

Vicar's Report 2025/2026

'Let's start at the very beginning, A very good place to start.' (Maria, T.S.O.M)



Following my licensing service at the end of November, I did indeed start at the very beginning, the beginning of the new Church year on Advent Sunday 2025. On that day I celebrated the Holy Eucharist three times in the morning and then participated in the ecumenical Advent Carol Service at St. Paul's in the evening, quite the first Sunday! My very first week included a Standing Committee Meeting, a meeting at Price's Funeral Directors, a funeral meeting, Deanery Synod at Rishton, and a funeral at St. Mary's. The month of December continued apace with a finance meeting with the diocese, Ladies Group Christmas Luncheon, Moorlands School

Christmas Concert, a funeral, Christmas Fayre, CRGS Carol Service, Pendle Primary School Carol Concert, SMC Management Team meeting, Carol Service at St. Mary's, Christingle Service at St. Mary's and Christmas day services at St. Mary's and St. Leonard's. Following Christmas day services, I headed down the motorway, Gloria in tow, to spend Christmas with my family for the first time in 19 years.



As a parish priest, my ministry has been shaped by one of the key statements from Jesus in the Gospel of Saint John: *'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.'* (St. John 14:6). For me, the three words with which Jesus identifies Himself, can be applied to our life as a Gospel centred missional parish community. The **Way** is our mission to our community and outreach to others. The **Truth** is the revealed truth of God revealed in the holy scriptures, principally the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the apostolic faith, which we are all called to proclaim. The **Life** is the shared life of our Christian community as part of the body of Christ. This is the lens that I use to review our shared ministry.

The Way (Mission)

As the new vicar of the 'parish church' of Clitheroe, I know that we are blessed with opportunities to make connections with the wider town community. I have therefore tried my best to utilise the opportunities that have come my way. I led the town's Christmas Crib dedication service, and in doing so made connections with both our town and borough mayors. I met them both again at our Carol service and at the CRGS awards night in January. I then hosted them both at the vicarage during the interval of the *Evita* musical and then hosted them both, along with other civic



dignitaries, at the Civic Sunday service on 8th March. Other ways in which I have tried to reach out to the wider community included one visit to the Playgroup, attending meetings of the SMC Management committee, the Clitheroe Parish Church Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society committee, Clitheroe Christian in Partnership, Quiz night at the Buck Inn, Quiz night at St. Paul's and visits to Pendle Primary School – to meet staff and pupils and more recently to lead their 'Easter' assembly. There have also been many conversations with members from U3A, Clitheroe Civic Society and Rotary Clubs! A *secret weapon* for general outreach to the local community is Gloria, who (with her *majestic magnetism*) enables me to talk to many people on our daily walks. She is already quite familiar to some stall holders at the market and to staff at the Knead & Grind coffee shop and Byrne's Wine shop! This year I will look for more opportunities for networking and reaching out to the wider community.

The Truth (Gospel)

I hope all those who attend services at St. Mary's will appreciate my fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is always my intention in leading worship that the central focus of our devotion is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is one of the reasons I reinstated a Gospel procession at the main service: to highlight the central importance of the Gospel.

In preaching, my aim is to focus our attention on the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel, and my objective is to relate and apply those teachings to our lives as Christian disciples today in our context here in Clitheroe.

Providing opportunities for studying the Word of God is key element of my role as vicar. I delight in studying the scriptures with other people and have enjoyed our Lent Bible study course on the Psalms of Lament. I plan to offer more Bible studies throughout the year. I am also looking at ways of sharing the Gospel through including articles from interesting contemporary theologians in our parish magazine.

I have also tried my best to share the Good News of the Gospel at the (many) funerals I have conducted thus far.

The Life (Community)



Worship is the beating heart of our Church community. It is what brings us together to offer God our prayers, our praises and the honour due unto Him. The Holy Eucharist is vital to our lives as Christians, as it nourishes our souls and is a sacrament of grace which unites us with Christ in a profound way. With this in mind, and with episcopal blessing, at the beginning of this year, I reordered that chancel (back) to a more traditional Anglican/monastic layout. This was to ensure that the main altar and the high altar cross are the central focus of our worship. I

have also ensured that the main altar is dressed with antependia in the colour of the season. I also moved the standing torches to the main altar and purchased larger altar candles. This (literally) highlights the importance of the altar. I returned the large candlesticks to the high altar, to flank the cross. They are much more visible and fitting

for the space. To avoid these candles guttering in the draughts and burning at different speeds (which they had been), I also purchased brass candle *followers*. They seem to have worked! I also purchased some large bookmarks for the lectern to enhance the use of liturgical colours in the chancel.



From Advent onwards, I introduced some new Orders of Service that were printed in a more accessible larger font size and also included more of the liturgy in full (important for the hard of hearing). In consultation with our musicians, I introduced some more simple liturgical music to encourage the whole congregation to participate. We are now slowly introducing a new Mass setting which is meant for the whole congregation to sing. I am grateful to our choir for being very adaptable and for leading the congregational responses.

In addition to Sundays, I have been elated by the participation in our weekday services. In December I introduced Morning Prayer at 9:00am on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in the chapel. I have been blessed by those who attend regularly and ensure that our church is truly a house of prayer. It has also been a good opportunity to build relationships. In January I introduced a midweek celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Wednesdays at 10:30am. This was to provide an opportunity for people to attend the Holy Eucharist at a later time in the morning than our 9:30am Sunday time. It also allows me an opportunity to chat with people over refreshments afterwards, something I cannot do on Sundays. Again, I am most grateful to those people who have become regular members of this Wednesday congregation.

Pastoral Care is an important part of our life as a Christian community. On 27th January I convened a meeting of the Pastoral Visitors at the vicarage to find out what is currently happening and discuss ideas. I am most grateful to the team for the work they do, most especially in our long-term care facilities. I have made several home visits personally, but I wish to explore ways in which communication of such needs could be improved. As I'm new and still trying to learn people's names, I need your assistance with this!

Fellowship is an important way in which we build relationships as a community. Unfortunately, I am unable to do this after church on Sundays. However, I have attended the Ladies Group Christmas Lunch, AGM and Christmas Fayre, and am grateful for the opportunity to chat with people after our Wednesday morning services and during our Lent course. I am contemplating organising some social events later this year that could provide opportunities for us to get better acquainted.



In summary, I would say that it has been a very positive start to a new ministry amongst you. I am incredibly grateful for the warm welcome that I have received and for the ongoing encouragement and support. I am very happy to be serving amongst such lovely people (you) and in such a beautiful part of the country. My sincere thanks to all of you who serve God's church in so many ways! I pray that God will bless us with growth, faith and confidence, as we continue to work together to serve Him and our neighbours here at St. Mary's Clitheroe.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Paul

(Gloria watching Crufts!)



Churchwarden's Report – Howard Riley

GENERAL : This last year has seen the appointment of Revd Paul Sherwood as priest for the new benefice of St Mary's Clitheroe and St Leonards, Downham. He has been most welcome and his ministry goes from strength to strength with the refreshed Sunday services, regular morning prayer and midweek communion plus bible study and the recruitment of a new and dedicated Director of Music in Mr James

Chaucer. Following a sometimes troublesome interregnum our church is getting back on its feet and to help us do that, Jo Robinson has stepped up as a second church warden.

FINANCES: Our treasurer has raised the key issue of our diminishing financial resources as our congregation shrunk in 2025/26 and outgoings overtook our income. The question of meeting the full payment of our parish share was integral to our current and projected position therefore the treasurer arranged a meeting with the diocesan finance board to identify the emerging problem and establish options for the financial future of the church. In consequence we received a significant reduction in our parish share for the year. Our thanks to our treasurer for his dogged services in this respect. With quinquennial works looming we have no choice but to examine our personal giving, consider fundraising options and most importantly to do our level best to grow our church. The establishment of a dedicated fundraising team was agreed at the 16/3/26 PCC meeting.

SIDESPERSIONS:

Thanks to all on the rota for your commitment over this last year and for all those who help open and close the church most days. Special thanks goes to Keith Robinson who modestly supports so much at St Mary's. Keith oversees all our funeral arrangements with Jenni and has recently organised the 5 yearly renewal of our Parish Electoral Roll. Serving the parish since an incredible 1961 Keith has decided it is time to retire which he does with our sincere blessing and gratitude for all he has done over the decades. Bishop Philip has written to Keith on the occasion of his retirement at the age of 86! Thanks to Steve Cunliffe who has covered more than his share of funerals over recent months ably supported by Keith Jackson. Howard Riley will temporarily work to the vicar in overseeing funeral arrangements with four new volunteers having kindly stepped forward to assist.

PARISH ADMIN : Jenni has been such a good catch and works so efficiently in the office always ready with a smile and a chat with the many visitors whilst keeping us all organised and resourced. During interregnum Jenni worked hard with Patricia Duxbury in keeping all our services up and running by securing regular ministry cover, planning the services and choosing hymns and music for our worship. Can we record our heartfelt thanks to them both and those faithful retired clergy who still supporting us through periods of uncertainty.

BUILDINGS: Our 2025 quinquennial inspection went ahead the last year with our new conservation architect Jill Cowgill from North West design collective of Preston.

The leaking roof above the organ has been fixed with a repair to the lead flashing. Work for the 2020 inspection has not all been completed so some issues will roll over into the next five year programme. The full inspection by Jill Cowgill took place on 20th March 2025 and we are in receipt the full report. We need to prioritise the water ingress and damp in the walls of the ringing room, south east nave and Alleys Chapel. The repair to the roof flashing above the organ has proved successful. On receipt of the inspection report we have drawn up a work schedule and specification to put out to tender identifying 12 priority pieces of work to the fabric and roof. Following recent receipt of a diocesan list of conservation heritage builders we are progressing the invitations to tender for the work. On receipt of all the quotes we can then look at what range of grant funding is available to apply for and consult with the fund raising team.

The church floodlights were condemned in 2023 and we appealed to our congregation for funds to replace them in 2024 and received a number of generous donations. The Town Council committed to match funding the project which has been quoted to include anti vandal cages to protect the new LED lights which can be seasonally removable. The replacement system was installed in 2025 and is working well highlighting the presence of our church on dark evenings.

Our church clock stopped working a long time ago and requires a significant up grade. The engineer has recommended a complete new system that has automatic winding and seasonal adjustment and which can be adjusted remotely via a phone App at a cost of £3850 with a ten year warranty. RVBC annually

cover the annual maintenance cost for the clock and have generously agreed to fully fund the new installation. This option 'future proofs' the clock and we are in receipt of the funds from RVBC and the work is planned to commence in April this year.

So, we have soldiered on as a team to meet a range of challenges. There are so many willing helpers and unsung heroes who give hours of their time cleaning the church, making the brews, our Ladies Group, the 'Flower People', the churchyard gardeners, our organist and choir, our servers and home communion team, our Mums and Toddlers volunteers, our sides persons, our baptism team, our magazine editor and vision champion, our PCC and secretariat, our funeral vergers and our 'locker uppers', so the list goes on including those who faithfully attend and worship on Sundays!

A huge thankyou to our organist Simon Emery who has done so much to keep us worshipping and our steadfast choristers singing. Simon and the choir set up the St Marys Pop Choir who have occasionally supported our regular singers for events and special services. We remain grateful for the commitment of our choir who have kept going through 'thick and thin' and look forward to their development under our new Director of Music.

I would also like to pay tribute to our stalwart team of bellringers and Tower Captains who ring so regularly and continue to develop quality bell ringing performance in the tower whilst encouraging visits from other ringing bands and pealing across our town and the valley putting our church on the map. Thank you all for all those hours of regular commitment to keeping our church functioning, may God hold you all in His hands.

PCC Secretary's Report – Merle Allen

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) At the beginning of last year the PCC consisted of one Churchwarden - Howard Riley - plus nine elected members – Linda Ainsworth, Merle Allen (Deputy Warden and Secretary), Ann Binnie, Patricia Duxbury, Keith Jackson, Luke Lowry, Ken Robinson (Treasurer), Susan Robinson, and Diana Wilkins. In addition, the two Deanery Synod representatives – Colin Scott and Jo Robinson - attend the meetings.

Now, happily, we have a new Vicar – Rev Paul Sherwood, who started his ministry with us in November of last year. We hope he has settled in and look forward to many years under his leadership.

Sadly Patricia will not be standing for re-election this year – she blames old age but where are her wrinkles?!!

The PCC will have met for formal business, on six occasions from May 2024 to March 2025, not including the APCM.

The Standing Committee – The Vicar, Churchwardens, Treasurer, Special Advisor during the Interregnum – Patricia Duxbury - and Secretary met for business on seven occasions. Patricia has now stood down as advisor, now that our Vicar is in post.

The work of the council is supported by nine committees – Finance, Magazine, SMC (St Mary's Centre) Hall Management Team, Social committee, and Clitheroe Christians in Partnership.

Other officials;

Our 'Vision 2026' Vision Champion is Linda Ainsworth. Our Associate Champion is Patricia Duxbury.

Our Safeguarding Officer is now Luke Lowry.

Our Data Protection Officer and now our new Electoral Roll Officer is Jenni Carysforth – our Parish Administrator.

Keith Robinson has stepped back from being our Electoral Roll Officer (and many other roles) - due to ill health.

Our Archivist is Dorothy Jackson.

Our Calligrapher is now Norman Kelly.

I personally would like to thank all of the above and in fact everyone who is part of one or the other 'teams' which contribute in a very vital way to the running of the church. There are several such teams;

Church coffee rota

The Flower Ladies

All the sides persons

Counting team

The Cleaning Team

Play Group helpers

Chalice Bearers / People who deliver home communion
People who write and deliver intercessions
People on the 'prayer network'

Readers
Key-holders who close the church
Holy washers

There is always room on any / all of the rotas for more volunteers!

Treasurer's Report – Ken Robinson

We have experienced another hard year: Rev Judith was on long-term sick leave from September 2024 and left the post at the end of April 2025. We have effectively been in vacancy for 25 of the last 36 months. This has caused weekly attendance to decrease, whilst expenditure has been kept almost *Income*

The budget figure for income in the calendar year 2025 was set at £89,000. The actual total amount for our income was £134,013.

Income was therefore £45,000 above budget.

This is mainly attributable to:

- reclaiming costs of vicars covering services during vacancy
- renegotiating the parish share request. The Diocese have supported the parish share by allocating us £29,760 to set against it.
- Payments for funerals and weddings and other items that do not have budget estimates due to their unpredictability.
- Special donations for floodlighting and the tower clock

Planned Giving [bank standing orders and pledged envelopes] reached £44,407, which is 10% less than the average of the previous five years, although along with gift-aided white envelopes and loose-plate giving has increased slightly from 2024.

Fund-raising events added £2,500 more than in 2024.

Ladies Group have recently donated £500. Ken will send a letter of thanks.

Expenditure

The budget figure for expenditure was set at £134,960. The actual total expenditure was £124,811. Very few areas exceeded budget estimates, one being insurance due to the revised charges after the St. Mary's Centre took out their own insurance.

We renegotiated our Parish Share, but the full amount of £74,960 is shown in the accounts, as the Diocese allocated support to the request, saving £29,960 but didn't reduce it.

Assets

At the end of 2024, our assets had a value of £106,040, this year the balance on 31st December 2025 is £101,960 showing a decrease in assets of £4,080 due to a volatile share price.

Our assets comprise:

- Varley Bequest £62,526
- Varley Income £11,192
- Organ Maintenance Fund £ 4,280
- General Purposes Fund £19,958
- Deposit Account £ 4,001

The Future

We will have another challenging year ahead but can face it with optimism following the arrival in November 2025 of Fr. Paul as our new Vicar.

Our parish share is due to be reviewed in September 2026, as the Diocese want to support us in our efforts to grow the church.

We still have a lot of repair work planned to go ahead in 2026 following on from the quinquennial report this year, which will require grant aid to accomplish. The organ also requires major work to bring it to full working condition.

Budget 2026

Ken has increased all categories by 4%.

Church Insurance Policy – Our updated policy has now been received. Our premium is £800 per month

Fundraising Committee – It was agreed that a small committee of suitable people could be formed to address fundraising and would include applying for external grants. Paul and Ken have volunteered. Other possible interested parties will be approached.

Parochial Fees 2025 / 2026

	2025	Proposed for 2026
Heating	£50	£60
Verger	£55	
Organist Funeral	£90	
Wedding	£140	
(If a professional videographer is present - an extra £100 will go to the organist)		
Travel [if not in undertaker's vehicle]	£10	£15
Bells	£240	
Flowers [weddings]	£80	£100
Live streaming [£100 to organist]	£125	
Recorded/Projected Material	£50 - this has never been charged but will be in future	
Orders of Service [unlimited]	£60 - this seems a random figure – needs investigation.	

Vision Champion's Report – Linda Ainsworth & Patricia Duxbury

In 2025/6, the Vision Champion and/or the Assistant Vision Champion:

- Maintained links with Beavers and Cubs, inviting them to services and delivering input for badge activities.
- Publicised and updated events on the A Church Near You website and the Church website and revised the information under the Prayer tab.
- Established the Manga Café, a Fresh Expression of Church for teenagers aged 13+, providing the opportunity to read manga, enjoy free south-east Asian-themed cup noodles, snacks and drinks and talk with adults in a relaxed setting.
- Produced, distributed and displayed publicity material for special events in Church.
- Maintained the Prayer Board, praying for all those using it and those for whom they pray and arranging for space to be available for new posts.
- Continued to lead the after-service Prayer Group on Sundays to pray for St Mary's, our community and the wider world and to supply a prayer based on what had been prayed for to be printed on the weekly notices for general use.
- Produced AI copyright-free images and PowerPoint presentations for services and publicity.
- Reported through articles and photos for the Parish Magazine on the search for and appointment of a new incumbent to inform readers about the changes taking place in our Church.
- Updated and rewrote the St Mary Magdalene's Statements of Need and Significance as part of a programme of funding bids for grants to repair the fabric and furnishings of the Church, making them available for use by all bidders.
- Joined the proposed new fundraising group and shared ideas about future possible events.

Safeguarding Officer – Luke Lowry / Howard Riley

There have not been any reported incidents during the year 2025 – 2026. DBS checks for PCC members, Home Communion Visitors, Tower Captains, Music Director and Toddler Group Leader are all due for renewal this spring. All those individuals who are eligible for DBS certification have already undergone the mandatory online Foundation refresher training including the Domestic Violence package to increase our awareness. We still have permission from the diocese to do the online training as a group where some others are doing it online themselves. The group sessions proved to be successful with the subject matter provoking meaningful discussions.

Luke Lowry has taken over as PSO and the necessary notices been amended. Both Luke and Revd Paul have been enabled on the Parish Safeguarding Dashboard system and will be maintaining the necessary oversight. Similarly, they have both been registered with the diocese DBS desk for access to the 31:8 Basic to Enhanced Recruiters DBS online system. Both are undertaking the necessary diocesan training programs.

The Parish Safeguarding Dashboard is an online comprehensive software package that covers every aspect of our safeguarding requirements. We have identified all the specific church activities that we routinely engage with looking at any risk associated with participation by children, young people or vulnerable adults. Matters such as risk assessment, insurance cover and related policy and procedural issues are all involved in populating the dashboard which is monitored from the Diocese.

We have identified the following Church Activities to date:

- PCC members (Church based)
- Holy Communion Pastoral Visitors (Home visits)
- Music director and Choir Master (Church based)
- Bell Tower Captain & Deputy (Church based)
- Visiting Bell Ringers (Church based)
- Toddler Playgroup (St Mary Community Centre based)
- Clitheroe Christians in Partnership (CCP) Events

On the 16th March 2026 the PCC endorsed the Safeguarding Action Plan and the reviewed risk assessments for the aforementioned church activities.

The whole Parish Dashboard and previously been signed off as fully compliant by the Diocese and we have now updated it as of the 16/3 PCC meeting endorsements.

Role profiles have been compiled by the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) to support the CofE Safer Recruitment Strategy and the role risk assessment process. This can now be managed via the new Parish Safeguarding Hub which compliments and underpins the main Dashboard. This program can be used to design and record role profiles and associated risk assessments and may be developed to do that for us by the PSO during 2026. Luke Lowry has recently been enabled on the parish admin computer on which he will conduct his safeguarding work and use to access the Dashboard and Hub going forward. The church safeguarding policy remains featured on the St Mary's website with the 2024 revised reporting procedures.

Both the Vicar and Howard Riley have completed the safer recruiting training and were able to lead the recruitment and selection process for the new Director of Music who will formally be appointed 1st April 2026.

Thanks to all for their willing commitment to the safeguarding procedures.

Health & Safety Officer – Howard Riley

There have been no reportable H&S incidents during this last year 2025 to 2026 . Following the 2024/5 incident in the churchyard where a lady walking her dog left the footpath and slipped on a gravestone and broke her pelvis, the incident was reported according to H&S Executive process, and I reported the matter to our insurers. In consequence we have erected three signs warning off slippery gravestones and directing people to remain on the pathway.

Following a bush fire in the northeast corner of the churchyard our treasurer liaised with the RVBC and facilitated the removal of the tree and bush to recent further risk. The Police were asked to patrol the churchyard and there have been no further incidents to date.

Following the tragic death of a child last year caused by a toppled gravestone RVBC/LCC have inspected our churchyard and erected two warning signs.

The existing risk documents have been reviewed by the H&S officer and remain fit for purpose. The documents are available for scrutiny at the west door entrance to the nave. Any issues then please contact a church warden.

All the necessary inspections and surveys have been completed to date.

The poor state of repair of the pathways and some lighting issues have been repeatedly reported to the Council and Highways Authority with little progress to date although a couple of lights have been replaced on the rear passageway and steps.

Deanery Synod Report – Jo Robinson

- **26/3/2025 at St. Peter's Church, Salesbury**

Led by Bishop Jill this meeting focused on how Vision 2026 came into being, what it has done for the Diocese and what has it done for our Parishes.

Carolyn Barton, Director of Vision Delivery at Blackburn Diocese, then presented the major themes emerging from Parish consultation on the NEW VISION. At this stage she emphasized that this was a listening phase. It is hoped that the New Vision would be launched by November 2026. We must now look forward to 2033- 2000 years since Christ's death.

- **10/6/2025 at St. Paul's Church, Clitheroe**

Hosted by Assistant Area Dean Catherine Hale- Highway and opened by Ruth Haldene.

Rev. Steve Hackett and Sarah O'Donoghue, from the Diocesan Growth and Renewal team, set the scene for the Diocesan Centenary celebrations in 2026. A Whit walk event in Blackpool. We were shown a video from Bishop Philip encouraging us to look back over the last 100 years and to look forwards with a renewed commitment to spreading the Gospel. He hopes every Parish will put on simple events over the Mission weekend aiming for out-reach growth and mission.

Mission weekend September 11-13. It should not be about fund-raising!

A video message from Bishop Joe reminded us that mission is always invitational and that we should not be afraid of personal invites.

- **3/12/2025 at St. Peter and St. Paul's, Rishton and AGM**

The meeting began with a Eucharist service lead by Father Eddie Carr.

Rev. Liz McLean opened the meeting with a round-up of the year and asking "Where has God been with us this year".

The New Vision was announced "Joyful followers of Jesus" to be launched to coincide with the Diocesan centenary on 12th November 2026.

Lead by Ruth Haldene ideas were discussed about the Mission and Outreach weekend 11-13th September 2026.

AGM business- Whalley Deanery representatives up for election in 2026.

- **18/3/2026 St. Leonards Langho.**

The meeting was opened by Rev'd Liz McLean with the Leading Your Church Into Growth

prayer(LYCIG).

Rev. Karen Herschell gave an overview of her role in the Diocesan Renewal Programme. She described three main types of growth:-

Numerical (numbers coming to church).

Spiritual (becoming more like Jesus)

Missional (taking more of Jesus' mission to the world).

The programme is extended to 2027. Funding for this is not from the Parish Shares or Diocese.

Three clergy who are on/ have done the renewal programme shared their pearls of wisdom.

We were then split into groups to discuss how different churches were achieving growth.

Finally we were given notices including the Archbishop of Yorks 'Pilgrim Places' initiative encouraging our churches to be welcoming and reflective spaces. An invitation was given to attend a morning at Whalley Abbey where Theo Sheridan-Watts will give help and advice.

Next meetings:

- 29.07.26 – St Mary's Gisburn – AGM
- 17.11.26 – St Mary Magdalene Clitheroe

New members would be welcomed – Jo is stepping down since she will have extra duties as a new Churchwarden. Minutes of the meetings are circulated and available from the website. Colin Scott was elected as our representative on the Deanery Synod for the next three years.

Reports of Parochial and General Interest

St Mary's Centre – Lesley Howarth

The St. Mary's Centre continues to offer the local community a very flexible building to put on activities. But, yet again, over the last 12 months we have seen energy costs continue to increase significantly and our financial reserves are continuing to deplete.

Our diary of regular users continues to be very active although we always have room for new groups to meet on a regular basis, especially during the daytime. New activities over the last 12 months have seen a regular Line Dance class on a Thursday evening, a monthly junior herbalist's class, and Dog Behavioural classes.

We have hosted several Valuation Days, Residents meeting groups, several Dance Shows, the annual Operatic Society Musical, and Play, a Burlesque evening, an Abba tribute band and other Summer and Christmas shows.

We also hosted several concerts as part of the Ribble Valley Jazz and Blues Festival weekend and will once again be hosting more concerts this year.

The Hall Management committee has also started fundraising by holding a Tabletop sale and a Family Bingo Night. Both proved popular and we're hoping to continue to hold these in the coming year along with other events. A Ladies Fashion Show is planned for May.

The Mutual Room continues to hold many workshops and on-off meetings.

Some of our regular users have also run extra one-off full day events, including Hush Art Group, Jujitsu and Line Dancing.

We are actively trying to recruit new regular user groups and would like to thank the whole St. Mary's Centre team for their continued hard work on this. Marketing leaflets continue to be distributed, and the website and Facebook page continue to be used to publicise the space and flexibility that we have as a venue within Clitheroe. We also send out a monthly Newsletter to our distribution list of schools, regular users, volunteers, and potential users giving details of what's currently going on at the Centre.

The last of the money set aside from the sale of the Institute, (retained in a separate account, opened by the Trustees of the St. Mary's Centre, to be used for specified jobs that had been agreed with Ribble Valley Borough Council, for work within the St. Mary's Centre) has now been spent on the repointing, replacement gutters, downspouts and valley gutters on the North side of the building where there was significant water ingress. This work has now been completed. There is however, still work to be completed in the Main Hall to replaster the wall where the water damage has caused the plaster to come away from the wall.

Grants have been secured from several sources including the Lancashire Environmental Fund to carry out work on the internal insulation of the Main Hall roof. The plan is to complete this work over the summer months when many users will be on summer break, as the Main Hall and stage will be out of action for approximately four weeks. This is necessary work following an energy survey completed on the Hall showed the significant heat loss through the Main Hall roof was contributing to the Hall being cold during the winter months. This was affecting users and complaints had been received about the cool temperatures.

A grant has been received from Ribble Valley Borough Council, along with a donation from the Operatic Society towards replacing the projector in the Main Hall. This has now been replaced and is fully functioning and used by groups showing slideshows and films etc.

Turnover for the year to 31st December 2025 is down in 2025 at just under £55k compared to just over £75k in the previous year. However, the previous year includes just over £16k received from Lancashire Environmental Fund for the grant towards the solar panel installation.

We continue to look for ways to save money and apply for grant funding to carry out much needed work within the building. We are also looking at more fundraising ideas, and we are approaching our user groups to see if they would be willing to help with this.

We continue to be very grateful to our volunteers without whom we could not run the Hall, and we look forward to being able to continue to involve them with our activities. The Bar continues to raise much needed funds, and we continue to be very grateful to all the volunteers who staff and help run the bar. New volunteers are always welcome.

In conclusion the St. Mary's Centre is not in a good financial position and the coming year will again prove another challenging one, but thanks must go to the Centre staff, Management Team, and volunteers for their invaluable work.

Susan Robinson – Ladies Group

Well, what a busy, fulfilling and enjoyable first year it has been for me in my role as Chairperson for the group. I feel both privileged and blessed to be an integral part of this wonderful group. Each member is so precious and brings a special value to each meeting.

During the year we welcomed, Alison, Christine and Lorraine to the group, with membership now standing at 21.

2025 brought a full calendar of very interesting speakers and events. We were thrilled to be able to donate to the charities linked to the speakers, and in doing so helped to support their excellent work. The May Fair was a very successful event, which brought everyone in the church together in terms of donations and practical support. A real day of fellowship. - hard work of course, but very rewarding. We had our own stalls as well as outside stalls. How wonderful it was to have comments from these stall holders saying that our church is most welcoming, caring, and has a wonderful atmosphere. For the first time we held a Mango Café, run by Linda Ainsworth. Monies raised from the Fair were given to Christian Aid, UNICEF and our church.

In June our outing took us to visit Salmesbury Hall, which was very interesting, as we explored the ancient rooms, priest hides, visited the former Chapel and enjoyed the elegance of the stately rooms. Afternoon Tea at The Garden Room Eatery was then enjoyed by all.

In July the ladies had a delicious cream tea at Corbridge Court where the AGM was also held in December, followed by an excellent Christmas lunch provided by outside caterers. At this meeting Father Paul was welcomed as the new President of the Ladies Group.

The Christmas Fayre had many seasonal stalls and even brought Father Christmas from the North Pole to visit and sample our mince pies and mulled wine,(non-alcoholic of course)

At the end of the year we had surplus in our financial account and were thrilled to be able to donate to the Nightsafe Project, the Melanesian Brothers and our church.

I would like to sincerely thank Christine, Anne, Jenny and Janet for all their constant support on the Committee, John Wilkinson for setting up the Mutual Room at the St Mary's Centre, Jenni Carysforth for her tireless support to me in the Parish Office and to our dear friend Howard Riley for looking after us in the absence of having a Vicar. Grateful thanks must go also to the Reverend Jane Bury for stepping in and officiating our Corporate Communion earlier in the year.

Finally to the ladies in the group - thank you from the bottom of my heart for your love, care and most loyal support, both to me and in attendance at the meetings - coming out in all weathers.

We pray that God will guide and richly bless our group in 2026 and take special care of those members going through difficult times at the moment.

St Mary's Play Group – Sarah Dent

Play Group numbers have increased steadily over the last few months, with some weeks seeing 20+ children with Grandparents, Mums and Dads. Which is great to see.

Our team remains unchanged with a coffee and snack rotation from Anne, Jo, and Diane.

Julie Ascroft continues to come up with weekly craft activities which often link to the seasons and festivals.

Play dough continues to be popular it allows great opportunities to chat whilst manipulating the dough. The jigsaws are a weekly activity with some added threading and board games. We have purchased a play table which is multipurpose, so far we have used it for sand and wood savings very messy but great fun. In the summer we hope to add some compost and plant pots and maybe some water on a hot day so it becomes a shallow water tray.

Play group provides a great space to run ride and scoot and of course slide as the weekly "sit on toys" Slide etc are always available. We have a quieter area for reading and babies, with books and play mats baby chairs etc.

The small world toys such as the farm cars and train sets remain and we look out for bargains from local charity shops to top up and replenish our stock.

Patricia and Sue arrive around 10 for song and story time. Patricia always says a prayer and keeps us up to date with church news and events. Sue keeps us on our toes learning new songs as she guides us with her great guitar playing .

Patricia more recently has taken photos of our weekly antics and posted them on the Church Facebook page, which I hope people have enjoyed. Play group has its own Facebook page so its really helpful to be able to reshare the post. Keeping our presence on social media is important to help keep numbers up.

We've had some lovely comments from families recently who have said how much they enjoy coming and what a lovely group it is. This is great to hear, we have a fantastic team of volunteers who continue to make this such a lovely experience for everyone.

Parish Magazine – Linda Ainsworth

The Parish Magazine for the church of St Mary Magdalene aims to provide information, seasonal resources, articles and material for reflection to build up our common life, and to reach out to those in the local community, that they may see in it something of the Lord's glory reflected, and desire to know more of Him. Subscriber numbers stand at around 100 copies a month.

The magazine continues to generate some income from advertising, but we have still been unable to replace the majority of our half-page ads. This has necessitated an increase in the cover minimum price to 80p and for subscribers to £6 minimum for 10 issues. Thanks go to those advertisers who have stuck with us, and Jenni, our Parish Administrator, is seeking any suggestions as to whom we might approach to advertise in the magazine: please contact her in the parish office if you have any ideas. Advertising costs remain at £40 for a one-sixth page and £80 for a half-page advertisement for 10 insertions: in the current economic crisis afflicting small businesses, it might well prove counter-productive to raise prices. Annual postal subscriptions are available for £20.

Articles on any subject are always welcome, especially when accompanied by photographs. In order to facilitate editing, contributors are asked to submit articles as Word files, preferably unformatted, rather than PDFs, and any accompanying pictures as separate files not integrated into the text. Those without word processing facilities may submit articles in longhand to the Parish Office for typing. We look forward to hearing from you.

A new method of collecting subscriptions seems to have proved practicable this year: recycled church envelopes labelled with the subscriber's name and instructions for payment being attached to each magazine and being returned either to the magazine deliverer or directly to the Parish Office (via the letterbox if necessary). Thanks go to Jenni for her work on this innovation. Our distributors continue to take out the magazines efficiently and in a timely way. I can only thank you all very much for your assistance.

Clitheroe Christians in Partnership – Howard Riley

CCP has continued to meet each quarter. They continue to promote the monthly prayer theme for use across the fellowships and which St Mary's has contributed to and published in the parish magazine. A number of us assisted on the setting up and delivery of this year's Carols at the Castle which attracted over 2000 people.

We have continued to support the CCP door to door delivery of HOPE and EXLORE magazines to most of the housing estates in the town. CCP continues to support the Ribble Valley Climate Action Network (RVCAN) although St Mary's contribution has been minimal. CCP has facilitated the establishment of community warm spaces over the winter, but St Mary's was not considered a viable venue but volunteer support was offered. CCP have run holiday club style venues with activities and provision of refreshments over February half term at St James's, Trinity and the Community Church and are planning to run some sessions over the summer holiday period. This will be published in the newsletter with an invitation for volunteer support. CCP have continued to work with Turret House on Edisford Road offering thematic organised prayer and fellowship sessions at this attractive venue throughout the year. The CCP remains in support of outreach through drama using church space with the Lamps Drama Company 'PASSION' being performed at St Pauls Low Moor and 'The Romans at Easter' performed at Trinity

Coming up there will be a CCP Good Friday service and Walk of Witness at the URC and then walk up to the castle with the cross for outdoor worship. The Summer Town BBQ went ahead with a number of our fellowship assisting in various roles. There was an emphasis on reaching young people in the park area for this event. CCP will be overseeing Christian Aid week as usual. This summer offers an exciting weekend of 'Love Clitheroe' outreach with Live at the Castle and Church at the castle events. Publicity material has been sent to CCP churches.

The organisation is closely linked with the activities of the Gateway Trust which includes the Foodbank and they need more trustees to sit above this valuable local charity and ministry. Please speak to the churchwarden if you feel you wish to get involved.