

**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 2025**

Priest in Charge
Rev. Rich Townend

Bank
Barclays Bank Plc
38 Bridge Street
Morpeth
Northumberland

Independent Accounts Examiner
Mr Ian Bell FCA
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Background

This Report and Accounts is compiled and presented by St Michael's PCC, which has the responsibility of working with the vicar 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 and are the legal employer of any church staff.

Our vicar, Rev. 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	Alan Ferguson Nigel Marsh	
Deputy Churchwarden	Moyra Horseman	
Lay Representatives to the Deanery Synod	John Marshall Anthea Smith	<i>Lay Vice Chair of PCC</i>
Elected Members	Chris Allen Neil Collin Sam Driver Richard Evans Lizzy Hepper Moyra Horseman Kathy McConnachie Alan Thompson Charlotte Clarke Nick Morton	<i>Secretary</i> <i>Treasurer from Dec 2024</i> <i>Retired May 2025</i> <i>Retired May 2025</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

A new Electoral Roll was created in early 2025. The number of electors on the Electoral Roll on 31st December 2024 was 90 and on 31st December 2025 was 92.

Debra Philips, Electoral Roll Officer

PCC Review of 2025

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the vicar in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It is also specifically responsible for the maintenance of the Church. A PCC's members include the incumbent (and any other licensed clergy in the parish), the churchwardens (who are elected by an Annual Meeting of Parishioners), and representatives of the laity elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) of the parish. They are the main decision-makers for the church and responsible for all aspects of governance, safeguarding and the property and income and expenditure of the church.

At the Annual Meeting of Parishioners on 11th May 2025, Alan Ferguson and Nigel Marsh were elected as churchwardens to serve for the year to the next AMP in 2026. At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on the same day, PCC members Charlotte Clark, Richard Evans and Nick Morton retired by rotation. Richard stated he was willing to serve another term. Charlotte, who retired as treasurer after six years and a total of ten years' service on the PCC, was thanked. Charlotte is training as a Lay Minister (Reader) with Newcastle Diocese. Six of the current elected members of the PCC agreed to continue to serve: Chris Allen, Kathy McConnachie, Lizzie Hepper, Neil Collin, Moyra Horseman and Richard Evans. Two members co-opted in 2024, Alan Thompson, our new Treasurer, and Sam Driver, were nominated by the vicar and elected unopposed. John Marshall and Anthea Smith continue to serve as lay representatives of the parish at the Deanery Synod, elected in 2023. The PCC has eight elected members and five ex-officio members: the two Churchwardens, two Deanery Synod Lay Representatives of the parish and the vicar.

The first meeting of 2025 in January was preceded by a meeting with neighbours and the farmers who use Church Bank and the private road to Felton Park for access., following some difficulties with parking outside church for an event in church. The PCC has adopted an 'event management' protocol developed by Moyra Horseman, which has worked well.

At the beginning of the year the PCC also endorsed changes to services, in particular the introduction of Godly play at 11.00am to create a 'whole church family service' each Sunday. We also discussed options following notice that our part-time Children's Worker had informed Ignite that she was leaving at the end of January. Lizzy Hepper talked about the re-introduction of Five O'Clock in November. Feedback showed a clear desire for appropriate forms of worship for people looking for mutual support and learning and collective worship inspired by shared experience of God. The '20s-40s' Home Group were happy to continue responsibility for planning and organising the Five O'Clock Gathering, supported by PCC.

Throughout the year PCC gave significant attention to how it can respond effectively to the considerable burden Rich carries for the three separate churches and parishes, and with Felton being the parish experiencing rapid growth and development. Rich and the PCC are still working on the structure of the PCC and distribution of responsibilities to individual leaders and groups. Running costs and building repairs and maintenance are well organised by the church wardens and Standing Committee and the Finance Sub Committee has been helpful in analysing issues to make proposals to the whole Council in addition to financial management and accounting. Two initiatives from Rich have been discussed and are moving towards implementation. While these are not the whole solution, they will make a substantial difference and a good response to the dynamic growth in Felton. These are the appointment of a part-time, self-employed, professional Administrator to support Rich's work across all three parishes and the employment by Felton PCC of a new role of Community Assistant Minister for Families and Young Adults for Felton parish and surrounding villages. We expect to implement these in Spring/early Summer 2026.

Safeguarding featured at all meetings 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. Thanks to the dedicated voluntary work of Sue Marsh, our Parish Safeguarding Officer, and her input to the PCC we have achieved a high level of compliance on the Newcastle Diocese Safeguarding Dashboard.

There have been no safeguarding issues during 2025. Sue is also responsible for advising PCC and for information management regarding General Data Protection Regulation.

Charlotte Clarke, and other PCC members, worked on a report for PCC on accessibility to the building and to worship services for people with physical needs, hearing loss, neuro-divergency, dementia and other needs.

Rich and three PCC members took part in Newcastle Diocese's Cornerstone workshop at Church House. Cornerstone is a national CofE project designed to help churches develop the most detailed picture of their financial situation – using Parish Returns data. Cornerstone identifies different types of giving and shares comparisons with other churches both in the same diocese and nationwide. It then offers different pathways to achieve goals and growth, including access to a very large grants database.

The Finance Sub-Committee of the PCC met regularly in advance of PCC meeting dates. The Treasurer has spent much time and energy rationalising the church's banking arrangements and switching to online banking. The Committee worked with the treasurer on a budget for 2026 which helpfully differentiated between essential expenditure and potential discretionary spending. The budget was approved by the PCC in November 2025, and it was agreed that we need more communication of finance to the congregation and a giving campaign and teaching in the new year.

Richard Evans, PCC Secretary

Churchwardens' Report

The Annual Meeting of Parishioners on 11th May 2025 reappointed Nigel Marsh and Alan Ferguson as Churchwardens and Moyra Horseman as Deputy Churchwarden. During the past year we have continued to review and have oversight of all of the arrangements for supporting St Michael's with a particular focus on the maintenance of our church to facilitate our outreach. 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.

The space that we have for our various activities is very constrained and so we have continued to rationalise our furniture and create more storage options. In addition, we have been able to introduce improved notice board arrangements.

In May we had our Quinquennial Inspection, and this confirmed the areas to focus on in the coming years. A significant project has been the replacement of guttering and stonework around the southern part of the Chancel roof. This was urgently needed to stop water ingress that has been damaging internal masonry. Further works will be needed in the future to complete the project. The repair of masonry continues to be an ongoing issue for the church. Other works that need to be planned include a new access to the Boiler Room and repairs to the Porch.

This year has also seen significant works to inspect and undertake rectification to several areas of electrical wiring. This was necessary to renew our safety certificate and as a precursor to potential space heating improvements later in 2026.

In December we hosted an Archdeacon's Parish Visitation (conducted by the Area Dean) to review our records and procedures. We were pleased that all areas were found to be in order.

Following the completion of a Disability Access audit by Charlotte Clarke we are also looking to develop a project to remove the stepped access into the Porch. Like all projects this will require external funding and a 'Faculty' from the Diocese.

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 includes Godly Play for our children each week except for the first Sunday of the month when Holy Communion is celebrated. In the past year it has been a delight to see an increase in both families attending church and children in Godly Play. Refreshments are provided at the end of services and to encourage wider and ongoing fellowship. Messy Church has continued to take place on the first Sunday of the month and includes 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 Five O'clock Gathering 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 is a major outreach for the Church. Designed for pre-school children and their carers, it encompasses breakfast, play and 'Toddly Play' where a Bible story and activities are shared with everyone. We are indebted to the people who organise these events and who are active in leading, planning, teaching and baking.

Regular assemblies take place in Felton Church of England Primary School and members of the church are active in taking Open the Book to the school. Open the Book is also supported at Swarland School in conjunction with a team from the URC. Children and parents have been to church for Christmas, Easter, Harvest, and Leavers services.

Church members have also donated generously to provide a Bible for every child in Key Stage 2 and these are used daily. We have also sponsored a Dance Workshop focusing on the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

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 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 has grown significantly in numbers, and we are grateful for the continued commitment of our organist.

During 2025, 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. The introduction of a visitor book has also attracted some great feedback. There is an 8am Morning Prayer WhatsApp Group who pray together every morning except for Sunday. This, together with our monthly in-person Prayer Meeting supports the prayer life of our Church.

Two concerts took place during the year. Firstly, we welcomed the return of international classical guitarists Giulio Tampalini and Danielle Fabio; then, in December, the Coquet Concert Band held a Christmas Concert.

At Easter we held our Rolling Away the Stone prior to our Easter Celebration service and in December we held our traditional Candlelight Carol Service. We were delighted that over 230 people attended, many of whom were new to the church or visiting.

The churchyard has been maintained by our church members with additional support from Northumberland County Council. 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 and maintain access for emergency vehicles and we are grateful to everyone for being thoughtful when they visit.

We offer our thanks to those who prepare and maintain rotas, contribute to services, offer hospitality, undertake cleaning, arrange flowers, facilitate activities for our younger people, and conduct repairs. Your support and assistance are greatly appreciated.

Nigel Marsh, Alan Ferguson & Moyra Horseman, Churchwardens

**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 2025.

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.

14.4.26

Mr. Ian Bell FCA
10, Riverside, Felton, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 9EA
e-mail: ihbell@outlook.com

Felton Parochial Church Council Receipts and Payments Accounts to 31st December

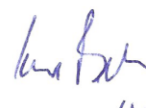
<u>All funds</u>	Full Year	
	2025	2024
Planned Giving - Gift Aid	58,656	43,645
Gift Aid recovered	18,218	17,756
Other planned giving	2,200	2,115
Donations appeals etc	7,672	2,020
Loose plate collections	2,352	2,231
Other incoming resources not covered elsewhere	5,686	16,713
Giving through church boxes	3,791	2,440
Fees for weddings and funerals	947	1,875
Church fetes, rummage sales, bazaars, etc.	390	-
Bookstall & magazine sales – objects related	2	17
Gift Aid – Envelopes	-	5
Receipts	99,914	88,817
Parish Share	33,400	30,910
Upkeep of services	4,267	6,290
Church running – electric, oil & gas	3,739	5,131
Mission giving & donations	2,599	3,354
Church maintenance	14,106	3,845
Church running – insurance	4,152	3,935
Working expenses of clergy	4,020	4,200
Other church running expenses	22,912	24,075
Cost of generating funds	315	149
Parish training & mission	66	42
Church running - water	138	132
Governance Costs	-	85
Church office - telephone	300	390
Payments	90,014	82,536
Surplus / (Deficit) for the period	9,900	6,281

Movement in Funds -

Funds at 1st January	92,288
Funds at 31st December	102,188

Notes

- 1 The financial statements of the PCC have been prepared in accordance with the Church Accounting regulations 2006 using the Receipts and Payment basis
- 2 The movements in funds is shown on the next page



Felton Parochial Church Council
Movements on Funds during the Period (£)
 Period Ending 31st December 2025

	Building Improvement s	Mission partners	Children & Youth Workers	Boiler	Flowers	Admin Work	Felton Relief In Need	Other	Total Restricted Funds	Not in Accounts	General Fund	Total Funds
Balance at 1st January	13,457	0	19,025	0	412	10,176	7,816	1,519	52,405	1,633	38,251	92,288
Total Receipts	15,768	2,014	9,274	0	0	0	0	0	27,056	15,811	83,866	126,733
Total Payments	(11,980)	(2,014)	(14,263)	0	(106)	(4,081)	(500)	(664)	(33,608)	(17,443)	(65,781)	(116,833)
Balance at 31st December 2025	17,244	0	14,037	0	306	6,095	7,316	854	45,852	0	56,336	102,188

Felton, Longframlington and Whittingham joint Ministry Account – (£)
Bank Balance at 1st January 2025 **607.10**

Receipts

Felton PCC	4,200.00	
Longframlington PCC	4,200.00	
Whittingham PCC	3,325.00	
Refund Photo copier lease	144.00	
Loan from Felton PCC	500.00 ¹	
Total		12,369.00

Payments

Council Tax	2,953.05	
Vicars Expenses	4,444.03	
Telephone/internet	698.18	
Photocopier Lease	1,021.32	
Water Charges	675.97	
Photocopier Charges	1,119.06	
Joint Service	180.00	
Other Expenses	62.35	
Total		11,153.96

Balance for 2025 1,215.04

Balance at 31st December 2025 **1,822.14²**

Gift Aid

Gift Aid is amazing! Thank you to all who are already signed up. For the year ended 31 December 2025 we claimed back £16,853 on gifts amounting to £70,183!

Thank you, all who have contributed – you are amazing.

And, for those of you who haven't signed up, then why haven't you? It doesn't matter how much or little you give. You can give as regularly or infrequently as you like. It's entirely up to you. St Michael's can get an extra 25% if you sign a declaration. That is £0.25 for every £1 given. You don't need to do anything else other than sign the form and let the Gift Aid Officer (Eileen Ferguson) know when a donation has been made.

If you don't pay tax, and wish to contribute to Church, then please give anonymously (in cash or by the contactless payment machine) in amounts of £30 or less – then we can still claim 25% through the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme.

Eileen Ferguson, Gift Aid Officer

¹ £500 lent from Felton PCC to cover shortfall to cover Water Charges

² Includes £500 to be refunded to Felton PCC in 2026

Treasurer's Financial Review

The detailed figures for 2025 are shown on the Receipts and Payments table, and Movements of Funds table as they relate to the general and restricted funds. Restricted funds are those where donations are given for specific activities or purchases. For one restricted fund, "Felton Relief in Need Fund", we function as trustees under very restricted criteria as to when and to whom payments can be made, however this year one person was identified as fitting the criteria, and a grant of £500 was made. All other donations form the general fund. On 31st December, our total restricted funds were £45,852, and our general fund £56,336, making a total of £102,188, of which £7,316 is in the Felton Relief in Need fund. Total receipts were £99,914. Planned giving amounted to £66,999 with an additional £18,218 recovered from Gift Aid, an increase of 17% over 2024, largely as an increase in the number of people giving on a regular basis.

An income of £100k may seem a sizable amount to have at our disposal however, we have responsibilities. We must maintain the church building; this includes the day to day running costs which reduced by £1,000 this year (but watch out for increased oil and electricity costs next year) and the cost of any maintenance or improvements to the building which increased by £10,216. We also must provide Ministry to the parish of Felton, this includes our Parish Share to the Diocese which increased by £2,500, the cost of providing services, and general and administrative expenses for Rev Townend, in total this increased by £2,500. The total cost for all those items, over which we have little control is around £70,000 or 70% of our total income. Expenditures where the PCC have some control fall into two categories, those areas where it is felt we should employ professional help, and second our broader mission where we make donations to other charities outside of St Michael's.

In 2025 the PCC have concentrated on setting up and running the Godly Play and Toddly play activities and these represent some 14% of our income, much of which comes from our Youth Work fund. We continued our commitment to Mission beyond St Michael's and £2,599 was given, this is less than we intended as payment of £2,000, to one charity, was delayed until early 2026, but has now been made and in total accounts for 4.5% of our income. In addition to our mission giving, we have been able to provide Bibles for all the children at Felton school at a cost of £1,500, and we collected £1,000 at the Harvest Service for the Bore Hole project, a total of a further 2.5% of our income. In total 21% of our income, and the balance of 9% is surplus income over expenditure.

Our day-to-day costs have increased substantially and will continue to do so next year, and we continue to be extremely grateful for the very generous financial support we receive.

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 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

Rev. Rich Townend, Priest

This Annual Report gives us an opportunity to reflect with gratitude on a year that has been both exciting and, at times, stretching. I am deeply thankful to all who have contributed to the life of our church over the past year—those who lead, serve, welcome, pray, and give so faithfully. Much of what has taken place is captured elsewhere in this report, but it is important to say clearly that this has been a year of remarkable growth, and a year in which we have seen God at work in powerful and encouraging ways.

Week by week, we are now welcoming close to a hundred people to our Sunday worship at St Michael's. This represents significant growth, particularly since the changes made in 2024, and is a clear sign of the Holy Spirit drawing people to us. Much of this growth has been among families and those in their 20s to 40s, which has long been a priority for us, and it is a great joy to see this beginning to take shape.

At the heart of this has been the development of our ministry to children and families. The introduction and growth of Godly Play—expressed through Godly Grow and Godly Sow—has transformed our Sunday mornings, creating space for children to encounter God in a way that is both creative and deeply rooted in faith. Alongside this, Toddly Play, Messy Church, and our outreach through initiatives such as Pumpkin Pie and community events continue to sow seeds of faith in our wider community. These are not simply activities, but places where relationships are formed and where faith journeys begin.

As our numbers have grown, so too has the depth of our fellowship. The number of home groups has doubled over the past year, providing vital spaces for discipleship, pastoral care and belonging. The development of our new welcome area has also helped us to receive people more intentionally, reflecting our desire to be a church where all can feel at home. These developments are increasingly important as we grow, ensuring that we remain a community where people are known and supported, not just attendees at a larger gathering. Throughout the year, we have begun to articulate more clearly the vision that God is placing before us: that we would be a church that is *sowing, growing and going*. This is not simply a phrase, but a way of understanding who we are called to be—sowing seeds of God's love in our communities, growing together in discipleship, and going out with confidence to share the gospel. Increasingly, I believe this vision calls us to think beyond ourselves. We are not just a growing parish church but are being shaped into a resource church for our rural communities—supporting and strengthening ministry across Felton, Longframlington and Whittingham, and potentially beyond. With that calling comes the need for change. We are no longer a small church, and the structures that have served us in the past will need to adapt if we are to sustain and steward this growth well. Over the course of the year, we have begun to explore what this might look like—whether through developing teams, sharing ministry more intentionally across our parishes, or considering new roles and ways of organising our life together. This will take time, and it will require patience, flexibility and a willingness from all of us to embrace new ways of working. My hope is that we can do this together with grace and unity, trusting that God is leading us forward.

Amid all this activity and change, we must not lose sight of what underpins everything: prayer. None of this growth is of our own making; it is the work of God's Holy Spirit among us. The development of our monthly prayer meeting, alongside our prayer groups and the quiet, faithful prayers of many, is vital to the life of our church. I want to encourage us all to deepen our commitment to prayer—for me in my ministry, and for the life and future of our church. If we are to continue to grow in a healthy and faithful way, we must remain rooted in prayer.

As your vicar, I remain committed to serving not only those within our church family, but those beyond it, across all our parishes. It is in our engagement with the wider community that so many new faith journeys begin, and it is a privilege to share in that work with you. I am grateful, as ever, for our churchwardens, PCC members, home group leaders, and all who serve in ways seen and unseen. We truly depend on the priesthood of all believers as we serve Christ together.

This is an exciting time to be part of St Michael's. It is also a time of transition, as we grow into what God is calling us to be. Thank you for your faithfulness, your encouragement, and your willingness to journey together into this new season.

Rev Rich Townend, Vicar

8am and 11am Services

Our pattern of Sunday worship continues to offer both depth and breadth, enabling people to encounter God in diverse ways while remaining a united church family. At 8am, our said service provides a quieter, more reflective space rooted in the richness of the Anglican tradition. With an average congregation of thirteen, this service remains a faithful and prayerful gathering, offering Holy Communion and a sense of stillness that many value deeply.

At 11am, we gather as a larger and increasingly diverse church family, with an average of around 70 adults and 6 children each week. This service has continued to grow over the past year, particularly through the inclusion of Godly Play, which enables our children to engage meaningfully with the Christian story alongside the wider congregation. Our worship at 11am blends traditional and contemporary elements, seeking to be accessible, welcoming and rooted in Christ.

I am deeply grateful to all who contribute to leading our worship so faithfully and creatively. In particular, I give thanks for Gabby, Fiona, Charlotte, Nick Morton, Jane Skelton, Liz Rowark, and all our ALMs, whose commitment, gifts and willingness to serve play a vital role in sustaining and enriching our life together in worship.

Rev Rich Townend, Vicar

Worship Music

There has been considerable change and movement in the worship music life of St Michael's over the past year. Throughout this time, a small and committed group has continued to oversee the choice of worship music for the 11am and 5pm services. Our intention has been to maintain a sense of familiarity in our music, enabling us, first and foremost as worshippers, to focus fully on our song so that it may be as Holy Spirit-filled as our prayers, readings, and message.

An open workshop last year to explore the musical talents within our growing congregation, enabled the 11am worship band to expand. We now have two Sundays each month led by the band, with a consistent core of musicians and a rotating pattern of worship leaders, vocalists, and guitarists. As new musicians joined us, others stepped away due to moves, retirement, or changing commitments. We are deeply thankful to everyone who has been part of this journey for the gifts, learning, and encouragement they have shared.

Traditional music remains an important part of our worship life, and we continue to value a blend of contemporary and traditional styles in praise. We are blessed by the faithful commitment of our organist, Dave Archbold. When he is away, we use backing tracks and the growing confidence of the band to lead traditional hymns in a guitar-led style.

Our monthly 5 O'Clock Gathering continues to have a strong contemporary worship feel. A small group of musicians works closely with the service lead each month to create a reflective and occasionally more spontaneous worship experience, shaped in part by the more intimate community room setting.

This year also saw the formation of a choir in preparation for Pentecost 2025, and the introduction of music at the start of our monthly prayer meeting. We have developed worship music principles to help keep us grounded in the purpose of worship and God's love, and we would warmly welcome anyone with musical gifts who feels called to contribute, particularly those with talents beyond guitar. Band practice takes place fortnightly on Thursdays.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to Libby Taylor, Dave Archbold, and Dave Shipley for their music leadership, to our wonderful sound and visuals volunteers, and to Nick Rowark for installing the new sound system, which has significantly enhanced our worship experience.

Liz Rowark

Godly Play

Godly Play launched in January 2025 offering children of all ages the opportunity to hear God's word through storytelling, wonder and response. It takes place in the community room during the 11am service on weeks 2,3,4 & 5 of each month. In St Michael's it is not possible to have a separate, dedicated Godly Play room and so we have trialed different ways of using the community room. It has been important to provide a sacred space for Godly Play where the children feel they belong, whilst remaining respectful of using a shared space. A generous donation allowed the purchase and installation of a Godly Play cupboard, providing much needed storage and the creation of a focal shelf where each week we light our candle and place our Holy Family on a coloured cloth, linking to liturgical colours.

In addition to the weekly Godly Play sessions for children, adults and families have had the opportunity to experience Godly Play at our church away day in Bolton Chapel in May, at the Godly Play UK North East Network meeting held at St Michael's, Felton in July and at the Felton and Thirston Fair in July and at Swarland Show in August.

During the summer we began exploring the idea of providing a separate provision area in church during the 11am service for our younger children. The main aim was to better meet their needs and allow their parents/carers to stay in the church service. September saw the launch of 'Godly Sow', a dedicated space in church for 0-4 year olds to play alongside their parent/carer during the service, with links to the weekly readings. 'Godly Grow' then became the adult led session in the community room for school aged children.

There has been generous accommodation from the congregation and church volunteers regarding the changes St Michael's has seen regarding children and families' provision during the 11am service. The number of children and families attending has steadily increased this year, and they are seen and valued as being part of our growing church community.

The Godly Play team of volunteers has of course been fundamental to the success of children's work on Sundays. Dedicated volunteers give up their time to attend meetings, take part in training and learn and practice stories by heart. Working alongside the children each week and sharing our feast with the families we gently bring one another closer to the wonder of God.

Emma Townend

Five O'Clock Gathering

The 5 o'clock gathering takes place on the 3rd Sunday of every month except August and December. The emphasis of the gathering is on experimenting with different ways of worshipping and learning about God, looking deeper into God's word, and providing a setting in which people can explore their gifts. Throughout 2025, the 20s to 40s bible study group has been responsible for organising the 5 o'clock service. In the summer and autumn of 2025, we had a series of three sessions relating to different kinds of worship. We have also had sessions on, among other things, the cross, mission and testimony. Sue and John Inglis-Jones continue to provide a shared meal after the gathering, for which all involved are very grateful. We are delighted that David Shipley and Simon Beeby decided last year to join the worship team and their contributions have been highly valued.

Sam Driver

Safeguarding

We have 37 volunteers currently registered on our Safeguarding Hub where it is recorded that 123 safeguarding training sessions have been completed. This information feeds into the Diocesan Dashboard. Here, there is space to record that all 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.' I appreciate all the training that volunteers at St Michael's have willingly completed and extend my thanks to everyone.

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 Parish Safeguarding Officer or with Rev Rich Townend will be both treated confidentially (as far as we are able) and dealt with appropriately, following our working practices.

The Diocese has recently changed the DBS provider from APCS to Thirtyone:eight which is an independent Christian charity. Being Christian means the charity has an overriding interest and commitment to actively help churches and other faith communities become places that are safer for everyone, and the advice they can give is tailored to the church context. The 'new' Safeguarding Team at the Diocese are also supporting with good advice and making changes to Safeguarding training to meet the needs in our society.

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

Sue Marsh, Safeguarding Officer

Sowing, Growing, Going with Prayer at St. Michael's

At St. Michael's, prayer remains the cornerstone of our spiritual life and community. We are seeing the fruits of faithful prayer—intergenerational prayer, where all ages pray together, and cross-generational prayer, where one generation lifts another before God.

Recently I was reminded of Nancy, a beloved former teacher and long-time organist. As her health declined, her commitment to praying for the children and young people of our congregation only deepened. She regularly asked for updates so she could pray specifically, and we believe we are seeing answers now as those young people begin to raise families of their own. This is the foundation we seek: to cover our communities, loved ones and church life in prayer, aligning all we do with God's purposes.

Across the church, our activities are rooted in prayer, with house groups serving as key places of mutual support and intercession.

Our WhatsApp Prayer group is now in its third year with 43 members. A small group meets daily at 8am for 20–30 minutes, led by a different person each day. Others use the chat to shape their own prayer time and contribute throughout the day.

On Sundays we pray together for the world, our charity partners and those who have requested prayer. Worship leaders and the band also pray before the 11am service to cover our worship, and anyone is welcome to join. After the service we offer personal prayer in the privacy of the Chancel area: we listen first, then pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to bless and move. We always pray in teams of two, and this is open to anyone who would value prayer for anything on their heart.

In September 2025 we relaunched an in-person monthly prayer meeting in the Community Room at St. Michael's (7–8 pm on the first Thursday). In an informal setting we pray through three simple movements: Looking Up (praise and worship), Looking Out (the needs of the world) and Looking Around (our local communities). Numbers vary from around six to over fifteen, but it is not about numbers—it is about gathering to pray. As Jesus said, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt 18:20). All are welcome.

A highlight of the year is our annual "Thy Kingdom Come" (TKC) season of prayer from Ascension to Pentecost. Our church has supported this international initiative for all ten years since it began, using the ten days to deepen prayer and reach out to our community.

In 2025, TKC ran from 29 May to 8 June and included:

- Ascension Day Service: our launch event, again a joint parish service at Brinkburn Priory, with TKC prayer journals shared for the ten days.
- Prayer Stations in Church: the flower team created Lord's Prayer-themed floral stations, offering a peaceful space to guide prayer.
- Prayer Walks: two mid-week evening walks, led by Rev Rich Townend and Mark Winter, around Thirston and Felton.
- 24-Hour Prayer: a continuous prayer time from 8am on 7 June to 12pm on 8 June, spanning Pentecost services and including worshipful moments such as a song hour.
- Pentecost Services: our 11am service on 8 June concluded TKC as we gave thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

While participation in additional TKC activities can be modest, the aim is to offer a supportive environment that helps people pray and talk with the Lord—our King and our friend, Jesus. Every prayer activity depends on volunteers, and we are deeply grateful for their faithful service. Year on year, we are amazed by what is made possible as we trust in the profound impact of prayer on our lives and our community.

Liz Rowark

Weddings, baptisms and funerals

This has been a notably quiet year for occasional offices. We celebrated one wedding in May and have had no baptisms. Weddings at Brinkburn have fallen significantly, from around 20 in 2024 to just 3 or 4 in 2025, reflecting wider changes in the wedding landscape. It is important to say, however, that we remain an excellent resource for weddings, thanks to the outstanding work Sue Inglis-Jones has developed over many years. There were four funerals at St Michael's and two others that we conducted at the Crem. This is broadly in line with recent years. We continue to provide pastoral support for those who grieve. Looking ahead, we plan to promote our occasional offices more intentionally in early 2026. These ministries are a vital part of parish life, and I am determined that baptisms and weddings remain central to our mission.

Rev Rich Townend

Food and Fun with Toddlly Play

Food and Fun has had a very successful year, continuing to provide invaluable opportunity for 0-4 year-olds and their parents/carers from the local area to enter church, where they are greeted by a wonderful team of volunteers to share experiences and build friendships. We meet most Thursdays in term time 9am-11am in the community room where food, drink and many toys are on offer.

During Food and Fun, Toddlly Play takes place. Toddlly Play is an act of worship designed for young children and their parent/carer. Each half term we look at a theme linked to the bible and each week we explore an idea linked to the theme through sharing a story, song, prayers and engaging in play together. Toddlly Play in Food and Fun has increased this year from one to two sessions each week due to high numbers. This has enabled a better quality of experience for both children and adults where it is easier to see, hear and play with toys on offer due to children and parents only attending one of the two and therefore each session being smaller in number.

In the run up to Easter 2025, Pumpkin Pie were invited to come to St Michaels on a Wednesday for 6 weeks to experience Toddlly Play as they had been showing interest in Food and Fun but due to us being so busy we were unable to accommodate. 16 pre-school children and two leaders attended St Michael's each week, learning about new life, spring and the story of Easter and receiving a book as a gift at the end of the 6 weeks. The links the children made between St Micheal's and Pumpkin Pie was fascinating, largely due to Pumpkin Pie being based in an old church. They recognised similar features such as the stained glass, asked about unfamiliar features such as the altar and had huge questions about God, asking where God is? and sharing how they had encountered God. The success of this outreach work, the positive feedback from Pumpkin Pie and the children's parents

plus several encounters at local fairs in the summer encouraged the continuation of this partnership.

In September 2025 Toddly Play for Pumpkin Pie began as a regular part of St Michael's outreach where 10 pre-school children and two leaders come to St Michael's every Thursday at 11.15am, following Food and Fun, to take part in Toddly Play.

Also in September 2025, Toddly Play at Whittingham launched as part of St Michael's outreach and in partnership with Whittingham CofE Primary School. Each Wednesday the nursery children from the school and their teacher, along with parents/carers and children from the community come to St Bartholomew's Church to take part in Toddly Play. It has been wonderful to offer provision for children and their families in church and builds greater links between the community, church and school.

Emma Townend

Messy Church (0 to Year 6 Primary)

2025, has been another really good year as a Messy Church team. We have held Messy Church sessions on the first Sunday of the month. It is great to see families coming along, with mixed ages of children from babies up to teenagers. Some new, some coming regularly each month and some right from our first session in 2022. But we always welcome new families, grandparents, and carers. Most of the families are from our local area but some do travel from further away. It is good to see some families also coming along to Food and Fun and Sunday mornings too, helping us to truly get to know them and walk alongside them in a faith journey.

We have painted pictures, baked bread, glittered and glued everything, as we have discussed and explored, many bible stories and themes, such as the wedding at Cana, creation and God's love, through very messy activities and games !!!

Many thanks to all those involved in making Messy Church happen. From the initial planning group of Tom, Kathy, Rich, Emma and Sue, to those who come and help in the kitchen, the amazing team of Anne, Carol and Shelia, my wonderful bakers, Christine and Anthea and everyone who has just come along and pitched in to help with the crafts and activities and teas on the day, we really could not do it without you and appreciate you all. If anyone would like to join us as a family or helper, please see Sue IJ or Julia Butlin, everyone is welcome. Thank you all.

Julia Butlin

Schools

Our links with our local schools remain a vital and fruitful part of our ministry, offering regular opportunities to share the Christian faith with children and families in our communities. At Felton, I lead weekly Collective Worship on a Tuesday morning, exploring Bible stories through storytelling, reflection and song. These gatherings are a real joy, and it is encouraging to see how engaged the children are. Alongside this, a larger team visits the school several times each term to deliver Open the Book, bringing scripture to life in creative and memorable ways.

One of the highlights of the year has been the presentation of Bibles to all children in Key Stage 2—an ambitious and generous project which was wonderfully supported by the church and wider community. The school also joins us in church for key moments in the year, including Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Leavers' services, which continue to be important occasions for connection and witness.

There are strong and growing links between our work in school and initiatives such as Food and Fun and Messy Church, helping to build relationships beyond the classroom. I also continue to serve as a school governor, with a particular responsibility for RE and SIAMS.

At Swarland, Open the Book continues, and Collective Worship is shared on a rota with Ed Butlin and Angela Feather from the URC. There is good partnership here, and we look forward to developing these links further in the coming year.

Rev Rich Townend

Young People – IGNITE Rooted (Year 3 to Year 13 Secondary)

Ignite is the charity based in Northumberland that St Michaels is linked with to offer children's and youth groups which are called 'Rooted Groups'. They run across the ages from Year 3 to Year 13 meeting in Alnwick on different weeknights. A number of children from St Michael's attend these groups. I am one of the trustees and during 2025 Rev Rich also joined as a trustee.

2025 was a big year of change for Ignite as a charity because Jessica McArdle needed to resign for personal reasons and this meant that the paid staff went from 3 to 1 in a short space of time and projects had to be reviewed and scaled back accordingly. This meant that for a period the older groups have not been able to meet. St Michaels stopped the partnership arrangement that had been in place and have moved to a different model of support.

The younger Rooted groups (Years 3-6 and 4-7) have continued to meet through the year at Alnwick Baptist Church on a Thursday and their activities, crafts and stories have focussed on the life of Moses as well as learning from the testimony of current public Christian figures. Work by the trustees continued to put in place the leaders to be able to restart an older group. The plans for 2026 are to recruit a youth worker and the fundraising and preparations for this are underway.

Sue Inglis-Jones

Serving Our Community

Community outreach remains a central priority at St Michael's, Felton. We seek to be a visible, generous and welcoming presence, creating opportunities for people to gather, belong and encounter something of the life of the church.

Our senior lunches are a key expression of this. Held twice a year in April and November, these are a significant undertaking, funded by the church and made possible through the commitment of a dedicated team of volunteers. Each lunch welcomes around seventy to eighty guests and offers far more than a meal—it is a space for friendship, care and connection. For many who attend, it is a much-valued occasion that helps to combat isolation and build lasting relationships.

We have also played an active role in the Felton and Swarland Fairs. Through our church tent, we provided Godly Play and toddler sessions, alongside games and activities for children. A consistent piece of feedback is how much this is appreciated, particularly the fact that everything is offered freely. This simple generosity speaks powerfully, helping people to experience the church as open, accessible and for everyone.

Our church building continues to serve the wider community as a venue for concerts and events. Over the past year, we have hosted performances by Giulio Tampalini, the Bridge Singers and the Coquet Concert Band. These have been well attended and contribute to the cultural life of the village, while also creating natural points of connection between church and community. In all of this, our aim is simple: to serve with generosity, build relationships, and reflect the love of Christ in ways that are both practical and visible.

Rev. Rich Townend

Community Teas

This is a happy occasion for members of the community and the hard-working team. We meet in the village hall in Felton on the last Tuesday of the month, come rain or shine. The folk who come enjoy a very good spread of cakes, breads, scones and other treats. Many thanks to Debra for her organisational skills and to the team. We would love more volunteers, do contact Debra or me if you feel you could offer help even on an occasional basis. The Christmas Tea is always a big hit! We welcomed the children from Felton School to sing carols again last year; we loved having them with us. Sadly, we have had to say goodbye to some faithful members, either because they have moved away or died. They are greatly missed.

Rev Gabby Llewelyn

Home Groups

Around the Table

Each Wednesday morning in term time, we meet with our Bibles and a cuppa, and with the expectations of hearing God and being in His presence and we are never disappointed. We continue to follow the ancient form of Sacred Reading, Lectio Divina. This has brought each one of us into a deeper understanding of God's Word, his people and how they reacted to him.

In January 2025 we started to trace the genealogy of Jesus down the female line following the story of the Old Testament through the narratives of the women. Women of Genesis - Eve, Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Tamar; Women of Exodus - Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Zipporah, Miriam.

Using Nana Dolce's book 'The Seed of the Woman' as a weekly background reading along with the corresponding Bible passages, we have found it so enlightening to step into scripture with these women and see how God used them to show us Jesus, the promised Seed of the Woman. Some of the women we have studied are less known, who at first seem insignificant, flawed and often misguided and yet have held pivotal, often heroic rolls, preserving God's redemptive plan giving birth to a Messianic hope.

We have fun and lots of laughter in our discussions as we step in and out of the lives of the amazing characters we meet and the situations, they find themselves in. In fact, Scripture comes to life through them. Most members of 'Around the Table' are also involved in Food & Fun, Messy Church and Godly Play.

Liz Scurfield

Courageous Women

Deuteronomy 31:6 reminds us to: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Throughout the Bible we read of women who have lived by faith and who have acted with great strength and courage. They are practical and inspirational and have often helped to alter the course of history. These women are our inspiration.

As Courageous Women we want our faith to be real. We want to act boldly. We aim to get to know Jesus more and follow the teaching of the Bible. Each week we delve deeply into God's Word and consider how to apply this teaching in our lives.

Throughout the year we have covered the following topics: fear, belonging; and facing opposition. Along with the other house groups we studied the first 12 chapters in Exodus during the autumn. Currently we are learning about the seven deadly sins, by following a series of teaching from St Aldate's in Oxford.

As well as supporting one another, during the year we have been involved with the wider Christian community by providing refreshments for Alpha in Wooler, and for praying for every member of our congregation and each church group.

Each one of us hopes that we are growing more like Jesus each week and we want to be true Courageous Women. Our constant prayer is this:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your promise to be with us wherever we go. When we are tempted to doubt and fear, help us remember that You are with us. In light of this promise, may we be strong and courageous no matter what we face. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Eileen Ferguson

Riverside Homegroup & ALPHA

The Riverside homegroup continues to meet Monday evenings (7:30-9:30pm) at the home of Mark and Christine Daniel - 16 Riverside, Felton. The values and purpose is to build friendships, grow healthy spiritual lives, pray and do life together.

At the beginning of 2025 we ran an Alpha Course plus a homegroup, who looked at the lives of Saul and David. The Alpha Course finished at Easter and some group members continued to meet and study the Sermon on the Mount until the summer break.

By the summer we had 12-15 regular attendees, so we decided to split into two, incorporating those who wanted to continue from the Alpha + group. After consultation with everyone we birthed a new group in September. The two groups (one led by Mark and the other by Christine) studied Moses and the story of Exodus.

Others have joined and there are 23 members in the homegroup WhatsApp channel, in practice regular attendance is 12-18 folk across the two groups. Interestingly 25% of members are women, 75% men. Now that both groups have 'settled down', we are encouraging group members to step up and share the responsibility for leading the studies.

We also enjoyed regular social get togethers either in our home or at the Northumberland Arms through the year.

Highlights (from Christine and Mark)

- Doing Alpha – all homegroup members helped out with this, one way or the other.
- Four men are now in accountability / prayer communities, outside of the homegroup.
- A good number of group members have got involved supporting the work of St Michael's. (Worship, welcoming, teas & coffees, cleaning, AV etc.)

Four men are either exploring or committed to helping out at the local prison (either Gardening or with Prison Fellowship).

Mark and Christine Daniel

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

The 20s–40s is a small group. The group began with seven original members, offering an opportunity to connect those of a similar age and stage in this rural community. However, the group has experienced significant growth with 17 members on the WhatsApp group, although more than half of these members attend only occasionally. We meet weekly on a Sunday evening, share food and study a passage of the Bible. Through this we support each other in fellowship. Our focus has been on reading books that we are often unfamiliar with (such as some of the minor prophets) and books we are familiar with. We recently finished reading through Mark. Our Bible study emphasises working through the text as a group, beginning with three prompt questions: "What is the basic structure of the passage?", "what stands out to us?" and "is there anything uncomfortable or difficult to understand?" The group continues to be involved in organising the 5 o'clock service.

Lizzy Hepper and Sam Driver

Coffee Plus

Coffee Plus started up again after a break, in May 2025. It meets on a Thursday morning, and we have a time of chat and feasting on cakes and other goodies with coffee. We move on to a time of reflection and encouragement. We have looked at Exodus, psalms and bible characters. The group has settled well, there are 9 of us now, and some of us are rather frail having been on the journey for a long time.

Rev Gabby Llewelyn

Cornerstone

Cornerstone is primarily a fellowship / social group for men where all are welcome. We have met throughout the year, often in the games room at Acton House and enjoy time together starting with prayers and discussion then enjoy fellowship by playing, for example table football, table tennis or board games in an informal setting. We also enjoyed several ad hoc meetings, and all got together for a Christmas meal at the Northumberland Arms.

Occasionally we have had sessions of Bible study during the course of the year. Other get togethers are welcomed including walks together and we simply put our suggestions on the WhatsApp meaning anyone can join in that wants to, including non-church members as well. We let the group know what is going on via a WhatsApp group, anyone who wants to join please contact Nigel Marsh, Tristan Hepper or myself.

Alan Ferguson

Mission Partners

The motive for identifying mission partners has been to help us look beyond our local church and community and into the wider world. The PCC have previously sought to adopt three charities: international, national and a local initiative for a term of three years. The PCC commit to send each identified partner an annual gift of £1.000 from general funds to develop and grow their respective objectives.

Our current international partner is **R.E.A.P.** – Restoration of Educational Advancement Programs. This multi-disciplinary project is based in a rural location, about an hour's drive from Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia in West Africa. From a simple well-meaning Vision of its founder, Christine Tolbert Norman, following the end of the devastating Civil War in 2003, it has gradually become a modern flourishing enterprise. Our modest contribution is gratefully received and benefits students from 3 to 18 years old. A free comprehensive educational programme is provided to about 90 of the youngest and poorest local children. Those approaching High-school age learn relevant skills and get new training opportunities - including construction, aquaponics, fish-farming and catering qualifications.

Our Local partner, since 2025 is - **The Oswin Project** – is based at HMP Northumberland, Acklington. 'The Oswin Project: Impact Report' produced recently, outlines developments in their work. A new 'pie making factory' within HMP Northumberland is being set up and two further pie making machines have been purchased in preparation of future expansion, this offers further opportunity for meaningful activity for more men. With a 'canny eye' for opportunism, they now have a site-cabin, serving home-baked hot and cold food to the many Kier construction workers currently employed to build a new wing.

The Farm Shop and the Cycle Repair shop are both well-established outlets. The number of *Oswinners* across mentoring, volunteering, training and employment now stands at 386, an increase of 228 (68%) from 2024.

The Oswin Project has expanded its work with women looking for mentoring support. This is a significant area of need. Whereas the women prisoner numbers are a fraction of their male counterparts, women face specific challenges around mental health and self-harm.

St Michael's also supports the Alnwick based Christian charity **IGNITE**. Ignite has a strong focus on youth and schools work and believes young people should be encouraged to think about spiritual matters while recognising that they need the space to make their own choices as to what to believe. It seeks to raise the aspirations of young people and facilitate their healthy and full development and to help young people become active in the community and develop into mature and responsible citizens. Ignite, has a small professional staff, but is supported by many committed volunteers including local church leaders, young leaders, parents and grandparents including the team from St Michael's delivering Open The Book and assemblies at Felton Primary School and parents helping with Ignite's Rooted Youth Groups. Rev. Rich and Sue Inglis-Jones are both Trustees.

Neil Collin Mission Partner Co-ordinator

Environment & Sustainability

The PCC adopted a church Ecosystems Policy several years ago and is also a member of the Alnwick Deanery Environment Group although we do not currently have a regular representative. We continue to follow the A Rocha Eco Church framework having received accreditation at the Bronze Level. Although we have continued to be mindful of our environment and made improvements in the Churchyard, we have not sought accreditation at the Silver Level until such time as we complete further improvements regarding our space heating.

Having installed a new boiler and remote heating controls in 2023 we are continuing to explore how we can improve the level of comfort in both the Community Room and Chancel whilst also reducing the costs of local heating for short meetings and times of Worship.

We have recently completed a much-needed full electrical wiring inspection and improvement programme. We can now develop proposals for the installation of additional local heating solutions (based on Infra-Red technology). It is hoped that we can make significant progress on this before the next heating season, but this is dependent on accessing external grants. Our current grid electricity supply continues to be from renewable sources as a part of our commitment to the environment.

Nigel Marsh

Church Cleaning & Churchyard

Church Cleaning

For many years, the church has been cleaned by a loyal team of volunteers. The PCC decided to move away from this model and appoint a cleaner for the weekly clean. A new cleaner started in April but due to ill health had to stop working, so we reverted to our volunteers again to keep the church clean over the Spring and Summer. Our thanks to those of the church community who once again stepped up to help whilst the search continued for a new cleaner. We were pleased to take on Gemma Howard who has been with us since September. Gemma cleans on a Monday or Tuesday after 4pm.

The PCC would like to thank all those who have offered their help over the years and continue to do so after services, food and fun and special events. A two hourly clean helps us keep on top of the regular cleaning, but for the major cleaning of the windows or ladder only areas, a professional agency will be used for occasional cleans. The brass and silver ware, communion linen and kitchen towels, are still cleaned by volunteers. We are all most grateful for this discreet but most essential service for our church.

Churchyard

The main theme of the last year has been to keep the churchyard tidy but reduce the workload. The churchyard garden has been looked after by volunteers and won awards in recognition of the beauty of the spring bulbs and summer flowers. Those who have so kindly given their time over the years felt they could no longer offer a commitment, so the aim has been to reduce the number of borders that require weeding, and enlist the grass cutting services of the Council to maintain the areas at the front and back of the church. The short border leading from the small gate has been reduced to include only lavender, and the aim is to completely remove the border along the long pathway to the wide gate. This border has offered a glorious display, but the weeds have now taken root and so the decision has been taken to turf this over. Jane Skelton continues to maintain the curbed gravestones which creates a beautiful display of alpines for visitors to enjoy. Our thanks to John Holmes for keeping an eye on the moles and doing the edging along the long path. The border along the south facing wall of the church is to be retained as the roses only require an annual prune.

As the Oswin Project is one of St Michael's Mission Partners this year, the PCC thought it appropriate to approach them to undertake some heavier duty garden maintenance in the churchyard. Their team of three workers plus a supervisor came in for two days and cleared much of the ivy off the remaining section of wall along the lane, and many of the gravestones. There is now much greater definition and clarity on these historic structures, enabling the many summer visitors to the churchyard to enjoy a walk around the cleared pathways taking in much of the history of Felton contained in the inscriptions which have been hidden for so long. The historic yew tree avenue has had a tidy up, but two trees at the far end are dead. The PCC will need to consult with the Council tree surgeon on the removal of these dead trees. As the area is very boggy, a more suitable trees for wet conditions should be considered.

The churchyard at St Michael's continues to be a haven for wildlife, and a greatly appreciated local resource for the community and many summer visitors who stroll in off the nearby St Oswald's Way or who just choose to sit on a bench and enjoy the peace and quiet. Our thanks go out to everyone who volunteers and cares for this precious resource.

Moyra Horseman

Deanery Synod Report

We continue to work within the Diocesan ethos of “Seeking, Sharing, Sending” and Deanery Synod continues to be the principal link between parishes, the Diocese and the Central Church. Parishes are encouraged to elect Deanery Synod reps at their annual APCMs and participate as fully as possible in Deanery discussions and events to maximise the free flow of information and opinion throughout the church hierarchy. The Deanery Development Group (DDG), an elected subcommittee, organises Synod meetings and discusses matters relating to Deanery resources, sharing ideas and good practice, interparish cooperation, staffing etc with our Archdeacon as do the other Deaneries in our Diocese. The Area Dean and I would like to see every Parish represented on the DDG and contributing to its decisions. Sharing ideas and good practice has been a feature of Deanery Synod in recent years and this has been helped by the friendly cooperation of the Parish Representatives who attend our meetings.

During 2025 Alnwick Deanery Synod met 3 times. On 25th January at Lesbury village hall we had an update on our deanery development plan: we are seeing closer working relationships between our parishes, schools work remains a priority and we are exploring ways to build on the foundations we have, a governance group is looking to streamline processes. Sal Howard from Alnwick parish was elected as a Lay Diocesan Synod member for us. We received a report on 2024’s Parish Share contributions. Thanks were given to all parishes who managed to meet their offered amounts. Alnwick Deanery paid 99% of what had been pledged. This Synod took place in the wake of the Makin report on Safeguarding. We await action from General Synod. In Alnwick Deanery we have a great team of PSOs and we noted that the Diocesan team was undergoing major change consequently we were awaiting the new appointments to deal with existing issues including outstanding training sessions.

On 16th September Synod convened at St Mary’s Longframlington. We welcomed Roger Styring Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). Roger spoke about the work of the DAC and how it can work with parishes to look at work on church buildings and helping with advice and guidance on the faculty process. He strongly encouraged parishes to talk to the DAC Secretary as early as possible, even before any architect is approached. DAC advice is free. Enjoy the value of the free advice available before any money is spent. Our deanery is committed to sustaining our buildings and there is more and more information and advice becoming available from the Diocese and the wider church. This includes information about the availability of and access to grants. Involvement in Deanery events will help to keep you informed and updated and offers obvious opportunities to benefit from the experiences of other churches in our Deanery.

On 8th November Synod met again at St Mary’s Longframlington. We discussed “Seeking, Sharing, Sending” and as the year of Sharing is beginning we talked especially about new worshipping communities and nurturing new disciples. We also shared information and ideas about initiatives in our various parishes (some newer than others), including Amble Café Church now in its 10th year, Third Thursday in Chevington and Toddly Play in Felton.

Deanery services

In addition to Synod meetings we have continued with our monthly Deanery Evensong services which have moved around the Deanery. Generally these services have been quite well attended. Hospitality was offered at most venues and our thanks to those choirs who performed for us. These services will continue in 2026.

Deanery Environment Group

It is good to report that this group, convened by rev Gilly Maude continues to promote environmental awareness from global to local level. Meeting largely on Zoom, the group works to encourage initiatives in churches and churchyards, sharing good ideas and good practice, including aspiring to the A Rocha Awards.

The group led a Deanery Service which was very well attended, and helps us all keep our minds focussed on the climate crisis, raising awareness and encouraging parishes to do what we can to make local improvements, incorporated into our life together as churches as well as individually.

Deanery Development Group (DDG)

The Deanery Development Group (DDG) which consists of the deanery clergy and lay representatives from across the deanery met regularly to plan for Synod meetings and to discuss the deanery development plan. Archdeacon Catherine Sourbut - Groves and the Diocesan Mission Adviser attended a meeting at mid-year..

The Diocese also organises a number of DDG catch-up days, meeting twice in Morpeth early and late in the year with a celebration Eucharist at the Cathedral in July. DDG members from every Deanery in the Diocese, our Archdeacons and other members of the Bishop's senior team meet to discuss wider issues covering deanery matters. In 2025 we had meetings looking at youth work and new worshipping communities. It is inspiring and encouraging to have contributions from parishes sharing good news or new developments in mission.

Welcomes and Goodbyes

In July 2025 Amble and Chevington parishes welcomed Rev Rachael Dines as priest in charge. For Amble this came after 18 months of vacancy, Chivington's vacancy was a "little" (considerably) longer, but both parishes are happy to have Rachael with them and are working together even more closely. We also welcomed Rev Fran Bell who is serving her curacy in Alnwick parish.

At the end of 2025 we had to say farewell to Rev Nathanael Hayler as he completed his curacy in the Coastland parishes and moved on to become Rector of parishes in the Diocese of Chichester. We wish him well and pray that he will be blessed in this new phase of his ministry.

We also thanked Jo Chillingworth for her time as our Deanery Finance Officer.

The Upper Coquetdale Parish remains vacant still. Advertisements continue with an improved parish profile.

We are yet to appoint a new Deanery Finance Officer. This is a small but important job. It is largely a liaison role ensuring the transfer of financial information between parishes, deanery and staff at Church House. If you are interested or know of someone who might be suitable for the role please contact me or the Area Dean for an informal chat.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who has helped to make Deanery events a success this year. It seems harder each year to find people who are prepared and able to take on roles of function and responsibility at parish level and the levels above. Many volunteers are now wearing several hats and consequently have various functions to perform and meetings to attend. Incidentally, if you can't attend a meeting ask someone to attend on your behalf. It's the sensible way to keep the information flowing. Your church and the Church generally cannot function or do the good that it does without you. Your contribution is valued.

Hugh Williams Alnwick Deanery Lay Chair