

St Mary's Church, Fowlmere



Annual Report and Financial statements of
The Parochial Church Council
For the Year ended 31st December 2025

Incumbent

The Revd. David Lee

Independent Examiner:

Mr Christopher Neild ACA

Rector's Introduction

As I write this, it seems hard to realise that, at the end of 2025, I had only been rector of the 4 Churches for a period of just over a year – this church of ours feels so much like home to Kate and me that it feels like I have been here for a lot longer. But 2025 was my first full year at the helm, and to me at least, it feels like a very good year.

The Church of England does get rather obsessed by numbers sometimes, and we are regularly having to submit some return or other to Ely. But numbers do have their benefits. Without the regular counting of people attending worship each Sunday we could not accurately say that the size of our worshipping congregation has grown between 2024 to 2025 – but it has. Not only that but the number of children and young people attending church has grown – although we do need to be attentive to the fact that those numbers fluctuate enormously. And again, in 2025, as a 4 Church Benefice, we managed to pay our ministry share to Ely in full. But before we even think about getting complacent on that one – it was jolly close!

Overall, 2025 felt like a consolidating year. Since I first turned up in the 4 Churches in 2020, in the middle of a pandemic, it has often felt that we are simply trying to keep going. But now it feels to me like we are all moving in the same direction – and enjoying doing so.

There have been some real highlights in 2025. The crafts mornings for children at Easter and Christmas continue to grow – both in terms of numbers and the size of the team helping. The carol services were really well supported this year – and on Easter Sunday, one of the small number of Festival Sundays when we revert to more than one service, numbers everywhere were very encouraging. We are gradually filling spaces on our PCCs. The churchyard in Foxton has been transformed by a weekly team of volunteers. And our churchwardens continue to steer us in the way only churchwardens can, and I am hugely grateful for all that they do and the support they give me. We are now regularly livestreaming our worship on Sunday mornings, and thanks to her amazing sales of second hand books, Jane Atkinson has raised enough money to buy a keyboard for Foxton – and the Shepreth one is not far away. Finally, in Laura we have found a Benefice Administrator who not only is taking a huge amount of administration away from me, but she is also bringing innovation into the way we work. The Church Office in the Dorothy Pluck room in St Mary's Fowlmere is gradually becoming the centre of our activity that I had hoped for.

But, and wasn't there always going to be a but, 2026 is presenting us with some challenges. One of those is financial. We have raised a challenge to you all to help meet our projected shortfall this year and we have had a great response so far – but we are still some way short of balancing the books. We also need some more help in running our children's activities on Sunday mornings. Gradually our strategy for our children's work is paying off. First, we attract children to a twice year craft morning. Then we encourage those children to join us at Messy Church. And then, hopefully, some of those families may join us on Sunday mornings – although we also recognise Messy Church as a worshipping Community in its own right.

There have also been some sad moments. In Foxton we lost three stalwarts of the church in Barbara Gaskin, Monica Hunter and Geoffrey Wells, and in Thriplow we lost Colin Fuller. All four have given so much to the 4 Churches over the years, but we now know that they are all with their Lord.

Finally, a huge thank you from Kate and me to you all for all the support you have given us this year. In the same vein that I started this review, I will close it, by saying what a privilege and joy it is to serve you all as we all work together to build this amazing church.

Every blessing, David.

Rev'd David Lee, Rector, The 4 Church Benefice, April 2026.

Introduction

St Mary's Parochial Church Council (PCC) has the responsibility of cooperating with the incumbent, the Reverend David Lee, in promoting in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. We aim to promote the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England.

Aims and purposes

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship at our church and to become part of our parish community. In association with the Four Church Benefice, the PCC maintains an overview of worship throughout the parish and makes suggestions on how our services can involve the many groups that live within our parish. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament.

When planning our activities for the year, we have considered the Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In particular, we try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the gospel; and developing their knowledge and trust in Jesus.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and outreach work.

To facilitate this work it is important that we maintain the fabric of St Mary's Church.

Objectives and activities

Regular activities include:

- Sunday church services as part of our benefice so every second Sunday in St Marys and occasional festivals. Morning Prayer once a week online.
- The website has maintained our communication link to everyone with updates of all the activities and events. The Facebook page also acts as a link through social media.
- The church has been open every day for prayer and reflection.

Achievements and performance

Worship and prayer

The PCC would like to offer a range of services during the month and over the course of the year that our community finds both beneficial and spiritually fulfilling. The new service pattern has restricted this somewhat, but we have maintained at least one service a month in the church building and numerous others on Fifth Sundays and festivals. As we worship as a benefice now, our congregations are larger and this is really encouraging. Liz Nottage continues to support us with her leading All Age Worship and we always get a good number of families attending those services.

All are welcome to attend our regular services. The average attendance at the service when it is in St Mary's is 63 and this number is similar at festivals, even when other benefice churches also have a service. As well as our regular services, we enable our community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of the journey through life. Through baptism we thank God for the gift of life, in marriage public vows are exchanged with God's blessing and through funeral services friends and family express their grief and give thanks for the life which is now complete in this world and to commend the person into God's keeping.

Children's work

Children's Church met monthly throughout the year whenever there was a service in St Mary's, When the service was All Age, the children helped to lead the service. There was a very well attended Nativity Service at Christmas. Messy Church met in St Mary's once a month after school on a Wednesday afternoon. Sessions were very well attended with a steady increase in numbers, particularly after the summer holiday. Messy Church is led by a wonderful team of volunteers.

At Easter a children's Easter Crafts event was held in St Mary's. This was followed by a Christmas crafts event at the beginning of Advent. We welcomed children from Fowlmere Primary School into Church for a Christingle service in December and children and families from the Flying Start Nursery came to church for their Christmas Performance.

Deanery Synod

Two members of the PCC sit on the deanery synod. This provides the PCC with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church. This year the deanery synod met in March and in October. The business of the Deanery has remained focussed on financial and pastoral planning.

Pastoral care

Some members of our parish are unable to attend church due to sickness or age. Dr Sheila Andren has visited all church members who have requested it and is authorised to take communion to patients in Addenbrooke's hospital who are unable to visit the chapel there. Her work is highly valued as supporting the Rector in visiting around the Parish. Lady Anne Coles has supported Dr Andren in this role this year.

Mission and evangelism

Helping those in need is a demonstration of our faith. We continue to support the work of Helen Tremeneere in Leeds through Interserve and the charity 'Hands of Mercy' in the Philippines. The income from a cake sale and the church Christmas card delivery service was given to the Hands of Mercy charity and towards our support of a child in Guatemala. Mrs Barbara Coates coordinates the annual Shoebox appeal in November and the door to door collections during Christian Aid Week in May.

Community and Ecumenical relationships

Café@St Mary's is open on Tuesday mornings from 10.00-11.30 and has become the weekly social gathering for its regular 'customers'. It is run by members of the PCC and congregation and it is supported well.

Remembrance Day was marked by a joint service in St Mary's. The ceremony at the memorial in the village accompanied by the laying of wreaths involved children from Fowlmere School.

The village news (Fowlmere and Thriplow News) is also produced by St Mary's in liaison with St Georges and the many other village groups in Fowlmere and Thriplow.

Church Buildings

The major work this year was the upgrading of the audio sound system which involved the replacement of speakers, microphones and new upgraded technology units added to the sound box. A Wi-Fi link has been added to the church and a Bluetooth system so that the sound system can be operated by the Rector at the front of the church.

The Dorothy Pluck Room has become the site of the benefice office. Plans were made to build a purpose built cupboard, but the strain on finances meant that this work was postponed and standalone furniture has been used instead.

This year we have carried out cleaning of the gutters and the roof tops and the drains around the building.

Following a full electrical inspection, the cabling to the lights in the nave and the broken heater in the Dorothy Pluck Room have been replaced. All moveable electrical items have been tested, the church roof alarm and the fire extinguishers have been serviced. Heating was used sparingly throughout the winter months.

Financial review

We remain extremely grateful to all our church donors, large and small, regular and occasional. Yet again, we have been able to meet our full Ministry Share, against all expectations.

Income:

Planned Giving (£17761) was over £4k more than last year, from 31 donors. The Giving Campaign at the end of 2024 was very successful, although monthly planned giving had decreased by year end. Unfortunately, we anticipate a substantial further drop in 2026. (Both decreases are for a variety of reasons.) Giving at services, both cash and contactless (£2133), was over £1k lower than in 2024, reflecting fewer services and more people moving to monthly giving.

All other giving was £4359. This was mainly from voluntary donations at the weekly café and summer fete, also church refreshments. Some one-off donations from parishioners were also received. The 2024 Christmas Post donations were received in early 2025, £370. The Tuesday Café continues to provide a vital community outreach, many thanks to all who help with that. There were no donations to the restricted funds.

Gift aid recovered was £5629. Gift aid on donations for specific purposes are applied to those funds. It should be noted there is always a mismatch between donations and Gift Aid received, as the final quarter donations are not processed for gift aid until the next financial year. (The claim for donations made in October-December 2025 was made in Jan '26 and £476 will be received in February '26.)

Grants of £12443 were received, the bulk of which (£10564) was from the Friends of St Mary's for the replacement audio system, and towards the cost of electrical repairs and improvements. Grateful thanks to the FoSM committee and its many donors for making this possible. Other grants (to the Fabric Fund) were £947 from the Church and Town Estate, and £932 from the Bat Conservation Trust. The latter must be spent within 12 months in accordance with the terms of the grant, many thanks to Liz Nottage for her work on this. Interest payments received by the Fabric and Restoration funds were £118 and £936 respectively.

Statutory Fee income was £377, £60 was received from the Parish Council for use of the Dorothy Pluck Room for meetings.

Expenditure:

As always, our main outgoing is the Parish Share, £19137 - a bigger increase than expected due to Deanery shortfalls. We started with a modest monthly payment which we were able to increase mid-year, and cleared the total with a lump sum at year end. Thank you to all our donors for helping us meet this enormous challenge.

Other outgoings (£23486), listed in the same category order as the CofE Parish Finance Return, were:

- Mission Giving £1355. This was £500 via the Winter Fuel Fund, £240 to Interserve, £124 Royal British Legion (Remembrance Day collection), £150 Valeria's education in Guatemala + £341 Hands of Mercy (2024 Christmas Post and Cake Sale).
- Clergy/staff costs £967
- Mission and Evangelism £42
- Church running costs, £7829. Of this, Insurance £2785; Maintenance/repairs for Roof Alarm, Fire Extinguishers, Boiler, Loo Light, Drains & gutters: £2803; Licences/Subscriptions £559; General consumables £935; Nave Floor Investigation £400. We also purchased equipment to extend the WiFi into the chancel and DPR (£95), and two railing banners to publicise Messy Church (£252) which have been hugely successful, bringing in several new families.
- Utilities £1916 (Electric £1080; Oil £591; Water/Sewage £177; Internet £68).
- Major Repairs/Replacements: £11145 (Audio system, electrical works)
- Miscellaneous costs of £283 include a loan of £50 to the Deanery (requested from each parish) to help them get things in order, and £233 donations made at the two Benefice Craft events held in St Mary's, transferred to the Benefice account to help cover costs.

Our share of the Benefice Expenses, covering Clergy/Staff costs, Mission and Evangelism and General running costs was £1223. This amount is already included in the totals above.

At year-end our General Fund balance was £2391, Restricted/Designated Funds £25603.

Reserves policy

It is PCC policy to try to maintain a balance on free reserves of about £2000. Share is paid to the benefice treasurer and the benefice account maintains a balance of one month's payment of benefice share. This is held to smooth out fluctuations in cash flow and to meet emergencies.

It is our policy to invest the short-term investment fund balances with the CCLA Church of England Deposit Fund, and the remainder in the CCLA Church of England Investment Fund. The helmets that are currently on loan to the Royal Armouries are now part of a new display on Church Armour.

Structure, governance and management

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is a Registered Charity.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. At St Mary's the membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent (our rector), churchwarden, the LLM's and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the electoral roll of the church. All those who attend our services / members of the congregation are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. The PCC met three times during the year with an average level of attendance of 80%.

The inventory has been carried out and the terrier and Logbook of the church are in the process of being updated. The allotment lands (Poor's Allotments Charity no: 239008) creates a small income which is used to offer grants are offered to families in need in the parish and funds are distributed to the elderly at Christmas.

The committee of Church and Town Estate (Charity no:201504) have met and inspected the land at the end of Lynch Lane.

The Articles of Enquiry are in the process of being completed and sent to the Archdeacon and the church continues to be insured by Ecclesiastical Insurance.

Volunteers

We would like to thank all the volunteers who work so hard to make our church the lively and vibrant community it is. In particular we want to thank Mrs Caro Hollway who organises the rota of volunteers who clean the church and the rota of volunteers who ensure that we have beautiful fresh flowers in our church throughout the year.

We are very fortunate to have an excellent choir which helps to lead the worship at St Mary's. The choir is ably managed by Mrs Iverna Moss and Mrs Maxine Pymer and supported by Mr Martin Atkinson playing the keyboard and guitar.

We also wish to thank the members of our congregation who provide refreshments after every service in St Mary's.

St Mary's Church is indebted to The Friends' of St Mary's who work tirelessly to raise funds for the maintenance and conservation of the church building. Their support is greatly appreciated and invaluable to the PCC.

Administrative information

St Mary's Church is situated on the High Street in Fowlmere. It is part of the Diocese of Ely within the Church of England.

The correspondence address is Dove Cottage, 37 Church Street, Harston, CB22 7NP

Ex Officio members:

Rector The Reverend David Lee (Chairman)
Churchwarden: Canon Lisa Turner, ALM Administration, representative on Deanery Synod
Deanery Synod: Dr Sheila Andren, ALM Pastoral Care, representative on Deanery Synod

Elected members:

Mr Grant Bage
Mrs Rachel Collins
Mrs Barbara Coates
Mrs Jane Follows
Mrs Elizabeth Nottage, ALM Worship Leading
Mrs Iverna Moss ALM Music Ministry (Secretary)
Mrs Carys Stocks

Other officers:

Electoral Roll Officer Mrs Sarah Burge

Sidesmen Mrs Jane Atkinson
Mr Grant Bage
Mrs Jane Bage
Mrs Nicky Coulson
Mrs Caroline Crawshaw
Mrs Sarah Deacon
Mr Barry Jones
Mrs Rosemary Jones
Mr Jeremy Pymer
Mrs Carys Stocks
Canon Lisa Turner