group and so far, we have had 2 children cross over with our Jam Packed group.

Creative Minds

Janene Pike

Creative Minds has continued to meet on the 4th Monday of each month at 2pm, at St Mary's Church Hall, with John and Paul continuing to provide vital support.

Numbers have been encouraging throughout the year with regulars as well as new people coming in, and God continues to work within the group, giving us good opportunities to engage with a diverse range of people. It continues to be a good, safe space for all, allowing those who perhaps do not find it easy to chat, to nevertheless enjoy the atmosphere and gentle talk.

Each session is facilitated by Janene and provides ideas for art, and sometimes craft. The ideas are left open for people to interpret and to be creative, as well as to encourage conversation and to promote positive mental wellbeing. Ideas, themes and mediums have included, seasonal themes, doodling, watercolour etc. These ideas and themes can be interpreted as people feel comfortable, as it's not all about drawing, which can be daunting for some people, so, colour, texture, shape etc. can also be used as an expression.

Refreshments are available throughout the session, and the afternoon usually concludes with a brief epilogue which has proved to be a great way of bringing God in.

Simon continues to play the piano for us when he is able, which is much appreciated by all and works really well to enhance creativity, relaxation and conversations. Lindy brings Pippin, a registered 'Pets as Therapy' dog, along each month, to join us as a much-loved addition, providing another therapeutic element.

In January a good number of us enjoyed lunch at Wildwood, as we had our annual meal together.

Janene continues to provide an art table at Open Space on the last Wednesday of each month, which seems to be well received and is a nice crossover between the groups. The aim is to provide another option for those wanting to explore their creative side through art, at Open Space



Be Still

Erin Coppin

Be Still has continued to be an important contemplative and creative prayer space for some members of St Mary's and the wider community, meeting monthly on the second Monday. In particular, we welcome some occasional and some regular attendees who are members of other churches but find Be Still a helpful part of their spiritual practice. The leaders are joined by an average of 9 attendees, with a core of regulars who attend as often as they can.

We were blessed to have several members of St Mary's lead us in contemplation in 2025. In Holy Week, Revd Stephen Leeke and Margaret Leeke led our best-attended session of 2025, called, 'One brief hour', with 22 attendees. Margaret also led us in a session on the Jesus Prayer. Janene Pike led us in a delightful hour of Creative Stillness, and Richard and June Darmody led us in a session called 'Learning to Linger'. Erin led us in two meditative complines, the Examen, a session on Writing Your Own Psalm, and a session on Dwelling in Your Identity in Christ. From outside St Mary's, we welcomed Helen Randall, a tutor with the Cambridgeshire Centre for Spiritual Direction and a Methodist Local Preacher, who led us in a session called 'Praying with Augustine', and the retired URC minister Richard Church, who led us in a session called 'Flooded with Grace'.

It was a year of change for Be Still, with Margaret Leeke stepping down as co-leader in December after several years, and Erin Coppin engaged in fruitful ongoing discussions about leadership going forward. Revd Matthew Creber led us in a helpful evening of discernment about the future of Be Still in February 2026, and we will see what God has in store!

Worship Team

Andy Sykes

This year our individual teams, led by our worship team leaders Emmie Smith, Victoria Davies, Matt Whittle, Mike Rocca-Terry, Katy Roe and myself, have grown in confidence, and each has its own particular style. It has been encouraging to see new members join our music team and AV team at the nine45 service.

I hope that in the coming year we can work to bring those styles closer together whilst keeping the best of that diversity.

Apart from providing the music at the nine45 and eleven15 services there have been a number of alternative worship events throughout the year.

The first was the “Harp and Bowl” (see Rev 5:8) service on a Sunday evening last March where the service was very much focussed on the study of God’s Word, Prayer and Worship. This was well attended and appreciated by those who came.

At Christmas we offered “Carols on the Green” on St Mary’s Green and the “crowds” that attended had a great time singing along to a collection of all the popular carols. Refreshments were provided by St Mary’s and Poet’s House and served by the Rotary Club of Ely. Visit Ely managed the event safety and lit the beacon.

This Lent we have run a series of services focussing on Worship with study and an extended time of contemporary worship

- A bigger God (Awe and Wonder)
What an awesome God we worship whom we “Boldly Approach” in humble adoration.
- Worshiping is answering God (Participation)
Engaging our whole being, body, soul, mind and spirit in worshipping God
- Clear the Throne (Allegiance)
Everyone worships something. Worship isn’t a Sunday activity we add to life; worship is the centre that shapes life. Worship declares what we value most...
- Come Near Through Christ (Confidence & Access)
In Jesus, God is “fearsome yet welcoming, unfathomable yet knowable.” The cross makes access possible. Through Christ’s perfect sacrifice we are invited into a new covenant close encounter with the living God — reverent intimacy rather than either flippancy or fear.
- Spirit and Truth (Authenticity that Offers)
Jesus seeks “true worshippers” who worship “in spirit and in truth” — not merely the right vibe, and not merely the right words but hearts alive to God, responding honestly to who he truly is.
- Rhythm of Worship (Arrive Worshipping)
How we can overcome the busyness of our weekly lives by small, repeatable habits of attention — a moment of stillness, a line of Scripture, a practice of gratitude, a short prayer of surrender as well as learning to make use of silence, making room to hear and to revere.

I look forward, as we grow as a worshipping church, to explore further what God is leading us into.

Elderberries

Phil Marsh

Elderberries continues to be a lively, warm, and valued part of our shared life.

Last year's APCM report described Elderberries as a new response to the ending of Monday Club and as part of a wider commitment to ministry among older people. This year we can say that it has not only continued but taken firmer shape as a ministry in its own right. What began as a hopeful next step has become an established and much-appreciated expression of welcome, companionship, and care.

Following Beth's move to the Cathedral congregation, the ministry has continued without losing momentum. That is encouraging in itself. Matthew, Chelle George, and others have helped lead it forward, and it has been good to see others stepping up into greater responsibility. Eileen Thompson has been particularly instrumental in helping shape a varied and engaging programme, and recent sessions have included both creative and musical contributions that have been warmly received.

The forthcoming commissioning of Chelle George following her ALM training in pastoral ministry will be an important moment of recognition and affirmation, both for her and for the development of the ministry as a whole.

Looking ahead, the task is to continue building the team, strengthening its sustainability, and ensuring that Elderberries remains well supported as it grows. It is not simply an activity for older people. It is an expression of the church's commitment to honouring, valuing, and caring for those who may be more isolated or less able to engage elsewhere. In that sense, it is both pastoral care and mission, and it has an energy and life all of its own.

St Mary's Mothers' Union

Joan Simper, Branch Leader

The theme for 2025 was "Join Us, Join In" which continues for another year, as we look forward to celebrating our 150th Anniversary Year in 2026.

Branch Meetings were held monthly with a variety of speakers and social/fundraising events. At our AGM in January, Joan Simper was elected Branch Leader, Helen Dickinson – Treasurer and Freda Morrison – Secretary.

Our Easter Reflection was given by Revd Paul Foster, and Revd Natalie Andrews led our September Holy Communion Service. There were talks from Luke Davies, our Children & Families Minister; Nick Keen from MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship); Carolyn Shaw from Cambs CC about the work of refuges/hostels; and Nora Gardner speaking about Ely Riverside. Peter Harris spoke at the Worldwide Day about his fundraising work for the dumpster children in Cambodia. The year concluded with Christmas entertainment with readings and carols from Canon Stephen & Margaret Leeke.

Funds raised for MU Projects from the Worldwide Day were £200, and from the Summer of Hope Tea Party £200; donations to AFIA were £200; and we supported the Christmas Appeal for the women's refuges.

Monthly diocesan Thursday Prayer Meetings were held in Ely Cathedral and on Zoom, available to watch afterwards on our YouTube channel. Daily Midday Prayers were on Facebook, led by MU staff and other MU members around the country and worldwide.

The Diocesan Garden Party was held in June in the Bishop of Ely's garden. Together with donations and raffle proceeds, £144 was raised for MU Projects.

The "Away From It All" Holidays project (AFIA) for families in need, provided holidays for 10 families. Members also contributed to local refuges, hostels, hospitals, and Mary's Child with donations of goods, produce and knitted items. In November a Banner Witness and Vigil at the Cathedral highlighted the MU "Rise Up" Campaign and the "16 Days of Activism" against domestic and gender-based violence, an international campaign running annually in November/December, and supported by MU.

The Wave of Prayer for Ely Diocese was in December: members prayed for our link dioceses of Lusaka, Zambia; Shyogwe, Rwanda; Sokoto and Ikka, Nigeria; and Karimnagar, India; plus Diocesan Links with Kigali and Vellore.

Thursday Morning Coffee

Paul Woodbridge

I think all that could be said is that refreshments after communion have continued this year. A rota of ladies participate in making the refreshments. A good number of those who come to the communion service stay for refreshments and chat, and also some come just for this time. A good spirit of friendship and sharing takes place.

Children from Highfields School come in regularly and the helpers have expressed their gratitude for being so welcomed and how helpful it is for the children to be accepted in this way. Some of the children come to the refreshments table and are helped to order things.

Bellringers

John Mitchell, Tower Secretary

2025 continued the centuries-old tradition of ringing the tower bells at St Mary's for Sunday morning service, for weddings both at St Mary's and the Cathedral, and other significant local and national events. Encouraging feedback continues to come in from townspeople and the congregation that our part in the City's soundscape is mostly appreciated.

The main national events to ring for in 2025 were the VE 80 and VJ 80 commemorations when the bells played their part in the events organised by Visit Ely. The Town Crier visited the tower but soon realised his handbell was no match for four tons of rotating Heavy Metal! Ordination Day at the Cathedral was marked by a quarter peal attempt rung by one of the ordinands and her friends. We will try again with a local band for the 2026 ordinations in July and of course the enthronement of The Bishop of Ely in June. Ringing In the New Year is always a celebration occasion, with some welcome local press coverage this year.

Unlike some nearby towers the St Mary's bell installation continues to be ringable, although the time for a major overhaul is drawing closer. As reported last year, professional inspections of the mechanical bits have highlighted potential problems in several areas, so outline planning for a rehangng project has commenced. This was last done in 1937. What other machinery can claim a working life of 90 years?

As regularly reported, the band of people on the end of the ropes operating the instrument is also wearing out. Age and ill health are taking their toll on numbers of regular ringers. Recruitment and retention of trainees to carry on the skill is a national problem. In recent years St Mary's has been notably unsuccessful in finding and developing new ringers from 'inside' to grow the links between tower and nave. This is a serving opportunity that could be promoted to new or inquiring members. Perhaps not very visible but certainly audible!

Learning to ring tower bells well is not easy or quick but is rewarding. The Parable of the Sower is a particularly appropriate description of what happens to learners that start training and don't make it through to fruition, but those that do achieve become strong plants bearing fruit. To ensure succession, we need two or three of those each year! Where are they?

The ringers' contact email is ringers@stmarysely.org or why not come up and say Hi on a Sunday morning?



After Ringing in the New Year 2026

Pastoral Team

Pastoral Team: Strength, Growth, and Intentionality

Phil Marsh

Pastoral care remains one of the quiet strengths of St Mary's. Much of it happens relationally and informally through friendships, small groups, Sunday conversations, quiet acts of kindness, and people who notice when someone is struggling and choose to step in. That is a real gift, and one that reflects the love and attentiveness of this church.

Alongside that informal care, a range of more structured pastoral ministries continues to develop and deepen. Each has its own report elsewhere in this pack, but it is worth naming them together here, because taken as a whole they represent something significant: a church that is learning to care well, in many different directions at once.

The Bereavement Café continues to meet monthly in the Lady Chapel, welcoming between twelve and fifteen guests each time, some long-standing, some new, and offering a gentle, unhurried space for those carrying grief. This year the café opened for the first time between Christmas and New Year, recognising how isolating that season can be.

Home Communion continues its quiet and faithful ministry, with Irene Dewsbury and a small team taking communion to those unable to attend services, carrying the church's life into people's homes month by month. This ministry is likely to grow as our congregation ages, and we are grateful for all who serve in it.

Prayer ministry remains active across all Sunday services, with the prayer chain, the WhatsApp morning prayer led by Paul Smyth, and the Home Prayer Warriors resource all sustaining a culture of prayer that reaches well beyond Sunday mornings. We continue to look for people to join the prayer ministry team, particularly at the eleven15.

Creative Minds continues to meet monthly, offering a welcoming space for creativity, conversation, and gentle community including those who find other forms of social engagement more difficult. The inclusion of Pippin, the Pets as Therapy dog, and Simon's piano playing have become much-loved features of the group.

Open Space continues to flourish, with a growing and joyfully diverse range of guests. The team works hard to ensure it is genuinely open to all not simply offering refreshments, but demonstrating real care for those facing isolation, personal challenge, or poor mental health. The recent registration with the Church Urban

Fund's Place of Welcome scheme reflects the seriousness with which this ministry takes its hospitality calling.

Care home ministry reaches several homes across Ely and the wider area; the Orchards through ChristChurch, Lily House, Roslyn Court, and Baird Lodge through a combination of regular services, prayer, scripture, and communion. These gatherings have become genuinely important communities for many residents, and we are grateful for all who make them possible.

Mental health remains an area of growing attention and intentionality. Kintsugi Hope's Mental Health Friendly Church training was offered to pastoral volunteers in 2025, and work is underway to establish a Renew Wellbeing space alongside Open Space, providing a dedicated room for prayer and reflection alongside signposting to local services.

As our congregations grow, it is becoming clearer that we need to be more intentional about how pastoral care is coordinated and made visible. Much currently depends on who notices whom, and newer or less connected people may find it harder to be fully seen and supported. That is not a criticism of the love already present; it is a recognition that growth asks more of us. We are therefore exploring what a more intentional pastoral culture might look like drawing the different strands together more coherently, developing a visiting team to reach those who are housebound or unwell, and helping people new to St Mary's navigate belonging more easily.

All of this matters of course precisely because it is close to the heart of what it means to be the body of Christ. We are so thankful for all those who serve faithfully in this area, often in ways that go unseen, and are hopeful that this team will only grow in the months to come.

The reports that follow give a fuller picture of each of these ministries, written by those who lead them. Together they tell a story of a church learning, in many different ways, to notice and to care.

Open Space *Matthew Creber*

Open Space has been flourishing in recent months, as new guests have joined us and the range of activities has expanded. Our visitors are joyfully diverse and often comment on the warmth of the welcome they receive. We now regularly have guests working together on puzzles or competing at scrabble, alongside creative activities or simple conversation over a cup of coffee and a piece of cake.

Our team work hard to make sure the space remains open to all, not simply offering refreshments, but also demonstrating real care for those who attend, many of whom face personal challenges, isolation, or poor mental health.

Several longstanding volunteers have recently stepped down, increasing pressure on remaining team members, and we are always seeking more people to be on the team. We are encouraged that some of our regular guests have offered to step up as volunteers, and we hope that others will consider giving some of their time. Special thanks to Jean Woodman, who diligently wrangles the rota into existence every term.

We have recently registered to be a part of the Church Urban Fund 'Place of Welcome' scheme which dovetails well with the principles of participation and hospitality which are already in place. We have also been working with Fiona Stern and Diana Patoir to establish a 'Renew Wellbeing' prayer space adjacent to Open Space, which we hope will be introduced in the Summer Term (see Mental Health report).

Bereavement Café *Fiona Stern*

The Bereavement Café continues to meet in the Lady Chapel on the last Wednesday of each month from 10am to midday. We welcome all who have suffered loss of someone, either recently or longer ago, and

offer refreshments and the opportunity to chat. In December 2025 we were able to open between Christmas and New Year for the first time, a welcome addition at a time that can seem very lonely.

At the café we have one volunteer welcoming and others ready to sit at the tables to talk with the guests. We are glad to include Pippin, a registered Pets As Therapy dog, and we have found ways to make this work even though we know not everyone feels comfortable near dogs. We were also involved in the Remembering service and the Peace at Christmas service in November and December respectively, and two of us helped at the seven week Bereavement Journey course at the cathedral.

Most months we have between 12 and 15 guests. Some have been coming for a long time, and we always have new-comers too. Conversations vary, some people want to talk about their bereavement, and some definitely don't. Generally, we find conversation flows naturally in and out of in-depth intense discussion and more light-hearted chat. When asked about our faith we are happy to talk about this and also pray with people if requested.

We see God at work in different ways. For example, through the conversations and how we are prompted to respond, the care and support that the guests show to each other at the café, the friendships that have developed between guests, and each month the provision of volunteers even if an hour before it does not seem that we will have enough.

This year we are exploring offering more one to one conversations if needed. Additional training for volunteers is also being planned.

I would like to thank our volunteers for all that you give of yourselves to enable the Bereavement Café to go ahead. Thank you too to the Open Space team for providing us with so many cups of tea and coffee and the chair team for making the space ready for us each month - we appreciate your help.

If you feel called to the bereavement café ministry and would like to find out more, please do get in touch.

Home Communion *Irene Dewsbury*

It is our privilege to take Communion from St Mary's Church to those who, for what ever reason, are unable to attend the regular services. We are a small team, myself, Janet, Helen and recently we have been joined by Nigel.

One thing which doesn't change is that it is a big change to accept that you need to receive a visit.

Our visit is usually monthly and at a time to suit both people. The communion is reserved during the regular services. The church has several "Home Communion Kits" which makes it easier to transport the elements. There are also service sheets to follow, then we take our personal prayers, readings and items, i.e. Palm Crosses, depending on the time of year and our knowledge of the person being visited.

2025 has been a steady year, with visits to those who have received communion in this way for some time, plus some who have returned to being able to attend normal services. The team fully understand personal circumstances can change quickly and know this effects people's availability.

The clergy and ALM's also do take communion when the need is identified.

I do know that this is being part of St Mary's church family and that God is in each visit. I have found both those visiting and those being visited are strengthened and confirmed by sharing this time together.

I think that this ministry may grow in the future, with an ageing population that become more housebound. If anyone feels that this is a service you could offer, please contact the office and it can be explained more fully.

Mental Health

Matthew Creber

In conversation and pastoral encounters, we have noticed the level of need in our congregation and beyond around Mental Health, and the importance of places where it is acknowledged and supported. In October 2026, we offered Kintsugi Hope's Mental Health Friendly Church training to all who volunteer in pastoral roles within the church. This provided an opportunity for us to engage with the challenge of mental health theologically and practically, and to consider ways in which our church can support good mental health across all our activities.

We hope to understand good mental health as a part of the God's *shalom*, or wholeness, which we are called to seek in the world, and to challenge the stigma which is often attached to those suffering poor mental health.

We're working towards introducing a Mental Health Group, in which people can meet over a 12-week period to explore challenges, receive peers support, and be signposted to further help where appropriate. This will require a team of volunteers, and a certain amount of funding; we are working to get these in place!

Meanwhile, Fiona Stern is working with Diana Patoir and Matthew to establish a regular 'Renew Wellbeing' Space alongside Open Space. This will include signposting to local Mental Health Services and a room dedicated to prayer and reflection. We are looking for volunteers to join us in this initiative.

Care Home Ministry

Matthew Creber

We are engaged in ministry to several care homes: To the Orchards, through the work of ChristChurch led by Michelle George (see ChristChurch report); to Lily House, and to Roslyn Court. Mike Banyard also visits Baird Lodge on a regular basis to offer communion.

At Lily House, a small group of dedicated volunteers attend on a monthly basis, to offer a simple service of prayers, Bible reading and hymns. We were well supported by Ro-ama the activities co-ordinator, who left at Christmas. At Roslyn Court, a growing group of around 15 residents meet weekly, supported by Paul Woodbridge. They pray, and read scripture together, and have recently been working their way through the Gospel of Matthew. When Paul is unavailable, the group is led by a resident in her 90s, and is very much driven by its members. These gatherings have been a vital source of support for Christopher Twycross and others since the death of Angela in 2025. Communion is offered monthly by Anne Williams of St Peter's and with the assistance of Brian Smith of ChristChurch.

There are a number of opportunities to extend our provision for care homes, with the potential to work with Vera James House and Bedford House, as well as deepening our connection with the residents with whom we already have contact. However, we are limited by the availability of volunteers, and to some extent the goodwill of the homes with which we are working. Please continue to pray for these homes, the staff and their residents.

