

Chapter Annual Report 2025



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**BLACKBURN
CATHEDRAL**

Contents

The Interim Dean's Review	3-7
Mission and Discipleship	8-9
Worship	10-11
Governance	12-13
Safeguarding	14
Education	15
Finance	16
Fabric	17
Partners	18
Chapter Members	19

The Interim Dean's Review

As I reflect on the year that has been, I do so with a complex and honest mixture of feelings: gratitude for the faithfulness of so many people who give so much to the life of this Cathedral; humility before the seriousness of the challenges we have faced and are still facing; and genuine hope for what lies ahead as we press forward together in God's service.

2025 has been, in many respects, a demanding year in the recent life of Blackburn Cathedral. It has also been, a year of extraordinary vitality, creativity, and grace.

A Year of Transition in Leadership

It would not be honest to begin anywhere other than with the significant change in leadership that occurred in the summer. Following the suspension of the Dean in late June, Bishop Philip asked me to serve as Interim Dean, and I took up that role in July. I am deeply grateful to the Bishop and particularly to the Cathedral Chapter, staff, volunteers, and congregation for the warmth and generosity with which they received me into this role.

I came to Blackburn Cathedral knowing it well, having served for twenty years as Chaplain and Head of Chaplaincy at East



The Interim Dean and Bishop of Blackburn

Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, and as Area Dean of Blackburn with Darwen. I was also part of the Cathedral staff in a part-time capacity as Canon Pastor from 2016 to 2020, and that earlier experience of the Cathedral's life and ministry has proved an invaluable foundation for the work of this year. But stepping into the day-to-day leadership of this remarkable place has given me an even deeper appreciation of the dedication of every person who serves here, whether in a paid capacity or as a volunteer.

To all of you: thank you.



Facing the Truth on Safeguarding

The most pressing work of this year has been our response to the INEQE Independent Safeguarding Audit, the findings of which were published earlier in the year. The audit, commissioned by the Archbishop's Council, involved a comprehensive review of nearly five hundred key documents, seven focus groups, over four hundred survey responses, and interviews with a wide range of stakeholders.

Its conclusion regarding the Cathedral was unambiguous: our approach to safeguarding required urgent improvement, with twenty-eight specific recommendations covering leadership, governance, case management, recruitment, communications, and culture.

We have accepted those recommendations in full.

Alongside our worship, mission and ministry; safeguarding must take high priority. Since the publication of the report, we have worked on the most urgent recommendations: partnering with the Diocese for the management of safeguarding casework; appointing two new members of Chapter with safeguarding expertise; establishing an independent Safeguarding Improvement Board; transferring case records to the National Safeguarding Case Management System; and proactively developing partnerships with statutory agencies.

I want to say with complete sincerity to all who have been hurt, let down, or failed by our previous safeguarding arrangements: I am deeply sorry. The Cathedral exists to be a place of safety, sanctuary, and welcome for every person. Where we have fallen short of that calling, we must acknowledge it honestly and commit to doing better.

The work of safeguarding reform is not a burden we bear reluctantly; it is the right and necessary expression of our care for one another and for all who come through our doors. I am grateful for the courage of survivors and others who participated in the audit process.

Gaia: A Cathedral Transformed

Amid the challenges of the year, it was also a privilege to welcome an extraordinary event. From October to November, Luke Jerram's stunning installation Gaia, a 7 metre, high-resolution NASA image of the Earth suspended within the Cathedral, drew visitors from across Lancashire and beyond.



Luke Jerram's Gaia

The installation transformed the interior of the building into something that many described as numinous: a space in which the fragile beauty of our planet was held within this place of prayer, inviting contemplation, wonder, and a renewed sense of our responsibility to creation.

The programme surrounding Gaia embraced worship and theological reflection, the arts, music, wellbeing, and community celebration, drawing the broadest possible cross-section of people through our doors.

A photography competition on the theme of 'Life on Earth' drew entries from across the country, with shortlisted images exhibited alongside the installation throughout its six-week run, extending the invitation to engage

with creation still further. Together, these experiences demonstrated something important about what a Cathedral can be: not only a place of prayer, but a space that opens people to experiences they might struggle to find elsewhere. I am grateful to all who worked so hard to make it happen.

Music and Worship at the Heart of Our Life

Whatever the upheavals of the institutional year, the daily rhythm of prayer, worship, and choral music has continued with faithfulness and beauty. Our choristers and choir have maintained their valued ministry, filling the Cathedral with sound that speaks, as music always does, of things beyond words. The lunchtime concert series brought live music to all who came, and the Choral Evensong and Eucharist

services have continued to gather worshippers week by week.

In November, the Cathedral hosted the Collation of the new Archdeacon of Blackburn, the Venerable Jane Atkinson, an occasion of joy and celebration for the wider Diocese, with civic representatives from across Lancashire gathering alongside clergy, parishioners, and members of the public. It was a reminder that the Cathedral serves not only as the spiritual heart of Blackburn but as the mother church of the whole Diocese: a place where the wider life of God's people in Lancashire is marked and celebrated.

Our Remembrance season also brought the community together, with the annual Remembrance Concert, held in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Council and raising funds for the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal, drawing on the generous talents of

local choirs, the Salvation Army Brass Band, Blackburn Junior Sea Cadets, and Blackburn People's Choir.

These civic moments of shared remembrance and gratitude matter deeply, and the Cathedral is honoured to hold them.

Community, Partnership, and Belonging

Throughout the year, the Cathedral has continued its work as a centre for the religious, artistic, and cultural life of our community: not only in Blackburn, but across Lancashire. The summer community barbecue in the Cloister Garth, the Community Carol Service in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Council, the Bank Holiday celebrity organ concerts, and the regular midweek services all point to a community that finds its purpose not in grand occasions alone, but in the steady, loving, open welcome extended day after day.



Collation of Archdeacon of Blackburn

The Sixteen's Choral Pilgrimage 2025: Angel of Peace brought stunning choral music to the Cathedral in the spring, with Hildegard of Bingen, Arvo Pärt, and a new work by Anna Clyne among the offerings, reminding us that in a fractured world, beauty and tranquillity are not luxuries but necessities.

Looking Ahead with Hope

As I write these words, I am conscious that the Cathedral stands at a threshold. 2026 marks not only one hundred years since the establishment of a new diocese in Lancashire, celebrated across the region under the title 'All for Jesus', but the Cathedral's own Centenary: a double cause for celebration and renewal.

As the Diocese looks ahead, it is also renewing its Vision statement, discerning afresh how God is calling his Church in Lancashire to live and serve.



The Sixteen

That process of renewal is one in which the Cathedral has a central and joyful part to play. The work of safeguarding reform, of leadership transformation and of institutional rebuilding is real and demanding, but it is being carried out by people of genuine faith, goodwill, and dedication. What we are about is the faithful renovation of a house of prayer and place of hospitality.

I am grateful beyond words for the community I serve: for the staff who come to work each day with professionalism and heart; for the volunteers who give their time and energy with such generosity; for the congregation who worship, pray, and persevere; for the many thousands of visitors who cross our threshold each year, often carrying things we know nothing of and hoping, perhaps, to encounter something of the grace of God.

To all of you, and to this Cathedral, I offer my commitment: to serve as Interim Dean for as long as needed, to lead with honesty, to serve with humility, and to hold fast, always, to the hope that is in us.

Andrew Horsfall

The Revd. Canon Andrew Horsfall
Interim Dean of Blackburn



Remembrance service

Mission and Discipleship

Despite many challenges, both institutional and personal, 2025 was a year of steady endurance, missional fruit by God’s grace, and much costly institutional work.

As the Cathedral made progress in many areas, its plans for the centenary in 2026 offered a welcome vehicle for shaping a sustainable and strong institution for the future.

A substantial portion of ministry led by the Canon Missioner was directed towards stabilising the Cathedral; upholding the life of payer and worship, giving pastoral care to staff including at times of conflict and distress, and keeping together a praying community when trust was frayed. Several mission and discipleship developments stand out against that background.

Discipleship continued to show fruit, including an Alpha course that resulted in four adults going forward for baptism and/or confirmation.

Cathedral community life was strengthened through shared social rhythms, including the annual barbeque and visits to Whalley Abbey, and a Weekend Away in June led by the Revd. Canon Dr Leah Vasey-Saunders, then Vicar of Lancaster and now Bishop

of Doncaster. These renewed gatherings help to rebuild congregational confidence.



Congregation meeting

Meetings were arranged, attended by as many Chapter members as possible, at which information was shared and questions answered. Such meetings are a practical way of mending fragmented communication and giving a voice to members of the congregation.

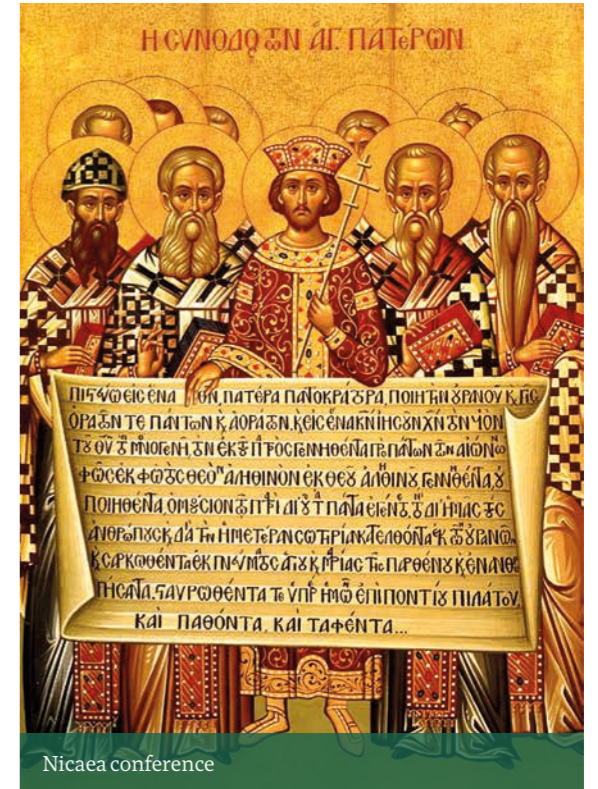
The Cathedral’s witness continued to grow through public theology and liturgy. Two major conferences were hosted: one to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, in partnership with Churches Together in Lancashire; and the other an eco-church conference during the Gaia period, featuring Canon Dr Ruth Valerio.

Gaia, Luke Jerram’s Earth artwork that came to the Cathedral in October to November and attracted 25,000 guests including a thousand schoolchildren, offered themes around which could be built Creation Care. These events demonstrate the Cathedral’s ability to convene, teach and offer a public Christian framing for pressing questions; not merely hosting culture but interpreting it within worship and discipleship.

Education and work with schools remained one of the Cathedral’s most consistent missional front doors. Mrs Siân Howell-Jones remained committed to the delivery of inspiring visits and the communication of the Cathedral’s purposes.

She and a small volunteer team delivered high quality, faith-based visits, tailoring provision and developing bespoke workshops for pilgrimage visits, seasonal, Nativity and Easter drama visits, and special Gaia events. There continues to be concern for the under-resourcing of this key area of the Cathedral mission.

Chaplaincy ministry at Blackburn College continued and grew, and relationships with staff and students were deepened. The Canon Missioner was again invited to lead Easter and Christmas services at the College, in partnership with St Luke’s Church,



Nicaea conference

and to provide an inter-faith week in partnership with the interfaith forum and the Muslim chaplain.

Diocesan ministry continued and expanded. The Canon Missioner led a curate training day, and worship for a clergy study day, chaired the Inspiring Children and Youth Committee, and served on the healing group steering committee and the Bearing Witness project board.

The INEQE safeguarding audit and report proved it necessary to shape the practical priorities for the year, leading to urgent repair and strengthening of the Cathedral’s safeguarding practices and culture. The Canon Missioner and Mrs Julie Eatwell continued to work on the volunteer database, alongside the Safeguarding Hub, as a means of maintaining training and safer recruitment pathway that aligns with current safeguarding policy and expectations.

Worship

The regular liturgical pattern was followed during the year and included a special Evensong on 11 May to commemorate Victory in Europe Day, attended by the Lord Lieutenant.

A farewell service took place on 6 April for the outgoing Archdeacon of Blackburn, the Venerable Mark Ireland, and the Revd. Jane Atkinson was collated to that position at an Evensong held on 23 November.

In October the Cathedral received a visit from the Archbishop of York as part of his 'Faith in the North' Lord's Prayer Tour.

and is communicating strongly with stakeholders and building external relationships. Some outstanding services took place, especially the Nine Lessons and Carols in December.

It was good to collaborate with other cathedrals, particularly Liverpool, where two visits to sing with them were made. There were good results in ABRSM singing examinations and



Lords Prayer Tour

The Music Department experienced a year of considerable changes in personnel. Ms Gill Broom was warmly welcomed as Music Administrator

high levels of entry by choristers to university and music school places. The department was sorry to lose the Resident Organist, Mr John Hosking,

who resigned in December. The organ appeal faced health and safety concerns around access, and these difficulties are being worked through with a team that includes an adviser, William McVicar. Meanwhile, the Wednesday lunchtime recitals continue with very loyal and dedicated attendance.

The junior choral scholars have benefited from the regular rehearsal schedule and sound increasingly assured.



Cathedral bellringers

The Youth Choir has continued to sing on Sundays at 9am, under the direction of Ms Helen Davies, and the voluntary St Paul's Voices cover when the Cathedral choir is unavailable. The Director of Music has identified the critically important need to re-launch Lantern Voices, the children's choir, that involves people from the outstanding "Let's Go Sing" organisation.



Blackburn Cathedral Youth Choir

The Cathedral's bellringing team said goodbye to two members during the year, but were encouraged by the gain of six new ringers. The team rang for 49 out of 52 Sunday Eucharists, with ten or more ringers on thirteen occasions, and also supported St Jude's on the second Sunday of each month. Thursday practices have been well attended and five quarter peals were rung for special occasions during the year.

Governance

The Chapter met for both scheduled and additional meetings arranged ad hoc when pressing business made this necessary, and attendance was good.

We were glad to welcome Ms Naomi Healey and Ms Jayne Jenks as new trustees in July. Both come from professional educational backgrounds, and both have agreed to act as safeguarding leads for the Chapter.

The clergy team came under exceptional pressure, and at the year end important issues remained, awaiting resolution during 2026. Legal advice has been taken where appropriate and the Chapter has ensured that its reporting obligations to the Charity Commission have been fulfilled throughout, including an online meeting on 17 September 2026 to discuss a Serious Incident Report submitted by the Cathedral.

The Chapter has taken seriously the exceptional pressures on the Cathedral community - its staff, volunteers, congregations and visitors - and taken formal and informal steps to address and where possible alleviate these difficulties.

The Bishop of Blackburn in late December 2024 commissioned a Bishop's Review, as provided for in Section 9(6) of the Cathedrals Measure 2021. The terms of reference covered governance, culture, and safeguarding, and it was led by the Rt. Revd. Julie

Conalty, Bishop of Birkenhead. Interviews with stakeholders, including Chapter members and staff of the Cathedral, took place early in the new year.



The Interim Dean

The findings of the review were presented to the Chapter at Bishop's House on 2 May, for discussion and action by the Chapter. These are ongoing, and included a Chapter meeting with the Bishop on 19 November to review progress.

The Dean, the Very Revd. Peter Howell-Jones, following complaints about leadership and inconclusive discussions



Worship event

about a possible mutually acceptable solution to his position, was suspended by the Bishop of Lancaster on 27 June, while retaining his residence in the Deanery.

The Bishop of Blackburn, in consultation with the Chapter, appointed the Revd. Canon Andrew Horsfall as Interim Dean from 16 July onwards, on a part-time secondment from his post with the National Health Service.

On 18 December a sole candidate was interviewed for the full-time post of Residentiary Canon, Canon Pastor and Vice Dean, and the Revd. Canon Andrew Horsfall was appointed with effect from 1 February 2026. Canon

Horsfall retains the title of Interim Dean. The Revd. Canon Dr Jenny Gaffin, Canon Precentor, was absent from the Cathedral at periods approved by the Bishop of Blackburn during the year. In December, with the support of the Interim Dean, she asked the Bishop if she could spend some time supporting parish ministry within the Diocese after Christmas.

The Canon Missioner, Revd. Canon James Lawrence, additionally carried the duties of Canon Precentor for significant periods of 2025.

The Chapter wishes to put on record its deep appreciation of their commitment to the Cathedral and its mission by both Canon Horsfall and Canon Lawrence.

Safeguarding

The INEQE audit of safeguarding at the Diocese and the Cathedral took place in the week beginning 3 February.

An Interim Report about the findings for the Cathedral was issued the following week, the Draft Report on 11 April, and the final text (available to view at blackburncathedral.com/ineqe) on 2 July.

The Chapter agreed to accept in full all 28 recommendations in the report relating to the Cathedral, and the matching recommendations relating to safeguarding in the Bishop's Review.

Additional resources have been made available from the Church Commissioners and the Diocese to help the Cathedral meet its legal and procedural obligations, and the following specific actions up to the end of December included the following:

- A Safeguarding Action Plan has been drawn up that shows progress on required actions, and this is reviewed on a regular basis by the Chapter. Early attention has been given to improvements in record keeping, safer recruitment, communications and training, together with externally-based support for individual members of staff.
- A Safeguarding Improvement Board has been set up, chaired by Ms Barbara Peacock, and includes the Interim Dean, the SNEM and the relevant professional community of interest. Terms of reference were agreed with the Chapter, to provide challenge and support for the aims of the Cathedral's improvement journey over an anticipated period of twelve months.
- A Service Level Agreement has been approved between the Diocese and the Cathedral that includes resourcing issues and lines of communication.
- Provision is made at all Chapter meetings for discussion of safeguarding, supported by the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, Ms Catherine Smith, being in attendance
- A part-time Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser, Ms Lesley Hurst, was appointed in November and reports to Ms Smith.
- A safeguarding operations group meets on a regular basis and reports to the Chapter.

Education

Although provision was somewhat reduced during the year because of capacity issues, with the assistance of a competent volunteer team, the highly effective offer to schools has continued.

Forty schools made visits from across the Diocese, with trails that included workshop visits being the most popular. Gaia offered the opportunity for theme-based workshops and visits focussing on Nations of the Earth proved to be particularly attractive.

Visits from two local mosques took place through the year, in line with a protocol drawn up between the institutions. Record keeping and administrative processes were

further developed and income of over £9,000 achieved. Careful bespoke preparation for every visit takes place, and evaluation forms issued. Of the 49% form return rate during the year, all expressed satisfaction with the organisation of the visits.

Particular mention was made of how the needs of the visitors had been met and how much pupils had learned. The issue of capacity remains a concern for the Chapter.



Primary school visit

Finance

The Cathedral's finances were stable with a small operating surplus.

Grant support was received for safeguarding from the Church Commissioners and the Diocese, and funding from the Cathedral Sustainability Fund covered several posts, including the centenary and fundraisers together with support for Blackburn Cathedral Enterprises.

Good housekeeping enabled operating costs to be kept to a minimum despite significant rises in employment costs and utility prices.

Blackburn Cathedral Enterprises continued to expand despite challenges of staff turnover and rising costs, contributing to the Cathedral's mission of hospitality and supporting special events.



Princess Proms concert



Candlelight concert

Major growth has been achieved through the expansion of events including showpiece exhibitions and art installations and once again being a host venue for the National Festival of Making and the British Textile Biennial.

Candlelight concerts continued to be extremely popular, generating a secure level of income and consolidating the Cathedral's position as a major cultural venue for Lancashire.

Checks & Greys, the Cathedral café served a dedicated clientele enjoying home cooked food in a family atmosphere. Addition revenue was achieved through the growth of online ordering for off-site delivery.

The John Booth Foundation generously converted a loan of £150,000 into a gift, and some private legacies were received for specific purposes.

Fabric

The year for the Fabric Advisory Committee, chaired by Ms Emma Birkett, has been one of stability for its work, largely due to the professional guidance and expertise of the Cathedral Architect, Ms Louise Priestman.

The committee regretfully accepted the resignation of Mr Ivan Wilson, and the recruitment process for his replacement has begun, to make the committee quorate and to complete its skills and experience set. Through the CFCE Mr James Traynor, who has been able to offer support on the decarbonisation agenda, has been welcomed to the committee.

Significant work took place during the year. The contractual position of Clergy Court was finally concluded, the quinquennial inspection of the Cathedral completed, and CFCE approval for the Cathedral lighting scheme obtained.

A reception office at the entrance was set up, and health safety and fire improvements made to the Undercroft. These included improvements to the archive space with good quality storage facilities, led by Ms Sue Hall.

A major refurbishment of the Crypt took place, transforming the space for active use, including a Changing Places facility, an upgraded servery and a new community space, together

with improved lighting and acoustic installation. Discussions around the future use of Church House continued, with various options being tested, while plans to clean and rebuild the organ met with delays about safe access to its higher levels.



West Doors

Ambitious plans are in place for further works during 2026, including the refurbishment of the West Doors. These rely on fundraising and approvals being in place, and it is a pleasure to note that two externally financed fundraisers are currently in post.

Blackburn Cathedral Partners

Blackburn Cathedral Trust

The Trust exists to support the Cathedral to ensure it continues to provide an outstanding environment, not only for worship, but also for hosting a range of diverse activities.

The Trust raises funds in a variety of ways and holds a lively programme of events throughout the year including literary lunches, garden parties, talks and a popular annual golf day, held at Clitheroe Golf Club.

The introduction of the Cathedral's new fundraising team has provided an opportunity for the Trust to renew and re-energise their fundraising strategy.

The focus during the Cathedral's forthcoming centenary year will be on raising funds for the new West Doors and interior lighting.

The Friends of Blackburn Cathedral

Membership at the end of the year stood at 167, with 20 associate members, and with the aim during the centenary year of adding another 100. Mr David Thornton stood down from the chair in May, after seven years of exceptional service, and his place was taken by Mr Paul Mason.

A fruitful day at Whalley Abbey, facilitated by Mr Andy Pratt, resulted in a new strategic plan, a new Facebook page and signage in the Cathedral.

Discussions with the Chapter led to revised protocols around Friends' gifts to the Cathedral. Since 2012 the Friends have contributed over £160,000 to projects that enhance the Cathedral, with more promised during the centenary year.

Thanks are due to the Council and trustees of the Friends, and to Mr Ian White for his continuing support.

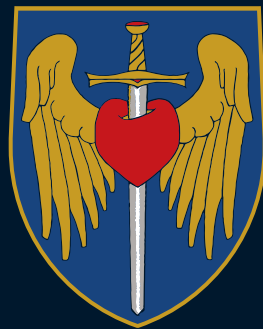
We hold a genuine hope for what lies ahead as we press forward together in God's service.

Chapter members

The Very Revd. Peter Howell-Jones
 The Revd. Canon Andrew Horsfall
 The Revd. Dr Canon Jenny Gaffin
 The Revd. Canon James Lawrence
 Janet Thomas, OBE
 Canon David Gascoigne

Naomi Healey (from 16 July)
 Jayne Jenks (from 16 July)
 Marion McClintock, MBE
 Keith Roberts

Ian White - Chapter Clerk



Blackburn Cathedral Chapter

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