



The Venta group of churches
Arminghall, Caistor St Edmund, Stoke Holy Cross and Dunston
Celebrating and Reviewing 2025
For the annual meetings in Spring 2026

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1. The year in overview

Vicar's report

Thank you so much to everyone for all you have contributed to the life of our churches in the last year. There has been so much happening that inevitably something will be forgotten in the pages that follow, but please be sure that I am really grateful for everything that has been done here in Jesus's name, and am very happy to be reminded of anything missing from these pages when we see each other at our annual meetings in March and April.

January often brings a number of special services, and this was very much the case as we started 2025, with a chance to hear from Nick Blanch from Youth for Christ, and to focus on the work of Hope into Action. Unfortunately a lot of illness in the team prevented HiA from joining us in person, but they sent some great resources and Kirsty stepped into the breach brilliantly.

The beginning of the year is never quiet as we head into Lent, and plan for Easter, but there is also time to do things like the annual tidy of Caistor churchyard, which lots of people kindly helped us with again this year, alongside the usual monthly walks.

This Easter for the first time we held our community event at the new hall in Stoke, but there were lots of other great things, including gathering some hardy souls at first light in Caistor churchyard to worship, and then for breakfast afterwards.

The period after Easter is an important one in the life of our churches, with May normally bringing both prayer meetings for Thy Kingdom come, and the prayer space at the primary school, and this year was no exception. It is so good to pray, and so wonderful to see the children praying, lots of them for the first time. I think if you get tired of people discovering prayer, you are probably tired of life!

Summer sun brings lots of fun in the great outdoors, and this year we had a number of events of that kind, including the Open Gardens weekend at Stoke (whatever the weather thought of the idea), and the Cream Teas at Caistor church. Thank you to everyone who worked really hard to make all of this happen once again. We also had a lovely holiday club with brilliant help from friends in the Poringland churches as well as our own team. We also had a fantastic gathering in the Vicarage garden where we welcomed lots of people from across the churches and the wider community, and had the chance to worship together.

September normally sees things settling down again after a slightly different summer period, but it also includes the service of Remembrance and Hope for bereaved families, and the special Harvest All Invited at Arminghall. These were such special occasions; at Caistor we saw people come and join us from as far afield as Cambridge and even Sussex, while at Arminghall God sent along what I think must have been a couple of unlikely angels who not only helped set up the event, but also headed out to find more people to bring along.

Christmas has been so good for the last few years. Once again, we saw loads of people, and new people really committed to things like the Christmas choir as well. When we moved the Crib Service forward an hour to accommodate the carol singing at Dunston I thought we might have made a mistake, but just as it rolled very close to 3pm people started coming, and didn't stop. In the space of one afternoon we had getting on for 200 people between the services at Stoke and Dunston, and a lovely midnight communion at Caistor as well. As ever, though, it wasn't really just about the numbers; we noticed a good few people engaging with the story in deep and meaningful ways, and that is probably the most important thing.

Over the course of the summer, Lyn Marsh decided to resign her post as Assistant Minister of the churches, and left the group in October. Lyn has given much time and energy to our

churches in the different roles she has held over many years, and I would like to thank her, as a number of you have in this report, for all that she has done. Just before Christmas, Kirsty Long was offered a post as Rector of Mattishall and the surrounding villages, and will be leaving us in the early part of next year after serving a wonderful curacy with us.

And so on into 2026! The years roll by, and we all grow older, but God's kingdom keeps coming, and Jesus who is the same yesterday, today and forever, continues to be proclaimed in our midst. It all comes from him; it is all for him; the glory is his alone, forever and ever.

Amen!

Rob Baker

Churchwardens' reports

Caistor St Edmund

Our pattern of two services a month at Caistor has continued throughout 2025 with Praise and Worship on the first Sunday and Holy Communion on the third. We thank all the leaders of services. With their imminent departure to Cambridge, Brian and Lia Day have gradually been relinquishing their various responsibilities within the church. Brian led his last Praise and Worship service in October. We thank Brian for all his work over many years in preparing and leading services and also serving as Churchwarden for several years in the time he has lived in the village. We also thank Lia who has served as Churchwarden for the past 7 years. The contribution Brian and Lia have given to the Church community has been immense (including hosting numerous community events at the Barn) - they will be greatly missed.

Sadly, Rev Lyn Marsh also decided to resign as Assistant Minister in October. We thank Lyn for all her work in leading services at Caistor over many years and also for her varied work across the community.

We thank Antony Jarrold who continues to regularly play the organ and ensures it is maintained to a high standard. A new electronic keyboard was purchased with the remaining money in the Mervyn Wymer's memorial fund and we thank Louise Collins who has played it for us when Antony is away.

On Easter Day we had a Sunrise service again outside by the wall of the Roman Town. We were blessed with dry weather and breakfast was enjoyed back in the church afterwards.

Rev Rob Baker made contact with the new Brownie group which meets in the Stoke Community Hall and a large number of Brownies and parents attended the Remembrance Day Venta Group service in November. We plan to continue this important link with the Brownie group.

The community choir came together again to sing at the Carol service, which was well attended with 57 people, and 26 attended the Christmas Eve midnight service.

The church continues to be 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 and welcoming to everyone.

The digital giving device has continued to work well for visitors and those attending services and it is worth noting that £1100 has been contributed to church funds via this device during 2025. It has also been useful as a payment method for Cream Teas and tickets for the Christmas season concert.

This charity concert welcomed Acappella who entertained a full church with seasonal songs at the beginning of December. As a result, £700 was donated to the Big C and £445 retained for church funds. Thanks to all who helped with this successful event.

We have served coffee and cake for the Central Norfolk Wellbeing walking group six times this year. Thanks to Kirsty Long, our curate, who has often come to help with these occasions.

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

Cream Teas were served at the church on Sunday afternoons in August and September. They were very well attended again. Many people are coming back year after year! 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 (£1036).

We have continued to have meetings with the Norfolk Archaeological Trust to investigate the possibility of shared use of the church building. However, the ambitious plans we had last year have been put on hold as they proved to be very costly and obtaining funding is getting more difficult. We are currently working on a smaller plan to remove a few pews on each side towards the back of the nave to provide a more flexible space. The Archaeological Trust have plans to provide refreshments on a regular basis from the church and if these prove popular then more ambitious plans will be considered again.

We asked the Community Payback service to do some work to maintain the church surrounds – this included painting the fence near the churchyard entrance and cleaning the plinth at the base of the outside walls – all carried well and efficiently.

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 the number attending regular services is not large, we do appreciate the time we spend together on Sundays and the increased number of Group services at Caistor this year with larger numbers attending have been very enjoyable. Thank you again to everyone who leads us in worship.

Jani Wymer, Churchwarden

Stoke Holy Cross with Dunston

The “All Invited” twice monthly meetings at the Church Hall or at the vicarage on a Sunday afternoon continue to grow steadily with some regular families and others popping in from time to time, and one family joining us in church 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.

There was, once more, 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 14th at Arminghall Church, and Sunday 21st at Caistor Church. The choir also joined in with carols at the new Community Hall.

Donations at our Carol services amounted to £390.97. This to be divided between St Martin's Housing Trust for the homeless in Norwich and a Tearfund project in Africa.

We continued to meet on zoom for prayer time from Tuesday to Friday at 9am and on Saturday at 10am until the summer break and have just resumed with a monthly meeting on 1st Monday of month at 7pm, 9 people attended the January zoom prayer meeting.

The PCC is now meeting roughly every other month at the Vicarage. We are currently in need of a new treasurer as Henry has indicated that he will stand down at the APCM. We also need a PCC secretary.

We have received an update from Phil Parker working for Natural England re the bat situation at Dunston Church. He submitted a Licence return in January. There is clearly further progress, but equally still work to be done to exclude a small number of bats succeeding in getting through to the main body of the church especially around the chancel arch. Bats have been detected in the tower area, but they are not yet roosting there.

We continue to be grateful to Phil and to Natural England for their ongoing commitment. He reported that they have funding for just two more years.

No further progress has been made in improving the interior of the Church Hall, but recent discussions with David a structural engineer will help us action possible work on the kitchen area. A new heater will be ordered for the small front room and some small heaters for the toilets. We are grateful for the generous donation which has made this possible.

We have been advised that one of the meter boards will not pass the electrical safety inspection, so will need rectifying as soon as possible.

We have been blessed, over the last 2+ years, by the ministry of our Curate the Rev Kirsty Long.

We were enormously sad, in autumn 2025, to part company with the Rev Lyn Marsh. We continue to pray for her future ministry in the diocese. We want to take this opportunity to thank her and her family for all their hard work in this benefice over many years.

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

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 2025 APCM:

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

The Reverend Lyn Marsh (until end of October 2025)

The Reverend Kirsty Long

Churchwarden: Jani Wymer (Electoral Roll Officer)

Churchwarden: Lia Day (until 8 September 2025)

Elected members:

Louise Collins (Secretary, Deanery Synod rep)

Brian Day

Church Electoral Roll

At the end of the year, there were 17 people on the church electoral roll.

Church attendance

With a service usually taking place every other week, 2025 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: 9 services with an average attendance of 12.

In 2024, average attendance was 11; in 2023, it was 11; in 2022, it was 7; and in 2021, it was 7.

Praise and Worship: 11 services with an average attendance of 11.

In 2024, average attendance was 8; in 2023, it was 8; in 2022, it was 7; and in 2021, it was 7

During 2025, there were five special services with the following attendance:

Easter Sunday (Sunrise) Service: 12

Songs of Praise: 25

Service of Remembrance and Hope: 15

Remembrance Sunday: 32

Carol Service: 57

Midnight Mass: 26

2. Areas of mission and ministry

Sparklers

We've had a great year at Sparklers with around 15-20 under-4s taking part each Tuesday with their parents, grandparents and carers. We've focused on making it a friendly and welcoming session, where we can get to know children and adults really well. This year our team has been able to have supportive and open conversations with lots of people around big issues like bereavement and disability as well as exploring questions about faith. We have held a number of 'Refresh' sessions focusing on the adults' wellbeing as well as the children's, hosted a summer session in the Vicarage garden and regularly invited families to other church events. As well as several families regularly coming to All Invited, we had lots of Sparklers families at Easter and Christmas events in particular this year. Thank you to everyone who helps us run Sparklers on a Tuesday. We are looking to widen the team, so if anyone is able to offer help around once a month at this significant point of contact for families, we would love to hear from you.

Cathryn Baker

Schools Ministry

We're so grateful for our longstanding partnership with the school, which has continued throughout 2025.

As well as leading assemblies throughout the year including seasonal and other themes, we have been involved at times with the lunch club with a member of staff, and we have visited classes to talk about faith from time to time as well. Thank you to Gary, Lyn and Kirsty for all the hard work with this.

Once again we ran a really successful prayer space in school in May in the week running up to the SATs, with Cathryn doing the planning, and a whole team of us helping to make the event work really well.

Of course, the school was once again the venue for a brilliant holiday club at the end of the summer term, with really kind help from volunteers from across the Poringland churches as well as our own.

We were really pleased to welcome Reception class to join us in the week before Christmas, and spent a great afternoon with all the adults and children. We also had a really big group of singers from the school at our Stoke carol service. Thank you so much to them and their families for coming.

Rob Baker

Homegroups

Caistor Lane

Another year of meeting together and meeting with God (albeit a bit more spasmodically than usual). 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 once again been a blessing to have times of worship, sharing together and praying together (for individuals, the church or the wider world). Times have also been

spent studying the Bible and generally enjoying each other's company, encouraging each other in our personal walks with Jesus, as well as praying for those people we meet in our daily lives. More specifically, both Jan and Carole have at times led our get-togethers, sharing online talks from a variety of speakers. These have always led to great times of discussion and praying. 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. Thanks also go to for Andy and Carole for hosting the zoom meetings

Eostre Caswell

Joyce, Ann, Alison, Jill and Viv continue to meet monthly. We are now sadly an all-female group now having lost David and Richard. We take turns to host the group, and to read the bible, to pray for each other, and for the wider church and worldwide issues. Many of us have been beset this year with health issues and would be grateful for your prayers.

Viv Carrington

Praying together

There have been some real highlights in our life of prayer as churches this year. In the week between Ascension and Pentecost, for Thy Kingdom Come, we met in person and online every day to pray for the coming of Christ in our communities. We also had periods of meeting to pray early in the morning, which continued into 2026; we did some of this on Sunday evenings as well.

As promised at the end of 2024, we started to meet to pray once a month in the Church Hall, with a consistent group of people gathering to do that on a Wednesday evening.

It has been good to have a number of people leading intercessions in their different ways at our services, and to be able to continue to leave space at our Stoke service every once in a while for people to pray for the things they have brought with them as individuals, rather than just one person leading from the front.

Pray is for everyone – everyone's privilege and everyone's responsibility – and I'm grateful to all of you for involving yourself in it in different ways.

Rob Baker

Thursday mornings

Lots of great things continue to happen on Thursday mornings, with the monthly communion service and fortnightly Coffee & Chat continuing to attract a lot of people, whether for worship or just drinks and company.

Over the course of the year, Kirsty and Lyn reflected on Vintage Church, and felt that it was not bringing the new people we thought it might, and so in October, at the time Lyn moved on, we moved back to a pattern of running Communion at the beginning of the month, and Coffee and Chat on the first and third Thursdays.

We felt that we couldn't let Christmas pass without a special event, so Coffee and Chat included carol singing and a talk and festive activities, alongside delicious refreshments provided by Naomi and others.

Many thanks to everyone involved with organizing Thursday mornings, especially Lyn and Kirsty who shared out a lot of responsibility between them, and a wider team of people who provided all of the refreshments and set up the hall.

Rob Baker

All Invited

We had a great year at All Invited. We have a handful of core families who come every time, and alongside them a sort of revolving cast of many others who come to be part of the community, eat together, and get to know Jesus better.

At some points in the year we have had smaller gatherings at the Vicarage, but there have been bigger ones too, particularly as people have met at key times in the year. We had a really good series of Sundays looking at the words of the creed to help us think about the core truths of the Christian faith which was a lovely thing to do together.

Alongside Kirsty, Rob and Cathryn, a great team of people have helped organise refreshments all through the year. We had a lovely Easter special at the new Community Hall, another Harvest gathering at Arminghall, our annual Light Party, and an extra special All Invited just before Christmas.

We're so grateful to everyone who has been along and been part of this in any way.

Cathryn & Rob

Worship

This year we've continued to practise and play as a band at services at Stoke church, as well as occasionally as a smaller group at All Invited at the church hall. We have been using recorded music around once a month, particularly for the more traditional format services. We held community choir practices before Christmas and sang together at some of our carol services, including a number of singers who are not normally involved in church.

Worship is one area that is particularly reliant on the Baker family, so it would be helpful for several people to be trained in sound and visuals, as well as to seek to include others in the band. Thank you to all our musicians, who help lead others in worship so faithfully.

Cathryn Baker

3. Some nuts and bolts

Safeguarding report

A big thank you to Andy Harding for all that he did to help as Benefice Safeguarding Officer. Andy felt that he was unable to continue beyond the end of 2025 because of his personal circumstances, but he was so helpful in driving many things forward over the course of the year and I am really grateful to him.

I have a lot of conversation with colleagues who have difficulty in encouraging people to complete the necessary safeguarding training and DBS checks for their roles working with children, young people, and vulnerable adults. That has never been a problem here, and I continue to be really grateful to everyone who is so willing to do what is necessary to keep people safe.

Over the past year we have carried on the good work of 2024, and made steady progress fulfilling the different requirements of the Church of England's safeguarding dashboard. There are a number of role descriptions, risk assessments and so on outstanding, but the compliance is now really high and we are moving on to the sort of level which will see real cultural change.

Getting to that stage will need someone to take on this vital role from Andy and work in partnership with me to see this process through, and head on into the future, and I'd ask you to pray with me that someone would be appointed soon.

Rob Baker

Deanery Synod

The year began in the Deanery Synod meetings with a strong focus on mission and everyday faith, moved into discussions about the developing diocesan strategy, and ended with a very personal and encouraging session with Bishop Ian.

In April, the synod spent time reflecting on what it means to live out faith in ordinary life. Rev'd James Shelton introduced the "Seven Principles of Pilgrimage," which prompted people to think about slowing down, noticing God at work, and sharing faith more naturally. There was also a helpful conversation about evangelism—what we already do without realising, and what sometimes holds us back. Parishes shared simple but meaningful examples, like school connections, festivals, and community hospitality.

By July, the focus shifted to the Diocese's emerging strategy, *Transformed by Christ: Prayerful, Pastoral, Prophetic*. Richard Lamey talked everyone through the data behind it—declining attendance, ageing congregations, and the uneven spread of children across churches. The strategy is meant to help the Diocese respond to these realities and shape future funding bids. Parishes were encouraged to join in the consultation through surveys and conversations.

In November, the synod welcomed Bishop Ian, who spoke very openly about safeguarding, the new strategy, and the financial pressures around parish share. He encouraged everyone that ordinary kindness and being "normal" Christians in daily life is often the most powerful witness. Safeguarding came up repeatedly, with thanks for the huge amount of work happening locally. Parish share remains a challenge: contributions are around 85% but need to move closer to 95% to sustain ministry across the Diocese.

Throughout the year, the synod also heard uplifting stories from parishes—youth groups starting or growing, creative services, festivals, and events drawing in people who might not normally attend church.

Louise Collins