

Rectors Report 2026

Not a fully scripted report at this stage – apologies and not apologies! Once I've shared, you'll see that what I see as a vital next step for us is going to require me to write something more substantial, in conjunction with the Stewards.

In my prayer and preparation for this evening, here are my reflections on where we are:

Fundamentals (1) – Gratitude. One of our key strengths as a community is encouragement. Not perfect, of course – but it is a strength. A larger church means more opinions, potentially competing ones. We must remain rooted in gratitude and encouragement.

(2) Love. As our book and course this term has reminded us, the only definition of success according to Jesus is love. We judge ourselves by our capacity to love God, each other and the world. We continue to grow – average Sunday attendance was 64 in 2023, 72 in 2024, 83 in 2025, and 97 so far this year (baseline of 42 in 2018), and we celebrate that – but that's not the ultimate definition of success. As I said last year and will keep saying, biggest challenge is to make sure that the things which draw people to St Mary's (that sense of a loving family) remain key strengths, as those things will be most under attack.

Review of last year's priorities: (1) Finances – continue to improve. A significant surplus. Need to think strategically about long-term. If we want to sustain our growth, we'll need paid staff (not just me). Without it, our growth will probably stall. We do brilliantly running everything with volunteers – but there's a limit to how far you can take that.

(2) Developing teams and more leaders – some progress – maintenance (churchyard looks as good as its ever done) and B is now pushing forward with developing welcome and pastoral work. Also more people involved on Sundays than ever, and new young adults group (TNT). I've shared with the stewards that what we're starting to do now with welcome and pastoral care will be added to with prayer and mission and evangelism, and also creative and musical. Purposely not rushing – tempting to launch teams all at once – we go at a sustainable pace.

Personal reflections – Sabbatical – (1) you all did great without me – sign of our health

(2) 3 reflections: (a) hit the ground walking (b) what I can offer – wisdom, discernment, unity; (c) leading out of weakness and not strength – in the bible is highest form of leadership, 'Christ's power is made perfect in weakness.' Recognising my limits. I've been leading out of strength, but as I get older, that becomes less and less tenable. Slowly learning what that means – it's not easy!

Since I've got back – some stuff I handed over I haven't taken back, which has freed up time and capacity; pastoral workload is higher and heavier than ever. Overall workload remains challenging.

(3) Noticed how many ideas and possibilities we have. I celebrate that – but am also conscious that we don't have a framework against which to evaluate those ideas and plans. We've seen rapid growth and change – we're happy, but also no clear sense of how this all shapes our future.

So my main proposal to share this evening is that I believe we need to look at our vision i.e. to work out who we are now and what we're about. This is positive, we start with a blank sheet – what does the Lord want us to be? We can dream dreams! We need to pray and seek the Lord, and also to discuss together what that looks like. Not going to do that this evening, this is the work of the next few months – but I think we need it now, in this season.

Matt, 16th March 2026