

Worship & Welcome

Start with loving thankfulness and a sincere humility

- Our culture of serving, mission and love as a church family is beautiful. I see it every day.
- Over 2025, thousands of people have been touched by the love of Jesus, through St Mary's. Lots of little miracles.
- Recognise our complete dependency on God's mercy and grace. We have a lot to learn.



We are moving into a new season

Over the last few years, Jesus has been inviting us to get ready.

- Long-obedience and pilgrimage / journey. Everything shared over the past few years about preparing the way (2024) and getting ready (2025); is still true for us now.
- We are not just to maintain ministry as it is in 2026. But, to step into a new season.
"The current pattern of our church life and daily discipleship will not survive a move of God. What we have built now cannot contain what is coming."¹

We all have a part to play in this new season. **How we choose to engage really matters to our church and community.**

God is getting us ready for something huge. A "slow awakening" / "quiet revival" is stirring in the nation. The national shift is also being experienced here in our church and local community.

Last week, the Evangelical Alliance (EA) published expected mission trends for 2026. Below in the box is the summary written by Phil Knox from the EA.²

"2025 saw a seismic shift for the church in the UK. More people are increasingly open to Jesus and are actively exploring faith. More people are being baptised. Churches are growing."

In the last one hundred years, the number of people attending church in the UK has been in steady decline. But in 2025, several pieces of research have offered marker points to indicate that the tide has turned. Drawing on the latest research, listening to our members and observing the missional landscape, in 2026 here is what to expect;

1. **Look out for the spiritually open: 2026 will be the most spiritually open year in living memory.** Atheism will continue its decline. Belief is back.
2. **Look out for the unexplained: 2026 will see spiritual experiences, dreams and unexplained events drawing people into church.** 28% of new adult Christians say a spiritual experience prompted them to explore the Christian faith. Expect people to turn up to your church who are asking, "What was that?"

¹ John McGinley and Anne Calver, *Awaken: The Lord is doing a new thing* (2025) p17

² Visit eauk.org

3. **Look out for gospel opportunities: 2026 will see the church needing to better join the dots between compassion ministry and faith sharing.** In 2026, foodbank use will sadly increase. For those who are invited to take steps into faith, many will become Christians. 74% of all parents with children under the age of five have attended a church activity. Churches that join the dots between these ministries and faith sharing will grow.
4. **Look out for booming Bible engagement: 2026 will see Bible sales continue to soar with seekers turning up to church having done their theological research.** Bible sales have increased by 87% since 2020. In a fake news and post-truth world, younger generations are drawn to good news that is true, profound and beautiful. Churches that keep the substance the same but relate relevantly to culture will flourish.
5. **Look out for discipleship questions and challenges: 2026 will see more people come to faith through new pathways, so their next steps in discipleship will be essential.** When people come to faith, research tells us their greatest needs are in helping to establish spiritual disciplines and find new community. Many people leave church because they have not been nurtured or built meaningful relationships. In 2026, newcomers to church will need spiritual fathers and mothers.

We see these signs and need to prepare to meet this spiritual hunger with the gospel of Jesus.

Bishop Adam preaching to St Mary's in November 2025.

"You have been stewarding well. But I don't think He is done with you. I think there is more. I think it's a new season of planting, and cultivating, and bringing the harvest home."

"This is a time to seek the Lord, because He is at the door of His church, knocking and ready to move in a fresh way. There is an urgency in being prepared for what is coming, even though we cannot fully comprehend what that will mean."³

To discern this new season, we need the Lord to speak to us.

Below are five summarised themes of various **prophetic words** that have been shared for St Mary's in 2025 either by members of St Mary's or speakers who have preached here (full text available online: I recommend reading them). The Bible tells us to share, test and honour prophetic words.

1. "It's Time" — A Coming Move of God

Many of the images (the golden clock, the wave in the distance, the flood of living water) point to a sense that **God is about to act in a significant way**. This move is described as imminent, powerful, and transformative. The repeated question *"Do you not perceive it?"* underlines urgency.

2. Wholehearted Preparation, Purification, and Surrender

A major emphasis is that God's people must **prepare themselves spiritually**. This includes:

- Removing obstacles, idols, distractions - allowing God to "strip away," heal, refine, purify
- Laying down personal plans and returning to "first love" devotion.
- Making room for the Holy Spirit and people becoming "new wineskins".

^{3 3} John McGinley and Anne Calver, *Awaken: The Lord is doing a new thing* (2025) p15

3. Costly Obedience and Discomfort

The expected move of God is described as both **glorious and uncomfortable**. Preparation may require:

- Sacrifice of time, plans, and routines
- Intercession, worship, and obedience beyond convenience
- Sharing in the sufferings of Christ and having a deep burden for the broken world

The message stresses that revival is beautiful, but also deeply costly.

4. Reordering, Releasing, and Repositioning of People

Several images speak of **separation, reassignment, and raising up new people**:

- A dividing field representing readiness vs. unreadiness
- Younger or newer believers overtaking older ones due to hunger and purity of heart
- Repositioning of teams and leadership
- A release of children and young people to take significant roles
- Leaders becoming more like nurturing mothers and fathers

This theme highlights a **repositioning of people within the church** to align with what God is doing.

5. Outpouring of the Holy Spirit — A Wave, Wind, and Flood

Powerful metaphors and pictures of the Spirit recur throughout:

- A tsunami of the Holy Spirit, a rushing wind (Acts 2), fire from the throne, Living water turning from trickles into floods.

This outpouring is described as cleansing, overwhelming and transformative.

Summary in one sentence and also a word cloud:





God is about to move powerfully, but His people must prepare deeply, surrender fully, reorder their lives, and make room for a costly yet glorious outpouring of His Spirit



Quiet moment of reflection & group reflection

What might this new season look like?

The new season is about God preparing us to meet this kingdom moment. It calls us into a different posture of spiritual battle. It is not conformable. **It will require a fresh commitment to love, obedience and courage.**

-  ENCOUNTERING GOD
-  LIVING FOR THE KINGDOM
-  LOVING DEEPLY
-  SHARING JESUS

We need to see significant breakthroughs in 2026. I want to share directly, clearly, lovingly about six areas we need to focus on and prioritise in order to step into the new season.

1. A new hunger for God - prayer and worship

Everything flows from a closer relationship with God. This is central to stepping into the new season. I believe our prayer and worship culture as a church needs renewal. Prayer gatherings as a church have been small for years now. We may need to repent and seek a new hunger to encounter God.

- **Jesus at the centre**, not the edges of our lives and our church.
- **Really getting to know God more in prayer:** learning dependency on God, radical humility, giving God space in prayer and worship, growing in holiness, obedience, hunger for God and practices that lead us to personal revival – brokenness, cleansing and joy.
- **Wholehearted, hungry and humble people in our worship and praise.**

What might a new season of prayer and worship mean for you?

- Investing in daily time with God: scripture reading, prayer, worship, fasting and reflection. We have a resource available online and in the news sheet for Bible reading and prayer topics.
- Regular commitment to church on Sundays, Life Group, Kingdom Come Prayer & Worship
- Learning to wait on God: more lingering and making room for God in our prayer and worship.
- Join with *Turn the Battle* (3 days of prayer & fasting for the UK – turnthebattle.uk)

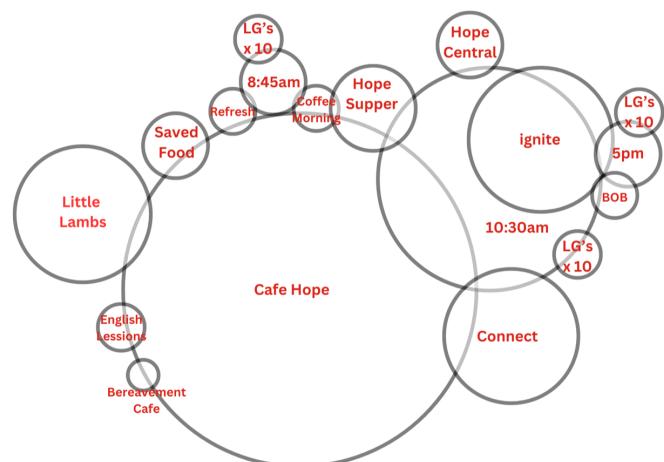
2. A new passion for mission – St Mary's is an apostolic hub

God loves people and wants us to share the gospel with them. We are to multiply disciples, leaders and congregations. The focus is on bringing the kingdom of God, not merely maintaining church programmes. Right now, we are journeying in various ways with around 1,000 people a month. The picture below is a **mission map** of St Mary's. Each circle is a discipleship community. Many people following Jesus or on a pathway to Jesus.

We are helping people find the next step to Jesus. Some journeys are short, and some are long. Everyone is somewhere on the pathway and all our mission is to help them move towards Jesus.

What do we mean by apostolic?

Focussing on being *sent* on mission, rightly ordering the church, suffering for the gospel and moving in the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. That is our calling.



Prophetic word from Anne Calver: preaching at St Mary's in January 2025.

"I sensed God turning this place into... an apostolic centre, an apostolic hub. What I mean by that is that there is going to be lots of people sent from here and there is going to be lots of people to find that place of refuge. It's kind of a combination between an ark (shelter from the storm) and a sending place, resourcing place and equipping place. And I felt like I was seeing, as we were worshipping, quite a lot of people birthing in the room. God is birthing something. You know there is something rising in you. You know there is something new coming in you and through you. That is the Lord. The leadership in this church are saying yes to whatever God wants to birth. I could see a nursery full of lots of children, because there is lots of birthing coming. At the same time being this safe sanctuary..."

In February this year, we will be sharing on Sundays more of the beautiful mission testimonies we see every week through Café Hope, Living Hope and other mission and ministry.

What might a new season of passion for mission mean for you and the church?

- Equipped to know how to lead someone to Christ and nurturing them in their new faith.
- Playing your part in growing your congregation or planting a new one.
- Actively welcoming newcomers into our church family.
- Serving in ministries such as Café Hope, Living Hope, Alpha or our outreach team.
- Praying for multiplication and that we may see many people come to Christ.
- Paying attention and being obedient to the ministry and calling being 'birthed' in you as a disciple-maker. Is God sending you? Is God releasing something new through you?
- Supporting a new mission network being created across Epping Forest and further afield to encourage missional leaders and community outreach across churches.

3. A new releasing of youth and children in ministry

It is time to empower and encourage our young people. Ignite is key to what is coming. We have 105 under 18s in St Mary's on Sundays and midweek. 30 are doing Youth Alpha. God is moving! We want to see them encounter God and learn to minister in the power of the Spirit.

Continued prophetic word from Anne Calver: preaching at St Mary's in January 2025.

"The children are really critical to what's coming. I was in a church last week and I hardly saw the leaders at all but I saw the young and I thought the leaders were very present, they were nurturing what God was doing, they were mothering and they were fathering but they were releasing the young .. I think there's this sense of a release of the young in order to drive certain things with that parenting nurturing training arms around it."

What might a new season of releasing our children and youth in mission mean for you?.

- Giving them more supported opportunities in preaching, worship, prayer ministry and more...
- Mentoring, praying for young people and discipling them in the power of the Spirit.
- Nurturing and getting alongside them – join the ignite team with this vision!
- We urgently need more people to step into leading our youth on Sundays.
- This includes Hope Central ministry to 18-30s.

Quiet moment of reflection & group reflection

4. **A new vision for generosity in giving**

This new season calls for generosity and gospel patrons motivated by love and giving with joy. Our mission costs a lot of money. We don't ever want there to be pressure to give. Generosity comes from love birthing a vision to give. The Bible teaches every Christian to give regularly, sacrificially and joyfully. **If we are going to see a harvest, we need to transform our giving.**

The PCC oversee our finances. We have a £45K budget deficit in 2026. We have a number of significant repair and improvement costs which could easily also total over £15K.

- Our reserves are reducing and will become unsustainable without a real shift in giving.
- We are more dependent now on seasons of special giving such as Gift Days.
- We are more exposed to larger outlays or unexpected larger expenses, which we used to be able to absorb more easily.
- Our 2026 reserve limit (three months of expenditure) is now approx. £100K
- We don't get money from the Church of England, rather to give to the Church of England. We are aware we need to communicate better about our church finances.

Continued prophetic word from Anne Calver: preaching at St Mary's in January 2025.

"I felt something around giving as well. There's something the Lord wants to do in terms of our giving where .. it's like a release, you know how you feel a release when you worship the Lord and you feel that sense of his presence, there's a release when we give and it's like a sowing into what you believe you can see coming.. through this place and through each one of you and going: "We are behind what God is doing and we want to see more." We're so careful to be good stewards but we can miss this generous generosity of God who wants to pour out, open the floodgates... it's all his anyway right? We just give it back to him and we say "Lord do with it whatever you want to do but we trust you Lord and we release it into your hands!"

What might a new season of generous giving mean for you?

- We all need to pray and trust for God's provision over our church. He is our Provider!
- This is good news for everyone as giving is about love and will be marked by joy!
- Take a fresh and faith-filled look at your giving. Are you giving regularly, sacrificially and joyfully? Tithing (10% of income) is the biblical starting point for generosity, not the end point. Do you need to get your giving right and honour the Lord with your money?
- There may be some not yet giving at all, who could begin to give. If everyone at St Mary's honoured the Lord with their full tithes and offerings; there would be enough.

5. **A new depth in our relationships and soul care**

Jesus taught us to love deeply. We have much still to learn about loving well. Being friends is central to church life and God's kingdom. Let's go beyond the surface and grow deeper in relationship and love for one another. This calls for vulnerability, openness, kindness, authenticity and sometimes grace, forgiveness, patience. We are also called to flourish and thrive, rather than burn out. Jesus wants us to learn good rhythms of rest and resilience through all the cost of this new season. This is a new season where we will need healthy rhythms of mission and prayer, engagement and retreat, wholehearted serving and soul care. We need to establish these now so we can be ready to sustain the coming new season in a healthy and life-giving way.

What might a new season of better soul care and meaningful relationships mean for you?

- Being still and giving God space in your inner life for you to find emotional, spiritual, physical and relational health. Living out Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God."
- Finding healthy rhythms of rest, investing in family and friendships and also growing in hospitality, welcoming newcomers and intentionally going deeper with a few closer people.
- Doing the soul care required to keep you emotionally healthy. This may involve growing in spiritual reflection, retreat or simply having a daily time of being still with God.
- Develop a Rule of Life using spiritual disciplines such as sabbath, community and solitude.

6. A new equipping and repositioning of leaders

We need to raise up leaders, so we can equip all of God's people for works of service. Many people feel uneasy about being seen as a leader. I see leaders more as spiritual fathers and mothers.

Continued prophetic word from Anne Calver: preaching at St Mary's in January 2025.

"There is a repositioning of people... a new shaping of teams in this hour and it's not dependent on training and it's not dependent on how we've understood things to look in the past... and it's through prayer, through the prophetic and through seeking His face, through intimacy that you'll know where each one of you will know where to stand."

What might a new season of equipping for repositioning mean for you?

- What empowerment, training or support do you need to serve in the power of the Spirit?
- Are you being called to lead, not as a manager or from a platform, but as a spiritual father or mother? We need people to step up into servant-leadership in this new season.
- We will be hosting a special leadership conference in October this year, including our young people, as we seek to grow leaders who have a vision for this new season.
- Do you need to reactivate your serving as a spiritual discipline?
- Are you serving in line with your spiritual gifting?
- Do you need to reposition your ministry or birth something new?
- **Life Groups are key to this equipping** – space to have a go!
 - In 2026, we are making Life Groups more flexible as discipleship groups. They can be any size and will focus on intentional discipleship and application of God's Word in our lives, pastoral care and using spiritual gifts.

Quiet moment of reflection & group reflection

For the church to be all we can be, **YOU are essential.**

At St Mary's, we believe that as followers of Jesus we are called to come, belong, serve, give and pray. These are the basic practices of being part of the church family. We are also called to grow in spiritual maturity; in love, faith, kindness, grace, forgiveness and much more.

Here is a snapshot of where we are at right now. This is helpful context for seeing how this new season still needs to be worked out in reality as a church.

COME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have 287 adults in the church family (133,000 in Epping Forest) Average Sunday adult attendance is 52% of the church family (based on Oct 2025). We have 105 under 18's in the church family.
BELONG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 37% of the church family are in one of our 10 Life Groups We welcomed over 30 newcomers in 2025.
SERVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 82% of the church family are serving in some way in one of the ministries of St Mary's on Sundays or midweek. We impact the lives of approx. 1,000 different people every month. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Café Hope – team of 16 people serve over 300 people every week 2) Ignite – team of 46 people serve Sundays and mid-week. 3) Living Hope – team of 43 people serve across 7 outreach projects 4) Counselling – over 100 people have had counselling since 2017. 5) Visiting Team – team of 11 who do pastoral visits. 6) Little Lambs – serving 50 local families and their young children ... and much more including outreach, pastoral care and practical help.
GIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 34% of the church family gave financially in 2025. (We are only counting individuals, who may also represent others in a household). The average gift was £166 per month.
PRAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5% of the church family come to one of our weekly prayer meetings. 40% of the church family got involved in the recent daily Advent Prayer.

Brief quiet reflection

What do you notice?

Where do we need to repent and recommit?

How do we need to change and grow?

How will I join in with what God is doing in 2026?

If you have not yet read, *Saturated with God* (2023), please do so. Copies are available from me (£10).

Closing response and prayer

