

Annual Reports for APCM 2026

Vicar's Report

It's always good to take stock and look back to see how God has been working amongst us in the past year. St Mary's is in good heart, with a growing congregation and much to look forward to. There were a number of changes in the Ministry Team in 2025. It was wonderful to welcome Revd John Russell and his wife Karen to the congregation. They have retired to Edlesborough and John has PTO (Permission to Officiate). With Revd Chris Lane, who also has PTO, John regularly presides and preaches at services in St Mary's and All Saints', Dagnall. We said farewell to Revd. Dr Stephen Burge in May after nearly seven years in the parish. As a curate fresh out of college, he brought new ideas and skills and it has been a great joy to see him develop and grow in his ministry. We miss Stephen, but he will be back to cover some services during the vacancy. Gordon Gray has retired as a Reader. For over 25 years, he has led a fruitful ministry, preaching and leading services at St Mary's, and at All Saint's Dagnall. Gordon also developed the very popular Christmas Eve Candle Services and was responsible for the third Sunday 'Worship For All' service which has been replaced by Café Church.

Stephen Axford is in his final year of Reader training. He had a three month placement in the autumn and we are grateful to Ken Robinson and Elizabeth Axford for providing the music whilst Stephen was at the Church of the Good Shepherd. Stephen and Catherine Wendeler continue to lead our monthly Café Church.

Pastoral Care is an important part of our work at St Mary's. Catherine Wendeler and I led two Funeral Forethought Forum workshops in February and October. Supported by the Pastoral Group, we invited people to explore aspects of funeral planning within a supportive and informal group. The Pastoral Group meets regularly and offers pastoral support by visits or phone calls both at home and in hospital. These can include home communions if desired. The Parish Lunch club continues to be popular and provides Sunday lunch for those who would otherwise be on their own. There is a team of helpers who enable this work. In April, Celia French celebrated her 100th birthday with a party at Park Farm. I have a lovely picture of me between two centenarians, Norman and Celia!

There are three schools in the parish. Links with Eaton Bray Academy have continued to develop. A dedicated team runs curriculum linked sessions for each year group from Reception to Year 6. The children come into St Mary's at least once a term and are able to explore topics like 'What do Christians believe Jesus did to save people?' There is great enthusiasm from both learners and teachers. The whole school came to St Mary's for their Christingle service. I also took a Christingle Service in Edlesborough School.

Dagnall Church of England School held a 'Vision Week' in April to share their renewed school vision: 'Rooted in God's love, we aim high', based on the Parable of the mustard seed. Parents, governors and the local community gathered and I was privileged to bless the new school garden as part of the weeks' celebrations. Revd. Chris Lane and I both lead collective worship in school and are on the Governing board. The governors are ably co-chaired by Catherine Hayden and Chris Paul. In a recent SIAMS (School Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) Dagnall school achieved 'Good' overall, being graded 'outstanding' at meeting the needs of individual learners.

In June Frankie was baptised and confirmed and Caroline was confirmed at The Priory Church, Dunstable, in a moving and joyous service conducted by Bishop Richard. Churches Together events included Pancakes and Prayer and Hymns on the Green. In September Eaton Bray Methodist church held their final service in the chapel. The VE Day commemorations on 8 May were marked by Prayers for Peace facilitated by different people throughout the day. In August we held a Prayer time in church especially focused on the conflict in Gaza. We were very sad to say goodbye to Brian Chapman who died in November. For many years, Brian was server for the 8am Communion service, sharing the role with Sharon Stilliard.

This is my final Vicar's report after 9 years in post. I have been greatly supported in my ministry by many people including Catherine Hayden, Churchwarden and the PCC, as well as the Dagnall Management Committee. Reading all the reports gives a flavour of the number and variety of different activities which flourish in our church community and which reach out to our villages. Thank you to all of you who contribute in so many different ways to make St Mary's Eaton Bray and All Saints' Dagnall places of vibrant Christian witness. I wish you every blessing for the future.

Revd Joy Cousans, Vicar of Eaton Bray with Edlesborough

Revd Joy Cousans, April 2026

All Saints Dagnall Report

It is good to report that our monthly services have continued, attended by our faithful few and the welcome addition of friends from St Mary's. Our Carol Service and Christmas Day services were well-attended and joyful occasions.

The members of the Management Committee each have a significant role - Liz who has a number of roles, especially that of cleaning the church, which she does so well, and the maintaining of the wildflower meadow; Norma, our organist, who plays for all our services; Sally, our treasurer who looks after our accounts so efficiently; Philip, who is responsible for matters concerning the building; and Dorothy whose roles include service preparation and administration.

During 2025 we held a successful Harvest Brunch and a Christmas Coffee morning. Thanks to all those who organised the events and provided the excellent refreshments.

The Choir no longer meet in the church but we were glad to welcome the Cubs to use our church hall while their building was being refurbished. Our hall is an excellent venue for small groups and for polling days and we welcome appropriate applications.

We were sorry to say goodbye to Stephen Burge our Associate minister, who has served us so well at Dagnall. We have been very pleased to welcome Chris Lane and John Russell, who have both moved to Edlesborough after their retirement, to lead some of our services. It seems that Edlesborough is a good place to retire to!

And very importantly we want to say thank you to Joy, for being our Vicar for the past nine years (how quickly time passes!) We wish her and Dave all the very best in their retirement, as they move to their new home in Yorkshire. We shall miss them both.

Philip Lee and Dorothy Green, District Churchwardens

Philip Lee and Dorothy Green, District Churchwardens

Bell Tower Report

Regular service ringing from 9:30-10:00 am on Sundays continues, as does our weekly practice night - Mondays 7:30-8:30 pm.

We've been very blessed and delighted to welcome 2 'new to us' ringers this year. Yes, Carl RiGer and Susan Rivett are wonderful additions to our ringing team, plus have enhanced our ability to consistently ring regularly.

We continue to work towards both improving our ringing, as well as increasing our ringing repertoire. Admittedly our ringing ambitions remain quite modest, but we do strive to slowly but surely make progress. We also take great pride in the fact that we are helping to keep this wonderful, old tradition of campanology alive.

Please don't hesitate to make contact with me if you would like further information or have any questions.

Gaye Soule, Tower Captain

Carnival Report

Having reported in 2024 on the success of the 2023 Carnival which, thanks to the near perfect weather resulted in a final income figure of £13,622; followed the following year with a day described as 'not a complete wash out' and a result of only £6970 we were hoping (and praying) for fine weather in 2025.

Thankfully, we were rewarded – in terms of the weather, the attendance, the support provided by many businesses and individuals and indeed to everyone who attended enabling us to distribute **£12,000** to local charities, organisations etc. all in the name of St Mary's Church.

Looking ahead. as every year, the Carnival Committee has already been working on the 2026 event for some months and the event will be held on **Saturday 4th July**, when we earnestly hope that we will again be blessed with good weather. The 2026 Theme will be '**Countries of the World**' (as we decided that the 250th anniversary of the birth of the USA will be celebrated widely elsewhere, and our chosen theme offers greater opportunity for those who will be participating by decorating their homes, businesses, procession floats etc.

Once again, the Carnival Committee will be led by Mark Kilfoyle, supported by an excellent team of volunteers, many of whom are not otherwise connected with St Mary's but who work tirelessly before the event and over the weekend of the Carnival to pull everything together in order to produce both an enjoyable day out for everyone as well as a strong financial result.

As is ever the case, as the day nears, we will be seeking your help in any way that you are able, so please don't be shy in coming forward to lend a hand in any way you can.

Thank you.

Chris Banks

Churchwardens' Report

Maintenance and repairs

Church maintenance

The usual annual programme of maintenance has taken place; this includes servicing the roof alarm, fire extinguishers and clock, as well as leaf clearance from the roof, and organ tuning. The boiler malfunctioned late in the year but it was repaired and at the same time received its annual service. All portable items of electrical equipment have been tested. The mandatory 5 year testing of the church's electrical system has taken place but further testing and upgrading to meet new standards have been advised and these will take place in May.

The church and brasses are cleaned regularly – many thanks to all volunteers.

Stonework repairs

Most of the stonework repairs advised in the Quinquennial Inspection of 2024, have been attended to. These included repairs to the north parapet and north porch.

Our historic piscina which is also in need of attention, is being examined by a conservator who will make recommendations. He is also being asked to advise concerning the eroded condition of stones in the adjacent south wall of the chancel as these may be allowing damp to penetrate and so possibly adding to the problems with the piscina; if so, this will become a larger and more expensive project.

Renovation of vestry

After 10 years residence, the bees in the vestry roof have been evicted prior to repairs to the roof, and general improvements to the vestry. At the time of writing, we are waiting for the builder to assess the roof timbers and carry out any necessary repairs to them and to the metal roof covering.

This renovation will be an ongoing project for the year with the aim of improving the environment of the vestry, especially by reducing damp.

South Aisle

For some years we were aware that in prolonged rainy weather, small amounts of water appeared at the east and the west ends of the south aisle. This was an occasional occurrence but before Christmas 2025, larger puddles developed over a wider area and it became clear that expert advice was needed. I'm pleased to say that in April, remedial repairs were carried out to the lead sheeting which we hope will solve the problem.

Health & Safety

Chris Banks continues to carry out regular inspections and provide safety reports to the PCC. Many thanks to him for his valued advice and expertise.

Churchyard

The Parish Council who maintains our churchyard has arranged for two dead trees to be felled; native shrubs or replacement trees will be planted in due course. We are very grateful for the support of the Parish Council. We are also grateful to the Beavers and their families for help with general gardening duties, and to our eco-group for continuing to develop the wild area in the north-west corner. The group has this year installed a second 'dead hedge' to create further habitats and a mini-pond to encourage aquatic species. Many thanks too, to all other volunteers who help maintain the gullies, drains, paths and flowerbeds.

Archdeacon's inspection

The Archdeacon's inspection, 2025 took place in August – there were no significant issues arising.

Inventory, Logbook and Maintenance log

I can confirm that these are all up to date.

Items acquired and disposed of

Acquired: Good Shepherd icon, the gift of Revd Stephen Burge

Disposed of: electronic keyboard and wooden bookcase from boiler house

Thanks

Many thanks to all who work so hard to maintain our historic church and preserve it for future generations – your efforts are vital and greatly appreciated.

Catherine Hayden

Coffee After Church Report

Our little chats over coffee after our church services on Sunday and Wednesday mornings continues to be very much appreciated and enjoyed by congregation and visitors alike. As our congregation grows so do the coffee and tea drinkers which is fabulous! It's such a lovely opportunity for our fellowship to extend beyond the worship service, helping us all to get to know each other better. There is so much written in the New Testament about the value and importance of Christian community, it is so important for our growth and support....and of course also provides an opportunity to welcome newcomers and visitors to the church.

Marion and I are very grateful for the wonderful team of people who support this special ministry and pull together to make it work each week serving hot drinks and biscuits. We probably average approximately £5 to £10 each week in donations which of course is welcome but the most important aspect is the fellowship.

If anyone feels they might like to be part of the team please do speak to Diane Goodwin or Marion Higley for more information.

Diane Goodwin and Marion Higley

Deanery Synod Report

The Synod meets quarterly throughout the year, and is hosted by the various churches within the Deanery. Thanks were expressed to those members who are stepping down and new members welcomed, The vital role of Parish Safeguarding policies and Safeguarding Officers was discussed by the Synod and it was agreed it would be an ongoing agenda item. At each meeting Parish news is exchanged and new ventures are supported by those already involved in similar undertakings.

The Synod hosts visiting speakers and we heard from Ruth Dennibngton, the Vocation and Discipleship Officer, and Phil Evans from Christian Aid, both of whom were very informative. The next meeting is in May 2026 and will centre on the General Synod Reports.

Jill Fountain

Electoral Roll Report

In the year 2025 - 2026 there are 9 new members on the roll. 6 members have been removed from the roll, either deceased or left the area.
This brings the total to 120.

Gareth Jones

Family History Report

I have received requests for information regarding family history, both for St Mary's Eaton Bray and also for St Mary's, Edlesborough. I have had a number of queries forwarded to me from the Parish Clerks for Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire and also from various Undertakers where the family know the location of the grave in Edlesborough Churchyard but not the reference numbers which I can supply.

Eileen Bennett

Finance Report

Year End Accounts 2025

The Financial Statement for the year ending 2025 has been independently inspected and approved by the PCC. This is a 12 page detail analysis required by the Charity Commission and a copy is available upon request.

Summary of 2025 Accounts

Included here is a simplified summary of the Financial Statement. It shows our funds divided into two main areas. First the long-term funds for the maintenance and preservation of the building and second funds used for the day to day running of the church. For full details of Church funds and those of the associated groups belonging to the Church please read the Financial Statement.

	Funds at 01-Jan-25	Income	Expenditure	Transfers	Investment Gain/ Loss	Funds at 31-Dec-25
1a. Long Term Funds						
Designated	£65,314	£2,889			-£999	£67,204
Restricted	£86,926	£991	-£12,243	£6,000		£81,674
Endowments	£81,792				-£1,971	£79,821
1b. Total of Long Term Funds	£234,032	£3,880	-£12,243	£6,000	-£2,970	£228,699
2a. Annual income						
Giving		£52,397				
Gift Aid		£12,563				
Donations		£754				
Fees for services		£5,240				
Fundraising		£12,036				
Other income		£2,171		£56		
2b. Annual expenditure						
Parish Share			-£67,736			
Clergy expenses			-£847			
Fundraising costs			-£2,353			
Church Running Expenses			-£15,139			
Other expenditure			-£1,468			
2c. Total of General Funds	£14,351	£85,161	-£87,543	£56		£12,025

Our long-term funds include restricted elements which can only be used for the purpose defined by the donor and designated funds that are identified by the PCC for particular projects. Incoming resources included a transfer from Carnival to the Fabric Fund, income from dividends and interest on deposits. Expenditure included major maintenance and fabric projects and is here largely represented by cost of the new lighting installation. The investments losses shown this year represent a reduction in market value of the ethical investment fund managed by the Diocese, which over the long term continues to deliver returns better than deposit accounts.

Our general fund is for the day to day running costs of the Church. It shows a small deficit with income falling a little short of expenditure. Individual giving is holding up well as are our fundraising efforts which are detailed below. An important component of income is the Gift Aid we claim on behalf of our donors who are taxpayers.

Expenditure continues to be carefully managed in these challenging times. We are grateful for the continuing support of our regular givers in supporting the work of the church and it's outreach to the community.

Fundraising in 2025

Easy Fundraising	£19
Cartridges and Phones	£55
Other	£31
Gordon's Quiz	£1,600
Coffee Mornings	£4,207
Spring Fair	£1,196
Poppy Prom	£660
Christmas Concert	£730
Christmas Fair	£1,298
100 Club Receipts	£2,240
Total Fundraising	£12,036

Fundraising is a very important contribution to the running costs of the Church. It represents the efforts of so many people throughout the year in organizing and running events to support the work of the Church. It provides new and diverse outreach opportunities bringing in many people from the community. The Coffee Mornings in particular have gone from strength to strength. We are grateful for all of your efforts that make these possible.

Charitable Giving in 2025

These are the external charities and appeals supported by the Church during the year.

Bishops Harvest Appeal	£133
Food Bank	£188
Childrens Society	£531
Bike 'n Hike	£270
Mission to Seafarers	£200
Total Charitable Donations	£1,322

Martin Hayden
Treasurer St Marys Church

Flower Arrangers Report

Our flower arranging team consists of ten regulars: Beryl, Helen, Sally, Catherine, Christine, Anna, Amanda, Jo, Lizzie and me.

Christine Horn very kindly orders flowers for the major festivals as well as making some beautiful contributions to the arrangements, especially for weddings. We have been trying this year to improve our eco-friendliness by using less floral foam and trying to source locally grown flowers. Of course this is not always possible, but we will endeavour to do more in the coming year.

We would love to see some more volunteers come forward to assist, particularly for the major festivals of Easter, Harvest and Christmas. Don't worry if you are inexperienced - with the help of our more able arrangers you will soon progress on to arranging flowers on your own during the year! Please contact me if you would like to come along.

Barbara Morton

Focus Magazine Report

The Focus Magazine Committee is a sub-committee of St Mary's PCC. It has seen a few changes over the last year with several members leaving and some new one joining. Ken Coates retired after 40 years as chairman having taken Focus from a small circulation subscription pamphlet to a free, glossy publication with a wide circulation across the four villages. Also leaving were Angela and Steve Dunford, Susan Tucker and Stuart Morris our distribution manager who sadly passed away.

The committee now consists of Sally Siddons, as Editor she is the mainstay of the publication each month, Sally Taylor, as Advertising Manager keeping the flow of revenue needed to fund the publication. Martin Hayden as Treasurer and temporary Distribution Manager. Recently joined are Steve Western and Jane Clark who will be supporting our advertising and administration improvements. Not on the committee but a key member of Focus is Lincoln Rodrigues, who is responsible for the graphic design of Focus and the new brighter and bolder look to the magazine.

Two of the key challenges over the last several years have been inflation and the ever-increasing costs of printing, alongside a difficult market for advertising. We have now switched to a new printer with a more competitive cost structure. With that in place and a renewed marketing campaign to restore our revenue, we are now confident that we can continue to support Focus as a free magazine for the next several years at least.

We have yet to appoint a new chairman and we are keen to attract new members to the committee to help us maintain and develop Focus as a valued source of information, support and interest in the four villages.

Martin Hayden

Fundraising Report

Fundraising activities have followed the familiar annual pattern including Coffee Mornings, Gordon's Christmas Puzzle, Spring and Christmas Fairs plus Music@St Mary's Concerts.

The Christmas Fair was as popular as ever and the amount raised was back up to pre-Covid levels. We decided to stop holding the Spring Fair as footfall was getting very low and it was not considered fair to the stallholders. Also, the monthly Coffee Mornings have more than made up for the amount raised in previous years.

The PCC is delighted by the number of attendees and helpers at these events which all form part of St Mary's Outreach Ministry. If you would be interested in helping to organise any of these events please talk to Gordon or Barbara.

Gordon Gray

North Chilterns Group Report

The aim of the North Chilterns Group is to bring all the parishes together in faith and worship as well as socially. The NCG banner is displayed in each church on rotation throughout the year. The January pulpit swaps were a success and happened in every benefice. I led the Lent Course on 'Scripture and story' with Martin Rees providing amusing, thought provoking short stories to round off each session. We were hosted at the Methodist chapel in Eaton Bray which proved to be an excellent venue. During the first part of Holy Week there were services at Kensworth, Stanbridge and Eaton Bray which were appreciated by those present.

There was no Confirmation Service in the NCG; instead our candidates were confirmed at Dunstable Priory in June 2025. The NCG Annual Service was held at St. Mary the Virgin, Kensworth, on 31st August 2025 and was appreciated by all who attended. Penny Fray and Kerry

Smith facilitated the Quiet Morning at St. Mary Magdalene, Whipsnade on 6th September 2025 on the theme of Spiritual gardens. This was a lovely morning which provided a refreshing quiet space for all those present. Revd Kaushal David celebrated Advent Sunday with an NCG Service in St. Giles Totternhoe. Dave Cousans is currently treasurer of the NCG, so we are seeking a new treasurer to replace him.

Revd Joy Cousans

Parish Lunch Club Report

The Sunday Lunch club continues to thrive thanks to an amazing team of volunteers.

We have 35-40 guests for lunch. All enjoy meeting up with others to socialize with old friends and new, especially on a Sunday when many others are with their families. We welcome all faiths to the meal.

We have managed to keep the cost of the lunch to £8.00 which includes:

Drink and nibbles on arrival
Main course
Dessert
Coffee and chocolates

We are very thankful to the Hall Trustees for keeping the hall rent at an affordable price.

We are non-profit making and hope to continue this lunch for many years to come.

Elizabeth Bray

PCC Report

There are 10 on the PCC including the Vicar and Gordon, our Lay Reader, who is co-opted on each year. The PCC met 10 times in the past year, with attendance between 6 and 9.

The following appointments were in place during the past year:

Lay Vice Chair	Catherine Hayden
Standing Committee members	Joy Cousans/Catherine Hayden//Hilary Jackson/Elisabeth Jones
PCC Secretary	Barbara Morton
Electoral Roll Officer	Gareth Jones
Treasurer/Bookkeeper	Martin Hayden
Finance Committee members	Joy Cousans/Martin Hayden/Catherine Hayden/Graham Mockett/Martin Quinn
Stewardship Committee members	Joy Cousans/Catherine Hayden/Graham Mockett,

	Martin Hayden/Martin Quinn
Stewardship Officer	Graham Mockett
Safeguarding Officer	Elisabeth Jones
Health and Safety Officer	Chris Banks
Bell Tower Manager	Gaye Soule
Fabric Committee Chair	Martin Hayden
Youth and Education Officer(s)	Sheila Banks/Catherine Wendeler
Fundraising Chair	Gordon Gray
Parish Lunch Club Organiser	Lizzie Bray
Representatives on the North Chilterns Group Committee	Dave Cousans
Representatives on Churches Together Committee	Joy Cousans/Stephen Axford
PCC representative on Dagnall Management Committee	Joy Cousans
Representative on Eaton Bray Village Hall Committee	Chris Banks
Focus Treasurer	Martin Hayden
Rota organisers 8am & 10am	Sharon Stilliard/Sally Taylor
Cleaning Rota organiser	Gaye Soule
Flowers organiser	Barbara Morton
Churchyard Maintenance organiser	Ken Robinson
Carnival Officer	Chris Banks
Eco Church Committee	Catherine Hayden, Joy Cousans, Iain Stubbs, Sue Walker, Tricia Toms, Sally Taylor, Diane Goodwin, Diana Barry
Pastoral Visiting Team	Joy Cousans, Catherine Wendeler, Gordon Gray, Chriss Hewitt, Sue Walker, Catherine Hayden, Pamela Richardson, Beryl Bishop
Focus Magazine	Angela Dunford/Sue Tucker/Ken Coates/ Sally Siddons /Steve Dunford

Barbara Morton, PCC Secretary

Pathlight Group Report 2026

Pathlight is a relaxed and informal bible study group looking to discover more about God through the Bible stories and how it relates to our everyday lives today. The group's name is based on Psalm 119:105 – "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path."

The group started in May 2025 and over the months we have looked at The Lord's Prayer by going through Archbishop Stephen Cottrell's reflections on this for Thy Kingdom Come. We've listened to

and discussed some podcasts with JJohn and theologian Tom Wright on how 'What is the Bible?' and 'How Should We Read the Bible?' Latterly we have read and discussed the book of Esther. The group usually meets on the 4th Tuesday and there is no commitment to attend every month as we hope that each session subject will be stand-alone. Everyone is welcome whether you are a regular Bible reader or don't quite know where to start....or maybe just not sure you even want to read it! We hope there will be something for everyone to discover, chat about or just ponder on.

Diane Goodwin & Chriss Hewitt.

Prayer & Praise Group Report

Prayer and praise continued to meet in the church this year on a Tuesday morning 10.30-12 each month. The dates are as always advertised in the pew leaflet.

The group remains a faithful and diverse group of people who have grown to know each other very well and we welcomed two new people to the group which is wonderful. This group is open to all who would like to join us and is a way of coming together as Christians and of coming closer to God in prayer and worship. It is very informal and not scary, you will not be asked to do anything but listen and sing.

We begin with light refreshments, over which we share our news and prayer requests; these are brought to God in an opening prayer. Then we worship God in song, accompanied by Ken on the keyboard, we reflect on a subject from the Bible or something else about faith. This is followed by Intercessional prayer for the church and the world.

This year we have looked at Christian leaders of the churches past and present and how what they taught us is still relevant to today and other subjects, also Sermons for discussion from evangelist J John. We all enjoyed a lovely meal at The Swan pub where new and past members joined us which was lovely. We opened with prayer and sang Carols which the others in the pub said they enjoyed.

If anyone would like to join us just come along or speak to me.

Chriss Hewitt

Prayer Matters Report

The Prayer Matters Group in its current format has now been active for almost 6 years. We meet in church approximately once a month and our aim is to pray in a group as well as on our own that we may know God's vision for St. Mary's Church and to share ideas of prayer with others to help develop and deepen prayer lives. This includes providing resources in church and the churchyard and liaising with the PCC to pray for church matters.

One of our initial projects was to develop the North Chapel into a focused prayer space. Resources added at the time were the Bible verses that are displayed on the altar and in the pew leaflet. Also added was the print of Holman Hunt's 'Light of the World' painting. Cards were made available for people to take away with a Bible verse on the reverse. Other ideas that have developed since have been

- The large banner about prayer near the North Chapel
- Signage informing people the area is a 'quiet area for prayer'
- A prayer tree (made by the charity Men in Sheds) which has been widely utilised by visitors and those who have been bereaved.

- Christian poems and reflections on the tables at the monthly coffee mornings for people to take away
- The planning of the annual Thy Kingdom Come 11 days has been incorporated into the Prayer Matters Group
- The Prayer Chain was set up. This is used for people requesting prayer in an emergency situation or for those who only require prayer for up to 3-4 weeks. Examples of this would be people having an operation, bereaved families, acute illness etc. Communication of requests is sent to those who have agreed to be part of the Prayer Chain.
- Slates in the churchyard with Bible verses to catch the eye of those who walk through the churchyard

We welcome anyone who would like to be a part of this group. If you would like to come and join us in discussing and praying for the life and community at St Mary's please do speak to one of us.

Chriss Hewitt, Sheila Brown, Marion Higley, Peter Janes, Laura Janes, Diane Goodwin

Reader Ministry Report

I have taken a step back from preaching this year following ongoing health issues. However, I was still able to lead the Candle Services on Christmas Eve. My sincere thanks to everyone who served at that service in the role of Sidesperson. I was also able to lead the Good Friday reflection, held this year at Dagnall.

I want to thank Christine, whose care and support I increasingly need and without whose support my ministry would not be possible.

Gordon Gray

Safeguarding Report

We are compliant with the safeguarding training provisions set out for the Parish and have obtained and completed DBS checks for all those for whom it's been required. We have had no safeguarding issues that we've needed to report to the higher authorities or to the police. I have made the decision to step down as safeguarding officer for our parishes and would like to thank Barbara for taking on the post.

Please continue to be vigilant and report any safeguarding concerns that you might have to either the safeguarding officer, the vicar, or the churchwarden. Contact numbers for related concerns are posted in both entryways to the church, including the safeguarding team numbers for St. Albans. However, if it is something non urgent it's best to channel concerns initially through our personnel here at the church. Safeguarding is everyone's concern. We all have a responsibility to look out for our vulnerable, young and old, and to help prevent or address any issues that do arise promptly. Your cooperation with this is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Elisabeth Jones, Safeguarding Officer

Saturday Coffee Mornings

What makes these mornings in Church so successful? The variety of delicious home made cakes and savouries; the friendly, relaxed atmosphere - we aim to greet everyone with a smile and 'hello, welcome!'

We serve now, regularly 90+customers coming from the local villages and beyond – a group come from Dunstable, rain or shine! Our number swells 2 or 3 times a year when the Beavers and their parents/leaders come in for refreshments after a long morning gardening in the Churchyard for which we give them thanks.

The 'Book Swap' helps increase our number of customers too – people come in to swap a book and can't resist a delicious snack. Likewise some come in for a coffee and think what's going on over there and borrow a book!

The delicious cakes, sausage rolls, cheese scones and other savouries are made and donated by dedicated and generous church members, friends and recently by customers! My thanks to them all.

No cake is wasted. Customers are encouraged to have 2 or 3 pieces of cake and several cups of coffee/tea. And also encouraged to use one of the boxes available (or bring their own) and buy a piece or two to take home for tea! Whole unfrozen cakes are frozen to be used the following month; and then, if they are lucky, the congregation members enjoy a feast with their 'coffee after church', the following day!

We endeavour to be all inclusive and have gluten free, something for vegetarians, various teas, coffee, decaf coffee and drinking chocolate available (the last 4 items all being fair trade). Please have a word with Marion if we have forgotten any dietary needs.

This monthly event involves the work of a wonderful team of people. Again, my thanks to all. This team is growing in number which is very welcomed. If anyone wants to help or has any ideas as to what else could be done, please have a word with Marion. (07989179137). Or if you feel there is something wrong – creative criticism is welcomed!

We are proud of the outreach value of these very sociable events and the fact that it has become a major fund raising event for the church.

Marion Higley

St Mary's Website Report

In November 2025 the St Mary's website was given a major refresh as it had become out of date. Theo Gray developed a new version using the platform Umbraco and I have taken on filling it with material and pictures. The idea is that more than one person can learn the basic system as a content editor and update the site on a regular basis.

It's often said that a church website should be a digital shop window, providing a clear and inviting introduction to the church - both for members but also, importantly, for those wondering whether to come along. To this end, I have been trying to make sure that it is bang up to date, easy to navigate, colourful and welcoming. You can find current details for all our upcoming services, activities and events, as well as more general pages on our personnel, history, and news. You can find the most recent streamed service on the front page.

I feel now that we have the basic site up and running it would be great to have more original material, as at the moment I generally only receive information when the pew leaflet is distributed and then illustrate that with some general photos.

What would church members like to see on the website, is there anything that would be helpful that isn't there? How can we showcase all that goes on at St Mary's in a way that is attractive to our local community, and which welcomes people in? In our online world, let's use this resource as best we can.

Elizabeth Axford

Working with Children Report

As a result of work with children being badly affected by the pandemic, a future goal identified in the Mission Action Plan was to build resources connecting school curriculum planning with visiting and exploring St Mary's.

Since 2022 Eaton Bray Academy have held their Christingle service in church led by Joy. This has led to strong links with the school. This annual event now has the addition of music led by Stephen Axford and in 2025 featured his newly formed choir.

A further goal had been to set up a singing group for Primary school children. Instead of this, a new development has been that Stephen Axford has begun to go into the school to work with the children to form a choir to hopefully lead to performances in the church. The school choir has already performed with the Eaton Bray Singers at their concert in the Village Hall. Stephen is additionally supporting the links with the school as a member of the Governing Body.

We work across the whole age range of the school starting with the pre-School through to year 5&6. The Children's Work team which consists of Joy, Catherine W, Jill, Marion, Catherine H, Sally, Stephen and I lead and plan the visits. Everyone has an education background, is DBS cleared and has completed Safeguarding training.

We work with Fenella, the RE subject leader, to plan the topics to be covered by each class. We follow their RE curriculum and plan our activities accordingly. There is a wide range of topics ranging from Poppies and Love and Kindness with the youngest children to "What would make our community a more respectful place" and "How does faith enable resilience" with the top years. Plus, many more topics between. Since the last APCM, 20 school sessions have taken place for children from 3 to 11 years old.

The children always thoroughly enjoy their visits; for some it has been their 3rd year of visiting us, they are always well behaved and interested in whatever subject is being covered. During the past year Joy had some fascinating conversations about different faiths as not all the children have a Christian background.

The staff also enjoy the visits and are very appreciative of the work and preparation. At times they stop to acknowledge that they too have learnt something that day.

Sheila Banks