

St Edmund's Church Southwold. Reports for the APCM, 25 May 2025

Supporting the life of the community

Pastoral Care

In 2024 the pastoral care team welcomed three new members. The team meet every eight weeks to plan pastoral care, discuss training opportunities and support each other. During the year all members of the team completed a course, Living Faith in Suffolk Basics, this included sessions on Being Disciples, Being Called, Working Together and Sustaining Ministry.

Members of the team have attended workshops organised by the Blyth Valley Team Pastoral Ministry Group including Listening Skills and Healing Ministry, and Rev. Judy Miller and Sarah Wallington Smith led a workshop on 'Prayer in Pastoral Ministry' for the Blyth Valley Team. All involved in pastoral care were re-commissioned at the team service on 29 September 2024.

Lisa Nickell Lean and Ann Pooley have started a bereavement support group. The first meeting was in February. Monthly meetings will be held, currently at The Stella Peskett Hall.

Discussions are ongoing around developing a prayer ministry team to offer prayer to those who would like it after services, together with more home groups/life groups in the parish. Welcome cards have been created and are in every pew. The cards allow those completing them to request pastoral care support. A link has been made between the pastoral care team and the younger families.

There is a strong relationship with the residential care home at St Barnabas where the team offer a monthly communion service, a Christmas Carol service and additional communions at Christmas and Easter. Revd Russ Gant and Revd Philip Tarris together with four members of the pastoral care team lead the services. The residents much enjoy the service. Sarah Wallington Smith and Elizabeth Tarris are both Trustees of St Barnabas and visit the residents regularly. In the forthcoming St Margaret's interregnum Sarah Wallington Smith is helping with some of the home communions

Sarah Wallington Smith

Eco Group

Our main objectives during 2024 have been to:

- Register with the Eco Church scheme. Thanks to diligent work by Emma Taylor and Judy Miller, St Edmunds has achieved the Silver Award.
- Liaise with East Suffolk Council (ESC) on the management plan for the churchyard. A successful meeting led to a much clearer understanding of the role of ESC in the management of grass areas, trees, walls and hedges. Our task now is to review the management plan so as to maximise bio diversity and wildlife.
- Create a new compost area. A licence has been agreed with ESC to position this in a corner of St Edmunds Green. ESC staff will help to chip tree and shrub cuttings as required.
- Assembly and workshop sessions with children from Southwold Primary School, using the 'Threads through Creation' theme, on caring for the earth and different habitats.
- Research low energy solutions for church heating

Children's work

During 2024, we have maintained the growth in the children's work and we now have around 16 children that regularly attend Sunday School. We also have a core group of people that are willing to help at Sunday School and we thank God for this provision and their faithful ministry.

The Sunday morning groups continue to split into two, with the younger ones meeting in the Porch Room and the older ones meeting in the Choir Vestry. This enables age-appropriate teaching. The groups are led on a rota basis, allowing helpers to be present in some of the services, whilst also forming part of the Sunday School team.

Our 9.30am service of Family Worship is so enhanced by the families and children who join us and the atmosphere is lively and welcoming. Many families stay for refreshments afterwards and enjoy the opportunity for interaction and conversation.

Amanda Hirst

Parent and Toddler Group

We are pleased to report that the Parent & Toddler Group has flourished despite some challenges during the year. We needed temporary accommodation when the Arts Centre was closed for building work, and thankfully we were able to use the Guide Centre which proved an excellent home for a few months. We are grateful to Jill Horne and Mary Smith on behalf of the Guide Centre who made this possible.

Now settled back at the Arts Centre, we realised that, to enable the group to break even, we had to increase the entry fee to £1.50 for adults and £1 for all children over 6 months. This ensures we can continue to offer a healthy snack to all the children and tea or coffee with biscuits to the adults.

We have continued to celebrate events such as Shrove Tuesday when we enjoyed Pancakes and the Easter egg hunt were two very popular events. The annual Christmas party was again a success with a bouncy castle plus the usual activities including a visit from Father Christmas and a gift for each child. We are very grateful to the Town Council for sponsoring this event.

The group attracts local families with varying numbers each week in the region of 8 children and 6 adults during term time.

Liz Benson

Welcome and stewarding

During the year some 23 volunteers have served for an hour or two each week (31 hours in total) as church stewards—or maybe welcomers would be a better title. Comments in the visitors' book indicate that a smile and word of welcome go a long way towards contributing to St Edmund's renewed focus on 'welcoming' and showing that the church is a living body, not just a dead museum. With the church open for 49 hours in the winter and 63 in the summer, however, it is obvious that there remain many periods when the church is not attended at all, and offers of help from others would be appreciated; do have a word with me if you would like to explore this possibility.

While there have been no serious incidents to report, I often hear of curious questions and requests, with some of which stewards are able to offer help and guidance. None of us knows everything, however, so that a simple 'I'm sorry, I don't know' has sometimes to suffice. With the very large number of visitors who come through the church doors, we are very grateful for all the volunteers who offer this service.

Hugh Williamson

Study groups

The ecumenical lent study groups were well subscribed in 2024. There were 5 groups in total. The groups studied Paula Gooder's study course 'The Joy of the Gospel'.

Jenny Whines continues to host and lead her regular study group. The group is currently full.

Members of the pastoral care team have attended workshops organised by the Blyth Valley Team Pastoral Ministry Group including Listening Skills and Healing Ministry, and Rev. Judy Miller and Sarah Wallington Smith led a work shop on 'Prayer in Pastoral Ministry' for the Blyth Valley Team.

We are starting to explore what other life/home groups can be established alongside the above study groups, the Men's Fellowship and a group for young mothers

Open the book

With a team of seven (and one reserve) the OTB team has been able to present 10 varied Bible stories to the children at Southwold Primary School this year. We were sorry that two members of the group had to leave for health reasons, but we were delighted that two members of the URC have joined us. With men and women from URC, Anglican, and Salvation Army backgrounds, the group is never short of ideas for the best way to teach young children about the Christian faith.

The children are always eager to dress up and take part, and particularly enjoyed being ravens (Elijah), and camels, (Wise Men). For the shepherds' story every child in the school had a part either as a sheep or an angel. The Good Samaritan was enacted entirely with puppets, several of which were made by Brenda Doy. She and Peter provide inspirational ideas and props, for which I am most grateful.

Our thanks to the teachers in the school who are most supportive and welcoming. If any members of the church have spare time and needlework skills, and would like to assist with costume making, please let me know!

Julia Johnson

St Edmunds Mother's Union

Our branch membership now stands at 8. The decline in formal membership, the accident sustained by leader Jeanette Wallond in May 2024 which led to difficulties in mobility for a few months, plus various health problems of the committee and other members, has led to the sad decision to close the Southwold with Reydon Branch. The 8 members of the MU will become Diocesan Members. We shall still have occasional meetings and continue to support events organised by the Diocese and by

the North Suffolk Area (NSA) of the MU. We shall also continue to attend the Thursday communion at St Edmunds on the 1st Thursday of every month.

Friends in St Edmunds and St Margarets will still be welcome to join with us at meetings and events. We hope to continue also to support CAP, Christians Against Poverty, with gifts and cash for their festive hampers. Jeanette and a fellow member still hope to give help and support to the Parent & Toddler group that meet in the Arts centre on Wednesday mornings in term time. It would be good to have someone else to step in occasionally with playing nursery rhymes on the piano and /or leading the toddlers in simple activity songs.

So far, in 2025, two of us attended the annual Lady Day service which this year was held in Bury St Edmunds in the Cathedral. Several new officers were commissioned during the service to serve on the trustee board.

On Wednesday 9th June, a few hope to take part in 'The world We're Passing On' – a service of reflection being held at Fressingfield, led by Revd Alison Alder, followed by a ploughmans lunch. In July, on Saturday 12th, everyone is invited to "Tea by the Sea" in Southwold, using the URC hall. In September, on Saturday 12th, at St Margaret's, Reydon, Russ Gant will be speaker at an Afternoon with Tea. These 3 events are being organised by the North Suffolk Area(NSA) of the MU.

We are grateful for the support of St Edmund's, St Margaret's, and the Sole Bay Team. And special thanks to Mrs Jill Horne for looking after our finances.

Jeanette Wallond

St Edmund's shop

The church shop is prominent at the back of the church, sells many church related items and is popular with visitors. We are very grateful to Jay Williamson for managing the shop so well over many years and promoting Fair Trade. She stood down from that role during 2024.

We are also grateful to Lucy Millar-Hume who has taken on the shop and look forward to it being a continuing part of our contact with our visitors.

Website and Facebook

2024 saw a significant increase in Facebook and Website users compared to 2023. Our communications through Facebook reached over 12,000 people up from 11,000 the previous year and we added another 50 Followers giving us a total of 720 users.

The church website was accessed by 3,400 people throughout the year, up from 2,000 the year before. The online calendar was one of the most actively used parts of the website confirming to us how important this means of communication is to both our local worshipping community and visitors to the town.

Safeguarding

We are concerned to ensure that our church is a safe and secure place, particularly for the young and the vulnerable. We have adopted the Church of England safeguarding policy 'Promoting a safer church'.

There have been no safeguarding incidents in 2024. We are most grateful to Carolyn Kerr for her diligent service as safeguarding officer and to Deborah Young who has now taken over that role.

Revd Russ Gant

The daily life of the church

Deanery Synod

The Deanery Synod meets three times a year at different churches around the diocese. Each meeting had a discussion of financial issues, staffing and vacancies and an opportunity to share special events, successes or matters of concern in each parish, as these might be useful for other churches and focus our prayers. Each meeting also has a special focus when an invited speaker will address us on his subject and usually takes questions. The meetings are open to all.

In 2024 these meetings were as follows:

- Feb 19th St Luke's Beccles the speaker was Bishop Mike on "Making the most of Lent". He had recently returned from Kagera our sister Diocese. He spoke of the enormous warmth and growth of the churches there and how much they appreciate and benefit from their link with us.
- June meeting Holy Trinity Barsham Geoffrey Probert of Suffolk Historic Churches Trust described the work of the Trust since its foundation in 1973. At this meeting Revd Judy Miller and Revd Alison Alder also spoke about their pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela led by Rev Alan Perry
- Nov 7th at St Margaret's Reydon at which the special speaker was James Roll, the Diocesan Zero Carbon officer who emphasized that the call to net zero carbon was an essential part of our mission, concentrating as it does on caring for creation, ending poverty and seeking a viable future both for ourselves and the generations which will come after us. Because of the efforts of Judy Miller and Alison Alder 16 churches in the deanery were now registered for the Eco Church scheme with 12 having received bronze awards and 2 silver.

Jenny Whines

Handbell Group

The Handbell Group continues to meet on Monday afternoons in St Edmund's Gallery. With three new members the band is now at capacity. However, I would still be happy to hear from anyone who might like to join in the future. No previous knowledge of music is required.

The highlight of this year was the performance of Badingham Chime at Blythburgh Church for part of the closing service of the Aldeburgh Festival on June 23rd. This piece, by Imogen Host was written for the 22nd Aldeburgh Festival and was first performed on June 24th 1969 at Badingham Church by the handbell ringers from Leiston Modern School under the direction of Hugh Connell. The piece was found by Stephen Wells when researching handbell music. Permission was given for the St Edmunds band to purchase a copy of the music for their own use and for the one performance at Blythburgh. The band has also enjoyed learning another piece by Imogen Host called February Welcome which was written in 1980 for Barbara Brook and her handbell ringers.

The band has played for the Southwold Band Parent and Toddler Group on several occasions. It is always a delight to ring for the toddlers, and the ringers are made to feel very welcome. The band will shortly be ringing for the local WI group.

Visitors from UK and abroad (Sweden, Austria, Switzerland) have joined us during the year. This has encouraged us to learn to play tunes from abroad and occasionally to sing them as rounds.

Last year one of the band ran a short course on a set of hand chimes for a class in Southwold Primary School. Amongst other tunes the children rang Happy Birthday for a child in another class. The band have been very fortunate in having the loan of a set of hand chimes. This enables all members of the band to play at the same time, and also adds a different quality of tone.

The Sunday School children (and adults) have rung the handbells after morning service on a couple of occasions. They would be welcome to do so again when the opportunity arises.

The group manages to remain cheerful throughout the winter months, and it is warming to hear visitors singing along as they stroll round the church on a Monday afternoon! Birthday teas continue to be enjoyed in the church and in other tearooms in town. Thanks to all members of the group for their enthusiasm, interest and support.

Julia Johnson

Flower group

St Edmunds church is very big and, although already beautiful, we like to do it justice when we decorate it for the major festivals. It is great, therefore, that there is a willing band of people ready to help as there is always plenty to do at Christmas, Easter and Harvest time but we would welcome more help, skilled or unskilled.

For Mothering Sunday, the flower team were joined by some of the congregation including children who helped in making the posies to distribute. Refreshments part way through and conversation added to the enjoyment and fellowship in the task.

We had a major project this year making poppy displays for Remembrance. Through the summer the regular flower team were joined by others to make a large number of poppies from ribbon, holding a number of friendly workshops in church. The original intention was to make a 'cascade' of poppies for the font but so many poppies were made that we were able to make a cross for the altar and a wreath for the pulpit as well.

There are a number of ladies (could be men) who enjoy making up the regular pedestals. The flower team are available to create floral decorations for family events in church such as weddings and funerals. The team strive to be as environmentally friendly as possible and have developed ways of decorating without floral foam (oasis).

Mary Lomas

St Edmunds Tower

The eight bells of St. Edmund's church are maintained in good order and are rung every Sunday for the morning service, reminding the town that Christian worship is an important part of Southwold life. When requested, the bells ring out for weddings, funerals and special occasions.

A dedicated band of ringers practice on Friday evenings, in the tower, 7.30 to 9.00 pm. Several people have been learning to ring over the past year and have found it to be a very worthwhile exercise, the outcome being to join in with the band on Sundays.

Occasionally, a quarter peal will mark a special event. The bells ring for forty-five minutes, involving over one thousand changes, which means that their sequence alters, following a particular method. A full peal (rung twice a year at St Edmund's) lasts for almost three hours and it is a joy to hear the bells being evenly struck in a series of over five thousand changes.

Bell-ringers are always welcomed when visiting different towers throughout England. New recruits are encouraged to learn this skilled, long-established activity..

Kate Assmann

Church music

1. Choir and organ

We are hugely grateful for the choir's consistent and dedicated support across the year. Without their contribution to services, in leading the congregational singing and through the provision of a regular and varied repertoire of anthems, our worship would be the poorer.

Although our numbers remain modest, they are consistent and there are very few services where we cannot field a 4-part choir. We are also fortunate in having a number of 'supplementary' singers who we can call on when needed and our thanks go to them, also, for their support.

I am pleased to report that there has been much forward movement in the refurbishment of our organ. The console has now been stripped and taken to the organ builder's workshop where it is undergoing a major overhaul and a new, custom made, digital control system installed. The organ builders have also undertaken a long overdue cleaning of the organ chamber and have constructed a deflecting canopy over the 'choir' organ to protect it from any future rain or plaster fall. We are expecting that the instrument will be fully operational by mid-May 2025 and are hugely grateful for donations and grants received which have allowed us to proceed in a timely fashion.

Victor Scott

2. Family worship and church band

Music for the 9:30 services and other family-oriented or more 'informal' acts of worship continues to grow in range and ambition. We aim to cater to a very wide range of musical tastes, including everything from traditional hymns to more modern songs, and regularly introduce new music for worship in services.

The church band now has a roster of over 20 regulars, including several young people alongside adults of all ages and abilities. We owe them all a huge debt of thanks for their time and contribution to the church.

The new sound system has also made a tremendous difference to the band, enabling us to lead the congregation more effectively and increase the range of music we play in church. So thank you to everyone who so generously contributed to that appeal - it was a big expense but has made a massive difference to our worship.

A final and special thank you goes to our resident sound engineer Marcus Knight for setting up the numerous microphones, stands, monitors and cables - and most importantly making sure they all work! - often giving up a lot of his weekend to do so.

The band have also been delighted to collaborate with the choir on various team services and look forward to this continuing in special services in the year ahead.

New band members are always most welcome. We make all our own arrangements and can easily write a meaningful part for anyone who can play an octave of notes on their instrument. Reading music is beneficial but not essential as most of the songs we play can be learned from recordings online. Do contact me if you are interested to join us.

Nathan Williamson

Church hospitality

During 2024 Jay Williamson continued to provide refreshments after the 9.30 service each week, and Sarah Wallington Smith continued to organise a rota for refreshments following the midweek communion. Joan Goldsmith coordinated St Edmunds lent lunch at the Cardinal Newman Hall which was well attended and several of the congregation helped.

There were 2 bring and share lunches at Pentecost and Harvest both well attended and coordinated by Joan and the church wardens. A BBQ was held for the beach mission team and organised by Mary Goodrich and the church wardens.

Liz Tarris was appointed as hospitality team leader in the autumn and has completed her food and hygiene certificate level 1. Liz with the help of Mary and others provided mulled wine and mulled apple juice for the Town Carol service. Adnams kindly donated the mulled wine and the town council the mince pies. St Edmunds will be hosting the Christian unity lunch in January 2025.

Liz would like to thank Jay, Sarah, Joan, the church wardens and all the other willing volunteers.

Liz Tarris