St Mary the Virgin, Almondsbury

Reports from Organisations
SECTION 3 ANNUAL REPORT

Distributed with the Annual Parochial Church Report
Presented at a meeting held on 31 May 2026

THE LICH GATE

Helen Hine

The Lich Gate Magazine is published by St Mary's Church, and 1,220 copies are distributed to all homes in the Parish and to the community shop and Almondsbury Primary School (plus some selected recipients outside Almondsbury). Distribution Manager Steve Townsley is still running a strong distribution team, and Steve provides a useful link to past ways of working on the magazine.

Last year a small editorial team was set up to try and spread the workload. From February 2025 Helen Hine, Pam Skelding and Morgan Tickner work regularly to produce 10 magazines in a year, supported by the creative designer Gayle Smith at Motion Printers. The wider team includes advertising manager Karen Perks and group member Robert Graham, who has a link to the Parish Council, and Rev Anjali stays in close touch with the group. Lucy Rogers facilitates and hosts the group which meets at Old Almondsbury Hospital approximately 3-4 monthly. In February this year we celebrated one year of editing the magazine!

Karen has worked hard to secure a significant group of advertisers who pay annually and the fees for 2026-27 are all paid. The magazine covers its printing costs. There is an ongoing balance to be struck between number of adverts and available space for submitted articles.

A major change occurred in March this year, as Morgan decided not to continue her role of adjusting and laying out articles and choosing the artwork. Therefore Helen (with temporary support of husband Richard) is doing most of the production work, while Pam continues to develop new ideas for community involvement and produces a comprehensive events table each month. Helen and Richard are trying to work out the simplest process for organising magazine production before we advertise for one or more people to step into Morgan's role.

We are very grateful to Morgan for helping, with great enthusiasm, to get the magazine into a better place over 2025/early 2026.

We continue to receive much praise and encouragement from Almondsbury community.
I believe the Lich Gate magazine helps to strengthen the link between St Mary's Church and the wider community of Almondsbury.

Helen Hine (on behalf of the Lich Gate team)

BABIES AND TODDLERS GROUP

Sandy Thompson

Toddler Group has had a very special time with Val Slade from Holy Trinity leading us with her Bible stories. We have loyal families attending but are losing more and more children to school. I think the time has come to rethink toddler days and times. I started toddlers 40 years ago and I feel it's now time for a change so I am stepping down but I do hope the group will continue in the future.

OASIS GROUP

Jan Cooper

Due to the bereavement of Jan's sister and ongoing matters involved, Oasis has been having a break.

We are now praying about the future and best way forward. We will update Worship and Mission committee when things are clear.

MESSY CHURCH
Sandy Thompson

Messy Church is going from strength to strength! The children are regularly attending with their families. It is a wonderful atmosphere of pleasure and learning for everyone. Anjali opens the session with Bible content maybe a story (today we celebrated Pentecost). The children are very attentive and interact with her enthusiasticly. Lovely crafts linked to the message are enjoyed by children and parents. Songs, grace, food and a blessing end the service. The last 2 Messy Church have had 86 children, parents and helpers. 75 children, parents and helpers today. Praise the Lord.

CATERING COMMITTEE
Rosemary Griffiths

Our committee consists of five members.
Coffee is served every Sunday after the later service thanks to a rota of committee members and helpers.
Since the report last year, we have helped with The Good Friday Activities of 2025 arranged by Pam and Paul Van Rossum. Followed by the Village Fête on Saturday 10th May when, together with a band of helpers from the church, we served cream teas in the vicarage garden.

The committee served breakfast between the early service and the All-Age service on Sunday 19th Oct and although not many stayed on from the 8.30 one many from the 10am one came early to enjoy a croissant and coffee.

The committee also served teas and coffees at Almondsbury Village Events Annual Christmas Fayre in the Old School Hall on 21st November. Whilst after the Carol Service in St Mary's on Sunday 21st December, mulled wine and mince pies were served to a very packed church.

Anjali held an Alpha Course through February and March when a meal was served in the church to the participants. Although the committee co-ordinated it, the delicious meals were donated by members of the congregation.

Lent Lunches for 2026 were held as usual in the church, with the charity St Peter's Hospice as the beneficiary.

Finally, we come back round to the annual Good Friday Activities Day held this year 2026. Whether because of the inclement weather that day, or the great job that had been done of advertising, the number of parents and children attending exceeded last year and the committee ran out of hot cross buns.
I would like to thank everyone, the committee members and others who willingly offer their help with various events

FLOWER ARRANGERS
Sarah Redmond

This year we were blessed with amazing displays of flowers in church at the lectern.

The arrangements being changed on a fortnightly basis worked well and flowers lasted well usually, with any fading blooms being replaced to keep the display looking fresh. This has been welcomed by the arrangers and no complaints from the congregation, who in fact often make complimentary remarks.

As usual the arrangers have provided beautiful pillar displays at Easter Harvest and Christmas. With special thanks to Mrs Jane Smith for her extra special main arrangements at Easter and Christmas and for Mrs Jackie Hartley for her extra special Harvest display and to Mrs Toni Ranger for her extra special Remembrance Day .display.

Sarah Redmond

BELLRINGERS
Marcus Booth, Tower Captain

Another fun-packed year and we are settled into a steady routine of ringing. The bells have been rung where possible on Sundays and for weddings and practice nights. There was a large amount of ringing for the various Christmas services, weddings and activities and we gathered eight ringers to ring at midnight on New Year's Eve 2025/ Day 2026.

Thanks must go to the following people.

- Gerry for continued maintenance, key holder, CCTV, and being able to see the bells in glorious technicolour, fly cleaning and just about everything else that wouldn't have been done without him!
- To Anjali and Paul for their support of the ringers throughout the year
- Adam for continuing as secretary and wedding organiser and doing all the paperwork and keeping us abreast of the news and developments, locally and nationally
- To our members, guests and visitors, without whom we couldn't function.
- Tim as Treasurer and Adrian as Deputy Tower Captain
- All who support Sunday Service ringing and practices
- Thanks to everyone for supporting me through my period of incapacity with labyrinthitis.

In statistics the story of 2025 is:
Attendance on Sundays ranged from 1 to 10, with the average being 6.8 up from 6.35, the average last year. We rang on all 52 Sundays and had six or more ringers on 45 of these (87% up from 71% last year), with seven or more on 32 (62% up from 42%).

Attendance on Mondays ranged from 6 to 15, with the average being 10.34 slightly up from 10.07 last year. We rang on 47 of 52 Mondays, four of the missing Mondays being due to Bank holidays and one to the AGM. In 2024 we rang on only 42 of 52 Mondays. We had eight or more ringers on 41 of the 47 Mondays (79% down from 83% last year) and ten or more on 29 (56% slightly down from 57% last year).

We have 14 resident ringers, four more than last year and we are still regularly joined by three Alveston ringers who come to us to recover skills they once had when ringing in younger days.

Our ringing highlights in 2025 were a string of individual firsts: first quarter peals for Madeleine Jefferies and for two of our Alveston visitors, Lawrence Roberts and Julie Jackson. Pauline achieved her first touches of Norwich Surprise Minor, Ipswich Surprise Minor, Cambridge Major, and Spliced St Simon's and St Clement's Doubles. Pauline and Steve Crane rang their first touch of Primrose Surprise Minor whilst Pauline, Stephen Channon, and Andrew Stubbs rang their first touch of Bourne Surprise Minor. Adrian Cooper conducted a touch of Spliced St Nicholas and Winchendon Doubles for the first time and the band recorded its first touch of Spliced Cambridge and Beverley Surprise Minor. Gerry Anniss called Plain Hunt and led the lower for the first time. We rang two quarter peals in 2025, one less than in 2024.

Otherwise, we rang 35 different methods versus 36 last year. These were Rounds and Call Changes, Plain Hunt, Cloisters Doubles, Grandsire Doubles and Triples, Plain Bob Doubles, Minor, Triples and Major, Stedman Doubles and Triples, St Simon's Doubles, St Martin's Doubles, Spliced St Simon's and St Martin's Doubles, Reverse Canterbury Doubles, All Saints Doubles, Shipway Place Doubles, Twineham Doubles, Bampton Doubles, April Day Doubles, Spliced St Nicholas and Winchendon Place Doubles, Little Bob Minor, Spliced Plain and Little Bob Minor, Treble Bob Minor, Kent Treble Bob Minor, St Clements Minor, VJ Bob Minor, Cambridge Surprise Minor and Major, Primrose Surprise Minor, Norwich Surprise Minor, Ipswich Surprise Minor, Spliced Cambridge and Beverley Surprise Minor, Bourne Surprise Minor and the Ellacombes.

The Almondsbury ringers won back to back titles as the Branch Quiz champions in February 2025 by some fluke!
The target is probably NOT to win this year, as otherwise we'll have to organise it again! We look forward to another successful year, with plenty of fiendish challenges to come!

Marcus Booth
Tower Captain – Almondsbury

DEANERY SYNOD

See Bristol West Deanery Synod Annual Report 2025 at Appendix A

APPENDIX A

Diocese of Bristol | Bristol West Deanery

Bristol West Deanery Synod Annual Report 2025

Introduction

Three Deanery Synods took place. In 2025 and the key themes were:

- **'Creating a Culture of Safety'**
- **'Ministry to the Mature and Faith in Later Life'**
- **'An Outward Looking Church'**

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March Deanery Synod:
'Creating a Culture of Safety'

Deanery Synod on 12 March 2025 the meeting was held in at Christ Church, Clifton

Synod commenced with a summary of three items:

Diocesan Synod

The Area Dean listed the Members of both Houses of Diocesan Synod and provided an account of the Synod Members Breakfast. Three written questions were articulated for Diocesan Synod, they concerned:

1. **Diocese of Bristol Re-Branding**
2. **Christian Funerals**
3. **Creation Care and TC.T Partnerships**

Vacancy in See Committee

- The Vacancy in See Committee requested that Synod should address four questions:

  1. What fills you with joy and hope about the ministry and mission of the Church in the Diocese of Bristol?
  2. What are the challenges and frustrations, and what would you like to change?
  3. What gifts, qualities and experience do you think are needed in an incoming Bishop?
  4. Do you have any names that you feel the CNC should consider?

- These were discussed and output collected and communicated to the Vacancy Committee.

- **General Synod**
  - Revd Paul Langham, General Synod Member House of Clergy, provided an introduction to the Safeguarding Option selected at General Synod. This was a very fitting introduction to the main Synod topic.

- **The Main Theme: 'Creating a Culture of Safety'**

Introduced by Caroline Jowett Ive, previously Director of People and Safeguarding for the Diocese of Bristol.

The Church of England is committed to safeguarding as an integral part of its ministry and mission, promoting a safer culture and the welfare of every child, young person and adult. As such, the Church has robust policies,

procedures and guidelines in place, to ensure good practice throughout the central organisation, its 42 dioceses and other Church bodies.

The Church of England will:

- Promote a safer environment and culture
- Safely recruit and support all those with any responsibility related to children and vulnerable adults within the Church
- Respond promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation
- Care pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons
- Care pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns or allegations of abuse and other affected persons
- Respond to those that may pose a present risk to others

How do we enable this culture to live in our parishes, ministry and mission?

Output from Round-table Discussions – these have been communicated to the Safeguarding Team:

- Acknowledge the importance of training
- Ensuring safe recruitment is essential
- Role of all in the pews to keep their eyes open
- Good visibility is important
- Increase profile of PSOs - standing up front/at PCC meetings,

  not just a name on a notice board

- Acknowledge can be hard to recruit PSOs –

  need streamlined systems and more pooled arrangements (e.g. DBS checks)

- Undefended leadership - knowing who to speak to and when to escalate
- Ensure there is a National Church, Diocesan and Parish whistleblowing policy
- Promote Safeguarding Sunday (can be any time of year!) to raise awareness
- Awareness of different groups meeting with different vulnerabilities

  e.g. special needs, elderly

- Ensuring if a visiting speaker has had a DBS check
- Ecumenical situations, ensuring that appropriate reciprocal safeguarding protocols in place

May Deanery Synod:

'Ministry to the Mature and Faith in Later Life'

Deanery Synod on Tuesday 20 May 2025 focused upon Ministry to the Mature and Faith in Later Life. The Meeting was held at St Peter's Church, Henleaze.

Following the welcome Synod commenced with the report from Diocesan Synod on 22 March at which the primary focus had been Living in Love and Faith (LLF).

The Main Theme: 'Ministry to the Mature and Faith in Later Life'

In a world obsessed with youth, it can be easy for churches to overlook the gifts, experience and wisdom of older people. The simple fact is that people are living longer and there are increasing numbers of older people in society who sometimes feel overlooked. Churches can work together to encourage and bless older people, as well as drawing on their wisdom and helping them avoid loneliness and isolation.

Here's a more detailed look at the various aspects of church ministry to older adults:

1. Spiritual Growth:

- **Bible study groups:** Facilitating discussions on scripture, encouraging personal reflection, and fostering a deeper understanding of faith.
- **Prayer groups:** Providing opportunities for intercessory prayer and spiritual support.
- **Life review classes:** Helping older adults process their life experiences and find meaning in their past.
- **Spiritual retreats:** Offering a quiet space for reflection and spiritual renewal.
- **Worship participation:** Ensuring that worship services are accessible and engaging for older adults, potentially offering modified worship formats.

2. Social Connection:

- **Intergenerational programs:**
  - Encouraging interaction between older adults and younger church members, fostering a sense of community and belonging.
- **Small groups:**
  - Providing opportunities for fellowship and support within a smaller, more intimate setting.
- **Outreach and evangelism:**
  - Inviting older adults to reach out to other seniors who may not be part of the church, potentially starting an adult day-care ministry.
- **Recreation and leisure activities:**
  - Offering activities such as games, crafts, or outings that promote socialization and well-being.

3. Physical and Mental Well-being:

- **Health and wellness programs:**
  - Promoting physical fitness, nutrition, and overall health through classes, workshops, and health fairs.
- **Cognitive stimulation:**
  - Offering activities that challenge the mind and keep older adults engaged, such as memory games or puzzles.
- **Transportation assistance:**
  - Providing transportation to church services and other activities for those who may have mobility limitations.

4. Service and Outreach:

- **Involvement in church ministries:**
  - Encouraging older adults to participate in various church ministries, such as greeting, ushering, or serving in a church committee.
- **Outreach to the community:**
  - Helping older adults connect with their communities, potentially through programs like adult day care, respite care, or meals on wheels.
- **Service opportunities:**
  - Involving older adults in service projects within the church or the wider community.

5. Adapting to Changing Needs:

- **Accessibility:**
  - Ensuring that church buildings and facilities are accessible to older adults with mobility limitations.
- **Communication:**
  - Using various communication methods, such as newsletters, email, or social media, to keep older adults informed about church activities and events.
- **Individualized support:**
  - Recognizing that older adults have diverse needs and providing individualized support to meet those needs.

Messy Vintage is a missional offshoot of Messy Church, which began in a Methodist Church in Jersey. It is a movement that takes Messy Church values and good practice to older people.

Messy Neighbours (from Messy Vintage) https://www.messychurch.brf.org.uk/latest/projects/messy-vintage/

How does this session help people grow in Christ?
The parable of the good Samaritan not only gives the opportunity to share stories of times we have spent with neighbours now and in the past, but also causes us to think more deeply about who we consider our neighbour to be. Jesus makes it clear that everyone is; there are no boundaries or excuses for not sharing God's love.

Messy team theme
• Talk about those who have been our geographical neighbours in the past.
• Talk about those with whom we share our lives now (or next bedroom/lounge, etc.).

• Share thoughts on global neighbours.

Activity

You will need: household coil wooden clothes pegs (7.5 cm minimum); doublesided sticky tape; scissors; felt-tip pens; circle of thick card; craft wood glue

Twist the clothes pegs and remove the coils. Reverse the two halves so that the long ends are back to back and secure together with double-sided sticky tape. Turn each peg into the people who are attending using felt-tip pens. Form the pegs into a circle, with the lower third of each peg-person firmly touching its neighbour. Take out one person at a time and secure it to its neighbour using wood glue. Cut a circle of thick card (15 cm diameter or appropriate to the size of your pegs). Glue on to the back of the wooden peg circle to support the round from the back. Decorate the card that shows through the gap in the middle.

Then: Share a personal experience illustrating neighbourly love, or ask a team member to give a testimony of a good experience, before sharing the story of the good Samaritan. Then, talk about how God calls us to love not only those with whom we happily rub shoulders, but also those with whom we share no common ground.

October Deanery Synod:
'An Outward Looking Church'

Deanery Synod on Thursday 16 October 2025. The Meeting was held in person at St Alban's Church, North View, Westbury Park.

The Main Theme: 'An Outward Looking Church'

- **'An Outward Looking Church'**

  Revd Rosy Ashley (Advisor for Parish Development)
  Revd Lee Barnes (Advisor for Fresh Expression of Church)

  The Diocesan Offer:
  Rosy, Lee or another member of the Diocesan team will work with any PCC or leadership Team to help shape a strategy or direction relevant to a particular context.

  Introduction: Mission in a Strange New World

  Rosy and Lee introduced the Synod Discussion with a summary of the recent Diocesan Conference **Mission in a Strange New World.**

  The Key thought is that the end of Christendom is where the Christian story was known and the church was central. In the new world the church invites Christians in western culture to embrace marginality and discover fresh ways of being church and engaging in mission. While the transition from modernity to postmodernity has received a huge amount of attention, the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom has not yet been fully explored.

  How do we engage with local communities for worship and growth, and in providing practical support and outreach? As well as the traditional structure of what we do there is also opportunity in fostering new worship communities through "fresh expressions," running programs like "Leading Your Church into Growth". We also, as we have previously explored, need to become hubs for community activities and essential services, as seen with church cafes and foodbanks. We may also focus on family faith development through "Faith at Home" and equip communities for service through "Growing Good" initiatives.

  Rosy and Lee introduced Synod to a wide variety of working models to enable the shaping of local strategic intentions and direction.

Bristol West Deanery Uganda Link
During 2025 Bristol West deanery Uganda link committee, chaired by Rev Janet Lee, met twice and reported back on the three link dioceses in N Uganda. In each Diocese we heard about achievements and challenges:

1. Nebbi Diocese - the **Girlchild Project** to help young schoolgirl mothers has continued, money was raised to buy sewing machines for those who completed the tailoring course, enabling them to start a business and sustain themselves and their child. Janet was able to hand over the sewing machines during the visit in August. Thank you to those people and churches who contributed to this project.

2. Diocese of N Uganda - we continued to help support the Theological College in Gulu, **Archbishop Janani Luwum College**, by sponsoring students, and sending money for computers, exam transport and new classrooms. During a visit in August, we are able to meet the students, talk with the Principal, the Rev Sarah Cawdell (a CMS missionary) and see the improvements in the place. The biggest answer to our prayers has been the registration of the college with the Higher Education Council; this has been a long drawn-out process.

3. Kitgum Diocese - two projects have been supported, (1) the remote health centre at Lira Palwo, and (2) the borehole at Rev Jabuloni school. It was great for the team that visited in August to be able to see the solar powered refrigerator in use and a number of other improvements at the clinic.

A report was given in the October Deanery Synod about the August visit and experience.

Looking to next Year – 2026

Opportunities and challenges across the deanery for this coming year are:

- Invite a speaker from the Link Team to your church and talk about the great work that is taking place
- Pray for 'our' three Dioceses and the three Bishops: Godfrey, Wilson and Pons
- Identify a project that resonates and interests you and raise money
- Contribute to the: Training of theological students; Education of children by sponsoring school fees; Support the health clinics and develop school facilities; Contribute to the Nebbi Girlchild Project
- Understand the climate change impact on the environmental project in Kitgum