

Parish of Alston Moor. Curate's report for 2025

This is the first and if I'm being honest, I hope the only, parish report that I have to write for an APCM. This is necessarily a transition period for all of us as a) I'm in the process of preparing for ordination as priest b) and the parish is in a time of vacancy. We are hopeful that for next year we will have a new full-time vicar in post. Until then you will have to put up with me!

In his report last year Mark wrote "for all the challenges we face, the Holy Spirit is doing exciting things here, and it's a joy to be part of the life of the church on Alston Moor". This is a sentiment that I'm pleased to reiterate

Worship

In last year's report, Mark informed us that his vocation might be changing – since then he has taken up a new role as a prison chaplain. Whilst this was not a shock since he had shared his feelings with the parish for over a year, the time for his final service on the 28th of September came round far too rapidly. It is only with Mark and Bar leaving that many of us have found out just exactly how much hard work the pair of them did in our parish, often largely unseen and we all miss them. Speaking entirely personally I not only lost my Priest but also my new training incumbent, and whilst I am thankful that this role has been taken on by Revd. Steve Wright, much of the day to day / week to week organisation of worship has necessarily fallen to me and the remaining worship team, as well as the churchwardens. We have also been wonderfully supported by the cathedral team as well as our local retired clergy. Lizzie, Richard and Richard have shared in the increased worship workload and I am always amazed how my lack of planning often turns into their emergencies!

But with a change of leadership comes new opportunities and our preparations for Easter this year started with Bishop Helen Ann who broke her holiday time to take our Ash Wednesday service. On Maundy Thursday several of us attended the Chrism mass in the cathedral and in the evening, Bishop Mark travelled to Garrigill to take our evening Eucharist along with the stripping of the altar in preparation for Good Friday. Our Sunday services have been supported by Archdeacon Catherine the Revd. Steve Wright and Revd. Philip Greenhalgh as well as our own dear Bar. Hopefully we will be less reliant on visiting priests when I am ordained at Petertide, although I still won't be expected to take services every week. Throughout the year the pattern of our other services has largely stayed intact; Richard Glover kindly takes the monthly service at Garrigill, Lizzie and Dave often support the team at Nenthead, with Madeleine often leading worship. And I am gradually getting used to morning and evening prayer in the BCP tradition at Kirkhaugh again ably supported by Richard Graham. I spotted with delight on one Sunday Lee Batby, the Dean of the cathedral, who was taking morning

communion, sending a selfie to all his diocesan friends of him warming himself on the open fire in the vestry! I am only too aware of the fact that I have not been able to support Knarsdale church as often as I would have wanted, although we are now planning a blessing of the lamb service later this month. The runup week to Christmas was manic, I took/ supported eight services – not to be repeated next year unless we have a new incumbent. Lent and the Easter season was much more manageable for me – I suspect because there were fewer ‘community’ services than at Christmas. The ecumenical Holy Communion at the chat room and the service at Grisedale Croft continue to be supported by members of the parish as well as other (mainly Methodist) Christians on the moor. Speaking of Grisedale Croft, Dave and Lizzy also spend time in the community garden every week and the open day held was wonderfully attended. On a day-to-day basis Lizzie and I share taking daily offices and we continue to share compline online every Friday evening.

Baptisms weddings and funerals

Our baptism and funeral ministries continue to be appreciated by the community and again I am very thankful to the worship and music team who support these services again often at short notice. I particularly enjoy sharing these ministries with the wider team and churchwardens. The pattern of occasional services continues to change - the number of funerals in all churches in the diocese continue to fall in the wake of direct cremations - there were seven funerals held in the parish this year. There were no weddings in the parish again this year although we are now planning one in July and one in September 2026. We have taken seven baptisms in the parish this year with three being held in Garrigill, over twice as many as last year and it is a delight to see this church in particular being so wonderfully supported by the community.

Church and community life

The PCC and standing committee continue to meet regularly although now under the leadership of the lay chairs. The churchwardens and the leadership team have not met since Mark departed to York although I'd like to re commence this again. The same is true with the pastoral visitors group we're still doing the work of the pastoral visiting just holding fewer meetings each year. Not all of the people for whom we have pastoral care are from the congregations and I have valued Lizzies experience in this ministry, accompanying me on occasion to visit certain people.

Church buildings.

The reordering project team for Saint Augustine's continues to meet regularly. We have now largely finalised the designs full submission to the DAC although everything seems to take twice as long as we want it to especially when we are dealing with the diocesan organisation. We have recently received permission to sell the various properties and land that formed Joan Walton's generous legacy, but I suspect I will be contacting Bishop Helen Ann to delay the rededication of the church (please refer to Marks report last year!). Thanks to Richard for the hard work he put into preparing the bungalow for sale only for it to be wrecked by a winter water leak – also thanks to the multiple folks that help to clear all the mess out again.

The project to renovate the vestry at St. John's Nenthead is now underway thanks largely to Simon for raising the funds. Similarly, there's been progress on the project to renovate the vestry at Garrigill with the designs almost ready for submission to the DAC. The project is supported by a generous gift from a trust and we also thank Angela for supporting the refurbishment with her pop up cafes held each month. I am however aware that we haven't made anywhere near the progress I would have liked to replace the heating at Knarsdale, but again Richard Glover continues to work on this.

Community engagement

Our engagement in the community continues largely as last year's report. Josephine continues to play the carillon, not just on Sunday's but in support of other events that happen in the town including the recent visitation by a group of American visitors. The prescription run continues, again providing a valuable service for those who find it difficult to travel to Alston. The Faith in the Moor magazine continues although much of the work of getting the magazine published now falls on Dave and Lizzie. My apologies to both as I'm always late in getting the monthly service information to them. Our engagement with the schools continues to grow, this year we've held three whole school and community services in Saint Augustine's and we continue to be welcome in the schools at any time. Madeleine, myself and Richard P have spent time in Nenthead school preparing Chris tingles with the subsequent service at St. Johns.

Other activities

I don't intend to detail every activity per Marks report last year, that goes on in the various churches or is supported by our congregations. Knarsdale continues to hold coffee mornings and both Readers Richard support the work of readers in the Deanery. Since I was ordained in June, I had to step down as one of the three Deanery representatives to the diocesan Synod although I continue to support the Deanery

Development Group. It would be nice to have this role taken by another church member. The parish also welcomed the Deanery synod and the Deanery chapter meetings this year.

Some of the other activities your local curate gets involved in include monthly ongoing training in preparation for ordination and continued curacy, visiting families in preparation for funerals, baptisms and weddings, visiting the sick at home and in hospital, attending the clergy conference in Hexham Abbey, supporting Lindisfarne theological college. And to think I retired from paid employment

The Future

We hope and pray for a short vacancy – but there is so much going on in this community and parish to be thankful for. The lack of a congregation at Lambley continues to put the future of this part of the parish in question but this needs to be balanced by the thriving activities of the other churches. In particular we have seen the number of activities at Garrigill increase dramatically – the Carols on the Green worship evening was very well supported by the community (and after service mulled wine and nibbles from Jim!) and there is a desire to hold some form of Sunday school for the children there. We are also looking forward to taking part in the first school summer club which is being organised by the Christians on the Moor group. It is always dangerous to include particular names when giving thanks in a report such as this, I always end up leaving somebody out! But the joy of being your curate here is that so much of the work in the parish is shared among so many people. Thank you to Karen, Lizzie, Syl and Carol who decorate the churches florally. And thank you to all the team that supports our services musically. In addition I know that I am wonderfully supported and prayed for as I approach my ordination to the priesthood -hopefully next year it will be easier to prepare the rota. I want to close by quoting Bishop Helen Ann who said that the parish is welcoming, faithful and in a good position to welcome a new incumbent.

I thank you all for your continued faithful service and ministry in whatever form it takes.