

Clergy report on ministry and mission, January – December 2025,
for Annual Parochial Church Meetings in the Saxilby & Stow Group of Churches

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,
just as in fact you are doing.*

1 Thessalonians 5:11

As I reflect back on 2025, what has stood out to me has been the encouragement we have been to one another. No matter what we are facing, whether it be challenges that are personal, local or international, we have faced them together, and brought hope and support to our local communities. We have worked hard together in mission and ministry, deepened relationships and been there for each other, sharing life's ups and downs. I have personally found this a source of inspiration and comfort. It has given me courage when taking risks and I am so grateful for your generosity with your time and gifts, and for being willing to experiment with new ways of reaching out to our local communities in pastoral care and the gospel of Christ Jesus. Your encouragement has helped me to persevere through sad times such as the death of loved ones in our communities, and the challenge of reaching an unchurched world.

Worship and festivals

Thank-you for your enthusiastic involvement in and leading of our worship and festivals. I can look back at many highlights in 2025. The Candlemas Christingle at Saxilby was well attended. During Holy week we welcomed the Bishop of Lincoln as he presided at the Maundy Thursday Communion and foot washing in Stow Minster, and we had more involvement from young families in the Saxilby Walk of Witness on Good Friday.

In the autumn we experimented with a pet service at Saxilby church (attended by tortoises, dogs, cats, guinea pigs, and their humans) and had joyful harvest celebrations across our churches. The Harvest evensong and meal at Willingham helped us to engage with more members of the wider community. We also developed the monthly creative evening prayer at Saxilby and a monthly family holy communion service at Saxilby and Willingham, and lighter, family-friendly liturgy at Newton. For Remembrance Willingham and Saxilby had D day 85 celebrations and each parish had a moving Remembrance service. Advent and Christmas were marked by Lessons and Carols, a lively Crib Service, pantomime, Midnight Mass and morning eucharist, with attendance up overall compared to last year.

Deepening discipleship

In the spring, confirmation classes were a great joy and our five candidates (from both Kettlethorpe and Saxilby Churches) were confirmed during a service lead by Bishop David presiding at his last service as a Bishop in our diocese.

In the winter we launched the 'set our hearts on fire' course on zoom to continue into the new year. We gathered every other week to discuss, read the Bible and pray together, and these have been a great encouragement to all involved.

Pastoral offices and care

Across all our churches we had 15 baptisms, 6 weddings and over 50 funerals and burials. A huge thank-you to all who support the baptisms and are vergers at weddings and funerals, and to Revd Joan for her sharing with me in this ministry. These pastoral offices not only support people who are going through difficult times or moments to celebrate but also provide opportunities for me to pray with them, have conversations about faith and introduce them to our worshipping communities. In 2025 I began to change the way we book in weddings and baptisms so that the contact with their worshipping community is strengthened. It's been encouraging to welcome those who have joined our church congregations following a pastoral office.

The bereavement café took place in March and November. These have been encouraging for those attending and there was a request for one in the mid-winter for the following year which we were happy to deliver. Other members of the community have come forward as volunteers to help us with these. Over the year I began to meet more and more people in the community who want to help with church things, for example, we have a young man, Dan, who willingly creates the Messy Church flyers for me. I realised that the following year, 2026, my focus needs to be on expanding our volunteer base in the local community.

Shared ministry

We are really blessed by the contributions of our lay leaders, whose ministries support and enrich our worship, ministry and mission. I want to thank the ALMs for all the pastoral care they do on behalf of our church, including hospital visiting and home communions, and for their constant encouragement through sharing in worship leading. Prayer Warriors have underpinned all our ministry with prayer and have regularly prayed for those in need. Thanks to Lin and David Warner for organising this every week.

Helen Durasamy and Jonathan Wainwright became Authorised Lay Ministers in 2025 and Jonathan began Reader training. Trevor Lee continued his training to be an ALM too. Jonathan is also Chair of Governors and has been a supportive colleague as we have worked with the school on spiritual development. We were delighted, in September, to begin offering each school year group a special moment of worship in church, in addition to the usual festival services, with feedback from the children such as 'best collective worship ever'. In both Saxilby and Newton schools I've been delighted to be joined, in role of Foundation Governor, by two very capable and enthusiastic volunteers to help develop the Christian distinctiveness of these schools. Thank-you Deb Bunn and Justine Wright.

Our choirs have rehearsed hard and supported our singing beautifully. Willingham Church's choir showed great creativity and stamina in delivering their Sing-alongs which were much appreciated.

A huge thank-you to our organists Roger Pilgrim, Andrew Staton and Colin Kyme for their faithfulness and provision of music for our services.

I'm grateful for the dedication of the Messy Church leadership team as we worked creatively to provide services which had consistently good attendance. Now we need to explore how we rise to the challenge of what to offer the older children who have outgrown this provision and would like to continue to grow in their faith. I'm also grateful for Wendy Hewson for her support as Parish Administrator, especially when I'm on annual leave, and for Colin Knowles who is not only Treasurer for 3 of our churches but also does all the invoicing for all the pastoral offices for all seven churches, and for Barbara Bussey, Parish Safeguarding Officer extraordinaire for encouraging us to keep up with our safeguarding training and DBS checks, and for supporting Revd Joan and I with pastoral and safeguarding issues. We have been blessed and encouraged by Joan's continued ministry among us, and the ministry of our retired clergy, Revd. George Parrot, Revd. Ian Stockton and Ven. Geoffrey Arrand who provide cover for some Thursday and Sunday services.

Encouraging each other

Our churches are served by hard working Church Wardens and PCCs who make sure the church is maintained and that that our mission and ministry flourish. We've continued to meet as individual parishes and also together as groups of PCCs three times in the year in order to discuss and plan some aspects of our common life together. This has been hugely encouraging to me as we pool our resources and ideas or learn from one another. I've been pleased to see some PCCs create sub-committees to move forward projects and invite more volunteers from the local community to be involved with their local church.

Through moving the fifth Sunday service to Torksey Church we were able to support this struggling church. Revd Joan Vickers became the Focal Minister for Torksey in 2025, and it has been encouraging to work together in that community to develop friendships and offer opportunities for worship.

There's a lot of hard work that goes on quietly in our parishes. I want to thank all the teams involved in organising events for fundraising. It's a lot of hard work, but also a huge encouragement to see the fun had at these. There are too many to mention them all, but we have certainly enjoyed ourselves as well as raised money, from Kettlethorpe's and Newton's concerts where one just can't help but get up and dance, to Saxilby's teddy bear jump, book sale, big breakfast, curry night and strawberry tea (not all in one day), to Torksey's Harvest bingo and Stow Minster's constant welcome to tourist groups led by David Justham, to the final events of 2025 which included Willingham's Christmas Magic and the uniformed groups leading the carol service at Coates.

Thank-you also to everyone who has been involved in organising, tidying, cleaning, making beautiful flower arrangements or keeping our brasses shiny. Your cheerfulness and generosity constantly encourage me immensely. Thank-you also to the refreshments teams making cakes and hot drinks, and always serving with a smile. I'm not sure that many other vicars get to leave their first morning service with a freshly made cake or a bacon butty in hand (thank you Sarah Hogg and the team at Kettlethorpe Church).

Outreach

Behind the scenes, I do a lot of outreach for the church, liaising with parish councils and organisations such as our schools, care homes, charities and uniformed groups. Saxilby Church's poppy cascade was a phenomenal amount of work but had a huge impact and helped bring the community together as well as honour those who give their lives in service to our country. It's thanks to the support of so many of you that I can be active in our communities, have conversations about faith with people who don't come to church or show the love of Christ in loving service.

Evolution of my role

You may remember that I was supposed to be taking on a role in Gainsborough. In 2025 this has mutated into a proposal to take on two more parishes as the Corringham deanery (known now as the Corringham Local Mission Partnership (LMP)) decides how we move forward with reduced clergy numbers. I spent the autumn and winter in our parishes hearing people's views on the proposal for Gate Burton and Marton churches to join the Stow Group, as part of the Deanery Synod's informal consultation. In 2026 a formal consultation will take place. I have also liaised throughout the year with diocesan officers in order to make sure our parishes are well supported.

I continue to invest in developing my leadership skills. In June, I attended training on conflict management and earlier in the year joined with Joan as we learnt together how to work as oversight and Focal Minister. In October I attended a residential conference with the diocesan clergy to discuss how we can help our churches grow spiritually as part of 'Time to Grow Together'. It was a moment for worship and reflection that really encouraged me as I was reminded then, as I am now looking back over 2025, of the faithfulness of God, of the joy of sharing the gospel and serving God's people, and of the huge privilege of being your Priest-in-Charge.

I'm looking forward to seeing what happens in 2026.