

APCM Vicar's Report 2024/2025

When our new bishop came to meet the local group of clergy recently, his message was clear, simple and unequivocal: it's all about Jesus. In a year in which the Church has been associated with a lot else, it felt like a homecoming to hear him say it. What is Holy Trinity associated with? My hope is that, more and more, it's all about Jesus; that the net result of all we do is that more people meet Jesus and grow in their relationship with him. If it isn't, we're wasting our time and energy. Amid all that's going on (see below) it can be a challenge to keep remembering: It's all about Jesus.

If you come into the church at this year's APCM and haven't been in since the last one (which I hope isn't the case!), and your eyes are drawn to the front of church, the two striking differences you would notice first would be the arrangement of the pews and the absence of the pulpit. The pews have been slightly wish-boned to create a more friendly atmosphere – something we've wanted to try since we had such a positive experience of this layout while meeting in the scout hut. We have also sold a few pews to create more flexibility in the space. The pulpit, which we were unable to use due to health and safety concerns, has made way for a far more flexible front of church, making concerts, child-friendly events, and an extended worship band far easier to accommodate. You may then notice the projection screen having dropped in height to where the pulpit had been, enabling people to look at it more comfortably from further forward. The eagle-eyed (or -eared) will also notice the new PA speakers, which have given the sound greater clarity and richness.

If your eye gets drawn to the back of church, you will notice our new café, which is just now getting put together. We're so excited to trial this new venture and are really hopeful that it will be a great way of connecting with our villages, offering a much needed community space, and possibly even contributing to the church finances.

All this is about Jesus. I recognise that, in some ways, changes are really hard – for some, they constitute a loss of something that has been a stable part of life for a long time; a loss of something that felt deeply familiar and homely. But hopefully, these changes also represent a commitment to being ready for a future that is different from the past. It turns out that the Church in the UK is actually growing – in fact attendance has increased by 50% in the past six years. As Paul Williams (chief executive of the Bible Society) put it, “Far from being on a slippery slope to extinction, the Church is alive and growing, and making a positive difference to individuals and society.”¹ We want to be ready to play our part in that growth.

¹ <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival>

The café idea has been percolating (pardon the pun – in fact, percolating as such is unlikely to feature!) for a while now, though it crystalised for us at a meeting in June: we gathered members of the church and representatives of the local community, to consider how the church (in particular, the church building) can serve the needs of the community and draw them through the doors, with the ultimate aim that we can gently provide opportunities for people to discover Jesus. The discussion all seemed to point the direction of this café, and I'm so grateful to Tom Allen, Sarah Allen, Janna and others for the seriousness with which they have put this into action.

The café fits into a wider exploration regarding how we might best adapt our church building to prepare us for the future, and we have employed an architect to help us put plans together – more of that in due course! Another very big thank you to Tom Allen, who does such a huge amount to care for our buildings and help us move them into the future.

As we plan for future growth, we see signs that it is already germinating:

Among men in the village, Anthony and Tom started a monthly men's breakfast, and it has been great to see that group grow in strength. Meanwhile, Whisky Wednesdays continues – a group of 8-12 of mostly young(ish) dads gather in the vicarage garden about once a month, to chat and laugh together. The group has somewhat lost its loyalty to both Whisky and Wednesdays, even if the community around it remains strong. Faith comes up in conversation most weeks, though we don't force it.

It has been wonderful to see Teen Spirit, our group for older teens, going through the Alpha course. In September we had the privilege of baptising Ethan, and then in October, Ethan, Harri and Richard all went forward for Confirmation. They also made their mark in the village by raising over £1500 for Wycombe Homeless Connection by sleeping out in the church yard in early February. (Being away at the time, I sent them an encouraging video from the Mexico sunshine – I'm not sure if that made them feel warmer or colder...). I'm so grateful to the tireless work of Sarah Allen in leading Teen Spirit.

During the autumn, Janna also got going on a seeker-oriented small group for younger teens, alongside colleagues at SG Baptist Church. It has been great to see them engaging seriously with issues of faith, and we pray that it leads them to Jesus, and to his people. We also experimented with a 5.30 service, and there is potential there, even if the lack of communication around it gave it a fairly soft start.

November also saw a concert in the church, with Miriam Jones (my not-so-secret weapon) and two other singer-songwriters (Gareth Davies Jones and Rob Halligan) performing 'in the round'. It was a great success at drawing non-members into the church and giving them a really positive experience. The pink lights in the windows were also noted by many who didn't get to the concert! We look forward to doing more such

events. Then in December, we had our usual full set of services and events over Christmas – it is always a privilege to get those opportunities to talk about Jesus to so many.

In the new year, we put out a substantial survey in the villages. The idea was to get a sense of how we might be able to engage local not-yet-Christians better, in terms of both hospitality and faith. We had over 90 respondents, providing us with significant data to shape the café, and also how we move forward in terms of services and other projects. We are still considering the best way to respond to this, but watch this space.

In our services, we have spent some time following the lectionary, though we have also had sermon series in Colossians, Philippians and Ephesians. Musically, we have enjoyed a plethora of teenage contributions: organists Dominic Detre and Freddie Stevens have joined Carys Timpson (who has moved away to university), and we have also pulled together an impressive youth band which takes services occasionally. This is in addition to Adrian Roach, who continues to step into the organ rota gaps.

Over Easter we reran our Maundy Thursday meal (thanks again to Sarah Allen and her team!), as well as our regular pattern of Good Friday and Easter Sunday services.

The Pastoral Care team has continued to meet regularly to discuss what we have each been doing to support the vulnerable and isolated in the church community. Much of the team's ministry goes unseen, but I want to recognise Heather Rowe, Jenny Tebboth, Richard Campbell, Sue Puttergill and Nigel Morgan, for the amazing work they do in caring as Christ would have us care.

Janine Dunnell continues to provide wonderful leadership to two bible study groups, which meet on Wednesday afternoon and evening (the latter being shared with SGBC). These provide a deeply rewarding way of growing in maturity and confidence in faith. We have also continued with our monthly 'Third Thursday' prayer meeting, which is a wonderful opportunity to gather and pray, and undergirds our PCC meetings on those Thursdays where they both happen.

I remain deeply grateful to the members of the PCC for all they do to guide us in planning and actioning all that goes on. Thanks in particular for Anne Wall for her continued work on maintaining our safeguarding, and for Audrey Hardy for continuing to look after our church finances, along with Sam Barclay, Janice Barrett, Linda West, and Sue Puttergill and Anthony Bargioni. A special thank you to Janelle Stephenson, our administrator, who does so much that is unseen by most of us. And finally, my biggest thanks to two people who really do sit at the centre of all that we do: our warden, Janine Dunnell – I wish there were words big enough to express my gratitude for all that she does in so many ways, both practically, and in guiding me and the rest of the leadership; and Janna Holder, who continues to put her considerable skill and energy into

incredible resources, especially in connecting us with-, and helping us support-, the young families in the village.

Rev Jez Carr

29 April 2025