**St Andrew’s Church APCM 2025 – Vicar’s report**

This is my tenth annual report. It comes in a year in which I have been absent on study leave – extended ministerial leave to give it its proper name – for a quarter of the time the report covers. That was a great blessing to Lizzie and me, and we are hugely grateful to the wardens and PCC for supporting us in taking this time away, and to everyone who stepped up so well to provide services and keep the church running over Christmas and the whole period of our absence. We have real strength in depth in St Andrew’s, which is great.

My leave also a chance for Lucinda Howard to take the lead in terms of our services and spiritually, and she did so brilliantly. At some point later this year Lucinda will move on as her curacy draws to a close. She has now been ’signed off’ by Bishop Dagmar as having successfully completed all aspects of curacy. We expected that to take place without problems, but it is always good when it does! We will really miss Lucinda. She is a great colleague in lots of ways, with a very wide range of gifts, and I have enjoyed and continue to enjoy working with her. Matt Lewis will be our new curate, arriving in the summer. He and Lucinda will overlap for a bit.

In these reports my habit has been to review the good things that happened in the previous year, to look honestly at some of the difficulties we have – I think that is important – and to look a little to the future. I am going to do the same again this year.

So, 2024 and the start of 2025. In a nutshell, the Lord was worshipped and the good news was spread.

Starting outside Sunday worship, JOY and Little Fishes continue to flourish. Romie Ridley and Lucinda lead JOY, and Fiona Holliday and Lucinda lead Little Fishes. As you know, both of these events have avoided falling into the trap of just being social affairs. It is important that they are that, for it is part of our remit simply to show love to our community. But in each of them, and in pretty well everything we do, the good news of Christ is explained, drop by drop, week on week. Every cup of water we provide is, as it were, done in his name, not for our own satisfaction or glory. That is our missional ethos.

And that ethos is, I think, gradually paying off. There are increasing links between Little Fishes and church attendance, and, I think, likewise with JOY.

Our pastoral care is also going well. There is now a strong team in place, very well led by Romie, which really looks out well for members of the congregation. I am grateful to them for all their efforts. There are, however, real opportunities to expand it – our follow up of funerals and baptisms is not all that full, for example, and Strawberry Fields is going to need pastoral attention soon – but we need more personnel if we are going to expand our care outwards. We should see our pastoral care efforts as directed both inwards, which we do well, and outwards. The outwards aspiration is there, and the success of JOY is its first outworking, but it is going to be difficult to expand it to cover those other things without more volunteers.

Turning to Sunday things, our year was shaped, as ever, in two ways. Firstly, we celebrate all the major festivals with appropriate services, trying to involve the whole spread of our congregation as best we can. We don’t always get it right, and not everything is always to everyone’s liking, but this year we seem to have managed to bounce along fruitfully.

And secondly we have, in gaps between the festivals, planned sermon series. My view, which I am sure is apparent by now, is that slavish adherence to the lectionary, and using only it as the determinant of our readings and themes, is a really bad idea. When we do have episodes of using just the lectionary – which we have had more of this year that in recent years – I am always struck by just how badly it is constructed, and how much violence it does to the biblical author’s intentions. The reality is that any church that uses only the lectionary never gets a full grasp on biblical narratives or biblical lines of argument or the full impact of the author’s intended teaching.

So from time to time we have other series, either direct from the bible or using something else as a way in to biblical themes. In 2024 we had a wonderful series on four of George Herbert’s poems, looking at essential themes of judgment, love and redemption. Then over Lent we used Rowan Williams’ book *Being Christian* to explore church teaching on baptism, the eucharist, the bible and prayer. These two series were maybe our surprise successes of the year. They felt really fruitful. I suppose they were back to biblical basics in a way, and that is something we should do from time to time, using whatever resources are suitable. We the returned to passage by passage bible teaching with a series on the first half of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, and with our summer series on the life of Joseph. That was great fun, and showed how worthwhile it can be to return to those stories that we might know well from our childhoods. There is a great deal to learn from them.

And a heads up to what is coming the rest of this year: after Trinity we will return to the book of Acts for Paul’s first missionary journey, the summer series will be on the life of Moses, and in the Autumn we will look at the next part of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

And we had all the usual things that go to make up the life of St Andrew’s: lovely celebrations of our two mission links, parties, baptisms, weddings and funerals, some wonderful music, involvement in the Village Weekend and more. As I have been glad to say in previous years, it was again a good year in lots of ways. The Lord was worshipped, the Word was preached, the sacraments were celebrated and we had enormous fun for all ages all the while.

None of this could have taken place without a huge amount of work from lots of people. I have already mentioned Fiona, Lucinda and Romie. We owe them a lot.

Among her other hats, Romie, of course, is also an assistant churchwarden. Margaret Hebden is our other assistant warden. They both work tirelessly in helping organise services and entertainments and catering. I am grateful to them both for their work in that role, but I think it may be time to reinvent an Events Committee to take some of the burden. It rather died a death in the pandemic.

And I continue to be very thankful for Alastair MacGregor, who once again has been our sole churchwarden. We should have had two. Alastair’s kindness to me and his work for the whole church is outstanding. He is willing to serve again, which is great for us, though it masks a background problem that we do not have enough volunteers for these church leadership roles. It is not that others, for example our assistant wardens or others who get the working of the church, are not willing to step up to the warden role, it is that those who are willing are already doing other vital things. So we are a bit stuck, and this is going to come back to bite us as a church if we don’t have more volunteers coming through. So, pick something small and manageable and start there! It is a great way to give something back and to get involved.

A few more mentions, albeit at the risk of missing others out who I should have thanked. Stephen Brown’s tenure as chair of the Fabric Committee ended in December 2024. He did a good and very productive and orderly stint and we are better off for his care and attention. Kirsty Campbell is gradually getting her feet under that table. I am very grateful to them both.

The fabric side of things has sprouted a side-branch, our *Vision* project for the church building. This is a project that has been partly brought about by the need to replace our heating and re-plaster our ceiling. We have also been talking for years about the possibility of replacing the pews. I know full well that there are pros and cons, and that there are very strong feelings around that issue. And we have problems with storage – not enough of it – a poor kitchen and toilet, and difficult access into and around the building for those with impaired mobility. So lots of things are coming together to suggest that major works are needed. It will need a lot of planning and fundraising. Alastair is taking the lead at these planning stages. There will be lots of consultation to come. Nothing is yet certain, except perhaps for the extreme fragility of both our boiler and ceiling. My sense is that it is now time to do what the Victorians did in the 1870s, which is to do major works of such quality that they will last another 150 years before people start saying that it is time for a major refurbishment. We owe that, I think, to our forebears and to those to come. The piecemeal approach of the last few decades has attractions – it is more manageable and cheaper – but it also produces problems with the functioning of the building.

Turning to other matters, Sue Brown continues to lead our children’s ministry very well indeed, and we are all grateful to her. I talked last year of our disappointment at not finding a new youthworker to replace Zoe. It may be that later this year we will be able to tap into a portion of the YouthInc South Cambs youthworker, which would address that issue. And that may give further stimulus to our ongoing discussions about a possible Children and Families’ worker, as distinct from a youthworker. There are lots of things pushing us in that direction. One is that we really need to be able to return to providing for children’s ministry every week, but resources, in terms of the number of volunteers available, have prevented that for some years. We have lots of potential among children and families, as our attendance sometimes shows – though it is frustratingly variable.

Two other mentions. The first is our music. Tim Kwan has been with us over a year now and we are seeing the fruits of his tenure, with a vibrant choir – we are always open to more members, of course, but the core we have are excellent – and we enjoy Tim’s terrific playing week on week. He and his wife Sarah, with Lizzie and James Buchanan-Worster have organised two wonderful *Music Moments* concerts so far, and these have raised quite a bit of money for the church’s music, more than I anticipated, which, as time goes by, may allow us to be a bit more intentional about plans for developing the breadth of our music-making. We already now have a junior organ scholar, Philip Chang, whose playing is coming on in leaps and bounds, but there may be room for another, more established player as a senior scholar (which could free up Tim to conduct more), and Tim and I have been thinking about how we can have another go at establishing a junior choir, re-establishing our All Age band, and so on. There are lots of enticing possibilities, great scope here for worship in music, and we need to be imaginative, ambitious and forward-looking about it.

Last specific mention: Gillian Sanders, our administrator, retired this year. We wish her well. She did a great job over the last 6 or 7 years. New in the role is Sue Duncan who you will meet over the next few weeks and months. I am sure Sue is going to be a great asset as well.

In addition to all these individuals I know there are many of you beavering away behind the scenes, and really enhancing our communal life, and you are all wonderful: there are lots of you, and I will try to thank you all as the relevant reports come up during the course of our annual meetings rather than naming you here. But just a few who won’t feature in any reports: Gillian Halliwell keeping our altar linen clean and pressed; Glenda Ferneyhough changing our liturgical colours; Piers Brereton polishing our communion silverware; Lizzie Taylor keeping the tower clock in order; Alan Holliday managing our heating; Nicky West being PCC secretary; Clare Kerr being verger for funerals and weddings. Their frequent small acts of service, and some not so small, carried on quietly and unobtrusively, really enhance what we do and I am very grateful.

And now I have probably committed two of a vicar’s cardinal sins, of missing people out who I should have mentioned, and going on too long. I know, of course, that there are many of you, unsung heroes beavering away behind the scenes, without whom we could not function. Thank you, one and all!

Pulling all this together, I am optimistic. We have a compassionate, generous and ever-forgiving God and lots of great things happening. Yes we have a shortage of volunteers, but there are a great many who do step up and who are wonderful. We have sufficient funds for day to day purposes. You have given generously in response to our appeals over the last couple of years, and righted the financial ship, for which I am very grateful. We have more or less sufficient space, good music and a mission field spread out before us. What is not to like?

In essence all we are called to do is to trust in God. As I reminded us of last year, St Andrew’s is his. We are his. We have our bibles. We have prayer. We have faith in Jesus Christ who loves us and died for us. We have the Holy Spirit. In the end those things are all that we need. All that is required of us is to be faithful, and that we shall continue to do.

Every blessing to you all, Simon