

Vicar's Report for 2025

Presented at the Annual Parochial Meeting 26th April 2026

This report reflects the activities, services and events between the period of January to December 2025.

Dear friends,

Alleluia! Christ has risen!

It's been another earlier celebration of Easter and no sooner had we put away the Christmas decorations then we were entering into Lent. Looking back at the last 12 months we see once again how our church community has grown and changed. One of the features of St Paul's is that we welcome new faces each and every week, some are transient maybe coming for several weeks, some worship with us just the once, others are more sporadic with no discernible pattern to their attendance. It's quite a challenge for a small church community to try and keep worship going. It may be that St Paul's is a trail-blazer in this respect as we try and work out how to be a Christian community that is responsive to filling in the gaps at short-notice- whether that's putting the hymn numbers on the boards or assisting with leading intercessions or being willing to be the 'duty person' in case of a fire or emergency. If you spot something that hasn't been done- take that as an invitation to make it happen! There are of course a number of things that happen behind the scenes in advance of events and services- risk assessments, health and safety checks, administration-photocopying, writing

intercessions, sermon and service preparation, rotas, ironing the communion linen and music rehearsals. Increasingly there are congregational members where infirmity means that they can no longer offer practical assistance, but who appreciate being able to still attend worship. There are of course folks whose faithful commitment sustains the life and ministry of our church, and I am deeply grateful to all who give their time, energy and gifts in service of God's mission in Sale.

On behalf of the PCC we are especially grateful to our Churchwarden, Yvonne Stevenson, whose diligent work ensures that our building is safe and well maintained, who is often the first person to arrive on the Sunday to unlock and prepare the church for worship. Yvonne has indicated that she is stepping down from this role this year and we are thankful for all that she has done over the last few years despite her increasingly ill health.

I also need to thank our licensed pastoral workers Karen Salisbury and Yvonne Kerridge for their respective ministries and extend sincere thanks to Revd Dr Margaret Jones, Revd Dr Lisa Redfern, and Revd Shemil Mathew for their prayers, service preparation and wise counsel.

Thanks must also be extended to Anne Allen and Kevin Drury, whose contributions to music and worship enrich our common life.

Our Treasurer, Joe Blaney, continues to be an invaluable asset, ensuring that our finances are carefully managed and transparently reported, as well as taking on building management - filling out faculty forms and making sure permissions are in place.

A special mention must be made to Laura Jackson and Wiggle the Bible bookworm, it's been really wonderful to see the group getting larger each week and parents and families appreciative of the work that Laura puts into shaping the sessions and enabling our children to discover something new about Jesus and their relationship with God.

There are also those who regularly volunteer to offer their assistance to Laura with Sunday school, who help with refreshments and whose work 'behind the scene's keeps the church tidy both inside and outside.

2025 Events and Activities

We began the year with our tree planting scheme- in our church garden we added 12 new trees including fruit trees which we hope will be a great resource for the future. We also achieved our Bronze eco-church award. Well done to Vicky our eco-champion and those supporting our new target of achieving our Silver eco-award.

In March St Paul's hosted the World Day of Prayer led by the folks from around the local churches.

In May we hosted special commemorative service for the 80th Anniversary of VE Day in partnership with Trafford Council and the lighting of the peace-lamp. Other partnerships this year included hosting several concerts for Sale Festival including a Blues Band, a joint choir event and an operatic Christmas concert. We also hosted groups of Beavers and Cubs who came to look around the building and go up the church tower as well as undertake a scavenger hunt in church.

For Christian Aid week we had a jacket potato fundraiser with folks coming in from the Bridgewater canal footpath to join in the spud-fest.

Heritage Day was on a smaller scale this year, with exhibition boards, displays and refreshments in church.

Harvest was well supported with Springfield school choir in attendance and items were collected for the Mustard Tree and local foodbanks.

We invited the new Christians Against Poverty manager, Funa Joseph to talk to us in our morning service about CAP and what we could do to help and offer support.

Safeguarding Sunday was held in November and we are encouraged by the new Diocesan campaign to speak out and stay safe.

The Christmas Tree Festival again provided opportunities for various groups and organisations to sign-post their services as well as hosting families and children in meeting Santa and offering live music and the chance to come into a non-commercial space. Folks commented on the peacefulness of the building and spending much longer in church than they had anticipated. The Christingle Service again was well-attended, though we knew this year would be different due to the sad loss of our dear Sheila Clarke. Her funeral in October saw a packed church with those attending from all the different parts of her life including daughter Lisa, her friends from work, the Guiding community and her church friends. Sheila was always positive, always a smile on her face and a determination to roll up her sleeves wherever possible. She was an inspiration to us all and she is very much missed.

Together, these contributions reflect a shared commitment to the life of the church and to the mission to which we are called.

Discipleship

During the year we saw a number of people baptised both children and adults and it was great to welcome them into the church family. We did not have any confirmations, although nearby churches in the Deanery are keen to accommodate and welcome candidates from other churches at their confirmation services.

We held a Lent group this year using material from USPG on the Nicene Creed as it was the 1,700 anniversary of the writing of the creed. Despite holding groups

on-line in the evening and during the daytime, attendance was low numbers- with just 4 people. Given the amount of time and preparation that goes into running these groups, we will be sign-posting people to alternative Lenten provision next year.

A new midweek home group began however in response to requests from church members for a regular bible study and devotional time. This currently meets in the home of group members which restricts numbers that can attend. We have undertaken the Bible Society's bible course which included video clips featuring the author Revd Andrew Ollerton.

Our ecumenical links continued with a prayer walk taking place around Sale with Revd Lisa offering thought-provoking meditations in various locations including the Town Hall and Sale high street.

Experience Easter 2025 saw another group of 90 children from Springfield school come to listen to the story of Holy Week, told by volunteer story-tellers from across various churches in the locality including friends from Churches Together in Sale. It's a real shame that despite an ongoing stream of requests via the pew sheet and church newsletters that no church members have been able to volunteer to attend the evening Churches Together quarterly meetings as St Paul's representative. One of the great strengths of ecumenical working is that we can do things together that maybe we couldn't do on our own, as our St Pauls writes: "21 The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 In fact, it is just the opposite. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the ones we can't do without". Our Churches Together fellowship in Sale is diminished by our absence.

What's next?

- We'd like to continue to work on our eco-church awards and making small changes around the church building that help us to focus our attention on limiting our use of plastics and trying to buy items that fit LOAF principles- local, organic, animal-friendly and fair-trade.
- Somewhat surprisingly we had no weddings last year and have no enquiries for this year, it's a real shame as St Paul's is such a fantastic space and has the longest aisle that means you can take your time and enjoy the walk. It was lovely to hear about the weddings that had taken place over the years at the Heritage Day and see the wedding photos as well as the dresses. Perhaps we can take part in a wedding fair or host one of our own?
- In 2026 we continue our partnership working with Sale Festival and are looking forward to hosting once again a number of concerts and events including 'Tosca' and a 'Sale through the Ages'. A small church community like St Paul's really needs to develop its partnership working if it is to survive. The church building itself needs to be in use much more, the

church congregation have to raise £1,500 a week to keep it open- to cover insurances, utility bills and all the things we need to do to keep it in basic good order. We need to share the load more with the local community, providing more opportunities for 'one-off donations' through fundraising and events. For example, how many people walk through the church gardens each day and don't realise that it is maintained by our church community rather than the council.

Finally, I just wanted to say again thank you to everyone that's offered their support and prayers for the new ministry I've been undertaking. As you know I'm part-time at St Paul's and with the cost of living ever increasing, it was necessary for me to look at additional hours elsewhere. As a hospital chaplain my working hours are strictly boundaried during the day with on-call work in the evenings and sometimes at weekends. I'm based at Manchester Royal Infirmary with occasional forays into other hospitals to cover absences. I can be called to a variety of incident and accidents including end of life and sudden death for which I am grateful for your ongoing prayers in what can be distressing and challenging circumstances.

Yours in faith,
Becky Mathew, Vicar of St Paul's Church, Sale
April 2025