

Annual Report

2025



Serving the community,
sharing the good news

MINISTER'S REPORT

2025 was a busy and productive year. So much has happened it is hard to recall everything.

The first thing that came to my mind was Easter Trail. This time last year we were in full swing planning and preparing for that and it was hard work! But I am sure you will all agree it was a huge success in so many ways. First of all, it showed how we can work together to achieve what seems impossible! It also showed what hunger there is within our schools for events like this. 180 children and their teachers/volunteers were immersed in the story of Easter in a way that will stay with them for a long time. I'm sure it had a lasting impression on the schools too which has been seen by our increased relationship with them.

Our open the book team is going strong. It was resumed in September 2024 after covid and the team have won the trust of the schools. As well as sending children to the Easter Trail the schools have been keen to partner with us in delivering some of the RE curriculum. I recall events where the schools have brought classes to us, so that we could help them to understand why easter is so important to Christians. And we were delighted to offer a family fun day during the recent half term holiday which also included an "Open the book" story session.

We are currently preparing to run Easter trail again, and hope to reach even more children this time by bringing other schools on board.

Our children's work is growing, it is good to have some more children joining us on Sunday mornings and at Brigade on a Friday, they bring lots of joy into our fellowship and we give thanks for them. It was a joy to welcome Ava into Junior church membership in November. We do need to find new ways of involving the children and giving them ways to participate in the fellowship that will keep them wanting to be a part of this church community. If anyone has more ideas on that please talk to myself or Sonja. I would also like to express grateful thanks to our junior church team who work so hard in teaching and nurturing faith in our children.

Foodbank has continued strong and provided for the needs of many families. This is run by a strong team and there is no shortage of volunteers. It is good to see that people who are navigating difficult times are made to feel welcome, treated with dignity and respect and if needed can be directed to more help via the Money matters team. It is lovely to see the unconditional love of Christ shown in such a hugely practical way.

Similarly Welcome space has gone from strength to strength, providing a safe and welcoming space for those who would otherwise be at risk of isolation to make and maintain good friendships, keep active with the gentle exercise or just have some fun with our bingo days. It really does feel like a warm and welcoming family now. Many of those who enjoy welcome space have also taken part in other church activities, including church services, afternoon teas and concerts. This is such a wonderful enriching programme that will no doubt be boosting the self-confidence and mental health of its participants.

We have had a wonderful programme of social events throughout the year including concerts, craft fairs, meals and afternoon teas which have been enjoyed by all. We are immensely grateful for the team who organise these events as they add to the depth of fellowship here.

Bible study, is continuing well under the leadership of Colin Keen, and a great development has been the addition of an evening study which has meant that more people are able to join us who are unable to do Tuesday afternoons. So, we now have 2 Bible study opportunities every month and I am sure all who attend would agree that this is a wonderful opportunity for us to explore faith together, asking questions and reflecting on things ourselves instead of just listening to someone else's interpretation of it. This is invaluable for growing our relationship with God and each other, and our confidence in personal study. It is a relaxed and friendly group who would welcome any others who wish to join on the 1st Tuesday at 2pm or 3rd Tuesday at 7:30pm.

Our new regime of monthly Elders and by-monthly Church meetings is going well. I am sure we all appreciate the shorter meetings. And I personally feel we get more work done in a less stressful way now. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of attendance at these meetings which is why we have made such efforts to make them more user-friendly.

I was saddened that we are no longer working to put on events in the park with our neighbouring churches, but it has been decided that we would be more effective being a church presence at the events that the whole community have in the park and at other venues around the area, things like “Armed Forces Day” or “the pig run”. We would welcome any information about other events that we could look to get involved in.

Landau College are continuing to tend our gardens and it’s lovely to interact with them on a Tuesday morning when they come and enjoy a break with us at Welcome space. We hope to grow that relationship further this year. We are very grateful for the hard work they put into keeping our garden spaces tidy and I think they are doing a fantastic job.

Sundays are becoming very busy here. It has been a joy to offer space to Kingdom Life Apostolic Chapel (KLAC) church on Sunday afternoons. So, every week there are two distinct and diverse groups of Christians lifting the name of Jesus in worship in our buildings. This opens up the way for people from many different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities to be blessed with knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. All glory to God who unites us all as one family in Christ.

Once a month (On the Monday after I have led worship) I come to Longton to pray, I am pleased that a few have joined me from time to time and have found it beneficial to think carefully about what we do here and to seek God’s guidance. We have seen some lovely answers to prayer in the last year and those who have come together to pray always leave feeling uplifted and encouraged. I encourage all to come together for that time of prayer. It is relaxed and no pressure is given for anyone to pray out loud, but I guarantee it will encourage you and help you grow. **“Where two or three are gathered together in prayer, there I am in the midst of them.”** (Matthew 18:20)

Karen Jones,

Minister

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH COMMUNITY PROJECT AWARDS 2025

Sponsored by Congregational (Insurers) and in association with Reform Magazine, the URC seek annual nominations from their churches about work done with & for their local communities. This year we decided to nominate our church for this prestigious award by showing how we have built, not just one link with our community but several, taking one step at a time.



Thanks to the support of our congregation, friends and family, not only have we built these various links (all of which you will see reported on, in this Annual Report) but we have also managed to maintain and grow them, with plans to do even more in the coming years!

As most of you will know, our nomination, and the subsequent filming to capture what we do, resulted in the award of one of the prizes offered for projects making a positive contribution to their local community.

Congratulations to us all!

FOODBANK 2025



Well, another year has passed and we are still going strong. This is not a good thing as Foodbank started over 10 years ago as a short-term solution and at this time there still does not seem to be an end to the need.

On saying, this we have been so lucky here at the church with all the support you give us both with your food donations, which go to the warehouse in Magdalen Road for general distribution, and your financial donations, which enable us to buy the extras like toothbrush, toothpaste, shower gel and a small amount of cleaning products as extras for our guest. We also purchase stronger shopping bags for the guests that have to walk home so it is easier for them to get their shopping home safely, your financial support with this is wonderful.

We have sent down to the warehouse approx. 2480 lbs (1126 kgs). That means you have donated over 1 tonne of food and again we are very grateful for this.

This year we have filled 381 vouchers in total, approx. 977 people. Not only did all these people go home with the food sent to us from the distribution centre they went home with all the extras as listed above.

We do our best to make sure our guests go away feeling a little better than when they arrived.

It's that time of the year when we get the opportunity to thank all the volunteers who have supported us throughout the year as we could not do this without you. We lost Maureen and Clive from the team as they felt it was their time to have a rest but we still have a strong team of 11 THANK YOU to All of you past and present.

With God's Blessing we serve

Mary & Philippa

CHOIR REPORT 2025



In May of this year, the choir finally managed to present our Singalonga Abba evening at both Longton and Tomkin. Thanks to everyone who attended and supported this event.

We were very happy to welcome Lisa, Graeme and Colin.

We held our Hymns and Pimms service in July, joined Tomkin to celebrate their 160th Anniversary in July, took the Good Friday service at Longton, the Harvest services at Longton and Tomkin and the Christmas services at both places

Three Craft Fairs were organised this year in March, June and November. Special thanks to everyone who helped with these especially the kitchen dream team who provided outstanding refreshments to sustain us all.

Once again, we visited Coopers Croft Care Home to sing Christmas Carols.

Six Town Sound is an outstanding a cappella group who rehearse in our church. Only two years after forming, they won silver at the Barbershop of Iberia Association Convention in Spain, and this now qualifies them to represent Stoke-on-Trent at the World Championships in the USA in 2026. Imagine the pressure when they invited our choir to join them in a Christmas concert in December! Despite being nervous, they made us feel very relaxed. We managed to perform well and had a most enjoyable evening.



Shannon has risen to the challenge of improving our skills and we now enjoy her exercises with us at the start of each rehearsal.

I would encourage anyone who is interested to come along and join our choir family.

Janet Harper

BIBLE STUDY GROUP 2025

The Bible study group meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 2.00pm and third Tuesday at 7.30pm to discover what the Bible has to reveal for us today.

This year, 2025, we have studied two books: Hebrews & Romans, discussed the whole Bible story using The Bible Society study course and looked into Advent and its significance. Going into 2026 our first book to study is The Revelation of John.

Our membership on average is 10 on Tuesday afternoon and 4 on Tuesday evening.

It would be great if we could increase our numbers, on the third Tuesday especially, so I invite anyone who is interested to come along and join us.

WIVES GROUP REPORT 2025



2025 was another great year for the wives group. Our membership has remained constant at 19 but new members are always welcome and encouraged.

Our calendar saw us enjoy our regular activities, such as pie and pea supper, Christmas craft night and a fun quiz. One of our favourite events was our Christmas meal, provided by the fabulous Dollybirds once again, delicious food all round!

We have once again had visits from some very entertaining guest speakers, the first gentleman gave us technophobes some great advice on how to stay safe online in a world full of technology, it was greatly appreciated. Kath Reynolds talked to us about having babies in the 50's and 60's and the essentials needed at that time. We had a great visit from a man who instructed us in the art of playing African drums, it was entertaining if not tuneful when we all joined in. Unfortunately, Melanie Latham, had car issues which stopped her visiting us to talk about jam making, but luckily for us we have managed to book her in for 2026!

We already have a busy year planned for 2026, but if you come across anything you think we might enjoy please let us know.

Thank you to all of our members for their continued loyalty and support, it really is a team effort. Please come along and enjoy fun and fellowship with us.

Mary Harrison,
Group Leader

THE CRAFTY FRIENDS 2025



Well, here we are again, after another productive year!

For anyone who doesn't know who we are, here is a little info about what we do!

We are a group of knitters, crocheters, and sewers, who make various items for the neo natal hospital, care homes for the elderly, the homeless in the way of blankets and Age UK. We also make things to sell for the Church funds at the craft fairs.

Anyone wishing to join us will be made quite welcome as the more the merrier!

This year our production has gone very well, consisting of:

60 prem baby hats, 4 new born cardigans, 30 hats 2 mittens and 1 pair of booties, 14 baby blankets for the neo natal unit

32 twiddle muffs for the elderly

25 homeless blankets

7 lap blankets

68 bobble hats for the homeless

246 smoothie bottle hats for Age UK.

This year to commemorate Remembrance Day, with the help from Junior Church and various members of the congregation we made 230 crocheted, knitted and paper poppies which were made into a beautiful display in Church! Amazing!

So once again, I would like to extend a big thank you to everyone who contributed in any way for these things to happen. Let's hope that 2026 proves to be as good! God Bless.

Joyce Tabbinor,
Co Ordinator

OPEN THE BOOK 2025



2025 was a year full of storytelling!

Once again, we shared Bible stories on a fortnightly basis at both Sutherland and Newstead Primary Academies. During each school term we followed the suggested list of stories, helping to reinforce their RE curriculum. At the start of the winter term Sutherland asked us to include children in school year 2 rather than year 4, so over the two schools combined we now bring the Bible to the attention of children from years 2, 3, & 4.

The children always seem pleased to see us and very receptive to the stories, participating enthusiastically, and reflecting on what they have heard and seen.

At Sutherland, Denise and I were invited to a full-school assembly celebrating the school and the children's links with various groups within the local community. And at Newstead we met with the School Council (made up of 2 or 3 representatives from every class in the school) to find out what more they might like from us. They had so many ideas!

We look forward to working with both schools over the coming year as we look to take on board ideas from both schools to build on our current relationships both at school, at church and for the benefit of the local community.

A big thank you to all of the Open the Book team for their continued enthusiasm throughout the year and a warm welcome to our newest team member, Cynthia, who joined us at the start of the Winter term. At each of our fortnightly visits we continue to reach out to approximately 180 children, many of whom may otherwise never hear a story from the Bible!

If you are interested in joining us, new members are always welcome and your prayers for our efforts even more so!

Kath Warren,
Co Ordinator

WELCOME SPACE 2025

2025 has seen our Welcome Space Group continue to consolidate in all ways. Numbers remain consistently around 20 to 24 and, when the weather is dry, we also continue to make welcome the students and teachers from Landau College who join us for tea and toast before going outside to mow the grass and keep our church gardens looking neat and tidy.

Connections with the church continue to grow via weekly donations; making/donating items for the church stall at craft fairs; or knitting hats to support our 'Crafty Friends' Christmas tree of woollen hats which are then given out to the homeless. Church Afternoon Teas are always a big hit with our members and we saw some at church services linked to the Church birthday, Easter and Christmas. We spent time recalling memories of WWII and VE Day and, as part of our city's centenary celebrations we shared memories of our lives in Stoke-on-Trent in a display for the Church's All-Age Festival service on the 4th May. Then in July we took part in the city's record-breaking event, The Big Centenary Tea Party!



In amongst our weekly meetings, as well as hot drinks, toast and biscuits on offer, bingo remains a regular fortnightly feature together with a monthly exercise class designed to help with mobility and balance, and a monthly visit from an outside speaker. Since July the speaker has been provided by our local PCN covering a range of subjects to improve health and well-being for those of us in our later years!

Our team of 10 volunteers continue to help out on a rota basis, setting up, serving hot drinks and making toast. They also continue to join in the chat, the bingo and the exercise. And to end the year members and volunteers sat down together for the second year to enjoy a delicious Christmas dinner with all the trimmings!

Thanks to all involved throughout 2025. And if you want to join us as a visitor, or a volunteer in 2026 please come along on a Tuesday morning between 10 and 12. You will be made very welcome.

THE EASTER TRAIL

After 5 weeks of preparations our church sanctuary was transformed into Jerusalem in the year 33AD, showing 4 key scenes from the Easter story. Then during the first week of April we invited the Open the Book children from Newstead and Sutherland Primary Academies to visit the church to engage in the story in a way we have never tried before. Together with our Friday night Brigade children and adults from across the Pastorate and amongst our ecumenical friends, we guided over 200 people through the story.



Visiting the upper room, they sat amongst the disciples and heard about how the Passover meal became the Last Supper; they followed Jesus into Gethsemane and hid from the soldiers; they watched as a sad and confused Peter told the story of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion; and they witnessed the joy of Mary after she had seen the risen Christ.



Comments at the time and since, suggest it was a great success! But that success would not have been possible without the help and support of those involved in creating/painting the scene backdrops; clearing the sanctuary walls and moving furniture; building the scenes; loaning items used as props; acting out the story; creating the sound effects/lighting; providing and supervising craft activities; providing refreshments; and finally taking everything down and restoring the sanctuary back to almost its former glory in time for Sunday services to resume in their usual place! I won't name you all, for fear of missing anyone out, but you know who you are, and I can't thank you all enough!



JUNIOR CHURCH

2025 - a year which saw a few changes amongst our children and young people. In the older group our "regulars" (Charlotte, Ava and Thomas) said farewell to the twins when their stay with Sandra's son came to an end, then later in the year we welcomed Patricia and Caleb (and their mum, Helen). Josh introduced us to his baby brother, Vinnie, and together with Lily, the three of them continue to keep Christine, ably supported by Norah, on her toes in our creche! Finally, the year ended with a very special moment for us all, as Ava committed to Junior Membership with the blessing of the full church.

Now here's some of what else we got up to!



Janet Parsons, Chris Cotterill, Kath Warren and Liesa Hollins

BRIGADE



New strength for new challenges - Isaiah 40 v 28-31

Challenges of life can feel overwhelming at times, but we do not need to have the strength to do it on our own, but trust in God, whose strength is limitless, to rise above our struggles. The everlasting God, creator of the earth, never grows weary and gives power to the weak.

Brigade took part in a number of events during 2025 including another trip to Ninja warrior and also held a coffee morning to raise funds.

On a Friday evening staff spend their time supporting the members in lots of ways and encourage learning in a fun way.

The first half of the year they learnt about challenges that they may face and what support they could get and the second half of the year they studied the seasons Autumn and Winter.

We aim to continue the seasonal theme during the first half of 2026.

We have maintained numbers throughout the year averaging with 8 young people aged from 4 to 13 (age 2 for Lily) and are looking at growing throughout 2026.

I'd like to take this opportunity of thanking all of the staff team for everything that they have done and am pleased to welcome Amy, who is our District Team Leader, to our team.

Sonja Stevenson
Brigade Team Leader.

STOP PRESS

Earlier this year a social prescriber who visited Welcome Space and was interested to hear about other activities at our Church, asked if he could nominate us for a community Action Grant. Of course, we agreed and ...

*You have been awarded a **Community Action Grant!***

***Congratulations** on your successful application! We are delighted to let you know that the Longton Town Forum has approved your award of a Community Action Grant in the sum of £1,000.*

The passion, commitment and impact demonstrated in your work truly stood out, and we are so pleased to be supporting the difference you are making in our community.

Date: February 2026 to Outreach at URC Longton: £1,000 for capital equipment for community benefit.

Longton Community Action Grants are administered by Urban Wilderness CIC, approved by Longton Town Forum and funded by UK government and Stoke-on-Trent City Council through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

We look forward to reporting at the 2027 AGM how this will have been put to good use!