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Anglican Diocese of Chester – Middlewich Deanery
Mid Cheshire Circuit of the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District of the Methodist Church

St Mary's Church, Weaverham







Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Ecumenical Church Council for the year ended 31 December 2025

Incumbent
Reverend Paul Withington, The Vicarage, Church Street, Weaverham, NORTHWICH. CW8 3NJ

Minister
Reverend Janet Aspey, 38 Earls Way, Kingsmead, Northwich. CW9 8GQ

Secretary
Pam Thomson, 4 Barley Castle Close, Appleton Thorn, WARRINGTON. WA4 4SA

Treasurer
John J C Freeman, Stable Court, 20a Leigh Way, Weaverham, NORTHWICH. CW8 3PR

Banks
Santander, Bridle Road, BOOTLE. L30 4GB
CCLA Investment Management Ltd., POBox 12892, Dunmow, Essex. CM6 9DL

Honorary Independent Examiner
Kevin D Pickering, 5 Withens Close, Weaverham, NORTHWICH. CW8 3JJ

Registered Charity Number: 1135093

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, WEAVERHAM ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH COUNCIL [ECC] FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2025

St. Mary's Church is situated in Church Street, Weaverham. It is a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) between the parish church of the Church of England in the parish of St Mary in the Middlewich Deanery and Chester Diocese and the Methodist Church within the Mid Cheshire Circuit of the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District. The partnership looks for support, encouragement, advice and overview to the relevant denominations, the Diocese and the Methodist District. The correspondence address is St Mary's Lighthouse Centre, Church Lane, Weaverham, NORTHWICH, CW8 3NN.

ECC members who have served in the year are: -

Incumbent:	Revd. Paul Withington	Chairman
Methodist Minister:	Revd. Janet Aspey	
Wardens:	Robert Hough Colin Weeks	Elected 2024 ACM
	Pam Thomson John Freeman	Secretary Treasurer
Representatives on the Deanery Synod:	David Whitfield John Freeman	Elected 2023 ACM Elected 2023 ACM 1 vacancy
Methodist Stewards:	Lindsay Hough Mike Hornby	
Representatives from lay church roles:	Gilly Latham Linda Jones Jules Sanders Mike Sanders	

Elected members:	
Gillian Horth (re-elected 2023) Lindsay Hough (elected 2024) Christine Weeks (elected 2024) Sue Winnington (re-elected 2023) Jonathan Gore (re-elected 2024) Mike Hornby (re-elected 2024) 12 current members	Vicky Rushton (re-elected 2024) Denise Mitchell (elected 2024) Sue Cameron (elected 2024) Jerry Marshall (re-elected 2025) Pam Thomson (re-elected 2025) Kathryn Burgess (elected 2025)

Structure, governance and management

The method of appointment of ECC members (trustees) is set out in the Constitution of the Local Ecumenical Partnership signed in November 2009. All Church attendees are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the ECC.

The ECC met nine times during the year with Standing Committee meetings between when needed. The ACM was held on the 31st March 2025.

In November 2025, Mike Gilbertson, Archdeacon of Chester, “inspected” St Mary’s. The Archdeacon’s Inspection is a check that the administration of the church is being run properly. It includes inspection of church registers and records, insurance policies, the church log book, the inventory etc. It is also an opportunity to have a discussion with the clergy and church wardens as to the general health of the parish. Such inspections should take place every 3 years. Our inspection went well with no major issues raised.

Objectives and activities

St Mary’s ECC has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent, the Revd. Paul Withington and Methodist Minister the Revd. Janet Aspey in promoting the whole mission of the Church: pastoral, evangelical, social and ecumenical in the ecclesiastical parish. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the buildings associated with the church.

St Mary’s is fully integrated as an LEP between the Anglican and Methodist Churches in Weaverham. We worship at the Anglican Church building with our services varied between Anglican and Methodist styles and leadership.

The vision statement for St Mary’s Ecumenical Church, Weaverham is as follows:

St Mary’s Church Weaverham, sharing the light and hope of Jesus in our community.

Safeguarding

The safeguarding committee which includes Paul and Janet, Vicky and Louise have met in the last 12 months to ensure our Safeguarding Policy remains up to date and complies with the Church of England Requirements, and those of the Methodist Church. A copy of our policy is available to anyone who may want to see it. The policy has been approved by the ECC which has complied with the duty imposed under section 5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016 (duty to have regard to House of Bishops’ guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults). In addition we keep up to date with the Parish Dashboard and have joined in with meetings of parish safeguarding officers.

Louise Parry

Achievements and performance – a review of 2025

Church attendance

The current electoral roll has 105 members. We have a duality of Anglican and Methodist members; members can be either or both. Attendance varied during the year, with an average attendance on a usual Sunday of 73 adults and 6 children. At Café Church the average attendance is 43 adults and 9 children.

19 Funerals and 3 weddings were conducted and 2 baptisms took place during the year.

The service pattern at St Mary’s remained the same as the previous year. Café Church continues to be popular and is held on the first Sunday of the month. There are several families who attend regularly as do many members of the usual 10.30am congregation. Whilst attendance at the other services, Holy Communion at 8.30am on a Sunday,

Evensong and mid-week Communion are less well attended, they have a loyal congregation who value the quieter more traditional services. A “United Service” was held when there were five Sundays in the month, usually but not exclusively at 10.30am.
The sunrise service on Easter Sunday was attended by 25 people and the Easter celebration at St Mary’s was attended by 86 adults and 15 children with 76 taking Holy Communion. The Harvest and Remembrance Services took place as usual with similar attendances to 2024. However, at the Christmas Carol service there was standing room only, with people having to sit on kneelers at the back of church. At this service, John Freeman was presented with a “This is Your Life” Red Book from the village in recognition of his service to the different village communities.

Church Wardens Report
Terrier and Log Book

In the last 12 months there have been no changes to the real property holdings of St. Mary’s Ecumenical Church, Weaverham.
In June, 2025 a hard-wired Hik Vision CCTV system was purchased and installed in the church building.
Due to problems being experienced by church members with hearing impairments, at its meeting on 30 June, 2025 the ECC approved the purchase and installation of a new hearing loop system to replace the old, malfunctioning one.
An updated sound system has been purchased and is in the process of being installed. Once installed details of the system will be entered into the logbook.
During the audit for the Arch-Deacon’s inspection in November 2025, it was noted that in the period since the previous audit in 2019, 85 red hassocks (kneelers) had been sold as a part of St. Mary’s fund-raising.
R. Hough
Church Warden

Church activities and groups

Paul, Jerry Marshall and Georgina Withington visited Weaverham High School and gave some RE lessons at the school's invitation. It is hoped that the visits will be repeated in 2026.

The 2025 lent course studied The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe. We watched the film series, read from the book and discussed the Christian parallels. In December we went to The Lowry Theatre to watch a production of the play.

The following are our church groups and some have submitted reports. Most of our groups continue to thrive. However, a small group met twice in the year to maintain contact. Once in the summer and at Christmas to make gingerbread houses.

Home Groups are rightly recognised as an important aspect of St Mary's Church.

The Mothers Union Branch of St Marys

St Mary's Choir continue to lead congregational singing at the Sunday 6.30pm evening service,

Rambling Group - Meets for occasional Saturday morning walks of 3-4 miles.

Crafts and Upcycling Shed - Meets on Thursdays in the Lighthouse Annexe.

Crafts

There are 16 regular members and from a health and safety aspect we are now technically full to capacity and unable to accept new members.

In many ways we are a victim of our own success, however, we also have to be realistic re numbers and what Gilly and I can cope with to ensure every member leaves with a well made item. We are a diverse group meeting together to share our common interest in paper crafts and predominantly card making. Experience is varied form complete beginners to advanced crafters. A core group of ladies have been with us since we initiated this activity over four years ago. We both see a lot of caring and sharing within the group and have witnessed the development of friendship groups extending outside of the craft sessions. Many of our members are from St Mary's congregations, one lady from St Bede's and other ladies of no current church affiliation. It's a joy for us to see that craft group members now support many of St Mary's social activities. We started by using materials and resources which Gilly and I had, and continue to have available, and, which are prepared at home and carried to group, including various heavy cutting machines.

In the past year we were awarded a Community Grant of £200 from Gillian Edward's discretionary Council Award Scheme. This enabled us to buy a die cutting machine which we are now able to leave in our locked cupboard at the Lighthouse. This cupboard was a wardrobe donated by a neighbour which the gentlemen from the Up cycling group made fit for purpose for our use. You will appreciate that with 16 regular members using supplies, we are running low on many items and are currently waiting the award of a grant from the Parish Council Community Award Scheme. This will enable the replenishment of card stock, stamp pads, stamps, dies etc. The format of our group is based on Gilly and I facilitating alternate weeks. Each facilitator designs a weekly project and arrives at group with the project and all materials for 16 attendees to complete. Following a demonstration

the group then set about creating their master pieces. Both Gilly and I encourage individuality and application and don't expect to see 16 clones of our project. Occasionally members of the local community call in to seek help with projects they're doing at home. These have mostly been knitting queries and with some expert knitters within the group questions have been happily and satisfactorily answered. We have been asked to take on some larger community projects which we have needed to decline as we're not established as a community material repair group. I needed to turn down a request to darn ski socks!! Group members pay £4.00 weekly for the session which covers all the materials for that day with a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit. We are very grateful not to have to pay for the use of The Lighthouse, otherwise our charges would prevent some members attending. We accommodate known hardships. It's certainly a 'not for profit group' but, it is a group for sharing ideas, knowledge, skills, fellowship and understanding of the needs of others. It's a group where members can feel welcome, safe and respected for who they are and what they are without any judgement. Gilly and I both enjoy our Thursday morning sessions and feel great joy at seeing everything assembled for the weekly photo. Whilst we might get to lunchtime exhausted we're thrilled and amazed to see the development and growth within the Thursday morning craft group members.
June and Gilly

Upcycling
In spite of David being unable to join us every week, it's good to see him when he can make it for a coffee and to offer us advice and give us the benefit of his expertise. Upcycling has continued with the usual variety of projects ranging from the inevitable furniture repairs, restoration of painted or varnished finishes and the occasional bird box. The most significant job this year was the replacement of the garage doors, which has improved the appearance of the work area considerably. It presented many challenges, including the out of squareness of the door opening and the need to accommodate a change of top hinges. Ongoing currently is the preparation of chairs to enthrone 'royalty' at the upcoming village Rose Fete.
We have suffered from unfavourable weather conditions for several weeks since Christmas, which prevent us from setting up outside. Such occasions are where the other significant feature of upcycling makes itself evident – fellowship. It's amazing where conversations lead over a cup of coffee and a chocolate digestive. They might even have ventured as far discussing particular issues for an outstanding project on restart.
June and Gregor

Music Group – this group of singers and musicians lead the music at the 10.30am services

Sticky Fingers - Sticky Fingers is our Toddler group that runs on Monday mornings, 9.15 – 10.45am. It is run by 4-6 volunteers every week in term time, ` and is attended by approx. 22 adults and 22 children each week. Some families have more than 1 adult who attends, and some have more than 1 child. We have a broad mix of parents and grandparents who attend from the local community and the wider area. Each week they are divided into 3 groups and then rotated through each section: Singing, Craft / Free play, and Snack. The singing and craft are always based on a theme with a Christian message or a Bible story. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to share faith and build connections and community with our families.
We are extremely grateful to all our volunteers who make delicious cakes, prepare crafts, sing, look after the kitchen and welcome everyone. Each family has a different story and journey that we are able to share in some small way. We would value prayers for Jesus to

become real through the work that we do, and for the strength and health of our team, as we reach out to others. *Vicky Rushton*

Tuesday Café – a regular fixture in the village calendar supported by members of the congregation and other village residents.
We began our café Nov 2021. We were coming out of lock down and people were needing a chance to rejoin the world outside. Over that time numbers have risen, friendships been made or reconnected and lonely people have found a safe place with a warm and friendly greeting.
We hold special cafe sessions for Christmas, Easter and Valentines Day, all with raffles meaning we've raised around £1,000 for St Luke's Hospice and cancer research. This year we also had singers visit the café at Christmas and VE Day and they were enjoyed by all of us. We hosted a Macmillan coffee morning for the first time this year. Over the 5 years we have raised £11k for Lighthouse funds, but more importantly we think we have made a lot of people happy and served our church and community well.
Norma, Marcia and Sue

Bell Ringing – The bellringers continue to thrive. We have a regular band of 16 experienced ringers which includes 4 young people and there are two more youngsters learning to ring at the moment. We are also teaching people to ring from other towers and helping others progress. We regularly have visitors come to us from Lower Peover, Great Budworth and Daresbury, Hartford and Weaverham ringers support the ringing at other local towers. There were some notable events this year for the ringers. Kath Burgess was awarded a British Empire Medal for services to girls' football so we rang a special quarter peal to celebrate her achievement. We rang for the VE day commemorations but unfortunately we couldn't ring for VJ day, most of us were at The Crystal Maze in Manchester helping Pam celebrate a significant birthday – the young people on the teams were very helpful in most of the challenges.
Pam Thomson

Fund Raising - The fund-raising campaign "Raising the Roof" has now become "Building the Future". The original aim to raise sufficient funds to repair the damaged areas of the roof and stonework pointing has been completed. The fund-raising group arranged a few events during the year and money raised will go towards updating the heating system which is becoming slightly less reliable. During the year we held three concerts, we hosted The Warrington Male Voice Choir in March, in May the Weaverham Community choir came for what now has become an annual event and in September The Swinging Woodpeckers entertained us. Our final fund raiser was a "Race Night" in October with kind thanks to the warden from St Peter's Little Budworth for helping us run the event. All these events, especially the concerts were supported by the community as well as St Mary's congregation. It is hoped that when we have firmer plans for the funds needed for the heating system more events will be organised in the future.
Pam Thomson

INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS'S REPORT TO THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF SAINT MARY THE VIRGIN, WEAVERHAM

This report on the accounts of the ECC for the year ended 31 December 2025 is in respect of an examination carried out in accordance with the Church of England Accounting Regulations 2006 (the Regulations) and Section 3 of the Charities Act 1993 (the Act). As members of the ECC you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts; you consider that the audit requirements of the Regulations and Section 43(2) if the Act do not apply. It is my responsibility to issue this report on those accounts in accordance with the terms of the Regulations.

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general directions given by the Charity Commission under Section 43(7)(b) of the Act and to be found in the Church of England Guidance, 2006 edition. That examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the ECC and a comparison of the accounts with those records. It also includes considering any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given on the accounts.

In accordance with my examination, no matter has come to my attention which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements to keep accounting records in accordance with Section 41 of the Act, to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the requirement of the Act and the Regulations have not been met; or to which, in my opinion attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Kevin D Pickering – Hon Independent Examiner – April 2026

FINANCIAL REVIEW

There was an overall operating loss of £2531. Despite an operating surplus at the Lighthouse of £2476 it resulted in an overall loss of £5007 on church activities. Two grants were received during the year one from the Archbishop's Council of £1209 towards improving the PA system in church and the other of £2500 from the Brian Wilson Trust towards the cost of a defibrillator. Our modest investment made a loss of £68. Overall giving increased by £435 which is insufficient to sustain the church going forward. Work continues on improving the Church's PA system.

RESERVES POLICY

Reserves policy remains to hold at least £25 000 to cover three months of normal church activities and £10 000 against any urgent repairs. A donation of £30 000 has been received towards heating system improvements.

ACCOUNTING POLICY

The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Church of England Accounting Regulations taking into account the SORP 2005 revisions on a receipts and payments basis including as far as possible most Church activities being reported on a gross basis. Movable church furnishings are held on trust for the Council by the Churchwardens and would require faculty approval before removal. The Mothers Union accounts are not included as they respond to their headquarters for accounting purposes.

ACCOUNTS FOR THE 12 MONTHS ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2025

	Notes	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	*2024*
RECEIPTS		£	£	£	*£*
Voluntary income	A	103221		103221	*117680*
Church activities	B	18253		18253	*17414*
Fund raising		2635		2635	*7139*
Income from investments	C	3883	102	3985	*4542*
TOTAL		**127992**	**102**	**128094**	***146775***
PAYMENTS					
Church activities	D	126415		126415	*151129*
Fund raising		2405		2405	*1652*
Salaries		1737		1737	*1406*
TOTAL		**130557**		**130557**	***154187***
NET INCOMING RES.		-2565	102	-2463	*-7412*
Gain on investments			-68	-68	*46*
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS		**-2565**	**34**	**-2531**	***-7366***
BALANCES AT 1 JANUARY		795067	2908	797975	*805341*
BALANCES AT 31 DEC		**792502**	**2942**	**795444**	***797975***

BALANCE SHEET 31 DECEMBER

FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible asset – Lighthouse		684440		684440	*684440*
Investment assets			1643	1643	*1711*
CURRENT ASSETS					
Short term deposits	E	80509	1299	81808	*88837*
Cash at banks	E	27533		27533	*22986*
TOTAL		**792502**	**2942**	**795444**	**797974**

The notes A to E form part of the accounts

A Voluntary income

Planned giving				
Gift aid	69518		69518	*68109*
Tax recovered	19232		19232	*25339*
Other	6067		6067	*7602*
Collections	3518		3518	*2840*
Donations general	1177		1177	*1294*
Grants Archbishop's C.	1209		1209	*7000*
Brian Wilson T.	2500		2500	*4496*
Legacy	0		0	*1000*
	103221		103221	*117680*

B Church activities

Lighthouse	14604	14604	*12752*
Fees	3649	3649	*4662*
	18253	18253	*17414*

C Income from investments	£	£	£	*£*
Deposit account	3863		3863	*4417*
Wayleave	20		20	*20*
War Memorial	___	102	102	*105*
	3883	102	3985	*4542*

D Church activities				
Giving				
Overseas missions	3500		3500	*1100*
Development agencies	2500		2500	*2500*
Home missions	2200		2200	*2500*
Ministry				
Parish share	70213		70213	*68169*
Circuit fee	6240		6240	*5970*
Other ministry costs	7223		7223	*6857*
Church heat, light and water	9058		9058	*6747*
Church running and maint.	10239		10239	*13819*
Training	21		21	*349*
Lighthouse	10279		10279	*11172*
Major projects	2531		2531	*29803*
Administration	2411		2411	*2143*
	126415		126415	*151129*

During the year the ECC employed a verger and relied on casual organists. The organists deal with their own tax liabilities and payments to the verger are too small to attract social security payments. Reimbursement of out of pocket expenses were made to some members of the ECC, all supported by the necessary invoices.

E Cash balances at 31 December				
Current account	5545		5545	*3434*
Deposit account	80509		80509	*87641*
Lighthouse	22008		22008	*19532*
War Memorial deposit		1299	1299	*1196*
War Memorial 74 CBF shares		1643	1643	*1711*
	108062	**2942**	**111004**	**113534**

Approved by the Ecumenical Church Council at the annual meeting held on 20th April 2026.

Reverend Paul Withington
Incumbent

Canon John J C Freeman
Hon treasurer