



St James the Great, Hanslope Annual Report for 2025

St James the Great is located in Church End, Hanslope. The address for correspondence is:
The Vicarage, Park Road, Hanslope, Milton Keynes, MK19 7LT.
The church is part of both the Diocese of Oxford and the See of Oswestry within the Church of England.

Aims and Purposes

St James the Great Parochial Church Council (PCC) exists for the promotion of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the doctrines and practices of the Church of England. Its responsibility is to cooperate with the incumbent, Fr Gary Ecclestone SSC, and the Assistant Priest, Fr Adam Burnham SSC (in post until May 2025) in promoting the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical within the ecclesiastical parish. It is responsible for the church building and the upkeep of the churchyard. The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to worship in our church and to become part of our parish community at St James the Great.

In particular we try to enable people to live out their faith through:

- worship and prayer: focussing on maintaining and developing our spiritual life.
- provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- missionary and outreach work.

To facilitate this work it is important to maintain the fabric of the church.



Achievements and Performance

Fr Gary is now full time in the parish. He continues to serve Bishop Paul as his Vicar-General.

On the 3rd of July, The Feast of St Thomas the Apostle, Father Gary marked the 25th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Sacred Priesthood with A Silver Jubilee Mass and then In September Father Robin celebrated his Golden Jubilee – 50 years since his Ordination to the Sacred Priesthood



Worship and Prayer: Maintaining and Developing our Spiritual Life

June Paterson and **Kathryn Pope** write: Worship and Prayer are central acts of the Christian Faith designed to connect believers with God, foster spiritual growth and help to build a community that becomes the church family.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is committed to provide a variety of services throughout each week and year. St James invites everyone to Mass three times a week: Sunday at 11.15, Thursday at 9.30 and Friday at 12.00 noon. There are bimonthly Wholeness and Healing Services giving a peaceful space for reflection, prayer, candle lighting, blessings and confidential listening. Following the Silence meets most Mondays, while The Rosary Group gathers monthly at the Vicarage and weekly during Lent.

Additionally, major feasts of the Christian Calendar are celebrated with reverence and community spirit. These social occasions include: Corpus Christi, The Assumption, All Souls and All Saints, as well as Remembrance Sunday and Christ the King.



We have close links to the Shrine of our Lady of Walsingham and this year have visited as a parish for the Pilgrimage of Healing and Renewal. Members of the congregation have also joined in with the National Pilgrimage and the Encounter Weekend conference which members of the Children's Ministry attended.



Also, visits have been made to Coventry Cathedral, Lichfield, Northampton and Swindon, the latter for the licensing of Fr Adam, and again for the baptism of Beatrice Burnham at St Mary's Church, Swindon.



Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

As well as our regular services, we enable our community to celebrate and thank God at the milestones of the journey through life.

We have celebrated 7 baptisms, 2 confirmations and 1 wedding this year.

There have been 5 funerals, 7 burials of ashes and 1 burial of a body. There was also 1 memorial service.



The Electoral Roll

Maria Ecclestone writes: The 2024 Roll included no fewer than 15 people who had moved away and no longer qualify as they had not worshipped regularly in the last six months. In addition several students who are largely living away from home have come off the Roll. Around 12 other people failed to renew (more than half from two families) and some of those were non-residents. More than 20 names are on the Roll for the first time.

The 2025 Electoral Roll Report declared at the APCM a total of 142 names on the newly collated Electoral Roll. Of the 142 names on the 2025 Electoral Roll: 109 are resident in the parish and 33 are non-resident. The average weekly attendance counted during October 2025 was 27 adults and 2 children. This number increased at special services.

Children's Ministry Annual Report

Natasha Corr writes: Little Angels has welcomed new families, including babies and toddlers, along with their parents and grandparents. We provide a well-structured fun session with a range of craft activities on offer. We encourage the use of creativity, imagination and development of fine motor skills – the children particularly love threading pasta bracelets. Whilst encouraging sharing and the making of new friends, we also help the little ones prepare for nursery and school. The mums and tots are a lovely bunch and I really enjoy seeing new friendships form with both parents and their little ones. We offer a variety of snacks – the act of sharing food at the snack table is lovely to see! We finish with a selection of songs and a story and, of course, Jan's famous church march before encouraging the children to light a candle for their loved ones. Afterwards they enjoy choosing a sticker before heading home with smiles on their faces.

Wendy Thomson writes: We began the year with our joint Parish Sunday school post-Christmas party. A fun packed afternoon included a very competitive nativity scene competition, games, craft and tea for the children. Concluding with cheese and wine for the adults bringing families together.



Hanslope Sunday School continues with regular children diving into key stories and learning through different mediums including, drama, music and craft. This year we provided a Monday summer club. New families were welcomed over 4 Mondays filled with fun, who enjoyed activities, craft and a



snack. A joint parish family picnic concluded the summer and was enjoyed with competitive football which was definitely a highlight.

We continued our shoebox initiative and the children created 10 boxes, with donations from congregation members. For the first time, 5 children's ministry members from both churches joined the Encounter weekend conference at Walsingham. Social time was enjoyed and everyone returned inspired and buzzing with ideas to enrich our children's work.

Our annual nativity was a successful pop up and was performed to a packed church on Christmas Eve and new children and families took part. Highlights being children joining the parade round the church led by Sarah Murfin, our wonderful Angel Gabriel and our very own real baby Jesus, as baby Albert Sandham joined the candle lit crib scene. Beautiful!

Father Gary writes: Oversight of the Inspire Youth group returned to Fr Gary after Fr Adam's departure in the Summer Term. In September we changed the age group and welcomed members of Year 6 to join Inspire as part of their transition to Secondary School. Whilst the numbers attending were very small in 2025 new members joined in the autumn. The group was facilitated by Fr Gary with Graham Robinson and Natasha Corr. A need for additional leadership was addressed at the end of the 2025 and Anne Adams joined the Leadership Team. The current group is very young, lively and great fun. We hope to continue to rebuild the group during 2026.



Thank you to all our Children's Ministry team who help to provide such wondrous moments for our children and wider community. We look forward to another fun packed year ahead.

Learning and Teaching: a Report from Prester Coleman

2025 was a characteristically busy year for the Learning and Teaching Team. It was also a time of change. Father Adam had been heading up the team while Father Gary had been busy elsewhere in his role as Vicar General in the See of Oswestry, but changed circumstances led to Father Adam's move. Before his departure he planned a Lent course and a Lent retreat. The retreat took place at Turvey Abbey on 8th March. The theme was "The path of prayer". Father Adam's excellent and challenging materials were based on Brant Pitre's book "Introduction to the spiritual life." All those attending found it a thoroughly worthwhile day.

Just two days before the Lent retreat we started a six-week course based on Bishop Michael Marshall's book "Lent with the beloved disciple". We met at John Sorrell's home. He and Prester Coleman assisted Father Adam in leading the sessions, which explored passages in John's Gospel with the aid of Bishop Marshall's book. This was at times a deeper read than some were used to, but beneficial and challenging, nonetheless. Father Gary returned to the helm and soon called the team together. Two courses both started on May 1st, Explorer, and Credo.

The Explorer course has 10 sessions and covers the basics of Christian belief and church practice. Father Gary describes it as refresher or basic course, suitable for those considering baptism or confirmation, or to help those from a different church tradition. The various sessions were led by Father Gary, John Sorrell, and Diane Gordon. Mark Basson and Sarah Murfin attended and both were confirmed by Bishop Paul on 24th July.

2025 marked the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. This produced the Nicene Creed which remains such an integral part of the church's eucharistic

services. A six-week course, held at John Sorrell's and led by him and Prester Coleman, gave us the opportunity to look at six key parts of the creed. Sessions were introduced by videos with speakers from The Society (including Rev George Westhaver, Principal of Pusey House, Oxford.) Study sheets produced by the speakers helped shape our discussions. They gave rise to some interesting and challenging questions, which helped us all think through the elements of our faith.

The team met, now with the welcome addition of Anne Adams, to plan courses for the Autumn and for Advent. In the Autumn we enjoyed series 3 of The Chosen, the online TV series working its way through the life of Jesus. Participants are encouraged to watch the eight individual programmes in advance. Each evening excerpts were shown and we read sections from the accompanying study guide and responded to its various questions. Sessions were led by Father Gary, John Sorrell and Prester Coleman. The videos are well shot and acted and seek to portray the events of the gospels and their likely background in the light of contemporary Bible scholarship. Sometime the study guides seem a little "American" in their content, but the general feeling is that we are looking forward to further episodes.

For Advent, participants were offered two choices, both of which had been covered before, but not for some years. Father Gary and Anne Adams co-led Delia Smith's "A Feast for Advent", aimed at a more introductory level. John Sorrell and Prester Coleman co-led Paula Gooder's "A Journey to the Manger", aimed at a more advanced level. The numbers attending certainly justified running two courses and both were well received by those attending.

We ended the year thankful for all we had been able to cover and anticipating our next course. This would be held in January: "The art of Christmas", featuring depictions of the Christmas story by well-known artists, with commentary from Jane Williams.



Provision of Pastoral Care for People Living in the Parish

Where members of our parish are unable to attend church due to sickness or age, Fr Gary visits church members who request a visit, to take the Sacrament to them either at their homes or in hospital. We also support those who are sick or unable to get out for any other reason to keep them in touch with church life. Fr Gary continues to be assisted by John Sorrell and others in the pastoral work of the church.

Plans were put in hand to set up a Pastoral Connect scheme which will be launched in 2026. This will assist in ensuring not only a more strategic approach to Pastoral Care, but also to communication more generally.

Hanslope and District Wellbeing and Support Groups

John Sorrell writes: Hanslope and District Cancer Support Group meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at 8pm. The Carers Support Group meets on the 4th Wednesday of the month at 1030am and is facilitated by Harvey Gilbert. We meet in the coffee area at the Church. Both groups have a small but dedicated group of members who meet and support each other over refreshments and nibbles. They are often accompanied by their spouse or partner. From time-to-time John Keane, who is the Patient Participation Representative (PPG) from the Hanslope Surgery, attends the Carers Support Group. Dr John Sorrell, who is chair of the Milton Keynes Cancer Forum (MKCF) keeps the Cancer Support Group members abreast of new developments in cancer care. MKCF is a group linking the various support groups in Milton Keynes with the professional staff in the Hospital's Cancer Centre. The objective being to enhance patient care within the cancer services.

Our support groups are too small to invite external speakers. Our leaflets advertising both Support Groups are prominently displayed at the reception desk in Hanslope Surgery and in Church but it is difficult to attract new members to our Support Groups. Meetings of both groups are advertised on Facebook. New members and their partners are always very welcome.

Missionary and Outreach Work

The Ho Group Report from Mary Nokes

Ghana's economy is beginning to stabilise thanks to a change of government and improved administration, and Bishop Matthias is more optimistic for his country's future. He visited us in June. Whilst in the UK he was made an honorary Asst Bishop of Portsmouth Cathedral.

The Ho Group currently has eight members representing Hanslope and Castlethorpe churches. During 2025 the benefice sent £2,650 raised from the Ho Ho Ho appeal; a coffee morning; stalls at Easter, Summer and Advent events; plant sales; strawberry cream teas in John Sorrell's garden; some private donations; and two concerts. (One was part of Remembrance weekend events so additionally we sent £278.60 to the Royal British Legion.)



the benefice sent £2,650 raised from the Ho Ho Ho appeal; a coffee morning; stalls at Easter, Summer and Advent events; plant sales; strawberry cream teas in John Sorrell's garden; some private donations; and two concerts. (One was part of Remembrance weekend events so additionally we sent £278.60 to the Royal British Legion.)



This has enabled our friends at St Paul's Church, Agbozume, at long last, to resume their building project to provide accommodation for their priest and his family with parish administration facilities. Bishop Matthias says that he and the Diocese are incredibly grateful.

However, the Ho Diocese continues to struggle so our support remains vital.

Other Outreach Groups

Teatime Treats

Ann Ellis writes: Our monthly meeting held on the first Monday of each month is enjoyed, on average, by 24 guests. It is normally held at Lincoln Court. We have a Scrabble Corner and also play Dominoes with the occasional Beetle Drive. We have bingo twice a year which is always very popular. In June we had our usual cream tea and glass of Pimms. John Sorrell was Father Christmas and distributed a small gift for everyone out of his sack. The Christmas party was held at The Club with Peter Thorley on keyboards and John Sorrell as Master of Ceremonies. The ladies from Hart and Soul choir joined us and everyone enjoyed Carol singing. We had a collection for Willen Hospice and this raised £42.75. Our grateful thanks to the Club Committee who always make us very welcome. Also grateful thanks to the ladies who organise it and make cakes and refreshments for the various occasions that we all enjoy.

Community Lunches

Ann Ellis writes: These are held the third Thursday of the month apart from July and August. We provide a home-made soup and crusty bread followed by a home-made pudding. Proceeds go to kitchen funds or towards heating costs in the winter months. We have around 25 joining in each time. The Christmas party is always very well attended and soup etc followed by trifle, After Eight mints and mince pies are served. The Hart and Soul ladies come along for the meal and we sing carols getting everyone in a festive mood. We collected £170 this year for Willen Hospice.

Lent Lunches were shared with Castlethorpe and held each Thursday in Lent. The proceeds went to Willen Hospice. Soup and crusty bread were served followed by tea and coffee but as it was Lent there was no pudding!

Our grateful thanks to all who make these lunches possible by putting up tables making soups and puddings and doing the laundry each time.

Warm Space

Sue Collett writes: There has been no further funding for this initiative but we have continued to offer a warm space in church on Fridays mornings from 10.00am until noon. A warm welcome and refreshments are available.

Craftivists Group

Sue Collett writes: We meet in church on a Friday morning. This year we have again provided a Chocolate Easter egg tombola at the Eggstravaganza and a Chocolate Teddy tombola at the Advent Gift Fayre in November. We also knitted bobble hats for bottles at the Summer fete! All have involved lots of knitting and crochet and raised funds for the church. We have continued to make poppies for our hanging which this year was displayed inside the church over Remembrance weekend in November. We are still making poppies and hope to have an even bigger display in 2026!



The Milton Keynes Foodbank

Even in our relatively prosperous Borough, many people are disadvantaged. The Food Bank provides local families and individuals with essential food supplies at a time of crisis when they need them. We continue to be a collection point for this charity. Items are left in the bin provided at the church door and are regularly moved into church before they are taken to the food bank.



During Lent, we handed out Bags for Life and invited the two villages to collect for the Foodbank. We had over 30 bags full when they were collected from us in Hanslope. Later in the year we also took part in the BIG Doorstep GIVE. We continue to collect toiletries for **The Hygiene Bank**.



The Link Magazine

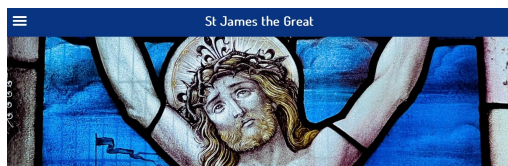
Mary Nokes write: The Link magazine account had, for many years, ended the year in the red. However, at the end of 2025 we celebrated our success in keeping the account in the black for a second year running. The annual subscription for 10 issues remains at £12 and we have seven local advertisers. The Methodist church continues to contribute news and articles every month and colour photos on the cover are now a regular feature.

The number purchasing the online colour version available has increased but the paper version remains popular supplying 130 households in Hanslope and Castlethorpe. June Paterson and Nick Fearn continue to organise delivery to our faithful distributors around both villages; Joel Sandham organises the online circulation. We are extremely grateful to them all.



St James the Great Website www.stjameshanslope.org

Joel Sandham writes: With strong support from Erika Burnham the handover of managing our website has gone smoothly. There have been no major changes to the website. PCC members and safeguarding links have been kept up to date, as has the calendar (thanks to Maria Ecclestone for regular updates.) The website allows access for subscribers to colour copies of The Link and holds an archive of back-issues of previous Link publications



Welcome to St James the Great, serving the communities of
Hanslope, Long Street, Tathall End, Higham Cross and Pindon End

Currently our domain and website hosting are handled by two separate companies and has been successfully renewed for the year, going forward I would like to understand if this can be simplified into a single provider for both.

If anyone has any suggestions for website improvements, particularly things they have seen on other parish sites that they feel we are lacking, please let me know.

The Parish Facebook Page is also a useful tool for helping to raise the church's profile in the local community and promoting our activities.

Hanslope and Castlethorpe Joint Benefice Choir

Jacqueline Barker writes: We are fortunate in the two churches to have a traditional choir comprising Sopranos, Altos, Tenors, and Basses, some members having joined more than twenty years ago. Sadly our choir master has stepped back due to ill health, so we rely on our organists, one who travels from The West Midlands, for our Church services.

The Choir sing four hymns, three with the congregation participation, and a psalm each Sunday.

The Choir has an extensive range of Anthems in its repertoire including Thomas Tallis' O Lord in Thee is All My Trust and If Ye Love Me, Stainers God so Loved the World and William Byrd's Ave Verum Corpus and Still Still

If you would like to join our choir please contact any choir member, Fr. Gary. or Jacqueline Barker at jacquelinebarker2009@googlemail.com or Tel. 01908 510252.

Bellringing

Sheila Blenkhorn writes: Ringing continued in 2025 as in previous years at Hanslope.

Tony Gray has continued in the role of Tower Captain with Sheila Blenkhorn doing any necessary communication with the church and other people as required.

For service ringing we usually only have five or six people, but we have still managed to ring for the majority of the Sunday services. Our Thursday evening practice nights are sometimes supported by other local ringers but most of them are not available on Sundays as they are ringing for services in their own towers. We rang for one wedding this year and also welcomed three visiting bands of ringers during the latter part of the year. As usual, we had the tower open on the two Church Open Days in July for people to climb up to the battlements, always a popular event. The tower was also open for visitors on the Sunday of the Heritage Open Days weekend. In September.

In July an inspection of the bells was undertaken by a member of the ODG Towers and Belfries sub-committee accompanied by the secretary of the ODG North Bucks Branch. They flagged up two defects which were subsequently rectified by Tony Gray.

Flowers Team

Mary Nokes writes: There are ten regular team members, with occasional help from other members of the congregation. We have continued to decorate the church for festivals and special occasions. In 2025 we provided flowers for two very special anniversaries – Fr Gary celebrated his silver jubilee as a priest; Fr Robin his golden jubilee. There was one wedding and sadly several funerals.



We would not be able to do this without very generous donations, particularly at Easter and Christmas as the cost of bought flowers continues to rise. We would like to record our gratitude to Jules at Home, the florist at Roade, who continues to supply us with really fresh flowers, free delivery and other support which is a big help. For example, a record number of the spray carnations they supplied for Christmas lasted until Ash Wednesday!



Fundraising: a Report from Maria Ecclestone

In the last two annual reports, I stated that whilst it is seen that we need to continue with our fundraising efforts because of the pressures being faced from rising costs, we do also recognise that we need to encourage new and/or regular contributions through stewardship. This remains as important now as then.



In 2025, I am pleased to report that our fundraising activities raised £12,874.35; our main fundraising events being our Easter Egg-stravaganza event, our Open Weekend and the Christmas Gift Fayre. However, our monthly Coffee Mornings, normally held on the 1st of every month, are fast becoming a great way to raise funds but also ensure those coming along receive a warm welcome with bacon rolls, homemade cakes and the ever-popular raffle in the capable hands of Angela Bowen and Jackie May. We raised just over £3,000 in 2025 on our coffee mornings alone!

Easter Egg-stravaganza – as with previous years, our annual Easter egg hunt for young people in the community takes place, with coffee, cake and bacon rolls in the church. Whilst we never had as many stalls from local providers at this event, we were still very busy. In 2025, the weather conditions were dry and we even had a visit from the Easter Bunny!



We raised £902.49 compared to £893.51 in 2024)



Open Weekend – Our annual celebration of our patron where we open the church tower to allow people to see the magnificent local vista; the weather conditions in 2025 were much better than in 2024 and many enjoyed the sights on offer. We even had local footage captured by drone!

Usual refreshments were provided, plus a range of traditional stalls with some new stallholders. We saw the return of themed hamper raffle prizes and we raised a record £2242.36 (compared to £2009.39 in 2024) This was a positive result as Hanslope Primary School and both Village Halls in Castlethorpe and Hanslope had simultaneous events happening too!

Oktoberfest – This event returned with some subtle changes; we were open in the evenings on the Friday and Saturday. The sub-committee worked hard to achieve a fundraising total of £1,476.08. Music was provided on both evenings by local bands. This will return in 2026 with more subtle changes no doubt...

Christmas Gift Fayre – We held our Fayre a week before the start of Advent in 2025. This year, the problem we faced was trying to fit the 18 stallholders into church; we managed it! Local photographer, Steph McCracken set up in the chancel and was on hand to take some seasonal family photographs.



We had some great hamper raffle prizes; with a Sunday roast dinner hamper being kindly donated by Tompkins Butchers. We raised a record £1,342.68 (compared to £1165.01 in 2024)



There are also several events that occur in the church year which sees us supporting other local and national charities such as the Milton Keynes Foodbank, Farm Africa and Willen Hospice.

We hosted **A Christmas Concert** in early December. This saw the return of Milton Keynes Brass Band and Hanslope School Choir. Monies raised were split three ways with the school donating to Willen Hospice (a total of £981 raised with each receiving £327)

2026 will see the return of two bi-annual events – Hanslope's Open Gardens and Castlethorpe's Duck Race. Finally, a huge THANK YOU to everyone who has supported these events. With us now being so busy with our fundraising activities, we continue to recognise that we do need more help to organise and run them. The fundraising team meets once a month to think about events coming up, to review past events and to think about what else we could be doing. You would be very welcome to join this team!

Fundraising contact – Maria Ecclestone.

Volunteer Help

A large number of people from the church congregation and the wider village community are involved in church life, helping in many different ways. Some are visible such as help before, during and after worship. But there are also a number of people doing unseen tasks that enhance the church and its surroundings to whom we are very grateful. Volunteers also play a significant role in the charitable and fundraising activities of the PCC: They give generously of their time and talents to make each event a success.

Fabric of the Church and Churchyard: a Report from Glyn Hollinshead

January 2025

- The 21 Lime Trees in the churchyard were pollarded. The work was carried out at no cost by Mark Basson and one of his team Josh. I am very grateful for their hard work.

April 2025

- One of the LED floodlights in the Nave required replacing. This was done with a unit that was held in stock.
- The lead hopper and downpipe taking water of the Nave roof on the southside was refixed by myself and Alex Adams at no cost.

June 2025

- One of the downlights in the chancel required replacing. This was done with a new one which was held in stock.

July 2025

- Two small sections of the west boundary wall were repaired by myself and Alex Adams using lime mortar to prevent further damage occurring. Cost £11.99 for the lime.

September 2025

- An inspection of the Bells was carried out by Alan J Marchbank of Oxford Diocesan Guild, and the following issues were found.
 - On the 4th and 6th bells one of the 2 wheel *halving* bolts had come loose and fallen out.
 - On the 2nd and 4th bells the wheel side main bearing has leaked lubricant very slightly and would need cleaning and have regular checks
 - The necessary work was carried out by Tony Gray, one of the bell ringers

November 2025

- 2 LED floodlights in the in the north aisle required replacing. This was done with units held in stock.
- A LED floodlight in the north aisle in the children's corner required replacing. This was done with a unit that was held in stock.

We also have several items that need to be serviced on an annual basis, these include: Fire Extinguishers, Tower clock, Gas heaters, Lighting conductor, Roof alarm and Organ (Retuning).

Churchyard

Having a sit on mower and a petrol strimmer, the main areas of the churchyard have been maintained in a good condition. Efforts were also made to clear some of the areas to the rear of the churchyard.



We are thankful for those who have come with their own equipment to help maintain various areas of the churchyard. We would welcome any help in the future.

The balance allocated under Section 106 grant was deposited in the church account in June. Some of the money has been used to start a planning application for the installation of a new shed. This will house the equipment that was budgeted for



during the application for the funds together with the existing equipment. All the grant monies are ring fenced as per the application. In November some equipment was purchased including a petrol hedge cutter, petrol brush cutter and a battery chainsaw. Further equipment will be purchased once the secure shed is installed.

Finance : a Report from Glyn Hollinshead

St James continues to be blessed with many generous contributors to our life and ministry in Christ.

Our annual income is quite diverse in origin, including:

22 Regular Givers using the Parish Giving Scheme (This is the preferred method as the Gift Aid Claim is carried out for us).

15 Regular Givers using Standing orders or Faster Payment Inwards

Collection Plates - £1615.72. This does not take into consideration those donations made by card outside of fundraising events.

One of the big issues is sorting out the gift aid claims for donations made outside of the Parish Giving Scheme. I would ask all those not using this method to consider changing to it. Those using the scheme still have full control of their donations. Forms are available from Fr. Gary.

I now have access to the HMRC charities gift aid claiming system but as you can imagine it will take some time to get a grip of it. Fortunately, I will be able to make back dated claims.

Investment Dividends – Unfortunately 2025 has shown a reduction in the value of the four CCLA investments due to fluctuations in the stock market but the three investment accounts managed by Oxford Diocese paid £1,485.47 in dividends into the Lloyds Bank Church General Account. Dividends from the CCLA investment account managed by the PCC are paid directly into the PCC managed CCLA deposit account. Those dividends and interest paid has increased the holdings in that account to £14,918.96, an increase of £3,369.10 on the year. That money gives the church a good buffer against any sudden issues in the future.

Fundraising raised £ 12,874.35 in 2025.

Our Gas and Electric costs are currently on a fixed tariff. The church's utility costs during 2025 were £4581.83 with gas being the main factor. Our church has various other outgoings costs which must be paid each year, including:

Regular maintenance (grass cutting equipment, roof alarm, lightning conductor, clock, gas heaters Fire extinguishers servicing + organ tuning - £3,028.40

Insurance - £7,606.24. We had one claim in regards the burglary where two windows were damaged. The insurance company agreed on one of the quotes for the repairs and transferred those monies into our account. There is a delay in repairing the window as this requires a specialist to do the work and he has a backlog. We are very grateful for donations from the village towards the insurance excess costs.

General Church running costs were £3,596.64 (Includes Ministry costs)

Parish Share – £32,541.36. This was paid in full as per the 3-year plan we set before the Deanery. For 2026 it has risen to £37,035 which is much higher than expected due to changes in the formula set by the Deanery. During 2025 we received a grant of £15,897 in Section 106 money to allow the usable burial area of the churchyard to be increased. This will give us a better capacity to manage the whole churchyard and also funding for a new secure shed and additional equipment.

The church's wider mission includes support for the Diocese of Ho and Farm Africa, with additional events that raise money to support them. Closer to home, we also supported Willen Hospice.

Structure Governance and Management.

Members of the PCC

Church Wardens are elected at the Vestry Meeting, immediately prior to the Annual Parish Council Meeting (APCM). Churchwardens who are on the Electoral Roll are ex officio members of the PCC.

PCC members are appointed at the APCM. The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules (latest revision 2020).

Deanery Synod members are also appointed in accordance with the said rules at the APCM.

All members of the congregation who are on the Electoral Roll of the Church may attend and vote.

PCC members from 1st January 2025 until May 2025

Priests:	Revd Canon Gary Ecclestone SSC	
	Father Adam Burnham SSC	
Church Warden:	Glyn Hollinshead	
Deanery Synod Representatives:	Alex Adams	
	Vacancy	
	Vacancy	
Elected Members:	Anne Adams	
	Sue Collett	Secretary
	Mark Edwards	Treasurer
	Maria Ecclestone	Electoral Roll Officer
	Diane Gordon	
	Joel Sandham	
	Wendy Thomson	

PCC members from May 2025 onwards

Priest:	Revd Canon Gary Ecclestone SSC	
Church Warden:	Glyn Hollinshead	Treasurer
Deanery Synod Representatives:	Sue Collett	Secretary
	Diane Gordon	
	Vacancy	
Elected Members	Maria Ecclestone	Electoral Roll Officer
	Mark Edwards	
	Gina Harper	
	June Paterson	
	Kathryn Pope	
	Joel Sandham	
	John Sorrell	
	Wendy Thomson	

PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish, including deciding how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. PCC members are inducted through a discussion of their role and function at the first meeting of the new PCC. Specific training provided by the Diocese is given in Safeguarding. Eligibility and DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks are carried out. The PCC met six times during the year.

In September the PCC consulted with members of the congregation to identify priorities for the coming years. The PCC are busy developing a Vision Statement.

Standing Committee

This committee, required by law, comprises of the clergy, the Churchwarden, the Treasurer and the Secretary. Wendy Thomson was invited to join this group during the year. It has the power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings, subject to any direction given by the full Council.



Groups

In order to achieve its aims and objectives the PCC has a number of groups each dealing with a particular aspect of parish life. These groups are all responsible to the PCC and report back regularly.

Current groups: Pastoral

Communications

Fundraising and Finance

Ho

Learning and Teaching

Pastoral and Wellbeing

Youth and Children

Safeguarding : a Report from Melissa King, Benefice Safeguarding Officer

2025 has seen continued progress with our Safeguarding Compliance, with the emphasis on ensuring any planning of activities has Safeguarding at the heart of discussions.

Both churches now display The Code of Safer Working Practice, which is at the heart of everything we do, and we encourage leaders to draw this to the attention of all volunteers helping at church events.

Regular meetings and discussions are diarised between Melissa King (PSO) and Sue Collett (DBS Administrator) and Fr Gary. These ensure that we achieve an agreed approach in both churches with regard to both individual and group matters.

At the time of writing this report, we have achieved the following percentage on the Parish Dashboard, which monitors our safeguarding compliance.:-

Castlethorpe 96%

Hanslope 98%

This is very pleasing to see and we strive to continue to improve.

In conclusion, it is encouraging to see a real improvement amongst our congregation in both churches of their awareness of our church family's wellbeing. We look forward to 2026 to continue this good work.

Deanery Synod Report

During the year discussions continued around the reorganisation of the Newport Deanery. The main reasons for having to reorganise are simply the lack of priests generally, ageing priests and ageing congregations. This consultation on the reorganisation is now well underway.

The allocation of the Parish Share was discussed. A special meeting was called to vote on the way in which the rural discount is applied. The chosen option will result in our Parish Share increasing significantly for both Hanslope and Castlethorpe in the coming years.

And a fond farewell

In May the church family said “Goodbye” to Fr Adam Burnham SSC who was appointed to serve as Mission Priest in the Parish of Swindon New Town. We miss him and his lovely family!



This report was approved by the PCC on 17th March 2026