



Barley Hill Church, Thame
ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING
TUESDAY 6 MAY 2025
7pm in St Mary's Church, Thame

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AGENDA

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Notice of AOB**
- 3. Electoral Roll**
- 4. Minutes of APCM held online on Tuesday 23 April 2024**
- 5. Matters Arising**
- 6. Declaration of Interest**
- 7. Election of PCC & Deanery Synod representatives**
- 8. Reports - Children & Families, Churchwarden, Deanery Synod, Fabric, Finance, Mission, Safeguarding, and Ministry Team Leader reports for Administration, Anna Chaplaincy/Pastoral & Seniors, Communications, Eco-Action Group, Hospitality, Outreach and Evangelism, Prayer, Small Groups, Tech, Welcome, Worship and Youth**
- 9. Review and Looking forward (Clergy Report)**
- 10. Unification of the Parishes**
- 11. Open Questions**
- 12. Appointment of Independent Auditor**
- 13. AOB (must be submitted 24 hrs before the meeting)**

Electoral Roll

This year the Electoral Roll was renewed. The number on the roll for Barley Hill Church as prepared for the 2025 APCM is 50 compared to 66 last year.

Andrew Newton

PCC Secretary



Children & Families – with a focus on 2024

Sundays:

- 9am: Activities and toys available in church for children
- 11am: pattern includes monthly All-Age service and activities in the Barns Centre for primary-school-aged children. Making some communion services more accessible to all-ages
- Coffee Time: Intergenerational activities and games; we need further encouragement and support from PCC to engage to support the building of an intergenerational church

Outdoor Church:

- Took place in February, May and October as a half-term all-age, outdoor event that supports our connection with and care of creation
- The structure and pattern of these services has developed over this time and the team feel that the current structure which includes Godly Play and free space to explore and connect, works really well

- We have made some new contacts through Outdoor Church, as well as providing a stepping stone for other periphery families into greater connection

Sparklers Toddler Group:

- This weekly Christian group for under 5s and their carers is thriving, with some weeks of over 100 attendees
- This year, three baptism families are part of our Sparklers group. In February 2025, this group has been running for 25 years!

Primary Schools:

- Easter Experience: almost 800 primary school aged children for a reflection station journey through Holy Week. Team of 32 volunteers/staff ran 11 sessions in 2024. Feedback was positive, but we were keen to refresh the scripts for 2025
- Termly assemblies at Barley Hill Primary School. Hannah has now joined the team of governors at Barley Hill
- Plans for wellbeing space support at John Hampden Primary
- A Move-Up Assembly to 64 Year 6 pupils, using S.U. resource, with contemplative practice, break-out challenges and questions post-box answers from local secondary students. Following positive feedback, we would like to offer this more widely next year

Community:

- Led a Cubs session to and church visit for them to achieve their Faith badge
- Good Friday Morning service within the area of Lea Park (2024). Some publicity issues resulted in lower than-expected turn out
- Music in the Park in May offered a stay-and-play space for children within the festival. Visitors received invitations to church events
- A new Eco Zone within Thame Carnival included fun family activities including a trail, minibeast discovery, pond dipping and crafts, which offered opportunities for deeper discussions and connections

Holiday Club:

Together with Impact Thame, offered a Summer Holiday Club for 72 primary school aged children, over 3 sites. This included a reflective area called the Chill Zone. Each 40-minute age-group session in the Chill Zone began with a Godly Play style story, before children were able to use materials or suggested activities to respond in their own way. We advertised the holiday club through our church families' connections, through schools, community outreach events (including Music in the Park and Thame Carnival) as well as online including social media. Of the attendees, 29 of the children had no current church affiliation.

Hannah Smith

Churchwarden's report

I thank God for our church community, which is increasingly coming together under the banner of Thame Church—for His kingdom and His glory in Thame. This past year, we have seen a deepening of unity, particularly as our ministry teams have begun to work more closely and effectively together.

We've moved on from three churches meeting in the same place; we are becoming one church, united in love and faith. Our ministries continue to grow, and teams are developing a stronger understanding of their roles within both the church and the wider community. I personally appreciate the warm welcome from the refreshments team every Sunday morning, and as a former technical lead, I have a special admiration for our tech team when everything runs smoothly!

The number of new volunteers stepping up to serve in various ministries is very encouraging. Their involvement is inspiring others to get involved too - helping to make the church function effectively and joyfully.

Much of what keeps the church running happens behind the scenes. From switching on the heating and managing accounts to teaching our children, cooking for events or those in need, and even cleaning—many people serve faithfully and quietly. Thank you all.

Caring for God's Creation

Progress on bike racks is ongoing as we continue to negotiate with the diocese. Meanwhile, we are taking important steps to become a more environmentally conscious church. We were delighted to receive the A Rocha Bronze Award this year—thanks in large part to the dedication of the Eco Ministry team. As a church and as Christians, we must and can do even more in 2025–26 to reduce our environmental impact.

St Mary's Building

As we now share a home in the St Mary's building, I'd like to highlight part of David Brown's (St Mary's Churchwarden) report:

The recent Quinquennial inspection identified a few pressing issues: the pillar near the North Transept (by the lectern), deteriorating stonework on the parapet, and rotting timber in the turret roof adjacent to the South Transept.

Much of this work had been overseen by Helena. I am now in communication with Andrew Waite from Nick Cox Architects, who is preparing drawings and a schedule for the urgent repairs. I've also engaged a structural engineer to further assess the pillar.

Thanks to Rosalie Gibson and the Estates Committee for their ongoing work to keep our church building safe for worship. I also want to thank Andrew Newton and others who are working on the Heating Feasibility Study, exploring the best options to replace our aging boilers.

On the matter of the churchyard: Helena had secured approval for ledger wedges marking the burial of ashes in the newer section of the churchyard. However, these remain disallowed in the older part.

Looking Forward

We're delighted to welcome Katy—our wonderful Operations Manager and a member of the Barley Hill electoral roll. She's been invaluable in helping Mike and Andy manage the heavy workload of church leadership. Thank you, Katy, and also to Jackie for your steadfast support in administration. We simply couldn't function without you.

Looking ahead, my hopes for the coming year include:

1. **Formal Merger of Our Parishes:**

All three PCCs—Barley Hill, St Catherine's, and St Mary's—have now passed resolutions to unite under the Thame Church banner. This is a significant step, and I'm grateful to everyone who has contributed to making this happen. Running three separate parishes has placed a heavy burden on our leadership and finance teams. Special thanks to Natasha Challoner and Keith Civval for their tireless work in aligning our financial processes and keeping the books balanced.

2. **Growth in Family and Youth Engagement:**

We pray that the coming year sees even more families, children, and young people engaging with church life—both on Sundays and throughout the week.

Final Thanks

A heartfelt thank you to Mike and Andy for their faithful leadership and support. It's an honour to serve alongside you both, and I'm especially grateful for your kind and generous spirits.

With gratitude,

Al French

Churchwarden

Deanery Synod Report

The Deanery meeting was at St Mary's Thame on 25th February 2025, led by Area Dean Jane Haslam and Lay Chair Maureen Underdown. We began with gratitude for the venue's hospitality and a reflective prayer session.

The first agenda item featured a presentation by Emma Firth on new congregations, discussing the impact of £4 million in funding since 2020. Lockdown initially disrupted plans, but efforts refocused on community outreach and youth engagement, with rural churches recovering faster than urban ones. Emma emphasized the importance of listening to young people as they increasingly engage in church activities independently.

Anne Perry, newly appointed Parish Development Adviser for Dorchester Archdeaconry, introduced her role, highlighting support for church vision, PCC operations, lay ministry, and funding applications. The Deanery Children and Youth Plan discussion underscored the need to streamline objectives, focusing on secondary school engagement, holiday clubs, and prayer initiatives, with communication improvements through WhatsApp groups.

Business matters included a proposal for new elections due to administrative challenges, and the Treasurer's report noted a financial deficit caused by unpaid parish shares, with strategies to address this. Future events were announced, including a Deanery pilgrimage and guest speakers scheduled for upcoming meetings. The session closed with the Lord's Prayer and a blessing.

Vicki Reay

Finance Report

For the year ended 31st December 2024

Financial Review

Income from all funds totalled £60,586 (2023: £65,266). Monthly income from individuals declined slightly during the year.

There was net expenditure in the year of £3,829 (2023 net expenditure: £504).

Overall costs were contained, and our Parish share was reduced as this is now shared across the 3 churches. Church running costs are also shared.

The cash balance at 31 December 2024 is £69,609 (2022: £76,080).

The PCC has a reserves policy of seeking to hold in its Unrestricted Fund a continuing minimum of 3 months' running costs including salary and expenses (16,103). At 31st December 2024 the balance on the Unrestricted Fund was £70,101. The charity's assets are both available and adequate to meet its obligations.

Independent Review 2024

The Independent review is complete and the statutory accounts are included with this report.

A resolution is proposed to the annual parochial church meeting that the accounts be adopted.

A resolution is proposed that Mercer Lewin Chartered Accountants are to be appointed as Independent Examiners to Barley Hill Church. A separate note is attached for information.

Budget for 2025

Key Highlights are:

Income £59,535 1.7% lower than 2024. Expenditure £69,692, 8% higher than 2024 Actuals, following inflation, full year of a part-time Operations manager an increase in Parish Share and Utilities costs. The budget deficit is £10,157. The Finance team will continue to monitor the finances, and report actual income and expenditure to the PCC quarterly.

Natasha Challoner

Treasurer

Mission

Since March 2024, the eight members of the Mission Group have assumed responsibility for the 14 mission partners of Thame Church. The partners are Scripture Union, Tearfund, Martin and Debbi Hosken in Thailand with Wycliffe Bible Translators, Stephen and Catherine McGoldrick in Burundi with WEC, Sitkar Hostel in Nepal, Andrew and Janet Sweet in UK with Wycliffe, Impact Thame, Phil and Andrea Bauman working worldwide with SIM, Joel and Fiona Kelling formerly in Jordan and currently at Ripon College with CMS, Tenebou and Bethan Manga in Senegal with UFM, Hope for the Living in Kimberley & Kuruman diocese in South Africa, Daughters of Cambodia in Phnom Penh with IOM, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), and Prison Fellowship.

In terms of our offerings to these mission partners, 2024 was a transition year whilst the financial accounts of the three churches became merged into those of one Thame Church. In brief, the united offerings to our mission partners in 2024 totalled £29,080, comprised of £1300 from St Catherine's, £18,000 from St Mary's and £9780 from Barley Hill church.

Going forward, the Mission Group propose that at least 10% of the unrestricted gift income of Thame Church for each prior year will be allocated for mission giving in the following year. Hence, towards the end of 2025 the mission giving will be determined by the 2024 income and

distributed as such amongst our partners. The amounts given to each will be reviewed by the Mission Group for approval by Thame Church.

Offerings at the 2024 Christingle services totalled £2113.76 and were divided equally between Toybox, the Children's Society and the Red Kite Family Centre. Christingle offerings to the Children's Society will be replaced this Christmas by offerings to another national Christian charity for children and young people.

During the year mission slots were held monthly in the 9am and 11am services, helping to inform our prayers for our mission partners. Speakers came from the agencies which support the partners.

- January, April and September. Stephen and Catherine McGoldrick, on Acts13 in East Africa
- February and November. Prison Fellowship and the work in HMP Bullingdon
- March. Phil and Andrea Bauman, on their leadership roles with SIM worldwide
- May. Daughters of Cambodia, led by its founder and director Ruth Elliott
- June. Sitkar Hostel (formerly New Life House) Nepal
- September. Tearfund
- October. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and its advocacy work for the persecuted church
- December. Shunem Trust, providing short-term accommodation in Thame for mission workers.

The Thame Church Mission Group met on 7 March and 19 September, to review and develop plans for mission finance, communications, mission slots and a Thame Church giving policy. The five agreed purposes of the written policy going forward are to:

- a. Provide guidelines for making decisions on our giving in support of charities and individuals which broadly support our Thame Church vision and values;

- b. Ensure that there are full, meaningful and prayerful relationships between Thame Church and these charities and individuals, which together comprise our mission partners;
- c. Confirm that important decisions about which charities and individuals we support are not made on emotional or haphazard bases;
- d. Maintain consistency in the mission giving policy, as membership of the Mission Group changes over time; and
- e. Safeguard continued good stewardship in the allocation of Thame Church's offerings to the work of international and local missional activities and persons.

All our 14 mission partners have been adopted by a small home group of Thame Church. Each has affirmed that they will keep in touch with their partners and pray regularly for their practical and spiritual welfare.

Robert Ridgway

Safeguarding

Incidents since last report and any ongoing concerns.

We have now started to use the Diocese Safeguarding Hub, which is making coordinating Safeguarding easier. Adding people onto the Hub including staff and volunteers has been a big task, and so far, we have 82 people on the hub. However, it will make life easier in the future as it generates a reminder to me when a person's training or DBS is due to be updated.

The Safeguarding team worked closely with the clergy and the diocese to support our community during this past year. No ongoing concerns to report.

Policies for Approval

All policies are annually renewed with the PCC. This was completed for 2024, we updated the Safeguarding Policy using a Diocese sample

template, there were no changes to other policies. St Mary's policies are aligned to the diocese policies.

For Reference

- Everyone is beginning to view Safeguarding in Church as a necessary part of church life which enables us as a Church family to keep everyone safe
- The Operations Manager is supporting me to put data onto the hub
- We have made significant progress with safeguarding training

The Dioceses Safeguarding Training can be accessed online at:

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org>

Sharon Bond

Parish Safeguarding Officer

Ministry Team Leader reports

Administration

It is fair to say that working in the church office there are rarely two days the same. The past year has been full of blessings but not without challenges.

It has been a privilege to help couples plan and prepare for their wedding day and with families arranging baptism, and the privilege extends to families who have lost a loved one and who seek information on how to plan a funeral or interment of ashes. This has latterly been a challenge having lost dear friends and one very special colleague over the past six months.

One highlight of the year has been getting to grips with Church Suite and more familiar with Share Point. It has been a slow process, but worth the effort.

Another highlight is without doubt welcoming Katy Hammond to the team. Katy has been exploring ways in which to simplify systems and processes

that are out of date and has been very generous in her approach to help me take up new ways of doing things.

One of the biggest challenges has been learning to let go of the extra out of office hours and only work the paid hours. Within this challenge and change has come a blessing by which the grace and patience shown by people accepting that instant responses are no longer the norm.

Working with a wonderful supportive staff team, ministry leaders that extends to the community of Thame Church is a great joy and honour.

Jackie Hurst

Church Administrator

Pastoral ministry to older people and the Anna Chaplaincy

Our Anna Chaplain, Ann Midwinter, concentrates most of her attention on Meadowcroft and Cuttlebrook Care Homes, visiting each routinely once a week. In addition, she regularly visits a parishioner resident in a Care Home outside Thame and provides occasional support to individuals as required. I provide back-up to her, attending Meadowcroft when required and visiting Cuttlebrook Hall twice a month.

Ann also makes occasional visits to the Dementia Café and Friendship Club.

She and I are in touch regularly, meeting from time to time to review progress. Her licence as Anna Chaplain was renewed in October and is valid for three years.

We have a team of pastoral visitors who have been through the Diocese of Oxford's pastoral visitor and safeguarding training, but there has been little deployment of them. Linda Newton was instrumental in helping me steer them through the training and putting appropriate policy and protocols in place.

Progress on this and other aspects of pastoral care by me have been hampered by personal pressures on my time.

Graham Choldcroft

Communications

For just over a year, Jackie has been producing the revamped and transformed Church News (the email formerly known as Jottings). The aim behind the re-design was to shorten and simplify the contents to the must-know items and shift away from it becoming a catch-all bucket. The draft vision and mission statements drawn up by the Joint Church Council at the end of 2023 were polished and approved in 2024. As well as Mike and Andy leading a three-week series on the mission, vision and values for Thame Church (*“Our vision is to see our local community transformed through the radical love of Jesus”*), the statements have been adopted as guiding principles when assessing the value of all mission work.

The review and migration of all necessary content from the old St Mary’s and St Catherine’s websites marked one of the final acts of completing the core launch of the new Thame Church website. Keith continues to make iterative improvements. The adoption and adaption to Church Suite as the primary form of communication continues to develop.

Katy’s arrival in autumn has increased the communications capacity, especially her design capability and one of the next developments will be able to track data from the Thame Church digital presence and begin to use the results to shape communications decisions. This is somewhat of a counter-balance to the distinct lack of volunteers recruited at the last call for volunteers.

However, it is worth noting that communications benefit from unsung heroes from many places: Al (general idea generation and deep thinking), Richard (overhaul of in-church noticeboards), Jackie (so much, including Church News), Keith (especially the website), Katy (design and data). I

essentially just write the reports, which should temper the possibility (it remains that) that I may need to step back from August.

The opportunities and challenges over the next 12 months come in the form of communicating wisely with grace and courage around the journey of addressing Prayers of Love and Faith and the next stage in the journey of three becoming one.

Matty Fearon

Eco Action Group - Championing Creation Care

In December we were very pleased that St Mary's was awarded the Eco Church Bronze Award. Some of the main activities which led to this were:

- Children & Families: outdoor church twice a year and Thame Carnival stall with kids activities in Cuttlebrook. Eco Area in conjunction with other Eco groups in Thame, to become an annual feature at the carnival
- Churchyard: bug hotels built with the help of the children (and some parents!) in November, bird boxes, management plan in progress with no-mow areas, reflective space with wild flowers etc
- Lifestyle: Eco tips - now as a column on the News Page on the church website. Examples:
 - People bringing their own cups for coffee, and washing up cups instead of using disposables
 - Use of eco-friendly paper and cleaning supplies
 - Box to recycle blister packs at the back of church
- Plan for bike rack to encourage fewer cars and more active travel - going through faculty process
- Teaching: visiting speakers (e.g. David Blackmore on 23rd March), regular mention of creation care in sermons, prayers and worship.
- Finances: most church funds are now ethically invested, apart from a small amount in the current account.

- Carbon footprint: Energy Audit in October 2024. Use of renewable energy tariffs and offsetting remaining carbon footprint for 2024 with Climate Stewards. Proposals for minor short-term improvement to controls, flushing out and insulation of current heating system but then a major investment to replace the gas boilers with an electrically powered system having significantly less climate impact

We are aware that the above actions are only the start of a journey and there is much more to be done. This will require investing substantial financial resources and being willing to continue to review our lifestyles as we promote good stewardship of God's earth.

Andy Clark

Hospitality

The hospitality ministry continues to be well supported by a dedicated and hard-working team serving refreshments to both congregations (9am and 11am) between the services on Sunday mornings. This has been working well with an overlap of servers between the services. The team has also provided refreshments at other church services throughout the year such as United:Ignited and the traditional and contemporary carol services. We are always looking for and would welcome new volunteers to join our team.

We also benefit greatly from team members who cook for lunches such as Leaders Lunch, Welcome Lunch and Everlasting Love (our relationships workshop for couples, including those preparing for marriage). These provide a valuable form of welcome and hospitality.

Vanessa Shearwood

Outreach and Evangelism

As well as Sparklers being a key outreach to local families, our regular lunch and talk for older people (55+) continues to flourish, supporting over 60 people each month.

Easter Experience welcomed around 800 children from Barley Hill and John Hampden schools to the church for a creative, interactive telling of the Easter Story.

Alpha was run with around 10 guests in the summer with a mixture of people from church, on the fringe of church and outside. It is hoped to run courses again early in 2025.

Our Curate Emma Endean-Mills has supported the local air cadets squadron as chaplain providing pastoral care to cadets and staff. This is done with a focus on representing the Kingdom of God and its values, to meet the pastoral, spiritual and moral needs of the cadets and to enable that body to practise its various faiths. We also welcomed the cadets into church for the squadron to celebrate their 30th Anniversary.

The church co-ordinated annual events such as Music in the Park's free drop-off and craft activities, supporting 76 children this year, and Carols Around the Tree enabling hundreds to gather to sing carols on Christmas Eve. Key community events at Towersey are also supported by the church including the May Festival and Church Fete.

We re-started women's events this year and have now had 4 with between 40-60 attending, includes non-regular church attendees. The mornings have consisted in pastries/cakes, circle dancing (Jan), short talk or Q&A from members of the church, and we always have a craft going on. We are trying our first evening event in June in the Thame Barns centre.

We ran a stall at the town's Christmas Tree Light Switch-On event giving out chocolates and leaflets for Christmas services. This was an excellent opportunity to engage with the local community and successfully promoted services.

Andy McCulloch

Prayer at Thame Church 2025

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths.

Proverbs 3:5

*Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people. **Ephesians 6:18***

Thame Church's first Value is to be Prayerful, seeking God's guidance in all that we do. Prayer, listening to and talking with our Heavenly Father, strengthens our relationship with Him, each other and the community in which we live.

Since December 2024, I have been co-ordinating initiatives in praying for each other and listening to what the Lord is saying to us.

Details of the opportunities for prayer can be found on the Thame Church website: [Prayer - Thame Church](#).

All our opportunities are important. We have something for everyone but I'd like to highlight a couple of areas.

In our Wednesday lunchtime "Thame Prayers" sessions we have had the sense that God is reminding us of His promise in **Isaiah 43:19** "*Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert*" We have reflected how our church building is like a beacon; it can be seen from all around as you approach Thame. We desire to be like that beacon, drawing people from our community to Jesus. We trust that the Holy Spirit is with us as the Lord begins a new thing.

We are growing stronger in our ministry of praying for one another. For example,

- The WhatsApp group where urgent prayer needs can be shared has grown and it is backed up by an email group for people who don't use WhatsApp

- We are refreshing Prayer Ministry after our Sunday services. We have 2 teams of people who will be available to pray with individuals after the 9am and the 11am services. The 9am team is new. Its members are excited to get started. Watch this space! The 11am team has been around for a long time, but it has grown. It is wonderful to see God calling people to pray

We know that God longs for us to have a deep relationship with Him and for the people of Thame to know Him. In the coming year, please join in the adventure of prayer and discover God's heart for our church and community. Please contact me at Julie.fox@thame.church. I'd love any feedback and new ideas.

Julie Fox

Small Groups

Past 12 months

Note: I only took over as ministry leader for small groups last autumn, so I can't reflect on the whole year.

Successes:

- We now have 104 people participating in 16 small groups. I'm not sure what the numbers were a year ago, but I believe this to be an increase
- Getting all the small group details, members, etc onto Church Suite (which was a big task!) and updating the small group leaders' photos on the noticeboard
- Working with Robert Ridgway to encourage small groups to adopt one of our church's mission partners has gone well, with all our mission partners now adopted except for CWS

Concerns:

- Based on Sharon's records, 6 sets of small group leaders have not yet completed the required safeguarding

- I have been able to connect with small group leaders via email, at church and/or at the leaders' lunches, but at times it has been a struggle with some of them

Coming 12 months

New initiative:

We recently launched the use of My Church Suite to make people aware of the groups that are open to receiving new members. Newcomers requesting to join a small group are now sent a standard email from Jackie (copied to myself, Richard Potts, Mike & Andy) pointing them to My Church Suite initially and stating that Zoe and the leaders are here to help them find the right group. We need to track how this goes and adjust the process as necessary.

Challenges to overcome:

I suspect that making sure small group details are kept updated on Church Suite might be hard to track effectively, particularly with those leaders who are less responsive on email and/or less tech savvy with Church Suite hence need assistance with making changes.

Zoe Alexander

Tech Team

The tech team plays a vital role within the church, ensuring that Sunday worship runs seamlessly. When done right, our work goes unnoticed, allowing services and sung worship to flow smoothly without distraction.

Over the past year, we have made several technical improvements...

- Five new screens have been installed, including one for the choir - improving visibility across the church
- A new speaker in the family area has enhanced audio quality
- A control system now allows the entire setup to be powered on and off more simply

- Significant improvements have been made to the internet feed in the church; with the hope to provide publicly available WiFi and increase the Audio & Video quality of the webcast

Despite these developments, recruiting volunteers remains a challenge due to the specific skills and training required.

Looking ahead, there is potential to enhance online engagement; for this to be effective, someone would need to take on the role of finding better ways to engage the online members of our congregation.

Pete Stratton

Welcomers Report

I would like to say a big Thank You to everyone who has served as a Welcomer at Thame Church in the past year. We have 12 Welcomers on the 9am rota and 17 on the 11am rota. Many Welcomers undertake other roles before or during the service, making it difficult to fill the Welcomer positions every week. Please get in touch with me if you would like to join the Welcome Team.

Welcome Lunches for Newcomers were held in September 2024 and March 2025, with invites sent to everyone who began attending Thame Church over the previous 6-9 months. These lunches give people the chance to meet other newcomers and church members involved in various ministries.

Since September I have been attending Leadership Team meetings once a month, to review all new visitors over the previous 12 months. This helps us as a team to identify newcomers and share our different encounters with them. This enables us to ensure that they are being cared for, settled into church life, and integrated into small groups when requested. It also helps to identify where people have fallen off the radar.

Richard Potts

Worship

The worship team's main purpose is to provide an opportunity for the congregation to worship together through music. Over the past year, Sian has taken on the role of worship ministry lead. New team members have been introduced into the band, which has brought fresh energy to our services.

A key change this year has been working closely with the tech team to introduce the use of in-ear monitors. This improves the clarity of the music and also allows the congregation to have conversations during the sound-check.

Looking ahead, we have a desire to engage more young people and children in worship, as well as build up new leaders within the team to ensure its future growth and sustainability.

To help the worship ministry continue to thrive, we encourage the wider church to turn up, sing loudly, and join in worship—your participation is key to creating an environment where we can encounter God together. Additionally, we are seeking training opportunities for our team to further develop their skills.

Sian Stratton

Youth

We have continued without a volunteer youth leader this year, which has prevented us from investing as much as we would like in this ministry. We started a new Sunday morning youth group at the 11am service, which has a pool of around 8 young people, but with around 2-4 attending each week. A great team of volunteers support the young people and we hope to join Cornerstone youth for some of their regular social/chill gatherings as well as going on a youth weekend away in 2025. We received a significant donation of £31,250 towards our youth work which is hoped will provide seed money for a youth worker in the future.

Andy McCulloch

Clergy Report

It is a joy to serve Thame Church, a growing family with much to be thankful for over the past year. We also look to the future with anticipation, trusting in God's continued work among us and in our wider community.

Remembering Those We Have Lost

This year, we have mourned the loss of beloved members of our church family. In particular, we remember Helena Fickling, our long-standing churchwarden, who passed away suddenly in late 2024. Helena's faithful service and leadership in overseeing building improvements and contributing to our Joint Church Council were invaluable. Her deep faith and dedication enriched many lives, and her absence is deeply felt.

Worship and Ministry

Our church remains a focal point for worship and community. The 9am and 11am services continue to be well attended, supported by a committed team of ministry leaders. The contributions of clergy, retired ministers, service leaders, and volunteers ensure that all members have opportunities to engage in worship and church life.

The pastoral team, led by Revd Graham Choldcroft, alongside Ann Midwinter and our trained visitors, has provided essential support to many. Our choir and worship teams have played a vital role in enhancing our services. Hannah Smith and her team have strengthened our work with children and families, ensuring their integral place within our church.

Administrative support has been bolstered with the appointment of Katy Hammond as Operations Manager, freeing up clergy to focus on ministry. We also are thankful for the return of Mike after a period of ill health. As he transitions to reduced hours from July 2025, we welcome the Diocese-supported appointment of Revd Heather McCulloch, who will work alongside her husband, Andy, helping our church into its next chapter.

Parish Unification

Since Covid-19, the Church of England in Thame has worshipped together, initially online and then in person, alongside St Catherine's, Towersey. After careful discussion and consultation with the Diocesan Pastoral Secretary, all three PCCs have agreed to pursue formal unification. We now enter a period of consultation, with a decision expected in the coming year.

Focus on Young People and Young Adults

Recognizing the need to engage older teenagers and young adults, we are taking two key steps: repurposing under-attended service times to create a distinct offering for younger generations and launching the New Wine Discipleship Year (DY) in partnership with churches in Oxfordshire. This initiative will equip 18- to 29-year-olds for ministry through teaching, practical experience, and residential retreats. The programme encourages spiritual growth, biblical understanding, and active service in God's kingdom.

Human Sexuality

The ongoing debate on human sexuality within the Church of England has stirred diverse perspectives. At Thame Church, we are committed to the importance of unity in Christ while respecting different theological positions: Mike is affirming, whilst Andy is more traditional in his view. Both of us have chosen not to adopt the recently introduced Prayers of Love and Faith, recognizing that their use may create division as their present use only permits this in existing services. We are committed to fostering respectful dialogue and will provide opportunities for the congregation to engage in discussions in the months ahead.

Looking Ahead

As we move forward, our priorities remain clear: deepening discipleship, strengthening community bonds, and expanding outreach. We will continue to lead through our church values:

We set ourselves the challenge to live through our values:

1. **Prayerfulness** – Seeking God’s guidance in all that we do.
2. **Courage** – Overcoming fear to boldly live out our faith.
3. **Humility** – Thinking of ourselves less, rather than thinking less of ourselves.
4. **Generosity** – Giving abundantly with dependence on God.
5. **Truthfulness** – Living with transparency and integrity in all relationships.

We are grateful for the service of our wardens, PCCs, and JCC, whose support enables us to continue our mission.

Thank you for your prayers and dedication. We are privileged to serve as your ministers and look forward to walking this journey of faith together.

Yours in Christ,

Revd Mike Reading and Revd Andy McCulloch