

Vicars report 2025

I can't quite believe that it's been a year since my last report to the APCM!

Firstly, I would like to thank you all for your care and support over the last year. At the time of my last report I had returned to work on a part time basis as I recovered from the blood clots on both of my lungs. I returned to work full time in early July, although my churchwardens, Archdeacon and Bishop urged me to consider a more gradual return to full-time working. With hindsight I would now take their advice as I didn't begin to feel fully well until November, but I am incredibly thankful to God for my recovery.

2025 was a challenging year for the church financially as we faced a large deficit. In May we held Generous Giving Sunday during our services where we asked you all to review your financial giving towards the church as we seek to build God's kingdom here in Norton. The response was tremendous and I am so thankful to all of you and to God for such generosity. Also, we are beginning to hold more fundraising events and some of the highlights have been the jigsaw sales, Bingo & Puddings, and our Family Barn Dance. The response to all of these events has been encouraging, but we still face financial challenges so I would urge you to keep your giving under review and to support our future fund raising events.

Over the last 12 months you may have heard in the media of the 'Quiet Revival', a renewed interest in Christianity and increases in church attendance across the UK. Although the accuracy of research findings is disputed we can say that this is true here in Norton. Our 8am Sunday service at St Nicholas has seen a number of new people attending, with one of those people also being baptised, and there is also growth at St George's.

Sadly a decision was taken in consultation with those who attended to bring our 11.15am Anglo-catholic service to an end. This was a difficult decision for all concerned, but I am pleased to say that the majority of that congregation have joined us at our 9.30 service and have become an integral part of that worshipping community.

We have introduced a monthly Choral Evensong service which has been a joy to those who attend. This has brought people together from across both of our churches as well as one or two people who have attended because they enjoy the service. It is my hope that this service will grow over the next year. Thank you to Tim, Keith and the choir who always lead us so well in our worship and also have to put up with me, usually singing in the wrong key!

Our youth club, Aspire, came to an end in the Autumn and we revised the way in which we deliver our Sunday morning children's ministry. Liz and Angie felt it was time to step down from their roles leading our Sunday morning creche. I am so very grateful for all that they have given in faithful service to the young people and children of our parish over the years and I would also like to add my thanks to Vicky, who co-ordinates our Sunday morning children's ministry, for all of her hard work in this, and many other roles!

Jackie Halter announced that she would be retiring as Reader this Spring and Bishop Jane has offered her the title of Reader Emeritus, which I am very pleased to say that she has accepted. I, and I know that many people here in Norton and at St Michael's, Letchworth are thankful for all that Jackie has given during her ministry. Jackie's ministry hasn't come to an end and I look forward to meeting with her and discussing how she feels called to minister in this new season of her life and ministry.

We continue to work with some of our schools. Norton St Nicholas came to St George's for their Leavers Service in July, Harvest Festival at St Nicholas Church in October and their Christmas Service in December. The Grange Academy and Northfields School came to St George's Church for their joint Harvest service in October and The Grange for their Christmas Service in December. It was wonderful to visit Stonehill School in March to deliver their Easter Assembly with Karen.

I continue in the role of Chaplain to TS Danae, the Letchworth and Hitchin Sea Cadet Unit and it was fantastic to welcome them and other Sea Cadet units from across the region to St George's for their Christmas Carol service.

We ran a Confirmation Course and it was a real joy to present two candidates for Confirmation to Bishop Jane at the Deanery Confirmation Service at St Mary's Church, Hitchin, during December. My thanks go to Rev Anthony for leading the course alongside me.

Our Advent and Christmas services were well attended and it was lovely to see so many people at our Crib Service.

Our Lent Course was based on the book 'Stand and Stare' by Nick Fawcett. It was wonderful to join together with so many of you to spend time in prayer, reflection and discussion and I think a good time was had by all. Keith and Susan assisted me in leading the course and I am grateful for their faithful and gentle leadership.

The bookings in our Parish Centre, both regular and ad hoc are increasing and this brings vital income to the church. This has only been possible due to the hard work of Flower and Neil and I am very grateful for all of their efforts. It is worth noting that one of our new regular bookings for an NHS Pulmonary Rehab clinic was only possible because we now have a defibrillator at the Parish Centre which is available for the whole community to use 24 hours a day. This was made possible by Izzy Allen working to secure the donation of the defibrillator

We are very fortunate that so much happens in our churches and it is vital that this work continues as it blesses not just our congregations but also the wider community. With that in mind my heartfelt thanks goes to

Jacque Croot and all who help run Norton Coffee Shop.

Liz Beardmore and Angie Caldwell for running the Creche and Aspire.

Vicky Cameron and all the team who organise and run Dragons

Karen Williams, Vicky Cameron and all who run our All Together Service.

Susan Taylor and all of the Messy church team which is run with Norton Methodist Church

Flower de Jager, Susan Taylor and the rest of the team, working at Norton Nippers

Keith Taylor, Susan Taylor for running the Bible Study groups.

The Social Committee for all the events they organise..

Tim Croot and Keith Sparrow and the choir for our music.

Michelle Rigby, Fiona Eve and the flower team.

All of our Servers.

Flower in her role as Admin and Cleaner.

Vicky Cameron and Susan Taylor for leading the prayer meetings.

Keith Sparrow for playing the organ at the 11.15 service.

Carol Greatorex for her work as our Treasurer.

Flower de Jager and Neil Greatorex for dealing with hall bookings.

Our readers Karen Williams, Helen Giles and Jackie Halter for their ministries and support.

Rev Don Dowling and Rev Anthony Giles for their support and encouragement.

Andy Nichols as our safeguarding officer

Ros Pratt and Neil Greatorex for their tireless work as our Churchwardens

All who serve on our PCC

The Friends of St Nicholas

The St Nicholas Bellringers.

The Sunday Wardens.

Although we face many challenges both in the parish and in the world around us there is so much to be thankful to God for. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the way of redemption has been opened for each one of us and we are called to live as redeemed, beloved children of God here in Norton. We do that through our worship, our prayer, our service to the church and our community. We do that as we try to live our lives as a witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

This is the ministry that we are all called too, whether lay or ordained, old or young, wherever you come from or however long you've been a Christian, whether that be 50 years plus or 5 minutes!

I know that can seem daunting and even frightening. I too sometimes feel that way, especially in a world that feels more and more divided. But as a church we are united around Jesus Christ our Saviour.

As I have been praying this year, especially in those times where I've felt daunted or unsure the words from Proverbs Chapter 3 verses 5-6 have been a guide and a comfort and I commend them to you as we move forward this coming year.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths".

God bless

Rev Eugene