



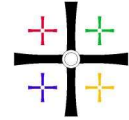
*January*



*February*



*March*



*April*



*May*



*June*



*July*



*August*



*September*



*October*



*November*



*December*

The Venta group of churches

Arminghall, Caistor St Edmund, Stoke Holy Cross and Dunston

Celebrating and Reviewing 2024

For the annual meetings in Spring 2025

[www.venta-group.org](http://www.venta-group.org)

Search Facebook/YouTube for "Venta group of churches"



**The following reports were available at the time of printing,  
but others may follow at the Annual Meetings.**

<b>Contents</b>	
	<b>Page</b>
Part One: The Year in Overview	
<b>Vicar's report</b>	3
<b>Churchwardens' reports</b>	
Caistor St Edmund	5
Stoke Holy Cross with Dunston	6
<b>Secretaries' reports</b>	
Caistor St Edmund	7
Stoke Holy Cross with Dunston	8
Part Two: Areas of Mission and Ministry	
<b>Sparklers</b>	10
<b>Schools</b>	10
<b>Youth ministry</b>	11
<b>Homegroups</b>	
Caistor Lane	12
<b>Praying Together</b>	12
<b>Thursday mornings</b>	13
<b>All Invited</b>	13
<b>Worship</b>	
Part Three: Some vital nuts and bolts	
<b>Safeguarding</b>	15
<b>Deanery Synod</b>	15

## **1. The year in overview**

### **Vicar's report**

Once again so many of you have given so much to the life of our churches in 2024, and I am so grateful for all the effort that has gone into working to see God's kingdom come, and Jesus's name be glorified, in our village communities. There is lots to celebrate in this report, and lots more that we could be said, and the risk is always that we forget someone or something important. So just in case, to all of you, thank you so much.

2024 started with a couple of great services as we welcomed both Nick Blanch from Youth for Christ, and friends from Hope into Action Norwich. Both of these organisations are supported by us in different ways throughout the year, and the partnership with them is something we really treasure, and which we saw grow over the course of the year.

January brought the first of a number of community gatherings at Caistor; a social to start the year led to continued monthly walks, and also included a very cheerful tidy of the churchyard in March. Our main project at Caistor continues to be our long-term goal of redeveloping the building for shared use with the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and the wider community. In the course of the year we scaled down the scope of the building works somewhat to work within the existing footprint of the building only, giving fresh focus to the project as we head into 2025. We held a really encouraging open evening for the community in June.

Throughout 2024, Kirsty opened Arminghall church on a Wednesday afternoon once a month. A number of neighbours dropped by in the course of the year, as well as others from our wider church community. The year ended with us decided to think and pray a bit more about what we might offer at Arminghall and when rather than continuing the same way into 2025.

We had a fantastic Easter season this year, with events all round the villages, including a really encouraging evening with our young people at Stoke Church on Maundy Thursday, and an All Invited session at the hall for Good Friday, while we waited for the Pavilion to be replaced with a brand new Community Hall.

Around Easter we said farewell to a lovely friend and colleague, David Owen, who retired as Rural Dean, and vicar of the Chet Valley Benefice. We have welcomed David at various services and events over the years, and appreciated his friendship in all sorts of ways. I was asked to take on the role of Rural Dean for an initial period of three years, which started with a licensing service at Stoke on 1<sup>st</sup> May. May has become an important month in the life of our churches, with the prayer space in the school, and the Caistor litter pick and BBQ. For the first time in a long time, the Dunston organ had a good servicing, which left it sounding the best it has for ages.

Heading into the summer there was lots to celebrate, including a lovely visit from colleagues from the churches in Koblenz, Embers enjoying football on the big screen, and a really lovely Hymns and Pimms evening at Arminghall. It was an important time for both Lyn and Kirsty, as Lyn began a very well earned sabbatical, and Kirsty celebrated her ordination, first at the cathedral, and the next morning with a lovely joint service at Poringland. Over the course of the year I continued to talk with Ian Bishop (Bishop of Thetford) and Robert Parsonage (Vicar of Poringland) about ways our two groups of churches might work more closely together as Robert heads towards part-time work, and then retirement, over the next couple of years.

Summer is another special time in our churches, and this year was no exception. We had a great Holiday Club with wonderful help from colleagues in the wider diocese and at Youth for Christ in making it happen; some of us went off and experienced another week's wonderful blessing at New Wine; we had a range of lovely morning services across the group in August,

including our annual BBQ at the Vicarage; lots of people again came and enjoyed Cream Teas at Caistor. At the same time Chris, Andy and Gary worked really hard on the Church Hall giving it a tremendous paint job ahead of further decorating and updating work planned for 2025.

In September we had another pair of events which seek to reach very different groups of people, but in their own way are really wonderful; the Service of Remembrance and Hope for families who have suffered bereavement in recent years, and our Harvest afternoon partnering All Invited with the local community at Arminghall. This really catches what is most brilliant about our churches; that we are doing all sorts of things to reach all sorts of people with the good news of Jesus. We saw more evidence of this as the autumn went on, and Lyn and Kirsty and the Thursday morning built on the success of the Communion service and Coffee and Chat by launching Vintage Church specifically to encourage that group to explore and deepen faith in Jesus. Later in the autumn we had a great evening as part of Tearfund's national Big Quiz, where Kirsty got a great team of people together to make it happen.

September also brought changes for us as a family, as two of our children started new schools, and Cathryn began a Children's and Youth ministry course run by the Church of England through Ridley Hall in Cambridge. These two years which she will spend studying and reflecting on all that she does with children and families in our churches are already proving a huge blessing to her, even as we navigate the various practical implications involved in it.

Christmas was brilliant this year. In common with many colleagues in ministry, we saw a wonderful number of people coming and engaging with our different events and services. As we left Stoke on Christmas morning, I reflected with Cathryn that it might have been the best we had seen in the 12 years – maybe it's 13 Christmases – we have been here. So many of you contributed in so many ways, and the choir was as brilliant as ever. Maybe not the highlight, but perhaps the most remarkable thing, was what happened when we arranged to open up Dunston church on Christmas Eve for those staying at the hotel. It quickly became apparent to Lyn and Gary Watson that something extraordinary was happening when they were barely able to get in the door – nearly 70 people had come down! This may just be a nice Christmas thing, but it is my suspicion that it is connected with the increasing number of people who seem to be open to faith in these days, and whom I am hearing more and more stories about.

Those are all kinds of people, but especially younger ones, which is why we continue alongside all we have mentioned above to put lots of prayerful energy into All Invited on Sunday afternoons; Sparklers on Tuesday mornings; school assemblies and lunch clubs; Embers and other youth events; and much more.

I'm bound to have forgotten something, but I know that everything that is done here in Jesus's name is seen by him, and appreciated by him. I know that one day we will see the lasting fruit of every little seed you have sown or watered in the last year, and that it will be a wonderful, wonderful day. But for now, for all that work which you do when things are going well, and especially when times are hard, thank you so much again.

Rob Baker

## **Churchwardens' reports**

### **Caistor St Edmund**

We have two regular services each month, which are Praise and Worship the first Sunday and Holy Communion the third Sunday.. We thank all the Leaders and we greatly appreciate the input by Brian Day who has led all the Praise and Worship services. Also thanks to Antony Jarrold who regularly plays the organ and ensures it is maintained to a high standard. Attendance at our regular services averaged about 9 people.

At Easter we had a service at sunrise outside by the wall of the Roman Town. It was a very special time with the mist slowly clearing. Afterwards we had a lovely breakfast back at the church.

The group Remembrance Day service in November was well attended with the usual gathering round the War Memorial. The community choir came together to sing at the Carol service, which was well attended with 60 people, and there were 35 people at the Christmas Eve midnight service.

The Norfolk Archaeological Trust (NAT) introduced parking charges at the Roman Town in June, which also apply to the church car park. Not everyone has been happy about this, however we have no control over this as the car park and Roman Town are owned by NAT. There is no charge during regular church service hours or special church events and funerals or for those visiting family graves regularly. A few permits are available for occasional use such as contractors.

The church is opened every day thanks to a band of willing volunteers – we do appreciate everyone who gives up their time to ensure the church is open. The number of visitors has dropped since parking charges were introduced but has climbed up a little during the year. It is worth noting that as a volunteer you do not pay parking charges.

The digital giving device has been used reasonably well, although the drop in visitor numbers has affected the giving. However the device is also appreciated by more regular attendees and has been helpful during events such as the cream tea afternoons.

About once a month we provide refreshments for the Central Norfolk Wellbeing walking group who always appreciate the fresh coffee and cakes we provide.

The annual parish litter pick in April was organised again by the Parish Council and volunteers gathered in the Church afterwards for a light supper.

Cream Teas at the church are a regular highlight and were held during August and September. The parking charges do not seem to have deterred many people as each session was well attended. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped with the numerous jobs to make sure everything went well. Half the proceeds were donated to Hope Into Action (£1000).

In March a group from the local community helped to rake off the cuttings of old growth at the sides of the churchyard. This work seemed to result in more wildflowers being visible in the summer months, and everyone who took part enjoyed it and the coffee and cakes afterwards.

We have continued working with the Norfolk Archaeological Trust to investigate the possibility of shared use of the church building. Draft plans have been drawn up to provide some office space for the Trust and to make the space in the Nave more flexible for other uses. A community consultation in July provided us with feedback which was generally positive. Current plans are to investigate starting with a first phase which would be the most simple solution of taking out pews and providing a shared space. Possibilities for funding are being investigated.

Iain Walker, the church architect carried out the Quinquennial inspection in Oct 2022 but there was a long delay in the report being issued. We finally received the report in Jan 2024 – there are no major repairs needed.

We would like to thank all those who have helped to keep things running this year, in particular those who

- Plan and lead a variety of services
- Clean the church
- Arrange beautiful flowers
- Play the organ or keyboard
- Unlock and lock the church
- Maintain the churchyard and its surround

We also thank our Secretary Louise Collins who looks after the PCC administration.

Although we are a small band of regular attendees, we appreciate the time we spend together in the services and thank everyone who leads us in worship.

Lia Day and Jani Wymer

### **Stoke Holy Cross with Dunston**

The “All Invited” twice monthly meetings at the church hall on a Sunday afternoon continue to grow steadily with some regular families and others popping in from time to time. We are especially grateful to all who help, and especially for those providing cakes and hot food and drinks. A rota is now in place to spread the catering.

The Community Food Cupboard is well used and we pray that those in need find it a helpful resource. Our thanks to all who help to keep the cupboard stocked.

Sparklers continues to thrive with numbers attending varying from week to week, but especially busy just before Christmas.

We are, once more, very grateful to a team of people who give their time to the maintenance of the churchyards. We are equally grateful for those who take turns to clean the church each week, and others, often the same people, who provide the coffee and biscuits before the service.

We thank Lyn for organising a community choir for all the Carol Services except the one at Stoke Holy Cross when children came from Stoke Holy Cross Primary School. The choir practised on a Friday evening for the weeks before Christmas. The choir sang on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> at Arminghall Church, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> at Caistor Church, and on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> December at Dunston Church. The choir also joined in at the unofficial opening of the new Community Hall. Generous donations at our Carol services amounted to £508. This was split between St Martin’s Housing Trust for the homeless in Norwich and Embrace the Middle East who have an outreach to that war torn area of God’s world.

We continue to meet on Zoom for prayer time from Tuesday to Friday at 9am and on Saturday at 10am. The PCC is now meeting roughly every other month at the Vicarage.

We have received an update from Phil Parker re the bat situation at Dunston Church. He submitted a Licence return to Natural England at the end of the year. There is clearly progress, but equally still work too be done. I include the following extract from the report.

“The number of bats inside the church reduced significantly in 2023, and the church members reported the condition of the church the best for many years. The bats were still however present internally with an increase towards the end of the summer. Further exclusion will be required in early April 2025 to the additionally identified points”

We continue to be grateful to Phil and to Natural England for their ongoing commitment.

Considerable progress has been made in improving the interior of the Church Hall. The floor in the main room has been sanded and sealed, and a small group of helpers have painted the ceiling and the walls. We thank this group for their D.I.Y. skills, and we are grateful for the generous donation which has made this possible.

Andy Driver has undertaken an enormous task in documenting, A Summary of Checks and Persons Responsible from all logbooks, including Insurance Policy, Health and Safety Policy, and other important documents.

We are thankful to so many people for their help and support, but, above all, thankful to Jesus who continues to inspire us and to love us in spite of everything!

Thank you, Father, for your love, support and guidance especially in the challenging times.

Viv Carrington and Andy Driver

## **PCC Secretaries' reports**

### **Caistor St Edmund**

#### **Background**

Caistor St Edmund with Markshall PCC has the responsibility of co-operating with the incumbent in promoting in the parish the mission of the church, be it pastoral, evangelistic, social or ecumenical. It also has the responsibility for the maintenance of Caistor St Edmund Church and churchyard.

#### **Membership of the Parochial Church Council (PCC)**

The following people served on the PCC from the date of the 2024 APCM:

Incumbent: The Reverend Robert Baker (Chairman of the PCC)

The Reverend Lyn Marsh

The Reverend Kirsty Long

Churchwarden: Jani Wymer (Electoral Roll Officer)

Churchwarden: Lia Day

Elected members:

Louise Collins (Secretary, Deanery Synod rep))

Brian Day

#### **Church Electoral Roll**

At the end of the year, there were 31 people on the church electoral roll.

#### **Church attendance**

With a service usually taking place every other week, 2024 saw a settled pattern of services.

There were two different types of regular services held: Praise and Worship and Holy Communion. Praise and Worship usually took place on the first Sunday of the month, and Holy Communion usually took place on the third Sunday of the month.

#### **Services**

Holy Communion: 10 services with an average attendance of 11.

In 2023, average attendance was 11, in 2022, it was 7, and in 2021, it was 7.



Praise and Worship: 11 services with an average attendance of 8.  
In 2023, average attendance was 8, in 2022, it was 7, and in 2021, it was 7.

During 2024, there were five special services with the following attendance:  
Easter Sunday (Sunrise) Service: 12  
Service of Remembrance and Hope: 22  
Remembrance Sunday: 31  
Carol Service: 60  
Midnight Service: 35

Louise Collins

### **Stoke Holy Cross with Dunston PCC**

Stoke Holy Cross with Dunston PCC has responsibility for both Stoke Holy Cross and Dunston churches.

#### **Membership**

During the year the following people served as members of the PCC

<b><u>Incumbent</u></b>	Rev Rob Baker	<b><u>Wardens</u></b>	Mrs Viv Carrington
<b><u>Assistant Minister</u></b>	Rev Lyn Marsh		Mr Andrew Driver
<b><u>Curate</u></b>	Rev Kirsty Long		
<b><u>Elected Members</u></b>	Mrs Eostre Caswell (Secretary)		
	Mr Henry Caswell (Treasurer)		
	Mrs Sarah Acklam		
	Mr Andrew Harding		
	Mrs Tracey Symons		
	Mr David Wiltshire		
<b><u>Co-opted member</u></b>	Mrs Cathryn Baker		
<b><u>Diocesan synod representative</u></b>			Mrs Barbara Cutts

#### **Church Attendance**

The number of members on the Church Electoral Roll will be advised at the meeting.

The average number of attendances at Stoke Holy Cross church for the year 2024 was:

10.30 am	Morning Worship	19 adults	2 children
10.30 am	Holy Communion	18 adults	2 children
3.30 pm	All Invited (every fortnight)	12 adults	13 children
Thursday am	Vintage church	18 adults	

There were three special services during the year at Stoke Holy Cross and the figures for these are not included in the average attendances shown previously.

Commissioning of Rural Dean	27 adults	2 children
Carol Service	62 adults	42 children
Crib Service	63 adults	39 children

Throughout the year at Stoke Holy Cross there were three funerals, one baptism, one wedding and three interments of ashes.

At Dunston there were occasional services through the year, including on Good Friday, Ascension Day, at the beginning of October at the time of St Remigius' Day, for a Carol Service, and on the Sunday after Christmas. Nearly 70 guests from Dunston Hall visited the church on Christmas Eve

#### **Review of the year**

The PCC met nine times this year.

- Regular discussions have taken place on the state of the finances and the importance of regular tithing by church members.
- There were regular updates on ongoing work in Stoke Holy Cross church and churchyard

- Regular finance reports have been received from the Treasurer.
- Regular feedbacks were received from Rob.
- There were regular reports on youth work, giving feedback on the progress with Embers.
- The Partnership Agreement Renewal with Norwich Youth for Christ was continued.
- It was agreed that charitable giving would be continued to support Nick Blanch as National Director for Youth for Christ
- It was agreed that Christmas collections would be sent to St Martin's and to the charity Embrace.
- Action Plans were created after each meeting with feedback on progress made given at the following meetings.
- Rob reported that Andy Harding had kindly undertaken the role of Safeguarding Officer.
- Decisions were made on the allocation of grave spaces.
- A great deal of time and prayer was spent on consideration of prayers of love and faith; a letter was sent to Bishop Ian with the formalised statement.
- Time was spent on consideration of Church Family meeting feedback responses.
- The decision was made to hold PCC meetings bi-monthly; feedback on two ministry areas to be at each meeting.
- The decision was made to hold a Tearfund evening in November with Kirsty leading the event.
- After discussion and prayer, the PCC was unable to agree to a request to employ Cathryn for all the work she does on a more formal basis as there were insufficient monies available for this; all agreed that Cathryn makes a significant positive contribution to the church.
- Regular feedback was given on Safeguarding.
- There were regular updates from the Wardens.
- Thanks were given to the small team who decorated the Church Hall; further updates were given on the general progress of building work at the hall.
- Feedback was given on the new initiative of Vintage Church.
- Time was spent thinking and praying about the various mission areas of the church, including children and families, the Dementia Café and Thursday morning coffee mornings.

Eostre Caswell.

## **2. Areas of mission and ministry**

### **Sparklers**

This year, Sparklers has continued to serve families with children of four and under every Tuesday morning in term time. Each week has a theme, with craft and play activities focused around it, along with a story and singing time. Our volunteers help to set up the space, welcome people and serve drinks through the morning, and we often have feedback from families about the warm, welcoming feel of the group – so thank you to everyone who helps to make it that way!

Between 15 and 25 children take part each week, along with their parents, grandparents and other carers: we now have a core of regular families who come most weeks and are building good relationships with each other as well as with those of us who volunteer in different ways during the session. There has been particular growth in grandparents bringing children and appreciating getting to know each other this year. We've also seen a number of Sparklers families coming along to All Invited afternoons, the Good Friday event and Christmas services this year which has been really encouraging.

A recent development at Sparklers has been the launch of "Refresh" sessions once or twice a term. These are focused on looking after the grown-ups in particular, with warm pastries, a craft activity for the adults (as well as the usual children's toys and activities), and a gentle thought for the day to get people thinking about a verse or theme in the Bible. We have had positive feedback on these and we aim to run more frequent "Refresh" sessions this year.

We also offer informal pastoral support to families at Sparklers, chatting and listening, following up on concerns that have been mentioned previously and offering to pray with parents and grandparents. One adult recently mentioned that the Advent booklet we had given out in December had made her think more about faith, and another asked for prayer for a grandchild.

In order to sustain and develop our work at Sparklers, we need to grow the team of helpers, so please pray for God to bring us more volunteers!

Cathryn Baker

### **Schools Ministry**

We're so grateful for our longstanding partnership with the school, which has continued throughout 2024.

We've continued to lead assemblies for the whole school on Thursday mornings, and as well as covering times of year like Christmas and Easter, we have explored different emotions using the Psalms, followed through the opening chapters of Genesis, and thought about the Beatitudes in Matthew 5.

At times through the year Kirsty and Lyn have been involved with a games club at lunchtimes together with a member of staff.

It is now well established that we run a prayer space in school in May in the week running up to the SATs, and once again Cathryn got a number of great activities organised, and a team of us to help things along.

This year once again we welcomed Reception class to the church just before Christmas, where they were excited to see we were getting ready to celebrate the same story that they were

doing in their nativity play. It was very kind of them and the other classes to invite all of us from the assembly team to come and watch their fantastic show.

Apart from her sabbatical break, Lyn has continued to serve as chair of the governors, providing support to the whole school community as well as maintaining another means of connection between us and the church.

Rob Baker

## **Young people**

2024 was a very encouraging year for the Youthwork in Stoke Holy Cross. Embers Youth Group grew, numerically and relationally and spiritually.

### **Numerically**

In early 2024 attendance fluctuated quite widely from week to week between 7 – 19 attendees. In September, we had a new influx of children from Year 5 checking out the club whilst the older children (now in High School) continued to attend. During that month, we had well over 30 on the register and had to initiate a waiting list for a while! Numbers have levelled out again (early 2025) with between 15 and 20 regularly attending. It is really encouraging that those who have gone up to Fram High from Stoke Primary feel they still want to come to Embers. We have struggled at times this year with having enough leaders due to health problems. It would be really good to have at least three adults every session due to having a larger group to oversee plus set-up and pack down. This is something to think about and pray into. I am very encouraged that Jonathan still feels he is able to come as a young leader. His help is invaluable.

### **Relationally**

The Embers young people, on the whole, get along with each other very well. This makes leading the group, so much easier and is a vast difference from a couple of years ago when we had issues with some not wanting the best for the group. They are crazy, noisy and enthusiastic and while this makes sessions quite exhausting, it is also a joy to witness! Personally, I feel my relationship with many of them has deepened significantly as I get to know them better. It really helps being able to see them in their school environment, both at Stoke Primary and Fram High. I am grateful to be employed by the Churches there to do that work. We are thinking about how the cross-over of my work and time between the two areas can be best utilised. There is a lot of trust and openness towards us as leaders, which has led to some important and significant conversations. Lyn, being able to share her health condition with them recently, and the way they responded, was very telling. When I invited those who wanted to, to come and stand with Lyn in prayer, the whole room got up and stood with us to pray!

### **Spiritually**

For the last six months or so, we have introduced regular theme evenings into our programme. These are based on Youth for Christ's 'Rock Solid' resource which provides a framework of activities exploring important themes in a fun and Jesus centred way. During 2024, we have looked at Love, Easter, Prayer, The Shepherd, The Servant and The King. The engagement during these evenings has been phenomenal with everyone taking a good level of interest in the subject matter. Even those who openly admit to not believing in God, attend on those night and join in with respect. I am excited to see where these evenings lead. One young person has been attending The Jam with the Baker children at the NYFC office in Norwich. This had led him being involved with our Youth Worship event 'Encounter'. This is exciting as he is getting to see Spirit filled worship and getting to hear some solid teaching as well as seeing that there are many other young people who are excited about Jesus. We would love to see more of our Embers members going to 'Encounter'. We would have to organise lifts or rely on parents to take them, so this is another challenge to tackle.

We would also love to see a small group attend Encounter Camp in the summer. This is something to pray into.

### **Conclusion**

For me, the highlights of 2024 have been the moments when it has felt like the Embers group is not just a random, chaotic selection of individual young people but a team; a fellowship, working together and discovering faith and life in joy and friendship. At the start of September, I reminded them why I chose the name 'Embers'. Because each of them has a special fire inside that, when breathed on by God, could ignite into something life changing and world changing. That's what we're praying for. May it be so.

Gary Watson

### **Homegroups**

#### **Caistor Lane**

Another year of meeting together and meeting with God. We are just so fortunate that we have at times been able to meet in person as well as meeting on zoom. During the year it has been a blessing to have times of worship, sharing together, praying together, studying the Bible and generally enjoying each other's company, as well as encouraging each other in our personal walks with Jesus, as well as praying for those people we meet in our daily lives. There was also a very special evening get-together which celebrated a milestone birthday. Thanks again to all those who organised such a wonderful surprise. More specifically, we have spent time this year looking at New Wine talks and, more recently, started a series of talks by J John. These have challenged us as well as being a huge encouragement in our personal ministry to others. Our thanks, as always, go to Jan and Roy for their continuing hospitality in hosting the home group and making us all feel so welcome in their home.

Eostre Caswell

#### **Praying together**

It has been wonderful to continue to meet to pray regularly on Zoom from Tuesday-Saturday mornings. We always include a bible reading, which this year has included passages from Nehemiah; John's gospel; Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes; Genesis; and some special readings based on Christmas carols for Advent.

Towards the end of 2024 we made plans to begin to meet in person to pray again monthly, and this will be happening on Wednesdays from the beginning of 2025.

Over the course of the last year or so we have introduced an occasional more open time of prayer into our Sunday morning service as well, so that all of us get a chance to join in in a more active way on Sundays as well, and not just those on the rota.

Thank you so much to everyone who is involved in prayer in different ways.

Rob Baker

#### **Thursday mornings**

Over 2024 Thursday mornings have grown from strength to strength. The monthly communion held on the first Thursday of the month regularly attracts 10 communicants. The Coffee and

Chats on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month between January and October attracted between 12-16.

Kirsty and I during the year felt called to try something new, Vintage Church (a relaxed café church for those wanting to explore faith themes). In October we held the first Vintage Church and have continued to do so on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month. The Christmas Vintage church concluded with us having a lunch together. Starting Vintage church resulted in our changing the Thursday mornings to the following for the Winter of 2024:

1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month – Communion followed by Coffee and Chat

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month – Vintage Church team meeting followed by Coffee and Chat

3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month – Vintage Church

4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month – Coffee and Chat

We are very aware that Thursday mornings wouldn't have grown if it hadn't been supported by those working in the kitchen, setting up and putting tables away and the provision of refreshments (especially gorgeous cakes from Naomi for Vintage Church). So thank you: Barbara, Viv, Jan, Elsbeth, Chris, Andy Driver, Gary, and Naomi. Thank you God for your presence and the growth that you have brought.

Kirsty and Lyn

### **All Invited**

Over the course of the year, we have had a great time at All Invited. We have met roughly every fortnight in the Church Hall, and have continued to welcome new people. We haven't kept count every time, but we know that since about September 2023, over 100 different people have dropped in, and that there have been an average of 25 every time, sometimes many more. Again we had a lovely Harvest event at Arminghall, and we used the "All Invited" banner for our Good Friday gathering, which we held at the hall while the Pavilion was being replaced with the new Community Hall this Easter. We also did a special session in the Vicarage garden in August as part of our annual BBQ.

As well as these special themed events over the course of the year, a big highlight has been following through stories from John's gospel, at pretty much the same time that we have been looking at the same passages on Sunday mornings. This year for the first time we have also shared communion with one another, remembering and celebrating what Jesus has done for us.

Kirsty has been ever-present in helping with this in different ways, including getting together a rota of people who have provided amazing cake and hot food for us all every fortnight. Thank you so much for serving in this way.

Cathryn & Rob

### **Worship**

Our team has continued to lead others to worship God in our services on a Sunday and at other times when the church has gathered in 2024. We've learnt new songs, practised each month and Naomi and Grace have joined in with those who were already part of the band this year. A lovely development has been starting to include "live" worship as well as video on Sunday afternoons for All Invited, helping people who are newer to church and faith to engage more in worshipping him through music.

Thanks so much to everyone involved in music and sound for your faithful service through the year.

Cathryn Baker

### **3. Some nuts and bolts**

#### **Safeguarding report**

This time last year we were in a gap between safeguarding officers as Alison Peck stood down, and I am very grateful to Andy Harding who offered to take on this vital role.

As with Alison before her, Andy and I have continued to monitor the training and DBS checking needs for all those involved in activities with young people and vulnerable adults in our churches. Thank you so much to everyone who is so willing to go through this process whenever we ask you to.

At the same time we started to make use of the Church of England's safeguarding dashboard, which has raised some more areas of work which we are getting to grips with, especially around safer recruitment and risk assessments, role descriptions, and so on. This is a further level of work for everyone involved in ministry of this kind, and again I am really grateful for the willingness that people have shown to engage in this.

There is a way to go with this, but the progress over the last year is very significant, and I am really grateful to Andy and to all of you.

**Rob Baker**

#### **Deanery Synod**

Loddon Deanery Synod met, as usual, on 3 occasions in 2024. Alongside our normal business we heard from Tim Sweeting (Diocesan Secretary), Dave Lloyd (Garden Church), and Jonathan Richardson (Children and Families' Team). There was always time to share the encouragements and challenges of our rural churches, and to pray together. I've noted earlier in the report that David Owen stood down as Rural Dean at Easter, ahead of his retirement in the summer, and that I was asked to take over from 1<sup>st</sup> May. Once again I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to David for all that he did in the years he carried out this role alongside his ministry in the Chet Valley Benefice.

**Rob Baker**