



2026 Annual Review
St. Michael & All Angels Church
Sandhurst

Including Papers for the APCM
Annual Church Meeting

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Annual Parochial Church Meeting
to be held on
Sunday 10 May 2026 at 11:00am
The Seeby Hall, St Michael's Pastoral Centre Sandhurst

Agenda

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|---|---------|
| 1) Opening Prayer and Chairman's introduction | 5 mins |
| 2) Apologies for Absence | |
| 3) Election of two churchwardens
(those who are on the electoral roll or live in the parish are eligible to vote) | 5 mins |
| 4) Minutes of the 2025 APCM | 5 mins |
| 5) Presentation of Electoral Roll | 2 mins |
| 6) Election of Parochial Church Council members
(those who are on the electoral roll are eligible to vote)
a) Four vacancies for three years | 3 mins |
| 7) Financial Reports
a) Annual Accounts 2025
b) Appointment of Independent Examiner
c) Stewardship Campaign and Fundraising | 5 mins |
| 8) Statutory Reports
a) Incumbent's Report (please see report in this Annual Review)
b) Fabric, Goods and Ornaments Report (please see the relevant reports
in this Annual Review) with updates on the Spire Project
c) Report on the Proceedings of the PCC (please see report in this Annual Review)
d) Deanery Synod Report (please see report in this Annual Review) | 15 mins |
| 9) Any Other Business | 5 mins |
| 10) Closing Prayers | 5 mins |

Minutes of the 2025 APCM

Held on Sunday 27 April 2025 at 11:45am in the Seeby Hall

Attendees

Catherine Wilkins	Martin Thomas	Sue Campbell
Brendan Watson	Nicky Thomas	John Campbell
Alun Grafton	Steph Martin	Karen Symons
Sheriden Cremer-Evans	John Martin	Kenneth Wilkins
Rupert Cremer-Evans	Peter Hulbert	Clare Hardy
Bob Oakly	Jennie Hulbert	Miranda Frary
Dave Percival	John Score	Emma Hodge
Liz Percival	Abby Coleman	John Castle
John White	James Mason	
Denise Yeomans	Sarah Bishop	

1. Opening Prayers and Chairman's Introduction

The Rector opened the meeting with a short prayer. He welcomed everybody to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

2. Apologies for Absence

Jon Toohey	George Castle	Jenny Oakley
Chris Harris	Karen Phillips	Victoria Adesev
Anne Harris	Sarah Ashton	Claire Clay

3. Election of two churchwardens

(those who are on the electoral roll or live in the parish are eligible to vote)

There were no nominations for churchwarden and therefore none were elected and two three- year vacancies remain. The Rector asked everybody to think whether they could volunteer and pray for the right people to come forward.

4. Minutes of the 2024 APCM

The Minutes of the 2024 were presented to the meeting in the Annual Review and were accepted with no amendments with 27 votes for and 2 abstentions.

5. Presentation of the Electoral Roll

In Claire's absence, the Rector presented the new electoral roll, having been completely revised this year. The Rector informed the PCC that there are now **134** on the electoral roll. **81** who live in the parish and **53** outside it.

That is down from **142** on the last electoral roll.

6. Election of Parochial Church Council members

(those who are on the electoral roll are eligible to vote)

Four vacancies for three years and one for two years. We have had three nominations:

- **Catherine Wilkins**, nominated by Emma Hodge and seconded by David Hunt
- **Jon Toohey**, nominated by Sue Campbell and seconded by John Campbell
- **Rupert Cremer- Evans**, nominated by Sheriden Cremer Evans and seconded by Clare Hardy

All were voted in favour of these being elected to the PCC. There is still one three-year vacancy and one, two-year vacancy.

7. Financial Reports

a. Annual Accounts 2024

The Rector drew the meeting's attention to the annual review and the Annual Accounts, both of which were available at the meeting. Jon Toohey (Treasurer) had sent his apologies. On Jon's behalf, the Rector thanked the meeting for their continued generous giving and for the hard work done by Brandon Ashton and Sunita MacIntosh on accounting our finances. He went on to explain that there was a small profit on the general fund of £3,000. We should also be putting £10,000 into a sinking fund to pay for future large expenditures, but we have no headroom to do this at present; which is not an ideal situation. The Rector informed the Meeting that there will be a Stewardship Day on 15 June.

b. Appointment of Independent Examiner

John went on to propose Kate Black as our independent examiner.

Resolution: That **Kate Black** is appointed Independent Examiner for St Michael's Church for the coming year (25/26)

Proposed: John Castle **Seconded:** Karen Allen **Passed unanimously**

c. Stewardship Campaign and Fundraising

The Rector thanked Catherine for the work she has done so far and referred the meeting to her report in the Annual Review. He went on to tell the meeting that £7,000 has been raised so far by the fundraising group towards the refurbishment of the Spire & Bells, through three events: Meet the Artist, Comedy & Carols and Burns night and one sponsored activity. The recent St Cecilia's concert is not yet counted in the total.

A question was asked about why the stewardship policy had been removed from the website. The Rector promised to make sure that it was found, checked, and reviewed at the May PCC meeting.

The Rector also reported that £2,000 had been raised by the Social Committee towards church funds. He was, however, very sad to tell the meeting that Chris Harris will be standing down as chairman and Ann as a committee member. The Rector thanked them for their many years of hard work. We now need to look for a new chairperson.

The Rector went on to mention that we need also think and pray about a new treasurer. Jon Toohey continues in the role he has held for 14 years but would like to be able to step down and we are currently looking for someone to take over. The Rector asked the meeting to think and pray about the issue.

8. Statutory reports

a. Incumbents Report

The incumbent's report is on page 7 of the Annual Review.

John Castle expressed his thanks to all involved in all the different aspects of the life of the church for their commitment to St Michael's, especially to Karen Allen for her time and service as churchwarden.

b. Fabric, Goods and Ornaments Report (with Update on Spire project)

The Fabric Goods and Ornaments Reports (otherwise known as Estates) starts on page 13 of the Annual Review. The Rector thanked all those who help with the church and buildings in practical ways.

c. Report on the proceedings of the PCC

The report of the PCC proceedings is on page 8 of the Annual Review.

d. Deanery Synod Report

The report of the Deanery Synod is on page 11 of the Annual Review. There were no questions on these reports.

Updates on the Spire project since the publication of the Annual review

e. Spire Report – Miranda Fray

Miranda updated the meeting on recent progress on the Spire project. She told the meeting that the three faculties for the work are granted thanks to support from the DAC and the parish. The spire re-shingling repairs should start late August early September subject to a bat license.

Scaffolding will be required and the process could take 4 months. The tower bells repair and renovation date were delayed by some slowness in the faculty progress. The hope is now that the bells will be taken away in early summer, overhauled and returned in September or October and a new floor to access the bells safely will be constructed at that point.

The clock will be repaired and regilded, but that we would not install a self-winding mechanism as it would be too expensive. A question was asked about who would wind the clock and it was suggested that we would need someone to keep it right.

f. Update on grant funding for the Spire project – Martin Thomas

The PCC had decided that the spire project should be funded as follows: one third by external fundraising; one third from the mission fund and the final third from grant funding. For the bells part of the project, that would mean finding £16,000 in grants. So far Martin has received £8,000 in grant funding with applications in for grants amounting to another £10,000. He would start on applications for shingles next. The Rector thanked Martin for his hard work.

g. Treasurers update on the costs and out goings of the spire project.

The Rector, in Jon's absence, shared the rough summary Jon had prepared for the APCM: For 2022 and 2023 we spent nothing but had 80.000 in the restricted fund end 2023, which thus is a good starting point.

For 2024 we had income of 28.000 (which included some very generous donations) and spent 23.000 leaving us with 85.000 in the fund at 31 December 2024.

Total cost is expected to be 250.000, less 23.000 spent = 227.000 to go. We hope 30.000 will come from grants and we have 85.000 in the fund – thus we need 112.000.

To date about 2.000 has come in since 1 January 2025 (mainly Burns night) – thus 110.000 will come from the Mission fund unless we get some sizeable donations or many, many, small ones. The Rector pointed out that if 110 people gave £1,000 each that would clear the problem and that as individuals and as a parish we should continue to pray about it. The building is a real Icon and a witness in the community.

9. AOB

a. Question from Dave Percival

Dave asked the PCC where the Rector and the Parish see themselves in five years' time. The Rector replied that he will be still serving the Lord. There was then some general discussion about the Rector's possible retirement on which he was non-committal.

b. Thanks to our Family Worker

Sheriden Cremer-Evans, pointed out the growth in Family Service and in Church Together, which is very encouraging. Also encouraging was the number of new young families who now go to Spring Harvest. Sheriden felt that this was due to the work of Sarah Bishop and the Rector and wanted our thanks to them both recorded.

10. Closing Prayer led by John Castle

The meeting closed at 12:55pm.

Rector's Report 2025

As I write this report, I am aware that by this year's APCM I will no longer be your Rector. I am truly grateful to everyone whose commitment and hard work is documented in all the reports which follow. Now I'd like to take this opportunity to look back over the past 21 years and pick out what for me are some of the highlights.

Since well before my time our church has made work with children and young people a priority, and we have had several youthworkers over the years. In 2015 we surveyed families connected with our church and decided to recruit a part-time Family Worker, expressing a holistic approach which recognises that the involvement of parents in church life is crucial for the spiritual development of children.

When I applied for this job, I remember reading in the Parish Profile that St Michael's wanted 'evolution, not revolution'. Our range of worship services has certainly evolved. The Family Service is very different from how it was in 2004: more accessible to people with little church background and much better attended. Following surveys of the congregation we introduced different weekly 'flavours' to our Parish Communion, including the Reflective Service on the third Sunday and the Informal Service on the second Sunday which features our talented worship band. I am most grateful to our gifted and enthusiastic Choir Director Karen Phillips for the way she has enabled the choir to adapt to new musical styles, while continuing to develop the repertoire of more traditional choral music in both morning and evening services. The launch of our Church Together service in 2022 was part of our response to the call from the Diocese to move to a more intergenerational model of church and it has brought together people from the different services, even though some people have decided that it is "not their thing".

It is always important to think about why we want to make changes, do new things or, indeed, carry on with the familiar. In 2014 we adopted the Parish Purpose of Knowing God for ourselves, Growing as individuals and as a Church, and Showing God's love

in the world. These principles will guide us to ask questions like: *How can we help new people to experience a personal relationship with God?*; *How can we enable our members to become more confident in their faith?*; and *How can we make an impact for good in our local community?* Decisions about repairing the spire, developing our work with families or running a Prayer Space in a local school all need to proceed from an evaluation of whether the time, effort and money involved will help us to fulfil one or more of the aspects of our core Church Purpose. I pray that those tasked with recruiting a new Rector will be guided by our Purpose statement as they seek to find someone who will lead this church in the mission to which God has called you.

It has been a real privilege to serve God at St Michael's, and to work with an amazing group of people who show their commitment to this mission in all kinds of ways, from cleaning the church or doing repairs to helping nurture children in faith or leading worship. There are so many people who deserve thanks, and there isn't space to do so, but I do particularly want to pay tribute to members of the Rector's Council for their commitment and support: to John Martin our Lay Chair for his level-headed leadership not only of the PCC but of the St Mary's project; to Sue Campbell (PCC secretary) who makes sure we attend to everything we should; to Jon Toohey our long-suffering Treasurer who keeps us grounded and financially solvent; to James Mason and the newly elected Nick Allen (Churchwardens) and to all past Churchwardens who have shown leadership and supported me in my role, each of them contributing particular gifts and expertise to the role.

In my report to the 2005 Annual Review I commented that on joining St Michael's I had found a church "*in good heart*". I'm pleased to say that I leave a church that is in good heart, thanks to the prayers and efforts of so many, and, above all, to the grace of God. It has been my privilege to be part of your journey. May God go with you in the future!
Rev John Castle

The PCC

The PCC continues to try and steer the parish through changing times, and this report sets out to give you a flavour of what goes on.

The full PCC held nine regular meetings during the year. The average attendance at all meetings was 82% percent. They met three times by Zoom because of poor weather conditions and accessibility issues. The PCC then met in person on six occasions.

The Rector's Council consists of the Rector, one Churchwarden, there being a vacancy for the second Churchwarden, the Vice Chairman of the PCC, the PCC Secretary, and the Treasurer. They have power to transact the business of the PCC between PCC meetings, reporting to the full PCC as appropriate. The Rector's Council met 11 times by remote means with an average attendance of 84%. Three of the meetings being fully attended.

The Annual Parochial Church Meeting took place on Sunday 27 April 2025. 28 people attended in person. There were 134 people on the church electoral roll. There had been a full revision of the electoral roll before the APCM.

Over the course of the year, the PCC has invited representatives of groups from the church to share with the PCC what they do and how we can best support them, including, our family worker and our choir director.

The meetings of the PCC have continued to cover varying topics including:

- ▶ To continue to explore and develop the ways in which we can encourage generous giving from those who attend St Michael's regularly and for events
- ▶ Nurturing the young: The PCC are developing new ways to develop and expand the role of the family worker to cover the work and support of older children and young people.
- ▶ How we make sure our buildings meet required safety standards and how we fund making our buildings more thermally efficient and in the case of the Pastoral Centre, more sound proof.
- ▶ The repair and renovation of the spire, clock and bells, has occupied our attention this year on a regular basis.
- ▶ How we steward our financial resources by sensible investment and careful use of what we have.
- ▶ Safeguarding and how best to protect those who worship and are nurtured by us.
- ▶ How we relate to the wider Anglican church, including updates from Sonning Deanery Synod.
- ▶ How we begin to prepare the parish for the upcoming Rector's Vacancy

The PCC represents and makes decisions on behalf of all the church. It is a pity therefore, that some groups are underrepresented. We have a big year ahead, steering the parish through the vacancy after John leaves. we welcome new members willing to engage with the future direction of the church. I would like to thank all those who have worked hard as part of the PCC this year. Particularly our new Churchwarden, James Mason, who took on the job after the APCM last year failed to find anyone; John Martin who is steady at the tiller (to continue my nautical metaphor) as lay chair and Jon Toohey who continues with great diligence, manage our finances.

Sue Campbell, PCC Secretary

Treasurer's Report

Firstly, a big thank you. Thank you to all who give to St Michael's – both financially and in time. This is the Treasurers report so does naturally focus on the former but please be assured the latter is appreciated.

We have a general fund whose income is most of your giving and the net rental of the pastoral centre. The general fund is used for parish share expense (that mainly funds our rector), our day to activities which should include maintaining the fabric of both the church and the pastoral centre. As far as the latter is concerned it was agreed by the PCC some time ago that at least £10-12k per annum should be placed in a sinking fund as some repairs are both infrequent and large. It is pleasing to report that nearly £10k was placed into the repairs fund in 2025.

We then have other funds, designated and restricted, to support various activities seen as integral for the mission of the church in our community. These are such things as our Family Worker, support of youth, the Choir and *Sandhurst Counselling Service*. The income for these coming mostly from both specific giving and our *St Mary's Mission Fund*.

We are in the process of a significant repair on the spire, bells and clock. The budget having been set at £250k – a large amount of money. Much work has been done to tap into various bodies that support church restoration work through grants. In rough terms, it is hoped that a third will be funded from such bodies, a third from both specific donation appeals and the current Repairs Fund and a third will come from the *St Mary's Mission Fund*.

Thank you again to those that continue to give generously and continue to financially support St Michaels – there are a number of options on how to do this;

- ▶ for regular giving, the *Parish Giving Scheme (PGS)* (effectively a Direct Debit but also collects Gift Aid – unlike normal Direct Debits's or Standing Orders's you may have). *PGS* is itself a charity set up 'to provide the most efficient and effective way for people to financially support the activity of the Church of England'. You can sign up to the *PGS* on our website.
- ▶ for one off gifts, the donate button on the website using your debit/credit card or *Paypal* account.

Both the above can be accessed at: www.stmichaels-sandhurst.org.uk/donations

- ▶ contactless giving at services (rather than cash in the plate) through 'Zac'
- ▶ the QR code you will see more of
- ▶ remember St Michael's in your will – ideally with a %

We would like to thank the following people – all who contribute so much to helping keep control of our finances;

- ▶ Brandon Ashton – for dealing with *HMRC* and recovering the Gift Aid tax due - a significant source of income.
- ▶ Kate Black – for taking on the role of being our independent examiner.
- ▶ A number of people helping with getting grants for the Pastoral Centre windows and *WinSpire* projects
- ▶ Sunita McIntosh - for everything else.

Jon Toohey

Stewardship

Firstly I'd like to say a big thank you to all who give money regularly through the Parish Giving Scheme, standing orders and envelopes, those who donate through the card machine and QR codes, and to everyone who gives their time and talents to supporting St Michael's. It all helps to keep the work of our church and maintenance of our buildings going.

This year we held our Stewardship Sunday in June which was supported by our prayer and teaching in the weeks leading up to it and resulted in some generous one-off donations, and some changes to planned giving amounts.

We have seen some new people join the Parish Giving Scheme last year but have lost others who are no longer with us or who have moved away, so numbers on this scheme have stayed fairly constant at 62. I am always happy to help anyone who would like more information on the Parish Giving Scheme or Stewardship in general.

The Stewardship and Fundraising Policy has recently been revised and updated, and is prefaced with this verse from *1 Chronicles 29:14*:

"...everything in heaven and on earth is yours, and of your own do we give you"

which will be familiar to many from its inclusion in the offertory prayer at the Communion service. When we take giving back to God as our grateful response for all He gives us, greater things will follow.

Catherine Wilkins, Stewardship Officer

Sonning Deanery Synod

The Synod met four times in 2025. The March and June meetings were chaired by the Lay Chair and by the Associate Area Dean as the role of Area Dean had not been filled. The March agenda included a number of "Good News" stories from around the Deanery including Twyford's success with beginner's courses and house groups," Come and Sing" meetings in Crowthorne which embraces church regulars and non-church goers, and the success in involving primary school children in regular services at The Church on the Green in Arborfield. There was also a report by Sonning Synod member, Peter Barrett, of the Church of England General Synod meeting in February which lasted five days with safeguarding being the dominant topic.

In the June meeting (the AGM), business included election of officers, members of the Standing Committee and representatives on the Diocesan Synod. There were reports on successful projects supported by Green Grants and data from parishes on their work with children and young people.

In September Revd Laura Wheatley Downs of St John's Crowthorne introduced herself as the new Area Dean and she took the chair. The Deanery Plan was discussed. The previous plan was a short one as there were more vacancies than parishes with incumbents. However, many vacancies had now been filled, and all should be filled by early 2026, so the Standing Committee would begin work on a new plan. The Area Dean intended to visit parishes listening to what challenges they face and the support they needed as the plan must work across all churches of the Deanery with its diverse community of traditions and worship. The target was that the new plan would be presented in September 2026.

Also, Bishop Mary would visit the Deanery on 3rd October, and the day had a very busy timetable of meetings and visits.

Much of the November meeting was devoted to the "Deanery Plan Listening Exercise". The Area Dean asked the members to answer several questions to provide information to the Standing Committee to help in drawing up a new Deanery Plan. The questions would also be circulated to all churches through PCCs, Synod and Chapter to give others a chance to contribute to the process. The questions were.

- ▶ Who or what are some of the gems and treasures in your parish?
- ▶ Where have you seen God at work in your parishes? Where has there been life and growth?
- ▶ What would you like to see nurtured within the life of the Deanery?
- ▶ What could do with more resourcing within your parish or the Deanery? Or what resources would be helpful?
- ▶ What fears/anxieties, worries or concerns do you have about the future of your parish?
- ▶ What are the priorities of your parish?
- ▶ What are some of the needs in your local community that you would like to respond to?

Following discussion of the responses, it was apparent that children and young people and volunteers were held as gems. Youth work and music were areas people wanted resourced. Churches wanted to serve their communities, but the priorities expressed did not always match the perceived needs. The standing committee would work on the information gathered and report back at the next meeting.

John Martin

Spire Repair

To continue to serve and welcome our community over the years to come, our wonderful church building needs to remain in good repair. As well as an important historical building, this is a focus for worship and important to many local people as part of their lives. Many have come together over the past couple of years to raise funds to support the project for which we are hugely grateful. Whilst we continue to push for more grant funding and donations, work is now progressing with the long overdue spire resingling, bell refurbishment and clock works.

You may have seen the rather hair-raising scaffolding on the tower as our roofing contractor is underway with replacing the wooden shingles roof covering, soldiering on despite the exceptionally wet weather conditions. The old cedar shingles, well past their sell-by date, will be no more as the new oak shingles take their place, as originally graced the tower when it was built. These will be more resistant to bird attack than the softer cedar and should last us well into the future.





As I write our wonderful bell ringing team have just completed construction of a brand new floor to the bell chamber with the bell specialists. This will mean safer and easier access for the future to maintain and repair the bells. We are eagerly awaiting the return of our bells from Nicholson's foundry in March – some issues have been encountered along the way meaning this took longer than expected but we are now back on track.

We have heard that the bells have tuned up very well (thankfully with no cracks or further damage) so we can expect a very fine, musical peal of bells on their return. We are very much looking forward to hearing the bells ring again.

It has been some years since the clock has been in operation and ringing the hours for the local community. On commencing the preparatory work to restore the clock we were disappointed to find that some parts needed more work than anticipated. Following this discovery the decision was taken to proceed with an automatic winding system upgrade. Apart from the obvious benefit of not requiring winding, this meant some of the old manual elements would no longer need to be repaired so this became a more economical choice.

The clock face is also being refurbished and repainted in its original gold and blue colour, barely visible in its current state. We look forward to seeing it return in its full glory later this year after the completion of the bell works, as well as seeing (and hearing) the clock in working order.

Miranda Frary



Churchyard

This has been a difficult year for the churchyard team for several reasons and I most certainly did not expect that it would be me who would be reporting on that fact. But first I need to highlight the importance of our churchyard within the local community, not just for the obvious reason but also as a haven for wildlife and as a place where people can just sit quietly and enjoy the relative tranquillity that it offers. And I also need to highlight the fact that maintenance of the churchyard relies entirely on a team of around twenty-five volunteers, none of whom is getting any younger! So, an enormous and heartfelt "thank you" goes to all who tend their patches during the year and also to those who help with the working parties. Thank you all – the churchyard is always a credit to all involved.

So, a difficult year. The sudden passing of Peter Hulbert last spring was an enormous shock and a dreadful loss to the community, his family and his numerous friends in so many ways, not least with respect to the churchyard. For many years, general over-sight of the churchyard had been in his very capable hands. He looked after recruiting new helpers, showed them the ropes, kept an eye on things (giving a gentle nudge about cutting individual areas where needed) and, neither last nor least, wrote a piece for the Annual Report. So his passing has left a lot of jobs at least partially vacant, writing this report being just one of them! John Campbell, Rupert and I have kept things ticking over but, as I have made clear elsewhere, none of us is in a position to cover all the roles that Peter took on. So we need two or three people who can cover them on a shared basis.

It has also been a difficult (ie expensive) year with respect to the machinery. One of our two rotary mowers reached the end of it`s days and had to be replaced, whilst the other needed major repairs. In addition, one of our strimmers also had to be repaired. We use semi-professional mowers and strimmers so new ones do not come cheap and it`s nearly as expensive, on an hourly rate, to have them repaired as to have your car done! In fact, the total bill for the work described above was well over £1200. Routine maintenance we do "in-house" so the cost of oil, air filters, strimmer cord and fuel has to be added. But on the plus side, the hot weather last summer reduced the amount of cutting that had to be done so our petrol bill was lower than usual and, fingers crossed, we are reasonably well set up for equipment for a year or two. I should add that we are very grateful to Sandhurst Town Council who recognise the importance of the churchyard and provide financial support.

I noted above our need to find two or three people to cover the roles that Peter took on. But we really need more than that. As I mentioned earlier, none of us is getting any younger and this means that we need to find some new faces so that some of our older helpers (and I write as one who has helped in the churchyard for well over thirty years) can start to take a back seat. Apart from general helpers, someone to help with routine maintenance of machinery – and maybe take over in a year or two – would be very welcome. Could you help, or know someone who might? The commitment is an hour or so every two to three weeks depending on how fast the grass grows and how much time you can spare! And you get the winter off plus, if future summers are anything like 2025, you won`t have to do much in mid-summer either. If you would like to offer your help, or just want to know what is involved, please do speak to John Campbell, Rupert or me, or to a Churchwarden or leave a message with the Parish Office (01252 873030).

Finally, to prove there is a lighter side to churchyard work, attached are pictures taken at the annual Grasscutters` Ball in February, a chance for members of the churchyard team to get together socially and a "Thank You" to them from the church as a whole.

Chris Harris



2nd Saturday

This year has been just as busy as in previous years, but thanks to all the support, we are still managing to keep the church and Pastoral Centre in good order.

In April, Rupert borrowed a calibrated PAT tester and we worked through all the available electrical equipment in the church and Pastoral Centre making sure they are all labelled and recorded. This is a yearly task that ensures the equipment is safe to use. By doing it ourselves, we save the cost of paying a contractor to do the work.

John Inwood has been very helpful in many ways this year supporting our IT infrastructure. In May he assisted me in getting the card reader to work to the church Wi-Fi, so it has a secure link to the internet, allowing people to use the card reader at events and services.

With better weather in June, James and I got on the roof of the church, using the safe access chain that James fitted, and we repointed the old chimney flue and brickwork that is over the organ area. The wall behind the pulpit and the column next to the choir are now drying out. While up there we cleared gullies and hoppers of all the leaves; a regular job which removes another source of damp.

Another regular maintenance job is changing lightbulbs in the church. This took place in July. Rupert and others got the ladders out and replaced quite a few of the lights in the church, particularly the spotlights on the nave altar. However, already there are more that need replacing, so we will be up the ladders again! Also in July, *Dravo* – who service our church heating, were assisted to gain access to the crypt to do the annual service. It has been done in September up until now but by bringing it out of the peak time, we got a better price.

August was a busy time for maintenance: A working party cleared the spire loft of the build-up of bird twigs and stuff, ready for the spire works that started in December. Thanks to bell team and all those who came to do this dirty job. Now the spire is being repaired, we are hoping this will be last time we will need to do this; Sue & Karen took on organising the decoration and refurbishment of the Pastoral Centre lounge, corridor and counselling rooms. It started with a massive clear out and the acquisition of suitable storage, then cleaning and decoration. The project took a week and we had a great team to help us. Thanks to those who gave their time and thanks also to Simon Ellis for the new screen in the lounge; KBO were assisted in another regular job, servicing the Pastoral Centre CCTV, fire alarms and intruder alarm. The church and Pastoral Centre fire extinguishers were also checked and serviced.

Other regular jobs took place throughout the autumn. In September, a working party cleared areas of the churchyard and cut back bushes around the Staff car park area and in October, Rupert assisted me in the replacement of two of the PC hall ceiling lights. We still have two more to do. Also in October, the defibrillator passed the latest check and a number of the outside lights on the church were replaced. The lights had been broken by catapult damage. In November, Nick from *Priory Heating* was assisted in the Pastoral Centre to replace the hot water boiler. The old one had a corroded flue and was declared unsafe. The new one is much more efficient. We also had a working party to clear the leaves around the lych gate and churchyard. In January this year, the hall WIFI was fixed so the card reader would operate again for the Church Together service.

This is not all the work carried out this year, but a selection of the many jobs of maintenance that take place. My thanks to all who have helped over the year so the church is still here to be a witness to the community.

John Campbell

Eco Church

It's now a year since the double glazing in the Pastoral Centre was installed, so I've been able to compare the 2024 electricity usage for the Centre with the 2025 usage, and am pleased to report that we have saved around 6,500 kWh of energy which has saved us about £2,000. This is a great win both financially and in reducing our carbon footprint.

Progress on attaining the A Rocha Silver Eco Church Award is continuing. Looking at their checklist, we score well on the sections covering Worship and Teaching, Land and Nature, and Lifestyle (which covers our use of fair trade and local food, elimination of the use of floral foam by our flower arrangers, recycling etc).

Areas on which we need to focus are Buildings and Energy, and Community Engagement. In the church we have to work with the constraints of the age of the building and the Grade II* listing, but can offset those problems with the gains that we are continuing to make with the Pastoral Centre. Community Engagement is going to take some thought.

Many thanks to the Eco Church team of Clare and Alice Hardy and to George who will soon be sharing her eco-knowledge in her new parish.

If anyone is interested in caring for the planet and would like to join the Eco Church team, please do get in touch.

Catherine Wilkins



Health & Safety

After excellent improvement last year, we have continued to make changes to the practices and fabric of our church.

Following on from a request from John Campbell to improve access to the church roof, and excellent work by Sue Campbell with tackling the faculty system, we have installed a safe access and handrail to improve the safety of the Saturday Club who do excellent work clearing gutters and leadwork on the church roof. This installation is very subtle and is barely visible from the ground so as not to detract from the appearance of our beautiful Gothic Revival building. With this new access in place we were able to safely repair the chimney above the crypt and re-point the west face of the North Aisle gable wall (above the organ).

Within the church building there has been some important work carried out particularly within the bell tower. A new hand-rope has been installed in the spiral staircase to improve safety and accessibility to the ringing floor, this hand-rope has been made from recycled bell-ropes and is entirely sustainable and helps towards our commitment to net zero. Now the bells have been taken away for refurbishment, the temporary floor installed last year has been removed and a new oak floor is being designed by the bell restoration company under the guidance of Miranda Frary. This will be installed when the bells return, hopefully by the end of June, giving safe access for the bell ringers to inspect and service the bells for many years to come. The design incorporates materials and a style which compliments the Grade II* listed nature of our church.

A trip hazard, namely a loose floor tile near the font, was identified by Emma Hodge and repaired forthwith, and this was carried out in such a manner as to be invisible, preserving the appearance of the tiled floor and maintaining safe access to the font area, which has high foot traffic in all our services.

We had a minor issue later in the year with a lack of hot water available when the boiler broke down and was deemed unserviceable, and this was quickly dealt with by the PCC and John Campbell who arranged a replacement the following week. This prompt action prevented any major disruption and maintained the use of the Pastoral Centre.

After reports of a tragic death at a cemetery, I was tasked with surveying our own graveyard to check the stability of headstones and was appalled to find some very poor workmanship resulting in 11 monuments being laid down, and a further 6 labelled as unstable. Much work was done to trace the families of the deceased, who are responsible for the maintenance of the headstones, and many thanks to Sunita Macintosh who spent most of a morning going through church records with me. After an exhaustive weekend filling out a faculty report of over 20 pages of documents and 35 photographs and plans, the application has been filed. This will ensure we can restore those gravestones that are unclaimed and maintain the appearance of our tranquil graveyard. The final act of the year was the much anticipated resurfacing of the carpark to improve accessibility and safety. This was carried out by an excellent crew of volunteers, most of whom are part of the churchyard maintenance party. My thanks go to Chris Harris, for organising the support, and Martin, Julian Peters, Martin Shimmen, and Colin Fuller for their work with the shovels and rakes, and Mike Sherren for taking the pictures!

With all these wonderful volunteers we have achieved a huge amount this year and after the departure of Katy Robson-Malone in the summer, we have a vacancy of Fire Officer, which we need to fulfil. If you are interested, or you know someone who might be, then please contact me or the Parish Office.

James Mason

Bell Ringers

During the first half of the year, the bells were only rung prior to the 9:30am Sunday service, occasional weddings and our regular Monday practice. This was because the ringers didn't want to further damage the bells prior to their removal for a full refurbishment.

The bells were lowered to the ground at the end of June 2025, before being transported to *Nicholson Engineering* in Bridport.

The photo of the bells on the path, shows the Rector, Neil from *Nicholson* (in red) and the ringing team who undertook the removal.

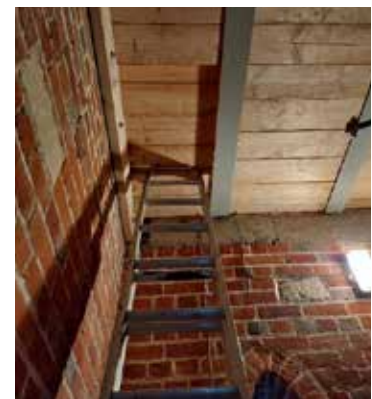
With the tower cleared, the usual Monday practice time was spent clearing the tower of many years of dust and twigs, before rubbing down and priming the iron work around the bell frame.

In September, a further visit from *Nicholson* achieved the painting of the steel beams and iron work, treating the oak frame with a double coat of preservative, and replacing a single tie-rod holding the top of the frame to the lower beam.



In early February, Neil returned with a van load of timber and with the help of four ringers created an oak timber floor between the steel beams to allow a safe working space for us to examine the bells. The picture shows the ladder under the sliding access point.

When writing this report, the ringers are eagerly awaiting the return of the tuned and refurbished bells. It is anticipated that this will happen mid-March 2026, and on arrival the bells will be immediately raised into the first-floor ringing area, prior to lifting onto the bell frame.



At this point the work will have only just started, as there will be many hours of fitting bell-wheels, sliders, pulleys and guides before the first sounds will be heard from the bells.

The ringers are extremely grateful to Miranda Frary and her fundraising team for all their efforts from inception to delivery.

At Easter, the band will actively be seeking for new recruits, especially from our local school and family service congregation. Full training will be given to anyone interested, but we would particularly like to hear from any lapsed ringers who would like to return to ringing. I would also like to thank our regular visitors from neighbouring towers, who enabled us to continue our regular ringing at Sandhurst and provided much of the help at each stage of the refurbishment process.

Practice nights are Monday Evening: 7:30pm until 8:30pm.

For further information, please contact Mike on the number below or via the Parish Office.
Mike Sherren, 07979 060925

St. Michael's Belles

Now 35 years old, and with three of the original six members still ringing, *St Michael's Belles* continue to entertain and educate the wider community.

Our monthly visits to Willow Gardens Care Home have continued and we enjoy seeing how the residents, many living with dementia, now recognise and welcome us, while enjoying the ring and sing sessions we provide. In addition to these, the whole team visited residents in June and December to entertain them with a variety of music.

In August, with the tower bells out of commission, we provided alternative bell ring for the blessing of Matt and Rachel Castle's marriage. We rang in the sunshine after the ceremony while the photographs were taken.



In October we celebrated our 35th Birthday with a concert where we were ably supported by *Blossoming Bells* and members of the Church Choir. Those attending were treated to a glass of fizz and slice of birthday cake in honour of the occasion.

We visited Beaumont Lodge in Camberley in December, our annual visit to ring a programme of well known Christmas music.

Performing at the Christmas Tree Festival and before both Carol Services brought our ringing year of 2025 to an end.

Looking forward, we are welcoming *Crowthorne Chimes* and *Finchampstead Handbell Ringers* at the beginning of February to an evening entitled, somewhat belatedly, "Christmas Together" where we will all ring three pieces provided by *Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (HRGB)*.

Blossoming Bells

Our group for new ringers continues to flourish under the guidance of Emily Birch and Karen Allen. They have had a very busy year, where at weekly rehearsals they work their way through the *Crescendo* scheme which is a progressive learning and award programme developed by *HRGB*.

In May and September, they attended two rallies organised by the South East Region of *HRGB*. In July, a summer concert raised £650.00. This money will go towards providing the group with their own set of bells. Our Birthday Concert in October gave the group an opportunity to join *St Michael's Belles* as we rang together.

December was particularly busy for the group as they rang at the Christmas Tree Festival, for families at the Nursery's 'Breakfast with Santa' morning and took part in the Nativity Service on Christmas Eve.

Having secured the continuation of the loan of bells from *HRGB* for 2026, the group will continue to expand their knowledge through the *Crescendo* Scheme, while planning another summer concert.

We are always looking for new ringers and if you would be interested in finding out what's involved please contact Jenny Thorn on 01344 775805 for more information.

Jennie Hulbert

Fundraising

The fundraising team have continued to plan and run a number of events to raise much needed funds for the *Spire Appeal* required for repairs to the church spire, bells and clock.

► 5 April – Cecilia Singers Concert :

An evening of beautiful music, including Requiem by Mozart and Gloria by John Rutter, was well supported and **raised £1093**.

► 15 May – Oranges & Lemons Floral Demonstration by Annette Urquhart :

Annette created several beautiful arrangements and kept us entertained all evening with anecdotes and stories referring to the history of St Michael's. The evening **raised £1735**.

► 14 June – St Michael's bell tower tour :

This was the last chance to look at the bells from the clock winding level as after they come back from restoration, an additional floor will be added to the tower to make routine maintenance of the bells safer. It was a great opportunity to meet people and talk to them about our church building and what goes on within its walls, it **raised £108**.



► 11 July – Project 7 Rock night :

A really fun evening was enjoyed by a crowd of people from the church and the local community.

Project 7, the local band which includes our very own bass guitarist James Franklin, covered a variety of rock songs.

£1222 was raised from entrance tickets, raffle, barbecue and bar.

► 4 October – St Michael's Belles 35 Years Concert :

It was a night of music, memories and celebration as St Michael's Belles marked an incredible 35 years of ringing together and **raised £345**.





► **29 & 30 November – Christmas Tree Festival and Advent Fair :**

A number of groups from the local community and our church exhibited a variety of tree displays.

There were also performances from the *Blossoming Bells*, *St Michael's Belles*, *St Michael's Church Choir* and *St George's Monday Singing Group*.

Over £1500 was raised for the church General Fund by the Advent Fair, and another £500 for the Spire Fund by the Tree Festival.

► **14 February – Valentine's Day Concert :**

Sandhurst Community Brass and *Sandhurst Brasshoppers* put on a wonderful concert, including an excellent solo from Rev John Castle, on Valentine's afternoon which **raised £405**.

We are grateful to all those who have contributed to our fundraising efforts over the last year.

Your support is invaluable in helping us achieve our mission.

If you would like to support our fundraising work, either by giving money or helping in other ways, please do get in touch. Look out for more events being planned over the course of the year.

Abby Coleman,
Fundraising Committee



Heritage

The *Heritage Open Days* in September had the theme of 'Architecture, Angels and Activities' and this reflects our activities throughout the year. In June we organised a last tour of the tower and bells before they went off for renovations and we were overwhelmed by the popularity of this.

The *Heritage Open Days* in September again provided a good opportunity for outreach, with several visitors including our MP, and our special thanks to James Mason for showing us the different aspects of the architecture of our wonderful building. On the Sunday, James gave a live demonstration of stone masonry techniques.

Catherine Wilkins & Emma Hodge



St Michael's CofE Primary School

St Michael's school continues to flourish, as the children shine their light in many ways to encompass the school vision, in which the flourishing of each enables the flourishing of all, thus encompassing the school values (*Community, Compassion, Courage & Creativity*). St Michael's has seen a change in leadership in the last year, when we said goodbye to Mr Bevan at Easter and at the start of the summer term 2025 welcomed Mrs Lanfear as Head of School, joined in September by our new Executive Head, Mrs Ruthven. Both have settled in extremely well to St Michael's.

The broad, balanced curriculum enables children to flourish in every aspect of education, creating opportunities to encourage a love of learning. Academically the children continue to grow, each showing a real zest for learning, and rightly proud when achievements are made, showcased through the weekly Head Teachers Awards that the children love to receive. Our SATS, phonics, EYFS and Multiplication results are reflective of the children's hard work, and we are rightly proud of these achievements.

The children have enjoyed many trips and special days and still frequent our local woods for outdoor learning experiences. Musically, children were given the opportunity to take part in a Spring Concert where they were able to showcase their musical talents and shine their musical lights! Our school choir continues to grow, the children love to show their hard work, performing on numerous occasions. The latest end of year production from our Year 6 leavers also showed creativity and courage in performing to the school community.

Sport continues to be encouraged, and our children have represented the school in many sports, including football, cricket, netball, boccia, tennis, athletics, golf and even triathlon! The recent inter-house Sports Days for both KS1 and KS2 showed how well the children from different year groups work together to achieve, helping and encouraging each other. Indeed, the mentorship across year groups, most notable with the buddy system between Year 5 and Ducklings really does enable our children to shine their light in a supportive nurturing environment.

In July 2025 St Michael's children sent letters to our partner school in Zimbabwe, Lilfordia School, which is the oldest small private primary school in Zimbabwe. It is a rural boarding school set in the Miombo woodland. In connection to this, the children also celebrated a Zimbabwe day, with written work and artwork on display. St Michael's also has climate ambassadors who are a group of children who help the school to care for the planet, learning and encouraging recycling, saving energy and protecting wildlife. We aim to be Net Zero by 2030!

The school continues to be a proud member of the *Keys Academy Trust*. We were delighted to be invited to take part in the Annual Service at St Andrew's Church in Sonning in October. Pupils from each school in the Trust contributed in several ways by sharing poems, prayers and readings. The theme this year was 'All are welcome', and the service celebrated the warmth and inclusivity that lie at the heart of each Key's school. There was also a first performance from the TKAT choir, uniting talented singers from each school in the Academy. Being part of the Trust has enabled St Michael's to collaborate with others for the benefit of all, to fulfil our potential both individually and together as a Trust.

Polly Harris
Chair of Governors,
St Michael's School



Pastoral Care

Pastoral Care is an integral part of our role as Christians and in our life within St Michael's Church. The most generous acts of faith often involve giving our time, attention, focus and love to those in need.

If you feel able to offer your skills towards pastoral mission in our community, please contact Emma Hodge or myself to indicate your interest and we can put you in contact with the right person.

Or maybe you have an idea of your own that you could help to organise?

Current Position

Key cornerstones for our pastoral care have been:

- ▶ Visiting and support for the sick and elderly
- ▶ Bereavement visiting and support for bereaved families
- ▶ Home Communion visits
- ▶ Prayer Ministry and the Prayer Chain
- ▶ Outreach to our wider community with community meals and other activities
- ▶ Church lifts
- ▶ Ministry for families, children and teenagers
- ▶ Nifty Knitters tea and chat, etc.

Our thanks go to the many volunteers who help in diverse ways:

Nicki and Martin Thomas took up the mantle of organising a community meal in the autumn when we held a most successful and enjoyable Afternoon Tea, supported by many volunteers who gave lifts, donated food, helped in the kitchen and with 'service' to our guests.

We have a dedicated children's and family ministry team led by Sarah Bishop, who with great initiative enhances family and children's involvement in church and identifies further areas of need.

Her team also help organise Baby & Toddler Time, volunteers involved with setting up and chatting with young mothers and fathers.

Claire Clay organised the Gift Tree project this Christmas, our thanks for the many contributions of gifts.

Sara Kaufman has re-instigated Nifty Knitters on the first Monday of the month for crafting, tea and a chat.

Home Communion visits continue, but our dedicated team has diminished. We need a new organiser for this most important ministry, could you be the link?

Prayer Ministry has been enhanced by a full complement of volunteers for the Prayer Chain, and our team of intercessors continue to help us pray with compassion and relevance.

Sarah Ashton is the lead for Bereavement Care, closely supported by Sheridan Cremer-Evans. They support the clergy at bereavement visits and follow-up contact when it is needed. Our church runs Memorial Services twice a year which have given many families a focus to help bring them peace.

Our Next Steps:

I am happy to act as 'caretaker' until another volunteer takes up the mantle of Pastoral Care Co-ordinator but hope a successor will step-up with their own ideas and mission.

Safeguarding is essential and volunteers need to be encouraged to partake of any training available - but first we need volunteers. The task is great and a larger team is needed to touch the edges of it.

I ask you all to think hard and pray about our mission. Please think who may do things well in areas you have witnessed, maybe recognise those in our congregation who might be prepared to commit to become a member of our Pastoral Care team, and help with initiatives.

Maybe you have your own vision about what we should be doing?

Please contact me or Emma Hodge with any suggestions or offers.

Steph Martin, Pastoral Care Co-ordinator

House Groups

This report provides an overview of the activities and structure of the house groups for April 2026. It is intended to inform members of the church community about meeting times, breaks, and the social aspects of participation.

We have two house groups that meet every Tuesday evening from 8:00 to 9:30pm. These sessions provide regular opportunities for fellowship and discussion among members.

Our group meetings pause for breaks at Easter, in July, and at Christmas. These breaks are usually timed to coincide with school holidays, making it easier for members to plan around family and community commitments.

Joining a house group is an excellent way to become acquainted with more members of our church community. Typically, we relax and enjoy a tea or coffee before the meeting begins, which gives everyone a chance to connect and get to know each other better.

The formal part of the evening starts and ends with a time for prayer. The subjects we study are chosen collaboratively by all the group leaders and me, in consultation with the group members.

Over the past year, we have explored several biblical subjects, including a course called *ReFrame*, which looks at Christianity in the modern world and has encouraged much exploration and deeper thinking.

Currently, we are studying '*Deeper into the Gospels: Coming face to face with Jesus in Mark*'. This course is proving to be very thought-provoking.

After Easter, we will begin planning for the year ahead. If you have a subject you would like to explore more deeply, please consider joining us you would be very welcome.

If you would like more information, please contact the Parish Office or myself.

Diana Taylor, House Groups Co-Ordinator

Email: DT1864875@aol.com

Mobile: 07873 128680

Sandhurst Counselling Service

A Time of Change

2025 began with a major challenge when *Bracknell Forest Council* announced it could no longer fund our core costs, around 40% of our income. Without this support, the service was unsustainable beyond the summer, and we reluctantly decided to bring the work to a safe standstill by the end of July. This difficult process was handled with great care by Helen Wells, our Clinical Manager, who postponed her planned retirement to support both practitioners and clients through the transition.

This period was marked by deep reflection, prayer, and consultation with team members and others interested in continuing the service. During this time we also suffered the loss of our Treasurer, Peter Hulbert. His faithful stewardship of our finances and fundraising over 15 years had been central to the service's stability, and he is greatly missed.

In June, the Trustees took a step of faith and decided to relaunch the service from 1st September. This decision rested on our belief that the founding vision – reaching those most in need with care and compassion – was God-given, and that He would continue to provide for the work financially.

Leadership and Organisation

The transition required significant time and energy from the Trustees, Management and team to maintain momentum. Peter's loss and personal pressures on Sunita created real challenges, but God provided interim support through Karen Symons. We now have six Trustees and would welcome one more.

Lucia Pool is fully engaged as Clinical Manager, with responsibility for the safe and professional delivery of counselling services. Sunita continues to manage administration and day-to-day finances. We currently have nine practitioners: six qualified counsellors from the former SCS and three newly recruited trainee psychotherapists. Three supervisors are in place, with one trainee supervisor starting, and Lucia is supported by a retained mentor from Basingstoke College.

Activity and Resources

As part of the relaunch, we launched a new website through *DeliveredSocial* and refreshed our *Facebook* presence. In the first four months, our referral pipeline has proven effective in generating community enquiries.

Re-establishing links with the *NHS* and *Community Mental Health Team* remains challenging, partly due to wider *NHS* structural changes. Trustee Eric has been attending local 'Happiness Hubs' to raise our profile among clients and partner agencies.



'Finding your way in troubled times.'

"Volunteering with SCS has been a truly welcoming, inclusive and supportive experience. The sense of care and encouragement is felt throughout the organisation, and the training provided has been both valuable and impactful. My SCS affiliated supervisor has been exceptionally knowledgeable and supportive, which has greatly contributed to my growth – and in turn to the progress of my clients. I believe SCS offers an essential and remarkable service to the community, and I'm proud to be part of an organisation whose values and mission I deeply respect."
A Practitioner

We have developed and implemented an improved CPD programme which is proving beneficial not only to our own practitioners but is also engaging practitioners from our two neighbouring services, Cornerstone (Yateley) and Connect (Camberley).

We are also developing a more proactive community presence. Gill Birch has joined to lead this work, and our first community event—“Anxiety in the Modern World”—was held on 1 December at the Day Centre. We are building relationships with CAP and Crowthorne Food Bank, whose clients may qualify for support through our fund.

Facilities and Systems

We are grateful to the church for improvements to the Pastoral Centre rooms. Financial transition to Xero is planned for 2027, and we will continue investing in *Lamplight* (client management system) as funds allow.

Conclusion

The transition and restart have been achieved, though we are about a month behind our original hopes. We understand the key challenges and have clear plans to address them. We are deeply thankful for the church's prayer support and for the opportunity to share our history during the August transition.

Above all, we give glory to the Lord, trusting His continued guidance and provision.

Dave Percival

Chair, Sandhurst Counselling Service

“My practitioner assisted me through a journey - always respectful, empathetic and professional. The practitioner’s prompts and insights have assisted me to self-realise that I am drained by the opinions of others. I now have a voice and am equipped to deal with conflict, separating emotional reaction from human reaction. I feel liberated and able to problem solve without feeling useless and doom filled. I found, not answers but a much clearer understanding of my life and why I dealt with things the way I do”
A Client

Safeguarding

Over the past year

- ▶ In October I attended a meeting with Bishop Mary along with other Parish Safeguarding Officers from our area to discuss Safeguarding, the challenges and what is going well.
- ▶ Claire Clay and I have worked together, monitoring the DBS checks that are due to expire or outstanding and logging completed training to track where this is required.
- ▶ I have supported Rev. John Castle in responding to Safeguarding concerns that have been raised within our parish. There have been 2 new cases, both have been shared with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team who offered support and guidance during our interventions, and both have been closed.
- ▶ We have continued to undertake the Parish Safeguarding Audit and update the Safeguarding Dashboard.

Completion of DBS and Safeguarding Training

Unfortunately, on 31 July 2025, an external software contractor to the data processor Access Personal Checking Services Ltd (APCS) was affected by a cyber-attack. Some personal data on DBS applications was accessed by unauthorised individuals. We are now following the advice of the diocese to use *Verifile*, Emma Hodge has investigated the data security aspects of the service and is satisfied with her findings.

Over the course of 2025-26 we have seen our highest compliance with completing and renewing DBS checks. However at the time of completing this report, many of the DBS checks have expired and we believe this may be due to a push with DBS checks 3 years ago and many of them now expiring at the same time. It would appear many of our recent DBS applications have been rejected as we have been informed we do not meet the criteria, we need to give some thought to which volunteers require a DBS and how we reach this decision going forward.

The fact we were able to get to a good place with DBS completion is encouraging and gives us hope that we can start to see some progress with training completion as this continues to be a challenge. It would appear the requirement to complete training is understood by those I have spoken to, it is purely a time commitment some struggle to prioritise. However, by repeating the message I am confident we will start to see increased completion. I have put a reminder in the newsletter and will send reminders to group leaders to share.

Our volunteers need to complete the Basic Awareness Safeguarding training as a minimum, this is to ensure they not only understand clearly what safe practice looks like, but, can identify safeguarding concerns and know how to manage these. There are higher levels of training for those with greater responsibility. All our volunteers should complete this training every 3 years and this must be a priority when starting in the role.

At the time of writing the report we believe these to be the current numbers on volunteers and their safeguarding checks and training:

	FEB 2025	FEB 2026
Total number of volunteers	52	70
Number of volunteers without a current DBS check	17	28
Number of volunteers who need to complete Basic Awareness Safeguarding Training	26	28

Plans for 2026

- ▶ Rev John Castle is often at the forefront of Safeguarding interventions, taking away and completing the actions following our meetings. I am conscious that this will not be the case after April and will need to think carefully about who is best placed to have sensitive conversations should safeguarding concerns arise that need to be handled with care. I will of course meet with individuals when required and appropriate but will need to consider established relationships when there may be someone better placed to support individuals.
- ▶ Aim for all volunteers to have up to date DBS checks and complete the relevant Safeguarding Training.
- ▶ Continue to update the Parish Safeguarding Audit and Safeguarding Dashboard.

Jenny Rose, Parish Safeguarding Officer and Claire Clay, Safeguarding Administrator.

Families, Children and Young People

Baby and Toddler Time

*'Who's the king of the jungle... ooh ooh... who's the king sea...
burble burble burble ...
Who's the king of the universe and who's the king of me?
I'll tell you... J.E.S.U.S... Yes...'*

I learnt that song at the toddler group my childminder has been taking me to. It is amazing, we get to have breakfast there after the big kids get dropped at school. There is always lots of toast and fruit and the grown ups get coffee and cake! It's all run by volunteers; they work so hard.

There is a new lady helping to run the group now and she helps set up all the toys. There are lots of things to play with and always a fun craft to do too. My mum loves getting all the things I make there. The craft usually goes with the story that John tells us. My favourite was the Noah's Ark I made on a paper plate! There was a new helper this term who helped me stick all the animals on.

Sometimes my friend is there who goes to the nursery upstairs. He told me they can join in some weeks, when it's not busy. My very favourite part is the singing! We sing songs about God, and I'm learning about how much He loves me! We also sing about this king called Jesus... got to go now...

*'He's the king of me... he's the king of the universe the jungle and the sea...
burble burble burble... ooh ooh!'*

Youth work

The work with young people has continued steadily this year. The Sunday morning groups in the Pastoral Centre, formerly known as *Kidz Church* and *Reach*, have remained combined for most weeks, with myself and Karen Allen leading. We have a small group of volunteers who step in to cover absences. We have, where appropriate, followed the themes in church, using resources from a variety of websites, including *Nexgen Premier Youth* and *Youth Group Ministry*. The group is well attended by the young choir members and they are joined by others occasionally.

This year I ran a *Youth Emmaus* course for two young people who wanted to learn more about the Christian faith. One of the participants has decided they would like to be confirmed when the opportunity arises.

Fellowship amongst young people is very important, and with this in mind, Liz Percival and I have set up a pizza and games night, which we have been running monthly this year. It was a slow start, but we now have a few youngsters engaging with the evenings, where we do just that... eat pizza and play games!

It is important to me that young people enjoy church life, so fun and biscuits are always on the agenda. Through this we can show them God's love.

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11

Children and families

'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God' 1 John 4:7

I have been hard at work this year trying to show God's love in our community and helping others to get to know Him better. It's been a busy year with lots of teaching, outreach and serving others.

This year has seen lots of baptisms, including several adults who have come to faith through the Start course and the baptism preparation evenings. All those who were baptised this year were invited to come together for a teddy bears' picnic.

During the summer break, I organised another holiday club. The club ran over four Mondays, and included bible stories, games and crafts. A puppet theatre was used to retell four stories of Jesus healing people. A recurring character called 'Dave the donkey' was introduced to add the very important touch of humour to the sessions. The club was well attended again this year.

Bible Bites, the weekly club at St. Michael's school, has continued to go well. With lots of children attending from both years 5 and 6, the decision was made to split the group into two and run them on alternate weeks. This has interrupted the flow a little but makes the sessions easier to manage.

As well as my work at school, I have continued working with nursery to offer weekly bible stories and colourings. The children are all getting to know me now.

Family service is going well with many of the new families that have been attending now engaging in church life, offering their time and energies to take on roles and responsibilities. This has been very encouraging. I am sure this has been helped by the monthly social evenings I have been organising, which is building up relationships.

The Light Party was a great success again this year. It was well attended by families and supported by many church members. We had fun with the autumn themed crafts, with tag line *'Fall for Jesus, he never leaves.'* These were followed by the light trail and campfire.

In the summer, I was invited to a tour of the Sandhurst allotments, who have generously donated this year to our Food Share. With their donations and food from the Co-Op, I have been able to support local families in need. I was also able to make Christmas hampers to help the families at that time of year.

I look forward to another year of serving God and showing His love to others.

Sarah Bishop, Family Worker

Marriage Preparation and Support – ‘Beyond the honeymoon’



This is the 40th year (2026) that we have been doing marriage preparation at St Michael's. We had only been married 8 years when we started and the course has developed over the years with input from incumbents and other leaders and feedback from participants. The age of the couples coming to marriage has increased and some of the challenges they face have changed. The last 20 years have been marked by the encouragement and involvement of John and George, and John's determination that all couples should benefit from the course even if it has had to be delivered on some occasions couple to couple. Although we will miss John and George and their valuable contribution we are determined to continue in the interregnum, with the support of Nick and Karen.

Please continue to pray that couples will come to recognise the benefits of making a public commitment in marriage and want to express their commitment before God at our church.

Many arrive at the course slightly anxious about what will be involved but once they have experienced it, they seem to value the time to discuss their relationship encouraged by the personal sharings of the leaders. We encourage them to think about what may change once they are married, how they are going to communicate well, handle the pressures that will come along, handle hurt and conflict, and forgive each other, and help them gain a vision for what their marriage could be, and where God fits in to it all..

The number of weddings at St Michael's in 2024 was 2. In addition, Matthew and Rachel Castle celebrated a blessing of their marriage in August. Only one of the couples could make the marriage preparation course while the second was seen separately by John. The course went ahead with the addition of one couple getting married in 2026 and three other couples, from Winnersh and Finchampstead parishes. We were also able to welcome Rev Patrick Mukholi, the newly appointed priest for Winnersh, to observe.

Feedback on the course included:

“Very helpful to get you thinking. Fantastic, friendly and a relaxed way to look at marriage and understand it. Loved hearing from your real life issues you have faced and how you have overcome them.”

“I found it insightful and useful to help me be a better husband.”

Each couple receives a card for their wedding and then one for their first anniversary reminding them that the wedding is just the beginning of their journey together and there is so much more to learn about each other as they got through the ups and downs of married life. It's important for them to know that we and the church care about them. Our hope is that they may be drawn to explore a relationship with God and their local church.

Most relationships have their ups and downs, and life itself brings many challenges that impact these relationships. If you are married we encourage you to consider what you can do to keep your marriage refreshed and vibrant even when you've been married as long as we have (47 years) or longer. There are opportunities to escape the humdrum of everyday life and focus on your marriage. You could just have a fun weekend away at a spa or resort but in the end you'd be left with some photos and some happy memories. Anglican Marriage Encounter, which we continue to lead nationally offers weekend programmes which provide input to reflect on and discuss together. It's a bit like going to the gym for your marriage, the privacy of your relationship is respected and it's free up front with a small booking fee and the opportunity at the end to donate towards future weekends.

It's a chance to deepen your love and invest time, energy and attention in your relationship. Life is so pressured these days that we are sure your first response would be "We don't have time." But surely the most important relationship and the most important person in your life deserve time and attention. If you'd like to know more, do ask us, or visit the website, www.marriageencounter.org.uk.

Liz & David Percival, with John & George, and Nick & Karen

Sidespersons' Report

It is never easy to find something new to say in this report as things don't change a great deal from year to year, and this year is no different. Whether that will still be the case next year after (hopefully) the interregnum is over and we have a new Rector remains to be seen. But what I'm sure won't change is the warm smile and friendly greeting that are always in evidence as people enter the church. So thank you to all our sidespeople and welcomers for that.

Whilst many of our congregation use the screens rather than hymn books etc. the screen system does have it's moments so there is still a need for hard copies to be available. And some people prefer them so, if you would like a hymn book and service sheet, please don't hesitate to ask.

As ever, we would welcome one or two new faces to join either the team of sidespeople (mainly helping at the 9:30 service) or the family service team. If you feel you would like to join either of these teams please do contact Sarah Bishop, our Family Worker (for the Family Service) or Chris Harris (for Parish Communion/Evensong); or speak to a Churchwarden.

Although separate from the general sides duties, we would also welcome two people to help with baptisms when they are booked for the 2nd Sunday in the month at (usually) 11:30am. Currently either Sue & John Campbell or Ann & I help with these, welcoming people, giving out hymn and service cards and also setting up and tidying up. Inevitably, there are some months when none of us is available so some additional helpers would be useful. In practice, there are only about six baptisms a year on the 2nd Sunday (there are more in the Family Services) so any helpers would probably only need to help once or twice a year. We will show you what to do of course.

Finally, on behalf of all the sidespeople and welcomers I would like to thank John & George for all that they have given to our church in the last twenty years. We wish them well as John moves to his new post – we are certainly going to miss his trumpet!

Chris Harris

Church Flowers

It has been a pleasure to welcome enthusiastic new people to join us on the rota for decorating the church for festivals and putting flowers on the altar week by week.

We were most grateful for the donations from members of the congregation towards our Easter displays. This time we used glass vases (cutting out the need for oasis) to display lilies on the altar and font, and yellow and orange roses in the windows, together with a stunning pedestal by the pulpit.





In May our talented Annette kindly put on a magnificent demonstration entitled "Oranges and Lemons". This was well attended and ticket sales went to the *St. Michael's Bells and Spire Fund*. At Harvest Festival we filled the church with sunflowers and wonderful autumnal colours re-using baskets and hessian containers.

The *Christmas Tree Festival* was an occasion for our team to create a tree on the font by wiring branches onto a metal stand, decorating it with fresh orchids and surrounding it with presents representing the Gifts of the Spirit.

At Christmas we prepared the flower arrangements in the Pastoral Centre, rewarding the volunteers with mulled wine and mince pies, as we had only a small window between services to bring the church from Advent into Christmas on the Sunday. Our theme was white with big gold bows.

A big thank you to all our talented ladies who give their time and energy to fill our church with joy.

Steph, Sue, Annette & Sheridan



8:00am Servers & Communion Assistants

We are a small group who assist the clergy in the preparation of the sacrament for the traditional 8 o'clock service of Holy Communion, plus the verger's duty of unlocking the church.

Since the last annual parish meeting, we have continued with the initial preparations of the altar table and administering the chalice.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the servers and communion assistants for their continued support throughout the year.

Should anyone be interested in joining our group, please contact the Rector or myself for more information.

Mike Sherren, 07979 060925

Servers – 9:30am

I am going to start this report by saying a huge thank you for all the work the Servers do on a Sunday. Thank you to Claire Clay, John Campbell, and Brendan Watson.

It is a privilege to be a Server, especially when you take time to think about what you are doing and realise that you are in fact serving God and not just helping out at the service. A quote I have used before:

“It is primarily a ministration to God on behalf of the lay people, and only incidentally an assistance to the priest.”

We really could do with a few more volunteers as on occasion there have been times where none of us are available to Serve. Thanks go to Emma Hodge for standing in for us at the last minute.

The Bible talks a lot about how we should be serving God, but it can be very difficult when life is so busy and you perhaps have a family to care for. Do you occasionally come to the 9:30am service? Then why not think about joining the 9.30am Servers as a way of serving God. The time is just a little bit extra at the beginning and end of a service and with more people on the rota it is only once a month at most. Full training and support will be given, and we would never leave you to serve alone until you are confident enough to do so. If you are interested or if you would like to know more, please don't hesitate to speak to any one of us.

I hope you will pray and consider if this is something you would like to do.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. 1 Peter 4:10

Karen Symons

Church Choir

The Church Choir committee meets once a term for planning, discussing and biscuits and this January we were marvelling at the events since September as listed for review in the agenda which probably accounted for some choir members quietly humming Elton John's '*I'm Still Standing*' by the time we got to Christmas Day. So I thought I'd do a list of our extra gigs since the last Annual Report – we love a bit of outreach!

In 2025:

- ▶ January 25 – Burns Supper Entertainment
- ▶ June 8 – Songs from *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* with singers and instrumentalists for *Churches Together* in Sandhurst, Crowthorne, Owlsmoor and Camberley in St John's Church Crowthorne
- ▶ July 6 – Fundraising Concert with the *Blossoming Bells*
- ▶ August 23 – The Wedding Blessing of the Year for Matt and Rachel Castle followed by a garden gathering at 32 St Michael's Road.



- ▶ October 4 – St Michael's Belles Fundraising Concert
- ▶ November 9 – Remembrance Sunday Service at the Memorial Park
- ▶ November 29 – Christmas Tree Lighting and Santa Welcoming with a short service and carols at the Memorial Park
- ▶ December 16 – Carol Singing at Sandhurst Lodge
- ▶ December 17 – Carol Singing in the Intensive Care Unit, Royal Berkshire Hospital
- ▶ December 18 – Carol Singing in Buckler's Lodge Residential Home
- ▶ December 20 – Pub carols, entertaining customers in The Bird in Hand, The Swan and The Rose and Crown
- ▶ December 22 – Carol Singing round the streets

In addition, of course, the choir is called upon to lead the music worship in Sunday Morning Eucharist, Choral Evensong and on festival days as well as singing for the two fixed Memorial Services in October and May, two Carol Services and funerals and weddings throughout the year.

We do have time for socials! Our Christmas dinner unsurprisingly takes place in January and adults in the choir often enjoy a lemonade down at the Rose and Crown or at Number 32 after a strenuous Thursday rehearsal. Juniors will have a film night with food (of course!) soon.



We would welcome more singers, both Juniors and Adults: there's plenty of room for more and plenty of robes and music. Be assured we always have lots to do so you'd not be bored!

Massive thanks must go to our wonderful organist, Jane Palmer. It would be very difficult to achieve this programme without her expertise - even this morning she managed to beat the organ into submission by fixing a sticking E flat, but she's also capable of changing the key of a whole piece in order to dodge some technical snags! Thanks also to Janet Rogers who, together with Steve Kaufman (guitar) James Franklin (bass) Jonny Mason (drums) and Alison Wren (flute and organ too) provide the accompanying music for the Informal 2nd Sunday services. Alun Grafton has been a superstar; having depped for me many times, he's presently shouldering the running of the choir this term and this has given me a chance to sing with the sopranos and appreciate the commitment of all the singers to the important work that they do in church and beyond.

But how will we manage without John Castle?? We wish all the best for him in his new job but, goodness, he has done so much for St Michael's. John's musical input, the arranging of hymns and psalms, suggestions of music, playing guitar, piano, trumpet and singing tenor and dressing up – what a legend! And lovely George singing in the sopranos – how we will miss them both.

Thank you to all in St Michael's for your support and encouragement

Karen Phillips, Choir Director

Church Cleaners

HELP!

Well, normally in the Annual Review you read nice reports of all the good work that is done but, this report is different. The church cleaning team is in urgent need of help.

- ▶ **We need people to sweep and clean the aisles and pews including choir and chancel.**
- ▶ **We need brass cleaners**
- ▶ **We need communion glass cleaners.**

Ideally each of the areas need at least a couple of people to help make the work easy and ensure that there are plenty of people available.

What it is involved

Coming into church, at a time that suits you and cleaning part of the church. Depending on your area, if you are on leave you can either swap with someone or some areas can be left (for example missing a week of brass cleaning is fine).

My thanks to all who help, especially Jenny Piggin (nave aisles) and Pat Johnson (silver), for their work.

During 2026, if no one comes forward to help with cleaning, we may look at other ways of cleaning the church – such as monthly deep cleaning, but that would tie people into a fixed time and day of the week.

Emma Hodge

Sacristan Report

The work of the sacristan is unseen but vital. We are the ones who take the church linen home, launder them and return them ready for next use. It is also the work of changing the frontals and banners as the seasons of the years change.

My thanks to all involved especially to Jenny Thorn for repairing the mouse damaged kneelers, Gill Ostler for taking on the responsibility of washing and ironing the large table cloths.

If anyone would like to help either on a regular basis or as a back-up / holiday cover please speak to me.

Emma Hodge

Audio Visual Team

The Audio-Visual projection of the liturgy, the hymns and worship songs on the screen continues to be very much part of our worship. This needs operators, so we applaud the team (see below) who set it up and operate it each week for the requirements of the Parish Communion, the Family Service and the Church Together service, held in the Seeby Hall.

We continue to offer the streaming for Funerals and Weddings, where relatives are abroad or unable to be present at the service. This has been taken up for a few services in 2025.

Thank you to Martin Thomas and Simon Ellis who most weeks operate the AV system for the 9:30 service, handling both the service Powerpoints and simultaneously the streaming software. Ewan Franklin also helps us occasionally, having initially joined us in 2024 as part of his Duke of Edinburgh's Silver Award scheme. Thank you to Martin and Nicky Thomas who prepare the Powerpoints of the 9:30 service text to give us hands-free participation in our worship.

The twice monthly Family Service and the 4th Sunday Church Together service do not need the same level of operation but they do need people to set up the equipment before the services. Thank you to the donor for the new projector donated in 2025, for the Church Together service, which gives us a much brighter image on the screen, it is much appreciated.

We would always welcome anyone interested to join one of the teams towards making it a less than monthly contribution. Training and support would be provided.

Going forward into 2026, the church projectors will have an annual service, and the PCC have approved this cost of £300.00. Last year we had an estimate for the cost of placing a couple of screens in the Chancel so that the choir can see what is projected on the screen. We have not progressed this yet.

Life of the PA and AV equipment is limited. At the service in 2024, it was pointed out that we have some lamp/lense burn. So we are currently running on 'borrowed time' for the Nave projector. The recommendation is that we should replace the Nave projector over the next year. Currently a replacement projector would cost £5,000 + VAT, but a bonus is that it would be newer technology; using a laser rather than a lamp. Funding for this needs to be considered.

Rupert Cremer-Evans