



# Annual Report for 2025

**Encountering** God

**Growing** as Followers of Jesus

**Participating** in the Life of His Spirit

*Prepared by the PCC, the Coordinators and other leaders*

*Fabian Wuyts*

*Vicar*

*9 March 2026*

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*Registered Charity No:* 1130757.

*Full name of the charity:* The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St. James, Taunton.

*Short names:* St James Church PCC; St James Church Taunton.

*Address:* St James Church Office, St James Street, Taunton, TA1 1JS.

*This report covers calendar year 2025 and has been written to meet the requirements of the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practices (SORP FRS102).*

## Foreword by the Vicar

Let me begin by expressing my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to you all. Each one of you is precious and brings into the life of our church your own personality, gifts, time, generosity, and prayers.

Whether you serve within a team, lend a helping hand behind the scenes, or offer a timely word of encouragement, you are a vital part of what God is building here. For that, I am deeply thankful.

God calls His church to love one another, and pastoral care has been at the heart of our conversations, prayer and discernment. This year we launched a new Pastoral Care visiting team, complementing the care already woven into the life of our community. Through our Life Groups - including Thursday Fellowship and Hymns and Tea - through prayer ministry, and through the informal support offered across many of our groups, our church family continues to walk alongside one another in times of both joy and sorrow.

Many of you were involved in the production of the community pantomime *Sleeping Beauty*. Although the performances took place in early 2026, much of the preparation happened during 2025. Across the three performances, nearly 400 tickets were sold, raising significant funds for the Foodbank and for TEAR Fund's Ukraine Appeal. My thanks go to the St James Players and to everyone who contributed their time, creativity, and energy to such an enjoyable and high-quality production.

Under the leadership of Rachel Haddell and her team, the ministry to children and their families continues to blossom and enrich the life of our church. We thank God for the joy they bring and pray that this vision will continue to grow and strengthen as we seek to remain faithful to the call of passing on the Gospel we have received to the generation that will shape our future.

This past year we have also seen a significant increase in the number of teenagers joining our social events and Sunday services, as well as blessing the church through leading our worship and serving in various ways. We are committed to nurturing this growth and ensuring that we provide space for them to develop in both leadership and discipleship.

At St James we believe that when the church prays, it aligns its heart with God and releases his work among his people and in the world. For that reason, we are committed to keeping prayer at the centre of both our personal and our shared life as a church, and to providing a range of spaces and tools that help people pray.

A visit to <https://stjamestaunton.org/praying> shows the many ways people are already engaging in prayer, and I am deeply grateful to all who support and facilitate this vital ministry: the Simply Pray initiatives, the Quiet Room, the prayers shared in our Life Groups, the monthly Prayer for Taunton, the Prayer Ministry Team, and the Prayer Chain. We have also been producing 20 prayer cards to help guide our prayers for St James, its ministries, and its impact in our local community. Please do make use of these in your groups, as families, or in your personal prayer life.

We have continued to run regular Alpha courses, and have launched a Junior Alpha involving our young people. With many people, particularly young adults aged 18–24, searching for meaning and authentic faith, we want to remain available to our friends and colleagues for honest conversations, prayerfully inviting them to discover the good intentions and plans God has for them.

Looking ahead, we continue to sense a strong call to deepen and expand our ministry to children, young people, and their families, placing them at the heart of all we do. We had hoped to welcome an intern from South West Youth Ministry (SWYM) last September, but circumstances led the candidate in a different direction. While this was disappointing, we trust that when God closes one door, he opens another. Please pray with us as we seek to recruit a part-time Youth Pastor to support and strengthen the wonderful work already taking place through a growing team of youth leaders.

The PCC has also discerned the need to place bold evangelism once again at the heart of who we are and what we do. Evangelism is not an optional activity for the church but part of the heartbeat of our calling. Yet it can easily become the priority we quietly set aside because it feels uncomfortable or uncertain. The good news we carry, however, is too life-giving to keep to ourselves.

We can be confident in the knowledge that God has placed each of us among people who need hope. He invites us to share our faith not because we are experts, but because we are witnesses. As a church, we recommit ourselves to courageously and lovingly sharing our faith, trusting that God works through ordinary conversations, genuine relationships, and simple acts of obedience to draw people to himself.

Alongside this, we will explore ways of creating welcoming events where friends, neighbours, acquaintances, and colleagues can gather, ask honest questions, and encounter something of who God is. These moments will offer space to explore life's deeper questions, discover aspects of God's character, and begin a journey of searching for meaning. Through hospitality, conversation, and shared experiences, we hope people will not only hear about the Gospel but begin to experience its reality within their own lives.

I am conscious that this foreword can only touch on a small portion of all that takes place at St James. There are many other acts of service, ministry, and quiet faithfulness that often go unseen but are deeply valued. For all of these, and for every person who offers a visit, a phone call, a meal, a prayer, or a listening ear, I am profoundly grateful.

I trust that as you read further in this report you will gain a fuller sense of the breadth and depth of what God is doing among us. My prayer is that it will warm your heart, encourage you, and move you to pray with renewed hope for the year ahead.

### **Prayer for Growth**

*Heavenly Father, increase in number your Church at St James as you deepen us as followers and learners of Christ.*

*Help us to show uninhibited reliance on your grace and power as we seek renewal of our lives, our church, our community and our world.*

*Give us courage, imagination and generosity in order that your kingdom may come and your abundant life be known by all.*

*We make this prayer in the name and to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

With love and gratitude in Christ,  
Fabian Wuyts  
Vicar, St James Church

### **Introduction**

St James Church, Taunton, is a parish church within the Diocese of Bath and Wells in the Church of England. Its parish includes the Roughmoor, North Town, Priory and Firepool areas of Taunton. The church's membership is drawn partly from within the parish, partly from across the rest of the town, and from nearby villages. Its services and activities are open to all, and the church works with other churches and local inter-church organisations in proclaiming and applying the good news of Jesus Christ.

The size of the worshipping community at the end of 2025 (as declared for the "Mission Statistics" return to the diocese) was 163 adults and 41 children. For comparison, the 2024 figures were 159 adults and 32 children. At the 2025 Annual Meeting, there were 148 people on the Church Electoral Roll.

### **Objectives**

The governing document is The Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956. In common with other Anglican (Church of England) churches, this gives the objects of the church as to:

*Promote in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.*

The PCC's registration with the Charity Commission (using headings provided by Church of England Guidance at the time of initial registration) expands the statement of objects as covering:

- *Regular public worship open to all.*
- *The provision of sacred space for personal prayer and contemplation.*

- *Pastoral work, including visiting the sick and the bereaved.*
- *Teaching of Christianity through sermons, courses and small groups*
- *Taking of religious assemblies in schools.*
- *The provision of a youth club with a Christian ethos.*
- *Promotion of Christianity through the staging of events and meetings, and the distribution of literature.*
- *Promoting the whole mission of the Church through provision of activities for senior citizens, parents and toddlers and other special need groups.*
- *Supporting other charities in the UK and overseas.*

## **Public Benefit**

The PCC has noted the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit, including publication PB4 *The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit*.

Worship services are all open to the public. The church building is open as many days as possible for private prayer, and is available for weddings and funerals of parishioners as required. Baptisms of parishioners are normally conducted during Sunday morning services.

Pastoral support is available to anyone who requests it. Church members also receive support through home groups.

Significant effort goes into supporting St James Church School, with volunteers helping to lead assemblies, assist school staff run Christmas, Easter and Leaver's services in the church building, listen to children reading and run a mentoring scheme.

The church also supports local Christian organisations – further details are in the *Local and International Mission Partners* section, below.

A church does not exist in isolation, but is part of one world-wide church of all denominations. St James supports the work of several organisations whose work is overseas – further details are in the *Local and International Mission Partners* section, below.

The PCC also has maintenance responsibilities for St James' Church building (Grade 2\* listed) and the church halls. The halls are available for hire by community groups. The church building is also used for concerts and by some other groups, such as the NHS Blood Donor service.

## **How St James Church Operates**

St James Church has long had a tradition of Every Member Ministry, with all members encouraged to play an active part – and not wait to be told what to do. This applies to all parts of church life except those where licenced clergy are required to undertake a specific role.

**Paid staff:** Vicar (full-time), Church Administrator, Children's Church Pastor and two caretakers (all part-time). Glenys Hanlon, the administrator, handles bookings for the church halls. The caretakers work alongside the administrator and together they look after the needs of hirers of church premises. In 2025 we welcomed Sharon Giddings and Roger Hunt to jointly take over the caretaker role from Ian White. Rachel Haddell, the Children's Church Pastor leads Sunday children's activities and liaises with families.

**Church officers:** the churchwardens, together with the vicar, manage the day-to-day business of the church, assisted by the administrator. All financial matters are handled by the Treasurer, assisted by the Planned Giving and Payroll Officer. The PCC Secretary manages the routine business of the PCC and looks after governance matters.

**PCC:** The PCC meets monthly, except for the month of the Annual Church Meeting) and August (summer holidays). It approves all major non-recurring financial expenditure and decides proposals to undertake any major new activity. The PCC's Standing Committee is empowered by law to conduct PCC business in between meetings of the council. Its members are the church officers plus one ordinary member of the PCC.

**Readers and service leaders:** a small group of church members, including one licenced Reader, assists the vicar in leading services and preaching.

**Coordinators:** a number of coordinators were appointed from 2012 to manage certain aspects of church life with delegated responsibility from the vicar and PCC. The aim is to avoid overloading the vicar with too many decisions. The Worship, Discipleship and Facilities (premises and

technical) Coordinators continue to function largely as originally envisaged. A Hospitality Coordinator has since been appointed. The Pastoral area is currently being reviewed.

**Groups and Teams:** the original intention was that the coordinator structure would evolve with experience, and this has taken the form of establishing groups and teams. These look after specific activities, again with the expectation that they will progress their business without unnecessarily troubling the vicar or churchwardens. The following are currently operating: Mission Review Group (support for mission partners), Welcoming Team, Prayer Team, Deputy Wardens, Hospitality Team, Tech Team, Pastoral Team, Worship Group, Safeguarding Team, Premises Team (including gardening), Flower Team, Banner Group, Hymns and Tea Team, the Churchyard Development Group and the Communications Team.

**Fellowship and Interest Groups:** Lest the previous paragraphs give the impression that everything is business related, most of the groups and teams work with a strong element of fellowship. The same members may also be part of other groups, such as Life Groups or specific interest groups such as the Bellringers, the Art Group and St James Players.

**Diocesan authority:** provisions decided by General Synod or decisions made by Diocesan Synod govern, for example, the type of public worship services that can be provided but allow a church to develop its own style. The appointment of clergy and readers is managed by the diocese, in consultation with the parish. Payment of clergy is carried out via the diocesan Common Fund, to which all parishes pay their Benefice Share. Significant maintenance work and alteration of the church building is overseen by a Diocesan Advisory Committee, through faculties granted by the diocesan chancellor; this process is in lieu of civil planning procedures. The parish is required to appoint an architect approved by the diocese to advise on and specify all works required.

## Activities

### Worship

This year we have continued with our pattern of morning services, there remains one service on a Sunday at 10.30 am which is live streamed on YouTube and available later on the church YouTube channel. This service is Communion on two Sundays and Morning Worship/ All Age Worship on the other Sundays with the pattern dependant on school holidays and other factors. These services are planned by Fabian and are each part of a themed series. Fabian works in collaboration with Ray Crooks (the Musical Director) and Worship Coordinator as well as a leading and preaching team, Fabian organises these rotas. Alongside this there are those who read and lead prayers within the service. Church Suite is used to support this.

The Musical Director selects the songs and hymns in consultation with the vicar and the Worship Coordinator and those leading the service. Prayer ministry has taken place after each morning service as well as within communion services. Ongoing training takes place for the team.

The style is contemporary corporate worship with a range of songs and instrumentation that complement this. The music team currently comprises of a drummer and singers with the Music Director providing settings to match the available skills. New music is introduced in collaboration with the Musical Director, Worship Coordinator, and the Vicar and meetings take place as required to practice new worship songs. There is excellent commitment and engagement from the team with different members leading the praise section of each service. There are also meetings when required with the Vicar to look at the praise and worship within the morning service.

Sue Doyle leads the dance ministry which enhances our worship and adds dimension to our prayers during each service. Members of the church are encouraged to use the flags to express the lyrics of the songs we sing or words we say.

Alongside Morning Worship there is a growing young people and children's church in the hall planned and led by Rachel Haddell and the CYP team that is engaging the younger members of our church and is well received with excellent feedback. As part of this initiative the young people have started leading services with a Youth Band which has been grown and developed with singers and musicians over the past year.

The crèche area for younger children continues to be well used and the south side of the church is arranged to encourage family groups and participation.

This side of the church is also used by members of a nearby residential home. Their support workers comment that they respond well to the music, in particular those with actions and signs.

A great deal of planning, preparation and set up goes into each service. A hard working and dedicated team of volunteers runs the various elements of the technical set up, sound, live stream, visuals on screen, flowers and banners as the visual expression of the season or theme, refreshments/hospitality, and the welcome team.

Online Morning Prayer continues twice-weekly on Zoom, with the readings and refection being published soon after as "Bible Bytes" podcasts on the website.

Church Members are encouraged to use the Prayer Space in church.

The monthly evening service known as "The Room" is not currently taking place on a Sunday evening as new ways of engaging through contemporary outreach approaches are investigated and with Praise as part of particular services and initiatives for example with the recent prayer weekend.

As always, we must always be mindful that Worship is a whole life experience and is not confined to the time in church services and the portion where we sing. Praise within our worship may to be a vertical act – we receive from God and we return our praise to him. However it is also Horizontal – we praise God with others and in speaking and singing out our praise with each other we encourage each other and remind ourselves of Gods character and acts. We also need to continue to be mindful of the third dimension – the world beyond the walls of our church and how we declare what God is doing and how we appear and present to those who do not attend currently attend a place of worship, do not have a faith background or who are exploring what a faith means for them.

So we continue to consider how we reach out to those who are currently outside of the church and those without a church background and endeavour to make worship accessible and relevant within the changing landscape and what could be a quiet Spiritual revival

I would also again this year like it noted that there is a great commitment required for both online and face to face services in facilitating the technology required and my thanks go to all those who give their time to this ministry.

Richard Lucas, Worship Coordinator

## **Prayer Ministry**

Prayer is an integral part of all aspects of church life at St. James. References will be found to prayer in different situations throughout this report.

Prayer ministry happens after each morning service. Within communion services it takes place while communion is being distributed. We are changing the pattern of this for the coming year. The Prayer ministry team meet together three times a year for training and fellowship together.

An Email Prayer Chain offers a confidential intercession service for acute or urgent prayer needs.

Simply Pray 2025 is an initiative that is slowly growing from an original idea of Lyn Jones and Felicity Miles to offer the opportunity for people to explore contemplative prayer.

In Lent 2025 a series of gatherings was held themed on Pilgrimage using psalms as study. Discussion was encouraged to allow people to share their own personal thoughts and experiences. This was followed by guided meditation and a period of silent prayer. The first meeting had an attendance of 10 and by the last this had grown to 25.

Following this positive response, it was decided to start a monthly meeting of Simply Pray. This is offered on the first Thursday of each month, alternating between morning and evenings to allow anyone who is interested the opportunity to try contemplative prayer and details of timing can be found on our website under Growing in Faith - Praying or click <https://stjamestaunton.org/praying>. To end the year an Advent Quiet Day at Hilfield Friary was promoted and car sharing offered.

A Lent series themed on the Prodigal Son is planned for 2026, along with a summer prayer walk at the Bishops Palace gardens, a Taizé service with Taunton School Chapel Choir, and an Advent Quiet Day.

Life groups continue to be centres of weekly prayer.

The Side Chapel continues as an informal Prayer Space and is often remarked on by visitors as being an attractive and welcoming place.

## **Pastoral Care**

At St. James Church, pastoral care is a cornerstone of our community life, reflecting the Christian calling for every member to support one another in faith, fellowship, and service. Our pastoral care initiatives take many forms, combining structured programs, volunteer support, prayer, and fellowship activities to nurture spiritual growth, practical support, and meaningful connection among all who worship with us.

### **Life Groups: Strategic Support Hubs**

Life Groups form the foundation of pastoral care at St. James. With 10 active groups engaging approximately 80 members weekly or bi-monthly, these groups reach around 50% of our 160 regular worshippers. Life Group leaders play a crucial role in providing pastoral support within small, supportive communities, offering encouragement, guidance, and practical assistance. A key strength of these groups lies in their ability to provide close-knit, relational care, enabling members to share life's joys and challenges in a trusted environment.

### **Other Key Groups on Church Premises**

Several other groups contribute significantly to pastoral care, creating opportunities for fellowship and support beyond Life Groups.

**Thursday Fellowship:** With 20–25 participants, this group excels in maintaining strong contact networks, conducting home visits, and offering phone outreach.

**Hymns and Tea:** This group provides connection and joy through hymn singing and fellowship for 30-40 participants. It attracts individuals with diverse vulnerabilities, such as mobility issues, dementia, or social isolation, presenting unique pastoral opportunities.

**Special Interest Groups:** Activities such as art groups and bell ringing offer meaningful social engagement, supporting both spiritual and relational well-being.

### **Newly Formed Pastoral Visiting Team**

To complement existing pastoral structures, St. James has recently established a Pastoral Visiting Team. This team adds an extra layer of support for individuals who may not currently be part of a supportive Christian network, such as a Life Group or other regular church activities. Its purpose is to provide occasional encouragement, prayer, and presence, rather than ongoing pastoral care. Long-term support remains most effective through established Life Groups or close relationships formed via church activities such as Thursday Fellowship, Hymns and Tea, or special interest groups. This initiative ensures that no member of our community feels isolated, while maintaining the integrity and focus of our existing pastoral framework.

### **Safeguarding and Volunteer Support**

Effective pastoral care at St. James is underpinned by robust safeguarding practices and volunteer support. Safe recruitment processes, including clear role descriptions, ensure volunteers are well-prepared and confident in their responsibilities. Ongoing training helps volunteers provide sensitive and appropriate care, while specialist insight is available for complex pastoral situations, often through small, dedicated teams. These measures ensure the safety, well-being, and holistic care of all members.

### **Prayer Ministry**

Prayer remains central to pastoral care at St. James. Our post-service prayer ministry offers attendees the chance to seek encouragement, comfort, guidance, or healing, while the Prayer Chain Team provides confidential intercession for urgent or acute needs.

### **Hospitality and Welcoming Teams**

Our Hospitality Team creates opportunities for connection and fellowship through post-service refreshments, school events, welcoming lunches, and family-focused initiatives. These efforts foster community engagement and encourage meaningful relationships among congregants.

The Welcoming Team focuses on pastoral care for newcomers, helping them integrate into church life and encouraging a sense of belonging. Activities include befriending, relationship building, and invitations to welcome lunches.

Fabian Wuyts, Vicar

## **Discipleship**

The co-ordination of Life Groups and running Alpha Courses remains the main focus of my role, but I choose to start my report with mention of chatting with new people joining our church, a part of my role which is quite varied and interesting. Following on from the welcome given by the Welcome Team, I try to ascertain where they are on their faith journey and what can St James do to help progress along if they want to, or would rather simply settle in for a few months. All answers are different, but most of the time, St James can meet their needs.

There were plans to deliver 3 Alpha Courses during 2025, but one course needed to be dropped as there were too few applicants to make the running viable. One applicant was willing to wait, and is currently attending the first Alpha of 2026. Two courses were run successfully, one of which comprised a mix of ages from over 70's to teenagers, which, perhaps surprisingly, was very successful. I wish to thank the Life Groups and others who have donated desserts during the early sessions of these courses. There are plans to run three Alphas for adults and at least one Alpha specifically for 'juniors' during 2026.

The number of Life Groups (Home Groups) remains unchanged from 2025, at 10, but overall membership has reduced slightly. Some long-term members have needed to stand down because of health issues or moving away. I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation for the support I receive from the Life Group Leaders, a ministry which can be challenging at times. Life Group Leaders meet together 4 times each year for prayer, fellowship and mutual support, and the church continues to support, develop and invest in these leaders.

Study notes for Life Groups (and all church members) continue to be produced each week (apart from holiday periods) with Fabian, Richard Carpenter and myself being the authors on a monthly rota basis.

I invite anyone who feels called or challenged to develop their existing ministry or move along their faith journey in some way to contact me for a chat and prayer.

Roger Fenton, Discipleship Coordinator

## **Children's & Youth Work**

The Children's church has continued to flourish on a Sunday morning. We welcome between 20 and 30 under 18s most Sundays but are in regular contact with around 50 children and young people. Rachel Haddell oversees a wonderful team of volunteers who bring a variety of gifts and strengths to the ministry. Jane Bluemel is invaluable and has kindly increased her involvement in Children's church as the Sancto's focus more on the youth. Jane gives a lot of time to Children's church and is a fabulous and creative teacher. In addition to running wonderful sessions, Jane creates beautiful flyers and takes photos of the children's ministry to keep the Instagram and Facebook pages up to date.

We appreciate Fabian leading when he can and families have expressed how valued the children's work must be within the church for the vicar to come down and lead! Jenny Wakefield helps at least once a month and prepares wonderful crafts and has led informative and inspiring sessions for both Mothering Sunday and Remembrance Sunday. Lillian Gill brings great enthusiasm and joy and loves to come alongside the families in a supportive way. She loves crafts and is the best play dough baker in town! In addition, we are grateful to Lisa Tagg and Lily Haddell who prepare snacks every Sunday, with amazing cakes kindly baked by Hannah Prickett. Kate Smook will sadly be coming for the very last time this month as she moves on now with her life in Wells so we will be looking for new team members too.

Babies and toddlers transition from playing in their dedicated play space at the back of church (often popping into the hall initially just for a snack) to attending Children's church with a parent/carer when ready. Vashti is a fabulous baby whisperer and quick to find a mat or box of toys for visiting babies and another volunteer often provides a friendly welcome to newcomers at the back of church helping them navigate their way through the service. Although these are not formal,

written roles, we are very grateful to them for the way they initiate this welcome. In the hall, we welcome parents both attending with their children or leaving their children with the team. The children use the hall and outdoor space for stories, songs, crafts, snacks, games and prayer. Friendships between parents and informal support often begin around the edges of this room.

In Jan/ Feb 2025, Children's church looked at the theme of Friendship and considered various relationships which Jesus formed with people during His ministry. Easter saw the children reflecting on the Cross and getting creative with Easter gardens and egg hunts. The summer term we had a focus on Pentecost and delved into many aspects of the Holy Spirit. There were some exciting explosions as we delved into Science and Faith in September 2025, before digging into some Old Testament stories with the Jesse tree in preparation for Christmas. Rachel sees the importance of the environment for children and families and tries to keep the children's areas fresh and tidy and updates displays to reflect the season/ term's topic.

One specific development during the last annual reporting period was to set up a group for young people in Y6 and above. The focus for this was to encourage the young people to grow in their faith and friendship. Our concern, if this group had not started, was that there would be no provision for those finishing Y6 and possibly losing the opportunity to engage with them. In September 2024, Steve and Karen bravely started a Youth church who met once a month in the lounge. In addition to this they organised termly social events (Bowling, Flipout, Mcdonalds...) for the young people to spend a bit more time together. The young people were delighted and began inviting their friends and neighbours!

It was clear that by September 2025 we would need to expand this provision. Despite the SWYM placement not working out, Karen and Steve Sancto, Ruth Dunn as well as some parent volunteers have ensured this promise to the young people was fulfilled. At this point we are therefore now offering two Sunday morning Youth church sessions and two Friday night socials each term, thereby doubling what we had last year. Karen, Steve and Ruth have a wonderful way of connecting with the young people and helping them feel supported, connected as well as challenging them to go deeper in their faith. We are so grateful to have them, and for the time, energy, fun and love they have poured in to our young people. Starting January 2026 Youth church have embarked on an exciting Youth Alpha series which we envisage may result in some baptisms? It has been amazing to see God at work in this and we are praying for His guidance as to how we take this forward.

During the school holidays, we enjoy All-Age services with the whole church family. In the summer we trialled gathering around a 'campfire' before the children delved into their crafts and activities in the south aisle. During our Christingle service, we involved Youth church in Welcome, Christingle making support, worship, readings and prayers. This is something we hope to build upon more regularly through the concept of 'Serve Sunday'. Services where our young people can bring their different talents and personalities and feel welcome, involved and engaged in a morning worship service.

A movie afternoon was a new initiative we trialled in the Christmas holidays. Around 70 people attended 'Journey to Bethlehem', including lots of children, and we are hoping to recreate this at Easter. We also enjoyed another Family breakfast in the New Year. Again, we welcomed around 50 children and parents for breakfast, worship, a treasure hunt and prayer. This was a great opportunity to get to know each other a little better. We are excited for all that 2026 may hold and have plans for more movie afternoons, Light parties, Away days at Great Wood and are hoping and praying that a Youth Worker may be on the horizon very soon too to support our growing needs within Youth church.

Rachel Haddell, Children's Church Pastor

## **Schools Work**

We continue to have a strong link with the local Church of England St James Church School.

**Collective Worship:** Fabian and Mike Gillingham lead weekly school collective worship. The content of the collective worship is a mixture of singing, Bible story, reflection and prayer. There is good participation, fun and a sense of anticipation.

The school continues to hold their Christmas and Easter services at St James Church as well as a special Leavers Service that includes a free lunch and activities provided by a team of volunteers from St James church.

**Teaching:** The Vicar helps teach specific years about Christian Festivals and occasional services such as Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals.

Fabian also takes part in the Ethos Group that meets several times a year to look at the Christian and Pastoral input across the school.

**Mentoring and Reading:** David Jordan leads a **growing team of 6 mentors** who have been trained through TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) who are working with **6** individual children referred by the school who feel they would benefit from individual time. Two of the mentors started at the beginning of 2024 having done the necessary training, **followed by another new mentor in 2025**. In addition, David coordinates four other people who go into listen to children reading, **two of which are having a break in the last few months for personal reasons**. It has been a great privilege to partner with the school in this way and we have been warmly welcomed.

**Panto:** The 2026 church panto “Sleeping Beauty” gave us an opportunity to specifically welcome a number of our TLG families, and school staff, which is another exciting link to develop with school.

**North Town School:** Our involvement consists mainly in hosting their carol service. Once a year Fabian helps with the Harvest Assembly and is always available for Christian input where needed.

**Prayer:** As a church we pray for the schools and meet twice a term at St James **school** for a prayer meeting – although mainly attended by the school volunteers and staff members **there is welcome to anyone who has a heart** for supporting the school **and building the links**.

David Jordan, church school team liaison

## Communications

Communication includes both internal information provided to church members and external messaging for those who may be interested in who we are and what we do. Anything internal needs to be written such that it is also intelligible to enquirers.

In 2024 the PCC formed a Communications Team, one whose remit is to take a proactive approach rather than react to events as they are planned. The team is now working together to coordinate regular information flows and will in due course develop a more strategic approach. Thought is being given to refreshing various leaflets and displays, and work has started on reinstating the board explaining contact points for all officers and teams in the church. The team consists of Fabian (vicar), Glenys (Administrator), Lyn Jones, Jane Bluemell, Jenny Wakefield and Martin Wakefield.

**Internally** the weekly bulletin is the main means of informing church members (and anyone else who has signed up to receive it) of what is happening. It is sent out by the church administrator by email from our ChurchSuite database. Immediate notices are also displayed before and after morning services through a video carousel on the screens. Various noticeboards in the church carry other information, but this cannot be relied on to reach everyone.

The church magazine is published quarterly in print and on the website. Thanks to Chris Doyle for his hard work in putting this together and for the quality of the presentation. It carries a wide range of articles from church members, and a summary of what the PCC has been looking at.

**Externally**, online media are our main method of communication.

The website is the core of the online presence, being the overall source that can be referenced from other media. Its content is kept up to date and its structure adjusted to better meet the evolving nature of the content. Most of the site contains ongoing information, but the front page is regularly updated with new information, linking to details in the rest of the site. A “Bible Bytes” page carries audio recordings of the Sunday morning talks, which are posted a day or so after the service, and also “Bible Reflections” drawn from the twice-weekly online morning prayer services.

Facebook is the main online front window and this is kept up to date weekly, together with links to livestreamed services on YouTube, and further details of events on the website.

The church’s Instagram page has been brought back into use, and is now aimed primarily at families and kept up to date by a member of the Children’s Church team.

YouTube carries tidied-up videos of our morning services, which replace the livestream recordings. Many people prefer to catch up this way rather than via Facebook. It also carries other occasional videos. The service recordings used on YouTube are also sent out on DVD to a few church members who do not have the internet.

## Local and International Mission Partners

We have active links with six local Christian organisations working in the local community and five national/international organisations involved in humanitarian relief and the mission of the Gospel.

These are our **local links** and, and in all but two we have church members volunteering with them:

- **Street Pastors** (ministry to young people visiting night clubs and local community areas during the daytime). Street pastors also operate in Bridgwater and Wellington.
- **Taunton Team Chaplaincy**: Chaplaincy team members and Rail Responders are operating as before the pandemic, and the Courts Chaplaincy is now well established at the magistrates' court and hopeful of extending to working in the Crown Court in the future
- **Besom**: remains very busy and are receiving referrals from keyworkers for gardening, decorating, furniture and starter packs for people setting up in new accommodation.
- **Open Door** continue their work with the homeless, providing food, wash facilities and clothing in the centre and support services for those wanting to move on.
- **Taunton Youth for Christ** has continued to work with schools and detached youth where possible and their work with young people has developed a greater urgency. They have a bus which provides a mobile meeting point. Kelly Jones is the coordinator and is supported by the trustees and volunteers and is passionate about working with young people on the margins and developing their service provision.
- **Taunton Area Debt Advice** provide advice to those struggling with financial difficulties and have adapted to using more technology to assist their work.

In addition, we have links with the following National organisations:

- **Transforming Lives for Good** – is a UK organisation which supports and encourages local churches in partnering with local schools, offering training for mentors and support for Make Lunch Activities. We have a mentoring team operating at our church school. We now have 6 mentors working with 6 young people. It is a great privilege to be actively part of working with the school in addition to other activities there involving other church members and the Vicar

The church continues to support the following **overseas missions**, financially and in prayer:

- **TEAR Fund** (emergency and relief work).
- **Samaritans Purse** (international relief organization); and
- **Barnabas Fund** (which supports the persecuted church worldwide).
- **ACTS (Uganda)** – a locally-founded charity supporting children with profound disabilities in Uganda. Ruth Preater-Gillard has organised several fund-raising events for ACTS on church premises.

We continue to make financial grants to the above charities and have maintained our commitment to give 10% of our income to mission. We review the grants on an annual basis and although we have to make adjustment in accordance with our income, we remain committed to these very important organisations.

Jenny Wakefield, Mission Review Team

## Community links

This section covers various groups and initiatives which reach out into the wider community. All of these events see participation from people who do not normally come to a church service.

Thursday Fellowship meets monthly. Carole and the committee provide a varied programme for church members and nonchurch members, but also the ongoing care and prayer for the members.

Hymns and Tea continues to run twice a month on Sunday afternoons. It has proved popular for those who enjoy hearing the organ, singing hymns together and enjoying tea, cake and chat afterwards in the church.

The Eco group has continued to advocate for a positive response to our responsibilities in God's Created world. The churchyard conservation area has been extended and further developed in

conjunction with Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and other local experts. Children's Church participate in some events.

St James Players again "staffed" the annual Heritage Open Days on two Saturdays with a cast of historical characters illustrating scenes from the history of the church. Many conversations were had with the steady stream of visitors throughout both days. In mid-year, the Players began preparations for another pantomime, *Sleeping Beauty*, to be staged in January 20206.

Our bellringers meet weekly for practice and welcome new members. They ring for some morning services and share duties with other towers' teams, both locally and wider in the diocese.

The Art Group continues to meet weekly in the Hall offering an opportunity for those who enjoy creativity through different art mediums.

Open Church and Prayer Space – the Side Chapel continues to be appreciated as a prayer space by visitors.

The Flower Team continues to produce wonderful displays that add to the worship experience but also are frequently commented on by visitors. More importantly the fact that the team are often working in the church on a Friday gives them an opportunity to talk with visitors to the church.

Our Caretaker, Administrator and other volunteers working in the church have many opportunities to talk with visitors and enquirers, when a chance conversation, the handing out of a booklet or leaflet provides an opportunity to share God's love.

We continue to foster good relationships with hirers of church premises. The many concerts held in the church during the year help to make residents aware of us as a church, as do the frequent blood donor sessions run by the NHS. The local parish of the Romanian Orthodox Church uses the halls for family events and occasionally uses the church for services that would overflow their regular premises.

## **Facilities**

This section covers premises and technical matters relating to the church, the churchyard and the halls. A Premises Team (Norman Bambridge, Johnny Gill and Martin Kennard) looks after minor repairs and maintenance, while a Technical Team (Richard Carpenter, Norman B, Martin Bluemell, Martin K, Martin Wakefield, Stan Wojcik and Bob Boulton, shortly to be joined by Cameron Wood) operates the sound system, projector and livestream for Sunday morning services and other events, and maintains those systems and the overall IT infrastructure. Bob B is also in charge of maintaining the bells, with advice from the Diocesan Association of Change Ringers.

Sue Carpenter and helpers keep the churchyard tidy and manage the developing conservation area. Other church members participate in working parties, mainly in August. Oversight is provided by the Facilities Coordinator, who also deals with contractors and applications for faculties. Among the contractors, Andrew Hull continues to carry out sterling work for us on repairs that are beyond the capacity of the volunteer team, including the annual maintenance of the slate roofs and gutters.

61 jobs were completed during the year, a slight decrease in number from 2024, though not in the effort expended. The backlog of longer-standing jobs continues to decrease slowly.

Following the week of stonework repairs on the tower in 2024, JP Conservation undertook another week's work in 2025. This included replacing the finial stone on top of the stair turret and removing the weathercock for repair and regilding. While this completed the most significant repairs needed, ongoing weathering of the 150-year-old stonework means that ongoing monitoring is needed, and we are now planning for an annual two-day visit from the rope access team to identify and fix issues as they arise. (JP Conservation is the continuation of the rope access group of the former Sally Strachey Historic Conservation, who undertook the 2024 work.)

We were unable to find the time to research a heat pump system for the halls, as mentioned in last year's report. This is still the plan, especially since another gas heater, this time in the Large Hall, failed its annual inspection. We are aware of the Church of England's intention to be carbon neutral by 2030, but to replace all our heating systems in a short time frame would exceed our financial capacity. The halls are in almost continuous use, so are the priority for attention, but we will seek advice for the church and offices as well, including options for solar panels and batteries.

Meanwhile, we have replaced all but three of the old discharge lights in the church and continue to replace fluorescent fittings with LEDs on an opportunity basis.

The move from gas heating to electric heaters increased the peak electricity demand across the site, causing an overload on one occasion when a user brought in extra electric heaters. Fortunately, the incoming mains cable had a second phase that was previously used for the local council's floodlighting scheme, so we were able to get that made live again and a polyphase meter installed so that the church and the halls now have separate supplies, doubling the capacity.

Three emergency lights were fitted in the church in March 2025, which means that all of the premises are now equipped with internal emergency lighting. Attention is now being given to fitting crash bars to external exits, with the door from the corridor to the car park now equipped.

Jane Osborne Price oversaw a lengthy programme of recovering the seats and backs of the 130 chairs in our halls. This was necessitated by excessive wear of the original vinyl. Richard Sainsbury, the PCC treasurer, continues to arrange for the disposal of redundant furniture, and we should have cleared the remaining items by the end of 2026.

Work on the outer office refurbishment resumed after a long interruption started by the Covid restrictions and extended by lack of available effort. It is hoped to finish the project in 2026. This will leave the outer vestry as the only room not yet tackled since the programme began in 2011.

The Quinquennial Inspection was due in 2025, and while this was started by our architect in November, and her report should be available in early 2026. Meanwhile, we completed the last task from the 2020 Quinquennial, the repainting of the railings facing St James Street.

Finally, I must give a massive "thank you" to all the volunteers who have given a lot of time and effort to keeping our buildings and equipment in good order.

Martin Wakefield, Facilities Coordinator

## Financial Review

The majority of the PCC's income is from direct giving by church members (including tax reclaimed under Gift Aid), with an increasing proportion derived from hire of premises. No funds are raised from the general public.

Note: figures below are rounded to the nearest £1, so some sums might not quite add up.

### 2025 Significant events

Stewardship has a noticeable decline during 2025 from 2024, despite a generous 1-off donation of £3,000 during the year with at least 70% of the congregation continuing to support through regular giving. Allowing for inflation, this is something that will need to be addressed in 2026.

Hall hire continued to increase, and was up on 2024 after taking into account increases in hiring charges. Increases in Stewardship and hall hire meant that the predicted deficit for the year was less than expected.

2 new caretakers were taken on during the year to work alongside each other and split the work undertaken by our former caretaker who has now retired.

Routine expenditure was on a par with 2024, with over £9,500 being accounted for by renovation works on the tower and regilding of "Tom" the Cockerell!

The General Fund ended the year with a balance of £145,654, with no restricted funds. This was £16,870 less than at the end of 2024.

### Investment Policy

it is our strategy to invest our funds balances in the Church of England's Central Board of Finance deposit funds.

No funds are held as custodian trustee on behalf of others.

### Reserves policy

Within the General Fund, the PCC has designated the following reserve funds:

**Projects Fund** – for capital projects being planned by the church and as a place to hold legacies when first received. There is no set level for this fund, monies being assigned to it as needs arise and funding allows. Although designated for projects, this fund will need to be used for day to day running expenses should a further shortfall arise.

**Fabric Fund** – for major fabric repairs that will occur from time to time but cannot be met out of annual income (for example, gas boiler replacement, re-roofing, repairs to stonework). The intention is to maintain this fund at £30,000, but that level will fluctuate according to demand.

**Risks Fund** - for maintaining essential church activities for a period of up to around one year should there be a loss of income for any reason. This fund is set at 10% of Stewardship giving (and Gift-aid), which allows, for example, for members moving away; plus 30% of non-giving income (i.e. hall hire and car park charges, over which church members do not have control).

The Reserves Policy is reviewed annually.

At the end of 2025, the designated reserve funds stood as follows:

Projects Fund: £102,535 (£119,901 at the end of 2024.)

Fabric Fund: £20,000

Risks Fund: £23,118

(10% of giving = £11,131, plus 30% of other income = £11,596)

Total: £145,654

The total exceeds the £95,174 needed to cover the recommended accounting practice of holding in reserve 6 months' budgeted expenditure.

The £102,535 held at the end of the year in the designated Projects Fund was not assigned to specific projects. This figure has been drawn upon at the end of the year, as has the fabric fund. The church maintains a Capital Expenditure Plan detailing future projects which may in due course draw on this Fund. The PCC has decided that some of the funds can be used to pay for the Children's Church Pastor.

### **Grant-making policy**

The PCC has a policy of donating a minimum of 10% of stewardship giving (including cash collections and income tax recovered) to other Christian organisations. This is because an individual church such as St James is part of the one worldwide Christian church, with different parts of the church undertaking different responsibilities, and also being dependent on each other. Local organisations supported have aims which overlap with those of St James church. Organisations outside the local area are largely ones with which the church has had a relationship for some time. From time to time, the PCC also supports church members undergoing Christian training and undertaking full-time work with Christian organisations.

Richard Sainsbury, Treasurer

## **Staff and Volunteer Support**

Approximately two and a half full-time equivalent posts are paid. The vicar is full-time, and the balance is made up of four part-time posts: the Church Administrator, the Children's Church Pastor and two caretakers..

The majority of effort spent on preparing for and running church activities comes from volunteers: 98 members carry out various roles (approximately 180) within the church on a voluntary basis. This is equivalent to at least 10 full-time posts.

The contributions of all volunteers are much appreciated and are essential for the running of services, children's and other groups, maintenance, pastoral care and every other aspect of church life. In particular, the churchwardens, treasurer, and Music Director all carry heavy loads.

**Appointment of volunteers:** where a post involves working with children or vulnerable adults, appointments are made using the Safer Recruitment process set out in the Church of England's safeguarding guidance. This includes having a formal job description, being interviewed with references taken up, and, where eligible, the completion of enhanced DBS checks. Other appointments are made using a process appropriate to their role and in accordance with Church of England Safer Recruitment Guidance

**Supporting volunteers:** everyone who volunteers should have the opportunity to discuss their roles with the relevant coordinator in order to agree expectations, receive support, be reasonably

resourced, discuss training needs and, as far as practicable, have these met. The safeguarding team have recently completed an audit, in which job roles have been reviewed and team leaders asked to confirm that their team are complying with Church of England guidelines as set out in the Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance 2021.

## Safeguarding

As a church we adhere to the Church of England Policy – Promoting a Safer Church:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/cofe-policy-statement.pdf>.

The latest guidance documents can be found in the e-manual on the Church of England website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual>

The Church of England Safeguarding Handbook has recently been withdrawn pending revision of safeguarding guidance by the National Safeguarding Team. In the meantime the guidance for church activities can be found on line at

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/safer-environment-and-activities-oct19\\_0.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/safer-environment-and-activities-oct19_0.pdf)

Volunteers and team leaders within our church community need to be aware of the guidance. In 2024 The Safeguarding team conducted an audit of all teams who in the main confirmed that they were working in accordance with advised safe practice. This will need to be repeated towards the end of 2026.

The aim of the Church's safeguarding policy is to encourage a safer culture within the church We are *"called to share the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. The life of our communities and institutions is integral to how we address this task. The good news speaks of welcome for all, with a particular regard for those who are most vulnerable, into a community where the value and dignity of every human being is affirmed and those in positions of responsibility and authority are truly trustworthy. Being faithful to our call to share the gospel therefore compels us to take with the utmost seriousness the challenge of preventing abuse from happening and responding well where it has"*; from Promoting a Safer Church 2016.

Jenny Wakefield and Jacqui Sainsbury continue to work as a Safeguarding Team working with the PCC and church leadership to provide as clear advice and guidance on enabling us to be a safe and supportive church for members and volunteers alike. Work has continued in using the Parish Dashboard system which has been advocated by the Diocese as a bespoke means of maintaining Parish Records. We are also now using Parish Hubs which has enabled us to store our training records and some recruitment information, giving easier access for the team and vicar. Further development of the hub is promised in the future.

The Parish Safeguarding Team working with the Vicar, Wardens and PCC, has a responsibility to:

- Carry out safer recruitment procedures
- Respond to any disclosures or concerns
- Work with the Diocesan Safeguarding Team on any matters connected with parish safeguarding
- Raise the profile of safeguarding in the parish and ensure PCC is kept up to date with developments
- Advise regarding training.

Safer recruitment procedures are carried out for all appointments involving working with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults, which all require DBS clearance.

For other voluntary posts there is a recruitment procedure in place operated by those in charge of different teams. We follow the guidance issued by the Church of England as set out in the Safer Recruitment and People Management Guidance

<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safer-recruitment-and-people-management-guidance>

Currently we have 96 volunteers from within the congregation engaged in a number of different teams and roles within the church, comprising approximately 185 different roles.

The Church of England recommends that anyone who acts as a volunteer should have safeguarding training, at least at basic awareness level and for many roles working with children or vulnerable adults a higher level of training (Foundation or Leadership) is required. This training is available online but for people who are not comfortable with this technology the PSO offers to

support their training with in-house sessions as agreed with the Diocesan Safeguarding Manager (DSM). Training should be renewed every three years and reminders have been sent out. The use of the Parish Safeguarding hubs will assist in the administration of this, and the Safeguarding team is very grateful to church volunteers for their response which in general is very good.

Safeguarding Training is obligatory for all clergy, PTO clergy and licensed readers, and this is overseen by the diocese. The diocese has been working hard to increase the number of leadership courses available. The PCC members have all completed the Domestic Violence Awareness and Foundation courses, which are available online. All church officers required to undertake leadership training have done so in the past 12 months.

Members of the prayer team, home group leaders and pastoral visitors have been encouraged to complete the Domestic Abuse Awareness Course, and virtually all have now done so.

In November 2024 St. James again took part in the national Safeguarding Sunday with a service aimed at helping the congregation understand more about keeping our church a safe place.

Jenny Wakefield, Parish Safeguarding Officer

## Risks

**Finance:** the main risk to the operation of the church is financial support. Most funding comes from church members, supplemented by income from hiring the church hall and car park. The church is not in receipt of any regular funding from other sources, either from within the Church of England, or the government. Grants may be obtainable to cover partial costs of some projects, and legacies may occasionally be received, but such sources do not impact on routine planning.

The church's finances are thus vulnerable to:

- Fluctuations in income from hall hire;
- Church members moving away;
- Gradual changes from one generation to another of members' understanding of their financial responsibility;
- Unexpected large costs for repairing the church building;
- Increases in the Parish Share contribution to the diocese which can be well above inflation.

In 2020, one of these risks materialised, in that the majority of income from hall hire ceased due to Covid; it has now recovered.

The PCC keeps a proactive watch on these matters through reports from the Treasurer to alternate meetings of the council. An annual stewardship campaign, in liaison with the Planned Giving Officer, aims to refresh church members' awareness of the principles of giving.

**Communications:** as the church grows in numbers, there is a risk of fragmentation due to the inability of all members to know every other member and what the various groups and teams are doing. The PCC has recently agreed to form a Communications Team (which will also cover outreach communications).

**Disaster Recovery Planning:** The loss of the use of the church building is not considered to be a major risk. In 2001, the church moved its activities temporarily to the local church school, while the floor in the church building was replaced. It is considered that similar arrangements could be made again. The PCC does not consider that any disaster recovery plans need to be maintained for specific activities; the scale of operations is such that contingency plans are best drawn up in response to the nature of any issue that may occur.

**Health & Safety:** physical risks are managed through the church's *Health and Safety Policy*, which is reviewed annually by the PCC. The policy includes a schedule of risks using a checklist provided by the Ecclesiastical Insurance Company. The Schedule sets out the procedures for mitigating and managing each risk. Equipment safety checks (gas appliances, security alarms, lightning conductor, fire extinguishers and electrical PAT testing) are undertaken annually. A summary reminder is issued to all volunteers annually.

## Trustees

The members of the Parochial Church Council are the trustees of the charity. PCC members who served at any time from 1st January 2025 until the date this report was approved were:

Vicar:	Rev Fabian Wuyts	Chairman	*	
Churchwardens:	Mr Nigel Bright	Vice chair	*	
	Mrs Fiona Hope		*	
Deanery Synod:	Mr Richard Carpenter		*	
	Ms Chris Rickard			
	Mr Martin Wakefield	Secretary	*	
Elected members:	Mr Roger Fenton			
	Mr Mike Gillingham			<i>From 12 May 2025</i>
	Mrs Lyn Jones			
	Mr David Jordan			
	Mrs Jane Price			<i>(co-opted)</i>
	Mr Richard Sainsbury	Treasurer	*	
	Mr Johan Smit			
	Mrs Jenny Wakefield			
	Mrs Vashti Wuyts Smit			
	<i>There were three vacancies for elected members following the annual meeting on 12 May 2025.</i>			

\* Asterisks indicate members of the Standing Committee: the Church Officers plus one ordinary member of the PCC.

**Appointment of trustees:** The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church of England's *Church Representation Rules*. The number of elected members is 12, with one-third coming up for election each year.

Ex-officio members of the PCC are: clergy licensed to the parish, two churchwardens, separately elected annually, three representatives of the parish to Deanery Synod, elected every three year, and any members of Diocesan Synod and General Synod who are members of the church.

**Recruitment of trustees:** all Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and consider standing for election to the PCC. Active recruitment may occur when one sector of the church appears to be under-represented on the PCC.

**Training of trustees:** new members are provided with a copy of the *PCC Standing Orders*, which sets out how the PCC works, and a copy of the booklet *Trusteeship – an introduction for PCC members*. They are encouraged to obtain a copy of *A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors* and to attend any training events run by the diocese. PCC members also receive safeguarding awareness training.

**Custodian Trustees:** The Diocese of Bath and Wells is the custodian trustee for property owned by the church, i.e. the church hall and associated buildings and land.