

St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Reports of the activities of the Parochial Church Council and the Parish 2025



Tea and Talk with the Poulsons - 1 October 2025



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Registered Charity Number: 1152514

This parish is a part of the Benefice of Goring and Streatley with South Stoke

Introduction and Vicar's report

Another year which could not be described as dull!

God is at work and we continue to be surprised and encouraged in small and big ways. Our worship of almighty God has continued and our church building to be a place where we give time to meet and encounter God together and to seek His will and way.

Thankfully we have kept the doors open in our church every day. Thank you to those who do this physical unlocking each day, but also a huge thank you to everyone who participates in the life of your church, giving generously to pay the bills and very importantly to provide a welcome to those who come to visit and join us for worship.

Refreshment, interest in and engagement with everyone is a blessing we all have a part in. None of us is called to be a Christians on our own.

*“ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, **not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing**, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* Hebrews 10:24-25

In a world where it seems to be increasingly hard to get commitment from people, a willingness to volunteer and take on roles of responsibility, we thank God for all who vitally hold together the nitty gritty and service represented in this report.

Please read it and delight and pray for the coming years.

Of particular note and input have been the Bereavement Café (see report below) which was literally a place of transformation. Over the course of the year we saw the heart-broken discovering they were not on their own and that that they could and were going forwards through their grief. At the end of the year they were ready to let the group come to a natural end. With the very able Melissa and Matt Walker we are planning to offer a different course this year hopefully reaching a wider audience.

The other has been the Ministry Calling Group (see report below) which has built up the individuals involved, but also the depth and repertoire of our services, adding resilience and promise to the body of the church for years to come.

The Passion organ symphony by Dupre at Easter was a first and much appreciated. A great highlight was Matt and Emily's wedding in August, a deeply spiritual and of course a joy-filled musical occasion. But perhaps even this was surpassed by the Christmas carol service with the school children's choir joining the extended adults achieving together what was beyond our expectations.

Madeleine Bastawrous began in June to lead more children and family's work bringing huge gifts from God to us all through them. Their feedback and teaching of us all at the end of our services of what they have done, and the wider gathering of families for meals in the Canterbury Room has broadened our ministry hugely. Alleluia and thanks to God.

A number of church members have been involved in developing an exciting project called Just Grow to be an example of what's possible and replicable hand in hand with many other initiatives enabling a healthier, fairer more sustainable food system, when we (the community) take responsibility for stewarding soil and land as part of a just food system. The PCC has offered to support the Just Grow project with a donation of up to £50,000 from a recent legacy from Daphne Prue, herself a botanist which was gifted to the PCC, subject to Diocesan approval.

I appeal to you all to pray for revival of our own faith, and the community around us with a deeper placing of ourselves in God's hands and asking Him to be central and Lord of all we are and aspire to. “Thy Kingdom come...”

Rev'd Ben Phillips

Overview of Parish activity

St Thomas of Canterbury Church is situated in Goring village near the banks of the river Thames. It has been a place of worship since before the 11th Century. It is one of three parishes forming the Benefice of Goring and Streatley with South Stoke, the other parishes being St Mary's, Streatley and St Andrew's, South Stoke, and part of the Henley Deanery within the Diocese of Oxford. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is registered with the Charity Commission since 20th June 2013. Charity number 1152514.

Church members who have served on the PCC in 2025:

Clergy:		
Vicar	Revd Ben Phillips	
Associate Priest	Revd Wendy Middleton	
Permission to Officiate	Revd Liz Dowding	
Licensed Lay Ministers	Mrs Judith Aguda Mrs Judith Hogg	Electoral Roll Officer Deanery Synod rep
Wardens	Brenda Kerr Muir Rob Howard	Lay Vice-Chairman, Deanery Synod rep
Elected members	Bridget Braham Alison Gray Simon Merritt Elizabeth Parkinson Don Shrimpton Christopher Tassell Melissa Walker Matthew Walker	Safeguarding Officer (until 6 th June 2025) Honorary Treasurer

Mr Henry Parkinson continued as non-voting Honorary Secretary

The structure, governance and activity of the PCC is regulated under the Church Representation Rules 2022. Members of the Church community are encouraged to join the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC. Responsibility for the compilation of the Electoral Roll was held by Judith Aguda. The number on the Electoral Roll reported by Judith at the 2025 Annual Parochial Church Meeting was 95.

The Parish Mission Statement is:

To understand more fully the Good News of our faith and to be more active disciples of Christ in our own community. To make our church a welcoming and relevant place in the life of the village and to take seriously our responsibilities to the wider world.

The normal pattern of services was: first Sunday - Family service and Choral BCP evensong; second and fourth Sundays – Sung Holy Communion Common Worship; and third Sunday – Good News, Service of the Word format. The 8am BCP Holy Communion on Sundays continued weekly, alternating with St Mary's. Holy Communion was delivered to Communicants in the Summer by the Common Cup but sadly it was resumed by intincting the wafer at all services by the end of the year. The monthly Prayer Breakfast continued throughout the year.

The PCC met on 4 occasions during 2025 under the chairmanship of Revd Ben Phillips. There were PCC meetings on 8th January, 26th March, June 25th, and 15th October. The Vicar and Wardens of the Benefice met between PCC meetings approximately every 8 weeks in between. The APCM was conducted at 11am on May 18th with members of the congregation present.

During Christian Aid Week, we delivered envelopes to people's homes with a note asking them to take their donations to Jack's or Inspiration for Goring and Streatley, or the Village Shop in South Stoke. It seemed to work well raising a total of £2,064.

The life of the parish and group activities run to enhance and further the aims of the Mission Statement including *Digging Deeper*. The weekly newsletter continued to be a vital support and communication channel to church members throughout the year. We are most grateful to Jill Kirby for putting it together and to all those who prepared the intercessions - we now used Roots prayers when not specially written. People continued to be added to the circulation list and a paper copy was delivered to homes for those without internet.

The PCC discussed at length the proposal for Goring Primary school to federate with Stoke Row Primary school and our concern for fewer local people being involved in the depths of governance and so broadening understanding and support of the school.

The PCC is indebted to the small band of people who faithfully unlock and lock the church door each day so that the building may be a place of welcome, solace and refuge for those who are passing and choose to enter.

Statistics in the Service Register during 2025 sadly continued to show reduced attendance throughout the year – pre-pandemic 85-90, post-pandemic 45-50. The services at Easter and Christmas were well supported with a lot of people attending. There were 2 Weddings and 14 Funerals or Thanksgiving services and 4 funerals held at the Crematorium as well as 4 burials of ashes.

Brenda Kerr Muir & Rob Howard

Churchwardens' Report of Actions, Fabric, Goods and Ornaments of the Church

Quinquennial Report

We got a 'good report' from the architect, Henry Saunders in the 2024 inspection. The main issues identified were:

1. Adequacy of the rainwater pipes on the north aisle roof, which is particularly important with the high rainfall experienced.
2. Further slipped roof tiles. The roof was overhauled two years ago by J G Restoration, but more have slipped since then. The alternative would be to completely re-roof the Church, which would require full scaffolding and a temporary scaffold roof, before the re-roofing itself could start. It would be extremely expensive.
3. One of the lead flashings to the tower parapet has become loose and will need fixing. This was installed during the works to the tower, over 10 years ago.
4. The upper level of the west face of the tower was repointed during the work to the tower roof and the lower level as part of J G Restoration work. However, there is still cement pointing at mid-height on the west face of the tower. I do not think this is urgent.
5. Early C20 (?) cement-based pebbledash on apse, should if possible be removed to help the wall breathe. This has been discussed before, but although not ideal, it does not seem to be causing dampness inside. It would be extremely expensive, so will not be done in the foreseeable future.
6. The only main water stopcock is outside of the organ chamber and tests need to be done to see if it controls all the water in the Church.
7. The modern rendered external panels on the west end of the Canterbury Room are loose and need refixing or renewing.
8. Refixing Canterbury Room flashing

A heritage builder is coming to quote for item 3 (tower flashing). Items 4 and 5 (repointing and render removal) will not be done during this quinquennial period as there seems to be no adverse effect on the Church. Item 6 (mains water stopcock) has had an initial investigation by a water engineer and further investigation is required by Henry and me. Item 8 (lead flashing) has been completed. We will obtain quotations for items 1 (rainwater pipes), item 2 (replacing slipped tiles) and item 7 (rendered panels) in the next few months.

Other work done during the last year includes:

Choir Heating – during the annual heating service, Ken Chandler adjusted the circuit serving the choir radiators so that they reach a higher temperature. On his advice, we now turn on the choir radiators on Friday, so that there is 2 days to properly heat the area of the choir. Members of the choir say that they are warmer as a result of these changes.

Steps outside tower – we obtained a quotation for rebuilding the steps at an easier gradient and providing a new footpath and handrail to connect to the north porch. However, this proved prohibitively expensive and we have taken the cheaper option of removing the old steps, reinstating the bank and erecting fences to discourage use of this shortcut.

Churchyard lighting – our electrician has connected up the four lights at the lych gate end of the footpath to the Church circuit enabling us to dispense with the very expensive supply to these four lights. He has also changed all the lamps in the external lights to LEDs. Taken together, these changes will considerably reduce our electricity bills. It is worth noting that the trench dug to run the underground cable exposed the foundations to the transept of the nun's church, demolished during the reformation. The location of these foundations matched Percy Stone's archaeological excavation carried out in the late 19th century and reproduced in our Church history booklet.

Trees – You may have noticed the yew by the north porch has had some lower branches removed to achieve the shape of a traditional Churchyard yew and avoid bruised heads of those maintaining the ground below. Alan Braclik, tree surgeon, pruned many trees in the Churchyard in November last year. The pruning will make the Churchyard (including gravestones) easier to maintain.

Rob Howard & Brenda Kerr Muir

CMS Mission Partners – Steve and Lindsey Poulson

The year began with 65 children and young people being served at the mentoring centre in Talanga, Honduras. 53 of these children and young people are registered for the new school year and the remaining children the staff are trying to reach. These children are very much connected to life on the streets.

They now have 5 full time members of staff: increasing the part time psychologist, Fernanda to full-time, and hiring a new education co-ordinator, Abi. And of course, the rest of the staff, Lorena, Christian and Sergio.

5 young adults are continuing their education and another 5 who have left school are benefiting from the mentorship programme. Throughout the year Proyecto Alas have provided after school sessions for the children and young people. Each session has time for homework help and tutoring and throughout the course of the week they participate in rotating events such as library time, crafts, cooking, games, recreation and some religious guidance.

A Boy Scout group was started for 24 children and young people who were interested and Proyecto Alas staff helped to coordinate with the Honduras representatives of the Scout movement.

In addition to the work with the children and youth ,Proyecto Alas provided educational scholarships to 6 young adults and 4 mothers of children involved in the mentoring programme. All either completing secondary school or working on university degrees.

The Alas staff also offers regular support and encouragement to the parents, (usually single mothers), of the children and young people through monthly breakfast events, home visits and psychology services as and when needed. During the year they were also able to help with several medical emergencies covering the cost of treatment and care.

As usual the group welcomed visits from mission teams from the U.S. churches, who enthusiastically helped with building projects, maintenance and activities for the children and young people during their stay in Honduras.

Proyecto Alas celebrated its 8th anniversary as a project in June and has now established a local board of trustees as part of the process of establishing the project as a non-profit organisation in Honduras.

Unfortunately, due to lack of staff and customers the decision was made to temporarily close both coffee shops that were created to help support Proyecto Alas. However, the barber shop, run by one of Alas young people continues to thrive and is a source of income for the project.

On a positive note, during the year, 6 of the 12 street connected children and young people mentioned earlier in this report registered for school and began regularly attending the mentoring centre.

Of course, one of the highlights of 2025 was the birth of Lindsay and Steve's baby daughter Elizabeth Milagro in March. As she grows she is a sociable little girl delighting in the attention she gets from anyone involved in Proyecto Alas. It was a pleasure to see the family during their September visit to U.K. They managed to visit all three churches in the Benefice and gave an update of their work to parishioners with tea and cakes in the Canterbury room.

Their enthusiasm shines through in the all the letters we receive through CMS and we offer our prayers to Steve, Lindsey and the team at Proyecto Alas in this coming year.

Jackie Brookes

Goring Church of England Primary School

Each week we have been pleased to welcome Ben, Nigel or Wendy into school to lead collective worship. Wendy is particularly enjoyed by the youngest pupils in Greenfinch Class, while Ben and Nigel bring a valued sense of variety and engagement for the rest of the school.

We shared several services at St Thomas' Church over the year, including our Easter celebration alongside Streatley School. Our Year 6 Leavers' Service was also held in church and was well supported by pupils and their families. Both the Harvest and Carol Services were very well attended.

Genesis Club has been a positive addition to our provision. This weekly after-school club for Year 6 pupils is led by Ben with the support of volunteers from St Thomas' and feedback is extremely positive.

We are very grateful to everyone at St Thomas' for their continued support of the school.

Angela Wheatcroft, Headteacher

Communications

This year we have continued to send out a weekly newsletter to over 250 e-mail addresses. The newsletter is also uploaded to our website each Friday morning. The website version is read by a varying number of people, often over 100, and many more around Christmas and Easter. **We are always happy to receive articles and photos for the newsletter by e-mail to officeofgsandss@yahoo.com.**

We continue to be very grateful to Geoffrey Horne who delivers physical copies of an extended newsletter with a weekly thought, psalm and prayers to the housebound in Goring and Streatley. Thank you also to Catherine Coulson who delivers further copies in South Stoke and others who take on this task if Catherine is unavailable.

We produce an A5 sheet (usually on coloured paper) for everyone in church on Sundays with the week's collect and space for your sermon notes. We encourage you to take this home with you to keep as your weekly bookmark and prayer prompt.

We regularly send articles to the Goring Gap News, the South Stoke newsletter and to Genie, the electronic village newsletter. We again had an ecumenical Christmas card printed for all homes in Goring, Streatley and South Stoke and thank Wendy for sorting these into folders and everyone who delivered them.

As noted above, the website is another source of information for people and Robin Middleton, Henry Parkinson and Jenny Hall do sterling work adding articles and bookings for the churches and Canterbury Room. Melissa Walker has very kindly taken on the **Benefice Facebook page** ("Goring Gap Churches – St Thomas, St Mary's & St Andrews") so please do find and "follow" this page. We hope that you enjoy reading what you receive and please do keep us informed of any news! Thank you.

The Benefice Office Team

Church Choir and Music

The previous year has once again been filled with musical delight, achievement, and joyful music-making. I remain as enthusiastic as ever about my role and, in collaboration with Ben and the wider team, am already laying the groundwork for projects stretching well into 2027.

Over the past year I have introduced a significant amount of new repertoire, which the choir has taken in its stride — including works requiring additional instrumentalists, many of whom we were fortunate to source in-house. Although I may be slightly biased, one of

the crowning musical moments for me was our wedding in August, where the choir sang magnificently. I cannot thank them enough for embracing the challenges involved and for contributing so beautifully to such a special day.

Looking ahead, my focus is on rediscovering hidden gems within our existing music library — works that may have been long forgotten or not performed in recent memory. Already this term we have several delightful pieces lined up. We are also hoping to introduce more of the lesser-known hymns from our hymn book which are seldom sung. You may have noticed the regular inclusion of movements from Handel's Messiah where liturgically appropriate; this forms part of our preparation for a large fundraising performance of the complete work during Holy Week 2027.

I would once again like to extend my sincere thanks to:

- Ben, for being such a supportive and musically minded vicar;
- Elizabeth, for shouldering a substantial administrative workload to help the choir run smoothly;
- Mal, for keeping the music library in excellent health;
- and the Music and Hymn Committee, whose thoughtful hymn selections demonstrate real liturgical sensitivity and nuance.

Our organ scholar, Toby, has progressed by leaps and bounds this year. He is now regularly accompanying more complex repertoire and has stepped in for me on several occasions. He has been a delight to teach and has developed rapidly. Toby is hoping to complete his Grade 6 ABRSM examination before leaving us at Easter to travel prior to university.

We have also awarded Annabel a choral scholarship for the coming year. She is currently having lessons with Emily, attending most rehearsals and services, and taking on an increasing number of solos. She is progressing very well and shows great promise.

This year we ran a highly successful Come and Sing Rutter Day to celebrate John Rutter's birthday. The event was extremely well attended and generated a great deal of positive feedback.

One of my personal highlights was, of course, the Carol Service. Although the music was not immediately well received at the first rehearsal, everyone persevered, and the final result was immensely enjoyable. There was something truly magical about seeing the children involved — clapping along — and I was especially pleased to welcome my brother, who assisted with the accompaniment. He enjoyed the experience so much that he is hoping to return again in the future. As a gifted organist who is also a full-time doctor and cancer researcher, he rarely has time to play these days.

The organ has, for the most part, now fully settled and is behaving reliably, requiring only routine maintenance. One recurring issue may indicate a more serious underlying concern, but we are aiming to accurately diagnose the issue, steps are being taken, and the matter is very much in hand.

Following on from last year's report, we have reached the point where the youth choir is effectively no longer functioning. The two remaining members are both scholars and are now fully integrated into the adult choir. Due to personal commitments over the past year, I have not devoted as much time to recruitment as is necessary, and I apologise for this. However, plans are now being developed, and I intend to place significantly greater emphasis on recruitment and outreach during the coming year.

Matt Foster

Heal the Gap Bereavement Café

From the beginning of 2025, we began running the Heal The Gap Bereavement Café, meeting monthly to offer a warm and welcoming space for those navigating personal loss. This was the first time St Thomas' had introduced the café in this format. Having previously run a small number of bereavement courses, we felt it was the right time to try something a little different and see how a more informal, ongoing gathering might serve our community.

The response throughout the year has been very encouraging. Each month was well attended, clearly reflecting the need for gentle and accessible support. It has been particularly heartening to welcome not only people from within our own community, but also others from slightly further afield, showing how valuable this kind of space can be.

Each month, thoughtfully prepared reflection questions were offered to help guide conversation and encourage deeper sharing within the group. These prompts gave participants opportunity to pause, reflect and, if they wished, share something of their own journey. Discussions were often moving and meaningful, yet there was also space for warmth and companionship as friendships gradually formed.

Feedback from those attending has been overwhelmingly positive. Many shared how much they valued being able to speak openly in a safe and understanding environment. Several commented that the café had become an important part of their personal grief journey and that they genuinely looked forward to gathering each month.

Of course, no café would be complete without refreshments. Tea and coffee were served alongside a generous spread of biscuits and cakes, all of which were happily enjoyed. One participant kindly baked delicious rock cakes for us during the year — so delicious, in fact, that they rarely lasted long on the table. Around the tables there was thoughtful conversation, gentle support, and — at times — much chat and even laughter, reminding us that moments of lightness can sit alongside grief.

We concluded the year with a delicious Christmas lunch, offering a special time of fellowship together. During this gathering, we also paused to remember loved ones who had gone before us, holding them in our thoughts as we marked both loss and hope within our shared community.

The Heal The Gap Bereavement Café has quickly become a valued and much-appreciated ministry within our benefice, and we are grateful to all who have supported and participated in it throughout the year.

Melissa Walker

Ministry Calling

This year we led a training course for those who felt called to a greater level of service and ministry. Six church members met monthly and with input from Wendy and Ben, they then took it in turns to lead the Good News Service in Goring and South Stoke. Mutual feedback and support have been a vital part of this. They reflect that they have learned and grown in this process and it has brought an added depth and variety and different insights and an exploration of more people's testimony.

This gives us a blessing and a resilience in our service planning and cover when our regular clergy are not available.

Ben Phillips

Hymn Committee

The committee met three times during the year to select hymns for the 9.30 am Holy Communion and Good News services as well as for the monthly Choral Evensong. We received a few requests, more would be welcome, and compliments exceeded complaints about the choices we made, which was reassuring.

Alun Hughes

Coffee Volunteers Rota

Thanks to the fantastic support of our small band of volunteers, we have again managed to serve coffee after most of the first Wednesday communion services and the main Sunday services.

We were also able to serve mulled wine, juice, mince pies and some very popular chocolate biscuits after the Carol Service in December which was much appreciated by those who stayed.

We were again short of volunteers, and this hasn't changed, so realistically, we will need some more people to help if we are going to be able to provide coffee every week in 2026. If anyone is able to help us about once every two months it would take some of the pressure off the existing group. I do know that the chance to meet and talk after the service is very much appreciated by many regular members of our congregation as well as visitors so I hope that we will find enough volunteers be able to serve coffee regularly throughout the year.

I am very grateful to all our volunteers and I would like to thank them so much for their support.

Hazel Shrimpton

Pick-a-Flick

We have had a happy year at Pick a Flick and it continues to be well-attended with people meeting others for coffee, a film and lunch. It is an informal community get-together with a warm atmosphere and people say how much they enjoy coming. We try and choose films that will appeal to everyone and the cost of attending remains at £5, with any surplus funds being distributed between the three churches in the benefice.

We have a group of loyal volunteers who enjoy helping make the occasion such a happy one and, when time and space permit, sitting and chatting with people over a delicious lunch of homemade soup, cheese and a dessert.

Sarah Fraser

Prayer Breakfast

Prayer Breakfasts are held once a month, usually on the last Saturday in the month, in the Canterbury Room. The actual date is in the monthly Benefice Calendar and on the relevant weekly News Sheet. We start at 8.15 with coffee/tea and croissants and then look at a short Bible passage and discuss it. After this we pray for the upcoming church services, activities and events. We also pray about what is going on in the world and for individuals who need particular support at the time. We aim to finish at 9.30 sharp.

The number attending varies between three and eight or nine. We would love to have more people join us as prayer is so important to the health and growth of our churches. Everyone is welcome!

Judith Aguda

Ecumenical Groups

Parishioners from local churches Our Lady and St John, the Free Church and St Thomas' in Goring, Christ the King, Woodcote, St Andrew's, South Stoke and St Mary's in Streatley came together to explore the chosen material for the Lent and Advent groups.

For both events there were four groups, of roughly 10 people in each, that met for 5 weeks for Lent and 4 weeks in Advent, followed by a plenary session after both, allowing the groups to fellowship and reflect on the course. The groups met in people's homes: two morning groups, one afternoon and a group that met in the evening.

We used the Embrace the Middle East's Lent booklet, Hope in Hard Places. Whilst we continue to pray for healing in the Middle East, we were asked to look inward to explore where we are challenged. When life is extremely difficult, the question is often asked, where is God in all this? We can feel abandoned, like Job, or unheard, like, Hannah. But God calls us to live in hope that he is in it all with us. Hope that is not whimsical, but steadfast.

For Advent, the chosen book was 'Long Ago in Bethlehem' by Amy Scott Robinson, which focused on the book of Ruth, admiring how Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi travelled from Moab to Bethlehem, and comparing their journey with that of Joseph and Mary

from Galilee to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. The course was well received, perceived as a little different from what had been studied previously, offering plenty of discussion issues, with opportunities to relate their situations to today's world.

We are always looking for more people to host or lead, so if you would like to get involved, please do get in touch with the parish office.

Catherine Coulson

Flower Arrangers

Our small band of flower arrangers continue to place flowers on the altar throughout the appropriate seasons. As ever, we also come together to decorate the church for the festivals of Easter, Harvest and Christmas. We are very pleased to have recently welcomed Samantha Drage to the group and look forward to enjoying her obvious creativity.

Bearing in mind the increasing cost of fresh flowers, it is likely that artificial blooms may be used from time to time. Any expenses that our arrangers incur for fresh flowers and wish to claim can be reimbursed by the church treasurer. Last Easter's 'Lilies in Memoriam' fund was generously supported and the church again looked wonderful for that important festival.

We continue to avoid using 'floral foam' and try to find creative and attractive alternatives for arranging flowers. Floral foam does not biodegrade, goes to landfill and needs careful handling. It is best to avoid it.

My grateful thanks to all the team for the caring and thoughtful work they have put in over the year. Any offers of flowers, greenery or help with arranging would be very welcome. This could be any interested person, not just those who come to services! We would welcome your involvement.

Jenny Boyd

Goring and Streatley Bell Ringers

Goring and Streatley bells continue to be rung for Sunday services and on special occasions, including in celebration of the 80th anniversary of VE Day.

We are fortunate in having 6 new recruits who are very enthusiastic and progressing well. Ringing practices at Goring continue to thrive and with the help of visiting ringers we continue to challenge ourselves. Practices for the new recruits and less experienced ringers are held at Streatley with the occasional trip to South Stoke.

The steeple keepers are currently sound proofing the ringing chamber at Streatley.

Josie Irving

Deanery Synod

John Blair stepped back from his role as Area Dean, having pulled together a Recovery plan agreed by the benefices of the deanery to move from only paying 79% of its share towards the target of a full share of the costs of ministry across the Diocese. Jeremy Tayler was appointed in his place and we thank God that this year, thanks to much generosity, we paid a much higher proportion. Goring Streatley and South Stoke continue to pay their full share and help in this mutual support and charitable endeavor. Thank you all and thank God for all that comes from Him.

Goring hosted the Synod summer BBQ this year which was a great occasion of fellowship.

Ben Phillips

Churchyard maintenance

Mowing and strimming continues to be carried out by the same volunteers, with possibly others unknown to me. Others regularly do a significant amount of tidying and disposal work task – thanks are due to all of them. Ivy growing on walls – but not on trees - has been greatly reduced by cutting at ground level and allowing to die *in situ*.

I continue to remove bushy growth from graves and other areas where it is inappropriate. My schedule of possible tree work was approved and has been carried out over the winter with seemingly no complaints but several complimentary comments.

As always, the churchyard management for wildlife could be much better, but in the absence of a dedicated team of sufficient people to do the necessary work the current management is probably the best we can achieve with our limited resources. The two major concerns are the proliferation of cow parsley and a garden escape geranium which could both take over the whole churchyard. The notice at the church door explaining the lack of close-mowing everywhere is good in its aim to deter complaints.

Finally, the new fencing has been very well executed and makes the churchyard safer.

Tom Worthington

Safeguarding

The Benefice Safeguarding Group continues to meet and I would like to thank Jill Kirby and Lesley Longden for their work on safer recruitment, DBS applications and record keeping and Alison Gray for her hard work and support across the board.

I continue to be a member of the Oxford Diocesan working group formed to share experiences and look at pragmatic solutions to some of the issues facing us and in March I attended a workshop and focus group to consider the future of Parish Safeguarding responsibilities in the Diocese.

At the January PCC meeting we approved the Safeguarding Policy and a Policy for Recruitment of Ex Offenders and agreed a list of Benefice Activities together with an updated Checklist and Action Plan for the coming year. Throughout 2025 we made progress on

ensuring that all recruitment meets National Safeguarding requirements, on encouraging the take up of training and on agreeing an appropriate level of procedures for safer activities within the churches. The focus for 2026 will be on continuing this work and endeavouring to fill any gaps.

The PCC has a duty under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 to have regard to House of Bishops' guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. The PCC believes it has complied with this duty.

If you have any questions or concerns do not hesitate to get in touch with me (safeguarding@stthomasmaryandrew.org.uk or Tel: 07903 140 436) or a member of the Diocesan Team. Contact details are displayed on our website and in the Churches.

Bridget Braham, Safeguarding Officer

LLF - Living in Love and Faith

Goring hosted an evening with our Area Bishop and Archdeacon who reach different conclusions on the issue of same sex blessings. They explained how they justify this through Scripture and missional reason. This was open to all our congregations and to those of other churches in our deanery.

The PCCs then all had very thoughtful and thorough chances to discuss this question. We were determined that there are no subjects that we cannot talk about, listening carefully to each other and those who honestly reach heartfelt and faithful, but different, positions on subjects.

Voting was taken on whether the Church Councils would allow blessings of committed lifelong partnerships to take place when allowed to do so. Every church passed this by a significant majority. No church was unanimous and we wish to continue to follow this open hospitality to each other on this and other subjects. Only God is the final judge on all matters. We are all inclined to get things wrong and we all need his grace and mercy. We thank God for his presence and guiding in these debates.

Thank you to our PCC members and for all the responsibility they take and do for us all.

Ben Phillips

Gift Aid

In this calendar year 2025, because of tax-paying donors completing a simple declaration, which then enabled the tax to be reclaimed on their donations, the income to the church was augmented by a total of **£16,696**. This additional income received from HMRC through Gift Aid came via three routes:

1. **£5,471** claimed from donations made directly to the church;
2. **£9,853** returned from donations made to the church through the Parish Giving Scheme (this figure does not include the repayment due on donations made in the month of December which has been delayed until January 2026);
3. **£1,372** from the 'Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme' which enables the church to claim a 'top-up' payment on money received in the plate collections, wall safe and via the card reader. (NB this scheme runs over tax years, so this figure relates to the tax year ending on 5 April 2025.)

If you do not already gift-aid your regular donations and would like to do so, all you need to do is to fill in a simple declaration form. This can be for donations made either directly, or via the Parish Giving Scheme which an increasing number of our regular donors are making use of.

Thank you to everyone who enables this additional income to be claimed through use and support of the Gift Aid Scheme.

Henry Parkinson

Financial statements of the PCC for the year ending December 31st 2025

For these please see the separate report which includes the audited annual accounts.

Don Shrimpton