

Vicar's Report at APCM on 18 May 2025

Before I began my report, I invited the meeting to watch [this video](#) from the Bishop of London.

Last Wednesday, it was four months since I started as the vicar of St Stephen's. I can hardly believe that it has been *only* four months. It feels like a lot longer, and that's a good thing, because these four months haven't dragged at all, they've flown. Hannah, Josiah, Clara and I feel very settled. We are delighted to be here.

Over these first few months, we have loved getting to know you all. The dinners at the vicarage we have hosted so far have been lovely, and there will be more dates coming soon. These, I hope, will morph into welcome evenings where we can extend hospitality to any newcomers and help them become connected into our church community.

I have also loved learning about the various groups that make up St Stephen's. We have our two Sunday services, of course, and we have all the teams that go into making these services the joy that they are:

- Duty wardens
- Welcome team
- Refreshments team, including bakers
- Children's and youth teams
- Worship team, including organists and pianists
- Audio visuals team
- Livestream team
- Flower team
- Prayer ministry team
- Servers and chalice administrators
- Readers
- Intercessors, and...
- Occasional preachers

Then there are the many teams and people who lead midweek activities or other parts of our church life:

- Shining Stars for the under 5s and their carers
- Gardening team
- TeaTimers team
- Pastoral Care team
- Our PCC and churchwardens

- Connect group leaders, whether these groups meet in homes or here at the church
- Buildings team
- Finance committee
- Those who care for the community at St David's home
- Those who serve with Mark Tate on Gurnell Grove
- Giving co-ordinators
- Safeguarding leads
- Youth night team
- Those who lead morning prayer, both here and online, and...
- Those who open and close the church for community activities

And of course, there are teams for the more irregular but no less important activities:

- Those who co-ordinate our Sleeves Up Saturdays for church cleaning and maintenance
- Those who plan and run the Christmas Fair
- Those who volunteer for our commitment to the Ealing Churches Winter Night Shelter
- Those who organise fundraising activities for mission and charity, including for Christian this past week

I hope this includes everyone. Forgive me, if not; I'm still learning! Either way, thank you to all of *you* who make the church community of St Stephen's what it is today. And thank you for the manifold ways in which you use your gifts, skills and talents, not only to serve others both here and in our wider community, but above all to serve God. Thank you.

Thanks must be given to particular members among us. Our thanks have already been expressed to Ann Toley and Mary Ann Auckland as our churchwardens, and to Jane Maffett as Treasurer and PCC Secretary. But there are others who were very much on the front line with them during the vacancy.

I'm talking about our staff team: Morgen, Stephen and Jack. Together, they took the lead on key ministry areas including children, youth, worship, and engaging with the many community groups that use our building. Over the past few months, I've occasionally been able to join the children and youth groups and to see the great work that Morgen and Stephen have been doing in their Sunday sessions. I also know that Shining Stars offers an invaluable point of connection with young children and their carers, most (if not all) of whom come from the wider community. And the Friday youth nights have built connections with young people who may not come to us on a Sunday. We've also

seen earlier how Jack has built contacts with key community groups which in turn generates income for the church. Their roles may have been less prominent in the vacancy, particularly in terms of the meetings and paperwork connected with my appointment, but without them, lots of our key ministries would crumble. So on behalf of all of us here, Morgen, Stephen and Jack, thank you for all that you have given of yourselves in these key parts of our life together.

Finally, thanks must go to Ruth, our curate for what is now close to three years. She has been a great gift to me as the new incumbent. She's been an invaluable sounding board for ideas, and she's allowed me to take a bit of a step back on some things to discern where God has been at work, including as I say going out to be with our children's and youth groups on a Sunday. It goes without saying, Ruth, that you, Mark, Oisin and Aoibhanna will be hugely missed when it is time for you to move to your own parish as incumbent. I and the rest of the St Stephen's community will continue to hold you in prayer as you discern your next step, and we look forward to cheering you on when that next step comes.

This evening is primarily a time of looking back and giving thanks for all that God has done among us over this last year. And there is *lots* to give thanks for. But this evening also presents us with an opportunity to look forward and to think about where we might be headed.

Now, I need to be clear that I'm not in a position to give specific details about our next steps at St Stephen's. I haven't got a firmly worked out vision. Four months just isn't enough time to reach that point. But let me offer some brief thoughts based on my experiences here so far.

The first thing to say is that I love the vision statement I inherited. For those who don't know it, St Stephen's aspires to be a 'Community growing in the love of Jesus'. I think that's great! I love the imagery of remaining in the vine, like Jesus says in John 15. I love its call to discipleship, which is to say learning to walk the walk of the Christian faith. I love its simplicity, and I love its humility.

I don't see the value in changing a good vision statement. But I do want us to be confident in what that vision statement means for us at St Stephen's, because that vision statement should underpin everything that we do.

Second, I want to suggest that we have all the makings of an excellent intergenerational ministry. We're not a young church. We're not an old church. We truly are a church that engages every generation. And that is a great gift. The challenge, of course, is holding it all together. That's why, when it comes to Sunday worship, I don't want to focus on our main 'adult' gatherings and fit the children and youth around that. I want to ensure that

the needs of our children and youth are taken alongside the needs of the adult members. And I would also love to see children and young people playing an active part in our life together, instead of simply being recipients of what we adults offer them.

The third thought I want to offer is that I think it's really important we learn from people who experience God in different ways. Put simply, I value unity, and again I love how St Stephen's is home to people from a variety of Christian flavours if you will. Unity is, however, costly. It takes us out of our comfort zone as we realise that there is more to God than our own individual experiences can contain. To pursue unity can therefore be uncomfortable and fraught, but to experience unity is to experience a glimpse of Heaven. I don't know about you but I long for more glimpses of heaven at St Stephen's, and so I hope to cultivate opportunities for us to learn from one another so that together we grow into the fullness of life that Jesus intended for his community of followers.

Four months in, there is still lots to figure out, particularly in terms of how we engage and serve our wider community. And so, as the Summer months begin, the weather is more pleasant, and people are out and about a little bit more, I want to go on prayer walks around our parish. I'd love for you to join me. I hope it will then become clear where we, St Stephen's church, should invest our time, talents, and energy to ensure that we play our part in the Diocesan vision: that every person in our parish might encounter the love of God in Christ.