

 **St Nicolas**
NEWBURY
Being Good News. Bringing Good News.



Photo: Elaine Canniffe

2025-2026
Report of Parish Activities

For Presentation at the
Annual Parochial Church Meeting
On Tuesday 5 May 2026

PARISH OF ST NICOLAS NEWBURY
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1. Rector’s Introduction

This Report of Parish Activities is the result of a huge amount of work. Not just the writing and collating of all the reports (although thank you to all of you who have contributed), but, more significantly, the many, many activities that make up the life of our church. This Report is ordered under the three areas of our St Nicolas Church vision: Looking Up (Our Worship); Looking In (Our Fellowship); Looking Out (Our Mission). In each of these vital directions for St Nic’s, individuals and teams have worked hard – and the following pages are a testimony to that work.

Of course, a booklet like this can never be exhaustive: so, whether your name appears in the headlines somewhere, or whether your work at St Nicolas is largely unseen and un-named, thank you for all that you have done.

One of the prayers that I sometimes pray for St Nic’s Church is Paul’s prayer in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1. Paul prays for the Thessalonian church, that God would bring to fruition ‘every desire for goodness’ and ‘every deed prompted by faith’, so that Jesus might be glorified in the church and the church glorified in Jesus. St Nic’s is not a perfect church, but it is full of many good desires and many good deeds, which are described in the reports below. As you read through them, please pray with me (and with the apostle Paul)...

“that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him.”
 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

With every blessing

Will Hunter Smart

2. Churchwardens’ Report

‘The joy of the Lord is your strength.’ (Nehemiah 8:10). We have had a year of great joy in the Lord together as we have met to listen to the word of God excellently taught and we have

praised our Saviour week by week. We continue to be privileged at St. Nic's to listen to great teaching and to be blessed by joining in fellowship with a wide range of ages and, for Newbury, people from a wide range of countries of origin, who all bring gifts to share with one another to make St Nic's such a vibrant and friendly community.

As I write we are looking again at our Vision document because we have achieved several of our aims, one of which was to work on our welcome. We realise that we have changed as a community into a people who welcome newcomers better, with everyone playing their part in this job. This is just a small but important example of how we are growing as a part of the family of God. We seek to enable each other, and our visitors, explore what it means to meet Jesus and belong to his family. We have been blessed to see our numbers grow gradually on Sundays.

This last year saw a 'Come and See' fortnight in June with a wide variety of events from dog walking to lectures to which we could invite our friends, neighbours and colleagues to see who we are as a family of God and what we believe. Much fun was had and hopefully some people engaged with thinking about Jesus who don't usually do so. We also continued our craft and open days in the summer and Christmas to invite the town into our wonderful building and have some fun in Jesus' name. As before, some visitors edged gently through the door 'just for a minute' and stayed several hours. What a joy!

We also ran our children's holiday bible club again in the summer: 'Shipwrecked! The story of Jonah.' We had around 70 children supported by 70 adult volunteers from our congregation over the week. About half of the children were from families who don't usually worship at St. Nic's. A great deal of energetic fun was had by all thanks to a great atmosphere and hard work by Tania and her team. Small people going home all abuzz with the happiness of spending a morning thinking about Jesus! Well worth the effort. Then the 4-metre-long whale swimming down the central aisle stayed for another 4 weeks whilst the adults followed the kids learning about Jonah on Sunday mornings.

Meanwhile CAP (Christians Against Poverty), for whom we host the Newbury branch, passed a remarkable milestone of £500,000 of debt written off or otherwise dealt with for their clients in Newbury. Many of our congregation volunteer quietly as befrienders for this charity, providing a vital support for the clients freed from crippling debt.

Another highlight of our fellowship is how many groups meet up during the week to encourage one another in faith, with Home Groups, Meet Monday, Fellowship on Tap, the 'Rooted' series looking to explore faith more deeply, Foundations, communion on Thursday mornings, and Hidden Treasures to name just a few. With a large and vibrant fellowship like this we are of course sad to acknowledge we have lost a number of our well-loved congregation this year. We are missing Madge Hancock, David Pascall, Audrey Lewendon, Derek Tozer, Grahame Church, Jane Sutton and, most recently, Mark Knight. All of these had played important roles in our congregation, and were dear to us, but now see their Saviour in person.

One small blight on our fellowship again this year has been the heating for the church, which has broken on several occasions through the winter. But we are very blessed to have a highly skilled building project team looking into our options for solving that, and, we hope and pray, also making our wonderful 500-year-old building more welcoming and suitable for the 21st Century. How wonderful it is to know that there have been Christians worshipping God on this site of ours for nearly 1000 years now.

‘Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ‘(Hebrews 12;1-3).

We have a wonderful Saviour indeed who has given us this wonderful year we have enjoyed as the St Nic’s part of the family of God.

Madeline Norman and Richard Coward

3. Deanery Synod

The massive issues demanding much consideration at present have meant that the Deanery has reverted to its original purpose: simply a means of communication. Our Deanery consists of many small rural and village churches. Rightly, as the demographics change, the church is often the only facility left in a village locality. Small churches then are our focus.

The Deanery traditionally looks after the parish share to make sure that it is collected and its distribution fair. A much kinder approach has been used of late which certainly helps. The stricter rules-based methods of the past were not particularly helpful anyway. Clergy deployment, particularly in smaller churches, receives far more attention, again of a kinder nature than previously, which is a great help.

There is a very limited resource base in parishes and finding free volunteers is almost impossible! However, David Willetts, the community officer from Saint Mary's Shaw, had been promoting an idea which would make a village church a village hub with a strong connection to the parish council and local school. Our local authorities thought this would be a good idea, but they have no spare resource to help implement. Similarly, our churches have little or no spare voluntary help free enough to make this work.

It is of course gratifying and inspirational to know that there are other bodies of Christians in our locality. As Bishop Stephen starts his retirement journey, inevitably the work of the diocese slows. Many of us are simply waiting for our new Bishop to stamp their authority on the organisation and perhaps we will see a rather different Deanery Synod at some stage in the future.

Mark Knight

4. Electoral Roll

We renewed our Electoral Roll last year which is something we have to do every six years. When it closed on 8th April this year, there were 280 on the ER. I developed an online form last year which really helped with the administration of responses.

I have emailed a large amount of people since Christmas to encourage them to sign up, and I will continue to encourage people to join the roll throughout the coming year.

Mandy Maskell, Electoral Roll Officer

5. Safeguarding

Safeguarding remains fundamental for all that we do. Keeping people safe and enabling them to flourish is at the heart of our gospel work.

We marked Safeguarding Sunday in November, and I spoke about my role at both morning and evening services. Safeguarding is, of course, something that we are concerned about all year round and it is everyone's responsibility, not just that of those of us who are more closely involved.

The Diocese provides clear guidance about how we should safeguard children and vulnerable adults and we follow the safer recruitment processes for all those who need this for the role that they fulfil at St Nic's. I am grateful to both Chris Reeves and Mandy Maskell for all that they do behind the scenes to support recruitment - processing DBSs and monitoring training needs. I would also like to thank all those people who help to run groups and have undergone important safeguarding training - this is much appreciated.

We have responded to some concerns this year with the advice from the Diocesan Safeguarding Team which is always helpful and timely. Nationally, safeguarding in the church has been under much scrutiny and there are plans to set up an independent organisation to provide oversight and challenge to the Church of England in this area.

If you have any concerns or queries, do not hesitate to be in touch with me on safeguarding@st-nics.org.

Paul Mawdesley, Parish Safeguarding Officer

6. Building Project

In our quest to re-order our church to be a warmer, more welcoming, and worshipful environment that delivers a more flexible space for ministry and community activities, we entered 2025 with feedback on our feasibility study. This came from the meeting of Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) following their visit to the church in December 2024. Two key tasks for the year were then set; the need to address the issues raised in a largely supportive response from the DAC; and undertaking in parallel with this, a funding feasibility study to ascertain what level of expenditure we could possibly support and over what period.

The key challenges from the DAC surrounded the request to extend the building, the suitability of the proposed heating system and our critical proposal for introducing flexible seating. In order to move the process forward, we moved on from a schematic proposal for the extension that would house toilets, plant room, a utility area and storage, into a more detailed design that would enable the DAC to envisage the architectural impact of the proposed extension on the North elevation. As we entered 2026 the final details were being agreed for submitting this to the DAC.

We were asked by the DAC to further consider how we replace our heating system in order to produce a solution that would address an economic solution that would allow for greater use of the church building and minimise any adverse visual impact. This was a substantial piece of work that included consideration of using Photovoltaic (PV) cells on the roof in order to produce a 'green' solution that would also minimise the running costs. This work is now complete and ready for consideration by the DAC.

Lastly, knowing that there was a high likelihood of taking up the floor to install under-floor heating, and that this would entail the removal of the pews, we were asked to consider whether our plans could be amended to return some or all of the pews. Extensive work was undertaken to consider how this might impact on our desire to make the space one that could be used flexibly. Again, at the end of the year this work was ready for submission to the DAC.

In parallel with our ongoing discussion with the DAC, we appointed Jacqui Watson to undertake a funding feasibility study. This was completed during the year and is ready to be considered by our PCC in order to inform us as to the likelihood of the scale and phasing of any work that we want to undertake. It is clear that the funding for a project of this scale is not an easy task and will need a significant commitment from the congregation both in terms of financial support and in organising the raising of funds from external sources.

During the year Ellen Hunter Smart and Jonathan Dean both stood down from the Building Core Group and we thanked them for the huge amount both had done to help move the project forward. John and Caroline Michalski joined the group, with John taking on the role of undertaking our commercial control and Caroline initially acting as secretary, but then taking on the dual role of both secretary and Project Manager. More recently, Steve Wolak has joined the group to take on the Communications Lead. We are really blessed in having such talent and capabilities in our congregation!

Since the New Year, in order to progress the design of our proposed external extension to the church building, we have undertaken the digging of trial pits so that it feels like things are really starting to move forward! We look forward to finalising a workable plan with the DAC in 2026 that enables us to start a funding campaign and begin turning our plans into reality that will enable us to better be and bring good news to Newbury!

Richard Coward, Churchwarden and Chair of Building Project Committee

WORSHIP (Looking Up)

10am service

Our 10am service is the largest of our services at St Nic's and it is the most diverse. We have new-born-babies, much-older-saints and everyone-in-between! The great joy of this diversity is that the service is a genuine expression of our church family – this is something that many newcomers and visitors comment on. The great challenge, as in any family, is how to hold together the different preferences of different members of the family.

We praise God for signs of growth in recent years. We have certainly increased in the breadth of our congregation (including a growing number of different nationalities and backgrounds). We have also grown in size – when I stand up to lead or preach on a Sunday morning it is a great joy to look out at such a full church! We now usually have over 200 adults and over 70 children at the service. We continue to do a really good job at welcoming newcomers (a key task in such a large service), and I think this task is increasingly taken on not only by the 'official' welcomers, for each Sunday but by every member of the congregation.

We are, as in every area of church life, dependant on and thankful for the many people who serve in different ways. Each Sunday morning, before the congregation arrive, those who are serving that Sunday gather to pray. It's a diverse team, with many different skills and responsibilities: worship leaders and musicians, 'livestreamers', PA and projection operators, stewards, clergy and others. It's a fantastic representation of the church family, even before the rest of the church family have arrived! We are so grateful to the many people who serve in these ways, displaying such commitment to our church and to the importance of Sunday Worship.

Will Hunter Smart

The Six

The Six is our informal Sunday evening service, meeting each week at 6.00pm. It continues to be a real privilege to gather with a wide range of people from different backgrounds and church traditions as we worship God together. Over the past year we have again seen encouraging growth in regular attendance, with noticeable peaks during our more unusual evenings such as testimony nights and Bible read-throughs.

A particular highlight was our Casual Carol Service. Designed as a relaxed and accessible evangelistic event, it attracted such a large number of guests that we moved into the main church building rather than stay in the hall. It proved to be a joyful evening of welcome, music and gospel hope.

One of the great strengths of The Six remains its flexibility. The informal style allows us to shape occasional services around different ways of engaging with God and with one another. This year we have enjoyed hearing personal testimonies of God at work, using prayer stations, walking around Newbury to pray for our town and spending extended time in sung

worship. Six in the Sticks continued at the same location as last year and again provided a refreshing evening of fellowship and worship outdoors.

We have also been pleased to host services led by Count Everyone In, CTNA, and the carol service team. Community continues to deepen within the congregation, and it is often a challenge to lock up the hall at the end of the evening because so many people are still chatting and sharing life over a cup of tea. It has been especially encouraging to see new people stepping forward to serve, growing in confidence and gifting as they contribute to the life of the church family.

Our teaching this year has taken us through a rich and varied journey in Scripture, exploring The Everyday Kindness of God in Ruth, Paul's call to Guard the Gospel in 2 Timothy, selected Psalms in David's Songs, wisdom from Ecclesiastes in The Good Life, the assurance we have in Christ through Take Heart, and the call to discipleship in Walking with the Teacher from Matthew. We also enjoyed a Book in a Night on Haggai, alongside other one-off evenings that added depth and variety to our regular pattern of worship and teaching.

The Six continues to be overseen by a planning team which has evolved over the year. The current team—Joy Mawdesley, Rosemary McDonald, Tim Saunders, Barbara Sporne and Pete Winmill—represents different aspects of the service. We meet once or twice a term to review, plan creatively, and pray for the ministry of the evening service.

We remain thankful to God for the way He is shaping this community, drawing people in, and deepening our love for Him and for one another.

Tim Saunders

Thursday Holy Communion

Thursday morning communion at 10.30 is a wonderful 'pit stop' during the week. With a simple and traditional communion service that lasts about 40 minutes, it offers the opportunity to come together in quietness and reflection, to stop and be reminded of all that God has done for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There are familiar faces week by week, but new faces too, and some for whom this is their main service during the week. We are a congregation of about 30, many of whom stay on for coffee at the coffee morning in the hall. We look forward to seeing how plans develop to grow our Thursday morning contact with so many people from our community.

Services are shared among the clergy – Will, Joy, Simon, Janice Macdonald, Pam McKellen and Geoff Sowden. We are also supported by those who read the gospel reading each week and by Sam Bryant, Maria Muir, Sue Elliott and Bob Kennaugh who prepare for the service and welcome those who come – thank you all very much!

Joy Mawdesley

Benefice Choral Evensong

Despite reports in the media of cathedrals disbanding their choirs and moving away from traditional choral services, our benefice choral evensong is going from strength to strength. Previous reports have mentioned the good humoured ‘competition’ regarding the numbers in the choir and congregation; I am delighted to report the current trend is for the congregation to often outnumber the choir!

These services delight those listening and those who take part; as the music soars, so do our hearts and spirits as the offering sets us up for another week and month until the next time. They would not happen were it not for the large amount of teamwork and dedication encompassing organist/choir master (such skill!), choir (such beauty!), refreshments (and what refreshments!), advertising, carpark monitor and verger, together with the rota of clergy who lead and preach. All play their part and contribute to a beautiful offering of worship for the congregation which attends from around the Newbury area.

If you haven’t yet found time to attend, please make time, you will not be disappointed! Everyone is warmly welcomed. The services are on the first Sunday of each month at 6pm although it is worth checking the St Mary’s website beforehand (stmarysspeen.org.uk).

Rev Janice Macdonald, St Mary’s, Speen

Children’s Ministry (ages 0–5)

Small Stars

It’s been another busy year at Small Stars! We meet in the upper hall on Sunday mornings, and we usually have between 12 and 25 children each week. We start with free play for a few minutes whilst the parents and carers drop their children off and the wonderful volunteers help to settle them in. Looking around the room after a few minutes you will see groups of children playing with cars, dolls, bricks and dressing up, some on the climbing frame and some reading stories. There is usually a happy buzz, even if there has been a little initial wailing! Parents are free to stay if their children are finding it hard to settle, or alternatively we have a small room with the service livestream and some toys where they can take their little ones who need a space to play but aren’t ready to be left in Small Stars.

After some playtime the mats are put out, and we sing “Come to the circle” – this is the signal for the children to come and take an instrument and sit on a mat. We sing a couple of songs – favourites include ‘Our God is a great big God’, ‘Who is the King of the jungle?’ and ‘Smile, smile, Jesus loves you’. Then we come to the all-important snack time! The team distribute water, biscuits and rice cakes, and we sing ‘Thank You God’. While the children are enjoying their snacks, one of the team tells the story for the day, usually using props in a ‘godly play’ style, or else with some acting. After a prayer, there are more activities such as a craft or tuff tray activity related to the story, as well as the chance to explore the sensory room – the bubble tube and the dark tent are both favourites!

In the summer term we began with some sessions on baptism, prayer and communion, helping the children to explore and understand some aspects of church life and faith. We then focused on some of the parables of Jesus, including the lost sheep, the wise and foolish builders, and the great feast.

In the autumn term we began using a resource called 'Diddy Disciples' as a basis for our story times. They often include a song and encourage lots of interaction in the storytelling; this has been working well for our group which is a lot younger after we sent a very big cohort of children up to All Stars in September! We thought about God's wonderful creation and how we can look after it, and then we considered the Christmas story by looking at a different character each week.

In the spring term we have been thinking about the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and we are now jumping ahead to the events of Easter week.

Excitingly again this year, we have had some families join us in Small Stars through initially coming to Hidden Treasures. It is wonderful to welcome them further into the community of the church. It is such a privilege to share Jesus with all these little ones and to play a small part in their journey of faith. May they grow in the knowledge and love of God.

Sarah South

All Stars (ages 5-11)

All Stars continues to be a joy and a privilege to lead. I have been in role for 20 months now and have loved getting to know the children who come regularly. It has been wonderful to see them grow in confidence – those who were shy at first now running through the hall doors to find their groups. It's also been great working in partnership with Elaine, our children's administrator, sharing ideas and developing the ministry as we learn from one another, from training and from feedback from the wonderful team of volunteers. She is great at keeping us all organised and ensuring that the rotas are populated and we have the right volunteers in the right places for each Sunday.

All Stars is a thriving group of primary aged children, from school years 1-6. Most weeks we have 25-30 children in the hall during the morning service, plus a smaller group of year 6s, who, since September 2025, meet in St Nic's House with a couple of volunteers. Children are registered in their age groups and then participate in a game, or quiet colouring if they prefer, before joining together for a time of singing and teaching as we explore the Bible message for the week. Back at our registration tables we take time looking at God's word in smaller groups, before finishing with a craft or challenge activity related to the theme.

Last spring we spent time immersing ourselves in the gospel stories leading up to Easter and then in the book of Acts, exploring the work and power of the Holy Spirit and the amazing birth of the church despite so much opposition. In the autumn we returned to the Old Testament, looking at the exodus and wilderness years of God's people. In the first half of the spring term 2026 we began with Joshua and then looked at how the Israelites behaved

once they settled into the Promised Land and the period of the judges. We learnt that, although the Israelites kept forgetting God and all that he had done for them, he was always there when they cried out to him, was merciful, forgiving and faithful, as he will always continue to be with us! We continued to use the wonderful teaching resource, “The Biggest Story” curriculum, which comes complete with some excellent short videos, telling the Bible stories in a very accessible and aesthetic way and providing a great springboard for delving deeper in our smaller group time.

One of the highlights of each term has been a Praise Party, where we have enjoyed extended times of singing, dancing and generally making a joyful noise to the Lord! Andy Cooper, Hannah Gadsby and Paul van Zyl have led us in worship, and it has been so encouraging to see the children really engage with this, learn some new songs, including ones written for adults, and be willing to pray out loud too. The children love joining in with the percussion instruments and dancing with streamers. In the autumn we invited Benjamin Lancaster to join in with his drum kit, which he did with gusto - an ideal opportunity to train up new worship leaders!

During the October half term, on 31st, we held our annual Light Party. About 40 children attended, a third of whom were from outside the church community, and had a great time playing games, doing crafts, eating hot dogs and listening to a very short talk, which saw the children immersed in darkness so they could then experience the power of the Light, reminding them that Jesus has victory over all that is dark in this world and with him they are winners! Once again, we are grateful to the wonderful team of volunteers who joined in to make that happen – including some brave souls who don’t normally involve themselves in the children’s work!

As well as immersing myself in All Stars at St Nic’s Church, I have continued to be involved with St Nicolas School. The clergy, Caroline Chichester and I all take regular turns at taking assemblies on a Wednesday morning, which is a huge privilege as we get to talk about Jesus to 250 children at a time. In addition to that, Caroline, Victoria Maxton-Livesey and I run a weekly lunchtime club, JAFFA (Jesus, A Friend For All), which gives us a great chance to build up proper relationships with a smaller group of children, currently 10-14 in regular attendance, and to Be and Bring Good News there.

It is an enormous privilege to be a part of All Stars and the children’s ministry in general at St Nic’s as we seek to be and bring good news to the younger generation. Our big prayer is that every child who comes along to All Stars feels welcomed and loved and inspired to get to know Jesus better and that those who come along regularly become true disciples eternally. I am so grateful to the amazing team of volunteers who give up their time, Sunday by Sunday, to help make this happen. You know who you are and I pray that you will be encouraged as the seeds we sow sprout and grow and bear fruit, without us seeing or knowing how (Mark 4:26-29).

If joining the All Stars team is a ministry that you would like to be a part of, please do talk to Elaine Canniffe or myself, as we would love to grow the team. Thank you and God bless you for reading!

Tania Wolak

Youth Ministry

Pathfinders (ages 11-14)

It has been a joy to spend another year with the Pathfinders group. I am very grateful for the continued support in leadership from Phil Davis, Cheryl Gadsby, Matt Kingston, Rob Canniffe and Adriel Comer, as well as Poppy Read and Toby Davis, who have now joined the Pathfinders team. They have all been a wonderful support to me and, week by week, provide the group with excellent leadership.

Last spring, we took a number of the Pathfinders to an event at St Helen's Bishopsgate called Sorted Nano. It was a great day out together, giving us the opportunity to spend time as a group while also joining with other Youth Groups. Throughout the day we heard talks from the book of Revelation and joined together in worship.

The Pathfinders enjoyed a summer camp weekend in June at the Bradleys' home in Highclere. We are so grateful for Peter and Liesl's generous hospitality. This annual event is always a highlight of the year and something the young people look forward to with great excitement. The Year 6 group also joined us for part of the weekend so that they could get to know the group ahead of moving up to Pathfinders in September.

In September our group increased in numbers with the new year 7s joining us: we now regularly have up to twenty young people at Pathfinders. This is brilliant and brings a great atmosphere of fun and friendship to our sessions. As a team we continue to be so thankful for the wonderful blessing and opportunity of having so many young people part of our church family. Recently we have started dividing into smaller groups for discussion time halfway through our sessions, with the Year 9s forming one group and the Year 7s and 8s another. This has helped encourage greater discussion and engagement within the group.

Our Friday night games socials have proved popular and after requests from the young people we have increased the frequency of these since September 2025 to every other week, from monthly as it was previously. These Friday nights offer a great chance for the young people to spend time with their friends and get to know new people. As leaders we also really value this time to build relationships with the young people, hearing about what they are interested in and what is going on in their lives.

In September we started a new three-part mini-series on the roles of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King and then we joined the morning series in looking at Romans 8 until Christmas. In January we then started a series called 'behind the beat', looking at our favourite worship songs and how the lyrics are rooted in different parts of scripture. This has been really helpful

in connecting what we sing in church with who God is, what he has done for us and our response to Him in praise.

Clare Caskie

The Firm (ages 14–18)

The Firm has continued to meet after The Six service on a Sunday evening, and most recently we have been doing the new Bible Course. The videos have been an excellent resource, and the course has proved really helpful in giving the young people a picture of the Bible as a whole and how all the parts fit and the story unfolds.

In addition to The Firm, many of the young people are now involved with serving at our different services on a Sunday. It is wonderful to see them using their gifts to serve others in such a variety of ways at All Stars, Small Stars, Projection and Worship.

Firm+ has recently joined Rooted which happens on a Tuesday evening. Here we spend time studying the Bible and seeing what it has to say to us on a wide range of subjects. It has been great to join in with other members of the church family, and I know the youth have enjoyed learning alongside and hearing from them.

Last summer we saw many of The Firm go to the summer ventures camp, Quantock. This is a week-long camp in Somerset and always provides a wonderful time of fun, friendship and learning more about what it is to follow Jesus. The summer also saw many of The Firm helping at Holiday Club. It was so lovely to serve alongside them - they were such valued members of the team and obviously extremely popular with all the younger children!

I continue to be so grateful for a wonderful team of volunteers for The Firm: Luke Radford, Paul Mawdesley, Sian Lupton, Mildred Obeto. They are such a blessing to the young people and offer great wisdom and leadership as well as always being a great support to me.

Clare Caskie

All-Age Celebrations

On Palm Sunday 2025 the All Stars children dramatised the story of Jesus coming into Jerusalem. The whole congregation decorated stones as we thought about the stones crying out in praise if the people didn't. At Pentecost Praise we celebrated the church's birthday and Will's 50th birthday with a wonderful spread of delicious nibbles and cakes. In July we thought everyone being part of the body of Christ and having a role to play. We then wrote something about ourselves on cardboard people and swapped our cutouts so we could pray for one another, reminding ourselves that we are all indispensable and each have a part to play in God's family.

Back to School Sunday was also a chance to celebrate the Holiday Bible Club and introduce the new songs to the rest of the congregation. Wilma the whale was still in situ as we sang

about Jonah running from God! It was great to have the dais covered in rucksacks and bookbags as we prayed for the challenge of going back to school and work.

At Harvest we thought about being plants in God's field and bricks in God's building. We also heard more about Biojemms and their pig project as we were raising money to support this initiative. In November we had a world missions Sunday with Viv talking about Hope for Africa and Tom Mawdesley sharing about the work of UCCF. We talked about sharing Jesus with those close to us as well as those further away. The service was followed by a Missions' Fair.

Christingle saw Simon delivering a poem about the dark things going on in this world and then Jesus bringing light into all this darkness. He even managed to get in Pringles rhyming with Christingle!! On Christmas Eve at the Nativity Service the church was once again full of shepherds, angels and kings as we joined in retelling the Christmas story. Rob Canniffe revisited his role as the Angel Gabriel and the whole church fell silent as Will lit the Advent Wreath.

February got us in a party mood as Poppy came on in her party hat and blew her party blower and we talked about the best party we had ever been to. Will then shared about the Feast that we are all invited to and the excuses that people make not to attend. We were also celebrating the Lunar New Year and several of our Hong Kong brothers and sisters joined in the service to mark this. Themis did the reading, Sarah Shek led us in the affirmation of faith and Eric and Rebecca led us in the Lord's prayer in Cantonese. The Hong Kong community then treated us to delicious Chinese eats as we continued the celebrations after the service.

In most of the all-age services through the year we were joined by our wonderful children's choir, organised by Paul Philip and Joanna Lazarus. Thank you to everyone who contributed to our very varied and uplifting all-age services this year!

Sarah South and Tania Wolak

Bellringers

2025 began in fine tradition at St Nicolas with the Mayor and Mayoress, Andy & Sheila Moore, joining ringers to welcome the New Year. A total of fifteen people enjoyed a joyful hour of ringing, accompanied by a generous spread of food and drink. The event even earned a mention in the Newbury Weekly News! The annual tower dinner took place on Saturday 29th March, with sixteen attendees gathering at The Coat and Bear in Newbury for a convivial evening of good food and camaraderie.

On Thursday 8th May, the bells were rung to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day, followed by a celebratory curry at the ever-popular Curry Cave in Newbury. The bells were also rung for a joyful 'renewing of the vows' service in March—adding a resonant touch to the special occasion.

The annual St Nicolas tower outing took place on Saturday 31st May. The tour took in five charming Wiltshire towers—Milton Lilbourne, Wootton Rivers, Pewsey, Bishops Cannings,

and Marlborough. A scenic pub lunch at The Barge Inn and afternoon refreshments at the Honey Street Mill Café provided perfect breaks between ringing.

St Nic's ringers have also been active further afield this year, representing the tower at some truly prestigious venues. Notable highlights include ringing at the Old North Church and the Advent Church in Boston, USA, as part of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution; the Curfew Tower at HM Free Chapel of St George, Windsor Castle for Ascension Day and Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, for an Ordination service. [Click here](#) for photos.

As part of the St Nicolas Open Day on Saturday 21st June, the tower welcomed approximately 100 visitors. Guided tours gave guests the opportunity to learn about the bells and their history, sparking great interest and enthusiasm among attendees.

The number of regular attending ringers, belonging to the St Nic's band is fifteen, with Monday evening practices continuing to be lively and well attended, with numbers reaching as high as seventeen with visiting ringers. Four teenage ringers have been taking part in special practice sessions.

In August the bells were rung for a Renewal of Vows service and in September a St Nicolas band came 3rd place in the Branch 6-Bell striking competition held at Beedon.

The ringing room was beautifully redecorated, and the three windows were renovated in November to produce a ringing room to be proud of, which will help attract and keep new ringers in the coming years.

In December two peals were rung on the St Nic's bells to celebrate the Diamond Wedding anniversary of Ian and Lesley Park.

David Bebbington, Tower Captain

St Nicolas Festival Choir

The St Nicolas Festival Choir has become something of an Experience with a capital E, coming together to sing at Christmas and Easter services. A highlight event of the Choir is to sing at the St Nicolas Carol Service, itself a key feature of "The complete Newbury Christmas".

In December 2025, around 70 singing volunteers came together to sing some quite ambitious pieces sometimes in up to 6 parts, held safely in the ever-capable hands of Hannah Maskell. Leading a Choir of such a size is a challenge at the best of times. When the attendees are aged 8-80+, drawn from the whole community with differing levels of engagement, across the whole range of musical ability (anyone is welcome to join) it takes some skill to steer it effectively. Hannah managed just that, and after some weeks of enthusiastic practice, the Choir had a wonderful sound as it led the Church in significant pieces of worship.

The Community Choir is literally that, all walks of life and all states of faith, a fabulous evangelistic opportunity with a single goal, to uplift us all in song.

Chris Davis

Church Flowers

We have continued arranging seasonal artificial flowers in church which have been well-received. The flower team came together to arrange extra flowers for Easter, Harvest and Christmas which really added to the celebration of these festivals. We also arranged artificial flowers for the Newbury Spring Festival in May, which they helped to fund. We have no flowers in church during Lent, although we place a greenery arrangement in the porch during this time as it seems more welcoming. We are delighted that Clare Serruya has joined our small flower team this year.

Maria Muir & Judith Crockford

Prayer

In 2025 we continued to work on our prayer goal, albeit in a quiet background kind of way. Our prayer ministry at both the 10am and 6pm services has continued. One lady who came up for prayer asked us why there was not a queue for prayer ministry after the service! A challenge to us all maybe to help create a culture of prayer at St Nic's.

The new thing that has happened in 2025, without fanfare, has been the creation of a new prayer page on our church website. It includes details of our regular prayer activities plus a form for submitting prayer requests. There is also a section for reviews of books on prayer, and maybe we can encourage more reviews in future.

A quick review of our prayer activities at St Nicolas over the past year:

Regular Prayer:

- Corporate Intercession - at each service
- Prayer Ministry - now offered at every 10am and 6pm service
- Encounter - 2nd Tuesday of each month in the church hall, a time for praying together for the church's ministries
- Wednesday Morning Prayer - at 9am each Wednesday at the church for half an hour
- Listening Space - from 11:30am to 1pm on Wednesday at the church
- Home Groups - meeting in people's homes and supporting one another in prayer

Event Prayer:

- Thy Kingdom Come - annual initiative set up by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. The Six had a set of prayer stations set up in the church
- Summer Prayer Walk - The Six step out of the building and walk around the town to pray for the people of Newbury
- Persecuted Church Sunday - The Six focus on prayer for the persecuted church. Linked to Open Doors

I am also encouraged to hear of many other prayer groups that meet regularly, including prayer triplets, DNA groups, etc. If you are interested in being in one, then please speak with

me or Joy who will help you set one up. We are also running a prayer email (prayer chain) as part of our prayer ministry which is now available on the prayer page of the church website.

We have many prayer activities at St Nicolas Church, but we could always do more. If you have any ideas on prayer, please talk to Joy or Will about the new Prayer Goal being defined in 2026.

Stephen Wolak

Stewardship

We started off 2025 with a stewardship budget of £270,581, revised mid-year to £279,531 and finished the year at £280,916. To target a break-even position in 2025, a giving appeal of £16,000 was made to the congregation to increase their giving to fund the ministry activities, outreach giving and running of the church. We had amazing support with many new stewardships, increased contributions, and one-off gifts. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, we met our stewardship budget successfully, which helped to reduce the overall deficit and achieve break-even position.

During the year we were pleased to welcome several new families who have also joined our Stewardship schemes. Some members have left, for various reasons, and we are most grateful to them for their contribution to St Nicolas Church whilst we shared the pleasure of their fellowship.

Retaining current giving along with few new stewardships and increases from existing donors has helped to set an initial budget forecast of £282,408 for 2026. The ongoing impact of cost-of-living and economic climate challenges could potentially impact our performance against the stewardship budget forecast for the year. For the 2026 budget, though we are consciously planning a deficit, I would urge the congregation to reflect on their personal commitments to increased giving (regularly or one off) which would contribute significantly to reducing the planned deficit in 2026.

Yet again, we also have a shortfall against the budgeted expenses and therefore a specific appeal will be made to the congregation to increase their giving to meet the financial challenge. Therefore, I would urge for your continued support.

If you have any questions related to giving or wish to make any changes, including legacy, please reach out to: stewardship@st-nics.org.

Whilst we are most grateful for all the financial support we have received during the year; the church cannot function effectively without the enormous amount of voluntary help we receive. Thank you for all you do to keep the church running smoothly and help achieve our vision in being Good News and bringing Good News to Newbury.

Shalini Philip, Stewardship Secretary

FELLOWSHIP (Looking In)

Welcome and Integration

During the past year the welcome team, together with the church staff, have continued to establish a plan and rhythm of events to help newcomers feel welcome, and to enable them to integrate into the St. Nic's church family.

We had two welcome lunches during 2025, one in January and one in September, which were both well attended.

Our 'Sunday lunch at home', event took place in April and was enjoyed by hosts and guests with over 70 people enjoying hospitality together over a shared Sunday lunch!

Currently, welcome events are put together by Sharon Coward, Mandy Maskell, Tim Over and Tania Wolak, and are run with the assistance of many other members of our church family. Thank you to everyone who has helped in these events.

Welcome is the responsibility of everyone: please guide new people to the welcome desk which is available after the 10am service, link someone to a welcomer or steward, or give them a welcome card (found at the end of the pews, and in the church hall). Once these cards have been filled in, they should be handed in to the church office. Newcomers will receive a weekly church email with what is going on and will be given an invite to the next welcome lunch event.

Our team of welcomers do a great job each Sunday. If you would like to join the welcome team, please get in touch with the church office. Thank you to everyone who has been involved in welcome in the past year. We are aware, from feedback, that although our welcome has improved in recent years, we have more work to do on enabling people to integrate into our church community which we will be addressing as we go forward.

Sharon Coward

Women@St.Nics

Current Team: Vivien Staunton, Sandra Reeves, Joyce Zealey, Mandy Winter, Ali Carver, Maria Muir, Mandy Maskell and Joy Mawdesley.

Women at St Nic's aims to bring women together in different ways. Some events are designed to build our community, and others are more outwardly focussed. In 2025 we felt that although we organised breakfasts, quiet days and pudding parties there was scope for a much broader range of activities in our growing church. Accordingly, at the autumn breakfast, we offered an open forum asking what was the value of the ministry, what should we continue doing and what fresh ideas could we explore.

This presented us with an interesting list of ideas to consider, some regular events and some "pop up" events.

Within a few weeks, new members had joined our team, and a new monthly craft group was started, open to all women (16+) not just those who attend St Nic's. There is a bi-weekly fun run on Tuesday morning and Wednesday evening, a walking group and we also held a curry night.

We now have a rolling calendar of events (always look at the church website for up-to-date information) and a What's App group, so why not join us?

Joy Mawdesley

Men@St.Nics

Bacon, tomatoes, scrambled eggs, beans, mushrooms, black pudding, sausages (including veggie), hash browns, toast – have I forgotten anything? Ah yes – curry (but not in the same meal)! Regulars will know that these are the staples when Men@St.Nics gather together for fellowship and food. And we make no excuses for that given our Lord regularly used meals as a core ministry strategy to build community, demonstrate God's grace, and include the marginalised (thank you to AI for that summary).

Our first breakfast of the church year heard about the awesome progress being made by Christians Against Poverty in lifting the burden of debt in Newbury, hearing personal stories from their befrienders.

In June, we were delighted to welcome David Wilbraham MBE, former National Police Chaplain and Police motorcyclist, who inspired us all with his own faith and vocational journey after another excellent breakfast.

In November, following popular demand, we chose to hold a breakfast without a speaker (mainly because we could not get one in time) which made way for some much-needed extended chin wagging!

Although we enjoy all the events, the highlight was our evening in September in the wonderful church yard at St Mary's Speen, spent eating curry made by a number of our men, and chatting with others from both St Mary's and St Nic's. The weather, fellowship and food were all fantastic.

These 'flagship' events are attracting 40-60 men and boys, but we continue to encourage the much smaller but more frequent DNA/prayer groups to meet, where 3-5 men can encourage and support each other in their faith journey.

Our thanks go to all those involved in the ministry – those who help organise the events, those who get up exceedingly early on a Saturday morning to chef and do front-of-house-stuff, our many curry night chefs, and those who attend. Too many to mention, and GDPR probably precludes us from listing them in any case!

Jim Lupton and Tim Saunders

Pastoral Care

Joy Mawdesley, Sharon Coward, Sue Elliott, Christine Jago, Janet Price

The pastoral care team supports people in the church community when made aware of the need for a little extra help. It supplements all the caring done in the church community through our groups and networks. The extra help may include giving practical assistance with tasks or transport, keeping in touch with those who are unable to attend services (maybe sharing home communion), or offering emotional and prayer support where this is sought. We are currently in regular contact with around 15 people, but we have also been able to give temporary or occasional help to many others during the year.

As well as the core team members listed above, we also have a small team of helpers to whom we are very grateful for their occasional assistance with driving or befriending. If you feel you would like to offer your time and service to either team, we would love to hear from you.

We would also, of course, love to hear from anyone in the St Nic's community who would value a little extra support. Anyone who contacts us can be assured that all conversations are treated with the strictest confidentiality within the team, and that every team member has been safely recruited. Members of the pastoral team can be contacted in person, through the clergy, or by email at pastoralcare@st-nics.org

Janet Price

Rooted

In September we began a course for those who are relatively new to Christianity or who simply want to think more deeply about some theological topics. A particular pleasure has been having the young people from Firm+ with us. In our first term we looked at the Doctrine of God for four weeks and then spent another four on the Doctrine of Humanity. A mixture of speaking from the front and Bible study, it's been a good conversational atmosphere with really good questions and discussions.

Simon Eves

Small groups

If you want to grow as a disciple of Jesus, being part of a small group is a great way of seeking to ensure that it happens.

Small groups do what the name suggests - they provide an opportunity to meet with a smaller number of people, usually in a home environment, to study the Bible together in many different and creative ways, to pray for what is on our hearts, to grow friendship, to support one another in the midst of life, to share food and have fun. They seek to fulfil so much of what we want our church to be like - a place where people feel welcomed, that they belong and faith grows.

Whether you are an early bird or a night owl or can only manage to meet during the day, we have a small group that will work for you! Most groups meet during the week, Tuesday to Thursday, while we also have family-based small groups (that aren't so small!) on a Sunday afternoon. Some meet weekly, some less often, some term time only, others all year round. We currently have 15 small groups which together bring about 150+ people to meet up across the week. This is a very exciting number of people, but there is always room for more!

We are very grateful for the 30+ leaders who lead groups week by week and who enable us to grow in our faith and build community – and without whom St Nic's would not be the church that it is. In January it was great for the leaders to come together for an evening of pudding and conversation about this area of our church life. We aim to continue this once per term going forward as a way of sharing what our groups get up to, praying for one another and hearing new ideas.

So, if you are not yet in a small group, why not think about joining one, as many have during this year? Sunday services do not always enable us to connect in meaningful ways with one another, and small groups fill that gap. Perhaps you don't find it easy to read the Bible or pray on your own, so a group would be helpful during the week to keep you on track. By all means invite yourself along to a group that you already know of or be in touch with me for help identifying one that will work for you. We are always really happy for people to try a group, and if it doesn't seem to fit, try another.

Small groups are so exciting in the contribution they make to the life of St Nic's and we look forward to another year of growth in this area.

Joy Mawdesley

Fellowship on Tap

This ministry for the men of St Nic's - sitting and having a drink and a conversation together - continued into 2025 and to be enjoyed by those who came along. However, as numbers dropped we made the decision to pause for a time acknowledging that it's good to know when to stop something as well as to begin new things. Although this is strictly the report on 2025 - FoT has made a return in 2026, with people saying they missed the opportunity to speak about life and faith in good company.

Simon Eves

Party Days

Lunar New Year Celebration

Over the past few years our celebration of the Lunar New Year has developed. We are very grateful to the wonderful cooks who prepared delicious Chinese food and treats. It was lovely to see members of all ages and from all different cultures enjoying refreshments together in the church hall. Thank you to all those who made this very special event.

Sharon Coward

Ride + Stride

This nationwide annual event is organised by the National Churches Trust in conjunction with local historic churches trusts to raise money to provide grants to support and maintain the fabric and heritage of churches in financial need. It is a sponsored event where participants can walk or cycle on a local route, taking in pit stops for refreshments along the way at different churches.

Over 80 people set out from St Nic's and they all made it back in one piece! The weather was wonderful which makes all the difference. We have raised nearly £2.5k which is a wonderful result! Money raised has been split between the Building Project and Berkshire Historic Churches.

Last year we won the trophy for most successful Ride + Stride in Berkshire and wait to hear whether or not we have done it again. Certainly it was a great success in terms of fellowship and increasing awareness of the beauty and history of our own church and the churches around us.

Ellen Hunter Smart

St Nic's Football

Football on a Monday night has continued to be a really enjoyable fixture in the week. It's pretty rare that we aren't full to capacity and there is a regular core who have got to know one another and friendships have developed. About half of those who play are regular members of St Nic's on a Sunday and friends who have been invited along. We would love to think of more ways to invite people into more of the life of St Nic's but this continues to be a really positive ministry.

Simon Eves

MISSION (Looking Out)

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

On 20 April 2025 (Easter Day) nine young people and adults from St Nic's were baptised – six by full immersion, and another three renewed their baptism vows. We also celebrated another seven baptisms through the year. It is wonderful to celebrate new life with these families and friends, and to welcome them all into our church family.

We also celebrated with one family giving thanks for the birth of their son.

Last year we had no weddings at St Nicolas! With venues offering weddings as well as receptions these days wedding bookings in church have dropped off, but good news we have lots coming up in 2026!

We have held 11 funerals here at St Nicolas Church this year, with two interments of ashes in our Remembrance Garden. We have also taken six funerals at West Berkshire Crematorium during the year. We have supported all these families through their bereavement.

Many thanks to our vergers, organists, flower-arrangers, bell ringers and technical operators who wonderfully support us making these occasions so special.

Libby Lake & Mandy Maskell

Our Buildings

Our buildings continue to give us an arrangement of useful spaces that in addition to our regular Church activities, give pleasure to many external hirers.

The past year has seen a steady flow of bookings with revenue of approximately £45,000. We receive very positive feedback from those who have hired, comments ranging from the wonderful acoustics of the Church, beautiful architecture, good quality of halls and meeting rooms, general provision of facilities and the cleanliness of the spaces.

We have continued to run a Wednesday Prayer group and Listening Space giving the opportunity for us to pray for many members of our local community.

Over the past year we have hosted highly successful children's groups with Hidden Treasures and Tiny Treasures, Brownies and Rainbows. In addition, there are Open Days with a Christian message, and our facilities are extended to our local schools and COINS who continue to book at Christmas and Easter, bringing more school children into our building.

St Nicolas House provides a welcoming and comfortable space for smaller gatherings, and Pathfinders and the Firm enjoy the space on Sundays in addition to a number of evening meetings and games nights throughout the month. Headway Charity regularly meets here along with home groups and Manna's mid-week gathering.

As well as our superbly attended services, our Church is also used for a growing number of concerts. Throughout 2025 these have included Newbury Choral Society, The Newbury Spring Festival, Newbury Symphony Orchestra, Sing Louder, Cecelia Consort, Cold Ash Brass, Mencap, local school concerts and services, Sing Louder, Berkshire Chamber Music, Lumos Candlelit Concerts and monthly organ recitals. In 2026, we also have celebrity concerts booked from Will Young and Russell Watson (returning after hiring in 2024). The Church bells are ever popular, with David Bebbington also bringing regular groups of ringers in from other Churches around the country, due to the significance and quality of the St Nic's bells.

The Halls have been booked to host regular CA meetings, Events for the Mayor of Newbury, Thames Valley Air Ambulance fairs, Nomads Musical Theatre Group, Yume, U3A, Berkshire Agricultural Society, Berkshire Archaeological Society, vintage record fairs, Newbury District Field Club, kettle bell classes, clothes sales and workshops, a comedy festival, birthday parties, family gatherings and a number of funeral and christening receptions.

Our facilities are a blessing and play a significant part in making St Nicolas good news to Newbury.

Samantha Bryant, Facilities Manager

CAP Debt Centre Newbury

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) Newbury is a joint ministry between St Nicolas' and Bridge Church which is supported by several churches in the Newbury area. It re-opened in January 2024 with Colin Cunningham as the new Debt Centre Manager, supported by David Clark, an experienced CAP Debt Coach (DC) who attends Newbury Baptist Church.

2025 was another good year for helping people with their debts and finances, with 51 new cases registering for the service (up from 49 in 2024) spread across Newbury, Thatcham and outlying villages. Here are some headline numbers for 2025:

- During 2025, 14 cases went completely debt-free, to the value of £210,014 (up from 10 cases to the value of £173,245 in 2024)
- During 2025, 4 cases commenced Debt Management Plans, to the value of £99,220 (up from 2 cases to the value of £45,332 in 2024)
- Since re-opening in 2024, a total of 34 cases are either completely debt-free, or repaying their debts on a repayment plan, to the value of £587,873
- At the beginning of 2026, 33 cases are in progress and include a potential further £294,061 of resolvable debt through insolvency or debt repayment plans

We have continued to help people get support with claiming benefits, receiving Foodbank parcels, and in getting them rehomed away from dangerous locations or unsafe properties. As part of our pastoral approach, we have been able to bless clients with gifts and financial support from the CAP Blessings fund, which was generously donated by church members, to provide emergency and immediate help to clients in their times of need. With generous support from our amazing volunteer CAP Befrienders and their home groups, we were able to give Christmas Hampers to many of our clients to support them over the Christmas period.

Most of our clients sadly come with varying levels of additional complexity, including mental health (anxiety/depression), unemployment, addiction and other health issues. This is precisely why they need CAP and the love of Jesus in addition to help with their debts. Prayer is always offered during our meetings and is accepted by many people who are on their own journey with meeting Christ. One client came to a church service for the first time in decades, and who feels drawn to seek further. We've also had the privilege of witnessing and praying with clients from other faiths.

During 2025 we restarted the CAP Money Coaching course, running 5 courses with 44 attendees. The 3-session course helps people of all ages and backgrounds to take control of their personal finances, to create their own budget and to learn how to live to their budget, with the aim of avoiding getting into debt and achieving their financial goals. A big thank you to David Clark and Helen Andrews from Newbury Baptist Church who ran most of the courses.

We would like to expand the courses in 2026, so would welcome new volunteers to be trained (simple to do).

The Newbury CAP ministry only exists with the support of Befrienders - members of churches who attend the client meetings to provide support to both the Debt Coach and the clients, and who also provide a level of pastoral and emotional support to the clients. We had a Befriender's gathering in the summer, and the unanimous feedback was how rewarding the ministry is.

We are excited for the future of CAP services in West Berkshire, in the hope that more and more people who are in debt will hear about us and get in touch.

Colin Cunningham, CAP Newbury Debt Centre Manager

Thursday Coffee Mornings

St Nic's Committee: Janet Price, Joan Stacey, Fiona Shaw, Caroline and John Michalski, Sue Edwards and Sue Elliott

During 2025 our Thursday Coffee Mornings continued to run, however visiting charity numbers were generally dwindling and it was left to the committee team to fill quite a number of gaps. It became apparent that the format for the coffee mornings was in need of a revamp.

At various meetings of the committee, along with Will Hunter Smart and the wider team of volunteers, it was decided that there was still a willingness and a need to ensure the regular continuity of these coffee mornings. They are an important meeting-place for local people, a community outreach and a great opportunity for charities to raise funds.

John Michalski kindly wrote a paper highlighting the pros, cons, goals and challenges to overcome, and it was unanimously decided to continue... with an upgrade.

To assist our aims, Samantha Bryant has since taken on the role of Staff Co-ordinator. Chairs and tables are being assembled and cleared by Eli and Noah, helping alleviate the heavy lifting. We offer free tea and coffee to all our guests, along with newspapers and a selection of games. New tablecloths and vases of flowers brighten up the room and volunteers of the team provide a warm welcome and integrate with our guests. New branding has been designed for posters, banners and flyers to spread the word. The new format means that charities are invited to come along each week to promote themselves free of charge, and at their discretion sell cakes and savouries, bric a brac etc. to provide variety and interest. However, the coffee morning is very much a St Nic's Event run with a Christian theme, where our clergy come to circulate after the Communion service and from March, Sunrise (Steve Wood, previously Shoemakers) has been invited to sell Christian books and cards once a month.

On this new basis, we have managed to very quickly secure charities for 26 of the 36 dates from March to December, and we are confident that the remaining 10 dates will also be filled

shortly. Feedback so far is very positive. Donations received from providing tea and coffee will be awarded each term to a ministry area of St Nic's, with the first term going towards the Church Garden.

We are very grateful to all the people who help us make these events happen every Thursday and we are excited and confident for the future of this ministry.

Samantha Bryant, on behalf of the Committee

2025 Easter and Christmas Open Days

The Open Days that run during the year are a wonderful outreach here at St Nic's. Although it is a lot of organisation, being able to offer free refreshments, crafts for both young and old, live worship and prayer for the people of the town in our beautiful building is a great way of being and bringing good news to Newbury. You cannot run such a huge event without the commitment from the St Nic's congregation. We had over 70 volunteers scheduled through the day, guiding people through craft, welcoming, serving and also some helpers being available just to chat and pray with people. Thank you to everyone that contributes, and particularly to Vivien Staunton and Caroline Michalski who have help me with the planning and preparation, not to mention the smooth running on the day.

Mandy Maskell

Church Gardens

The church gardens blossomed throughout 2025! We are eternally grateful to the willing team of volunteers helping me maintain the grounds currently consisting of Viv, Rosemary, Linda, Gary, Jill, Tania, Themis, Connie and Noah. The gardens are enjoyed by so many people, and we are told regularly what a joy they bring.

Improvements continued to be made to both the church gardens and Remembrance Garden and for another year we were awarded 1st Prize from Newbury in Bloom in the 'Places of Worship' Category. This came with a £100 prize which went towards new plants. We also received an engraved garden spade! We won a Silver Award in the wider Thames & Chiltern competition too. The judges loved the wide range of pollinating plants and the idea of bringing the together community to help tackle the vast number of borders. We have now entered these two competitions for 2026 and committed to aim for Gold this year!

In pursuit of this, we are engaging with St Nic's Junior School to widen our community reach and to help them with their own gardening and eco club goals. We will be building bird boxes with them, providing plants and assisting them with their raised planters. In our own grounds, we will be looking at a water feature, community herb garden, sustainable planting, historical interest and encouraging of wildlife. So much to do... and so much to enjoy, especially when the sun shines!

Samantha Bryant, Facilities Manager

Come and See

In June we opened our doors (and some homes) for a fortnight of events where we particularly tried to bring Good News to Newbury. The core idea of the fortnight was that we sought to have ideas come from the congregation which made for a wonderful and varied programme of activities and events.

We had fun runs, open days, 'a taste of all nations' (where we got to sample cuisine from around the world), Rick gave us a tour of the stained-glass windows, we thought about our brain chemistry. Friends were invited for dinner, dogs walked, an evening of worship and prayer - a whole church open day and many of our regular ministries did 'specials' aimed at reaching out. We also had 4 "guest services" across the two Sundays. Throughout the fortnight in big and small ways we tried to take opportunities to speak about Jesus as we welcomed the hundreds of guests who came into church.

Simon Eves

Encounter Course

In the Spring Term of 2026, we ran a new course, Encounter. (Confusingly this is the same name as our monthly prayer meeting!) The course is produced by Olive Tree Media, a Christian media company that seeks to produce "culturally relevant, compelling and informative media" about Christianity. The course is a series of videos, followed by small group discussion questions, looking at men and women who have encountered Jesus - both in the gospels, and in the modern day. The strapline of the series is "People Jesus met: then and now".

We advertised the course in our Christmas carol services, and then ran it on six Wednesday evenings from January to March. We had three good-sized groups attending, including one home group that joined the course instead of their normal meetings at home.

Each evening looked at a different encounter with Jesus in the gospels, and then modern-day testimonies along the same themes: Encounter, Outsider, Seeker, Unexpected, Redemption, and Grace. The course was an engaging and inspiring way to discover and discuss the life changing ministry of Jesus, who changes lives, and brings hope, healing and restoration to ordinary people like you and me.

Will Hunter Smart

Hidden Treasures and Tiny Treasures

If you come to St Nic's on Monday morning you will find the church full of buggies and the upper and lower halls full of adults and small children! Around 50 adults and 60+ children aged 0-5 come through the doors from 9:50am onwards and enjoy refreshments, toys, craft activities, messy play, water play, dressing up, the sensory room, ball pool, singing, storytime and much more! Hidden Treasures has a mission of fun, friendship and faith and it is made

possible by a wonderful team of volunteers from the St Nic's congregation – here is what some of them have to say.

- *Hidden Treasures is very special to me. It feels like a bridge that connects me with the local community. Through it, I've had the chance to meet people and make new friends. I've been volunteering here for about three years now, and it's been such a joy to see the children growing up. It's also lovely to see parents and carers having the chance to relax - enjoying a cup of coffee, a piece of cake, and a good chat with one another. They really enjoy being here. Every week, we have a blessing time where we share the Good News with the children, parents and carers, planting small seeds of faith in their hearts. Hidden Treasures is truly a great blessing!* (Rebecca Wong)
- *Hidden Treasures is a safe and happy place where parents & carers can chat with each other and where the children can enjoy lots of exciting activities which vary every week. Then we all enjoy singing some songs together followed by a short talk on a Bible story. We have started a new initiative called 3-2-1 which features a short video exploring the Christian faith ~ a number of parents are joining in, which is encouraging. It is great being part of a team of volunteers who work really hard to ensure the weekly sessions run smoothly, safely and are full of fun!* (Adrian Dunn)
- *Hidden Treasures has taken the place of the Mother and Toddler group that I used to run in Tadley at the URC Church called Little Angels. We moved to Newbury and started going to St Nic's and found they had a Toddler group called Hidden Treasures and so I asked if they needed any help and they were very happy to take me on. It has been a wonderful place for children to get together, play safely and make friends and for carers to chat and also to make friends.* (Ena Menarry)

Over the last year we have had blessing times (our 3-5 minute slot for a 'thought' from the Bible) about birds in the Bible, God's wonderful world, the Christmas story, and events from the life of Jesus. As Adrian mentioned, we started a light version of the 321 course this term, which happens after the group finishes from 11:30-12. At the end of each session we set up a picnic area and some of the families stay to feed their children lunch, so during this time we have been playing a 321 video clip and inviting discussion and questions from anyone who is interested to find out more about faith. We have had some great conversations with people and it's so exciting to see what God is doing in people's lives! In the words of Isaiah 45 v.3, "I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name."

On Monday afternoons we run Tiny Treasures, a smaller and quieter group in the upper hall for parents and carers of younger babies (from newborn to crawling/cruising age), from 1:30 till 3pm. We usually welcome between 10 and 16 parents and their little ones each week, and they come to meet, chat, support each other and very importantly drink a hot drink and have a piece of cake! There is always a warm buzz in the hall as people share stories, catch up with

each other and empathise with the lack of sleep! Margaret and Sandra make sure everyone is supplied with refreshments and always chat to anyone who is on their own, or needs a listening ear. We finish with a time of singing, including a simple Christian song each time. This has been another great opportunity to build relationships with families, and it's been wonderful seeing people grow in confidence, connect with other parents and ask for prayer in difficult times too. Several of our original Tiny Treasures families have now 'graduated' to Hidden Treasures – we regularly see at least 5 families who originally came to Tiny Treasures with young babies who are now toddlers!

Lastly, this year has seen the start of a semi-regular meet-up for those involved in church-based toddler groups in Newbury and the surrounding areas. We have met twice so far, and had a great time-sharing ideas and resources, and praying for each other. Baby and toddler groups are such a vital resource for parents and carers, and a great opportunity to be and bring good news.

Did you know that around 75% of parents with children under 5 are in contact with a church, and toddler groups are a huge part of that? (Talking Toddlers report, 2020) It's great to support each other in this work of sowing seeds for God's kingdom!

Sarah South

Holiday Bible Club

What a week! It is always such a pleasure to see our church filled with energy, laughter, and singing. It was certainly a group effort so thank you to all who were involved, but a special thank you to all the young leaders who got involved, our energetic upfront crew led fabulously by Hannah Gadsby, and Tania and Elaine who worked tirelessly for months to make everything run so smoothly.

The Bible teaching each day (delivered by Will, Clare, Phil and Sarah) was excellent, and we developed on this with questions and discussion in our BLAST groups, as well as fun activities, challenges, and crafts throughout the week. We focused on the story of Jonah, with a recurring theme of 'our way vs God's way'. We thought about how when we go our own way we fail and fall short, but when we follow God and submit to him, he rescues us. Our memory verse for the week was Jonah 2:2&9 - "I was in danger. So I called to the Lord, and he answered me. (...) Salvation comes from the Lord".

Alongside this, to illustrate the teaching, we were joined by Teddy and Bella (played by Simon and Ellen) - 2 siblings who ended up stranded on a desert island (or maybe dessert island is more accurate given all the donuts that were eaten), along with a variety of other characters including the tricky Tucker twins (Joseph and Rory), Captain Cee (Rhodri) who bought us our Bible passage each day, and last but definitely not least, Fluffy the shark (Toby). Particular highlights for the week include the great songs and actions, watching one of our leaders get slimed, and Wilma the giant whale (thank you Ian!).

The most exciting part of HBC for me is the great opportunity it gives us for outreach. This year we had 70 children in attendance, more than half of whom were not from St Nic's. What a great way to come together as a church family to be and bring good news in our town. Come and join us this year amongst towering trees, mischievous monkeys and vibrant vegetation in our 'Jungle Jamboree' - you don't want to miss out on the adventure!

Poppy Read

Listening Space

Listening Space has been running for the whole year with only a few pauses for holidays, funerals and other events taking place in the church building. The timing remains 11.30am until 1pm on Wednesdays in the church building. There continues to be a dedicated team of volunteers who faithfully fill the slots on the rota.

A team of 2 is present for each session. We greet and chat to everyone who comes in and are sensitive in listening to folks, and are ready to pray with them where appropriate or requested. There is a sign on the path outside the church door when the ministry is available and a poster permanently on the railings to indicate that Listening Space is available.

People come into the building for a wide range of reasons. They come to appreciate our church building (some on coach tours) who will often stop to chat. Others see the sign and spontaneously and bravely come in with specific matters on their heart to talk about and about which they ask for prayer.

Not only is it a privilege and humbling to pray with people, and have their confidence, particularly those who are vulnerable, but also to see that people are pulled towards Church in times of angst and need. It is a reminder of the significance and purpose that the beautiful building of St Nic's has in our community.

We have listened to and prayed for people who are worried about the security of their homes or have lost their jobs. Those who are experiencing loss after marital breakdown or bereavement as well as people who have received a serious diagnosis or who are struggling with physical or mental illness and pain. Events in the world continue to cause people pain and anxiety. Also, we have had people share about wanting to reconnect and feel closer to God after a time of drifting or those who have questions about faith and God. We have been able to pray and have seen people experience the love and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have been able to share with visitors that this church is a community of believers ready to share and live out the Gospel and that our faith is active and practical.

We always pray for more team members, to ensure that this service carries on regularly and smoothly. If you would like to be part of this prayer ministry or know anyone who would be well-suited to it who we could ask, please contact Barbara Sporne to find out more.

Barbara Sporne

Living Advent Calendar

In December 2025 we took part in the town's Living Advent Calendar event again, door number 11... and why not, as surely we have the best doors in town!

We used the West Door again this year and lit the pathways with lanterns. It was a great success with a good number of expectant people waiting outside to be welcomed in, and to be amazed by a colourful triptych by Ian Norman, celebrating the birth of Jesus. Ian is exceeding all our expectations year on year! We continued to display his magnificent artwork in the church throughout December, for all to enjoy.

The Church was of course festively decorated and the lantern theme continued inside the building. We offered hot chocolate, mince pies and a blessing. Both children and adults were also encouraged to enjoy dressing up in a large array of costumes available in our welcome area.

Samantha Bryant, Facilities Manager

Meet Monday

A highlight of the past year has been seeing people from Meet Monday in church on Sundays. The aim of Meet Monday is not only to attract adults with learning disabilities to our monthly meetings but also that they put their faith and trust in Jesus, even if they are unable to articulate it as such. For the church to be complete it needs to include people of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, abilities and disabilities, and that includes people with learning disabilities.

The average attendance is 16, plus support staff and our team of twelve. There is joy as we worship God with songs, Makaton signing and waving of colourful flags, we act out Bible stories and thank God for good times and for answering prayers. When sad news is shared there is understanding and mutual support, sometimes leading to one or another praying out loud. During 2025 we looked at incidents where Jesus showed his kindness, such as healing the man born blind, calming the storm, raising Lazarus to life and turning water into wine. We have now started a series called Living for Jesus, based on the life of the Apostle Peter. Our aim is to apply the Bible teaching to our own lives.

We continue to thank God for our generous, kind and gifted team. Sometimes they arrive at Meet Monday feeling tired after a busy day, but they leave feeling energised and thankful to God.

Thank you to you, St Nic's church family, for your interest, encouragement and prayers for Meet Monday, this group of people who are often overlooked outside the church.

Pete and Christine Winmill

Newbury Friends Together

Team: Cherry Catterall, Ansa du Toit, Kathryn Field, Joy Mawdesley, Jasu Shah, Joan Stacey, Liesl & Peter Bradley

Newbury Friends Together is an important part of our outreach ministry and meets in the Church Hall on a Tuesday afternoon with the aim of providing a weekly fellowship opportunity for our senior friends. Around 25 participants engage in a programme of a welcome, friendly catch up and is centred around an activity or presentation, followed by refreshments. Our programme this past year included craft work, musical performances, fitness and healthcare presentations, multimedia informational talks and external social events.

It is our aim to make NFT a fun, happy, supportive, caring community and it is rewarding to see friendships forming and deepening not only through the Tuesday meetings, but also during the rest of the week.

We believe that NFT plays an important role in providing valuable support to our senior community and I would like to sincerely thank our leadership team and the clergy for their commitment and support they afford.

Liesl Bradley

Outreach Committee

Team: John Michalski, Poppy Read, Rachel Shepherd, Rob Canniffe, Sian Lupton, Vivien Staunton.

The Outreach Committee seeks to prayerfully allocate the outreach budget that is set aside by St Nicolas church at the start of the year (equivalent to 10% of the St Nicolas' Church unrestricted income in the previous year), to share news and prayer requests from the organisations we support, and to assist anyone in the congregation who is looking for ways to get involved in mission.

In 2025, St Nicolas Church donated £59,514 to 11 Christian organisations: 6 working in the local area and 5 working overseas (see the table below and the amounts raised through specific appeals). Members of the congregation (past or present) are actively involved in many of the organisations we support. It is a privilege to be partnering in the great work that is done. We receive 'thank you' letters that express sincere appreciation for the prayers and giving of the St Nicolas congregation - our partnership is making a difference. Thank you!

Some particular encouragements in 2025:

- The continued prayers and support from the congregation for outreach, locally and overseas
- The Mission Fair held at church on Sunday 2nd November. This was new for 2025. It was an opportunity for the congregation to meet representatives from, and find out more about, the organisations we support regularly. The church hall was full of activity

and conversation, and there were presentations in the church. Thanks to everyone for a great event. We hope to do something similar again!

- Hearing from mission partners during our services: Siân and Quentin Ball from Biojemms on Harvest Sunday, and Tom Mawdesley from UCCF
- The generosity of giving for the Harvest Appeal which raised £3,667 for Biojemms, and the collections at the Christmas services for Friends for Hope for Africa Lesotho which totalled £14,830. Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed financially and through prayer
- Welcoming Poppy and Rob to the Committee!

In 2025, Lesley Park and Pam McKellen stepped down from the Committee. Lesley had served as Secretary for over 100 meetings! We are deeply grateful for their service - they are missed!

We would love to hear from you if you would like to get involved with outreach in any way, or venture out on a mission trip, or if you would like to receive the latest prayer requests from the organisations we support.

Rachel Shepherd for the Outreach Committee

St Nicolas' Outreach Giving in 2025:

Outreach in local area

Organisation	Main contact at St Nicolas Church	Allocated in 2025
Christian Outreach in Newbury Schools (COINS Trust)	Siân Lupton	£6,000 + £5,500 *
Count Everyone In (working nationally)	Peter & Christine Winmill	£7,000
UCCF - The Christian Unions – Tom Mawdesley, Staff Worker	Rob Canniffe	£1,500
Good News for Everyone - Newbury branch	Colin Cunningham	£500
Yeldall Manor (drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Reading)	Lesley Park	£2,217
Churches Together in the Newbury Area (CTNA) Christmas lunch	Will Hunter Smart	£300
Total		£23,017

* This amount had been given to Newbury YMCA from the Outreach budget in a previous year. The donation was returned due to the closure of YMCA and reallocated to COINS in 2025.

Outreach overseas

Organisation	Main contact at St Nicolas Church	Allocated in 2025
Friends of Hope for Africa Mission church in Lesotho	Vivien Staunton	£4,000
Biojemmss (children's charity in Uganda)	Bronwen Davies	£4,000
Miriam Dean Fund (working with the poor in Africa and India)	Andy & Sheila Moore	£2,000
Medic Assist International - Chinchpada Christian Hospital, India	Rachel Shepherd	£4,000
McCabe Educational Trust - Jeel al-Amal School & Boys Home, Bethany	Pam McKellen	£4,000
Total		£18,000

Total allocated to Outreach organisations in 2025:

St Nicolas Outreach budget:	£41,017
Harvest and Christmas donations:	£18,497
Total:	£59,514

St Nicolas C.E. Junior School

One of the main areas for focus at St Nicolas School in the past year has been sustainability. We were really fortunate in the summer break to have our heating system replaced by the diocese with a new air-source heat pump system installed – the school has never been warmer! Alongside this, the school has secured funding for solar panels to be installed over the coming summer, and we are looking to replace our lighting with LED lights. Taking all of this together, the school is well on the way to becoming net zero. There is a climate action plan in place, which our children are working on as part of our Eco-Council, and we will be holding a sustainability week in May.

We are particularly proud of the article on the Church of England website, highlighting our successes: see [For the Good of All: How St Nicolas' Junior School Is Decarbonising the Next Generation](#).

In other aspects, the school continues to do well. Our children continue to be good role models in the community, taking part in many different sporting and cultural events, with Young Voices at Wembley Arena being a recent highlight.

For the past couple of years, we have had worship leaders at St Nic's, who support in our assemblies – reading prayers and who also run our spirituality shed. This has been out of action for a little while, but we are hoping to get it up and running again, so that the children have a quiet place to go on the playground.

We are excited by our links with St Nicolas Church, particularly looking forward to partnership with our Green Team in the coming year, as well as the opportunity for some of our older children to support with the Friends Together group.

As always, the life of the school is enjoyable, frustrating and life-affirming, with no two days ever the same. I was reflecting the other day that I am about to come to the end of my 18th year as headteacher and am still learning new things every day. The role continues to be worthwhile and enjoyable!

Keith Harvey, Executive Headteacher

Sketch, Paint and Reflect

Sketch, Paint and Reflect in Lent (17th-21st March 2026) was a new inspired initiative here at St Nic's. The aim was to have the opportunity during a week in Lent to take time out from all our busyness to be still, reflect and be creative in the beautiful building of St Nic's through observation, sketching, painting and other creative expressions and discover moments of peace and the presence of God.

The initiative was enthusiastically encouraged by a great team of creatively minded people at St Nic's resulting in 9 different 2 hour sessions taking place at different times over the week. These included a variety of creative activities and materials, 3 workshops, an evening of sketching and painting by candlelight and a display of photos from St Nic's. Peaceful reflective music was played throughout and on 3 evenings there was live music and vocals from several musicians from the worship team which created a beautiful atmosphere.

Including helpers, the number of participants for each session was between 8 and 16. On Saturday morning for the family friendly session there were approx. 30. There were many fantastic sketches and paintings created which have been on display in the church. We also had some lovely comments:

'I can feel the Grace of God and His beautiful creation here. What a lovely morning!'

'Thank you, what a lovely thing to do. So peaceful and calm, lovely music and singing helped to make me feel calm.'

'We had such a peaceful, lovely time this evening and were made to feel incredibly welcome. Thank you so much for such a creative, well-thought-out week of events.'

The initiating group was Maria Muir, Viv Staunton and Joyce Zealey, but there are too many other people to individually name and thank here who came on board with ideas, helped, ran workshops, printed leaflets and posters and prayed. It has been a most enjoyable and

successful event in which we acknowledge, from the verse in Ephesians 3: 20: God 'is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'.

Maria Muir



Simon's Ordination



Holiday Bible Club Drama!



The Upfront Crew



Holiday Bible Club Volunteers



Riders + Striders set off again raising money for our building project



The St Nic's Staff Team



Christmas Biscuits for Hidden Treasures



Tree Planting



Living Advent Calendar (by Ian Norman)



Ringing in the New Year 2025



Newly renovated ringing room window

