



Steyning Parish Church
of St Andrew & St Cuthman

**ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH
MEETING**

**For the year 2025
held on 19 April 2026**

ANNUAL REPORTS
(1 January to 31 December 2025)

**From the PCC, Churchwardens
and Church Groups**

The contents page of this document carries a list of our usual Church Groups. Anyone who may be interested in joining any of the groups is asked to contact the Parish Church Office (tel: 01903 813276 or office@steyningparishchurch.org) for further information.

CONTENTS

PAGE	REPORTS
4	Proceedings of the PCC
5	Report from the Churchwardens
	People & Community
5	1.1 Families & Children - <i>Gary Pickett</i>
7	1.2 Pastoral Care and Grief Café - <i>Judie Thomson</i>
7	1.3 Wednesday Coffee - <i>Elizabeth Brown</i>
7	1.4 Welcome in church (welcome team, coffee) – <i>Wendy Francis</i>
8	1.5 Safeguarding – <i>Christine Aubrey</i>
9	1.6 Steyning Primary School – <i>Caryl Vine</i>
9	1.7 Open The Book – <i>Rosie Harrison</i>
9	1.8 SAMS (St Andrew & St Cuthman Men’s Soc) - <i>Len Warner</i>
	Church Support Groups
10	2.1 Fabric (see separate report) - <i>Sarah Lavery</i>
10	2.2 Projects & Fundraising – <i>Christine Aubrey</i>
11	2.3 Communications Team – <i>Bill Thomson</i>
11	2.4 Generous Giving – <i>Len Warner</i>
12	2.5 Storrington Deanery Synod – <i>Bill Thomson</i>
12	2.6 Churchyard - <i>Simon Knowles</i>
13	2.7 Holy Dusters - <i>Kate Burnett</i>
13	2.8 Flower Ladies and Gentlemen - <i>Carol McKechnie</i>
13	2.9 Bell Ringers – <i>David Kirkcaldy</i>
14	2.10 Penfold Hall - <i>John Edwards</i>
14	2.11 Steyning & District Churches Together – <i>Elizabeth Brown</i>
15	2.12 Family Support Work - <i>Penny Warner</i>
	Music and Additional Services in Church
16	3.1 Choir - <i>Brian Sawyer</i>
17	3.2 Music Group - <i>Neil Aiton</i>
17	3.3 Other Music in church - <i>Kate Burnett</i>
18	3.4 Reflections – <i>Bill Thomson</i>
18	3.5 Taizé - <i>David Littlejohns</i>
	Home Groups
19	4.1 Pilgrim Group - <i>Catherine Berry</i>
19	4.2 Penfold Group - <i>Mary Travers</i>
19	4.3 Grove House Group - <i>Pat Edwards</i>
19	4.4 Wednesday Evening Group – <i>Catherine Berry</i>
20	4.5 Prayer Group – <i>Mary Travers</i>

PROCEEDINGS OF THE PCC

The Annual Parishioners Meeting and the Annual Parochial Church Meeting took place on Sunday, 18 May 2025 following the 9.30am Eucharist. The meetings were chaired by the Vicar. Two nominations for the post of churchwarden had been received and the Vicar was pleased to announce that Kate Burnett and Sarah Lavery were duly re-elected. The Annual Parishioners Meeting was followed by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting which was attended by approximately 40 church members.

Electoral roll update: Brian Hanson reported that the electoral roll currently stood at 143 which included 41 new members over the past year; 19 more were currently being put forward making a total of 162.

Deanery Synod elections: It was agreed by the meeting that current Deanery Synod members would be able to continue for a third term subject to due nomination and election.

Parochial Church Council (PCC) elections: Three nominations for three vacant PCC places had been received: Tina Hobbs (previously co-opted), Christine Aubrey and Stephen Holliday were duly elected to the PCC.

PCC Meetings during 2025: The PCC met on the following dates:

29 Jan 25 – in attendance 14

22 March 25 – in attendance 11 + Pat Edwards minute taker

15 May 25 – in attendance 12 + Pat Edwards minute taker

23 July 25 – in attendance 15

24 September 25 – in attendance 13

10 December 25 – in attendance 14

Fabric Committee and Finance Committee: both committees met regularly during 2025 and reported to the PCC at each of their meetings. Separate reports on Fabric and Finance are submitted to the Annual Meeting.

REPORT FROM THE CHURCHWARDENS

During 2025 attendance at our services continued to increase and we welcomed new members to our congregation. Our church building and the Penfold Hall were busy with music, art and community events and the popular Community Fridge made good use of Church Cottage.

Since his appointment in September 2024, Gary Pickett has continued to work with enthusiasm and commitment, energising our worship and building links with our wider community. We are now half-way through the initial 3-year appointment and must turn our energies to raising funding for this essential ongoing work.

During 2025 our principal outcomes identified in our 5-Year Plan having been achieved, our 5-Year Plan Coordinating group was disbanded. The ongoing activities have been successfully absorbed into the programmes of our individual church groups overseen by the PCC. After many decades (too many to count!) of loyal service, our Social & Catering Committee disbanded in 2025. We would like to take this opportunity to thank this wonderful team for their cheerful willingness in

supporting our social and worship events over so many years. They leave behind a legacy of service and generosity which lives on in our church community and we can always count on support from our church community when we appeal for help with events and celebrations.

The vicar and wardens offer our grateful thanks to all who have worked with us during 2025 to continue to build our church community and develop our plans for the future of our church.

Sarah Lavery and Kate Burnett, Churchwardens

1. PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

1.1 Families and Children – Gary Pickett

Children's Worship: We held a 4pm service on a harvest theme aimed at families which was well attended with positive feedback especially with the introduction of Revd Squeaks taking part in the service. During December we held our annual Christingle and Crib services, with the Christingle taking on a slightly different format than in previous years. Both services were well attended with total attendance numbers of over 700.

The third Sunday music group service has some engagement with families and children with a hope to grow this engagement. We have also introduced some new toys into the children's area in the Cuthman chapel. The monthly Fire Pit service at 6pm is a new initiative which has brought in some new people who have not previously attended church. We have also launched children's church twice a month with varied attendance but those weeks where we have had children it has been really good.

Little Stars: Little Stars had been going well with the average number in attendance around 35 to the point that parents asked for a second group on a Monday afternoon which we started up in September. The Thursday group had increased to an average of 43 in attendance at the latter part of the year. We have a great team involved in leading the group and the general feedback remains very positive. Some examples: '*...I've recently moved to Steyning and it's been lovely to meet new people. Lots of lovely toys for my daughter to play with and great to have coffee and cake....*' '*...So many things, wonderful volunteers, warm friendly group, lots of variety, community feel, connection to Church. Of course, tea and cake!*' '*...My son loves singing time. It's our fave playgroup*'

Board Games Café: In partnership with the local community wardens, we are running the monthly Tuesday afternoon board game café. Numbers are steady but consistent, and we have also seen an increase in families attending this group.

Pancake & Coffee: During 2025 we held our first pancake event in the church after school on Shrove Tuesday and it was great to see the church full of people. The smell of pancakes filled the church and we had a lovely inter-generational event.

Easter Messy Church: We held an Easter Messy church event in the church with lots of different things going on from Easter gardens, biscuit making and lots of other crafts.

Easter Story Trail: During Lent we had an Easter video trail through the church which people could access at any time using their phones and when on a number of times I had popped into the church we had people doing the trail.

Family Fun Holiday Activities: During the summer holidays we held our first family fun holiday activities. Over two weeks of the holidays we held four sessions with different themes where parents could attend for crafts, games and refreshments. We engaged with lots of new families and built on the relationships Gary had been forming at the school.

Hallowe'en pitstop: This was our second year taking some learnings from the previous year. We had a number of crafts and board games but most importantly hot chocolate. Over the evening, we had a steady flow of people through the doors an increase on last year's numbers with up to 175 people attending. We had a larger team this year and some great conversations with our community took place at this event.

Advent stir up: We held our second Advent stir up and again we had six different activities in the church with lots going on. Our flower team did a great job not only with the young people but the adults too making wreaths as one of the most popular activities of the event. This event really seems to pull the whole church and community together.

Angel Drop: We had our first ever angel drop with tiny angels knitted by our team of volunteers and placed strategically around the town. This went down so well with a great deal of positive feedback. The primary school was very impressed too.

Memorial Tree: Launched this year was our memorial tree during Christmas where people could add a message and a name of someone they were missing over the Christmas period. The tree was covered with messages and when the cards were taken down after Christmas, the Prayer Group said special prayers for them.

Steyning Primary School: Gary also engages with the school and is building stronger ties with them from our existing relationship and work which includes Open The book, Collective worship and Church services. We launched Godly Play in Early Years and KS1. Gary has also provided support for the school's Harvest and Christmas celebrations and has supported the school when they have attended the church for school trips to look at the history of the church, the stained-glass windows and other trips. The church has supported the school with their fundraising events. Cake ministry was launched and continues to be successful, linking the cake bakers from our congregation with the hard working staff at the school.

Diocesan Activities: Linked to our funding from the Diocese, Gary has also supported May Camp running their kids' team for the event and also with the music group Gary attended and supported Family Camp with two families from our Parish attending.

Gary Pickett (Families & Children's Worker)

1.2 Pastoral Care and Grief Café

During 2025 our Pastoral Care team of 15 members continued to offer meaningful compassionate support to our congregation and the wider community. We held 12 monthly Grief Cafés providing a safe and welcoming space for those living with loss and bereavement. In October we hosted a Proper Preparation for Death event with local solicitors, funeral directors and a member of the local Patient Participation group, encouraging open and thoughtful conversations around end of life planning. The intention is to hold similar events annually. Home Holy Communion is also administered to those unable to attend church.

Judie Thomson

1.3 Wednesday Coffee

There are sixteen volunteers on the rota for Wednesday Coffee. Each of the four Wednesdays in the month a team leader and three volunteers prepare freshly made coffee, tea and cold drinks to serve to our visitors. On the fifth Wednesday there are usually enough volunteers willing to work an extra day. We offer conversation to visitors and encourage people to chat to one another. Our visitors make a donation towards the costs we incur including a contribution towards the running costs of the Penfold Hall and the purchase of ground coffee. The Wednesday Coffee volunteers buy the milk and biscuits we offer our visitors.

During 2025 we made donations towards the cost of some resources for our children's worker, Gary, to use for Godly Play. In addition donations of £100 each went to the following charities:- St Barnabas, Chestnut Tree House, FSW (Family Social Work), Worthing CAP (Christians Against Poverty), Guide Dogs for the Blind and Homes for Good.

Elizabeth Brown

1.4 Welcome in church

The Welcome Team 9.30 am Sunday Services: Sunday by Sunday the loyal Welcome Teams are waiting to greet with smiles the worshippers, regular, new and visitors. They are the invaluable members of our church community who are the first point of contact to welcome people to Steyning Parish Church. There are 17 people in the 5 teams, one team for the four Sundays in the month and the occasional fifth Sunday. During the services, with the Churchwardens, they are always ready to guide and assist the congregation. This year two more people have joined the team. To bring the teams up to full strength, I do need a few more people to join us. There is one duty a month. If this appeals to you, please let me know. My grateful thanks go to all of you who are our warm and smiling Welcomers.

Wendy Francis

Sunday Coffee and Refreshments, 9:30am Service: The Sunday Coffee and Refreshment Makers greet you at the end of 9:30am service with fresh filter coffee, tea, soft drinks and biscuits. From time to time, such as Mothering Sunday, Harvest Festival and special occasions we have trays of homemade cakes and other delights for you. In order to have all the coffee pots made and everything prepared before the service starts, we begin at 8:40 am. Ideally, we have three helpers each Sunday. At the

moment we are short of three people on the second and fifth Sundays, so please let me know if you would like to join our team. Mary Evans has joined me in keeping the cupboards well stocked with coffee, tea and biscuits; this much appreciated. I really do thank all the wonderful coffee makers for their loyal dedication and brilliant serving.

Wendy Francis and Mary Evans

1.5 Safeguarding

A significant change this past year has been the introduction of the Parish Dashboard for safeguarding. This is a national online tool where the PSOs can record completed mandatory requirements and safeguarding standards for their church. The dashboard helps to highlight areas where there is more work to be done - for example in relation to policies, roles, reviews, and activities. There are three levels according to how many standards are completed. By the end of 2025 we reached level three, although there is still some ongoing work to be completed. As PCC members are ultimately responsible for safeguarding in our church, they all have access to the dashboard so that they can check what has been done and what actions are still required. Some of the remaining actions will involve the PCC.

We have been following the diocesan requirements for 'Safer Recruiting' which means a large number of volunteers were safely recruited for Little Stars, the Pastoral Care team, the Grief Café, Wednesday Coffee and Children's Church. We have provided safeguarding support to Gary, our Families and Children's Worker, with regard to his various new initiatives.

Christine renewed her Leadership Training for PSOs. The focus was on the culture of the church and how to make this a safe and welcoming place for all. This led to discussions with the Comms Group on how we might communicate this with the rest of the church community. Father Mark interviewed Christine during the morning service on Sunday 26 October and Gary organised a display of posters and information. We also produced a new information leaflet for the general congregation (available at the back of the church). An article about safeguarding appeared in the October parish magazine. We visited an Ashurst PCC meeting to help them think through safeguarding issues as they considered starting a pastoral support service for the village.

The Diocese added a new training this year, *Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse*, because of the recognition that this is an area which is vastly under-reported in all communities. Updated posters regarding domestic abuse awareness were placed in the Penfold Hall and the church as recommended by safeguarding guidance.

Fiona manages our training database and continues to offer face-to-face support with training for those who prefer to access training in this way.

We would especially like to thank everyone who has completed new and updated relevant training for their roles as volunteers and everyone who supports the work of safeguarding in our church. The church website <https://steyningparishchurch.org/safeguarding/> continues to give links for advice, contact details and relevant information.

Christine Aubrey and Fiona Aiton (Parish Safeguarding Officers)

1.6 Steyning Primary School

Our partnership with Steyning Primary School continues to thrive. This year there have been visits to the school by the Open The Book Team, both in Collective Worship and classes. Godly Play has been introduced in the Early Years' classes by Gary. The Music group continues to contribute to Collective Worship. There have been visits to the church which have included an organ recital to Year 4 by Brian Sawyer and Year 3 for baptism. The school celebrations of Christingle, Christmas and Easter take place in the church. Church members continue to be part of the Reading Army although there is always room for more volunteers. Cakes are baked by church members and delivered to the staff room weekly. Artwork by pupils is regularly displayed in the church. We are very grateful for the time given by all our volunteers.

Caryl Vine (Foundation Governor)

1.7 Open The Book at Steyning Primary School

Another enjoyable and rewarding year has seen us present the stories of Jonah, Joshua, Abraham, The Flood, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Good Samaritan, the Annunciation, the Journey to Bethlehem, the Great Banquet, the Ten Commandments, the Last Supper and Jesus' Arrest and Trial. The Open The Book scheme provides us with a wealth of adapted Bible passages that can be linked to Steyning Primary School's RE syllabus and school themes in different and dramatic ways. This means that we can cover a variety of stories in the classroom sessions with years 3, 4, 5 and 6 and the whole-school Collective Worship year on year.

Pupils' responses are always a highlight of our sessions. They love to be actively involved, taking on acting roles, contributing to discussions in class, drawing or writing their own personal thoughts as part of a class display or to add to their RE books. A core team of up to eight members of our congregation meets to prepare for and present Collective Worship and classroom presentations. This usually involves three short sessions (maximum two hours each) over the course of a week, once every half term. Not everyone can be available for all of these; so, if you feel called to join this valuable ministry to the children of our Church school, do contact Rosie Harrison. We would love to welcome you.

Rosie Harrison

1.8 SAMS (St Andrew's & St Cuthman's Men's Society)

We enjoyed five meetings during the year. We commenced in February with a talk by Canon Nigel entitled 'Aunty's Bloomers' recounting his experiences during his employment with the BBC.

In April Donald Flatt continued the beginning of his life experiences given to us last year with an amusing 'Second 40 Years'. In June Larry Culliford gave us a talk on 'The life of Thomas Merton' and Larry's experiences as a follower of his theories and beliefs. In September Fr Ray ably assisted by Maureen spoke to us on his God-given gift of healing which was a very moving spiritual talk. In November Charles Harries gave us an extremely interesting talk on the construction of The Menai Bridge and his engineering involvement. We meet at the Penfold Hall usually on the last Tuesday

of every other month at 3:45 pm for a 4pm start to enjoy a glass or two of wine and we finish at 5:30 pm. We welcome all men of faith to join us.

Leonard Warner (Chairman)

2. CHURCH SUPPORT GROUPS

2.1 Fabric Committee (see separate report) - Sarah Lavery

2.2 Projects & Fundraising

The Tower: This has been a rather frustrating year for the PFR group. A long delay in obtaining the faculty for the work on the tower meant that it was not until later in the year that we were able to make an application to the National Churches Fund for a grant towards the work. An application has also been made to the Franklin Trust. We were successful in obtaining grants from The Benefact Trust.

Cowerson Gravestone: The necessary permissions were being sought for the conservation work to this important gravestone. The Friends of the Church have agreed to pay for the work.

Churchyard Lighting: We are very grateful for donations towards this which were received from: the Parish Council £1,000; the Steyning Society £500; and the Wilson Memorial Trust £499.

Heritage Fund: Having attended a webinar run by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we submitted an Initial Enquiry for their medium grant of £10,000 - £250,000. Feedback was positive and was followed up by an online meeting with Cassie Griffiths, Senior Engagement Manager (London and South). She was particularly encouraging and gave us some useful guidance as to how to present our full application. Work on this is ongoing.

At Risk Register: When applying for grants for work on the church, it is helpful to be on the Historic England At Risk Register. Having submitted an application, David John (Historic England architect) visited us in March. He presented our case to the team. They did not consider the church to be 'at risk' at the moment as the building is obviously so well looked after and used. However, they decided that the church is currently considered to be 'vulnerable' and that they would continue to monitor the situation with us.

Listed Places of Worship Scheme: This scheme has been in place for many years and enables churches to reclaim VAT on work to the fabric of the church. Sadly we received confirmation that this scheme was to end in early 2026 so this will add considerably to the amount of money we have to raise for our project. The government have promised a new scheme but it is unlikely to be so generous and we await further information.

General Fundraising:

- Several donations were received towards the main project throughout the year. By the end of the year we had a total of £344,810 in PCC accounts, not including gift aid or money promised by The Friends of the Parish Church.

- One donation came from the sale of shares and we received a couple of legacies. There is no capital gains tax to be paid on the sale of shares which is donated to a charity so this might be an attractive way of donating for some people.
- Several events were held in church which raised money for the project. Particularly successful were the Lunchtime Concerts organised by Kate Burnett.

Publicity and Communications: We have published a couple of articles in the Parish Magazine on progress or otherwise. Fundraising is a difficult task at the best of times and these are definitely not the best of times. However, we go forward in faith and are grateful for the support and prayers of our congregation.

Christine Aubrey (Chair of the Projects and Fundraising Group)

2.3 Communications Group

At the beginning of the year, Chris Fitton felt she needed to stand down from editing the Church Magazine. The group, and the whole church community, thank her for her work over the years. Fortunately, the group has been able to continue regular publication.

We have continued to update the Welcome Pack for newcomers and visitors, and have produced new Welcome/Contact cards to be left on the pews.

We have continued to increase our presence on social media; Gary has added a new Instagram page alongside our Facebook page. The success of this was borne out in the lead-up to Christmas, with over 18,000 views.

The ChurchSuite address database and calendar has proved useful, we are now using it for the weekly bulletin and other mailings, avoiding the task of maintaining multiple spreadsheets and lists. We will shortly be making the Address Book function widely available for those wishing to contact each other.

The church has a comprehensive website with details of services, events etc which is constantly updated.

Among other tasks, we have been looking at sending cards to parents and godparents on the anniversaries of baptisms. We know that there is still more that can be done to attract people to our church family as well as keeping the existing community informed, so will always be open to suggestions; ideally accompanied by offers of help. As Chris Fitton has now resigned from the group, though thankfully will continue to offer ideas and suggestions, we are particularly in need of new members. We thank Chris most sincerely.

Bill Thomson

2.4 Generous Giving

Our planned giving in 2025 was £83,050 (2024: £69,318), a welcome increase of 20% and a continuing result of our generous giving campaign; gift aid increased in proportion with this. We have 107 regular donors of which 97 give through the Parish Giving Scheme. The Parish Giving Scheme simplifies the recovery of Gift Aid and giving those who sign-up the option of uplifting their donations each year in line with inflation. Some members of our congregation offer planned giving direct to our separate Families & Children's Work fund.

It is incumbent on each and every one of us to regularly review our monthly donations to ensure that our committed giving increases year-on-year to keep pace with inflation and our Diocesan commitment for our clergy, for the salaries of our organist and for the office administrator for running costs for local mission and church repairs.

Leonard Warner (Stewardship Recorder)

2.5 Storrington Deanery Synod

The four elected representatives and Fr Mark ensured that St Andrew's & St Cuthman's was well represented at the Deanery synod meetings in 2025. We hosted the first meeting of the year at Steyning on 26 February. The Diocesan safeguarding team was due to give a presentation, but as nobody was available, a member of the Pulborough congregation, Austen Hindman, a secondary school headteacher, gave his views on the subject and took questions. Revd James di Castiglione, from Chanctonbury Churches, gave an outline of the proposed Mission Week at Steyning Grammar School. The synod agreed to make a financial contribution.

The next meeting was on 12 June at St Mary, Thakeham, where Michelle Leach, Director of SPLASH, spoke about the organisation's work in schools. This was followed by Fr Neill Stannard, SGS Chaplain and vicar of 3Bs parish, who gave further details of the SGS Mission Week in November, to which the synod had agreed a £5,000 contribution. There was a report from the Diocesan Synod at which Bishop Ruth had given encouraging news about church growth.

The 19 November meeting was held at St Mary, Storrington, and featured a presentation from Revd Buff Stone, Diocesan Environment Officer. Fr Neill gave a report on the successful SGS Mission week at which 800 Bibles were given out and staff had reported a marked improvement in behaviour following the event.

The Deanery Synod organised two pilgrimages, to Chichester Cathedral on 10 May and to Walsingham on 20-23 October.

Bill Thomson

2.6 Churchyard Team

This year has seen us start on the approved planning consents for the reduction of 13 trees/combo of trees. With the amount of brash we produce, it is impossible to put it all in bins so we have created 'dead hedges' around our boundary, creating new habitats for all kind of creatures. Our team is working hard to carry out work within the two years given by the planning permission.

Alongside this work, we have altered the grass cutting to try and help our wildflowers and insect life. Bulbs galore have been planted, and we hope to see the outcome through spring and summer. We have had great support from our congregation, giving us bulbs and plants to add to our churchyard. It's great to know so many people support our work and want to be a part of it.

Finally, I would like to thank my team, who work so hard to keep our grounds looking good. All of them give their time freely and take great pride in making our churchyard a place of beauty and peace.

Simon Knowles

2.7 Holy Dusters

The Holy Dusters meet every fortnight at 9am on Saturdays and spend one hour cleaning our beautiful, historic church. This includes hoovering, sweeping, dusting, and polishing the silver and brass. We are always happy to welcome more to join our small group, so please speak to a church warden if you feel you could spare some time for this worthwhile activity.

Kate Burnett, Churchwarden

2.8 Flower Ladies and Gentlemen

This year we celebrated Margaret Burgess's retirement after an amazing 60 years looking after the flowers in our church. We were delighted to welcome Lindsay Sharrier who has taken over from Margaret with the buying of the flowers and planning the various decorations for the festivals throughout the year.

Julia Elliot and I have continued to organise the flower arrangements in church with the assistance of a team of 18 enthusiastic helpers. The altar flowers are provided every week, apart from Lent and Advent, and the church is decorated for Easter, Harvest Festival and Christmas. We are also willing to undertake, with prior notice, any particular arrangements for weddings, funerals or other memorial services in the church. Everyone gives of their time freely, so any profit made from this charitable enterprise goes to the Church Flower Fund which is used for the purchase of any flowers bought during the year.

If you would like to have fun with flowers, and can spare whatever time you have to assist us, there is always a member of the team who would willingly give help and support.

Carol McKechnie

2.9 Bell Ringers

Another fulfilling and active year for the bellringers, with both exciting new developments and continued support of community and church events.

Our band continues to meet regularly for Thursday practices and Sunday service ringing, and there is a real sense of camaraderie and support up the tower. During 2025, the bells were rung for funerals, weddings and other special occasions – an important part of our service to the church and wider community, and we are always honoured to be a part of them.

We continued to tour other towers in the locality - a fantastic opportunity to experience different bells, enjoy spending time together, and we look forward to planning the next one in 2026. With our new learners progressing well and the development of our existing ringers, we are looking forward to the year ahead. If you would like to learn more about us and would like to explore joining us, please contact the Tower Captain David Kirkcaldy.

We look forward to carrying on developing our ringing and being a valued part of the church and local community, and we thank them for their continued support.

David Kirkcaldy (Tower Captain)

2.10 Penfold Church Hall

The Penfold Hall had been closed during underpinning and structural repair work. All the community facilities in the Penfold Church Hall became available again in July when the repairs to the large hall had been completed, thanks to the generosity of the Wilson Trust (£50,000) and the legacy of the late Millicent Honeywood (£16,300). The Parochial Church Council financed the remainder (£55,400). Other parts of the Penfold Hall remained open whilst the works were carried out.

The large hall, originally built in 1840, was the old National School and is a Grade 2 Listed building. For several years it has suffered from subsidence and cracks in the walls had become more serious. Two trees, which had made the subsidence worse, were removed by Ben Warner and the stumps ground out by Maplewood Tree Surgery. Pilbeam Construction Limited started work at the end of January having been awarded the contract prepared by Simon Dyson of Hanslip Architects and Heather Munro of Hockley and Dawson, Structural Engineers. Asbestos in the wall boards, floor and outside paintwork was removed by Crucial Environmental where it would have been disturbed by the works.

After Pilbeam had finished their work, which included excavation and underpinning from inside the hall, internal painting was carried out by a team of volunteers organised by Christine Aubrey and helped by Richard Bean, a Steyning decorator, and a new floor laid by DJ Flooring.

Users returned during the autumn and charges have been increased. However, running costs have exceeded income from hirers and the PCC contributed £3,570 in 2025 to help meet these costs. In 2026, all finances will be managed in a Penfold Hall Fund within the PCC Accounts.

John Edwards

2.11 Steyning and District Churches Together

The first of the aims of SDCT is to join together with Christian Churches in our area for prayer and worship and to seek a greater understanding of our several Christian traditions. This happens every month when informal worship services for the residents of Croft Meadow are led by one of the churches in SDCT. Steyning Parish Church, the Catholic Church of Christ the King, also the Baptist Church at The Hub in Upper Beeding all take a month at a time on a rota. These services with music, Bible readings and prayers are greatly appreciated by the staff and the residents' families as well as the residents themselves. Any visitors or members of any of our churches are welcome to join in this worship on the third Monday of each month.

We also work together on a regular basis throughout the year. In January the Methodist Church invited everyone to join them in an Agape service during the week of Christian Unity with the breaking of fruit bread and sharing a fruit juice drink together in an informal service with readings and song.

A speaker from Worthing CAP (Christians Against Poverty) drew a large number to a breakfast event in March which was, as usual, hosted by the Hub Baptist Church. SDCT made a donation to the work of Worthing CAP.

In May all members of SDCT publicised the Rogation Sunday service at Ashurst. It was well attended and very much appreciated.

SDCT committee and church members worked together for a coffee morning, held this time at the Methodist Church Hall, to provide the drinks and cakes which raised money donated to Christian Aid.

In November the breakfast meeting speaker was Robin Hobson talking about the Lorica Trust. A donation was made by SDCT to the Lorica Trust.

At the beginning of Advent our church hosted the Darkness to Light service. The collection from this service was, as has happened often in the past, donated to Turning Tides which is our local homelessness charity.

In December a number of people sang Christmas Carols at the Steyning Farmers Market. This was a valuable opportunity to hand out a single flyer listing all the Advent and Christmas events and services that were to be held by our churches.

Elizabeth Brown, Chair SDCT

2.12 Family Support Work

Our Steyning and Ashurst Parish Churches, together with their supportive congregations, continue to contribute to the valuable charity of Family Support Work.

In the last year we have raised considerable donations from the Ploughman's and Fizz Lunch in the vicarage garden in July, the Concert of Summer Music in the Church in September, and preparations for another Coffee Morning in the Penfold Hall in January 2026. At the moment we are working towards hopefully organising a couple of concerts in the church during the Summer/Autumn.

Last year FSW worked with over 800 families across the Diocese offering support to families ranging from simple form-filling to help with complex challenges such as mental health needs and special educational needs. This last year FSW has had to make some very difficult decisions about how they structure and deliver their work including very sadly, making two of their practitioners redundant, which will in turn affect the level of intensive one-to-one support that they have previously managed to maintain. Cuts have also been made within the office team. These decisions have not been taken lightly.

The priority is to protect as much frontline support as possible and ensure the long-term sustainability of Family Support Work. With your help and from the whole Diocese this will be possible.

Penny Warner (FSW Team)

3. MUSIC AND ADDITIONAL SERVICES IN CHURCH

3.1 Church Choir

I am pleased to begin this report by confirming that there are now 22 regular members of the choir on the register and nine guest singers who join us occasionally for choral evensong and other services. They all remain loyal to our tradition of choral music in worship.

I am always keen to recruit new singers into the choir and was delighted to welcome Adrian Moss as an adult member of the choir in December 2025. The choir continues to sing the 9:30 am Eucharist Service weekly, Choral Evensong once a month and the major church festival services.

The choir is affiliated to the Royal School of Church Music and the Director of Music follows its principles of voice training and music in worship. I am delighted to report that, through the generosity of the Cheale Trust, Isla Humphreys was able to attend the RSCM Summer Course in Bath during August 2025. This quite intensive residential course lasts for a week and includes vocal training, music theory, choral singing, including solo work, and taking part in daily sung worship. The final service of the course was choral evensong held in Bath Abbey. Isla received an excellent course report and made a number of friends that she still keeps in touch with.

The Good Friday Sacred Concert on 18 April 2025 was well supported by the congregation and local community. The choir was joined by members of the Chanctonbury Chorus and other guest singers for a performance of 'The Crucifixion' by John Stainer, always popular with audiences because of the congregational participation in the fine hymns. The soloists were Mark Kendall, tenor, and Simon Madge, bass, two local professional singers. Neil Aiton was the organist.

The annual December choral services, From Darkness to Light, the processional Advent Carol Service, and the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols are both very popular and the congregational attendance at these services continues to grow, which is very encouraging. The choir party after the carol service was enjoyed by everyone, as was the summer party held earlier in the year. These two social events are very important for the choir.

Recent RSCM surveys have continued to raise concerns about the difficulties of recruitment and training of church choirs and organists. In conclusion I would say that generally our choir members are loyal and continue to sing enthusiastically to the greater glory of God.

Brian Sawyer, Organist and Director of Music

3.2 Church Music Group

In 2025, our church music group continued to play an important role in the life of the church, leading worship during Music Group Eucharist once a month.

Over the past year we have also tried to develop opportunities on Sunday afternoon (4pm) for 'special services': including the Pet Service, Family Harvest Festival as well as Christingle. Additionally, during the year, we contributed to the worship at the Deanery service held at Steyning Grammar School and playing at the 'All Souls' memorial service.

During the Christmas period, as well as the Christingle service we led the music at the two crib services, with over 700 people attending on Christmas Eve. It was a privilege to support worship at such joyful and significant occasions.

We maintained our links with Steyning Primary School through regular collective worship, where we teach new songs to the children. These sessions are always well received, and it is a joy to see the children joining in so enthusiastically. We were also pleased to support the school's end of term church services at Christmas and Easter, attended by the whole primary school including teachers and parents.

A particular highlight of the year was attending the Diocesan Family Camp, a new and very successful venture for the diocese. Over the course of the weekend, we shared in informal worship, including singing a cappella in the woods, and led worship in the marquee for the wider gathering. It was a time of rich blessing and fellowship for all involved.

One of the challenges with Music Group Eucharist taking place 10-11 times each year is to maintain a balance between familiarity and the introduction of new songs. Different songs can sometimes be just reflecting a particular time or season or even saying something fresh to us in our current situation. Our aim is to lead and support the congregation in meaningful and engaging worship.

Members: Neil Aiton, Vanessa Knowles, Simon Knowles, Tamzin Ripley, Kate Burnett, Fiona Aiton

3.3 Concerts in church

During the last twelve months the church has hosted a number of concerts, in fact eighteen in total. They have all been well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by the wider community. It has been a wonderful to hear their appreciative comments, not only about the music, but also about our church.

The performers enjoy the resonant acoustics, and the flexibility of the chancel area has made it possible for larger groups to perform. We were delighted to welcome professional ensembles such as The Hanover Band and Lumos, both of whom attracted large audiences, and it's always a pleasure to hear local performers. Many of the groups have performed in our church previously and are looking forward to a return visit. Thanks must be given to Carol Mitchell and the volunteers from our congregation who help at these concerts.

Kate Burnett, Churchwarden

3.4 Reflections

Reflections is intended primarily for those who prefer an informal but peaceful service, not tied to the rituals of liturgy. It has proved popular over the last year, attracting numbers between 20 and 40 people.

It is an evening service, usually held at 6pm on the first Sunday of the month, except when other events such as Advent or All Souls fall on that day. We held 11 services in 2025. The service lasts around 40 minutes and is built around a time of silent contemplation. There is no fixed order of service, though each service follows a theme. Generally, we have an introduction, readings (Scriptural passages as well as poems and prose) and quiet music leading up to the service, with music and readings of a more uplifting nature, to follow, along with prayers. Music is drawn from a variety of sources and traditions, from classical choral to modern worship songs. Mostly we play recorded pieces, though we are blessed to enjoy Neil's talents on the piano occasionally.

We have a small team drawn from our congregation who put these services together and we are grateful to Fr Mark for giving us free rein to use our imagination and find inspiration from above. We welcome input from others, and are happy for anybody to help with the readings.

Bill Thomson

3.5 Taizé Service

On the fourth Sunday of most months we hold a Taizé Service in the choir stalls at church. Taizé is a community of Brothers from all denominations near Cluny in the Burgundy region of France. It welcomes visitors especially, but not exclusively, younger people throughout the summer months and is famous for its music in the form of wonderful simple chants based on biblical quotes.

The services are quiet and meditative, and as well as the Taizé Chants include a short Bible reading and a period of silence for reflection on the reading, private prayer or meditation. The service lasts around 35 minutes. For further information contact one of the Taizé team.

David Littlejohns, Adrian Bamforth and Sarah Lavery.

4. HOME GROUPS

4.1 Pilgrim Group

The Pilgrim Group is now in its third year, and although it was initially intended for people who were new to faith, we were delighted to welcome three more long-standing members of the congregation. The eight of us meet fortnightly in a member's home. For most of the past year we have been looking at the book of Luke, using music, art and visualisation to accompany the text and to help us feel part of the events described.

Fiona Aiton, Catherine Berry and Vanessa Knowles

4.2 Penfold Group

We started the year with a new theme for our meetings, choosing 'women of the Bible' and taken from both the Old and New Testaments. We followed this theme for 12 meetings. This involved a reasonable amount of research from everyone, which was interesting to share at each meeting. We did not take part in the Diocesan Lent course as a group but some of us followed it privately.

We are currently reading through St John's Gospel, which is challenging, but with a variety of books between us, and on-line research, we find each meeting worthwhile and leaving us with lots to think about. An eighth member has joined us, and we appreciate the varied input from what is now quite an ecumenical group.

We very much valued the meeting in November when Fr Mark was able to come and celebrate Holy Communion with us. We continue to meet in each other's houses on the second and fourth Tuesday morning of each month.

Mary Travers

4.3 Grove House Group

Our group of 10 meets fortnightly (except during August) at our home in Saxon Road. The support and friendship we receive from each other helps us with our personal issues. Each session starts with prayers for family, friends, those mentioned on the weekly bulletin and for conflicts throughout the world.

In 2025, we studied a previous York Course entitled 'Superstars' and also the Diocesan Lent Course 'I Believe'. Our wide-ranging discussions brought together both the courses and current events, which have also helped our faith to grow.

Pat Edwards

4.4 Wednesday Evening Group

In September 2025 we changed our name from 'Study Group', since all of our home groups exist to study the word of God in their own way. The Wednesday Evening Group now meets at the Penfold Hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm; we officially have 13 members and are happy to welcome newcomers to the group.

During the past year, we followed a course by Douglas Connelly entitled 'The 14 Sayings of Christ' taking turns to lead sessions. In July, Fr Mark kindly agreed to celebrate Holy Communion for us and we thank both Fr Mark and Chris and David Fitton who generously hosted us.

The autumn term saw us embark upon something quite different: two members shared each session, each one bringing a Bible text or a hymn which was particularly significant to them in their spiritual journey. This encouraged us to share ways in which we have felt the Spirit working in our own lives, and enabled us to get to know each other in a deeper way.

Our Christmas session was a 'bring and share' social event focusing on the Joy of Christmas, each of us bringing a poem, text, object or piece of music to share. Our thanks go to Pam Finnigan for organising the refreshments.

Catherine Berry

4.5 Prayer Group

Eight of us continue to meet in a private home once a month. The short order of service is centred around the requests from the prayer tree, and on occasions include children's prayers after their special services. We are also asked to pray for individuals or situations privately, and not share it further. This is a privilege and trust we try and honour monthly with dignity, care and love. There is also space for thanksgiving, which should never be forgotten.

Some words from an on-line lent course seem appropriate for this report: "It is good to pray for others. Jesus modelled this like no one else. As followers of Christ we are invited to do the same, with intercession being both a privilege and honour. When we intercede it is doing something truly kind, servant-hearted and powerful. It is indeed an expression of God's love".

We plan to take the prayers and names from the memorial tree placed in the church porch during December, and include them as one intercession, when the tree is taken down.

Mary Travers