



**St Paul's,  
Wokingham  
with  
St Nicholas's,  
Emmbrook**



**PARISH  
REPORTS  
2025**



# PARISH REPORTS 2025

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## **Introductory Note**

The Annual Report prepared with the Financial Statements for the Charity Commission contains information on many aspects of parish life, including the PCC sub-committees. Parishioners are encouraged to read it in order to get a fuller picture of the life and work of the Parish in 2025. It is supplemented by the following reports.

And thank you, thank you, thank you for all you offer and share and treasure and bring and... none of this would be possible without you and your heartfelt response to God's love.

## **Rector's Report**

A little while ago, I was standing in the clergy vestry at Winchester Cathedral with a couple of the cathedral canons. The St Paul's choir had just finished singing Evensong there. One of the canons said to me, 'You're very fortunate.'

I agreed with her, of course – but really she didn't know the half of it. I am a very fortunate priest to be the Rector of this parish. I am so very glad I came. I am very happy to be in Wokingham.

There are a great many thanks to give, too many to number. But I do want to pay particular tribute to the Churchwardens, David and Peter, and to the Pro-Wardens at St Nicholas, Liz and Fiona. A further thanks must go to the wider Standing Committee and the PCC. It is not normal to arrive to such a well-functioning parish!

Similarly, I am very grateful to all the clergy who helped the parish through the vacancy, and indeed to those who are continuing to offer their ministry in the parish today. Especially I must mention Revd Cara Smart, Revd Judi Hattaway, and Revd Jane Kraft. It is a great joy to minister alongside them.

The last four months of 2025 were, of course, very much a time of getting to know the parish and the people who gather in our churches. I am still working on this. If I haven't been to visit you yet, or had you round at the Rectory, I would like to. Please do get in touch. I would be very glad to hear from you.

### **Priorities for the future**

In the (excellent) parish profile, you discerned the following priorities:

- Work with children and young people
- Mission and outreach
- Building relationships in our local community

- Growing our spirituality

I couldn't agree more. I hope you will still see these as the priorities for our parish life. I would urge you not to see them as discrete items, however. Whatever we are doing, we should have these priorities in our minds. How can your work incorporate them? Is there an area of our life where these need developing or taking further? Could *you* be the one to do it?

### **The life of the Church of England**

The Church of England in its national form has been much in the news in the past year. The year began with the departure of Justin Welby as Archbishop, under a significant cloud. It ended with the news of the appointment of Sarah Mullally as his successor, an extraordinary moment for the Church and especially for women. I am so glad that the Church has been able to reach this point.

With that said, the Church of England remains in a bad state. The Church's reputation for safeguarding is very poor, for very good reasons. The Church remains very non-inclusive especially of LGBT+ people. The 'Living in Love and Faith' project has ended, and a move to a fuller inclusivity seems as far away as it ever has.

But we mustn't forget that *we* are the Church of England. It is not some far-off non-functional bureaucracy. It is thousands of churches, just like ours, proclaiming Christ and his kingdom. Churches like ours are the reason to have hope. And if we want to see change in the Church, we have to fight for it. The PCC wrote to our bishops following the news of the end of the LLF project. Bishop Mary replied very positively, committing herself to work for a more inclusive church. She wrote, 'Thank you for all that you are doing in offering ... unconditional hospitality – something that I have certainly experienced on my visits to you.'

We must keep fighting for the Church of England.

### **Our schools**

We are very lucky to have two excellent church schools in our parish and I have the great privilege of being a governor at both, along with several members of our congregations. St Paul's Junior School is the better established; I go into the school every week to deliver collective worship and to work with the leadership of the school. St Cecilia's, on the Matthewsgreen development, is obviously much newer and still establishing itself, with a very transient population. Both schools have a wonderful culture and first-rate staff.'

St Paul's is going to experience a significant change in 2026: it is opening an SEND Resource Unit, which will offer specialist provision for autistic children and those with speech and language difficulties. St Cecilia's first headteacher, Rich Thomas, is leaving at Easter: every institution has a difficult challenge dealing with its first leader leaving.

All Wokingham schools are dealing with a significant issue: falling student numbers. Schools' funding is based on headcount, so when the rolls are not full, it has a very significant impact on their financial strength. This seems likely to be a recurring issue for the next few years.

### **St Nicholas 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

2026 marks half a century since the foundation of St Nicholas Church in Emmbrook. It is an unusual church. It is built every week, rather than being a building in its own right, and it is built out of people, in a very conventional village hall. I wish to pay tribute to the work of St Nicholas' in its community over the last fifty years, and to celebrate all that it is today. It is a reminder that the Church is ultimately built out of living stones. So happy anniversary to St Nicholas', and may I commend all the anniversary celebrations to the attention of our whole parish.

### **Holy people**

When I was ordained a priest, I had an interview with my bishop. He asked what I saw priesthood as being all about. I told him that I saw it as being 'a holy person for the sake of making holy people'. This is a good summary for what I hope to achieve as your Rector.

I wish to be holy. That means that, before everything else that I do, I wish to be a man of prayer. I hope you will see that in me. An Anglo-Catholic priest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century wrote: 'Who will make up for the losses incurred by an unprayerful priest?'

And I hope that you will seek holiness too. I hope and pray that you will find in our church life and in your own prayer lives a glimpse of God. I pray that you will hear God's call to follow Jesus Christ more closely each day, to know him better, and to love him more.

That is the greatest Christian work. I pray for you every day. Please continue to pray for me.

*Fr Sam Tanna-Korn, Rector*

# Parish Life

## **Churchwardens' Annual Report on the Fabric of St Paul's Church 2025**

*Under Paragraph 5 (1)-(3) of Care of Churches and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1991, the Churchwardens are required to deliver the Annual Fabric Report to the PCC, and on behalf of the PCC to the APCM (with any amendments made by the PCC), including an account of all actions taken or proposed during the previous year for the protection and maintenance of the fabric and all articles appertaining to the church.*

Since the time of the Quinquennial Inspection, it had become clear that repairs to the ceiling of the nave were needed. Early in the year there were some minor falls of plaster on the south side of the nave and also above the font, which was an area of the ceiling repaired a few years ago.

A platform was hired to enable these two ceiling sections to be covered with melamine faced MDF held in place with white beading. It was originally intended that the platform would also be used to inspect the whole ceiling and remove the dirt and cobwebs. In the event many more panels were repaired than had been originally planned. Nigel Traylor also swept all the cobwebs from the ceiling and from the porch ceiling. The work was successfully completed before the Ascension Day Mass on Thursday 29th May. The overall cost of £2917.86 including VAT for materials and for hire of the equipment was charged to the Restoration Fund and the VAT was reclaimed.

Later in the year there was another fall of plaster from the North wall near the flower cupboard due to damp arising from the need to reroof the aisle. This will be attended to in due course. There is some pointing on the outside of the church that needs attention, and we will be seeking quotations for this. We are also considering making repairs to the churchyard wall.

Since the existing loudspeakers in the Nave for the sound system could not produce sufficient volume at the back of the Nave, especially when the church was full, the PCC agreed that two additional speakers would be installed at the back of the Nave on the aisle walls. These have greatly improved the overall volume and provide better clarity. Some improvement of the loudspeakers in the choir has resulted in greater clarity in the sound in this area. The cost of the work was £2797.25 including VAT, paid from the Restoration Fund.

An energy survey is currently being conducted to see whether there are any suitable greener heating options available to us. A number of temperature sensors have been placed around the church which will record the temperature in different areas over a 6-week period, and the results will be reported to the PCC.

As recommended by the 2023 Quinquennial Report, the gulleys at the foot of the downpipes have been cleared.

The following items have been added to the Church Inventory:

Two additional church loudspeakers including mounting hardware, cables and installation purchased on 11 Dec 2025 at a cost of £2,797.25.

Two card readers:

- (1) A Payaz Giving Station purchased on 13th Dec 2024 at a cost of £412.94.
- (2) A PayazGO with SumUp Solo (located in Parish Rooms) purchased on 31 Dec 2025 at a cost of £287.44.

*David Ruddock and Peter Wells, Churchwardens*

## **The Parochial Church Council**

The PCC have had 6 main meetings since the last APCM in April 2025. At all the meetings the financial position of both the church and the Parish Rooms Trust was monitored. Other highlights are:

In May 2025, it was announced to the PCC formally that a new Rector had been appointed, Fr Sam Tanna-Korn, and he would be installed on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025. The PCC agreed the 2025 Safeguarding Policy. The appointment of officers and Deputy Wardens was confirmed and a list of PCC Committees and their members was circulated. Peter Wells advised the PCC that a further fall of plaster had occurred, this time above the font. He proposed to repair both areas of the nave ceiling and inspect the remainder of the ceiling during the last week in May using an Ariel platform. The PCC agreed in principle to renovation work at Brook Close to bring the house up to rental standard.

In July 2025, the PCC discussed the arrangements for the Installation of Fr Sam and the licensing of Rev Cara as Associate Priest to Woosehill. As trustees of the Parish Rooms, the PCC agreed to install CCTV cameras in the car park and by the front door to the building. It was noted that the PRT Committee were looking to refurbish the toilets in the building and the PCC requested that the Committee also report back about the best solution to improve the fencing and gates to the garden.

In September 2025, the PCC agreed to support the proposal by Jason Searancke to establish a Young Adults Group. It was reported that the replacement of the windows in the Parish Rooms had been completed. The PRT Committee presented a proposal on the refurbishment of the toilets and the PCC asked for further clarification and a clear specification. St Nick's members advised the PCC that 2026 would be their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and a number of events to mark the milestone are being planned.

In November 2025, the annual payments to our Mission Partners were agreed. The PCC approved the appointment of Pauline Wells as J-Club leader until summer 2026 when the position will be reviewed. Peter Wells submitted a proposal to install two additional speakers at the back of the Nave to improve the overall sound in the church. In the churchyard, it was agreed to plant a rowan tree to replace the cedar and a new incense cedar to replace the existing one which has died. Lyn Austen presented a draft budget for 2026 which was approved. A review of our three charities which we support was presented by Paul Armitage and the PCC agreed that for 2026-2029 we will support Soulscape, HomeStart Wokingham and the Bible Society.

In January 2026, the PCC approved the appointment of Nigel Traylor as Health & Safety Officer. It was agreed that the Parish Rooms Trust should appoint Blandy & Blandy as their legal advisers to work with the Trust to try and expand the terms of the Trust which are too restrictive. Fr Sam proposed that St Paul's should apply to the Diocese to have a curate. If successful, the new curate would arrive in July 2027. Fr Sam also advised the meeting that he is working to increase our presence on social media. Fr Sam advised the meeting that he would like to use the choir to help bring new people into the church and particularly children. He would present more details to the PCC at the next meeting.

In March 2026, the PCC approved the Annual Report and Accounts 2025, the Parish Rooms Trust Report and Accounts 2025 and the Churchwarden's Report in readiness for presentation to the APCM. They received reports from the PRT covering the Budget for the year, planned expenditure including redecoration of the Rooms and a capital expenditure plan for 10 years. The members also approved a plan to provide a scholarship scheme for young choristers which is dependent on a successful grant application to the Cathedral Music Trust.

*Lesley Ruddock, PCC Secretary*

## **Safeguarding**

The Safeguarding Team has gladly welcomed Father Sam Tanna-Korn. We are hugely grateful to Mother Cara Smart for her great work and support during the interregnum, and we are pleased that the handover appears to have worked well.

### Audit of Safeguarding Training Requirements

- Chris and I started the year with an audit of safeguarding training for all our volunteers in safeguarding relevant roles. People were systematically contacted if any training or refresher was due, and the response has been positive. Thank you to all our hard-working volunteers for keeping safeguarding aware, it is truly appreciated.
- There were a few concerns raised about some courses. I would like to use this occasion to urge anyone who has to complete a training and finds it challenging – be it technically or with regards to content – to contact someone from the safeguarding team!

You are not alone! We will be delighted to assist you.

Also I am keen to point out any difficulties to the Diocese so they can be addressed.

### Safeguarding Audit of Church Groups

- Likewise, I have conducted an audit of the requirements for those of our church groups which include children, young people and adults at risk. Most group leaders have been responsive and provided me with great insight into their groups and the required risk assessment. Again, if ever you experience any difficulties or have any safeguarding questions in your role as group leader – the Safeguarding Team is here to help!

### Policy Update

- We are up to date with all our policies which, are regularly reviewed and updated by the PCC.
- We have also added a “Known Offenders Policy”. As a Church, we are in the rather unique position to be called, as the House of Bishops says, “to offer pastoral care and support to any members of the church community who may pose a known risk”. The policy follows Diocese guidelines on how we would engage with any such persons if they came to our parish.

### Beyond the Parish

- The Diocese has started to promote stronger networking among PSOs for faster, better, more informal peer support. I have connected with several other PSOs in Sonning Deanery and we are in the process of planning a first get-together at St. Paul’s. Watch this space!

### Promoting a Safer Church:

Especially when exchanging notes with my fellow PSOs, I was once again humbled and very grateful to find that I am working in such a supportive parish, where safeguarding is taken very seriously and To this end, I appeal to everyone who by their presence, support and contribution is keeping our parish alive and thriving:

- Continue to be curious, critical and engaged!
- Continue to be vocal, speak your minds and any concerns!

*Stefanie Cetin, Parish Safeguarding Officer*

## **St Nicholas' Pro-Wardens' Report**

### *St Nicholas' Missional Vocation Statement*

*"Exploring through relationships and worship*

*how God's love is creating and sustaining communities in Emmbrook"*

Although small the congregation remains committed to meaningful worship at St Nicholas' and being compassionate to each other's needs.

As well as our Sunday Eucharists, our Good Friday Meditation and our First Mass of Christmas on Christmas Eve we held three reflective and peaceful Taizé services, which have been well attended and enjoyed by members of the whole Parish. We joined with St Paul's for Mothering Sunday and for the Sunday after Christmas. A Wednesday House Mass is held in Emmbrook once a month and prayers are said on the other Wednesdays.

Our Children's Church meets twice a month during term time, and our leaders work very hard to come up with ideas which will engage our two regular young people. The congregation often learn things when they make a presentation of their work at the end of the service!

In August we were delighted that Fr. Sam joined the Parish as our Rector. Members of our congregation took part in his service of Institution and Induction at which Cara was also licensed to serve as Associate Minister at Woosehill. Fr Sam's first Sunday Mass at St Paul's was attended by members of all three churches in the Parish. These were both wonderful and joyful occasions. We are very grateful that Fr Sam has been very supportive of St Nicholas'.

Sadly, in the first part of the year Mike and Wendy Darlison, two of our most loyal and loved members died. Over many years they gave so much to St Nicholas' and are greatly missed.

On a happy note, we were able to celebrate with Susannah and Vernon in celebrating their 25th Wedding Anniversary when Judi blessed them and their rings during a morning service in September.

Our three Fellowship Groups, with their varying formats, continue to offer prayerful and practical support.

The Council met four times during the year to discuss all aspects of life and worship at St Nicholas'. A fair amount in 2025 was about how we could improve our visibility to try and attract new members and do more for the community. With this in mind an A Board was purchased to put outside when we hold services or events, and all services and events are posted on A Church Near You and the Parish website. Some of our congregation helped at Emmbrook Primary Schools Summer Fair and St. Cecilia's Christmas Fair and made Christingles with Emmbrook Junior School. We were made very welcome and hope to do more in 2026. During Advent nearly 2,000 postcards were delivered to homes in Emmbrook advertising our services and our 50th Anniversary with more to be delivered at a time closer to our anniversary. In addition to this a bereavement video was posted on ACNY and YouTube. An extra hymn booklet was also introduced and has been very well received.

As has become our custom we held an auction of the donated goods following our Harvest service. This raised money for the three Parish charities and members of the congregation were very generous and went home very happy with the goods they had bought.

Many of our congregation support Parish committees, Parish events and volunteer for various local charities.

Now to 2026, our 50th Anniversary! This is a very exciting year for us, and community events have been or are being planned during the year. These will culminate in a birthday party on Saturday 5th November, at which Bishop Mary has agreed to come along and talk, and our Patronal Eucharist and shared lunch on Sunday 6th. So much to look forward to and to hope for.

Our thanks to Fr. Sam, Judi and Cara for their teaching and care and to our Church Wardens and all the clergy who helped and supported us during the Interregnum and thank you to every member of our congregation, for all they do for St Nicholas, the Parish and for the community which we serve.

*Liz Gallagher and Fiona Albinson, Pro Wardens*

## **Woosehill Church Report**

The year 2025 saw a change in Ministry, in July saw us say farewell and happy retirement to Soba and his wife Nava who moved to Wales and in September we welcomed Cara her husband Richard and Oscar and Bethan her children. We also

welcomed Wes Hampton and his wife Cherry to the new Blackwater Valley Circuit and as our Methodist minister at Woosehill as part of our alternating ministry.

Our outreach projects still happen regularly, Tadpoles for pre-school aged children and their carers, Thursday coffee, chat and sometimes knitting, craft or games and the second Saturday each month Sip and Share for anyone who is lonely. Both the Thursday and Saturday groups host friendship tables linked to the local Friendship Alliance.

We have a successful bible study every Tuesday on Zoom from 19.15 until 20.30 learning more about what the stories in the bible mean to us and this is open to the whole parish and led by Rev. Cara Smart, Derek Hutchinson, Doreen Murgatroyd and Penny Williams. This year we looked at women in both the Old and New Testaments and mapping John. During Lent and in Advent we study specific courses.

In March ladies from Woosehill church joined with ladies from other churches in Wokingham to share in the World Day of Prayer Service, this year it was at Corpus Christi.

In May each year we join with the whole parish to run a coffee morning to raise funds for Christian Aid.

As a church we are looking for ways to encourage more young families to join us.

Just before Christmas we were informed that the Junior Action Group who run breakfast and after school clubs will cease to do this from March 2026 and that the new providers would be using the school premises.

*Lynn Smith, Woosehill church representative on the PCC*

## **Changes in the Electoral Roll**

Following revision of the Electoral Roll this year, the total number admitted by 29<sup>th</sup> March 2026 now stands at 190. The number of persons on the Roll on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025 stood at 179. The following people have been added to the Roll: Lawrence Doyle, Hilary Ellis, John Ellis, Felix Hargreaves, Jo Hargreaves, Jemima Hargreaves, Catherine McEnhill, Charlotte McEnhill, Grant Morgan, Susan Newport, Sonia Russell, Rosaline Voke, John Woodburn. The following people have been deleted from the Roll: Tony Eggleston (died), Dr Mike Darlison (died).

*Teri Austen, Electoral Roll Officer*

## Stewardship Report

We are grateful to all the St. Paul's and St. Nick's Parishioners who continue to generously support the Church through both regular planned giving and one-off donations.

Planned, regular giving is very valuable and allows the Church to budget effectively so if you can support the Church through regular donations, please consider doing this through the Parish Giving scheme.

The majority of planned giving is via the Parish Giving Scheme which is run by the diocese who claim Gift Aid on all eligible donations on our behalf. Information on joining the Parish Giving scheme is available on the parish website but if you have any questions regarding the scheme please contact myself at the email below or Lyn Austen, our treasurer. I would like to encourage anyone still giving by Standing Order or envelopes to consider switching to scheme.

We continue to collect donations in a number of ways:

- Via the plate during Sunday services for those wishing to give during service. Donations can be in cash or by the yellow gift aid envelopes which are available in the pews.
- Card readers are available at the back of the Church and in the parish rooms. Donations received using the card reader are treated as anonymous cash donations and if they are less than £30, we can claim 25% tax back on these through the Gift Aid Small Donation Scheme known as GASDS.
- Cash donations can also be put in the wall safe near the font at the back of the Church.
- By text. You can donate by texting STPAULS5, STPAULS10, or STPAULS20 to 70450, allowing you to give that particular amount and you can also choose to add Gift Aid to your donation.

Donations can also be made to the Church through direct Bank Transfer.

If you are a UK taxpayer, then we can claim Gift Aid equal to the standard rate of income tax on the value of any gifts given to the Church. Gift Aid provides an extremely valuable contribution to the Church's annual income so if you can Gift Aid your donation, please let me know and I can provide a declaration form.

If you have previously completed a Gift Aid declaration form but if your circumstances have changed and you are no longer paying UK income tax please inform me.

HMRC suggest that declarations are reconfirmed on a regular basis so if you have not completed a declaration form in the last 5 years or you have moved house since you last completed a form, please let me know and I can provide a new form.

If anyone has any questions about the Parish Giving Scheme, stewardship or Gift Aid then do please contact me at Church or via email at [stewardship@spauls.org.uk](mailto:stewardship@spauls.org.uk)

*Stuart Fairhead, Stewardship Secretary*

## **The Churchyard**

During this year the churchyard has continued to be looked after and continues to receive very positive comments from the local community.

We enjoy the help from the Probation Service Payback group as well as a few volunteers from the congregation who help in the churchyard or provide refreshments for the workers in the churchyard. This volunteer contingent has decreased to two churchgoing members and one non-church attending volunteer who likes to help us out, but we need to be joined by enthusiastic new churchyarders. In fact we could do with a Quartermaster to keep the shed tidy and the tools in good shape (there can be lots of help from other volunteers as needed), a biodiversity champion and a tree champion who can maintain a continuous survey of the trees – the last fully completed survey was in 2017. We have the regular provision of refreshments and when necessary, we work together in groups.

Following on from the reduction of the old Oak just after Christmas in 2023, we had to have the big Cedar of Lebanon cut back but were required by the council to retain a 4m monolith. This has recently been surrounded by 5 rambling roses, which we hope will grow up and provide a show of flowers in midsummer. Two Rambling Rector roses have been planted, one of which has since suffered in the last year's drought and need replacing, two Paul's Himalayan Musk roses and one Banksia lutea rose which is thornless and flowers a little later than the others. Hopefully the new roses will grow quickly and provide a good show of flowers over a longer period than just one variety would have done. Unfortunately at some point we will need to remove the remaining stump so it does not damage the graves which surround it although it should not damage the church or the road.

The volunteers have managed to maintain the chipper and make it functional so we are now able to chip much of the tree waste we generate in the churchyard. The chipped waste has been successfully used to maintain the paths in the churchyard although we

still use a donation of good quality wood chip to keep the paths dry and in good condition. As a result of the chipper donation we no longer have bonfires, which are unpopular and release significant carbon into the atmosphere. So we have done a bit to reduce our contribution to climate change.

We have also started to invest in battery powered machines to manage the churchyard although we still do use petrol and diesel in the chipper and mowers since available battery mowers are currently unsuitable for all day use. Material which previously we might have burnt but which is unsuitable for the chipper, is being composted and the leaves, which fall in the autumn, are collected to produce leaf mould. We have been using much of the compost to level out the ground in the churchyard but there is plenty of good quality compost and leaf mould available for anyone who cares to come and collect it for themselves. Please contact [churchyard@spauls.org.uk](mailto:churchyard@spauls.org.uk) for further information.

We are pleased to welcome visitors into the Churchyard to support their local community. We have hosted students from Chiltern Way Academy and two groups from Optalis. An organisation that supports the disabled people of Wokingham who find working difficult. The churchyard is clearly an excellent way to reach out to the local community as well as our very long term and successful link with the probation service.

Most of the trees we planted as part of the Tree Succession Project are growing nicely, although we have had two unsuccessful attempts at a replacement cedar, and the incense cedar, planted in recognition of the Walter Family has succumbed to the drought last year. A Rowan/Mountain Ash has been planted as a replacement for the Cedar, and in years to come it will be small enough to be removed without the cost we experienced with the Cedar. A new Incense cedar will replace the dead tree when they are available for purchase. The Medlar tree which was planted by Wokingham WI near the Parish rooms has again provided a good show of blossoms and colourful leaves as well as a supply of medlar fruits this year if anyone has an interest in using the fruit's next year please contact [churchyard@spauls.org.uk](mailto:churchyard@spauls.org.uk)

We are still looking out for Ash Die Back, or Chalara (*hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), but so far it seems to have missed the churchyard trees. If our Ash trees are affected we will need to remove them. It is this threat that we are addressing with the planting of new trees which will take over when the inevitable happens (over 95% of the Ash trees in the UK, *fraxinus excelsior*, are expected to succumb to the disease eventually).

The tree survey which was carried out in 2017, was being re-run by the churchyard volunteers, to make sure that our trees are kept in good order, pruned and removed, as necessary. Half of the trees have been surveyed so far but the remaining half have not been surveyed because of the lack of volunteers. Other work has taken a priority.

The drains around the Church still need repairing. This work was being planned a couple of years ago but the project was halted by the pandemic. I would be pleased to

hear recommendations of suitable contractors ([churchyard@spauls.org.uk](mailto:churchyard@spauls.org.uk)), since this is something which needs to be revisited to keep the drainage system, around the church, in good working order. The drains have been cleared of leaves and weeds by the Payback group as specified in the recent church survey report.

There has been a lot of work done over the past couple of years to remove the old spoil heap on the south side of the churchyard. This has provided new grave space and we are indebted to Tom Gemmill, who has spent hours managing and maintaining the area. Tom has reseeded this part of the churchyard but we may need to reseed areas which are looking thin.

If you are pleased with the way the churchyard looks and would like to help to maintain it to its current standard, please come and join us. We really do need more people to mow the grass, manage the compost, maintain and document the graves, tend our trees, look after our wildlife, mend our machines, provide refreshments and more. If this is you, please join us any time from 9.00-16.00 on alternate Saturdays email [churchyard@spauls.org.uk](mailto:churchyard@spauls.org.uk) for more information. We share the payback group with All Saints Church which is why we have churchyard working party every fortnight.

*Andy Clark, Churchyard Manager*

## **Mustard Seeds**

As for the previous year, specific missional activities have been fewer than in earlier years, with people being unavailable to plan and organise events for personal and other reasons. Along with the rest of the Parish, we were delighted to have Fr Sam join us and are looking forward to 2026's missional opportunities.

Some points worth mentioning are:

- We donated a total of £6788 to our three charities in 2025.
- The system we had in place, and the process by which we come up with a recommendation for which charities to support was reviewed. The system overall was considered to be working well, but a small number of changes were proposed to PCC and accepted:
  1. Funding to be equal between the charities supported (previously 40%-30%-30% in favour of the international charity)
  2. The three groupings of charity (international, national, local) to be used as guidelines only, rather than strict categories
- Due to the vacancy, the last 3-year cycle for charity funding was extended to 4 years (finishing at end 2025). Using the newly revised system, Mustard Seeds proposed retaining Soulscape and HomeStart Wokingham District, and

substituting The Bible Society for USPG. With PCC accepting the recommendation, these three charities will be supported for the 2026-28 cycle.

- Paul worked with a small number of fellow members of St Nicholas' congregation to plan 2026's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary activities. Four community events are planned, each with a faith-based element. Timings roughly coincide with liturgically significant dates (Easter, Pentecost, Harvest, Patronal Festival.) The prayerful hope and expectation is that new initiatives will develop out of these, as St Nicholas' engages with different parts of Emmbrook's community. This is very much in line with the approach the Parish has taken over the last few years – looking for missional opportunities within other planned events.
- As always, outreach is something many people do, of course, not just the Mustard Seeds. For example, it was particularly pleasing to see more volunteers come forward in September and commit to delivering Soulscape's "The Lounge" project at The Holt School for the 2025-26 academic year.

Anybody can have a good missional idea; Mustard Seeds certainly do not have a monopoly on them. So, any that fit within the Parish's resource constraints are always welcome.

*Paul Armitage*

## **Spirituality Report**

In 2025

- Despite being "in vacancy" for more than half the year, services for worship and prayer took place regularly: Mass on Sundays, sermon series at Evensong once a month, Morning Prayer on Zoom three times a week and twice in church), plus "extras" such as Stations of the Cross and midweek festivals at appropriate times.
- We are very grateful to Mother Cara, Mother Jane and Revd Judi for their support and spiritual input, as well as to the visiting clergy who enabled services to continue uninterrupted
- It was my privilege and my joy to provide Communion by Extension on occasion during the vacancy, and to continue to take communion to care homes over the year.
- the choir continue to flourish and inspire,

- J-Club has taken place regularly in term time
- Fellowship and prayer and/or study groups continue to meet, both via Zoom and in person in people's homes
- the monthly meditation group, under the leadership of Susannah Riley, included some teaching this year, adjusting its meeting place on occasion to best match the weather.
- We were, naturally, delighted to welcome Fr Sam as Rector at the end of August.

For these and many other blessings we praise Almighty God.

Unfortunately, our March morning "to contemplate and discuss the promises made at our baptisms, through focus on the words of the Nicene Creed" was booked for the same day as the annual parish Lent lunch, so discussion was cut slightly short, but valued nonetheless.

In September another group met at the St James Church Centre, Finchampstead for a Quiet Day led by Susannah Riley: Meeting with God Through Trees. The magnificent trees and open space there were a perfect backdrop for our contemplation.

As I said last year, our call to discipleship is precious and it matters, personally and corporately, that we are all putting time and energy and prayer into deepening our relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If you are keen to deepen your spirituality, there are many routes to explore. Do ask about them, try some, and make a conscious decision to respond to new opportunities.

*Mary Cassidy*

## **Social Committee**

JANUARY LUNCH

12<sup>TH</sup> January 2025

70 people attended this much enjoyed event. A good choice of dishes. We raised £476.

## QUIZ NIGHT

8<sup>TH</sup> February.

A packed Hall of 80 for this popular evening which proved to be as competitive as ever. The event raised £336. Tables included participants from Woosehill and St. Nick's. The top three teams were very close. The Station Fish and Chips were up to the usual standard. A very big thank you to our Quiz Masters, Pippa and John Sutton, who provided a range of challenging questions, and to Mary Cassidy who organised a Raffle which raised £177.

## LENT LUNCH WITH M.U.

8<sup>TH</sup> March.

47 people attended when we served soups, bread and cheese. We received many compliments for our soups and artisan bread. We were delighted to have the Rev. Jane Kraft join us. The event raised £330 by way of donations for our 3 Charities.

## EASTER SUNDAY BREAKFAST. 20<sup>TH</sup> April.

Breakfast was served from 7:00 am to 100 people. We provided bacon, sausages, rolls, croissants, Danish pastries, fruit juice, prosecco and tea and coffee. Donations amounted to £353.50. The Card Reader and a sign saying "minimum donation of £5" helped to ensure we covered our outlay.

## CHRISTIAN AID COFFEE MORNING. 10<sup>TH</sup> May.

Tea, coffee and cake proved very popular and raised £356.55 towards the overall amount for Christian Aid.

## BBQ 6<sup>TH</sup> July

We were very fortunate with the weather. 70 people attended. It was a very enjoyable day, with many delicious salads and puddings. Our grateful thanks to Chris and Nigel for barbecuing sausages and burgers. We made a profit of £500.58, together with £145 from the Raffle.

## CHRIS AND NIGEL'S WEDDING. 12<sup>TH</sup> July.

This was a joyful occasion for the Parish when the Committee happily gave their support which was much appreciated by the happy couple. There were over 100 guests with tables set out in the sunshine in the garden, as well as in the hall.

Sandwiches were provided by Waitrose, together with some gluten free sandwiches provided by the Committee. Prosecco flowed!

INSTALLATION OF OUR NEW RECTOR. 28<sup>th</sup> August.

This was a very special service for the Parish when Father Sam was installed as our new Rector, and Mother Cara was installed as Minister at Woosehill. The Committee provided refreshments after the Service, including a selection of sandwiches and nibbles. Many people enjoyed the refreshments after the Service, when the sparkling Elderflower proved most popular.

ANNUAL SOCIAL COMMITTEE DINNER 26<sup>TH</sup> September.

A most enjoyable evening at Alan's home with an excellent menu. Fortunately we were able to enjoy drinks in the garden before the rain came.

HARVEST LUNCH 5<sup>TH</sup> October.

60 people attended a vegetarian meal, which included fruit crumbles. Some people were unhappy not being offered meat dishes, so we may revert to a mixture of dishes next year.

EVENSONG REFRESHMENTS 19<sup>th</sup> October.

Wine, soft drinks and nibbles were served.

ALL SOULS REFRESHMENTS 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

We served tea, coffee, fruit juice and nibbles. Attendees were mostly the regular Congregation and the Choir.

PARISH BAZAAR 8<sup>TH</sup> November.

This was well attended and a profit of £496.95 was made for church funds. We provided small plate lunches as well as afternoon tea and cake. Thank you to Ian and Georgina who helped with the tea.

NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS 21<sup>st</sup> December .

A very festive occasion. We served mulled wine together with mince pies, stollen and nibbles. We overcatered on the mince pies and nibbles as so many were donated. Donations amounted to £97.10 which will go towards our January 2026 Lunch expenses.

## GOODBYE AND HELLO

The Committee said a fond farewell to Janet Charlton who finally decided to retire after serving tirelessly on the Committee for many years. She will be greatly missed. Fortunately, we were able to welcome Sheila Donohue to the Committee in April. Sheila has proved to be a bundle of energy. and a delight to work with.

## SUMMARY.

2025 proved to be our busiest year yet, with 14 events catered for. Our thanks go to all members of the Committee as well as others who generously gave their support and time when needed. It is particularly helpful to have more able-bodied volunteers help set up tables prior to an event. Thank you, too, to Louise for posters and admin support. Many members of the Committee have reached the age where participation is more challenging, and we would like to see younger helpers join us on the Committee.

*Trish Gatland, Alan Harrison / Social Committee*

## **Meditation Group**

During this last year we completed a series of 6 teaching sessions, using WCCM material. We had some new people joining us for these. We have had to move the day and time of the group, now meeting monthly, usually on the second Thursday of each month, at 4pm. By popular consent we have changed venue to the Rapsey Room, St Paul's Parish Rooms, for the colder months (October to April). We will be back in St Paul's May to September.

We are open to anyone of Christian, other faith, or none. If you would like to join us do just come along or contact me, [meditationgroup@spauls.org.uk](mailto:meditationgroup@spauls.org.uk)

*Susannah Riley*

## **J-Club**

At the start of the academic year, the risk assessment for J-Club was reviewed and updated. Leaders met to discuss future plans and agree on safeguarding protocols. Following this, Fr Sam led a training session. He introduced us to the ideas of Godly Play. Fr Sam has acquired a complete set of resources for Godly Play which we hope to make use of in the future. There are currently 4 adults who are on the list to lead J-Club sessions and 2 adults who are supporting J-Club sessions. We would welcome an increase in the number of adults involved and hope to recruit more people in line with further training sessions.

We are using the Roots resources to run sessions. The resources themselves are of a high quality. However, the leaders feel that because they follow the lectionary, topics are not always the best for our children. There is currently no more suitable schemes available, but we will continue to research this.

The Autumn term allowed us to run 11 sessions, with time out for an ATM and half term. We had an average of 5 children per session. The team are keen to be able to provide regular sessions for our children and note that this would be more sustainable with extra helpers!

*Pauline Wells*

## **Choir and Music**

During 2025 St Paul's choir continued to flourish in every way. They sang for the morning mass every Sunday (except in August), several weekday evening services over the year and also sang choral evensong once a month. Other special services included a Palm Sunday evening service of lessons and music, the festival of nine lessons and carols at Christmas and a Songs of Praise to launch the new hymn books acquired. The choir were also delighted to be part of Fr Sam's installation in August. Other notable moments included two trips to cathedrals to sing choral evensong. Firstly, St Paul's Cathedral in April which was a truly wonderful experience for all and Portsmouth Cathedral in October which, although a much more intimate setting, was also very special. For both these events a coach was full of choir and members of the congregation who were a marvellous support and these days out are a wonderful testament to the fellowship within the life of our church.

Numbers in the choir are very positive with some special services including 36 singers of all ages. Unfortunately, several children simultaneously moved away which left us with fewer young people and this has prompted us (with Fr Sam's direction) to invent forward thinking plans to recruit during 2026. Early results are very promising.

Choral repertoire continues to be very varied, stretching from plainsong chant and Palestrina through the centuries to some excellent new liturgical works by contemporary composers such as Gjeilo and Clausen. The members of the choir are constantly striving to achieve their very best music-making to offer in worship and their commitment is exceptional. There is also a wonderful, general feeling of goodwill towards each other. Christopher Cipkin continues to be an incredible asset to our worship with his fine organ playing and thoughtfulness of planning repertoire according to the liturgy. Christopher also gave a highly successful series of organ recitals which raised a large amount towards funding the renovations required for the organ. A special mention of gratitude should also be made to Lesley Ruddock, choir secretary, for all her hard work with administration and hymn planning.

*Louise Turner, Director of Music*

# The Wider View

## Deanery Synod Report

Once again, it has been a year of significant change in Sonning Deanery.

In September 2025, Revd. Julian Bidgood (Barkham) finished serving as Deanery Co-ordinator. We give thanks for his ministry among us, particularly through his support of the many parishes who found themselves in vacancy and his work on our Children and young people's plan which has given us a firm foundation to work from. A thank you was given to Julian before his sabbatical in the summer of 2025. In June 2025, Deanery Synod also said thank you to John Sutton and Lynne Paine who stepped down as Lay Chair and Treasurer respectively. A huge thanks for all they gave to those roles.

The Bishop of Reading asked Revd. Laura Wheatley Downs (Crowthorne) to serve as Area Dean from September 2025, and she has been working alongside Leigh Welham (Secretary), Anthony Pollock (Treasurer) Anna Pearce, David Horrocks, John Sutton, Revd. Gemma Donnell (Parish of Finchampstead and California) and Revd. Mark Gould (Twyford and Ruscombe) who have served as members of the Deanery Standing Committee and Mission and Pastoral Committee. Revd Mark Gould was licensed as Associate Area Dean on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026. Behind the scenes, advocating for deanery is Peter Wells. Special thanks also go to him for all his work managing our Parish Share allocations.

Over the last year, the remaining three incumbent vacancies have all been filled. It has been an absolute delight to welcome Fr. Sam Tanna-Korn (St. Paul's and Woosehill) Revd. David Chislett (Wargrave and Knowl-Hill) and Revd. Peter Hyson (Owlsmoor). It has also been wonderful to welcome other priests into the parish – Revd. Cathryn Howse as Associate minister in the parish of Finchampstead and California, Revd. Andrea Platt as Associate priest at All Saints and Revd. Robert Wynford-Harris (PTO).

This year, we have also said farewell to Revd Julian McAllen who left the parish of Finchampstead and California in the summer. And farewell and good luck to Revd. John Castle in Sandhurst who has taken up a new role at St. John the Baptist, Aldenham. He had joyfully served his community for 21 years, and we have been enriched as a deanery through his ministry. We wish him all the best!

Sadly, Revd. David Webster died in February. He had continued to minister to those at Suffolk Lodge which was his home toward the end of his life. We give God thanks for his years of faithful service.

One of the most significant beginnings within the Deanery has been the first phase of work on our Deanery plan which has taken up the majority of our time at Synod since September 2025. During this time Synod has been discerning where our deanery priorities lie. A consultation has also taken place in Deanery Chapter and explored through conversations across parishes. The Deanery has reflected on: signs of God at work, parish treasures, anxieties, priorities, community needs, required resources, and hopes for the deanery's future.

Out of this work have emerged some exciting key priorities to focus on as a Deanery which will be discussed at our next Synod AGM, alongside our vision and values.

Our next step will be to encourage those with a gifting, passion or skill in our priority areas and other key offices who would like to facilitate informal deanery clusters which meet a few times a year where others who are also interested in collaborating and sharing learning, encouragement and prayer about a particular area can gather together. e.g. safeguarding, churchwardens, children and young people. This already works successfully amongst our Treasurers and our Green team- a huge thankyou to all those involved in that.

We are also in the process of looking for a new Deanery Secretary. This is an important role within the life of the Synod. Leigh has been a fantastic secretary, but serves in so many other places- if you want to know more about what the role entails, please do speak with her. We're also looking for a new Lay chair. Again, an important role that enable the voice of the faithful members of our churches to be represented, and to ensure balance in how we work together as clergy and as laity. Please do speak with Laura if you'd like to find out more.

This next year, I would encourage anyone who has a heart to see our churches work together to grow God's Kingdom through any of the roles above or below, to sign up to be a deanery representative over the next 3 years at your APCM. And don't worry, if synod isn't for you- there are plenty of other ways to be involved! I look forward to seeing what God does through us.

Grace and peace,

*Revd Laura Wheatley Downs, Area Dean*

### **Supporting**

Clergy, individuals and churches to serve their parishes and communities by meeting together, sharing resources and engaging in mission.

### **Discerning**

Deanery Synod is a place where encouragements, concerns and missional ideas from individual parishes can be shared and potentially considered by the diocesan synod, which can then be considered at General Synod. At each of these stages, those involved are seeking to serve God, and grow God's Church.

## **Connecting**

People together from different churches across the area in worship, mission and governance. Parishes with deanery, diocesan and national initiatives and vice-verse through the sharing information.

## **Sweden Report**

Our parish link with Mariakyrkan in Växjö, Sweden has continued quietly over the last year. It has been a time of change for both parishes, with the change of Rector at St Paul's and the parishes of western Växjö developing into a large team ministry under the leadership of Johannes Grimheden, who was previously the parish priest for Mariakyrkan. Services at Mariakyrkan are now regularly led by all members of the western Växjö pastoral team, which includes Johannes Friberg and Victor Hjort.

The parish of Mariakyrkan kindly sent greetings to Fr Sam on his installation service in August 2025.

The large display about our link with Mariakyrkan has been at the back of St Paul's Church several times during the year, for benefit of both parishioners and visitors. The booklet about Mariakyrkan is still available to provide parishioners with an opportunity to find out more.

2026 has started in an exciting way for the parish of Mariakyrkan as they were asked to provide four of the Lent Sunday services for Swedish Television (SVT). The first was broadcast on 1<sup>st</sup> March with the others following on the three Sundays from the 15<sup>th</sup> March. They will remain accessible on SVT's catch-up service until December and available to viewers in the UK. This has meant a very busy time at Mariakyrkan planning and filming these services. The services also included the combined adult choir from the churches in nearby Öja and Bergunda and the children's choir from Johanneskyrkan.

Particularly during these internationally challenging times we should continue to stay in touch, to pray for each other and for the strengthening of the connection between the two parishes.

Välsignelser till våra vänner i vår tvillingförsamling i Växjö.

*Andrew Harte*