

Church Activities report 2025

Vicar's Introduction

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.”

Hebrews chapter 13 verses 8

Dear friends...

2025 could be summed up as the year when everything changed and yet stayed the same. As you read the fascinating reports that follow, you will see that all our various groups and activities have continued, thanks largely to the faithfulness of our wonderful volunteers. Most have flourished; some have faced challenges.

We were expecting to appoint a new vicar for St Oswald's in 2025, instead I was licensed in February as your parish priest – probably until I retire!

Bryan Milner stood down as churchwarden after many years of service but his parting gift was a list of his duties and responsibilities... Some of these he kept on, some of them he continued to support Lesley with in her role as verger, and others were divided between a lot of other people.

The PCC decided to employ an administrator for 10 hours a week and we were delighted when Nikki was appointed to the role; she was one of those who took on some of Bryan's duties under his guidance.

Then in June we unexpectedly welcomed our curate, Revd Hannah Theobald. She is a self-supporting minister which means she doesn't get paid but she still took the brave step at the end of the summer to become a full-time member of staff working alongside our other ministry team members, Jackie and Ben.

Then at the end of the year, after many years of debate, we decided to go ahead with our building plans to have an accessible toilet, a kitchenette, new heating and draught-proof porch built in the church. The process began of identifying grants and launching an appeal as well as seeking to increase our weekly giving.

Throughout the year we have welcomed new people to church – some who were just passing through, others who have joined us more regularly.

As I say a lot of changes, and yet still all that is good seems to have stayed the same. I am reminded of the school hymn, 'Everything changes but God changes not', something I believe has been echoed in our experience here at St Oswald's throughout 2025.

Yours in Christ...

Sue Sheriff – Revd Canon, Vicar of St Oswald's

Housegroups

We started the year by reflecting on the talks from a Sunday morning. This gave the opportunity to think more deeply about the scriptures and Rev Sue or Rev Gill's interpretation of them.

During Lent we followed the Come and See course. Unfortunately, we were not able to follow our usual pattern of meeting at lunchtime for homemade soup before the study, so instead we studied the material in our normal Housegroups. The course was devised by the Diocese of Exeter especially for Lent and was equally suitable for enquirers and those well established in their faith.

After Easter we looked at Book 8 of the Pilgrim Course on Church and Kingdom. This material is produced by the Church of England and like Come and See included video materials to support the Bible study and accompanying booklet.

In September we started studying the Acts of the Apostles, learning about the early church and the spread of the Gospel, a study which will continue into the New Year. For this study we followed the questions set in the Serendipity Bible, a Bible designed for small groups.

All the materials we study in Housegroups can be adapted to suit the depth of Christian experience of the group members. Each group is a safe environment to study together, to pray together and to support each other as we grow in faith.

Jackie Tuvey-Smith

Mission to Seafarers

It is St Oswald's Church nominated charity by the congregation.

The Mission to Seafarers provides help and support to the 1.89 million crewmen and women who face danger every day to keep our global economy afloat.

We continue to support the charity for the next year by our share giving. We have a Sea Sunday service each year in July. This is followed by a cake stall which raised £106.15 donations this year.

The Mission to Seafarers (MtS) information board at the back of church is regularly updated.

MtS monthly newsletter and Flying Angels magazine which provides up-to-date news can be accessed on the notice board and via the church website.

Thank you for your continued support.

Wendy Henwood

Food Bank

As a church we continue to support the Trussell Trust, an anti-poverty charity and community food bank providing emergency food and practical support to people in their hardest moments within our parish.

We have a box at the back of church for donated items of food which is regularly actively used and restocked.

We have regular updates on our weekly church newsletter on the donation of food items that are urgent or running low.

Thank you for your continued support.

Wendy Henwood

Pebbles

Pebbles is a children's group for those (aged approximately 2 to 6 years old) going out during the Sunday morning service and to meet in the small room off the main church hall.

Due to a shortage of leaders/helpers available to do Pebbles each week, the decision was made last year to offer children's groups during the morning services on the first and third Sundays each month.

Pebbles follows the Roots material – covering the theme and readings from the main church service. We start with a Bible story and often complete a craft related to the story we have learnt about – usually involving lots of sticking and drawing, before having free play with the toys in the Pebbles room once finished.

The children then return to church before the end of the service and go up to the front to proudly show off their craft to the congregation and tell everyone what they learned.

We have a really wonderful group of children who are enthusiastic and keen to engage in the activities. We have a lot of fun each week, and it is lovely to see relationships building between the children, and also with the leaders/helpers too.

Elizabeth Brown, Evelyn Courcier, Jill McCreedy and Ali Tuvey-Smith

Explorers

The start of 2025 brought a lovely group of children to the Explorers sessions in church on Sundays.

There was good communication between the leaders and helpers and most of the time the rota could be covered.

The sessions were fun and we were guided by the Roots information. The helpers really made the sessions work and sometimes we required up to three helpers to ensure a safe and enjoyable session.

Unfortunately by the autumn term, the leadership team was finding it more difficult to cover the sessions and due to personal circumstances Kathryn Wells as well as Lynne and Richard Borrows reluctantly had to retire from leadership duties at the end of the year.

We all hope that moving forward there will be people who feel called to children's work and it will continue to enrich the children's experience of church.

Kathryn Wells

Wild and Muddy Forest church at St Oswald's Church

Wild and Muddy Forest church has continued to flourish in the muddy outdoors, and we look forward to seeing each other at our meetings in the church garden area whatever the

weather. We have gained and lost some families and then new families come along, often by word of mouth. Now we have 28 children on the books who bring their grown-ups to the 1 ½ hour session on the last Saturday of the month.

We have nine amazing church helpers who are great at encouraging and talking to our forest church families and we all have fun making and creating in the great outdoors. We are looking for more helpers who love the great outdoors, so do get in touch if this is something you might be interested in. Most participants are still from the community which we are thrilled about. We have been out in all weathers and used the big tarpaulin in rain which has worked well as a shelter along with a gazebo over the tool area. Although we have had more gales this year, forest church sessions have thankfully been unaffected by these. The dry summer was challenging to keep things watered and our three water butts ran dry. Thank you to all who helped water the flowers at the traffic lights, although this wasn't a forest church activity, it kept the neighborhood looking colourful and provided flowers for people, birds and insects to enjoy.

We participated in the RSPB Great Bird Count and have continued to feed our feathered friends and put more sources of water out for birds and animals to drink from. Making fat balls is a very messy activity, but fun! We have continued to make things from recycled products; this year we planted all our seeds in toilet roll tubes. We made conker soap in the autumn and have been using it to wash our hands. We use natural resources, cones and feathers are always popular, to make crafty creations to take away. We have sown seeds and bulbs and watched them grow and flower and added flowers and vegetables to our new raised beds. We also have a new herb bed and have been using the wild plants and herbs in our cooking; we ate nettle soup in the spring, elderflower cordial in early summer, and had mint and lemon cordial in July. This year we grew onions, garlic, runner beans – sadly not successfully this year as it was too dry – tomatoes and potatoes, made soup from our harvest, made nettle fertilizer again – a very popular stirring activity. We watered everything, another very popular activity, and enjoyed and appreciated nature and each other. We have a new leaf cage to put our fallen leaves in which will mulch down to make leaf compost eventually and are very grateful to YCC for giving us money for this and our raised beds. We had another very successful wreath making session before Christmas and had a very successful wreath-decorating session at the Christmas fair attended by many families from Forest Church and Tots. The children have continued to be involved in making some flower arrangements using a grid system (not oasis), using colourful twigs, foliage and seasonal flowers mostly from local gardens to decorate the church with.

We always start our sessions with singing, mindfulness and noticing what has changed around us. This engaging with nature powerfully reminds us of a loving Creator God whose love never fails. We end our sessions with hot chocolate and vegan cookies each week before our singsong with clocky sticks and appreciating the children's creations, and end with a Celtic blessing or two.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep peace of the shining stars to you
Deep peace of the gentle night to you
Moon and stars pour their healing light
on you
Deep peace of Christ
Of Christ, the light of the World to you
Deep peace of Christ to you.

Pippa Ensor

St Oswald's Tots Group

St Oswald's Tots group runs every Thursday morning in term time in the church hall. It attracts children from birth to school and their parents and carers. The group is free and open to everyone. We have areas for babies, reading, toy kitchen activities, a ball pool, ride-on train, slide, building bricks and transport toys. We have a weekly craft table and refreshments for children and adults. This year we have continued to have occasional sensory play sessions at the craft table. We have a story, singing and worship session at the end.

We use the Jump In material developed by the Salvationist and the Diocese of Worcester's Little Seeds as the basis for our story and craft alongside. This material is rooted in the Bible.

The summer party was held in the church grounds and included a visit from the ice cream van! Father Christmas and one of his elves visited the Christmas party (we are very grateful to two of our church members!).

This is a lovely group to be part of. We have an amazing group of volunteers who run it each week. Parents and carers comment on how friendly and welcoming a group it is and how much they appreciate it. The children are delightful and clearly enjoy coming each week.

Sue Baughan

Time Out

Our monthly Time Out afternoons in 2025 for the older people in the community have been enjoyed by both the guests and our great team of helpers. We continue to be joined by residents from the Fulford, Ouse View and Broadway Lodge care homes as well as others from our local Fulford Community.

We are so lucky to have various music groups that give up their time to come and play and sing for us and we really appreciate them all. This included return visits from Steve Cassidy, the Dynamic Community band and the U3A classical guitar group. Once again the children's choirs have been a firm favourite and primary children from St Oswald's CE Primary School came to sing for both our strawberry tea afternoon held in June and our dementia friendly Christmas carol service held with Bronte House in December. Two other highlights this year were a band new to Time Out called Bandura and also a surprise visit from Elvis which was very popular.

As well as musical entertainment from visiting musicians we enjoy singalongs led and accompanied by our own team playing piano, guitar and singing and also games. 'Play Your Cards Right' gets quite competitive and we have also tried musical bingo. The cakes and scones for afternoon tea go down well and we have been told by some of the musicians that come to play for us that they really enjoy the cakes!

Time Out afternoons are a time for some fun and chat with a friendly group and everyone is very welcome to come along either as a visitor or a helper.

Angela McClean

Eco Church

As a church in this time of climate crisis, we are trying to encourage and challenge each other to be good stewards of Creation and live more simply, to rethink, refuse, reduce, reuse, repair, regift, and lastly recycle to help us become more aware of the Earth's finite resources. By living like this we can protect and nurture Creation. 'Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly' is our strap line; this includes our care and commitment to everything in our world around us, including wildlife etc.

'A Rocha Eco Church is a learning community of churches of all shapes and sizes. It provides a framework to support churches and its leadership to take practical action on caring for God's earth.' <https://arocha.org.uk/what-we-do/eco-church/>

We have put on three eco services this year and some of us took part in the World Earth Hour, switching off our electrical items and lights for one hour to show support and care for the planet in March. Will you do this, next March too?

Our eco services this year promoted the slogan, 'Let's go green together'. We looked at tea bags and how these contained hidden plastic and are not biodegradable in home compost bins as they are not hot enough. We looked at green ideas for confetti, greener options for printer paper, and looked at soy candles and celebrated all the things we have introduced in our cleaning products.

This year we have concentrated on changing our cleaning products and toilet rolls to environmentally friendly products. Our cleaning products are now biodegradable and will not harm and pollute water sources. Our toilet rolls are made from recycled paper, so have a reduced carbon footprint.

Our June eco service introduced our nature trail around church to encourage people to come in and look around our church grounds and see what we are doing to try and boost biodiversity. We had some very excited beavers and cubs attend a short talk one evening to participate in this trail. Thanks to Victoria for making loads of paper envelopes filled with sunflower seeds as a giveaway for completing the trail. We also looked at swifts and swallows which are on the red endangered list – thank you Jill. Our Eco Harvest service focused on green energy looking at hydroelectricity, solar panels, power, and green providers of electricity with an amazing model wind turbine thanks to Lewis and Christy.

We are now working towards our Gold Arocha award, although this is very hard to achieve with an old building like ours. We are still looking at the easy wins first, such as whether the candles we use are free from petroleum, and if we buy new candles can alternatives be sought. St Nicks are now recycling candle waste, so do bring all defunct candles to our mini recycling hub and put them in the drawer. We do our flower arranging in a variety of ways, so using less oasis (where we can – it is bad for the environment), using less hot house flowers and more in-season flowers, from our own gardens or hedgerows. We have surveyed our plants/wildlife in the gardens and continued to feed the birds and put out more water stations for the birds and animals. We are still restocking the church garden borders with plants, many

generously donated by a local resident who has been invaluable in helping in the gardens, thank you Judith. We have installed two raised beds and a leaf cage, thanks to a grant from YCC, which we planted up late in July and managed to grow some flowers and vegetables.

If you want to want to join our Green Team, then please contact Pippa Ensor or speak to one of our Green Team members – Victoria, Christy, Lewis, Jill, and Pippa.

Pippa Ensor

Tuesday Café

The Tuesday café continues to be a great space for the Fulford community to meet up and share conversations and friendship. We have new people attending and regulars continue to support us.

Tuesdays are cosy and convivial which encourages people who are lonely and vulnerable to come along.

Thank you to all the Tuesday volunteers and bakers who make the café possible.

Carolyn Blain

Wednesday Café

Once again I echo the statement that without the support of Carolyn who does the weekly/monthly shopping and the wonderful team of registered volunteer bakers there would be no café at St Oswald's. I would like to make an URGENT plea for one or more bakers to come forward, to make one or two cakes or traybakes each month.

The team of bakers consists of 6 regular bakers and a couple of others who step in to support at odd times. The bakers are all registered with York City Council and bake, at home, on a monthly basis ensuring that their products are clearly labelled and stored in the café freezer for the beginning of each month. They produce a wide variety of scones, cakes, biscuits and pastries which are always well received. Thanks to Terina, the bakers are paid a nominal sum each month. If anyone would like to join this team, then please chat to one of the café team.

The week-to-week staffing of the Wednesday café is done by a regular team of five/six people. Although we do not open until 10am we make a point of having a coffee at 9.30am.

This gives us the opportunity to update calendars, talk through any new training or just simply have fun. We have become firm friends and look forward to meeting not only on a Wednesday but socially as well.

We also have a team of regular customers who stay behind to help us clear away. Wiping and folding tables, bringing in advertising banners and generally returning the hall back to normal, ready for Thursday activities. This great team of often around four people help to ensure a clean, tidy hall and enable us all to get home for lunch.

Wednesday café has become a vibrant meeting for a wide variety of people both from the village and surrounding area. It is a place where customers come to socialise with friends or make new ones. Customers range from the very young to those of a more mature age. It is common for all our tables to be occupied in both rooms of the church hall, with weekly numbers averaging high 60s. Throughout the year we have regularly taken over £100 per session. Not bad when each item is still only £1.

Once a month the health walkers meet at the café at around 10am, go off on an hour's gentle walk somewhere local and then gather for coffee and cakes for the last hour of the Wednesday café. The church Wednesday morning service has supported us from the beginning and we are delighted to welcome them. Alice Hawken, Local Area Co-Ordinator from the York City Council is in attendance weekly. She offers a wide range of advice and support for those who need it. It is usual that she has made prior arrangements to meet with people but is always readily available. Fulford Parish Council also have a regular slot where they are available to answer residents queries along with Ward Surgery consultations. OCAY and Heath Watch also make use of the café. Toni our local PCSO tries to call in on a fairly regular basis. She has a bubbly personality and mixes well with customers. She also supports our Warm Space events and usually supplies some activities for children. It really is a café for the community and we are proud to be part of a very happy team.

The Wednesday friends – Barbara, Trevor, Frances, Anne, Christine, Louis, Anne, Barbara, Ian.

Thanks to all.

Barbara King

Good Place, Warm Space

This event continues to grow when we have them in school holidays. Regular attendees are faithful, and new people continue to seek us out and use the space to meet new people and

be among friends. Lots of hot drinks and cake are consumed and our food share table is warmly received. The atmosphere is always joyful and warm.

Thank you to everyone who makes these sessions possible.

Carolyn Blain

The Use of the Church Hall

It is still important to note that lockdown jolted our hall hire – both commercial use and church-based. Although we were able to restart in the autumn of 2022, many of our former hall hirers had found venues elsewhere and we needed to start afresh but cautiously, and at a reduced hall hire charge. By 2023 we were ready to restart most church-based activities including the Village Café held on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, and expanded the number of regular and occasional hall hirers. Thus, at the time of our AGM in 2023, we had a fairly full use of the hall and this continues today.

As to income from commercial hall hire – at the end of 2021 it was £1,500, at the end of the 2023 calendar year it had risen to £6,507, at the end of the 2024 calendar year to £9,178.50 (with an additional £300 or so to be paid in arrears). This is a such a good amount considering our low rate of hire (£15/hour).

It is helpful to review the use of the church hall, both commercial hire and church-based (free let) activities:

1. Monday mornings are usually the time when our cleaner is in the church hall and therefore the hall is not hired out.
2. Monday afternoons are used for TABLE TENNIS sessions organised by Keith and Jean Hood.
3. Monday evening is ZUMBA with Sam Harrison for one hour. She live-streams her session for those unable to attend in person and is grateful for the Wi-Fi facility we have in the church hall.
4. On Tuesday morning is the TUESDAY CAFÉ from 10am to noon which, from September 2023 is led by Carolyn Blain and her team. Recently, a care home has brought residents in as a treat; and occasionally there is visit by a community liaison officer or community police. Once a month, the Church Magazine team use the church hall during café hours to compile the parish magazine. Our BABY CAFÉ for young babies and their parents/carers is now a play area for young children as well.

5. Tuesday afternoon and evening. Occasionally there is church-based activity on Tuesday afternoons and the PCC meets every other month in the evenings. The LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY sometimes have a meeting on Tuesday evening.
6. On Wednesday morning is the WEDNESDAY CAFÉ from 10am to noon led by Barbara King and her team of helpers. Many groups drop into this café, as do the community police and the local councillors.
7. Starting in October 2023, there has been a WARM SPACE CAFÉ during school term breaks organised by Carolyn Blain and Victoria Burle. Sometimes this is held on Tuesdays, Wednesday and/or Thursday mornings and attracts many children and youths not able to come during school terms.
8. Wednesday early afternoon is an AFTER-SCHOOL KARATE session with Simon Flint for about an hour; followed in the evening by a two-hour session run by YORK SHOTOKAN KARATE by Michael Dean and Keith Gullan.
9. Thursday morning is reserved for our ST OSWALD'S TOTS drop in which is very popular with young children, parents and carers and features snacks, lots of toys, a story and songs.
10. Thursday afternoon has a new FULFORD ART CLUB session (organised by Louise Wheatley) which is open to all those who dabble in art – they meet two or three times a month usually 1st, 2nd and 3rd Thursdays. This leaves the last Thursday of the Month for our own TIME OUT FOR SENIORS, another very popular church initiative.
11. On Thursday evenings the GARRISON GUIDES, led by Charli Goodfellow, meet for one and a half hours.
12. In March 2024 a new Friday mornings session started for young children called RYTHYM TIME organised by Victoria Ranner which runs during school term time. On the occasional half-term breaks there might be a session of CHILDREN'S CRAFTS, run by Anthea Stock or SEWING SESSIONS led by Holly Davies (Thread and Press). Both of these occasional sessions also take place on different days of the week depending on availability.
13. Friday afternoons are still available for regular use and there is a possibility that there can be Dementia Support sessions, organised by one of the local organisations.
14. Friday evenings has an early session with GARRISON BEAVER SCOUTS led by Derick Mollans and Gemma Stevens and this is followed by a late evening session of IAIDO MARTIAL ARTS run by Ashley Hardwick. It is very difficult to hire out Friday evenings and these are very good sources of income which also meet the needs of other groups in the community.
15. On Saturday there is a variety of different use. Once a month the LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY is held 10am to noon and there are occasionally longer sessions for a

conference. From September 2024, the PITUTARY SUPPORT GROUP started to use our hall for their occasional meetings and participants come from miles away just to reconnect with others. This is organised by Dr Dominika Butler, *Postdoctoral Research Associate, Department of Biology* at the University of York. Other Saturday mornings are used for fund-raising events (for example ST LEONARD'S HOSPICE COFFEE MORNING) and craft and sewing sessions, and sometimes A MUSIC RECITAL.

16. In December 2024, the YORK MYSTERY PLAYS used our church hall for a rehearsal on a Tuesday night and for both matinee and evening performances. A truly memorable occasion.
17. CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAY PARTIES take place on Saturday mornings and afternoons and on Sunday afternoons. We have a safe venue which is large enough for an indoor medium-sized bouncy castle or space for soft play and running around. Our church-based, very popular, MUDDY CHURCH meets on the last Saturday of the month and though they are outside for 99% of the time, they do have access to the church hall.
18. Very occasionally, the church hall is hired out on a Saturday evening for a FAMILY PARTY OR WINE-TASTING (no alcohol can be sold); and there are also occasional DANCE PRACTICE SESSIONS OR MUSIC REHEARSALS. We hope in the future however, to have occasional church-based activities, for example a QUIZ NIGHT.
19. On Sunday, we have our children's groups which meet in both the Pebbles Room and the Main Hall for and then there is the regular AFTER CHURCH REFRESHMENTS. Although there might be a CHILD'S BIRTHDAY PARTY in the afternoon, apart from this there are only occasional bookings such as the LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY CHRISTMAS SOCIAL and CHRISTENING PARTIES.

From the above, I think it can be seen that we have a wide variety of activities that take place in our church hall that serve various parts of our community from the very young to the elderly. I WANT TO THANK ALL OUR HALL HIRERS for their prompt payments and responsible attitudes and their concern for their group and the church hall itself. THANK YOU also to all those who organise and help run our CHURCH-BASED ACTIVITIES. BUT equally import to thank is our treasurer who deserves our heart-felt gratitude for her skill in sorting out the payments which come by BACs, cash, cheque and card.

Finally, although our mission statement has changed, our hall use reflects "*reaching out to the community and beyond with the Christian gospel, witnessing to God's love thorough word and action, from an accessible and welcoming centre for prayer, worship, teaching and fellowship.*"

Louise Wheatley Church Hall Bookings Secretary