

Vicar's APCM Report 2025

This year sees me chair my 25th APCM, having now been a Parish Incumbent since the year 2000. Like any anniversary it makes me ponder the passage of time, the changes that the years have brought, and the things that have remained constant. Among these are my gratitude for God's grace to **sustain** and **uphold**, and his transforming Spirit which inspires us to **grow** and **change** in conformity to Christ.

I wonder what **sustaining and upholding** you might be grateful for, in your discipleship, and in the life of our Church? And what **growth or change** you may have noticed, in your own journey with Jesus, or our corporate life as St Michael's?

For many Christians, the **stability** of Church life is important. Like me, you may well be grateful for the well-worn rhythms of the Church Year here at St Michael's, giving shape and structure to weekly praying and worshipping, and a seasonal framework for journeying ever deeper into the mystery and truths of God. I'm grateful for fellow-travellers on the journey, who've been alongside me here now for over 12 years. And I know that deep and long-lasting relationships are a valued feature of St Michael's for many. May we give thanks for all the people who give so much time, attention and skill to the work of simply keeping the Church's routines going, so that this can happen. Especially our Churchwardens, Claire and Gill. After three years Gill has decided for family reasons not to seek re-election this year. She will continue to serve in various activities alongside Claire and the Wardens' Team. I'm grateful for this, and for the work Gill has done these past three years. Please pray for, and support, Claire, as she enters a season as sole elected Warden. And pray that a new Churchwarden can be called and commissioned to enter this key ministry in due time.

Alongside stability and familiarity, we do need appropriate **growth and change** if we are faithfully to be God's people. A Church that refuses ever to change will simply shrivel and die. So while St Michael's tends to develop by evolution rather than revolution, it has been good to see the Spirit moving here in some new ways recently. Tiny Tots, for example, re-launched in the autumn, and is a joy-filled time of play, song, prayer and story. New members, older and younger, have joined our Choir, and it was encouraging to admit young choristers to full membership a few weeks ago. While our 'ordinary' coffee times after worship on Sundays and Wednesdays remain a backbone enabling fellowship, and growing our community, it has been good recently to complement this with some joyful and hearty Parish Lunches on Festival Sundays, and a couple of fun Quiz Nights. Our worship pattern has been quite steady these past 12 months, and our services essentially function with clergy presidency. But we have taken some gentle steps towards developing our worship offering, through beginning to train a team of Lay Leaders of Worship. And after further development and experience it is my hope that the Team will be commissioned in the coming months.

Pretty much every week there are new people among us at worship, offering opportunity for our community to grow and diversify. This is heartening, not least because in recent years quite a number of long-standing St Michael's servants have been called to glory. They serve God in heaven, but no longer make those great contributions to the Church they once did on earth. As God enlarges the Church Triumphant, it should gladden us that Church Militant is

being renewed. And while we enjoy meeting old friends and maintaining long-standing relationships in the Church, may the Spirit always open us up to being agents of welcome and integration to further newcomers here, so that they, with us, can serve the Gospel in ever-evolving ways.

I give thanks for many encouragements. Yet life as the Body of Christ is never without trials and tests. Some initiatives flourish quickly and evidently, some endeavours seem not to achieve so much, at least visibly. There are sometimes differences of perspective which can cause conflict - between the Church and outsiders in the world, or within the fellowship. Being Church in a World which is often indifferent to us, sometimes hostile and not consistently friendly, can be tiring. As a Church of England Parish we reflect on occasion the discontents and fractures of our wider C of E, strained as it is (in my view) by theological incoherence. Yet even in our sufferings we should exult, the apostle Paul counsels. They foster patience, character, reliance on God's grace, and endurance. And, when reconciliation is sought, charity extended and constructive communication offered, grace can abound even through moments of division. Please pray with me that this may be our shared resolve, whatever demanding debates, decisions and discussions may come our way into the future.

One important, vital and demanding challenge in the contemporary Church is the constant development of **Safeguarding**. This has been the subject of some nationally publicised failings and fall-out in the past year. Our PCC has been trying to develop our local Safeguarding practice and culture, to respond well to the current challenges, and do our utmost to make St Michael's as safe a place as possible for all worshippers, especially the vulnerable. One action focus is to broaden and deepen our Parish Safeguarding culture. To this end I'd like our APCM to spend some time in group discussion of the following questions, to which I'd ask you to give a little thought in advance, please:

1. What does 'Safeguarding' mean, at St Michael's church?

2. Who performs 'Safeguarding' here?

3. How might you contribute?

When Safeguarding fails, in any of its dimensions, individuals are maimed, and the Church also becomes injured, as a body. Individual souls can be alienated from God because of the sins of the community which claims to know Him, and good work done in the Lord's name becomes tainted by association with harm, even perhaps becoming discarded and destroyed.

So, we take this APCM moment to give thanks for ways in which God has both sustained and preserved our Church, and nurtured and transformed it. And may we resolve each to play our part in its Safeguarding. Thus may God's individual children (of all ages) flourish in safety, and the character and reputation of the Lord's people in this place never be impugned.

Derwyn Williams, Vicar, May 2025.