

## Vicar's Talk at Sunnyside APCM 2026

### Give Thanks

I know that APCM's are not everyone's favourite event of the year, but I think they are a wonderful opportunity. Yes, there is some formal business we need to do so that we can ensure that we are properly constituted as an organization, but for me the annual meeting is essentially an opportunity to look back and give thanks for what God has done in the past year and look forward to what we think he might be going to do in the year ahead and that is exciting. Although there have been some significant challenges, we have much to be grateful for from 2025 which is the focus of this meeting.

### Psalm of thanks

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.  
**His love endures for ever.** (Psalm 136.1)

### My thanks

As we have seen in the annual reports and our psalm of praise, we have much to thank God for at Sunnyside. I have much to be thankful for too. I continue to be thankful that God has called me to serve as your Vicar. I am thankful for the support and the care you show for me in so many ways. I am thankful for all that you do to ensure that Sunnyside runs so well and enable us to shine be witnesses to Jesus in this place. I am thankful for the ways in which I see God at work in your individual lives and in our communal life as we seek to follow him and serve our community.

I am not going to try to thank lots of people by name as I would need to name all of you because you all contribute in different ways and it would be awful if I missed someone out, but I do want to take this opportunity to thank Chris Stewart who has stepped down from the PCC. We are hugely grateful to him for his willingness to serve Sunnyside, for his contributions to the PCC and his continued commitment to his important role as Assistant Treasurer. I would also like to thank Jenny for all she does as our Safeguarding Officer to help us to care for one another - including the most vulnerable amongst us. I am extremely grateful to her for the care and commitment with which she fulfils this vital role. I would also publicly like to thank Tim and the tech team for their amazing work; Simon, Lesley and their group who are working hard on the *Fit for the Future* project to improve our buildings so that we can serve our community better; and the maintenance team. Mark has faithfully chaired the Maintenance Action Group for many years but stood down this year. With the excellent work of Neil as caretaker, the Group felt that it was no longer necessary for them to meet as a committee and so they have transformed themselves into a team to help support Neil in resolving problems with our buildings as they occur. We are hugely grateful to Mark for his steering of the Maintenance Action Group and to David, Ian, Dave and Peter for all they have done and continue to do to maintain our buildings. Mark is unable to be with us this evening, but Sunnyside has got him a small token of our appreciation. Finally, I would like to thank the staff team: I am so grateful for all Shirley, Sarah, Stephen, Chris and Neil contribute to our life at Sunnyside through who they are and the way in which they do their roles. Thank you!

### Vicar's report: Looking forward

As you know, Stephen has been organizing a monthly opportunity for us to have an extended time of worship here at Sunnyside. Sometimes we are led by a full band as we had on Saturday; at other times it is smaller scale. I have found each one a blessing and am extremely grateful to Stephen for his leading them. I want to speak about something I experienced during our worship celebration in February. I believe that it was – and is – really significant. I planned to share it with you all sooner, but Mum's died the following day

and events overtook me. However, it feels very appropriate as we gather together as God's people in Sunnyside tonight.

Whilst we were worshipping, I felt deep within me that something significant had shifted in Sunnyside and in the wider town. I then saw angels flying out from Sunnyside (think Oxford Street Christmas lights) with someone in front going out and spreading out all over our parish and town, enabling people to win spiritual battles in Jesus' name and to see God for the first time as we sang. I was then reminded that we are St Michael and All Angels and became aware that it was St Michael leading the battle across our town and community as we sang of God's holiness. I am firmly convinced that lives were changed that night in Berkhamsted and that it was the praise of God in Sunnyside by a few that released what God wanted to do in this place. I also firmly believe that we need to continue to pray for this and into this.

During a time of prayer towards the end of the evening, Tolu (the curate who was here on placement) had a word from Isaiah about a wilderness place and God bringing a harvest there. I believe this is a word for us and an encouragement that a season of dryness is at an end.

I have been praying and weighing this over the past months, and I believe that God is using it to encourage us and challenge us at this time.

First the encouragement: God is at work in Sunnyside and through Sunnyside. We see this in conversations with those who come to Messy Babies and in the new families coming to Messy Church. We see this in the school children choosing to come to Space to Be during their lunchtime and the relationships we are building with them. We see this in the enquiries about baptisms and in the young people coming here on Friday. We see this in the deepening connections with hall users and the positive responses to *Fit for the Future*.

We are facing real challenges at Sunnyside: challenges from a smaller group of people able to serve so that we can run the work we feel called to do; challenges from a smaller group of people able to contribute to our regular giving. These are not things we can ignore and indeed the PCC is having a special meeting in May at which we will need to make some difficult decisions because of our financial position. However, I do believe that we are on the cusp of growth. God is preparing the soil, and we need to keep faithfully and generously sowing seeds, some of which will bear much fruit.

On Sunday we heard the reading from Acts 2 where Luke speaks about the key ingredients of the early Church which allowed it to grow and flourish despite the opposition it faced. It grew in faith as the believers sought to live as apprentices of Jesus. It grew in number as people were drawn to this vibrant and radically distinctive community. Their life of loving service was rooted in prayer and their response to what Jesus was doing in their midst was worship.

If we wish to grow as followers of Jesus and grow as a church, we need to follow their example. We need to devote ourselves to prayer as the early disciples did: prayer as individuals and prayer as a community. This prayer is of course for the world, our mission partners and those in need but also needs to be for Sunnyside. We have some wonderful opportunities to pray for the life and work of Sunnyside: there are times within our house groups and weekly prayer meetings; there is the monthly Prayer for Church meeting where we focus all our prayers on what God is calling us to be and do at Sunnyside; there are suggestions of things to pray for in our newsletter and on the lobby screen. Prayer is how we see what God is doing and nurture it. Prayer is vital if the seeds God is planting in our lives and those around us are to flourish and bear fruit.

So we need to pray but we also need to worship. This is not just about gathering together for worship on Wednesdays and Sundays and for Worship Celebrations though we need to make this a priority. Worship is powerful. Declaring the name of Jesus is powerful, as I saw in the experience which I shared with you. It is

also about how we live our lives. How we serve our neighbour. How we do our work. How we treat our families and those we find difficult. Following Jesus means answering his call to seek to live as he lived. Following Jesus means shining his light in the places we go and witnessing to his love for his world. Of course, we cannot worship like this without the power of the Holy Spirit in us and without fueling our lives with prayer.

This gives us an encouragement, but also a challenge. If we wish to see what God is doing here, if we wish 'to be recognised as a Christ-centred community of living faith which seeks to make Jesus known to others' our vision statement claims, we need to be devoted to prayer and worship. We need to commit to praying for the growth we long to see: spiritual growth in ourselves as we seek to become more like Jesus and numerical growth as we see people decide to follow Jesus themselves. We need to commit to worshipping God here at church and through all areas of our lives for he is the only one worthy of our worship.

I believe that there is much seed in the ground. Let's water it through our prayer and worship and then, by God's mercy we will see the growth we long for. Then it might be said of Sunnyside:

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' (Acts 2.42-47)

I have had two clear visions in my time here at Sunnyside (it is not the main way God speaks to me). The first was some years ago when I stood at the front of church and saw the south wall needing to be pushed back to make room for all the people who wanted to gather here to worship God. The second was his angels going out from here to move across our community and town to change lives as we worshipped Jesus. God is at work in this place. God is providing good soil. Let's pray for an abundant harvest so that more people may have the hope and joy of knowing Jesus and God will receive more praise!