

**The Parish Church of
Saint Michael and All Angels**



**ANNUAL REPORT
AND
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
OF
THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
For the year ended 31 December 2024**

Priest in Charge in 2023
Rev. Rich Townend

Bank
Barclays Bank Plc
38 Bridge Street
Morpeth
Northumberland

Independent Accounts Examiner
Mr Ian Bell FCA
10 Riverside
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Contents

	Page
Annual Report for 2024	
Background	3
Membership of the Parochial Church Council	3
Committees	3
Church Electoral Roll	3
PCC Review of the Year	4
Churchwardens Report	5
Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2024	
Treasurer's Financial Review	7
Independent Examiner's Report	8
Receipts and Payments Accounts	9
Movements on Restricted Funds	10
Joint Ministry Ministry Account	11
Deanery Synod	12
Rev. Rich Townend	13
11am Service	13
Godly Play	14
8am Service	14
5 O'Clock Gathering	15
Safeguarding	15
Prayer	16
Children and Young People	17
Baptisms	17
Food, Fun and Toddly Play	17
Messy Church	18
Schools	19
Rooted	19
Weddings	20
Serving Our Community	20
Home Groups	21
Mission Partners	22
Environment and Sustainability	22
Churchyard	23

Background

St Michael's PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the Priest in promoting the whole mission of the church in the Parish, that is pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. The PCC, as the trustees of the church, also ensure effective maintenance of the church's finances and of its fabric, fittings and possessions.

Our Priest in Charge, Rev'd Rich Townend, was licensed by the Bishop of Berwick on 13th March 2023. In addition to St Michael's Felton, he is also responsible for St. Mary the Virgin Longframlington with St. Peter & St. Paul Brinkburn, and St. Bartholomew Whittingham with Edlingham St. John the Baptist, and Bolton Chapel.

Membership of the Parochial Church Council

Members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) are either ex-officio or are elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. During the year, the following served as members of the Parochial Church Council:

Priest	Rev. Rich Townend	(from March 2023)
Wardens	David Archbold	(retired May 2024)
	Alan Ferguson	(elected May 2024)
	Nigel Marsh	(elected May 2024)
Deputy Churchwarden	Moyra Horseman	(elected May 2024)
Lay Representatives to the Deanery Synod	John Marshall	<i>Lay Vice Chair of PCC</i>
	Anthea Smith	(elected May 2024)
Elected Members	Chris Allen	
	Charlotte Clarke	<i>Treasurer to Dec 2024</i>
	Neil Collin	
	Richard Evans	<i>Secretary</i>
	Elizabeth Hepper	
	Kathy McConnachie	
	Nick Morton	
Co-opted	Sam Driver	
	Rev Gabby Llewelyn	
	Alan Thompson	<i>Treasurer from Dec 2024</i>

Committees

Standing Committee

This is the only Committee required by law and it has the power to transact the business of the PCC between meetings, subject to any directions given by the Council. The Standing Committee comprises the Priest in Charge, Wardens, and two lay members of PCC.

Finance Sub Committee

The Committee comprises two Wardens, Hon. Treasurer, Gift Aid Officer and one or more other PCC member.

Church Electoral Roll

The number of electors on the Electoral Roll at 31st December 2023 was 105 and on 31st December 2024 was 108.

Debra Philips, Electoral Roll Officer

PCC Review of 2024

The PCC met for four full meetings and two short, extraordinary meetings in 2024.

At the Annual Meeting of Parishioners on 19th May 2024, David Archbold retired as churchwarden and Alan Ferguson and Nigel Marsh were elected to serve as churchwardens. At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on the same day, PCC member Liz Scurfield retired. Nine of the current elected members of the PCC agreed to continue to serve. These are: Alan Ferguson; Anthea Smith; Charlotte Clarke; Kathy McConnachie; Nick Morton; Nigel Marsh; Moyra Horseman, and Lizzie Hepper and Richard Evans. Two new members were elected, Chris Allen and Neil Collin. John Marshall and Anthea Smith were elected as lay representatives of the parish at the Deanery Synod. The PCC had eight elected members, three co-opted members, Rev Gabby Llewelyn, Alan Thompson and Sam Driver, and five ex-officio members: two Churchwardens and two Deanery Synod Lay Representatives of the parish and the incumbent.

The first meeting of 2024 was in February when Rich initiated the practice of producing a Vicar's Report, covering the three parishes in advance of each PCC meeting. Members welcomed the context this gave to the work in our parish and the realities for Rich of managing his leadership of the three parishes. An aspect of this first report and a recurrent theme through the year has been ways in which, as a PCC, we can simplify and structure the activities of the church to be more strategic and more manageable. Rich has also been keen to encourage the PCC to have vision for our outreach into the community as well as focus. One result of this has been a planned reorganisation of services for the three parishes that came into effect towards the end of 2024. Better planning of the pattern of Holy Communion and Services of the Word has made it possible to introduce a more family friendly format at 11.00 am services at St Michael's and the introduction of Godly Play.

We held a Vision Evening for PCC and church members in February and a PCC half-day away in September. In September we looked at a detailed annual work plan for the PCC with the aim of spending half of each meeting on core topics, such as: Outreach, Mission and Pastoral; Children and Young People; Worship and Growth; Spiritual Development; and Strategic Priorities and Resources.

Safeguarding featured at all our meetings with an emphasis on ensuring that all activities were properly risk assessed and that all staff and volunteers had undergone the relevant level of safeguarding training within three years and were DBS checked.

We also took part in a morning's discussion with representatives of the other parishes PCCs about responses to the Church of England's 'Living in Love and Faith' process.

Towards the end of the year our Treasurer, Charlotte Clarke, who had served on the PCC for ten years and as Treasurer since 2019, retired. Charlotte had been accepted for Licensed Lay Ministry training as a Lay Reader in Durham, a four year course that requires significant study, training and practice time. St Michael's is grateful to Charlotte for her diligence and commitment over the last six years. The church is already benefitting from more time she is able to give to preaching and leading worship.

In September Alan Thompson was co-opted onto the PCC. He volunteered to join PCC as our new Treasurer and was appointed in November. Sam Driver was also co-opted in September.

Richard Evans, Secretary

Churchwardens' Report

This last year saw the appointment of two new Churchwardens at the Annual Meeting of Parishioners: Nigel Marsh and Alan Ferguson. In addition, Moyra Horseman took up the role of Deputy Churchwarden. Since that time, we have been reviewing all of the arrangements for supporting St Michael's and have allocated roles and responsibilities to support both the maintenance of our church and facilitate our outreach. We now have a cadence to the way in which we support our church. The Churchwardens are supported by the Ministry Team in the delivery of regular worship under the leadership of our Priest in Charge, Rev Rich Townend.

We have already taken the opportunity to undertake improvements including the redevelopment of the vestibule area to make it lighter and more welcoming. The provision of a new noticeboard has improved the way in which we communicate and share information, both for those who attend regular worship and for the many who visit the church. We have introduced some branding and provided further notice boards around the church to improve access to practical information. Improvements have also taken place in the kitchen and toilet, especially in relation to storage (which is always a challenge for us) and an overhead door heater has been installed to improve our warm welcome.

Improvements to our building will continue to be a significant feature as we move into 2025 and our Quinquennial Inspection due in May. We are already aware of masonry, roof guttering and window works that are urgently needed to stop rainwater ingress. We also need to plan for ongoing improvements in our space heating including the upgrade of current heaters and the potential installation of additional infra-red heaters to better heat the Community Room and Chancel. This will improve the flexibility of our heating and reduce costs. It is hoped that some of this work can be completed with grants from the Church of England Low Carbon Fund.

Holy Communion is at the heart of Parish Worship, and we celebrate this each Sunday in one of our two weekly services. The '8am Service' is a traditional said service held in the Chancel when Holy Communion is celebrated each Sunday apart from the first Sunday of the month. Our 11am Service is for the whole church family and recently includes Godly Play for our children each week except for the first Sunday of the month when Holy Communion is celebrated. Refreshments are provided at the end of the service and to encourage wider and ongoing fellowship.

Messy Church now takes place on the first Sunday of the month to include games, crafts and activities based around a bible story, followed by a delicious family tea. This is always well attended and we are grateful to those who run and support this outreach.

The 5 O' Clock Gathering has restarted following a break and provides an opportunity for informal worship, prayer and the sharing of God's Word on the third Sunday of the month. Drinks and cake are available from 4:30pm and John & Sue Inglis-Jones continue to host a supper afterwards at their home.

Food & Fun continues to be a great success and has seen significant growth in the past year. Designed for pre-school children and their carers, it encompasses breakfast, play and 'Toddly Play' where a story and activities are shared with everyone.

We are indebted to the people who willingly organise these events and who take an active part in organisation, planning, teaching and baking. As a result of our regular services and these events, our mission family is continuing to increase.

Regular assemblies have taken place in Felton Church of England First School and members of the church are active in taking Open the Book to the school to act out a bible story. This has been successfully extended to Swarland School in conjunction with a team from the URC. Children and their parents have been to church for Easter, Harvest and First School Christmas and Leavers Services. The school celebrated their 50th Anniversary with a pilgrimage along part of St Oswald's Way followed by a service in the Church. At Christmas we enjoyed a 'Star Installation' full of prayers produced by the children from Felton School and Messy Church.

We are blessed by flourishing Homegroups: Courageous Women, Around the Table, Riverside and the 20s,30s,40s, Group. Cornerstone also provides a regular meeting for men in the church and it's pleasing to see this growing in number. The Riverside Homegroup have hosted an Alpha Course which started in January.

Revd. Rich Townend continues to provide leadership and oversight for three Parish Churches, with associated additional places of worship (Brinkburn Priory, St John the Baptist, Edlingham and Bolton Chapel). We are also blessed with additional amazing support from our Self-Supporting Minister, Revd. Gabby Llewelyn.

St Michael's has a strong and enthusiastic group of lay leaders who lead services and preach the Word. Our Music Group also adds greatly to monthly services and we are grateful for the continued commitment of our organist. We were delighted to welcome the Right Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley to Morning Worship in July when she affirmed the members of the lay ministry team who had completed their training. The service was followed by a well-attended lunch at Acton House.

During 2024, the church has remained open every day for private prayer and has been visited by many people daily, lighting votive candles as part of their prayer cycle. There is also an 8am Morning Prayer WhatsApp Group who pray together every morning except for Sunday.

Three concerts took place during the year. Firstly, we welcomed the return of international classical guitarist Giulio Tampalini; then, in December, there were concerts by the Coquet Concert Band and the village choir, the Bridge Singers.

At Easter we held our usual Rolling Away the Stone and were met at church with a surprise Easter Cross in the Churchyard decorated with spring flowers, announcing that 'Jesus Lives', and it is our prayer that the love and light of Christ will shine through, both in our church and in our community.

In December we held our usual traditional Candlelight Carol Service. We were delighted that well over 200 people attended, many of whom were new to the church or visiting. This is such a great outreach to our local Community.

The churchyard has been maintained by our church members with recently re-established additional support from NCC. The public highway at the front of Church was resurfaced last year and included the widening of the parking areas. Parking continues to be challenging, especially when we hold larger events and with the growth of weekly activities like Food & Fun. We are actively managing this to minimise any potential disruption to our neighbours.

We also offer our sincere thanks to those who prepare and maintain rotas, contribute to services, offer hospitality, undertake cleaning, arrange flowers, facilitate activities for our younger people, and carry out repairs; Indeed, we thank everyone who serves our Church in any way. Your support and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Nigel Marsh, Alan Ferguson & Moyra Horseman, Churchwardens

Treasurer's Financial Review

We are extremely grateful that St Michael's and All Angels continues to be supported so strongly, and appreciative of all who give so generously. 2024 was much less financially challenging than 2023, our income exceeded our expenditure by about £6,300, leaving our total funds at 31st December 2024 at £92,288.

During 2024, we have met our Parish Share payment of £30,910 in full, and we have maintained our payments to the 'F&L Account', which is used to cover the expenses shared with Longframlington and Whittingham for the vicarage and Rev. Townsend's expenses.

We have been able to continue to give £3,000 to our three mission partners and £100 to Felton Village Fair. Special collections resulted in us giving £51 to the Royal British Legion.

Overall planned giving rose by just over £5,000, Gift Aid recovered increased to £17,750, which included arrears for 2023. Other income resources not covered elsewhere, at £16,713 is abnormally high and is made up of £13,000 VAT refunds and grants for the boiler work, West Window and the lightening conductor undertaken in 2023, in addition we received a grant of £2000 from the St Hildas fund for youth work.

General Fund

Payments from the general fund cover the Parish share along with the cost of maintaining and running the church building. All our day to day running costs increased in 2024, however we did not have any significant repairs or maintenance costs, and helped by the tax refunds from 2023 the balance now stands at £38,251 up from £25,305 last year.

Restricted Funds

Restricted funds are those given for specific work and can only be used for that work, in addition where donations are made to restricted funds and Gift Aid is reclaimed then that amount is allocated to the respective fund. The balance of all restricted funds £52,405 shared as follows

- Building Improvements which now stands at £13,457, an increase on last year as no significant works have been undertaken in 2024
- Children and Youth Worker fund, which now stands at £19,025, down from £36,405 last year. In 2024 in co-operation with 'Ignite' we provided for a youth worker post in Felton school, at a cost of £18,000, we also have set up and commenced the provision of Toddly Play Godly play along with Messy church all of which amounted to £5,000. (this is shown in the £24075 of 'other church running expenses').
- Admin Work now stands at £10,176 and supports the high quality of services both weekly and for specific services such as weddings and funerals
- Flower fund now stands at £412 and supports the beautiful flower arrangements in church.
- We continue to administer the funds held in the Felton Relief in Need Fund. No grants were requested or made during 2024, and we continue to hold £7,816.

The financial statements of the PCC have been prepared in accordance with the Church Accounting Regulations 2006 using the Receipts and Payments basis. Other than those assets vested in the church wardens on special trust (i.e. inalienable assets) which are listed in the church inventory, Felton PCC does not own any item valued at over £1,000. Items below £1,000 are not listed as fixed assets but the church wardens maintain an inventory of all PCC property. The accounts have been audited and approved by Ian Bell FCA, to whom we are very grateful.

Alan Thompson Hon. Treasurer

Independent Examiner's Report to the members of St. Michael and All Angels' Church, Felton, Parochial Church Council.

I report on the accounts for the year ended 31st December 2023.

Respective responsibilities of the PCC and Independent Examiner

The PCC consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the accounts under section 145 of the 2011 Act;
- Follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 act; and
- State whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of Independent Examiner's Statement

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission.

An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the PCC and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from the PCC concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in a full audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the accounts.

Independent Examiner's Statement

In connection with my examination, no matters have come to my attention

- 1) Which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements
 - To keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the 2011 Act, or
 - To prepare accounts which accord with these accounting records have not been met, or
- 2) To which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed



Dated

30-3-24

Mr. Ian Bell FCA
10, Riverside, Felton, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 9EA

	Year to Date			
All funds	2024	2023	Full Year 2023	
Planned Giving - Gift Aid	43,645	38,456	38,456	
Gift Aid recovered	17,756	6,166	6,166	
Other planned giving	2,115	2,520	2,520	
Donations appeals etc	2,020	7,097	7,097	
Loose plate collections	2,231	3,188	3,188	
Other incoming resources not covered elsewhere	16,713	475	475	
Giving through church boxes	2,440	2,353	2,353	
Fees for weddings and funerals	1,875	1,014	1,014	
Church fetes, rummage sales, bazaars, etc.	-	1,221	1,221	
Legacies	-	-	-	
Bookstall & magazine sales – objects related	17	64	64	
Receipts	88,817	62,553	62,553	
Parish Share	30,910	29,051	29,051	
Church major repairs - installation	-	41,881	41,881	
Upkeep of services	6,290	5,360	5,360	
Church major repairs - structure	-	6,214	6,214	
Church running – electric, oil & gas	5,131	4,654	4,654	
Mission giving & donations	3,354	3,070	3,070	
Church maintenance	3,845	1,034	1,034	
Church running – insurance	3,935	3,887	3,887	
Working expenses of clergy	4,200	3,878	3,878	
Other church running expenses	24,075	1,490	1,490	
Other donations to support wider mission work outside the	-	343	343	
Cost of generating funds	149	-	-	
Visiting speakers / locums	-	-202	202	
Parish training & mission	42	217	217	
Church running - water	132	90	90	
Magazine & books expenses – PCC objects related	-	48	48	
Governance Costs	85	150	150	
Church office - telephone	390	75	75	
Payments	82,536	101,240	101,644	
Surplus / (Deficit) for the period	6,281	(38,686)		
Movement in Funds -				
Funds at 1st January	86,007			
Funds at 31st December	92,288			

Movements on Funds during the Period (£)														
Period Ending 31st December 2024														
	Building Improvements	Mission partners	Children & Youth Worker	Boiler	Flowers	Admin Work	Felton Relief In Need	Other	Total Restricted Funds		Not in Accounts	General Fund	Total Funds	
Balance at 1st January	2,708	(971)	36,405	0	490	12,406	7,816	1,849	60,702		0	25,305	86,007	
Total Receipts	12,589	971	5,506	0	0	0	0	0	19,066		4,864	72,824	96,754	
Total Payments	(1,840)	0	(22,886)	0	(78)	(2,230)	0	(330)	(27,363)		(3,231)	(59,878)	(90,473)	
Balance at 31st December 2024	13,457	0	19,025	0	412	10,176	7,816	1,519	52,405		1,633	38,251	92,288	

Felton, Longframlington and Whittingham Joint Ministry Account - (£)
 (Twelve months to 31 December 2024)

Bank Balance at 1 January 2024 880.73

Receipts

Felton PCC	4200	
Longframlington PCC	4200	
Whittingham PCC	1425	
		9825

Payments

Council Tax	2971.60	
Vicar's Expenses	3570.22	
Other expenses	130.10	
Telephone/Internet	482.82	
Photocopier Lease	1021.32	
Water Charges	563.90	
Photocopier Charges	1358.67	
		10098.63

Credit for the period -273.63

Balance at 31 December 2024 607.10

Alnwick Deanery Synod Report

During 2024 Alnwick Deanery Synod met 4 times

24th February – St James URC, Alnwick The focus was on children's work in the deanery and presentations were given on: Experience Easter (Amble), Schools Ministry (Chevington), Mini Michaels (Alnwick, Messy Church (Warkworth), Bags of Faith (Shilbottle), Baptism Preparation (Felton).

6th June – St Mary's Longframlington The meeting welcomed Rev Stephen Tranter, the Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Vocations who spoke about his role in the Diocese.

4th September – St Mary's Longframlington We welcomed Izzy McDonald-Booth, a Diocesan representative on General Synod, who spoke about the work of General Synod and its most recent meeting. Izzy emphasised the need for good governance at all levels in the Church of England. As a result of Izzy's input one of our lay vacancies on Diocesan Synod was filled.

2nd November – St Michael's Alnwick Guest speaker Rev Robwert Warren. The morning consisted of workshops on: leading Intercessions, reading in church, preparing the altar, welcoming worshippers.

Synod also elected Mary Elizabeth McIlroy-Hipwell to represent our deanery at Diocesan Synod. Throughout the year groups established by the Deanery Development Group have continued to work on strands of our Deanery development plan which focuses on how we can support each across the deanery by learning from each other, sharing experience and resources in 5 main areas

- Leadership & Governance
- Mission & Pastoral Care
- Sustainable Buildings and churchyards
- Development of Lay Ministry
- Generous Giving

Synod members attended three deanery development "check in" events during the year including a celebratory event at the cathedral. Our monthly Deanery service has been held on the first Sunday of each month and has moved around the deanery visiting different parishes each month. The Deanery Environment group continues to meet regularly convened by Rev Gilly Maude.

At year end our two vacancies in Upper Coquetdale and Amble & Chevington remain unfilled. The Area Dean is very grateful to the many people in these parishes have sustained ministry with grace and good will, to clergy and readers who have provided cover for services and to those who continue to pray for the people God is calling to these parishes.

In 2024 the Deanery offered £364,530 in parish share. At year end only one parish did not manage to pay in full. Because of some overpayments (and some parishes making additional payments after year end) the overall return was slightly more than 100%. For 2025 the deanery overall has not managed to achieve the Diocesan request for an extra 8%.

The Area Dean is grateful for the support of Synod, for Hugh, our Lay Chair, Sheila our Secretary and Jo our Treasurer all of whom work hard to ensure that deanery synod is focussed, informative and supportive of the Diocesan vision.

Rev Canon Alison Hardy, Area Dean of Alnwick

Rev. Rich Townend, Priest

This Annual Report looks back on the past year. I'm very grateful to all those people who have compiled reports, and all those who have offered their time and talents to enable every part of our worship and community life to flourish. I do not need to say too much about last year, because others have done such a good job of that. But looking ahead, I am sure you'll agree this is an exciting time to be at St Michael's. Each week, more people from within the parish and further afield are coming to join us at 11am for Sunday worship.

Last year was a year of change, and I am thankful that we've come together on that journey. It has allowed our services, gatherings and home groups to grow larger and deeper. It was made apparent when I first came to St Michael's, from the parish profile and the many conversations I had, that children were missing from our worship. I have made it my priority to address that, and we have been blessed by the introduction of Toddly Play and the development of Messy Church. On a Sunday morning, Godly Play has recently started and in time I hope people of all ages will see that St Michael's is a place where they can discover faith and journey in discipleship.

As a parish priest, my role is primarily focused on those not just on the inside, but on the *outside* of the church in the parishes of Felton, Longframlington and Whittingham. I commit to spending much of my time at events like Messy Church, Food and Fun, and Community Lunches and teas, because that is where we engage with those who often have little or no connection with church. It is so exciting when a conversation at Food and Fun, for example, can lead to the start of a new faith journey! But the priestly task is obviously much bigger than this. That's why I give thanks for the many people who are actively involved in serving on our teams and leading worship. I give thanks for our home group leaders who provide pastoral support and opportunities to grow in faith for those within the church family. I thank our churchwardens, PCC members, and those with safeguarding and administrative tasks. As a church, we rely on the priesthood of all believers as we serve together.

In many ways, 2024 was a tough year for the church locally. Many of our priests across the parishes have had prolonged absences or retired from active ministry during the year. Our 8am congregation were saddened by the passing of the Very Rev'd Charles Taylor. Meanwhile, we celebrated the lives and grieved the loss of Carol Evans, Lorraine Mitchell and Tony Cloutt, amongst others, in our church and community. As they enjoy the eternal rewards of their citizenship in heaven, I am sure they would be happy to see the movement of God's Holy Spirit among us.

In 2025, I will be launching a renewed vision for St Michael's. In some of our recent messages on the Corinthians, we have learned what it means to be 'Christ-centered and Cross-cultured'. My hope is that Jesus will always be at the heart of our worship, and the cross will always be the model of our witness. I am glad that you are joining me on that journey – I couldn't do it without you. In faith, hope and love.

Rev Rich Townend, Vicar

11am Service

In recent months, we have seen the congregation at the 11am service stabilise and grow. Across the year, the number of adults at the regular services averaged at 47 per service, which is up from 38 in 2023. This excludes special services such as baptisms, Easter, and Christmas. There was an average of 2 children per service. People attending regularly is an important measure of how appealing our 11am service is or how well it is meeting people's worship needs. In our hearts, worship at 11am is not a numbers game; it's about connecting and worshipping our Awesome God and closest friend.

Welcome, accessible worship, discipleship, and sharing are all elements we strive to hold in balance whilst respecting the range of experience and different worship traditions of our eclectic congregation and visitors.

The worship leading team comprises Lay and Ordained volunteers alongside Rev Rich Townend. All are passionate about providing a worship experience that leads us into a time focused on deepening our connection with the Holy Trinity.

We have shaped the services into a settled pattern with accessible liturgy, recognising the Common Worship tradition of the Church of England while providing the comfort of worshippers knowing what is going to happen, balanced with some flexibility and creativity. We have had to take some pragmatic decisions which haven't been easy and recognise our need to simplify and manage with the resources we have. We moved to one communion service a month at 11am. With the 8am service offering communion for 3 weeks out of four we continue to provide a communion service each Sunday at St. Michaels.

We are gradually introducing more contemporary music worship, sensitively balanced with traditional hymns delivered by organist, band, and recorded methods. We are so grateful for all the musicians and singers who are vital to this balance of music worship.

We have settled the foundation for a growing children's work that builds on the Messy Church success. Godly Play at 11am launched in January 2025 and takes place on the Sundays when there is no Messy Church (usually first Sunday). In each service, after a short spell including Family news and an all-age song, children make their way into their own space in the Community Room for worship which is child-focused and suitable for all ages.

We want to recognise all the elements and volunteers that make the 11am service a smooth and enjoyable worship time, from flowers to sound, coffee to welcomers, and Godly Play team to cleaners and all the support in-between. Thank you.

Liz Rowark

Godly Play

St Michael and All Angels Church, Felton is committed to providing increased opportunities for children and their families during the 11am service, each Sunday. Following completion of core training for one individual and building a team of volunteers, Godly Play is to be launched in January 2025.

Godly Play is a creative and imaginative approach to Christian nurture and spiritual life. It helps children *know* God – not just know *about* God.

It is delivered in a gentle and consistent way. Children 'receive' the parable or story through language and observing play. They have opportunity to 'enter' the story and wonder about it. Then they 'respond' in an expressive way, using materials and resources on offer, to explore what they think and feel about it, either as individuals or with others. This response time is about process, not product. Children do not need to create a craft or visible response. It is about providing children with time, space and opportunity to explore how they feel, bringing them closer to God in an uninterrupted way. Godly Play sessions end in sharing a feast, a time for eating, drinking, being thankful and fellowship.

Initiating Godly Play at St Michael and All Angels is about demonstrating the importance of children and families in our ministry. Providing a dedicated space for them to encounter God is vitally important to demonstrate how significant children are to the church both now and in the future. Being visible and sharing space following each service builds a sense of community and in turn, strengthens our church family. Godly Play, along with Messy Church, Food and Fun, Toddly Play and our work in schools provides children of all ages to be a significant part of church life and allows them to encounter God on many levels and in various ways.

Emma Townend

8am Service

The 8 o'clock service is mostly a Holy Communion service without hymns lasting around 40minutes. In 2024 we were fortunate that Rich was able to lead the service on about half of the Sundays. Other members of the clergy have officiated, and we were pleased to welcome Rev Gabby Llewellyn, Rev. Ray Best and Rev. Fiona Collin on several occasions.

Sadly, the Very Reverend Charles Taylor, who had also been a regular officiant in 2023 died in February and another regular officiant, Rev. Peter Askew, was no longer available. It became apparent that other parishes in the deanery were in vacancy, and they sought help from members of the clergy who might otherwise have visited St. Michaels & All Angels.

This lack of support resource for Rich affected not only the 8 am service but also the 11 o'clock. Inevitably some changes in service patterns were necessary and in the autumn, these were introduced.

The 8am has been fortunate in that the new pattern allows for there to be three communion services a month. On the first Sunday of the month the service is lay led and follows the Simply Worship format in our service books.

Attendance varied from week to week with a high of 24 on Easter Sunday but was typically in the mid-teens. We are mostly an older congregation with few attendees aged under sixty but not short of commitment to attend, even in the dark winter mornings.

Nick Morton

Five O'Clock Gathering

The Five O'clock Gathering took place on the 3rd Sunday of the month with refreshments, and a shared meal afterwards. This act of worship has been particularly popular with teenagers and young adults in the church family. This year, we explored themes such as the Fruits of the Spirit and looked at our church values of *simpler, bolder, and together*.

In July, I decided that to make things a little simpler for me in my role, and so I could focus on necessary changes to our 11am service, I would step away from coordinating the Five O'clock Meeting. A new lay team, gathered to oversee and develop it, looked together at how the gathering started out as a lay-led ministry. Several ideas were suggested, such as changing the day and developing it into a youth service. The Five O'clock didn't meet in September or October, but in November, a worship gathering and consultation event took place. Together with the PCC it was decided that the 20s to 40s Home Group would take on responsibility for the Five O'clock, with a plan to start again in January 2025.

Like many of our events and acts of worship, a lot of time goes into setting up, providing refreshments, baking cakes etc. We are particularly grateful to Libby Taylor for leading worship, Ed Butlin for the PA, and the Inglis-Jones family for hosting us for an evening meal. A big thank you also to Lizzy Hepper for leading the discussions on the future of the Five O'clock Gathering

Rev Rich Townend

Safeguarding

I was appointed as PSO at the AMP in May 2024. I appreciate all of the training that volunteers at St Michael's have undertaken to ensure that we have a 'safe church'. All of our volunteers are DBS checked and have undertaken a total of 96 training sessions between them. This information is recorded on a Diocesan Hub, which feeds into the Diocesan Dashboard. Here, there is space to record that all of our governance, policies and procedures are in place. Posters are clearly displayed in church, together with information on the website, detailing contacts and procedures should a safeguarding concern arise. Policies and other documents are all available in the Safeguarding Folder in the Community Room. Safeguarding is an item on every PCC agenda. The fact that volunteers give of their time to undertake all the relevant training ensures that everyone in our community can have confidence that we do have a 'safe church'.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and it is essential that we develop that culture in our church where we all look after each other. In addition, we need to ensure that there is confidence that any concerns raised with the PSO or with Rev Rich Townend will be both treated confidentially (as far as we are able) and dealt with appropriately, following our working practices.

Thankfully there have been no significant safeguarding concerns raised during the past year. I, along with Rev Rich, am convinced, as far as I can be, that our church is a safe space for all people to be welcomed and to flourish.

Sue Marsh, Safeguarding Officer

The Power of Prayer at St. Michael's Church

At St. Michael's Church, prayer is the cornerstone of our spiritual life and community. It is through prayer that we connect with God, seek guidance, and find solace in times of need. Prayer is not just a ritual; it is a heartfelt conversation with God, akin to chatting with a good friend. We believe that when we pray with honesty and sincerity, there is no limit to what God can accomplish through our prayers.

Our church is committed to fostering a vibrant prayer life among our congregation. Every morning at 8am, we gather for 20 minutes of prayer through WhatsApp chat, which is now in its second year. Led by a different person each day, it's an opportunity to contribute to the daily prayer or use the chat to shape a personal prayer time. On Sundays, we come together in church to pray for the world, our charity partners, and those who have asked for our prayers. We have group prayer before the 11am service to cover our worship with prayer, and we offer individual prayer support afterwards. All our activities are rooted in prayer, with the house groups being key powerhouses of prayer for each other.

One of the highlights of our prayer activities is the annual "Thy Kingdom Come" (TKC) event, which takes place from Ascension Day to Pentecost. This international time of prayer has been supported by our church since its inception. During the ten days, we engaged in various prayer activities designed to deepen our spiritual connection and reach out to our community.

The 2024 TKC event included a range of special activities:

- Ascension Day Service: This is the launch event each year and was again a joint parish service with the Bishop of Newcastle at Brinkburn Priory.
- Daily Prayer: WhatsApp Daily Prayer and prayer ideas shared through the TKC prayer journal, on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and through the #ThyKingdomCome app.
- Prayer Stations in Church: The house groups and Food & Fun helped create Lord's Prayer-themed prayer stations around the church to guide prayers and provide a peaceful space.
- 24-Hour Prayer: A number of our congregation contributed an hour or more to create a continuous prayer session from 8am on May 11th to 12pm on May 12th. The session encompassed the Pentecost services and other worshipful activities like a song hour.
- Prayer Walks: We had a men's daytime walk and an evening mixed prayer walk organized around the village.
- Village Prayer: We held a pop-in Prayer Tent on Saturday 18th May from 2-5pm located on the Bridge in Felton. A small prayer team was present to offer prayer to anyone in the community who welcomed it.
- Prayer Posies: The Flower Team produced prayer posies with prayer cards which were left in public spaces in our parish villages for any passer-by to take, enjoy, and feel blessed.
- Pentecost Services: This service is the culmination of the TKC celebrations at St. Michael's Church when we focus our worship to give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Participation in the additional TKC activities can be low, but the intent is to create a supportive and prayerful environment that encourages people to pray and to find it easier to have that conversation with the Lord, our King, and our friend Jesus. All prayer activities require the dedicated input of volunteers for whom we are really grateful. It's amazing what we achieve each year because we believe in the profound impact that prayer can have on our lives and our community.

Liz Rowark

Children and Young People

Baptisms

We had 6 Baptism Services at St Michael's in 2024, and 5 children and 1 adult were baptised and welcomed into the church family marking the beginning of a journey of faith. All families have been invited to a 'Preparation for Baptism' event and godparents receive a letter from Rev Rich Townsend outlining their responsibilities and detailing the promises they will make. John and June Holmes generously provide a bible for every child who is baptised at St Michael's and all of the services have been very special for parents, family and friends of the children. We contact each family a year after their child's baptism with a card and an invitation to Food, Fun and Toddly Play and to Messy Church.

Sue Marsh

Food and Fun with Toddly Play

Around 50-60 parents, carers and their pre-school children (0-4 years) are welcomed every Thursday morning, during term time for 'Food and Fun'. Food and Fun takes place in the community room at St Michael and All Angels Church, Felton. A team of volunteers provide warm and cold drinks, a delicious breakfast spread and a wide variety of toys for all to access during the two-hour session. Food and Fun gives opportunity for those from our local community and surrounding villages to enter church, feel supported and build relationships. The team, many of whom are trained professionals in working with children, spend their time serving the families through nourishment, play, time to chat and prayer.

Many families access Food and Fun across several generations, we regularly see child, parent and grandparent attend, demonstrating just how comfortable they feel and how much they enjoy coming. Fathers and Grandfathers are now much more likely to attend and engage, encouraged by male volunteers and Reverend Rich being in regular attendance. We have seen a steady increase this year of around 5 extra children per term access Food and Fun. Every child is valued and nurtured with the majority coming every week. Seeing the children develop and the interactions between adults and children in their play increase in time and quality has been hugely rewarding.

These factors are especially important following the traumatic events of covid in recent years where fathers were not allowed to be present at scans, during labour or for long after the birth. As new parents, mothers and fathers could not access as much after care, regular groups were not available and support networks reduced. Young babies and children spent many of their early interactions with people wearing face masks, and we are seeing the negative effects of this in young children's communication and language development nationwide.

Each week, 'Toddly Play' takes place. During Food and Fun, adults and their children follow the trail of bubbles to enter the nave and take part in an act of worship, specifically devised for pre-school children and their carers. A story is shared, songs are enjoyed and activity trays are explored, with clear links to the weekly theme. Weekly themes are linked to a half term focus, providing opportunity to build understanding, language and an awareness of links to the Bible. The families enjoy Toddly Play for around 30 minutes before returning to the community room for more social time.

We owe a huge thank you to the St Hildas Trust who generously awarded a grant of £2000 to Toddly Play, allowing the purchase of quality toys and resources that are age-appropriate and linked to our themes. The PCC have generously supported also, allowing for paid time to be spent ensuring the project is well planned, delivered consistently and of high quality. Kind donations of items to support delivery such as the lino, has provided a safe underlay for play. This has enabled the exploration trays to be sensory driven which is key for young children's development and emotional regulation. Every week, each child receives a Christian sticker, reminding them of their time at church and enabling them to share the message with those they meet later that day.

Food and Fun with Toddly Play is a huge operation. It involves, in a practical sense, making church child friendly every week. The set up begins the day before, where the whole of church is hoovered and looked over for hazards. Someone is responsible for setting out the 'bones' of the space, tables/chairs etc. Another arranges the toys, checking they are safe and suitable and disinfecting throughout. Two different people each week are busy baking cakes, delivering them to church. Another arrives to set out crockery and cutlery and clean/arrange the kitchen. Different people set out Toddly Play which involves creating as much space as possible in church to accommodate up to 30 preschool children, plus their carers. Chairs, rugs, tables, protective lino, trays and a whole host of resources are carefully and meaningfully placed for maximum impact and enjoyment.

On the day core team members start arriving from 7.30am to make sure everything is just right for our families and following each session they work tirelessly, with more volunteers arriving to help, to put everything back in its place and give church a thorough clean. Sometimes people joke that it 'looks like we weren't even here' and if you don't enter church during those 24 hours you may not even know how many extra people, from 6 weeks to 80 years, are choosing to enter church every week to come closer to God.

Food and Fun with Toddly Play acts as a 'gateway' ministry, providing a springboard for our families to access other forms of worship at St Michael and All Angels. Celebration services are promoted, with each child receiving an age-appropriate story book at Christmas and Easter. This year we have seen an increase in Food and Fun families coming to Messy Church and some have chosen to be baptised. It is envisaged that from next year some may begin to access Godly Play, taking place most weeks during the 11am Sunday service. This will provide a 'next step' for children who can no longer attend Food and Fun with Toddly Play due to being school age, allowing for their journey of faith to continue throughout their childhood.

Anne Byatt + Emma Townend

Messy Church (0 to Year 6 Primary)

We have had another really good year as a Messy Church team. We have held Messy Church sessions on the fourth Sunday of the month, with an occasional change due to school holidays or events. It is great to see a variety of families coming along, with many coming regularly each month and some right from our first session in 2022. But we always welcome new families, grandparents, carers. The majority of the families are from our local area but some do travel from further away such as Alnmouth or Alnwick. From 2025, we are having a change and moving to the first Sunday of the month. It is also great to see families coming along to both Food and Fun and Messy Church. We have a whole range of ages joining in, from babies up to teenagers. We average between 20-30 children and around 20 accompanying adults.

We have made crafts, drawn, glued, painted pictures, discussed and explored, made donkey poo and many more very messy activities and games. We have covered many bible stories and areas of Christian life, including "the journeys and travels of Paul", disciples breakfast on the beach, Pentecost and of course the Easter and Christmas story.

Many of the messy church families, also came along to the Roll Away the Stone, Easter story and activities as part of the Easter service and they also came to the Christmas family service, creating a connection with the Sunday morning congregation and the afternoon Messy Church families.

Many thanks to all those involved in making Messy Church happen. From the initial planning group to those who come and help with the crafts, story time, activities, on the day, to the amazing kitchen team who create a wonderful tea and an even more amazing clean kitchen after. To the many cake and tray bakers whom we couldn't manage without. Thank you all.

Julia Butlin

Schools Work

In our parish, there are two schools – Felton C of E School and Swarland School. Each week, Collective Worship led by either me or Sarah Hamer, our 'Ignite' worker, took place on a Tuesday morning in Felton School. Once a month, on a Monday afternoon, the Open the Book team also went into Felton School to deliver a dramatic retelling of a bible story. The children love Open the Book, and the team do as well! Unfortunately, the numbers on our team have dwindled over the course of the year, which has made things a bit more difficult. New team members would be appreciated! That said, we also launched Open the Book in Swarland with a new team, and that has been very well received. It is important that we have a presence in Swarland, and that we continue to build on this.

Felton School have also been active in other parts of church life. Sarah Hamer led Wizzy Worship as a lunchtime club, and the children loved the creative workshops for Easter Explored. The school also celebrated its 50th birthday with a Pilgrimage, and Sarah arranged prayer stations around the village before we finished with a service in the church. As ever, I led services for Easter, Leavers, Harvest and Christmas, which included a wonderful installation of stars in the north aisle, thanks to Nigel and Sue Marsh. There was no Christingle in December 2024, but this now takes place at Candlemas.

As a school governor, I oversee the SIAMs inspection framework. We are expecting an inspection in the coming year. I am grateful to my fellow governors from church who support the school in this key role. I am also grateful to Sarah Hamer, Jess McArdle and the work of Ignite within our parish. Sarah and Jess will be leaving their posts early in 2025. We will miss them and send them much love and all our prayers.

Rev Rich Townend

Young People - Rooted (Year 3 to Year 13 Secondary)

We started 2024 full of promise and excitement that for the first time we had established faith-based groups for all our young people from Year 3 through to young adults. We were welcoming families from across our wider area and had representation of various denominations, showing the value of an ecumenical vision. In all our four groups we had a significant number from the Felton Parish.

So, the year started strongly for us; all our groups met at the Lindisfarne Centre in Alnwick on two separate nights. This meant that we could share leaders and resources, the groups could run more smoothly, and we could join different age groups together as appropriate, giving a greater sense of community. However, we had no storage space, so carloads of resources were being transported by a couple of leaders every week taking hours of time and planning.

As we approached the summer holidays the charity, 'Mind and Sole', offered us storage and rentable weekly space for all four groups. We decided to move the groups to their new premises in central Alnwick, but after a few weeks their building was closed for safety reasons. We do not know when it will reopen. Alnwick Baptist Church kindly offered us the use of their church so the groups could continue to run, albeit with limited space and storage.

As a group of leaders, we finished 2024 with a sense of sadness. The faith of the children and young people is alive and growing; they are asking profound questions of themselves, their life and faith, and most significantly they want to be an active part of the groups. For most of the young people we serve, this is the only faith community which they belong to; but we struggled to have the resources to offer a stable and consistent group. As we move into 2025, I have resigned for health reasons, and we are short of people who are prepared to take a leadership role within the groups. As a result, the groups currently aren't running. My trustees are exploring options forward with the real hope that the groups will start again soon.

Jessica McArdle
Ignite Project Leader

Weddings

We were delighted to play host to 2 weddings at St Michaels during 2024, one in May and one in October. It is always lovely when the families involved have a local connection and are members of our church family and the church looked beautiful for the wedding of the Moyra and John Horseman's daughter, Laura, to Rob in May.

Rich conducted both weddings this year with the second one being that of John and Lucy who enjoyed attending St Michaels in the lead up to their wedding. The day itself included the baptism of their young son Jude as part of the service on a lovely sunny autumn day.

I am continuing to co-ordinate the weddings, along with those at Longframlington, and Brinkburn, and now with the addition of Whittingham and Edlingham parishes too. In 2024 that was a total of 35 weddings and wedding blessings. I continue to appreciate the great support of a whole team of local clergy (retired and in parishes) who have made this possible. We continue to offer 'Talking Marriage' days (a one-day marriage preparation day) and this is much appreciated by all the couples who attend. We are grateful for Mark and Christine Daniels' experience and support with these days.

Sue Inglis-Jones

Serving Our Community

This has been another year of activity in the community which we have been privileged to be involved in. All our Home Groups and Pub gatherings and Men's Breakfasts are open to anyone who would like to come along. These are times of rich fellowship, growth and fun.

The **Community Teas** continue to run each month with an average of 28 people coming along to a tea beautifully prepared and set out by Debra Phillips and her team. There is no charge for this but there is a donation box for people to give if they wish. This year we collected over £450 which we gave to the Amble Food Bank who were extremely grateful. At the **Christmas Tea** party the children from Felton School came and sang some carols, this went down very well. This is always a happy afternoon and it has been encouraging that a few people who attend have started to come to church on Sundays. We have a great team who work very hard, please ask Debra if you would like to help with this.

The **Community Lunch** is held twice a year and attracts a huge number of people from the community. Our thanks go to Julia McCormack and her team as they organise this popular event. There is room for more volunteers to help, contact Julia.

Community is always fluid and we have said goodbye to some dear people this last year, but we have also welcomed a number of others. Our parish is a very welcoming and friendly community and with the ebb and flow there is much activity. People have been visited in their own homes, and in hospital by a small visiting team and of course keeping an eye on the bereaved is a very worthwhile and important ministry.

Funerals across the parish have been conducted by Rev Rich and Rev Gabby and again it has been a joy to be involved in people's lives at this time of sadness and shock, and particularly so if they are not people of faith.

Felton Fair was another opportunity in July to be a presence and it was a fun day with lots of freebies for the children, and an opportunity to sit in a tent, and shelter from the rain! In August, we had a presence at the **Swarland Fair** for the first time, and we had a very favourable response from the organising committee. Thankfully, the weather was much better, and this time many families enjoyed the shade of the gazebo and the bell tent! We talked with and prayed with several people from our community at the fairs. We do need more volunteers to be willing to help with these, particularly setting up and taking down before and after the events. Please contact Moyra if you would like to get involved.

There has been growth in many areas of church life this year and we are grateful to all who step up, whether on welcome teams, sides people, coffee servers, candle lighters, car park attendants, gardeners, Food and Fun helpers etc. There is always an opportunity to volunteer and contribute to church life in the community. Thank you to all who do.

Rev Gabby Llewelyn

Home Groups

Around the Table

In 2024 Outrageous Women changed its name to Around the Table. We continue to meet each Wednesday morning 10:30-12:30. We meet in homes around the village to explore the Bible following a Lectio Divina format. There is always prayer, tea, coffee, cake, chatter, laughter and sometimes tears. We continue to support each other both prayerfully and practically. This year we have both lost and gained new women due to both a change in circumstances and location.

From January - March we studied how we can learn from the various people in the Gospels who encountered Jesus. This was followed by a study of the first chapter of John's Gospel.

We ended the year looking at the "I Am" sayings of Jesus. We come together with expectations of hearing God and being in His presence and we are never disappointed.

Liz Scurfield

Courageous Women

Every Monday evening from 7:30pm to 9:15pm a group of women meet to worship God and learn about the Bible. The format is relaxed and friendly starting with coffee and chat, followed by time of teaching and discussion. This year has seen the group grow from around nine women to over a dozen, with between six and eight attending at any one time. It is a group which integrates a wide age group (from mid-20's to 80's) and includes ladies from the three parishes that Rich oversees. It is fun, caring and supportive as well giving good practical teaching.

Since it started in the Covid lockdown this group has used the following format: 30 minutes chat and fellowship, 30 minutes watching a sermon online, 30 minutes discussion and prayer. The aim of our group is to get practical Bible teaching which is relevant to our lives today. This year we have studied the following topics:

- Studies through the book of James
- A series of studies on what we are called to be.
- The power of purpose
- Jesus unfiltered – looking at different emotions that Jesus felt.
- Suffering
- we are currently working through a series entitled When God moves.

Each weekly topic can be explored in isolation, so anyone wanting to join can dip in and out as they wish. As a group Courageous Women have also hosted several events for the church family, including some prayer lunches, a get together when Bishop Helen-Anne attended our parish, and a New Year Together lunch. We always welcome fresh faces, so if anyone is interested in coming along to a session please contact Eileen Ferguson.

Eileen Ferguson

Riverside Homegroup & ALPHA

The Riverside homegroup meets Monday evenings (7:30-9:30pm) at the home of Mark and Christine Daniel - 16 Riverside, Felton. Over the last year we completed our look at the book of Esther, we have studied some of the Names of God, stories of encounters with Jesus in the Gospels and we are currently looking at the life of David. We also enjoy regular social get-togethers with food and sometimes meet at the Northumberland Arms. Several new people have joined over the last year and if everyone is there we are 15 in the homegroup. Good relationships are growing between members.

In January 2025 we hosted an Alpha supper as a homegroup, with several guests joining us. The Alpha group started meeting at the same time as the homegroup on Monday evenings, so there was quite a buzz, fantastic homemade goodies and a lot of fun in the kitchen for our social time at the beginning of each evening. Chris Allen joined Christine to lead the Alpha course with six guests. The course finished at the end of March although five guests will continue to meet for three more Alpha videos after the Easter break.

Christine Daniel

20's, 30's and 40's Bible Study

The 20s – 40s is a small group which, towards the end of the year, has become formally part of the homegroups at St Michael's and All Angels. The group has grown from seven original members, to fourteen, offering an opportunity to connect those of a similar age and stage in this rural community. We meet weekly on a Sunday evening, share a meal and study a passage of the Bible. Through this we support each other in fellowship. Since September, we have been reading through Mark, gaining a deeper understanding of the stories that we were often familiar with. We have particularly enjoyed placing these stories geographically and in context with the Old Testament. Previously, we have read through a number of less familiar Old Testament books together including Joel, Habakkuk, Jonah and Ecclesiastes. In December 2024, we agreed as a group to oversee the planning of the monthly 5 O'clock gathering. We look forward to the future growth of this group as well as our presence in the wider church family over the coming year.

Lizzy Hepper and Sam Driver

Mission Partners

The three Mission Partners that St Michael's has supported since 2022 are:

- Local - The West End Refugee Service, Newcastle;
- National - Christians Against Poverty.
- International - REAP: Restoration of Educational Advancement Programme, Liberia.

Partners received donations totalling £3000 in each of the three years.

West End Refugee Service (WERS) works to create a 'Region of Sanctuary' where people seeking asylum and refugees are not just supported but have the opportunity to lead the change they want to see. For the latest news see the website <https://www.wers.org.uk/>

Christians Against Poverty - Churches across the UK are tackling the causes of poverty by partnering with CAP to provide debt help and community support <https://capuk.org/>

REAP, Liberia. Mr Julius Wese, the head of REAP recently shared some exciting news. Several initiatives that only commenced a couple of years ago are now producing results. An innovative *aquaponics* system that supplies water to a new fishery pond stocked with *Tilapia* a fish popular for the restaurant trade. The sustainability aspect of these investments bodes well for the future of REAP, both locally and nationally. The Liberian Government is monitoring and considering replicating them nationally. REAP supported communities are growing rice and 'plantain' to sell at the nearby market. Also, a piggery project, that began with only 8 piglets is now proving commercially viable, with a current stock of 40 pigs. The investment in the 'Early Development Centre' (nursery) allows around 90 children to attend and to be fed daily. Neil is in regular contact with REAP and has recently been appointed Chair of the REAP International Advisory Board.

Neil Collin, Mission Partnerships

Environment & Sustainability

The PCC has adopted an Ecosystems Policy and is a member of the Alnwick Deanery Environment Group. We continue to follow the ARocha Eco Church framework having received accreditation at the Bronze Level. We are continuing our path towards the Silver Level and in the past year have focused on Biodiversity improvements in our Churchyard. We need to consider what more we can do relating to Sustainable travel to Church and raising awareness on relevant issues. Having recently installed a new boiler we are now exploring projects to further improve the heating of our Church. At the end of last year, we installed a heater above the main entrance door to provide a warm welcome and also to reduce heat loss as people enter and leave the Church. Further work is envisaged in both the Community Room and Chancel to provide additional local heating solutions (based on infra-red technology). This would both improve the level of comfort in these areas and also reduce the costs of local heating for short meetings and times of Worship. We are in the process of seeking funding by way of grants being provided via the Church of England's 'Route map to Net Zero Carbon by 2030'. Our current grid electricity supply continues to be from renewable sources as a part of our commitment to the environment.

Nigel Marsh

Churchyard Report

As the financial year ends Spring starts in the Churchyard. The snowdrops are very much in evidence this year and this in part is due to the efforts of John Holmes to control the mole population and undertake regular grass cutting. The NCC have agreed to take over routine grass cutting from the Spring 2025 but will retain the rough area at the rear of the churchyard, only undertaking an annual late summer cut back here of the longer grass. Access to this area will be maintained by strimming a pathway below the bank to allow visitors to admire the yew tree avenue and the views to the north of Felton. Over the last few years, the grass cutting has been undertaken by John Holmes and David Phillips and PCC would like to extend their thanks to them both for all their dedication in keeping the churchyard accessible and tidy. Efforts continue to be made by John Horseman to control the ivy and some of the laurel along the boundary walls. Positive comments have been made by passers-by and neighbours to St Michael's about the improved look of the front wall. It is hoped that the NCC can take over some of the ivy reduction on the western boundary wall to further improve the presentation of the churchyard. Many of the inscriptions on the gravestones can now be read, and some previously buried under ivy have been rescued. Thank you to John for his commitment to this ongoing project.

The NCC tree officer Barry Wilson visited the churchyard in August and agreed to take on the long-term project of maintaining the Irish Yew tree avenue at the rear of the church. This type of yew does not respond to pruning, so the only way to ensure longevity is to remove the undergrowth of ivy and brambles and tidy lateral branches. Access down the avenue is much improved, and it is hoped that visitors can now enjoy walking through the avenue with greater ease and safety. The crab apple at the gate was given a hard prune to re-invigorate it, so watch out for new life on this tree. The churchwardens will continue to press the tree officer to keep working on the yew avenue and provide routine pruning of the laurel and holly trees.

A radical decision was taken to remove the old lavender from the short pathway to the church porch. Vivien Boulton and Jane Skelton planted the original lavender and other plants in this border and were both of the view that due to the infestation of grass and weeds it was time to start over again. Our thanks to Vivien for her gardening expertise. Two new borders have been created and lavender plants purchased for Spring planting. The lavender will be planted further back from the path, allowing better access for buggies and wheelchair users. The remaining areas will be grassed over. The herbaceous borders along the south wall of the church were cut back this winter and the roses given a hard prune. The borders along the north wall of the church will be grassed over as part of the reduction of tasks for the garden volunteers. The removal of undergrowth should also help with reducing damp on this wall. Our thanks to Jane Skelton for the regular weeding and care for the alpines in the kerbed graves. The planting undertaken by David Phillips of lychnis and lavender along the long path to the wide gate provides a beautiful summer display for visitors and we are grateful to him for his help with this.

Visitors to the church and passers-by often comment on the beauty and tranquillity of the churchyard. We are indeed most fortunate to have such a haven. Volunteers are always welcome to take on a specific task to help the gardening team in all that needs doing to maintain God's Acre.

Moyra Horseman