

Report by the Incumbent of the parishes of:

*St John-the-Baptist Barham,
St Giles Kingston,
St Mary-the-Virgin Bishopsbourne,
Holy Innocents Adisham,
St Margaret of Antioch Womenswold
St Peter's Aylesham*



2025 Annual Report of the Parochial Church Meetings (APCM)

Objectives and Activities

The Rector and the PCCs are committed to encouraging and enabling as many people as possible to see our churches as their 'spiritual and pastoral home'; to find a 'personal faith'; to be part of life's pilgrimage; to worship in our churches and to become part of our benefice community. The Rector and the PCCs maintain an overview of worship in the parish with the intention of being as inclusive as possible. They make suggestions on how our services can be open and welcoming. With six churches in our benefice, (one being a mission church) we have aim to provide a broad range of services to suit people of very different spiritualities. Our services and worship put faith into practice through prayer and scripture, music and sacrament, formally or informally which reflects the richness of the Anglican spectrum.

When planning our activities for the year, the Rector and the PCCs have considered the Commission's guidance on public benefit and, in particular, the specific guidance on charities for the advancement of religion. In particular, we try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- Worship, prayer and study sessions in learning about the Gospel and the Bible; and developing their knowledge and faith in Christ.
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish.
- Missionary and outreach work.

As a benefice we are also mindful of the priorities set out by The Church of England "Five Marks of Mission" and strive to fulfil them.

TELL – To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

TEACH – To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

TEND – To respond to human need by loving service

TRANSFORM – To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation

TREND – To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Also, in line with the priorities of the Diocese of Canterbury, we aim:

- To grow the Church numerically and spiritually in keeping with a 'mixed economy' of faith.
- To re-imagine our ministry, particularly through God's call to licensed and ordained ministry.
- To build sustainable and life-giving partnerships and communities.

The PCCs and the Fabric Sub-committees (or Project Groups) have a duty of care in maintaining the churches of our benefice, historic mediaeval Grade 1 Listed buildings, so that it continues to enable the church to be a safe and welcoming place for public worship, pastoral services (Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals) and for other community events and meetings. We are immensely grateful for the financial support of all five Friends of our Churches – so vital to the community and where fund raising activities have been limited the last two years.

Worship Services in 2025

The PCCs of the six churches collectively are keen to offer a range of services over the course of the church year which our communities find both beneficial and spiritually fulfilling, and mindful that being led by the Holy Spirit we address the worshipping needs of all.

We offer a variety of weekly services across the Benefice on Sundays, ranging from traditional *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) services at Bishopsbourne and Barham, through to mainstream *Common Worship* (CW) across our churches. A *midweek Benefice Eucharist* service is also held at Barham on Wednesdays. The pattern services have encouraged lay leaders to take the services as in the regular Sunday *Morning Prayer Services* at Adisham; *Songs of Praise* at Womenswold and Matins and *Evensong* at Bishopsbourne, and *Café Church* at Kingston Barn Aylesham holds a 9am and 10.30am services.

The *Benefice Services* prove to be most popular in January, July and August in encouraging congregations to travel and worship together in each other's churches as many members of one body - reminding us all of our pilgrimage through life and where Christ is our end destination.

In the Benefice we are blessed to have excellent *organists* in Rod Spencer (Barham), Michael Lewis and Richard Ansell (Womenswold), and Julia Lister (Bishopsbourne), Heather Armstrong & Sarah Taylor (Adisham).

The Choir based at St John's Barham is led by Mr. Rod Spencer which sings regularly in parish and benefice services. We are most blessed to have an excellent choir master and talented singers in that they keep returning to sing Evensong at Canterbury Cathedral during the school holidays when the Choristers are away. In 2025 they sang the Evensong during the February and October half term breaks and also at St John's Barham for

Candlemas on the 2nd February. Also during the year St John's Barham was hired out for the *Snowdown Male Voice Choir* and *Jubilate* for singing rehearsals with both bringing much cheer and enjoyment for singers and audiences alike. A special thanks to Lucy Gove.

Lent began with the Imposition of Ashes on *Ash Wednesday* at St John's Barham and Mothering Sunday celebrated in some of our churches with Kent College Junior Choir singing and leading the service at Barham

In the lead up to *Easter* we enjoyed a large gathering of our communities outside St John's Barham to commemorate *Palm Sunday* then processing in song to complete the service at the Village Hall for the Passion Reading. Once again, our churches provided *Easter Gardens*, which is becoming a tradition and my thanks indeed to the many who allow it to happen in construction and in planting and watering the plants. It also offered a chance for members of the public to pause, reflect and to hold conversations with us along the way. *Good Friday* started with *Witness on the Green* at Adisham and *Requiem* by the Choir at St John's Barham in the afternoon. All our churches offered special services from *Maundy Thursday Eucharist* at St Margarets Womenswold to *Easter Sunday Evensong* at St Mary's Bishopsbourne, including a *Holy Saturday Mediations* at Kingston and it is always special when each of our Churches can celebrate the ultimate day of our faith as the Easter people.

At the end of June we rejoiced as Rev Clary Read, our *Assistant Curate*, was ordained into the *priesthood* by Bishop Rose at Canterbury Cathedral and wonderfully supported by the benefice.

In September and October, *Harvest Festival Services* were held in all of our churches as we paid special thanks to our local farmers for their hard work in bringing the harvest home. Much needed food produces went to our local Food Banks. A benefice *Harvest Supper* was enjoyed in Bishopsbourne.

The *All-Souls Day Service* (2nd Nov) again attracted many people to St John's Barham to remember their loved one in prayer, song and candlelight, supported by the choir.

Remembrance Sunday services were held in every church of our benefice and at the same time. My thanks to both lay and ordained colleagues to allow this happen especially in the 80th Year of *VE & VJ Days*.

Advent and *Christmas* services saw increased congregation numbers with our *Crib Service* at Barham on Christmas Eve, as always proving to be a popular worship event. There was an *Advent Evensong* at St Mary's, Bishopsbourne and also a *Carol Service* followed by Refreshments at *The Mermaid PH*, with special thanks to the Landlady, Emma Homewood.

On the 13th December there were concerts by *Kent College Chorister (Juniors)* at Barham (with thanks to Rod & Jackie Spencer), and on the same day a concert by *Cantiacorum* brought Christmas music and story-telling through the different centuries.

The *Carols around the Tree* on the village green at Barham (19th December) was well attended with good singing plus a collection made to the *Barham CEP PTA in memory of*

Alison Higgins with special thanks to Sally Gurney's Pop-Up-Band and to Zaf and Hattie Nizamettin of the *Duke of Cumberland PH* for seasonal refreshments and their regular support of St John's through donations from *quiz nights* and raffle prizes, as well as supporting other local charities. As in previous years we are most grateful for the gift of the *Village Tree* from Andrew Clough in memory of his mother, Jean.

Carols on Station Road Green in Adisham also on 19th December was welcomed by the community with Adisham's own Brass Section (Gove Family) providing the music and with thanks to the Blackman & Page families in lighting and refreshment support.

During the *Advent Season* we hosted a well-attended *Kent Army Cadet Carol Service* for A&B Coy (9th Dec) at Holy Innocents Adisham and led the *Barham Crematorium Carol Service* on behalf of Pilgrims Hospice (17th Dec).

Even in Christmas Week (28th) we enjoyed a *relaxed concert at Bishopsbourne* with thanks to Julia Lister and Gubby Wales. The combination of concerts, carols and worship services not only help communities to celebrate the birth of Christ but also for donations to be received in aiding the mission of our benefice.

Support - My thanks to Rev'd Lizzie Hopthrow, Rev'd Dr Jeremy Law, Rev'd Diane Fawcett and Rev'd David Roper in being able to provide the odd cover for services - always very much appreciated.

Pastoral Services

As well as our regular services, we enable our community to celebrate and thank God at life's milestones through occasional or pastoral services. In Baptisms we thank God for the gift of life; in Weddings, personal and public vows are exchanged with God's blessing; and through Funeral services, friends and family express their grief and give thanks for the life which is now complete in this world and to commend our loved ones into God's keeping.

We rejoiced in 2025 at the 10 (-1)* *Baptisms* celebrated at Barham (4), Bishopsbourne (2), Kingston (4) conducted by the incumbent and assistant curate.

In 2025 we conducted 4 (-2) *Marriages* at Barham (1), and Adisham (1), Bishopsbourne (2) with Rev Clary taking her first wedding this year.

During 2025 we conducted 14 (-3) *Funerals* at the following places: Barham Crematorium (5), Bishopsbourne (1) Barham (6), Kingston (2), Aylesham (1) and Internment of Ashes (+4). A special thanks to Geoff Grabham our oldest village paper boy and grave digger for interment of ashes!

* (+/-) on previous year

A **Confirmation Service** was held at *St John's Barham in 2025* on behalf of the deanery led by *Bishop Rose* with five of our confirmands from our benefice, Barham x 3 and Adisham x2. A joyous occasion with three of them being teenagers.

The incumbent is also Rector of St Peter's Aylesham and attends PCC Meetings and APCMs and offers advice and guidance where necessary as required but leaves the running of the church and its mission to the Rev Nick Ratcliffe with support from the Benefice Leadership Team (BLT)

Christian Education in 2025

Our mission to our Church of England Primary Schools of Barham and Adisham continued throughout the year to the best of our ability. Barham CEP was led by Co-Head Teachers Alison Higgins and Jo Duhig, and the school suffered the loss of Alison Higgins who died in December of 2025 and pastoral support was offered by our church community and followed up by a pastoral visit to the school by Bishop Rose.

Alison was much loved and respected by staff and children and her funeral will be held 16. January 2026.

Adisham CEP was led by Head Teacher, Sophie Metcalfe and were successful in receiving a high mark in the new-structured Ofsted Report. We can be very proud of our schools in how they care for our children, pastorally and academically, and for the Christian ethos that shapes their communities.

Our thanks to Barham Primary Governing Board chaired by Tim Hopthrow and the dedicated governors including our Foundation Governors, Mary Cook and Anna Ivil. Anna stepped down this year after several years as governor and her dedication will be very much missed and I am thankful for her time and expertise.

As Adisham CEP belongs to the Stour Academy there is no local representation by governors and it is remotely governed by a central board of directors.

As a church we are involved in delivering Collective Worship in Assembly Time throughout the Academic Year.

For *Candlemas* the Adisham Year 3&4 students learnt how to create a Christingle Orange and had them lit during the service at Holy Innocents. The Barham Year 3 students did likewise at St John's and all enjoyed the experience. Parents and families were invited to attend.

On *Ash Wednesday* the Adisham and Barham Key Stage 2 students were invited to receive their 'Ashing' marking the beginning of the Lent season.

An *Easter Service* was held for Barham School at St John's at the beginning of April before the holiday and Adisham School held theirs after at the end of April at Holy Innocents

Year 6 Leavers Services in July were held for both schools in their respective churches is always moving and yet uplifting in celebrating their achievements in memories, song and prayer with the students receiving a gift of a Bookmark with a Bible verse from the church.

VE80 Services were held at both schools in marking this poignant anniversary when the WWII ended in Europe and both schools spent time in what this meant then and for us now.

Ascension Day was celebrated in worship by Barham School at St Johns whilst *Pentecost* was celebrated in worship by Adisham School at Holy Innocents.

In October, *Harvest Services* were also held for both schools and with a very good attendance of family members at St John's Barham and Holy Innocents Adisham held theirs in the School Hall.

In November both schools commemorated *Remembrance Day* in a solemn manner with prayers, readings and blessing during an extended Collective Worship in schools.

Christmas services during Advent were held by Adisham Students with a week in December for rehearsals in Holy Innocents for the different Key Stage Nativity Plays, culminating in a Carol Service. Barham Students held a Christmas Carol Service at St John's and also a Nativity Play at school for families. A lot of hard work and fun by both students and staff.

Pastoral Care 2025

Our benefice *Pastoral Care Team* (PCT) is represented by Kay Greig (Barham), Gubby Twigg (Bishopsbourne/ Adisham), Pauline Terry and Mary Rance (Adisham), Dianne Ansell (Womenswold) and Christine Horton (Kingston). Our thanks to Rev'd Lizzie Hopthrow in allowing us to meet regularly at The Quiet View for our Supervision Meetings. Pastoral care remains a priority in these uncertain times where anxiety and sickness seem more prominent and where In Christ's name we reach out to the lonely, the anxious, the bereaved, and the vulnerable is. This team is not exclusive we hope others will feel called to join us. Pastoral visiting is the heart to who we are but at times we can be pushed for time when trying to get round to see people in their homes, nursing/residential homes or in any of our hospitals in Kent. Nevertheless, we do our best in offering spiritual comfort.

The *Benefice Community Relief Fund* has been blessed to receive generous donations (which does *not* draw from Church funds) to assist the financially challenged parishioners within our communities. In 2025 we continued to still receive generous donations and allowing for one-off grants to help those parishioners with specific financial difficulties throughout the benefice. These grants often aid those struggling with heating and utility bills, assisting with food shopping and travel costs, to name the more common requests. The Fund is looked after by the Incumbent & Benefice Treasurer including reviews by the individual PCC Treasurers (who meet every three months). There was more of an uptake especially leading into Christmas and winter period. The fund was initially to cover the Covid Lockdown period, yet we are blessed that it has endured.

Mission and Evangelism

We place a strong emphasis on being available for everyone the parishes of the benefice, and regularly invite people to attend Church, especially at the major festivals and other relevant events.

Kingdom Season Study: Celtic Saints. During this season in November there was an opportunity to study the Celtic Christian of our lands and how their trail blazing witness of Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel and their humble approach can be imitated by our church of today.

Dwelling in the Word: An opportunity to read scripture without preparation and to read more than once in ascertaining what we noticed and how God is speaking to us was held in homes in Adisham.

Service Podcasts: High Days and Holy Days podcasts have been up and running for a few years now, found on our church webpage,

<https://www.barhamdownschurches.org.uk/podcasts.htm> allowing for a moment of reflection through prayer, music and readings from one's home.

Advent Study: Mary where we considered how Mary is presented in the gospels of Matthew and Luke and how as a role-model she speaks to us today. These sessions were held during Advent after the Wednesday HC service at St John's and in the evenings at the Duke of York PH to allow for a wider reach.

Big Breakfast: A wonderful community breakfast meeting at Adisham Village Hall organized by Sue Nyirenda and her kitchen helpers and where Holy Innocent often have a cake and jam store raising funds for the church led by Pauline Terry.

Greenbanks and *Bridge House:* We continue to have a good link with the students (in connection with the Fifth Trust) which provides a home and occupation for people with learning difficulties. Once a month a Bible Study is held for students from both houses which runs on a particular theme, so to chat, to listen, to sing and pray and of course, to clear me out of biscuits and cakes! It is a privilege to be with them and I often see God more so at work in these encounters.

Also, in the last year further Bibles studies have been possible at *Adisham House* and *Kingston House*, again for adults with learning difficulties.

The *Fifth Trust Vineyard Café* offers a great meeting place and a chance to meet both staff and students and to see their creativity in action with the various workshops onsite

Pause For Reflection: This is a community mission led by Mrs. Kay Greig (our thanks) which offers a space for our senior members to come together at Barham Village Hall and discuss a variety of topics whether religious or non-religious with a theme for the month expressed through memories, poetry and pictures followed by tea and cakes afterwards and with many a laugh to be heard. This tends to run from Spring to Autumn and brings many single parishioners together.

Tea Time @ St John's Barham: on the second Sunday of the month has allowed for a relaxed afternoon session of Bible story telling through music, songs, storytelling, crafts and refreshments for the whole benefice to enjoy whether young or old, single or with families as an alternative form of community worship.

Tea @ Two Adisham Village Hall, once a month allows for the gathering of the community who might not come to church yet enjoy a community fellowship through story-telling , a bible reading with prayer and of course refreshments.

Café Church @ Kingston Barn: on the fourth Sunday of the month is a lay-led initiative to allow for an informal way of worship in the comfort of the barn and all the amenities has to offer, especially the kitchen facility for constant refreshments

Home Communion @ Barham homes: With the presence of our Assistant Curate this was re-established for those who have mobility issues and find it difficult to get to the church building and with 8 – 10 people receiving the Sacraments.

Children's Mission Events : As much as we pray for a time when we have regular children's ministry outside of school ministry attending, we ensure that in key moments of the church calendar we hold an event for children, such as Candlemas Christingles, Holy Saturday Poetry and Art Workshop (with thanks to Ingrid Bax, Carolyn Oulton) and Mothering Sunday, Harvest and Christmas Eve services.

Dedicated Children's Area in Church, in both St John's Batham and St Giles Kingston allows for families to use not just during church services and concerts but also during the day when the churches are open to the public.

Community Outreach @ Gold Park Caravan Site (St John of the Park:

Our outreach ministry has led to the pastoral and spiritual care of those who are found to be both physically and metaphorically at the edge of society. We continue to support Gold Park and under the site management of Mark Leutert and Karen Dines. There are many residents who have social and medical issues and supported in terms of welfare and advice. Prayer services and occasionally Holy Communion is offered (and very much weather dependent). They are our outreach church and informally known as 'St John of the Park' – a nod to their occasional attendance at our Wednesday Eucharist service in Barham.



*Café Ad*Hope:* Our monthly meetings at Holy Innocents Adisham offers a place of security and safety in the church for those parishioners with mental health issues to discuss their struggles and their hopes. A theme in each session is explored which may involve arts and music their particular gifts or talents are encouraged. A short Bible reading and prayer concludes our meeting. Life-skills advice is offered and exchanged and by the time we finish most feel lifted. I am most grateful for the assistance of Robin Terry (Adisham) and Gubby Twigg (Bishopsbourne) and Pauline Terry (for the cakes) for their quiet, yet steady presence, especially should one of our parishioners be struggling with their thoughts.

Canterbury Festival in St John's Barham (during July), was very much enjoyed by us locally and from those visiting from further away with *Royal Anglo-Saxon Way* exhibition with paintings by Ingrid Bax in following the footsteps of Anglo-Saxon saints and featuring poetry by Carolyn Oulton in the Autumn Their talent in brush and pen was very much appreciated, thank you.

Other Mission Opportunities in brief:

Also, Kingston and Bishopsbourne held *Christmas Coffee Mornings* and so good to see the community coming together, plus Bishopsbourne had a post Easter plant sale. Womenswold had several concerts to help with fundraising and even an Open Garden this year – for parishioners and friends.

The *East Kent Annual Ploughing Match Day* was held at Quex Park this year and our Lay Reader, Simon Pooley teamed up with All Saints, Birchington Lay Reader to represent the church with a stand at the event and to great effect in praying for people and offering pastoral advice.

I am grateful to all who not only organized the *Ride 'n Stride* in September on behalf of *Kent Churches* but also to those who prepared the churches and took part. Half of the sponsorship money returns to our churches to help with our projects, while the other half goes to Kent Churches from which grant applications can be made, also our thanks to Holy Innocents in helping to celebrate *Heritage Day* and *Summer Fayre* among some of the events.

Chaplain to the Army Cadets is a blessed vocation in which pastoral and spiritual welfare is key among the adults and teenagers (and their families) across the county of Kent and I could argue that I hold the biggest youth group in the county! This year's camp was again at Okehampton (Devon) and in that week prayer gatherings and the Eucharist were celebrated. The incumbent was also Chaplain for the National Music Corps in Lydd in the Autumn Half term which was a treat to hear so many concerts but also being a pastoral and spiritual resource with cadets and adults from all over the country.

The Incumbent attended the *Bishop's Training Day* for Clergy in December with topic focused on Deliverance Ministry and completed an online course with the Guild of Health & St Raphael on Health chaplaincy. Our Assistant Curate attended her training days as part of IME2 program as she comes to the end of year second year with us.

Bishopsbourne Brownies – At the beginning of the year the incumbent helped teach the brownies the basics of Astronomy for their Space badge plus a mission on how we see God's creation in Genesis with today's science. In the summer a talk of the history and mission of St Mary-the-Virgin was given as part of their Community badge award.

Eco-Church

Eco-Butterfly – The Big Count was held around the gardens of The Rectory and the Churchyards of Barham and Bishopsbourne during the beginning of August, allowing

parishioners and members of the public to join in and add their tally to the national picture in ascertaining patterns and species of butterflies that are thriving but also those that may be declining due to climate changes.

Annual Blessing of the Geese - was held again at Longland Farm in November with over 300 Geese (plus the rest of the animals and birds) with a short service with song and it always amazes me how the Geese go quiet for the final blessing. Refreshments were served afterwards.

Of Swifts and Bats! - April saw the installation of a Swift box in the belfry of St Mary's Bishopsbourne (thanks to Colin Elliott) after a presentation on Swifts in our local environment and a blessing afterwards, plus in June a bat and Swift count at St John's Barham and at The Rectory. The swifts were in more numbers and an overnight recording of bat frequencies revealed at least 5 different species in the area.

Eco-Spirituality - In August the incumbent spent 4 days on a retreat at the Franciscan Centre at Godalming where the topics of Science and Religion were deliberated upon.

Communication

Media communication for our Benefice can be found on our Church website and on *A Church Near You*. Key information about services, events, local church history, Christian faith, and also occasional offices (baptisms and weddings) can be found online and we attempt to keep it updated as best as we can. In addition to the weekly pew sheet, we have continue with Word-26 for spiritual and pastoral support through celebrating the Church Year, <https://www.barhamdownschurches.org.uk/word-19.htm> and through occasional podcasts <https://www.barhamdownschurches.org.uk/podcasts.htm>

Our weekly pew sheet with readings, news and events can also be found on, www.barhamdownschurches.org.uk/beneficepewsheet.htm

Communication is through personal invitation and particularly through the parish magazines, where our Leaders contribute a regular column, and all services and events are publicised.

A Barham Church Face Book page and Instagram Account continue to be used and have proven useful in advertising services and communicating with parishioners. Social media, has been a valuable way of keeping in touch with a wide circle, especially with those for whom this has become a natural part of daily life.

Administrator

We value having a paid Administrator, Susannah Lavelle who supports not just the incumbent and our parish but the whole benefice in a paid capacity of 8 hours a week, but we know that she gives extra of her time. There are a variety of administration tasks

carried out from pew sheets to website updates, from monthly service notifications to liaising with families regarding baptisms and weddings to name but a few administrative tasks. Susannah assists with enquiries on the phone and assists Church Wardens, Treasurers and Organists with photocopying. It must be stressed that having an administrator releases the incumbent from routine administration and will be a vital post through a period of interregnum and beyond. I have very much valued her assistance.

PCC Structure, governance and management

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. The membership of the PCC normally consists of the Priest-in-Charge, churchwardens, and members elected by those members of the congregation who are on the electoral roll of the church. All those who attend our services regularly and are communicants are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent. Liaison with the other parishes in the Benefice has been formally through the Committee of Churchwardens which meets quarterly at the Vestry Office. A full PCC meet four to five times during the year and by Zoom. If decisions need to be made between PCC meetings and at short notice, a consensus of PCC views is normally sought by e-mail and recorded. However, for minor matters or in case of extreme emergency the standing committee consists of the Priest-in-Charge, Churchwardens, Secretary and Treasurer and can decide action and seek ratification at the next scheduled or extraordinary meeting of the full PCC.

Safeguarding: All PCCs takes seriously its responsibilities to ensure good practice in terms of Health & Safety, the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults, and the care and maintenance of the building. Additional Safeguard training is an ongoing matter, and it is important that Safeguarding is included on every PCC meeting agenda. I am pleased to say that our Reader, Simon Pooley, has taken up the position of Benefice Safeguarding Officer and is involved in training and assisting the incumbent in updating communication lines. Should anyone feel they need to report a safe-guarding issue. Simon can be contacted on 07419288022 and on pooleysj@icloud.com

Benefice Leadership Team (BLT)

The leadership team consists of the incumbent as Rector, Rev Nick Ratcliffe (Mission Priest), Rev Clary Read (Assistant Curate), Simon Pooley (Reader) and Esther Jonas (Reader). The team allows us to explore mission across the six parishes, to plan and support local church initiatives. I am thankful for their wisdom.

I would also add that without the *curates* in my time some of our mission initiatives may not have been possible, and this goes very much for *Rev'd Clary* as her curacy comes to completion by the beginning of next year. Clary has brought much joy to our services and by inviting many more through the informal gatherings in churches and halls – thank you.

With immense gratitude

With every annual report there is always a worry that I may have failed to mention certain names working within or behind the scenes and I would add that I am incredibly grateful for all the hard work by so many people of our benefice in helping to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, caring for our church buildings and walking alongside so many, without reward or favour. The *missio Dei* is, and always should be, a partnership of ordained and lay ministers and to remember that the harvest is plenty but the workers are few, and yet I am most thankful for so many in our parishes that ensure that the Risen Christ stands among us whether we are flower arrangers, coffee providers, cleaners, missionaries, accompaniers, PCC members, and in particular our dedicated and loyal Church Wardens for the upkeep of our buildings, but also our steadfast Treasurers in wisely advising us in these hard financial times and for all who, greet, guide, distribute and so many more such as The *Friends of our churches* who tirelessly raise funds towards maintenance projects and to our dedicated PCC Secretaries who keep us duly informed.

I would like to say that it has been an absolute privilege to have been your incumbent for these last nine years having learnt much along the way and in building-up this wonderful family of churches into the benefice of the six churches we have today. The Emmaus Road that we have travelled on has been about story-telling, hand-holding, bread-breaking, prayer-raising, lamenting and rejoicing but aware that the risen Christ walks constantly alongside us, no matter the journey or destination. During a time of interregnum this becomes more focused with an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to guide you into a future ministry, as yet unimagined, and where my blessing go with you and my successor.

In a strange way I know I will not be far away as the *Lead Chaplain of The Living Well* in Nonington <https://the-living-well.org.uk/> and there will be times you may see me not as your priest, but as a host for healing and well-being, and always as a friend.

With many thanks from both Andrea and myself, and especially my thanks to Andrea in her total support (and patience) and for her own healing ministry in the NHS.

Carissimi amici, donec iterum in nostra Emmaus via conveniamus!

Always keep in mind that none of us can do God's ministry alone and we are called to offer the Spirit-given gifts within us and to help build up the one body of Christ.

*For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many,
are one body, so it is with Christ.*

1 Corinthians 12:12

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Stefan Thomas (RevT)

6th March 2026