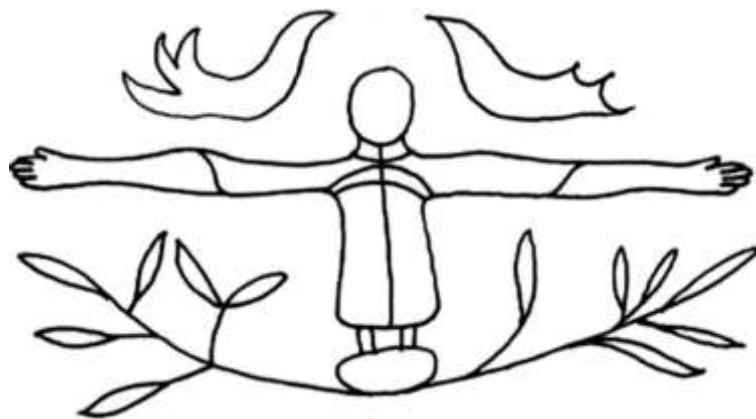


Diocese of Salisbury

The Parish Church of Saint Mary the Virgin

Gillingham, Dorset



'Open to God, Open to Gillingham'

Tuesday 28 April 2026

Agenda for the Annual Meetings
and Annual Reports for the year ending 31 December 2025

Registered Charity Number 1158272

The Annual Report for the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and Accounts for St Mary the Virgin, Gillingham.

Data Protection Notice

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) came into force in May 2018. As with all organisations, whether large businesses or small charities like ourselves, we must conform. We can advise that the only data we hold in confidence on any person within the parish is: -

- contact details that we use solely for communications with yourselves
- planned giving details that you choose to provide and held in total confidence on encrypted, password protected systems shared only with HMRC.
- contact and other details for baptisms, marriages and funerals for contact purposes and as required in law for the registers.

We do NOT share this information with any other outside bodies.

The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Gillingham
'Open to God, Open to Gillingham'

Agenda for the Annual Meetings to be held on
Tuesday, 28 April 2026, at 7:00pm in St Mary's Church

1. Welcome and opening prayers
2. Apologies

Annual Parish Meeting

1. Election of Churchwardens
2. Close of Meeting

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes of last meeting – Tuesday 25 March 2025
2. Matters Arising
3. Address and Service Times - Revd Becca McDonnell
4. Safeguarding Report
5. Elections
 - Parochial Church Council Members – 12 places, 3 available (3-year term)
 - Deanery Synod – 2 places available (for 3-year term starting from 1 July 2026)
6. Appointments
 - a. Independent Examiner
7. Reports
 - a. Electoral Roll Report
 - b. Presentation of the Annual Report
 - c. Presentation of the Financial Report
 - d. Fabric Report
 - e. Presentation of the Inventory
 - f. Deanery Synod Report
 - h. Reports of Church Groups
8. Any Other Business

First PCC Meeting

1. Appointment of Officers
2. Date of next PCC meeting

The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Gillingham

‘Open to God, Open to Gillingham’

Minutes for the Annual Parish Meeting and the Annual Parochial Church Meeting held on Tuesday, 25 March 2025 at 7:00pm in the Vicarage School Room

Present: Revd Canon Tim Heaton (**Chair**), Sue Bailey, David Botterill, Janet Botterill, Pat Brain, Steve Butler, Meriol Cottrell, Michael Giddings, Jean Harding, Revd Anne Heywood, Alan Jeffs, Linda Jeffs, Anita Leigh, Jennifer Light, Miriam Light, Robert Light, Helen Long, Jeremy Long, Anne Marsh, Revd Colin Marsh, Eileen Piper, Sarah Snook, David Wardle, Lois Wardle, Ian Watson, Karen Watson, Kate Wickson and Tom Wickson

1. The meeting opened with a welcome from Canon Tim and a reading by Revd Anne Heywood from the Gospel of St Luke for the Feast of the Annunciation. The Lord’s Prayer was said together.
2. Apologies were received from Teresa Goatham, Anne Pike, Mary Sargent and Mike Sargent.

Minutes for the Annual Parish Meeting

1. Election of Churchwardens

Helen Long (proposed by Meriol Cottrell and seconded by Mary Sargent) and Tom Wickson (proposed by Michael Giddings and seconded by Alan Winton) were re-elected as Churchwardens. Thanks were expressed for their hard work over the past year.

2. The Meeting closed. It was followed immediately by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

Minutes for the Annual Parochial Church Meeting

1. Minutes of the last APCM - circulated prior to the meeting, the minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting held on Thursday 4 April 2024 and were signed by the Chair.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes: None

3. Address by Canon Tim

A year ago, we were full of hope. The Rector’s vacancy had been advertised for the first time and the day of our Annual Meeting happened to be the closing date for applications. As we sat here a year ago, we had no idea what was to unfold: no applicants the first time; no applicants the second time; no applicants the third time.

It has been a hard and disappointing year, but on this Feast of the Annunciation we might reflect on the importance of Mary’s “Yes” to God: it is an invitation to all of us to respond likewise.

How often does God call us to something greater? How often does he ask us to trust in his plan, even when we do not fully understand it? Just as Mary was troubled at the angel’s greeting, but ultimately trusted in God, we too are called to embrace God’s will with faith and courage.

In a world filled with uncertainties and challenges, we can learn from Mary’s example. She didn’t ask for assurance of an easy path; she simply entrusted herself to God’s providence. As has so often been said, her “Yes” changed the course of history. Likewise, our own “Yes” to God, as we seek to be the church – the community of love and fellowship in this town of Gillingham – during this long vacancy, is more important now than ever.

It is vital to maintain a strong PCC at this time, so please take note, brothers and sisters, that there are eight places on the PCC to be filled this evening: please do not be shy in coming forward to take one of those places, whether for the first time or to serve a further term of three years.

We might reflect, too, on the angels' words: Do not be afraid. When we are bewildered or feel overwhelmed, when we are anxious or fearful, it's all too easy to say "No". Perhaps we think we are not good enough, or not equipped enough, or simply not up to the challenge. Then listen out for the word of God: Do not be afraid.

The Annunciation is the story of God's quite extraordinary work among quite ordinary people. God chose a normal teenage girl living in an insignificant town in an unimportant province of the Roman Empire, and blessed her with a child out of wedlock, who would become the Saviour of the world.

Today we can be quite sure that God is working here among very ordinary people like us. So on this Feast of The Annunciation, we pray for God's continued blessing on all our work done here in his name as this vacancy continues, giving thanks for the life that we share together, with one another and with God.

Thank you for all that you are doing and please keep up the good work. Remember the words of John Lennon: "Everything will be OK in the end; if it's not OK, it's not the end."

4. Elections

Deanery Synod: 1 casual vacancy was available. Eileen Piper was elected (proposed by Anita Leigh, seconded by Anne Marsh) to serve until the next elections in 2026.

Parochial Church Council Members

The following people were re-elected to the PCC to serve a three-year term of office:

x Michael Giddings - proposed by Kate Wickson, seconded by Tom Wickson

x Alan Jeffs - proposed by Tom Wickson, seconded by Ian Watson

x Jennifer Light - proposed by Tom Wickson, seconded by Kate Wickson

x Mike Sargent - proposed by Helen Long, seconded by Kate Wickson

Also elected to the PCC to serve a three-year term of office were:

x Pat Brain - proposed by Jean Harding, seconded by Tom Wickson

x Robert Light - proposed by Sue Bailey, seconded by Kate Wickson

x Anne Marsh - proposed by Steve Butler, seconded by Revd Colin Marsh

5. Appointments

a. Independent Examiner for Accounts

With John Bartlett being unable to, thanks were given to Ian Watson for inspecting the 2024 accounts at the eleventh hour. Ian has also agreed to be the Independent Examiner for the 2025 accounts subject to it being an inspection needed and not an audit.

6. Reports

a. Electoral Roll Report

As of 31 December 2024, the number on the roll was 136. For more details, see this year's APCM booklet, page 10. A prayer was said for all those who have passed on in the last year, especially Wendy Abbott, Mervyn Biss, Jane Coles, John Smith, Tom Brain, Margaret Grant and Linley Venters.

b. Presentation of the Annual Report

The Chair, Canon Tim, presented the report. The Annual Report for 2024 begins on page 10 of this year's APCM booklet, which was circulated prior to the meeting. The Annual Report was covered in more depth as this meeting progressed. Thanks were given to everyone who contributed.

c. Presentation of the Financial Report

The Financial Report was circulated prior to the meeting and presented. The accounts for 2024 have been adopted by the PCC. **For the full report, see the booklet entitled 'Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2024'**

The Treasurer was unable to attend this evening's meeting but sent in the following:

We are changing our Santander Bank Account from 2 signatures to ONE

- this is because Bank Transfers have become particularly awkward with 2 signatures
- single signature allows on-line banking, for which safeguards have been put in place (agreed by the Standing Committee)
- the Shaftesbury branch is closing
- cash and cheque deposits will be through the Post Office (with a Santander Cash Card).

Any further questions about the report, please let Mike know.

As the PCC previously agreed, the budget for 2024 was balanced by only paying what share we could afford. There was much discussion about the Share request and the new scheme that begins in 2025. The 2025 share is based on 1.66 priests which we cannot afford. There was frustration expressed about having to pay for clergy when we are currently in an interregnum. There was disappointment that we haven't had any applicants. The feedback has been that the parish profile looks good, but there are too few clergy seeking a post and at the same time a large number of vacancies. This is a problem which has its roots in the effects of covid. The Benefice Churchwardens will be having a meeting on Thursday 27th March to discuss the parish profile.

It was commented that The Rectory isn't suitable for anyone with a family, dog or who wants a bit more privacy. Hopefully, the diocese can send someone to have a look at a convenient time in the future. It might be possible that a future incumbent will be given the choice between The Rectory and The Vicarage (Fern Brook Lane).

d. Fabric Report

The Fabric report by Tom Wickson and Helen Long is on page 13 of this year's booklet.

Updates - The Town Council is handling and paying for the churchyard wall by Rutters to be fixed. The Roof appeal has been launched and it's been a positive start. Tom thanked everyone who has donated so far. Phase 1 (smaller bundle of works) will begin on 19th May. Ellis and co. had the best bid as assessed by our architect Mr. Griffin. The next thing should be for the PCC to ask Mr. Griffin to draw up a schedule of works for Phase 2 – the chancel roof. Current estimated costs for Phase 2 is £300,000. A third of that will likely be for scaffolding alone.

The government has extended the Listed Places of Worship (LPW) Grant Scheme until 31 March 2026. We will get our claim in for phase 1 of the works, phase 2 we are unsure about. We shall be applying to all other grant bodies that we can. The Church Commissioners are liable for approximately 60% of any repairs to be done to the chancel.

There was much concern, from several people present tonight, about the dangers of the loose gravel on the paths leading up to St Mary's. It was therefore agreed that Tom Wickson would write to the Town Clerk.

e. Presentation of the Inventory

Tom Wickson reported that there have been no additions or removals from the inventory or terrier this year. Subsequently, both the log book and the terrier were signed by Canon Tim, Tom Wickson and Helen Long.

f. Deanery Synod Report

The full report by Kate Wickson is on page 13 of this year's booklet. The meetings provided a good opportunity to meet colleagues across the deanery and have great conversations about common issues.

g. Safeguarding Report

The Safeguarding report by Sarah Snook (Parish Safeguarding Officer) is on page 14 of this year's booklet. Anyone on the PCC must do basic awareness and domestic abuse training. On Friday 28th March (2pm-4pm) there will be a face-to-face training session for Basic Safeguarding with Revd

Philippa Sargent. Sarah encouraged anyone who needs to do basic awareness to come to this meeting - there is no need to book! After this, a date for face-to-face Foundation Training and Domestic Abuse with Revd Philippa will be organised. DBS checks are ongoing.

It was agreed to again adopt in full the House of Bishops Safeguarding Policy. Proposed by Tom, seconded by Helen and agreed by all. The date, email address and phone numbers on the policy poster will also be updated.

h. Reports of Church Groups

For more details about the following: Messy Church, SMTV School, Gillingham Tower (we need more bell ringers!), Friday Breakfast, the Parish Office and the VSR - please see pages 14 and 15 of this year's booklet. With Carole Blackmore's retirement coming up, it was agreed that a deadline would be set with Mike for the collection for a gift for Carole. Mike, Helen, Tom and Tim will present it to Carole. It was also suggested that a card be got and available to be signed.

7. Any Other Business

x Appointment of Welcomers

Tom thanked the current welcomers - Meriol Cottrell, Richard and Margaret Cowell, Teresa Goatham, Christine and Kathryn Joy, Jeremy Long, Bob and Val Stevens, John and Pam Trout, David and Lois Wardle. It was proposed by Tom, seconded by Helen and agreed by all to reappoint the welcomers for the next year.

x Thank Yous

Tom thanked all the clergy - Tim Heaton, Angus Mayhew, Nigel Done and retired clergy - David Botterill, Jeffrey Hall, Anne Heywood, Bernard Joy, Colin Marsh, Robin Nash, Philippa Sargent and Allen Walker. They all offer us outstanding spiritual guidance and friendship.

Tom also thanked Miriam Light (PCC Minutes Secretary), Alan Jeffs (Lay Vice-Chair of the PCC and Tower Coordinator), Mike Sargent (Treasurer), Dr Daniel Cummins (Organist), the choir, the bell ringers, and all the unsung heroes who keep the show on the road - in no special order: LPA, dusters, brass cleaners, church and VSR cleaner, Fair Linen launderer, the Sacristan, Sunday morning coffee rota, readers and intercessors and, of course, all who help with the worship and the outreach of the church – especially those who keep Eden Café going.

Finally, and most importantly, Tom thanked Carole Blackmore, the Parish Administrator who makes the parish tick. This is Carole's last APCM as she is retiring on 15th April. As a thank you to Carole, Tom proposed a letter and bunch of flowers from us all, organised by the PCC secretary or her line manager, the Hon Treasurer. This was unanimously agreed to.

x Intercessors - It was agreed that an appeal for more intercessors should go in the pew sheets after Easter. Training will be provided for anyone who wishes, and there are books that people could use.

x Fundraising - There is no current fundraising committee but it was emphasised that you don't have to be on the PCC or part of a committee to help. Janet Botterill indicated that she would like to help with fundraising for the church roof.

x Revd Colin Marsh - A big welcome and thank you to Revd Colin who has been given permission to preach by Bishop Karen.

The meeting was closed at 8:29pm by saying the Grace. It was followed immediately by the First PCC Meeting.

Minutes of the First PCC Meeting

1. Appointment of Officers

It was proposed, seconded and then agreed by all that the people listed below retain their positions:-

x Treasurer: Mike Sargent - proposed by Tom Wickson, seconded by Helen Long

x Lay Vice-Chair: Alan Jeffs - proposed by Helen Long, seconded by Sue Bailey

x PSO: Sarah Snook - proposed by Helen Long, seconded by Eileen Piper

x (Minutes) Secretary: Miriam Light - proposed by Helen Long, seconded by Tom Wickson

2. Date of next PCC meeting - Tuesday 20th May at 7:30pm probably in St Mary's, location to be confirmed via email.

The meeting was closed at 8:35pm.

Statement of Accounts year ending 31 December 2025

Please see separate booklet

Reports and Information for the 2026 Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Electoral Roll Report for APCM to be held on 28 April 2026

In March 2025 a new Church Electoral Roll was completed and the number on the Roll was 94. During 2025 one name was added and one was removed. The number on the Electoral Roll as of 31 December 2025 totalled 94.

Names added during 2025

Denise Morris

Names removed during 2025

Gary Norcott (RIP)

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2025

Administrative Information

Saint Mary the Virgin Church is situated in Queen Street, Gillingham, Dorset. It is part of the Benefice of Gillingham, Milton on Stour and Silton in the Diocese of Salisbury within the Church of England. The correspondence address is The Parish Office, Queen Street, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4DX.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC, Church Representation Rules 2020) is a charity registered with the Charity Commission.

PCC members that have served since 25 March 2025 until the date this report was approved are: -

Incumbent (Chairman): Revd Rebecca McDonnell (from 29 January 2026) (ex-officio)

Rural Dean/Associate Priest: Revd Canon Tim Heaton (ex-officio)

Churchwardens: Mrs Helen Long (elected APCM 2025)
Mr Tom Wickson (elected APCM 2025)

Deanery Synod Reps: Mrs Sarah Snook (to 30 June 2026)
Mrs Kate Wickson (to 30 June 2026)
Mrs Eileen Piper (to 30 June 2026)

Lay Vice Chair: Mr Alan Jeffs (to APCM 2028)

Treasurer: Mr Michael Sargent (to APCM 2028)

Secretary: (Minutes) Miss Miriam Light (Non PCC Member)

Elected Members: Mrs Susan Bailey (to APCM 2026)
Mrs Pat Brain (to APCM 2028)
Mr Steve Butler (to APCM 2027)
Mr Michael Giddings (to APCM 2028)

Dr Teresa Goatham (to APCM 2026)
Mrs Anita Leigh (to APCM 2027)
Miss Jennifer Light (to APCM 2028)
Mr Robert Light (to APCM 2028)
Mrs Anne Marsh (to APCM 2028)

Parish Administrator & Electoral Roll Officer: Miss Miriam Light (from 15 April 2025), previously Mrs Carole Blackmore

Gillingham Churches Together Representative: Revd Rebecca McDonnell (from 29 January 2026), previously vacant

Parish Safeguarding Officer: Mrs Sarah Snook

Aims and Purposes

Every Church of England Church has the same aim: "To promote the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical".

Structure, Governance and Management

Members of the PCC are either elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, (APCM) in accordance with Church Representation Rules, or act ex officio. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

Objectives and Activities

St. Mary's PCC as trustees have the responsibility of co-operating and working with the incumbent in the ecclesiastical parish of Gillingham, sharing in the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the Parish Church of Saint Mary the Virgin and the Vicarage School Room in Queen Street, Gillingham.

Achievements and Performance

Church Attendance

St Mary's Church was open for public worship throughout 2025 always in accordance with the guidance given by the Church of England. The average attendance for the 8am monthly service was 6. The weekly 10am Sunday attendance averaged 68 with larger congregations at festivals such as Easter and Christmas and other special occasions. The midweek communion service regularly numbers 11.

We participated fully in the civic ceremonies held in our town. We celebrated the major festivals including Advent Carol Service, Burning of Ashes on Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Eve, Remembrance Sunday, Christingle, Crib Service, Christmas Eve Service and Christmas Day.

Statistics of Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms and Confirmations

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Baptisms | 8 |
| Confirmations | 0 |
| Weddings | 0 |
| Funerals at St Mary's | 14 + 1 at St George's, Langham |
| Funerals at Crematorium | 4 |
| Burial of ashes | 5 |

Regular Services

| | | |
|--------------------|---------|----------------|
| 1st Sunday | 8:00am | Holy Communion |
| Sunday weekly | 10:00am | Holy Communion |
| Wednesday mornings | 10:30am | Holy Communion |
| Friday mornings | 9:30am | Prayer Group |
| Saturday mornings | 10:00am | Meditation |

Services were held for all significant festivals. Messy Church also met several times in 2025. St Mary's Church is open daily between 10am and 4pm for quiet prayer and reflection. On the 5th Sunday of the month, the three churches of the Benefice come together to share Holy Communion. The service takes place at either 10am (when in St Mary's, Gillingham) or 10:30am (when in St Simon & Jude, Milton on Stour or St Nicholas, Silton).

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2025

The Rector position was advertised during the year, and in September 2025 we were delighted when it was announced that the Reverend Rebecca McDonnell would be joining us as the Rector for the Benefice of Gillingham, Milton on Stour and Silton. Revd Becca's Licensing Service was held at St Mary's Church on 29 January 2026.

During the year 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 the PCC met on five occasions with the Standing Committee meeting occasionally on a casual basis. The Grow Committee, which operates as Messy Church, also continued to meet.

In February we said goodbye to our greatly valued Curate Revd Angus Mayhew who was installed as Rector of the Knowlton Circle Benefice on 12 March.

The Annual Parish and Annual Parochial Church Meetings were held on 25 March.

At the APCM in March, the House of Bishops Safeguarding Policy (Promoting a Safer Church, 2017) was again adopted in full. This can be found in full on our A Church Near You website and on St Mary's Church and VSR noticeboards.

In April, we said goodbye and a massive thank you to the amazing Carole Blackmore, who retired as our Parish Administrator after 25 years.

Our annual stewardship appeal was launched as usual on Passion Sunday and again resulted with individual increases to planned giving. However, with deaths and moves out of the area we have seen a decrease in planned giving and overall income. Pew Sheets now contain weekly Finance Bite Size pieces in order to give the congregation a better insight into the Church's financial responsibilities and how the money given is spent.

The PCC continues to manage the maintenance of the church. After the previous year's Quinquennial Inspection (May 2024), the first phase of St Mary's roof works was completed in June.

Eden Café, open twice weekly in the Vicarage School Room (VSR), enabled fellowship and service to the local community whilst at the same time contributing significantly to our fundraising. Recycling continued alongside. The VSR continued to pick up bookings and now has a dishwasher.

The meditation group continues to thrive, and meets weekly on a Saturday morning in the Vicarage School Room (VSR). Messy Church met six times in 2025, ending the year with a wonderful Christingle service in which the children's crafts were integrated into the service. The church's work with local schools continues through the work of governors, collective worship, and Open the Book.

The Key Holder List is regularly updated. Risk Assessments are routine and various policy documents are available.

FINANCE REPORT SUMMARY

Please see separate booklet.

SAFEGUARDING REPORT

This year 2025/26 has been very administrative heavy.

We had a data breach mid 2025 with our DBS providers which affected some of our 3 benefice Churches. This took a great deal of time to deal with but all was dealt with effectively.

Now we have moved to 31:8, for new DBS checks, as advised by Salisbury Safeguarding Team. This has been a very busy time with PCC's needing to agree the change and then the set up to a new Company. In January 2026 I received the login details and started slowly to apply for DBS's. Slowly as I wanted to make sure it all worked. Thankfully checks are coming back quickly and the site is easy to use.

We offered face to face training over the year for Basic and Foundation Safeguarding training which has worked very well. I am looking forward to the next year when we can ensure all members have the correct training and checks.

New posters have been issued and displayed to also show Revd Becca as a Safeguarding point of call in my absence. May I take this opportunity to welcome Revd Becca.

Safeguarding continues to be everyone's responsibility and we will work together as a benefice to put safeguarding at the heart of our mission. A mix of both practical and spiritual. As always, any questions, please do contact me, and report any concerns you have.

Sarah Snook, PSO (Parish Safeguarding Officer) 07710 890415.

FABRIC REPORT

This has been a year of good progress on maintaining the fabric of St Mary's.

The bundle of smaller works to the roofs of the nave, aisles and tower referred to in last year's report was completed by Ellis and Co in July, with a brief return by them in September to fix a few extra slates. This work had a total cost of £36,000, with £3,000 of architect's fees.

Then, before becoming too involved with the Chancel roof project, we were able to carry out some redecoration work necessitated by the previous rainwater leaks. These were completed in February 2026, so strictly outside this reporting period, but much of the preparation was carried out in 2025. The total cost was just over £13,000.

In both of these projects, the church architect, Tomas Griffin, has been a good colleague. Experience suggests that, though expensive, a professional hand in drawing up schedules of work, letting contracts, supervising contractors and achieving Faculty or List B permission is very valuable.

The second major initiative mentioned last year – the chancel roof – has not been forgotten. Ian Simpson of the Church Commissioners, who have a 60% liability for chancel repairs at St Mary's has been closely involved with Tom Griffin in scheduling the proposed works. (Note: the Commissioners' 60% responsibility is for the Chancel only, not other parts of the building. This responsibility arises for historical reasons which we do not fully understand, but which derive from arrangements made at the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539.) In November, quantity surveyors made a 3-D scan of the Chancel roof, inside and out, and subsequently Tom Griffin and a colleague made a visual survey of the whole structure to consider how the edges and corners will be finished. Mr Simpson, as the majority shareholder in this project, has kindly offered to be the primary manager, to pay invoices directly and then bill us for the 40% we shall owe.

All this has been made possible financially by the careful stewardship of our Treasurer, Mike Sargent, and by the wonderful success of our summer Roof Appeal, which raised over £40,000. Thank you again to all who contributed so generously.

In October, Gillingham Town Council arranged and paid for the restoration of the churchyard wall between Rutters office at Spring Corner and the steps by the pinch-point. The need for this has been mentioned in the two most recent Quinquennial Surveys. Also, at the time of writing (March 2026) the Town Council is almost ready to begin the resurfacing of the footpaths around the church. We are very grateful indeed for the Council's persistence in planning this project.

Finally, though not concerning the church itself, we are investigating replacing the door to the parish office, which is deteriorating in condition and is hard to open, close and lock.

Tom Wickson and Helen Long, Churchwardens

DEANERY SYNOD REPORT

I attended the January meeting in 2025 and then was unable to make the meetings in May and September as we were away. The topic for the May sessions was Grants, led by Anna Hardy, and at the September meeting Net Zero.

In January 2025 we were hoping to have a meeting with members of the DAC committee, who could explain to us why the Faculty process takes so long. However, it transpired nobody was available despite Tim Heaton having booked the session many months before. We were offered as a replacement advice on how to process a faculty from a churchwarden. She was very confident about how easy the process was, but did not convince the meeting at all. It was a contentious meeting that led to a vote of no confidence in the faculty process as currently offered us by the diocese.

So, we were very pleased that this January (2026) we had a meeting with DAC members, namely Dan Crooke Dan Crooke, Diocesan Lead for Net Zero, Secretary to the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) and Team Leader; and with Canon Jonathan Triffitt, Deputy Diocesan Secretary, Director of Ministry and Mission, and Bishop's Missioner. They were very keen to reassure us that the diocese had heard our complaint and lack of trust in the process, and were doing their very best to speed things up and to streamline the cumbersome process. They did go some way towards reassuring us that the diocese was well aware of the difficulties the faculty system creates for loyal churchwardens, struggling to repair and maintain the many churches around Dorset.

Many thanks to Tim Heaton our Rural Dean for offering us a forum to discuss some crucial issues.

Kate Wickson, Deanery Synod Representative

MESSY CHURCH REPORT

Despite lower numbers, we decided to keep going with messy church this year and to maintain this offering for families, particularly those with young children. We also welcome our great supporter Jennifer Light and her friends, who enjoy the craft activities and the simple acts of worship and singing that we present, and of course, the delicious tea.

We have done six sessions over the year picking up on the themes of Easter, Pentecost harvest, special memories at Remembrance Sunday and finally Christingle in December. As with last year, this last was presented as a service in the church with craft activities preceding the service - the worship element. This worked really well, attracting a wide audience from older folk to young children who all very much enjoyed it. We follow the session with refreshments in the church and now we are used to this format we can manage it much more smoothly.

Great thanks go to the wonderful team who help and support messy church: Lea Root, Anne Marsh, Meriol Cottrell, Pam Trout and Anita Leigh. They are a lovely team to work with, always enthusiastic and positive and endlessly coming up with very creative and inventive craft ideas.

And finally, many thanks to Anne Heywood for her lovely worship sessions. Who would believe a riff on her favourite meal to make for friends could lead to such a fascinating conversation on food memories with a Polish grandmother.

Kate Wickson

ST MARY THE VIRGIN (SMTV) SCHOOL REPORT

At the end of the school year 2025, I retired as Foundation Governor having completed my 12 years. It has been a real pleasure to work with the school and I feel I've got to know both the staff and the children and the kind of work they do very well over the years.

At the end of this year Jen Williamson will be retiring as head of the school. She is moving on to work with her husband in his business as she feels she has given all she has to give to teaching.

The school continues to thrive and I am sure will continue to do so under a new head. Our links with the school have been strengthened by Becca's arrival and the opportunity for a more regular worship leader in their collective worship sessions. But many thanks go to Jessica Pitman who has led worship and been involved with the school over the last year.

Open The Book continues to work very well with the school. We are able to send a team in every week and are all getting used to the new material from the Bible Society. It is often written for an older age group than the young cohort that we see, but our team is experienced enough to manage to adapt it to their needs.

We all enjoy being able to include the children in the sessions with actions or as readers. We present the sessions in the school hall with a welcoming song to begin and a prayer and another song to finish. It is very much part of the worship life of the school.

Kate Wickson

GILLINGHAM TOWER REPORT

There are eight regular service ringers in the team ringing for the weekly Sunday morning service, plus regular support from a member of a neighbouring tower, and visitors at our Monday night practice. One of our more elderly ringers decided it was time to retire from ringing at the end of the year.

The 'tunes' we manage to ring (which in bell ringing terms we call 'methods') are based on mathematical rules. Following the welcome addition of two experienced ringers who have moved to Gillingham, we are again moving back to regularly ringing more varied methods.

In August, the tenor clapper broke and a new clapper was made and fitted by Nicholsons of Bridport. Routine Maintenance/greasing of the bells was carried out by the kind help of Tim and Jeremy from Kington Magna, who also removed the broken clapper and crown staple fitting. The 'tenor' bell is the heaviest of the ring.

We would welcome one or two new recruits, and if you feel you know someone who would be interested, please tell them they can contact me to make arrangements to see us ringing.

Alan Jeffs, Ringing Coordinator

CHRISTIAN AID REPORT

No special events were held during the year, but we encouraged support for Christian Aid in CA Week in May. As most of those donating now do so online and in 2025 it was not possible to do so via a link that showed the support came from this church, we don't know how much this raised. The few envelopes returned for Christian Aid week raised £65 (plus some gift aid). We also encouraged giving to the 'No crib for a bed' appeal in Advent, to support those living in the difficult and violent conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Teresa Goatham

FRIDAY PRAYER GROUP

This takes place 09:30-10:00 in church and has become a weekly fixture. A small group of us gather. Topics include current world events, the work of our Benefice and other churches in town, prayer requests left on the tree, people named on the pew sheet, needs in Gillingham and more. Started when we were searching for a new Rector, and so pleased to see Becca in place now! All are welcome to this friendly supportive group.

Helen Long

LENT COURSE: JOURNEYS & RESTING PLACES

Useful to have more of an overview of 6 of the significant journeys in the Old and New Testaments. 20 people signed up for this and we had about 13 attend each of the 6 sessions. Thanks to Tim Heaton for such an interesting study. The questions were searching and tackled some difficult topics.

Helen Long

PARISH OFFICE REPORT

After 25 years our brilliant Parish Administrator Mrs Carole Blackmore retired in April 2025. Having shadowed and learnt from Carole, Miss Miriam Light took over and now looks after the whole benefice dealing with all day-to-day enquiries, arranging weddings, funerals, baptisms, taking VSR bookings, liaising with all elected parish officers, organising and printing the weekly pew sheets, and keeping the administration in good order. There is also a pastoral element to her role in the office in listening to and dealing with parishioners' queries and supporting the clergy.

THE VICARAGE SCHOOL ROOM (VSR) REPORT

Our church hall is a community hub. Gillingham Repair Café, country dancing, pilates, the local community cinema, and our community café, Eden café, and Board Games Afternoon run from this building. Occasional events include art and craft events, various fundraising pop-ups, and it is also popular for hire for private functions when there is a free slot. It is the place where St Mary's congregation gather for coffee after Sunday morning Eucharist.