

Rectors Report 2026

There has been much to celebrate this year, and we arrive at the annual meeting energised and in good heart, hopefully! For my report this year, I'd like to share various reflections, under three broad headings.

The first section you might call 'Fundamentals'. And here I want to emphasise the importance of three key qualities for us: the first is **Gratitude**. In a culture of both rising anxiety and grievance, I am more convinced than ever that practising thankfulness is of supreme value: growing resilience in the face of daily worries, and a powerful antidote to those sinister worldviews which are on the rise. Thankfulness sits at the heart of what Eugene Peterson calls the 'unforced rhythms of grace'.

Second, **Encouragement**. We are delighted to be growing, but a larger church means more opinions, potentially competing ones! Practising encouragement is a form of gratitude in action.

Third, **Love**. **As our book and course this term has reminded us, the only definition of success according to Jesus is love.** We can only judge ourselves by our capacity to love God, each other and the world. We continue to grow – average Sunday attendance was 54 in 2023, 58 in 2024, 64 in 2025, and 74 so far this year (baseline of 45 in 2019), and we celebrate that! ...but that's not the ultimate definition of success. As we grow, our biggest challenge will be to make sure that the things which draw people to All Saints remain key strengths, as those things may be most under pressure.

Second, some personal reflections from my Sabbatical last Autumn. And may I say at the start that you all did fine without me – as I knew you would! That in itself is a sign of our health. For what it's worth, I came back with three reflections/resolutions:

(a) as I was fond of saying on my return, my intention is to '**hit the ground walking**' i.e. to slow down. I can't run like I used to, and I need to remind myself of that regularly.

(b) I reflected a lot on what I can offer to this role – and my sense is that the three areas where my input is most valuable are around **wisdom, discernment, and unity**. These should therefore be where I try to invest more of my time.

(c) the hardest reflection is that I am slowly learning to **lead out of weakness and not strength** – my reflections on the life and teachings of Jesus and of Paul are that this is the most Christlike form of leadership: 'Christ's power is made perfect in weakness.' Which is a way of saying that I am learning to recognise my limits. For most of my time here, I've been leading out of strength, but as I get older, that becomes less and less tenable. I am slowly and painfully learning to lead out of weakness, 'that Christ's power may rest on me' – but bear with me, it's not easy!

Practically speaking, since I've got back, some stuff I handed over I haven't taken back (thank you!), which has freed up time and capacity; however, the amount of pastoral work has been higher than ever. Overall, the sustainability of my workload remains challenging.

Third, and this is where we can focus a bit more on the coming year, **our priority is to turn our vision into reality**. Hopefully the headline of our vision is embedded in our minds and hearts by now: 'an oasis of God's grace and peace'. As I reflected in last year's report, the oasis image is deliberate: an oasis has a purpose. It is a place *we long to head for* (our two areas of inviting and nourishing) and it also *enables us to go back out into the desert again* (our two areas of refreshing and adventuring).

As we look ahead to the coming year, **the big structural change we've initiated is to re-structure our church council around our vision.** We've been blessed with a strong council for many years, but the time felt right to reimagine how we might adapt this strength to allow us to give more focused time and attention to our vision. So, first, we have clarified the 'ex officio' roles on the council: clergy and churchwardens, plus treasurer, secretary and safeguarding lead. Then, the other eight stewards will now form four pairs of two, each pair focusing on one area of our vision: inviting, nourishing, refreshing and adventuring.

However, the burden is not meant to fall on these four pairs alone! Each pair will be responsible for forming, nurturing and growing a team to oversee this aspect of our church life, with input from the clergy and churchwardens as appropriate. The churchwardens will also oversee the fifth vital team – our brilliant maintenance team. With these five teams it is hoped that we can significantly expand lay leadership across the church – we will need lots of people to join these teams, such that everyone gets to have more input and investment in shaping All Saints to be that 'oasis of God's grace and peace'.

I'm really excited by this development. This will not only allow us to embed our vision, but also to integrate lots of our newcomers into energising roles within our church family. In that way our growth becomes sustainable, our teams will continue to be replenished and new opportunities will also emerge.

It is one of those seasons where life feels in flux – our church is changing rapidly, society is changing rapidly, and our world, too. So as we give thanks for all that has been, as we say our 'yes' to God for all that is to come, I'll finish with words that were quoted to us yesterday, from King George VI's famous Christmas broadcast in 1939, perhaps a season we, sadly, identify with more than for many a year:

'And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown". And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way". So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.'

Matt, 23rd March 2026