

**Annual Reports of the Parochial Church
Council of Wickford and Runwell**

for the year ending 2025

presented 17th May 2026

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

The parish is served by a team ministry, whose members were:

The Revd Jonathan Evens Team Rector
The Revd Susan Wise Team Vicar (House for Duty)
The Revd Nik Wright Curate, from 25th June 2025
Michael Tricker LLM
Emma Doe LLM

The following also served as members of the Parochial Church Council during the year ending 31 December 2025 all were either ex-officio members or elected at the Annual Parochial Church Council meeting or co-opted in accordance with the Church Representation Rules.

Church wardens:

Seye Abiodun (St Andrew's), until 18th May 2025
Alison Davies (St Andrew's), also Safeguarding Officer from 18th December 2025
Vicki Swan (St Andrew's), from 18th May 2025
Richard Feldwick (St Catherine's)
Stephen Talbot (St Catherine's)
Alan Jones (St Mary's)

Deanery Synod:

Yvonne Branson (Electoral Roll Officer)
Marjorie Stanford
Emma Doe

Elected and Co-opted:

Roger Tyler (PCC Treasurer)
Marina Bailey (Safeguarding Officer), until 18th May 2025
Lolade Abiodun (Safeguarding Officer), from 18th May 2025 to 30th November 2025
Pamela Petts
Seye Abiodun, from 18th May 2025

Christine Evens (PCC Secretary)

PCC report

The PCC met on six occasions and discussed topics including: Wellbeing; Communications Strategy proposal; Fire Safety Policy and Procedures, Heating

and Lighting report, Stewardship Campaign; Pastoral Visitors presentation; Culture & Heritage Centre Feasibility Study and developments (St Andrew's), Underpinning proposal (St Catherine's), Work to North Porch (St Mary's). We have been very grateful for the support of Roger Tyler as PCC Treasurer and Christine Evens as PCC Secretary. Marina Bailey was thanked for her work as Safeguarding Officer. We are grateful to Lola Abiodun and Alison Davies for their work in the Parish Safeguarding Officer role.

Church Attendance and Occasional Offices

At the end of 2025 there were 88 names on the Electoral Roll, compared with 135 on the previous Roll. Our service pattern is three Sunday morning services, including an All-age service at each church once a month. Our average weekly attendance across the parish in October was 116, with 113 in our worshipping community and a usual Sunday attendance of 71 (and an additional 10 online). During that time our churches held their Harvest Festivals, we also had several baptisms, held our usual midweek (including home communions and care home services) and evening services, and hosted a School Harvest Service. We held monthly services at five Care Homes and held Messy Church on a regular basis. At Christmas, our numbers at Christingle and Crib Services, Midnight Mass and Christmas Day services exceeded those recorded pre-Covid in 2019. Advent and Easter also saw encouraging numbers in church.

PCC Committees

ST. ANDREW'S DCC

Seye Abiodun – Churchwarden to 18th May 2025

Marina Bailey – PCC / PSO to 18th May 2025

Lolade Abiodun – PCC / PSO from 18th May 2025 to 30th November 2025

Alison Davies – PCC / Churchwarden

Marjorie Stanford – PCC/Deanery Synod

Mike Tricker – PCC/LLM

Angela Wagstaff – Treasurer

Valerie Bryan – DCC Secretary to 1st July 2025

Vicki Gill – DCC Secretary from 28th August 2025

Steve Hunter – to 18th May 2025

St Andrews DCC Report

We continue to live stream Morning Prayer, Midweek Eucharist, and Sunday services.

We have now involved a management company called Sharesy to deal with and advertise our Hall and Church spaces available to Let. This, so far, has proved very positive, bringing new clients and relieving workload.

Events saw several well attended audiences. This included Eva Romanakova with Andrew Palmer Pianist, Men 2 Sing, TLC Ensemble, and Allegro Choir, to name but a few. We also had our well known unveiled events which have grown and are well known throughout the parish. Also, a good attendance for our Quiz Night. Thanks to Caroline Wheeler and her family for organising. We also saw another Craft Fayre.

We had a Lottery Fund given to us to transform an overgrown area alongside the church and hall to be landscaped into a community garden area that would attract wildlife. Thanks to all who donated plants, soil, bulbs, planters, compost, and a lot of other materials. A huge thanks goes to all who donated their hard work planting, watering, digging, and weeding to make the garden what it is today. The Garden was finally opened in the summer by Chair of our Town Council and other dignitaries attended including the Archdeacon of Southend.

Christmas showed our usual Bazaar hosted at St Andrews for all the three churches, to get together, and raise much needed funds for the parish.

Open the Book still continues at St Andrews, filmed and shown in local schools.

St Andrews coffee morning is still popular with the regulars from the community on Saturday mornings, thanks for all who help and those who donate by baking delicious cakes.

St Andrews Fabric Report.

We had our gutters and windows cleaned once in 2025.

All the necessary safety certificates have been completed and passed with only minor issues. This included certificates in Gas heaters, Electric wiring and equipment, our lightning conductor, and fire extinguishers.

Thanks to Steve Talbot we had an updated fire assessment and policy, which is now positioned in the hall and Church. New Fire Assembly notices have been positioned in the correct area.

We had emergency lightning, a new alarm and toilet flushing system

fitted in the disabled toilet.

The piano has been tuned twice by our regular tuner.

A huge thanks to Arthur Larkin for his time and energy spent keeping the grass cut around the building. Also, for repairing the loose floor tiles in the hall. Many thanks.

A huge thanks to all who Pray, volunteer, and contribute to the running of the church and also the hours the Clergy put in.

Alison Davies and Seye Abiodun

ST CATHERINE'S WICKFORD, DISTRICT CHURCH COUNCIL

Richard Feldwick Churchwarden/Chairman

Pamela Petts PCC

Emma Doe PCC/LLM

James Salmon

Barry Pocock

Steve Talbot Churchwarden

Robson Coke

Caroline Wheeler

St. Catherine's DCC Report

The DCC met on six occasions during the past year to discuss a range of matters concerning St. Catherine's Church: the restoration of its building, its worship, its people and its mission. Regular reports came from the clergy, the churchwardens and the Hall Manager, while the wide variety of topics discussed ranged from all-age services via fund-raising, plans for trial boring around the foundations, hall lettings and the environment, to our 150th anniversary celebrations.

Once again, attendance at DCC meetings during the year has varied but some members have managed to attend all of the meetings. We thank Jonathan and Sue and Emma and Mike for maintaining our services and we were pleased to welcome Revd Nik to the Ministry Team. It is also encouraging that we have been able to welcome a number of new people to our congregation on Sundays. We have enjoyed several visits from local schools and local history and wildlife groups. We were particularly pleased to host Beauchamps School's Carol Service again in December.

The hall continues to be well-maintained and well-used, with bookings efficiently managed by David Jackson.

We are grateful to everyone who gives of their time and energy to further the work and life of the Church and extend our thanks to our Organist, choir and sidesmen, male and female, for their vital support week by week.

Events during the past year have included the regular first Saturday Mattins, Saturday Solace and Coffee Morning and the Spring, Autumn and Advent Fairs, together with the Pancake Party and a Rectory Garden Party.

St. Catherine's is open to visitors every day, which is much-appreciated by those who seek a quiet space for prayer or simply to look around the building.

Regular contributions are sent to the Food Bank and Women's Refuge.

Fabric report, St. Catherine's Church

Our chief concern this year has again been the rear walls with their cracks. During the winter, Shire Consultancy Services, a structural engineering firm, visited to undertake Geotech trial boring to ascertain the state of the foundations and the composition of the surrounding soil. Last summer was fairly damp at times, which has resulted in relatively little movement of the walls. The next stage of the work will be to devise a plan to stabilise the foundations permanently and repair the walls. On completion of the structural work, complete redecoration of the building will be necessary. Fundraising continues, of course! We have also been looking at the lighting and heating installations, both of which are over thirty-five years old and will soon require replacement with more modern and efficient systems; our electricity bill is a worry! The organ required some more extensive maintenance last summer, too. Following very messy nesting attempts by pigeons in the porch, Steve installed netting under the roof, which solved the problem. Our next Quinquennial Inspection is due soon.

The churchyard continues to be looked after, while also providing a home for a wide variety of flora and fauna. This year, thanks to sales of Sue's Vicarage Cat books and various quizzes, we added nest-boxes and a bat-box. The snowdrops provided a wonderful display again this year but the wild flower seeds were probably eaten by the birds! We planted an apple tree, which is growing well. We are grateful for the efforts of a few individuals, including some who maintain family graves and extend their efforts to adjoining plots. We are grateful too, to Bob Jones, who responded to an appeal on Facebook six years ago and has since worked hard to keep the grass under control, and to Steve, who volunteered to help in the summer and has since worked tirelessly to clear many neglected graves. We are hoping that more members of our congregation and our local community will be able to help us to look after what has become something of a wildlife oasis in our increasingly urban area. Wickford Wildlife Society visited twice during the year and a Scavenger Hunt booklet has been produced for

visitors. The flagpole was broken by a gale in January 2024; repairs will be undertaken soon thanks to a donation given specifically for that purpose.

Richard Feldwick and Steve Talbot

ST MARY'S, RUNWELL, DISTRICT CHURCH COUNCIL

DCC Report

Deanery Synod Yvonne Branson
Churchwarden Alan Jones
PCC Roger Tyler
DCC Pat Watson
DCC Chris Carter
DCC Christine Ashcroft - till May 2025
DCC Coral Upham Secretary DCC
DCC Jeanette Tarplett
DCC Tracey Syrett

St Mary's DCC met five times in 2025.

Throughout the year St Mary's continued to have a Eucharist every Sunday at 9.30am, with the third Sunday of each month being an All-Age Eucharist. Through the year the numbers have remained steady, with a few new people joining us on occasion. There continues to be a service of Reflective Evening Prayer once a month, which has a small following, and is often themed. In June, we replaced this with an earlier Pet Blessing Service held in the North Churchyard and in August we held our annual Patronal Festival, which consisted of afternoon tea followed by a Eucharist in the vicarage garden, and which was well attended. Our Christmas services went ahead as usual, with a good number of people attending our Blue Christmas Carol Service, for those mourning the loss of a loved one. The Crib Services were well attended and Midnight Mass was back to its pre-COVID numbers, with standing room only by the end of the service. During the year Jeanette Tarplett was added to our Chalice Assistants and these have now been trained to set up before services, saving Alan from needing to do this. Our flower arranger, Yvonne Branson, had to stand down, with much thanks for the many years she had been doing this. Christmas flowers were arranged by Becks Wright, with window sills by Barbara, one of our coffee regulars.

Occasional services continue to take place, with only one wedding, and one renewal of vows, but a regular flow of baptisms and funerals, the latter of which are often followed by a burial in the south churchyard, this remaining open.

Having decided previously to open the church on a Saturday only in the warmer months, in light of the continuing lack of visitors, it was decided that an Open Day would take place on 6th September instead. The flower arrangers who met in the hall decorated the window ledges and font, we obtained a number of old records from The Essex Record Office, and a set of display boards (produced by a previous church warden) showing the history of the church and some of the wildlife identified in our surveys, were put out. Refreshments were on sale in the church hall and throughout the day we had over 50 visitors and raised £290 for our funds. Further Open Days are planned in conjunction with the churches in Rawreth and Rettendon, as part of a History Trail being set up by Revd Steve Lissendon, now rector of that parish.

During the year Wickford Wildlife visited the two churchyards again to carry out a survey of the flora and fauna to be found. Data was sent to Caring for God's Acre who run Love Your Burial Ground: Churches Count on Nature week.

Continuing with our care for God's creation, and from sale of Vicarage Cat books, several bird nesters, a bat box, a buddleia, a damson tree and wildflower seeds were added to the area round the hall and in the north churchyard. A long-eared brown bat found exhausted in the church was rescued with the help of Essex Bat Group and returned when well again. A 'Little Library' for book exchanges was installed outside the hall, with thanks to Tracey and her husband for making it.

During the year we have continued to maintain a connection with the Parish Council, and several of our members were invited to the afternoon tea to make the 100th Anniversary of the Parish Council and the raising of their new flag. They support us with a grant towards maintaining the churchyards which we are very grateful for. A report on the life of the church is given at the Parish Council AGM and an article is written for each 'Runwell Roundabout' to keep the wider community up to date with what is going on. Despite their support we have been unable to get the street lights at the top of the path fixed, so extra lighting was needed on the path for Midnight Mass.

We also continue to run a Coffee Morning on Wednesdays in the church hall and the number of people from the community attending, not members of the congregation, and the fellowships there are encouraging. In September we made this morning into a Fairtrade Coffee Morning as part of Fairtrade Fortnight and were lucky enough to have a representative from the Co-op, bringing fun activities and free samples. £38 was raised to add to the monies from the other two churches.

Members of the DCC also organised a successful Quiz Night and a Murder Mystery Evening in the church hall, with the help of Linda Payne. The aim with these is to have an enjoyable social gathering, and any money raised is a bonus.

We raised funds for various charities during the year. We continued to collect spare change in jars for The Spotlight Radiotherapy Appeal at Southend Hospital, and for Positive Life Kenya (with the parish) from donations for coffee on Sunday and Wednesday. Our Crib service collections enabled us to send donations to Tearfund. St Mary's people also supported the joint Parish Christmas Bazaar held at St Andrew's. We also send used postage stamps to the RNIB.

Fabric

During the year several of the quinquennial items were completed. The main item outstanding is repair to the north porch, which has to be completed while maintaining as much timber as possible while the brickwork is appropriately repaired. Mark Curnick has provided a quote for the guttering and tiles, which has been agreed. Plans have been drawn up for the repair of the brickwork and sent to the architect, with a view to applying for faculty once agreed and further quote obtained.

The heating was discussed several times, in light of the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Officer's report as well as feedback from the congregation. Draught excluders to prevent heat loss were put at the west and south doors, using the now defunct altar rail long kneelers.

A suggestion for an additional bell in the tower was opposed by the DCC.

Hall

The church hall continues to be used by The NHS Phlebotomy Clinic for three days a week. Other users include yoga and, up to August, the flower arrangers group, as well as for the weekly church Coffee Morning and other meetings and events. New chairs had or be purchased because so many had broken, said for out of the legacy from Richard Godolphin. The new storage shed has proved useful, especially as the clinic uses most of what is in the hall. The summerhouse, to the side of the vicarage, had to be treated for woodworm and has been cleared of as much as possible.

Grounds

The DCC continues to employ Roger Chandler to cut the grass in the two churchyards and we are grateful for his excellent work. The grounds surrounding the hall are maintained by voluntary labour and we are grateful to Jim Sloane and Simon Wise for their contribution.

The gates to the south churchyard were fixed.

The wildflower patch in the north churchyard managed to produce much several ragwort this year, along with the grasses, as the yellow rattle sown did not materialise. Both apple trees bore abundant fruit even if we thought one was a pear tree. Rhubarb and onions were grown in tubs to the rear of the church. We were also offered several small trees/ saplings, some of which were accepted and put in both around the hall and in the churchyards to make up for those that had been removed previously.

There has been no progress regarding access to or suitability of glebe land to the south of the church for potential suitable burials. The diocese will not free up any of the land adjacent to the north churchyard because of its development potential.

Revd Sue and Alan Jones

Children and Young People

Messy Church

During the year we held Messy Candlemas in February, Messy Easter in April, 'Messy Church in the Garden' in June and 'Messy Church Goes Wombling' in October and Messy Advent in November.

All were held in St Andrew's church making use of the new Wellbeing Garden for some of the activities, such as planting at Easter and ready for the opening. This year Messy in the Garden coincided with 'Churches Count on Nature Week' and we were helped by Martin, from Wickford Wildlife to identify some of the insects buzzing around on the day. We used the Ecobricks made last year in the new gabion which was planted with herbs by the children. In keeping with the Season of Creation focus on waste, this year our 'Wombling' theme was about making beautiful things from what would otherwise be thrown away.

We are very grateful to the team, especially those new to the role, including our new curate Revd Nik Wright, who help us to run these sessions and put so much into the planning and preparation for what can be quite hectic events.

Children in Church

Our regular pattern of monthly All-Age services has continued across our three churches, in both non-Eucharistic and Eucharistic services where we endeavour to include and encourage children in the worship as much as possible. There are a few regular attendees at all three churches. Once again, we held our Christmas services for children - three very busy Christingle Services at St Catherine's, two

Crib Services at St Mary's and one Crib Service at St Andrew's on Christmas Eve, led this year by Revd Nik Wright, our new curate. We were pleased to see these are still well attended.

Baptisms

Over the course of the year quite a few baptisms are held in our churches, mostly for younger children. We aim to provide a welcoming service and make it a special celebration for family and friends, while taking the opportunity to introduce ideas about God's love for all children, whatever their age.

Emma and Revd Sue

Education Committee

The Education Committee is comprised of the Ministry Team plus representatives from each of the churches. During 2024 the committee met 4 times to discuss and plan the ways that we can develop and deepen the understanding of our faith among our congregations and the wider community.

In January, our Study Day 'Our Churches and their Patron Saints', encouraged participants to get to know our three churches, the buildings and the people, finding out more about their history and reflecting on the lives of the saints that they are dedicated to. The history was provided by the churchwardens for each church, while the ministry tackled the reflection on the saints. This was well received and there were several suggestions regarding how to follow his up, including making more of the three patronal festivals.

Through Lent we studied a five-week course, once again written by the ministry team, looking at Journeys in the Bible. Through these conversations were opened up around people's individual journeys, with different responses in each of the three groups.

A weekend HeartEdge event, 'Living God's Future Now' was arranged by Revd Jonathan and financed by the diocese. This was held 27th - 28th June and drew people from outside the parish. The Friday included sessions on missional opportunities based on the 4 'C's, with Revd Dr Sam Wells contributing and James Fawcett providing a workshop on 'Being With.' Singers from St Martin-in-the-Fields provided entertainment during lunch and at an evening concert. The Saturday began with a contemplative walk in Wickford Memorial Park, led by Revd Catherine Duce, followed by a Quiet Day at St Mary's on the Rule of Life for the Nazareth Community. As a result, a local Nazareth community is to be set up in the area.

There were four other Quiet Days. Three were in St Mary's, with themes of

'Rogation', 'Sabbath' and 'Our Lady', and a further shared day was held at St Nicholas Rawreth on 'Lancelot Andrewes', who lived locally.

A further Being With course was held after Easter and a new Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Group formed. The numbers for the latter were low, and it was noted that we should set a minimum in future to make it work properly. Alison Davies has now trained as a Group Leader for Kintsugi Hope and will help with future groups.

In October we ran the Church of England 'Living Generously' course, using five of the themes, to follow on from our Stewardship Campaign. The campaign had resulted in a couple of offers of skills, while the course was attended by the usual participants, and was well received by these few.

During the year Mike Tricker successfully started a second Bible Study group, meeting monthly on a Thursday evening. The MU study group and the Thursday afternoon group continue to meet.

New members of the Education Committee are to join in the new year, to help us to continue to explore our faith together and deepen our understanding of our sharing with all of God's love and service.

Revd Sue Wise

Environment Committee

The environment committee met five times during the year and was joined by Revd Nik Wright in September and Carmen Tyler in December.

At the beginning of the year St Catherine's achieved the Silver Eco-Church award, one of the first churches to do so on the new version of the survey. As a result they featured in some of the Diocesan information at roadshows and on the Advent Calendar. The other two churches were also brought up to the same level on the new survey, and now all are working towards Gold.

All three churches submitted the EFT data in the 2025 Parish Returns. An Environment Policy sample was passed to the policy committee for them to progress. A newsheet was produced each quarter and distributed to the congregations, giving both news and tips for caring for creation. A further lifestyle audit was distributed but with less returns than the previous year. It did indicate that we have made some difference, particularly with keeping people informed and getting them thinking of planting for bees and butterflies.

During the year we were very pleased to once again have Wickford Wildlife

carrying out surveys of the flora and fauna in our churchyards, and the data was passed to Caring for God's Acre's for the 'Churches Count on Nature: Love Your Burial Ground' week in June. They also visited the Wellbeing Garden at St Andrew's to help the children at 'Messy Church in the Garden'. The Ecobricks made last year by the children were used in the gabions where the children also planted a number of herbs. We held our third Pet Blessing Service in St Mary's North Churchyard, and Wickford Wildlife also held a Moth Night during the week, and they counted 32 different species and identified two bat species. The Scavenger Hunt was put out again in St Catherine's churchyard and once again it rained!

Sue devised a cryptic Wildflower Quiz with half the proceeds to the winner and half to eco-projects. With the continued sale of the Vicarage Cat books, we were able to supply the following: bee tubes, 2 bat boxes, 3 bird boxes and 3 artisan nesters, bird feeding station, 2 fruit trees, bird bath, 'St Francis' bird feeder, natural wind chimes, wildflower seeds, nature crafts for the children, and 3 buddleias (St Catherine's one disappeared - we suspect the muntjac deer). These went into the churchyards and the new Wellbeing Garden opened at St Andrew's in July.

All three churches held Fairtrade Coffee Mornings during Fairtrade Fortnight (22nd September - 4th October) and were able to send £140 to the charity. St Mary's event was lucky to have a representative from the Co-op who brought fun activities and free samples.

In September the parish once again marked the Season of Creation, the theme for which was "Peace with Creation". Over the five weeks the special prayer was used in all churches and by individuals, with the third Sunday set aside for focusing on Waste, with readings and preaching on the subject. Messy Church went 'Wombling', making items out of waste. Posters were put up in all the halls to encourage people to recycle responsibly.

During the year Sue was able to attend the Essex Nature Recovery meeting which was very informative, and encouraging that we are doing quite a few useful things towards reintroducing bio-diversity. Angela attended the

Revd Sue Wise

Finance

Total receipts on unrestricted (including designated) funds were £146,591 (last year £131,880) including £13,901 (last year £10,373) tax recovered from Gift Aid. The receipts included a one-off grant of £18,500 to fund a UKSPF Feasibility

Report and a related grant application. Restricted donations of £4,707 (last year £14,382) were also received.

Planned giving through the Parish Giving Scheme and envelopes fell by 3.9% (last year increased by 0.3%). Total income increased by 3.4% (last year down by 4.2%). Total expenditure increased by 17.2% (last year down 1.6%).

We paid £72,008 towards our Parish Share. However, £2,000 was an additional late payment for the previous year. Therefore, we paid £70,008 towards our Parish Share in 2025. This was 71.5% of our allocated share of £97,928 requested. Last year we paid £62,000 which was 63.7% of our allocated share of £97,276 requested.

The net result for the year was an excess of receipts over payments of (£3,021), (last year £1,986) on unrestricted (including designated) funds. Restricted funds increased by £2,304 (last year £14,649). Adding bank and deposit balances brought forward at the beginning of the year, the balances carried forward at 31st December on all these funds totaled £110,985 (last year £110,882).

The Treasurer would like to thank the many people from all 3 churches who all work together as a team to support him in maintaining the PCC finances.

Roger Tyler

Pastoral Visitors

The group met regularly during the year to catch up on how things were going, and to consider ways of strengthening our provision of pastoral care for our congregations and wider community. In June we were delighted to commission Alison Davies as Pastoral Assistant, having completed her training with the diocese.

Along with the clergy, many home visits were made by members of the group, some including taking Home Communion, and often offering practical help. Members of the group also made hospital visits and, most important of all, provided a listening ear and a cheery smile for those in need of company, or whose carers needed time out.

One of the members is instrumental in keeping the parish Prayer Circle going, and updating as necessary. Many members are also part of a further team of people who visit the five care homes for short monthly church services, where favourite hymns are sung and which are much appreciated by many.

Much thanks must be given to this small group who keep us all connected and show their love and compassion in their commitment to others.

Revd Sue Wise

Policies

The Policies subgroup has met twice this year and now comprises: Revd Jonathan, Roger Tyler, Steve Talbot and Seye Abiodun. We are grateful to Revd Steve Lissenden and Marina Bailey for their valued input.

Through Steve Talbot's hard work Fire Safety policies and procedures have been agreed for each of our three churches with posters and signage updated. Existing policies have been reviewed and updated. An Environment Policy has been agreed.

Revd Jonathan Evens

Deanery Synod report

Three members of the PCC sit on the Deanery Synod (Yvonne Branson, Emma Doe, and Marjorie Stanford), as well as our clergy. This provides the PCC with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the Church. There were four meetings in 2025.

The Basildon Deanery Synod meetings across 2025–26 focused on encouraging talks from visiting speakers, ongoing mission initiatives, and updates on parish life. Highlights included Archdeacon Sue Lucas' reflections on faith in a post-Christendom society, Maxine Paul's presentation on the Mothers' Union and the Rise Up domestic abuse campaign, and insights from Revd Alan Moss and Tim Hayward on mission in new estates. The Deanery continued to develop its Mission Opportunities Fund projects, particularly the organ-training scheme and the appointment of Keeley Scarborough as Deanery Mission Support Administrator to reduce administrative burdens across parishes. Finance reports showed generally strong parish share contributions, with some parishes adjusting payment patterns due to financial pressures. Parishes shared encouraging signs of growth, community engagement, and creative outreach—from confirmation services and Lent courses to open days, new community spaces, and increased attendance in several churches. Elections to Diocesan and Deanery Synod were completed, and future meetings were scheduled alongside ongoing preparations for confirmations, vocations events, and mission planning.

Emma Doe

Local Ministers Group

The ministers of the various local churches meet bimonthly to exchange ideas and updates on how we together support the local community and share the good news of the kingdom and God's love among the people of Wickford and Runwell.

This year we were joined by new ministers at the Salvation Army and Our Lady of Good Counsel. Pastor Alan at Wickford Christian Centre was joined by Tim Read, enabling him to move toward retirement.

Updates are regularly received on how the Gateway Project food bank is faring, and volunteers from our own churches continue on the rota for helping out on a Thursday morning when the food bank is open (although more are needed). There is always plenty to discuss in the different initiatives coming from each church, as well as sharing news of how we are working in schools. We also plan for the 'events' that we can work together for, bringing the congregations together too.

On Good Friday we held the annual Walk of Witness, commencing at Our Lady of Good Counsel and finishing at Christchurch for the very welcome cuppa and hot cross bun. This was very well supported by the churches.

Once again, the joint churches 'choir' was asked to sing some carols for the 'Wickford at Christmas' street fair. We also had an information stall in the High Road for the same event. The new location proved to be a much better location.

Revd Jonathan Evens

Wickford and Runwell Mothers Union

This was a very mixed year of emotions. Some highs and some lows.

We started the year with a new Royal Patron, Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh, and a new Worldwide President, Kathleen Snow. Both came to Chelmsford in February, when some of us were able to meet them and have tea in the cathedral.

Sadly, we lost 6 members in 2025, 4 of these being past branch leaders.

During the year we had 22 meetings and 5 Lent course meetings.

4 members attended the conversations roadshow in Rainham and a group of members also went to St. Martins in the field for the commissioning service of the WWP.

We had a wide variety of meeting and fund-raising events.

We welcomed – Sandra Baines, Rev'd Margaret Fowler, trustee Rose Gorton, Rev'd Sue and Rev'd Nik to speak at some of our meetings.

The branch had a stall at St. Andrew's Craft Fayre in May, 2 coffee mornings also in St. Andrews and the Christmas bazaar.

Our meetings also included a visit to View nurseries for lunch, a Deanery service with Lucy Bubb when 2 new members were enrolled and a Christmas lunch at the Quart Pot.

We invited the Toddler group to join us for tea at one of our meetings and had a visit from changing pathways where we gave them donations and help for there home and Christmas party.

We had a committee of 8 and 27 members at the end of the year.

Caroline Wheeler
Branch Leader.

Positive Life Kenya

Positive Life Kenya works closely with the most vulnerable members of their communities; including children, schools, and families to support education, wellbeing, and child protection through school- and community-based programmes in Kenya.

The Positive Life Kenya team say: "Your faithful support, given consistently throughout the year, makes a real and tangible difference in the lives of the children, families, and communities we serve. It is deeply encouraging to know that our work is held and supported in your prayers and support."

Their most recent email says:

"We highly appreciate your quarterly gift of \$750 which could not have come at a better time! This donation has come when we are at a very needy period and it really touches the depth of our hearts.

Through this donation, we are being reminded that God is working things out through us, and He has people who support us along the way.

Your donation is going to make a huge difference for us as far as keeping our children in schools despite the hard times that we are currently facing.

Our priority has always been children support especially through education, and your support will directly be making a difference to the children.

We will ensure it is used where it is most needed, bringing hope and stability to the children and families who depend on us.

Please pass our heartfelt thanks to the Wickford and Runwell Parish churches. Your continued partnership, prayers, and generosity are a true blessing to our community.

With sincere appreciation and love in Christ.”

Carmen Tyler

Care Home Visiting

For a number of years teams from across the churches have been paying monthly visits to five Care Homes in the parish to hold short services with simple prayers, a reading and hymns. The singing is particularly popular and the familiar words of the hymns we use are enjoyed, with ‘All Things Bright and Beautiful’ being a favourite.

A team from St Catherine’s visit The Grange, while other homes have people from across the churches. Silvana Court greet us in their entrance hall and sometimes give a list of requests, which helps the process of choosing the right hymns. In Eve Belle we are frequently given drinks and cake in their lovely bar area and get various invites throughout the year, and residents from there also join us for some services and concerts at St Andrew’s.

Thank you to the team who support these visits, which are enjoyed by the residents in all the homes. We could always do work more voices!

Revd Sue Wise

Contemplative Commuters

Contemplative Commuters is a Facebook group for any commuter wanting quiet reflective time and content on their journeys to and from work. Those joining

receive a short weekly reflection, prayer and link to a useful resource at the beginning of the week. These can be used as group members wish, at any point throughout the week. Also available are 30-minute online services of Morning Prayer recorded on Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays at churches in Wickford & Runwell.

The group is publicised by Revd Jonathan at Wickford Station where Mindfulness exercises are given to commuters fortnightly. Revd Nik is supporting the initiative with a monthly visit to the Station to give out mindfulness exercises.

48 commuters have joined the Facebook group and 60 take the mindfulness exercises when these are handed out. We have been encouraged by much positive feedback from those taking the exercises and through conversations with those we see regularly at the Station.

Revd Jonathan Evens

Quiet Days

During 2025 five Quiet Days were organised and run mainly at St Mary's by members of the Ministry Team. These were advertised both locally and more widely and we had people coming from both our churches and further afield. Lunch was provided at each event.

In May, Revd Sue led a Quiet Day on Rogation Days: Rogation Days precede Ascension Day. Traditionally, they are days of prayer and fasting observed with processions and 'beating the bounds' when God's blessing is asked on agriculture and industry, and were.

In June, Revd Catherine Duce (from St Martin-in-the-Fields) led 'A Path with a Heart: Seeking inspiration from the Nazareth Community': Silence and Service are at the very heart of the Nazareth rule of life. This Quiet Day has led to further meetings exploring the formation of a Nazareth Community for South Essex, with members of our congregations taking part.

In July, Mike Tricker led a Quiet Day on Sabbath. This explored Sabbath as both a day of rest and the coming kingdom of God.

In August, Revd Sue led a day on Our Lady: Reflecting on the experiences, inspiration and support of Our Lady, the Mother of Jesus.

In September, Revd Jonathan and Revd Steve Lissenden led a day on Lancelot Andrewes at St Nicholas Rawreth. The day helped participants discover the

influence and example of Lancelot Andrewes (who lived in Rawreth) who helped define Anglican doctrine, translate the Bible, and shape the liturgy.

Revd Sue and Revd Jonathan

Saturday Solace

Saturday Solace has provided regular 10-minute reflection and Christian mindfulness sessions between 10.00 am and 12 noon at St Andrew's on the second Saturday in the month. These have been led by Emma Doe. Emma has also offered Christian Mindfulness exercises at St Catherine's as part of the Coffee Morning on the first Saturday in the month. A small group of people have dropped in when they can or combined their visit with food and drink at our Coffee Mornings.

Revd Jonathan Evens

Schools Ministry Report

Through the course of 2025 we were able to continue our connections with our local schools.

Wickford Church of England Infant School

We have a regular presence in our church school, where Emma Doe, our Licensed Lay Minister, is a member of staff, acting as their Spiritual Adviser, organising the children's Worship Committee and planning the assembly topics as well as the termly special events and services for Easter, Harvest and Christmas, which the clergy also support. Emma and the clergy take turns at leading assemblies and the Thursday after school 'Holy Space', which engages the children with their faith through stories, activities and prayer. We were delighted to add Revd Nik Wright, our new curate, to the rotas for these. Emma, Revd Jonathan and Jim O'Sullivan also contribute as Local Advisory Board members for the School.

Primary Schools

During the year our churches hosted visits from some of our local primary schools for RE teaching, art workshops, and for Christmas services. Two schools brought their choirs to sing at our Christmas Bazaar. Revd Jonathan, Revd Sue and now Revd Nik, visit Wickford Primary, Abacus School, and Grange School to take regular assemblies. Revd Sue was also able to visit Runwell Community Primary School for lesson support during the year, and they in turn visited the church with Revd Nik as their guide.

EYFS children from Hilltop Infants School visited St Catherine's at Easter, then Years 1 and 2 visited for Christingle making prior to Christmas and Revd Jonathan went into the School to make Christingles with Reception children and their parents. Richard Feldwick and Revd Jonathan also spoke to Year 4 children at Hilltop Junior School in an RE lesson as part of their topic on charitable giving by churches.

Castledon School organized several RE visits to St Andrew's and St Catherine's in the course of 2025. They also held their School Pantomime and Disco at St Andrew's in December.

Abacus Primary School, Wickford CofE School, and Wickford Primary School have all organized art workshops at St Andrew's in 2025 based on our exhibition programme. While teaching art skills (often with the artist present), due to the content of many of our exhibitions, these workshops have also contributed to RE understanding as well.

Open the Book

The Open the Book team continues to record bible stories and the videos are sent on a monthly basis into four schools; Wickford Church of England Infant School, Abacus, Grange and Runwell Community Primary. Following the introduction of the new Open the Book programme in 2024, we have found that the rewritten stories are made easier by less speaking parts, and using puppets has made up for not being able to use the children as we would if we were able to go into the schools.

Secondary Schools

Lessons are given at Beauchamps High School at Easter and Christmas by a group involving Revd Jonathan plus Tim Read and Suzanne Ward from Wickford Christian Centre. This year Revd Jonathan also provided the Christian input at the School during Interfaith Week. Beauchamps High School also held a well-attended Carol Service at St Catherine's for the third year in succession.

Emma Doe, Revd Jonathan Evens, Revd Sue Wise

Toddler Group

The Toddler group has continued to run and be very successful! It is still a much-needed thing for our area and it has been a joy for us to continue provide it. We have been running the Toddler group since 20 April 2023, it has been amazing!

We've had so many Mums with their children, as well as Aunt's, Grandad's or Nanny's. We had 45 children registered with us in 2023 and gained 28 in 2024! In 2025 we gained 20 new children.

We had an average attendance across the 47 weekly sessions of 6 adults and 5 children. This was slightly down from last year!

This is because a fair number of our children have started preschool or school and so are unable to come to the group.

Having said that we are seeing second and third children from the same families starting to attend!

It still gives parents and grandparents a place to come and chat whilst the children play. We've been able to reassure them and given them time and care to help them come to terms with issues and situations. Whilst some of us have been doing this our wonderful volunteers supervise and play alongside the children. We always welcome the people who come whilst also making sure they're signed in for fire safety reasons but also a form to allow me to know if any children have any allergies. I ask for this as we do allow food on the premises. I also request contact details so that I can notify them if for some reason the group is cancelled. We want to avoid unnecessary travel with their children. As we have progressed through the year, we have learned how to develop the group to the needs of those who attend.

Our numbers do fluctuate in the holidays still and up and down between weeks. However, we have a steady 4 or 5 coming each week with that number going up when everyone is around and able to come.

We've had grown-ups from all walk of life including foster carers. We have had a foster carer return with a different child after the original 2 were successfully adopted! We've had another foster family start with us this year which I met from a Yoga group being help before our Toddler group!

I love that people do keep coming back, it means we are doing something good! It's definitely still much needed and great to see that people are still seeing the adverts for it or sharing by word of mouth with friends, family, or even neighbours!

Beth Lissenden
Leader Parent and Toddler group

Art exhibitions/Unveiled

We delivered a full Unveiled arts and performance evening (Fridays fortnightly) plus art and heritage exhibition programme in 2025. We are seeking to deliver new cultural offers in Wickford to bring high quality art and performance to Wickford while also encouraging local talent by providing new platforms for local performers and artists. As such, we have taken part in the Wickford Voices commissioning group meetings organized by Basildon Borough Council and have worked with the Business Improvement District (BID) in Wickford Town Centre.

In 2025 we used UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies to carry out a Feasibility Study to assess the feasibility of a culture and heritage centre in Wickford situated at St Andrew's Church. The Feasibility Study confirmed the viability of developing St Andrew's as a cultural and heritage centre and suggested ways to organize such a development. Following the Feasibility Study funding applications were made to the Arts Council and Wickford Town Council. These were based on grassroots music programming and art workshops combined with musical performances. In addition, Wickford BID began delivering community cinema events at St Andrew's. Our partners on these projects began advising on the development of the cultural and heritage centre project.

Among those taking part in Unveiled have been: Tim Almond (musician); Adam Atkinson (poet); Max Blake (artist); The Choral Scholars of St Martin-in-the-Fields (choir); David Crawford (artist/musician); Revd Jonathan (poet/lecturer); Tim Harrold (poet); Ladygate Scribblers (writer's group); Simon Law (musician); Ken Porter (historian); Eva Romanakova and Andrew Palmer (singer and pianist); Neil Tye (artist); and Steve Whittle (artist). Popular Open Mic Nights have also been organized on a termly basis together with local musician John Rogers.

Our exhibitions have been: *The Way* by Steve Whittle; *Adventures in Joy* by Max Blake; and *Lily and the Masters* by David Crawford.

Many of these events have attracted excellent numbers while creating greater awareness of our churches. Schools have engaged with the art exhibitions in particular.

Revd Jonathan Evens