

Vicar's APCM Report 2025

In so many ways this has been a momentous year for the Church of England and St Mary's, and much has happened since my last report.

As the monthly letters out have addressed and shared developments as they have occurred, this report will seek to provide a short summary rather than a detailed rewriting of every event.

Thank you!

I am acutely aware of how inadequate saying a generic thank you at the start of a report can be, but there are simply so many of you to thank that I still can't think of a safer way!

So here goes...

Thank you everyone!

Your good will, support, generosity and encouragement are inspiring and heartwarming. We are all very happy living here among you and feel "settled in".

I am really enjoying my ministry here!

St Mary's Rickmansworth is a wonderful place to be!

1. Mission

The Mission and Outreach team and the Community and Events team are well established now and contributing a great deal to our mission.

Because there is some overlap in their approach there are some members common to both teams

These teams have worked really hard and helped a great deal in moving our mission and outreach and relationships with the wider community forward. I'll let their reports inform you as to the substantial progress being made.

The Mission and Outreach has placed prayer and discernment at the heart of each meeting. We begin with Lectio prayer every time we meet, and this feeds the ideas & discussions that emerge.

We now have a new MAP which is both aspiring and courageous

The Community and Events team has also brought new energy to our churches mission.

Throughout the year we have held, (and are continuing to hold), a wide range of events including the Poppy Displays, Christmas Tree festival, Children's Easter Craft Morning, Parish Pantry, & Welcome day.

We now have a new Director of Music – Sean Frost-who has been recruited to help our mission through musical outreach in schools and across the wider community.

We have fulfilled most of the goals of the old plan and are progressing well with the new plan's objectives

We are building good working relationships with local schools and organisations in sharing events such as hosting the market and this year's 80th anniversary VE day celebrations

I continue to work closely with our local schools and maintain strong and positive relationships with them.

Our congregations are growing, not only at special services such as Christmas, Mothering Sunday & Easter etc, but also on regular Sundays. New people are joining us on a regular basis, and I think we should all take great encouragement from this.

I believe St Mary's has an exciting future and will continue to grow!

2. Worship & Spirituality

Worship and prayer remain at the heart of everything else we do.

The present pattern and composition of our current Sunday morning worship continues to draw people in (as noted above) and will continue to be the model going forward.

We are reviewing the pattern on the third Sunday though, and the present NEW worship service will be reimagined in the coming year

We are still reworking and reissuing the liturgies. As the year progresses all of the old service sheets will be replaced with new books, that are designed to be more accessible and attractive.

Our Lectio prayer group continues to meet almost monthly (as do our other more established house groups)

We are in the process of developing permanent prayer stations in church for our many visitors – these will use some existing features such as the stations of the cross, icons and stained-glass windows. These will be linked to a meditation and guidance of how to pray through them via a QR code.

We are also considering launching a new bible based home cell group in the next year.

Music & Worship

The sudden and unexpected death of Tim Smith was deeply upsetting and unsettling. Tim and I had already mapped out a way of bringing schools and church together through musical outreach, and we were very much looking forward to working with one another.

Tim's insights in this approach really helped to refocus our Mission & Action Plan and a sense this was Tim's ongoing gift/ legacy for St Mary's.

Sean Frost has now joined us as our Director of Music, Sean is a gifted musician and composer, who has worked across a number of churches

Sean's musical talents will certainly enrich our gathered worship.

Sean will also work alongside me in our schools and community as part of our continuing plan to progress our mission through music.

In time this may lead to the creation of several possible new initiatives including pop community choral events, a rock choir or a fresh expression of church, depending on responses as we move forward in this area. **(for more details please refer to the MAP)**

Occasional offices

Though the number of funerals taking place at (or through) St Mary's was lower than the previous year – Baptisms and weddings are on the rise again. We have 3 weddings on our books over the next 12 months and another "in the pipeline". We have also had 10 baptisms since the last report with several more booked and enquiry's every week or so.

It's really in my heart to grow both of these important aspects of our work, but the limitations of having a smaller population and the complexities of legal requirements make holding weddings at St Mary's a little more difficult

Growing New Disciples

We continue to seek to reach out and welcome people of all ages, as has been reflected above, in the MAP and throughout the year

Children's Church continues to be a very important part of this. New volunteers are really needed, and anyone considering joining this ministry is encouraged to contact me to arrange an initial conversation.

We are progressively making the children's areas more visible and suitably resourced, not only for times of worship, but also for people with children coming in to pray while the church is open.

We are also beginning to display photographs of events and services that have taken place, as a visible celebration of the life of St Mary's.

These projects and the prayer stations mentioned above, help provide a silent witness that St Mary's is a welcoming sacred space for people of all ages and cultures, and that we truly are an inclusive church.

2. Safeguarding & Safer recruitment

This essential part of church life continues to be a growing responsibility for our PSO Hilary and her team, especially so after the national events of this year.

Again I wish to formally record my full cooperation and support in working with Hilary and the team in maintaining and growing a culture of safeguarding and awareness. This of course includes appropriate safer recruiting and safeguarding training and management of all volunteers.

3. Pastoral visiting

Visiting remains a very important priority in my ministry, though as other demands have grown, I am not, alas, able to sustain the pattern of visiting I enjoyed in my first year of ministry here.

We have built up a very strong & positive relationship with Riverside Lodge.

We provide a simple service of praise and singing there once a month, and they are frequent visitors to our Sunday morning worship. One of their current residents will be baptised at St Mary's in June, which beautifully illustrates our mission and outreach to people of all ages!

4. Publicity and communication

Our excellent website, and our Facebook page and our monthly letters out have continued to promote St Mary's events and services across our communities. Closer cooperation with local schools has also enabled more avenues to promote the work of St Mary's

5. Ministry team (Including Ecumenical & Collegial working)

I continue to enjoy the help and support of the Revd Scott which I greatly value.

Plans to work more closely with Revd Simon and the mill End group of churches were somewhat scuppered by Simons moving to be the vicar of Hertford!

We have now successfully recruited Revd Mark Harris and I look forward to building up a positive working relationship with him after he arrives (from New Zealand) in September

In the meantime as assistant Rural Dean I am continuing to work with the parish and its schools until Mark gets here.

In my last (and first) APCM report I concluded

In Summary, I think St Mary's church family should feel rightfully encouraged by all the hard work and goodwill of its volunteers and members. This church has an incredibly positive place in the hearts of our community, and there is widespread public goodwill, interest, and appreciation of our presence in this place.

There is much potential to be built upon. Please continue to pray for Gods guidance and blessing as we seek to grow. Please keep sharing the good news of all that is happening here and invite others to join us. Please consider how your own gifts and skills can further build the kingdom of God in this place.

I still think this holds true, and is the best way to end this report again!

In the love of Jesus

Gary

