

Celebrations and Challenges

Reflecting on the experience of our church life this past year, I find I want to **celebrate joyfully** many things which have been happening here. And also to acknowledge **some challenges** we face as we seek to be God's people for this time and place. So my Report for this year will explore a few of these **Celebrations and Challenges**.

Making New Disciples

Since the last APCM it has been my joy and privilege to present half a dozen candidates for Confirmation. Christine, Heather and Tracey in September 2025, and Alistair, Chi and Matthew this April. They were joined by supporters from St Michael's at joyous **celebrations** in Letchworth (2025) and Thorley (2026), respectively. And of course our Confirmation candidates are not the only church members who have joined us, or grown in faith, in recent times. We should celebrate the many new people who come among us, regularly or periodically. There is a wonderful **challenge** - and opportunity- pretty much every Sunday, to encounter and welcome, encourage and help newcomers to our worship. We can do this in the prayerful hope that God may lead them deeper into faith in Christ, and participation in his church. I'd like to flag up a coming opportunity to consider this together - on Saturday Oct 24, when we'll be joined by Church Growth Officer Revd Nick Smith, to talk, pray and think about our outreach.

The Tower Room Project

In recent days I've been **celebrating** the issue of a Faculty to move forward with the Tower Room renovations and installation of an accessible toilet at the West End of church. In the C of E it takes a long time to develop plans which satisfy all relevant parties. So huge thanks to Gill Johnson - and all who have helped her - for work to achieve this. Now let us embrace the **challenges** of funding and managing the building work, and afterwards seeking to use this new facility to enhance our ministry and mission.

Generous Gifts and Giving

You'll see from the Finance Documents prepared for the APCM that St Michael's achieved a significant surplus of income over expenditure in 2025 - over £90,000. We should **celebrate** the great generosity of those who give to our church - current givers and church members of the past, to enable us to meet our financial obligations. And to enable us to have confidence to embrace projects like the Tower Room. But look deeper into the figures and we will see a **challenge**. About £110,000 of last year's income came from 2 legacies, plus the wind-up funds transfer from the Friends of St Michael's. So in terms of routine income

and expenditure, our deficit was about £20,000. And we are budgeting for a £5000 operating deficit in 2026. Please pray for God to resource our ongoing mission, and for each of us to play a part within that, as we are able to, with God's help.

Ministries and Mission

I've been gently **celebrating** every moment that members of St Michael's step forward to serve God, in ways large and small - all equally precious to God - to help us serve and spread the Word. New volunteers have come forward, for example, to serve with Tiny Tots, choir, in the LLW Team, and to act as sidespeople and coffee makers. And new members have offered to stand for election to the PCC. Volunteering sometimes seems counter-cultural in our times, where we might increasingly tend to see ourselves as clients rather than agents. It can be a **challenge** to sustain a church which is, in large measure, a community sustained by volunteering. As I write, finding a way forward to adjust after our Treasurer, Graziana steps down, and seeking a second churchwarden to serve alongside Claire, do feel like weighty challenges for the future. Please pray that with God's guidance we will meet them.

The Wider Church

I've been **celebrating** some tentative signs that the wider Church of England might be calming down a bit. This comes after some years where the House of Bishops and General Synod have, in my opinion, sometimes been over-active in trying to re-shape the church. The new Archbishop of Canterbury seems more disposed to consolidate than innovate, and there are signs that the incoming Bishop of St Albans might be similarly minded. After some years of destructive division this would, in my opinion, be wise. But there will always be **challenges** within the life of God's people, calling us to be prayerful and thoughtful, constantly to 'guard the deposit of faith', and measure every proposal and initiative against scripture. Let us pray that we, and our leaders, may be faithful and wise in so doing.

The Gospel of God

Read the New Testament and we will see that **challenges** always face people who try to live as disciples and walk in Jesus' way. The world, our own sinfulness and limitations, and our incapacity to take on board the glorious abundance of God's grace do cause us to stumble. But there must be daily **celebration**. Ours is an Easter faith, for life has triumphed over death. So we rejoice that by the Spirit we can be Christ's body - serving in all the varied ways (with their delights and frustrations) that our APCM presents to us each year. Take a moment to read and consider the reports. Visualise the people and activities they witness to. Pray and ponder - what are your **celebrations**? What **challenges** can you help us rise to in 2026 and beyond?

Thank you for your fellowship in Christ and partnership in the Gospel here. ***Derwyn.***