

St Edmund's Church Southwold. Reports for the APCM, 12 May 2024

Supporting the life of the community

Pastoral Care

Pastoral care to those at home is an important ministry and the St Edmund's Lay Elders met regularly to plan this during the vacancy. They visited housebound parishioners and took Home Communion to three people who requested it. Revd Alan Perry asked if they would visit people in Reydon, which they were pleased to do.

Following Revd Russ Gant's arrival he called together all those interested in offering pastoral care which included three additional people. It was agreed that the term Lay Elder might not be well understood, so for this aspect of ministry it might be better to be known as the Pastoral Care Team. Russ wrote a piece for Heart and Sole asking any who were interested in this work to contact him and he will run three training sessions, using the diocesan material, for new Pastoral Care volunteers. Sarah Wallington Smith has agreed to be the co-ordinator for the team.

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 Philip Tarris has presided three times, and Russ is presiding in April. The residents much enjoy the service.

Sarah Wallington Smith and Elizabeth Tarris are both Trustees of St Barnabas and visit the residents regularly.

Sarah Wallington Smith

Eco Church

One of the five marks of Mission in the Church of England is "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth" and the national church has committed to zero carbon by 2030. It is key that we understand these environmental challenges locally, commit to reducing our carbon footprint and engage with the wider community.

A small 'Eco group' has come together and our first priorities are:

- To monitor and understand our use of energy in the church, particularly the church heating, and to continue to explore energy efficient alternatives.
- To work with the Council, who maintain the churchyard, on ideas for the management of biodiversity, and to involve the schools and the community.
- To register the church on the 'Eco Church' national scheme and to work towards the Bronze award (recently awarded to Walberswick Church).
- To engage with the church community, and more widely through environment-based talks, monthly 'eco tips', electronic newsletter, eco prayers.

Useful websites to visit include A Rocha UK, including Eco Church, <https://arocha.org.uk> and Caring for God's Acre <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk>

Philip Tarris

Children's work

During 2023, we saw consistent growth in the children's work and we now have around 14 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.

This has allowed us to split the Sunday morning groups into two, with younger ones meeting in the Porch Room and older ones meeting in the Choir Vestry. 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.

We hope that during 2024, we will continue to see growth in our children's numbers and we would love to be able to split the group into three in due course, so that all of our children and young people can receive age-appropriate teaching. We will continue to pray for leaders and helpers with this.

Halcyon Meldrum

Parent and Toddler Group

In 1985, Anne Bustin the wife of Rev Canon Peter Bustin together with Liz Bonsey a Sunday School teacher at St Edmunds started a Mother and Toddler Group which met once a week during term time at St Edmunds Church Hall. Some 39 years later the group still flourishes and many of the children we see today are the descendants of children who came to the group in years gone by, including grandparents. The group is now running under the name of Parent and Toddler Group to encourage both Mothers and Fathers to come along.

The group aims to provide the opportunity to meet new friends, to build support networks and to meet other parents in a similar situation. The children learn to socialise in a safe and friendly environment. A healthy snack is given to the children and tea, coffee and biscuits are provided for the parents.

We are fortunate enough to have a breastfeeding cafe join us twice a month to support breastfeeding Mums and their partners, and also to respond to any questions that they may have.

From the modest beginnings all those years ago, we continue to serve the local community with weekly sessions, including a Christmas Party with a visit from Father Christmas and a present for each child. This party is kindly sponsored by The Southwold and Reydon Society.

Liz Benson

Welcome and Stewarding

At the last count, over 30,000 people visited St Edmund's during the year. It is a vital part of our mission that we welcome them and show that the building is not just a museum. A smile and perhaps the offer of the coloured guide to help people explore is all that is required, and it is usually well-received. The church is open for 42 hours per week in the winter and 56 hours in the summer. At present, 31 of these hours are covered by the loyal band of stewards, to whom we are all grateful. It means that, unlike Beccles, we have not had to close the church because of vandalism and theft. Even so, there is clearly a need for more volunteers, so offers of help would be welcome.

Hugh Williamson

Study groups

The ecumenical lent study groups were well subscribed this year. 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. There are 10 who attend. The group welcomes new members. Jackie Casement and Sarah Wallington Smith have run the occasional six-week study course. Sarah is hoping to run further short period study groups.

Revd Judy Miller and Sarah Wallington Smith ran a six-week study course 'Threads through Creation' using the textile work of Jacqui Parkinson (<https://www.jacqui-textile.com/creation/>) in the autumn. They led a 'Threads through Creation' study day at Ely Cathedral in July when Jacqui's beautiful textile exhibition was there. They are also running a Saturday workshop 'Threads through Creation' on 18 May 2024 using the same material for those who prefer a single day workshop.

Sarah Wallington Smith

Open the Book

Open the Book is a national project which has been running since 1999. It operates under the auspices of the Bible Society, which provides suggested programmes and resources. A group has been running in Southwold for many years and currently enacts a bible story once a month in Southwold Primary School. In the past the group was affiliated to the group in St Margaret's, Reydon, but last year St Edmunds registered separately as this facilitates access to resources. The Reydon team also visits Reydon Primary School, once a month.

As far as possible the 10-15 minute dramas are lively and interactive, and children are always eager to take part. The team has always consisted of a small group of women from St Edmunds, but was joined in 2023 by Gary from the United Reformed Church. It's good to have a more mixed team and the impact of a taller person with a louder voice made the demise of Goliath quite impressive!

If anyone would like to consider joining the team please let me know as there is sometimes a shortfall in numbers.

A happy spin-off from Open the Book is that 3 members of the team now also go into the school once a week to hear children read and occasionally to help with other activities. Thanks to Southwold Primary School for their warm welcome on all occasions.

Julia Johnson

Mother's Union

Our branch membership currently stands at 10, and this is split fairly evenly between St Edmunds and St Margaret's. Jeanette Wallond is still leader, helped and supported by a committee of 2.

Our meetings continue to be on the second Friday of the month usually in the Church Room of St Margaret's, Reydon, transport being available in members' cars. We are always pleased to welcome friends and non-members. Corporate communion services are at St Edmunds Church at 10.00 am on the first Thursday of every month.

Our branch supports CAP, Christians Against Poverty, with gifts and cash for their festive hampers.

As usual, in early December at the first Thursday Eucharist in the month, we led prayers in St Edmunds church, as part of the national campaign against gender violence.

At home, two of us still are part of a rota to help with refreshments at the St Edmund's Parent & Toddler Group, and lead the toddlers in action songs. This is very much appreciated by the young parents.

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

Jeanette Wallond

St Edmund's Shop

The shop started about 30 years ago as a stall to encourage parishioners to buy fairly traded food items. These help marginalized people (mainly women) in the third world where climate change and economic circumstances make life extremely difficult for them. This is obviously much better than buying many standard brand goods which often rely on exploited labour. When the rear area of the church was developed a few years ago, the Revd Simon Pitcher was keen to see the stall properly housed in a way which would also provide for the sale of church-related items, such as guide books, postcards, and T-Towels. Sales continued at a steady rate during the year, and all profit (several thousand pounds a year) goes into the church's general fund, so this is also of benefit to us.

Julia Williamson

Website and Facebook

During the year we continued to see a lot of activity on our Website and Facebook page. Of the 2000 people who accessed our website, half were looking for details of services and other church events in our online calendar. We are therefore confident that the website is an essential communication tool for regular members of St Edmunds and also our visitors.

We continue to engage with the Facebook community with regular posts on what is happening at St Edmunds and our local churches. During the year our posts reached 11,000 Facebook users and we had 670 active followers. Only a quarter of those followers live in Southwold and Reydon and so our Facebook presence is clearly a powerful tool for reaching those living further away who wish to keep in touch with our ministry.

Marcus Knight

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 2023. Sincere thanks are due to Carolyn Kerr who successfully established St Edmund's safeguarding systems and records.

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. At each meeting there is the opportunity to hear about a matter which we all need to focus on and there is also discussion of finance, staffing and vacancies. In addition, there is usually time at the end for each church to talk about items they might consider useful for other churches to hear about or for which prayer is requested. The meetings are open to everyone.

The special topics – when an invited speaker addressed us - are listed below.

- Feb 23 at Ringsfield Village Hall where Rev Alison Alder spoke about the global effects of climate change and their impact on us. She also announced the establishment of the Deanery Environmental Group which will aim to produce a newsletter. She was especially concerned that each church could work towards becoming an ‘Eco church’ – something that the Team here is now working towards.
- June 15 at St Margaret’s Church Reydon where the main emphasis was on modern day slavery and human trafficking, and the speaker was John French from Suffolk Police. This was a particularly serious meeting for all who attended as many of us felt that there was much of which we were unaware.
- Oct 23 at St Mary’s Church Halesworth where we were addressed by Gary Peverley the Diocesan secretary of Finance and Rich Henderson, Archdeacon of Suffolk, with emphasis on the finances of the deanery, fund raising and the general financial challenges of the Diocese.

Jenny Whines

Handbell Group

The group has been running for 4 years now, and meets in the St Edmunds gallery room on Monday afternoons between 2 and 3. There is no age limit and no requirement to read music. The repertoire has expanded this year. New secular tunes include for example the Can-Can and Blow the Wind Southerly, and new Church tunes include Tallis’ Cannon and Ride on, Ride on in Majesty. There are many others.

Over the past year the band has played at St Barnabas, Pitches View, Aldingham Court Care Home and at the Loft Christmas Market. A particularly warm welcome has always been given to the band when ringing at the Parent and Toddler Group in St Edmunds Hall, (The Arts Centre). Several birthdays have been celebrated and tea parties in St Edmunds and also in local tea rooms have been much enjoyed.

The year has not been without its losses though. John Uden’s sudden illness and death this year has left a big gap in the band. Sheila and Dave Pettet are also much missed after their recent move to Kent. Whilst membership of the band is limited by the number of bells available to ring we would be glad to hear from anyone who might like to consider joining us at some stage. The music is delightful with tunes to suit all tastes, and the members of the band are delightfully cheerful.

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.

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

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).

Early in 2024 Russ joined the team for a tea party when ideas were shared for the future year such as a poppy 'waterfall' for Remembrance Sunday. It was also agreed that during 2024 a new initiative should be set up so that anyone may sponsor flower arrangements to commemorate personal events. This friendly supportive group are always looking for people to join us.

Mary Lomas

St Edmund's Tower

The eight bells of St. Edmund's are maintained in good order and are rung every Sunday for the morning service, reminding the town that christian prayer is an important part of Southwold life. If requested, bells are rung for weddings, funerals and special events.

The main event of 2023 was the celebratory ring for the Coronation of King Charles on May 6th. Further celebration ringing welcomed Rev. Russ Gant at his Licensing service on November 21st. Quarter peals marked both events. These last approximately 45 minutes. A complete peal takes nearly 3 hours. Usually only 2 are rung each year, undertaken by Guild ringers to a very high standard. It is a joy to hear these bells being evenly struck in a sequence of over 5,000 changes.

Open Tower Day is held in the summer, attracting many visitors and is well organised by our own band. Keen to promote the art of bellringing, we encourage new recruits. Our ringing instructor has been teaching several people in the past year. Practice night is on Fridays 7.30 – 9.00 pm. The band meet socially for an annual dinner; they also enjoy a day's outing to other towers, in the autumn. The AGM is held in the spring, when all reports are circulated, approved and filed.

Kate Assmann

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.

With the approval of the Rector and the PCC, and following a substantial financial award from the Southwold Trust, we are now in a position where we can move forward with essential works on the outdated and increasingly unreliable digital components of the organ (to also include some long overdue cleaning of the 'choir organ'). A formal quotation has been received and, following PCC approval, we are hopeful that the works can begin early autumn. It is likely that the refurbishment will take about six weeks to complete during which time the music will be piano led.

Victor Scott