

“State of the Union” address 2026

I want to begin by saying some thank-yous. It would be very risky to try and thank every single person who has committed time, money, and effort to the life and ministry of the church over the last year, partly because it would just take too long, and partly because I'd be bound to miss someone, and cause unintended offence. So, instead, I want to say a huge “thank-you” to absolutely everybody who has made Christ Church the community that it is: whether your role is big and public or small and hidden, thank you.

Having said that, there are of course a few specific people that I do need to name. First, my thanks go to Andrew C for the work he did as Church Administrator over many years. Thanks, too, to our wardens, Jason and Richard, who've worked so hard to keep this place going. Jason is stepping down this year, so know that you have my personal deep thanks and appreciation as you do so. Thanks to Peter and Liz for their ministry and support. Thanks go to Andrew R for his musical leadership. There are so many others, but I think I'll restrict myself to just a few more: thanks to Chris M for his sterling work as Parish Safeguarding Officer, and to Janice T for stepping up to work alongside him as Safeguarding Assistant. Thanks to the members of the PCC and the CMT, whether you are continuing or stepping down this year.

One of the churches I previously looked after was dedicated to St Lawrence. Lawrence lived in third century Rome, and was a deacon in the church. When the Prefect of Rome insisted that Lawrence give over all the valuable goods that the church owned, Lawrence brought forward a whole bunch of the poor people in his care. “Here is the treasure of the church,” he said.

Lawrence was right, of course. Without the people, the church is nothing, so thank you all for everything you are and do.

However, the true treasure of the church is God himself. We are like people who have found a great treasure hidden in a field: the obvious thing to do is to give up everything we have in order to receive that treasure. This is the discipleship that Jesus calls us to: to be people who live completely for him. Without him we are nothing, and with him we can do immeasurably more than we can begin to imagine.

2025 was a big year for me and my family. Following a seven-and-a-half-year ministry in the Manningtree area, we came over to Felixstowe in March 2025, and I began my ministry here. It's been such a blessing to be with you, to learn about the ways God has been using the church here, and the ways in which we might move forward together. It's especially exciting that God has been growing the church, and my prayer is that he would continue to do this.

We must remember that growth comes from God alone. In 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Paul says: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

When I was called to be your vicar, it was clear from the parish profile and the conversations in interview that you were looking for someone who might help you plan for growth. I've been working hard on this plan over the last year, and have a few things to share about it this evening, but I want to start by reinforcing the truth that nothing we can do will make the church grow. The best programmes in the world, the slickest services, the most incredible welcome: none of it leads to growth. God alone brings that, so as we talk about vision and plans, we remember that we are in God's hands, and must seek to stay in his will.

With that said, there is of course one more thank you to give. To Shiela and the team who prays so faithfully for the life of the church. Thank you. Prayer is the underpinning and the power behind our ministry: I want to encourage all of you to pray.

Now, on to specific things around vision. You might or might not have noticed that we've been going through a bit of a vision discernment process over the last year. I've been having lots of conversations with lots of you about the story of the church so far. We had a chance to think together about that story in some depth when we were joined by Graham and Di Archer at our Sizewell weekend earlier this year. They helped us think about the possibilities ahead, too. Our forty-day season of prayer was a fruitful time of listening to God together, seeking his plans and purposes for the church. And the PCC had a valuable day away together, with a chap called Malcolm MacDonald leading us, where we were able to think about where we are and where we're going. We've also had a number of PCC and CMT members engaging with the 'Leading Your Church Into Growth' course over these last months too.

I've been weighing all of this up, and working alongside the CMT to begin to shape a vision for the future of the church here. Our current vision: To Know Christ More, and Make Him Known, has been writ large across the front of the church for many years now, and I think, if we're really honest, we don't really think about it much any more. It no longer guides us, or shapes what we're doing, in the way a vision really should.

So we're going to change things. Our new vision isn't yet fully formed, but we have an outline shape. The vision will be based around four distinct movements:

- We are **relational**
- We are **rooted**
- We are **renewed**
- We are **released**

Let me expand a little on what this vision might look like. I'm going to read from the as-yet-unpublished draft vision document.

We are **relational**. We want Christ Church to be a place where everyone is known, welcomed, and loved. We practise hospitality, build intergenerational friendships, and create small groups where people can be vulnerable, encouraged, and supported.

Our relationships extend beyond our walls and into the life of the parish. Most importantly, we are seeking a deep relationship with Christ, which leads us to:

We are **rooted**. We grow deep in God through prayer, scripture, and worship. Prayer is the engine-room of our life together; scripture shapes our decisions; and worship is a place of encounter and transformation. We are also rooted deeply in the life of our parish, seeking connection especially with young people and families. This rootedness leads to fruit:

We are **renewed**. Christ Church was born from a move of the Spirit, and we long to see the Spirit move today. We create spaces of encounter through worship, prayer ministry, and personal formation in small groups. We are looking for signs of the Kingdom, and of fruitfulness and transformation, personally and in our community. This leads to:

We are **released**. Every Christian is called and gifted. We want to equip people to serve God in their homes, workplaces, schools, friendships, and neighbourhoods. We build teams, create pathways into ministry, and develop community-facing activities that place us at the heart of parish life. We expect growth – in depth, numbers, and Kingdom impact.

I hope this excites you. It does me.

So what are the next steps?

The first thing we need to do is to rethink how we do leadership.

As an Anglican church we have a PCC, which is the duly elected and representative body who are responsible for the fabric and finances of the church, and who are to work with the vicar in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church. This vital work of governance and leadership includes a responsibility for safeguarding, employment, and good order in public worship. While there are certainly important conversations to be had at the PCC about vision, it has seemed wise in the past to delegate this role into our Core Ministry Team.

The CMT is also an elected body. The purpose of the CMT is to hold and implement the vision – however, the way it is formed means that it is, like the PCC, a *representative* body rather than one *united around the shared vision*. Yet throughout scripture God calls people not because they represent a community, but because they have a particular task for a particular season, and are able to obey his call to “come and follow me” (Mark 1:17).

In light of all this, we are bringing the current shape of the CMT to an end, and will begin working on building a new leadership team. This team will be made up of dedicated Christian people who are able to fully subscribe to the new vision, and to commit to help shape and implement it, in collaboration with the PCC, over the next five years.

The current CMT have generously agreed to stay together over the next period to help shape the process of appointing this team, and the PCC have been consulted too.

So over the next few months I will be asking the church to nominate people who could be on this team. This isn't an election, but I will use these nominations to help shape my thinking, and will call a team together on the back of this. Their first task will be to refine and launch the vision, and then to decide together on how we move forward into putting it into practice.

There will be more details coming soon, including the specific things we're looking for in the people we call, but I wanted to use this meeting to let you all know what's coming in broader terms; to encourage you to pray about it all; and to ask that you begin to consider who you think might be suitable for the new leadership team.

God is always on the move, always calling us on, and always challenging and changing his people. Christ Church has been on an exciting journey over the last thirty-five years or so, and I know that there are many adventures ahead. I pray that we would be able to discern together the directions he's moving us in, and have the courage to follow.

Please pray for me, and for the CMT and the new leadership team, as we begin this next stage of our adventure together.