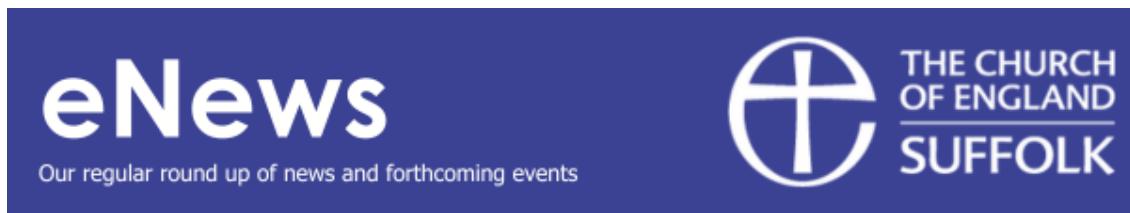


Thursday 18 December 2025



Suffolk sees 'encouraging' rise in church attendance

Our churches have seen a rise in congregation numbers – surpassing the overall national increase in church attendance this year.

Overall the attendance figures for 2023/2024 for the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich reveal that adult average weekly attendance rose by 6% on last year, well above the national rise of 1.8%. Average church attendance for children also saw a surge, with a rise of 10% in Suffolk compared to the national increase of 0.4%. These figures show the growth throughout the whole Diocese and include the impact from growth projects in our church communities.

Gary Peverley, Diocesan Secretary, said: *"We are pleased to see church attendance is growing across Suffolk, particularly as we look forward to welcoming people into our churches over Christmas. The latest reported attendance figures highlight an encouraging trend in worship participation, particularly among children, within the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich compared to national averages. I am delighted by this news as it indicates that our commitment to our Growing in God vision is working."*

[To read more please see our website here.](#)

Church attempts nativity scene world record



A Suffolk church community is attempting to break the world record for the largest number of nativity scenes in one place. St Mary's Church in Mildenhall now has more than 1,100 mini nativity scenes at the church, and aims to surpass the Guinness World Record figure of 2,150 by their final count on Christmas Eve.

Each nativity scene has been handmade or loaned by people living in the community, including children at the

local primary schools, scout and brownie groups and members of other local churches.

The Revd Sue Leathley, Team Vicar at the Forest Heath Team Ministry, said: *"We do something every year for the community so they can come in and get involved – lots of*

different groups and schools in the area. But this year we wanted to do something a bit different. We had a count at the weekend and we had reached 1,180 already, and we have the promise of several hundreds more this week. We are hoping we'll hit our target, and break the record, by Christmas Eve."

[To read the full story please visit our website here.](#)

Suffolk church of 'national significance' gets grant to fix failing roof



The roof at the medieval church of St Peter & St Paul in Lavenham, is failing and stonework and windows are also in need of urgent repair. Thankfully, help is at hand. The church has been awarded a £20,000 grant from the National Churches Trust. On the recommendation of the National Churches Trust, the church will also receive a

£10,000 Wolfson Fabric Repair Grant from the Wolfson Foundation.

This is great news for the much loved church and ensures it can remain open and in use and able to serve the local community for many years to come. Repairs to intricately carved stonework, beautiful stained glass windows, flintwork and the roof will protect the building from rain and frosts, making the church a safe and welcoming place for the hundreds of people who use it every year. The Revd Canon Simon Pitcher said: *"We are very grateful to the National Churches Trust and the Wolfson Foundation for their help. 2025 marked the 500th anniversary of the building of the church tower. To celebrate we held an art exhibition including works by local school children, a black-tie dinner with the Revd Richard Coles, a family fun day with teddy bears zip-wiring from the top of the tower, plus a number of other special services and events. These activities involved the whole community, young and old alike, and drew in visitors from across East Anglia. If we were not able to keep our building warm, safe and dry these community and cultural events would come to an end. With grant support we look forward to having a warm, dry, welcoming building, open every day of the year, offering a safe and peaceful place for everyone to enjoy."*

[For the detailed full story please visit our website here.](#)

St Edmundsbury Cathedral were delighted to host the 'Suffolk Together at Christmas' Community Carol Service

On Wednesday 10 December, Suffolk joined communities across the UK in hosting a 'Together at Christmas' Community Carol Service. The event, supported by The Royal Foundation, is part of an annual initiative spearheaded by The Princess of Wales to recognise and thank the many people around the country who act with love in their communities, contributing to a more cohesive and connected society. This year, the services brought people together to celebrate love in all its forms – whether it's love within families, through friendship, across communities, or even through powerful moments of connection with strangers.

The service at St Edmundsbury Cathedral brought together over 600 attendees including local charities and foundations to honour those individuals and organisations who have

created and shown love to foster compassion and togetherness in the community. His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, Clare, Countess of Euston, said: "*I'm delighted that Suffolk had the honour of hosting one of the Community Carol Services this year. This event was a wonderful opportunity for us to come together as a community and celebrate those who are truly making a difference*".



We will be having a two week break for Together we Pray over Christmas. Daily prayers will resume in the New Year from the week beginning 12 January 2026 led by the Revd Diane Grano.

Mission and Ministry Events

Church of England Talk Series | All starting at 7.30pm | Ipswich Minster IP1 3BN or on YouTube [here](#)

Join this talk series offering a blend of established and emerging theologians, writers and commentators, all exploring what a good Church of England should look like for the nation it seeks to serve.

7 January, Bishop Rosemarie Mallet - Global Majority Heritage Communities

21 January, Dean Mark Oakley - The Imagination

29 January, Archdeacon Rich Henderson - The Rural Church

There will be a Q&A session after each talk and refreshments will be served for those attending the Minster. All welcome, no booking required. To find out more please visit [Ipswich Minster on Facebook here](#).

Plough Sunday and Farewell Service for Archdeacon Sally Gaze | Sunday

11 January, 3.30pm | St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds IP33 1LS

Please join us for Archdeacon Sally's farewell service on Plough Sunday. The service will include blessing of the plough, refreshments, a thank you to Sally for all she has done and a Lightwave Celebration with stories from across The Lightwave Community. [To book](#)



[please click here.](#)

Eco Church Support | Tuesday 13 January 2026 - 6.00pm - 7.00pm | Online

These regional Eco Church support sessions are an opportunity to share successes, obstacles and challenges you may be experiencing, seek support and support others. Whether you're seeking advice, wanting to listen in to the chat, or have lots of experience you're happy to share, please join us for this informal session for people to chat about what you are doing to work towards Eco Church Awards. Rosie Venner from Just Money will join this session with a talk about greener finances for churches, including banking, purchasing and investing, with time to answer your questions. [Book for the Zoom link here.](#)

Exploring the Old Testament | Wednesday 14, 21, 28 January; 4, 11, 25 February; and 4 March 7.30 - 9.30pm | Earl Stonham Village Hall IP14 5HJ

The Old Testament is the larger part of the Bible and has far more to say than the New Testament about things like the life cycle (birth, marriage, death), sickness and health, daily work, the environment, social justice, and so on. In other words, it relates to life as we know it on a day-by-day basis. In this short course, Hugh Williamson will try to open our eyes to some of this wealth by surveying in an engaging manner all the different types of material in the Old Testament, very much with an eye on how we can apply it in our own times in both church and society. [Book here.](#)

Connect Essentials | Saturdays: 17 January, 21 February, 21 March, 18 April, 16 May, 20 June and 18 July, in Earl Stonham Village Hall.

We are relaunching our Connect course as Connect Essentials, compiled by the national church training team: [Children's Ministry Essentials \(CME\) | The Church of England](#). In the course, we will look at child development, learning and spiritual styles, discipleship, intergenerational worship, and how we walk with families through life's key transitions. Please [register on Insight here](#). For more information please contact [Charlotte Gooch](#), Diocesan Growing Younger Project Support, or phone 07802 428626.

Handling Conflict Constructively | Saturday 17 January 9.00am - 4.30pm | Saxmundham Church Hall, Saxmundham IP17 1ES

As part of the commitment to equip Church Leaders for the challenges of ministry, we are running a Bridge Builders 'Handling Conflict Constructively' training day. The day will start at 9.00am with welcoming drinks, with the course starting promptly at 9.30am. Lunch is included. For more information on Bridge Builders as an organisation [please see their website.](#)

Places are free of charge but numbers are limited and are being offered on a first-to-respond basis. If you would like to take up the offer of this valuable training, please register [here](#). (Please note: this link is for Clergy and LLM only - log-in is required).

The only way is Ethics! | 20, 27 January; 3, 10, 24 February; and 3 March | 7.30 – 9.30pm | Earl Stonham Village Hall IP14 5HJ

The Christian Ethics module is a six-session course which explores the history of ethical thought and also everyday issues and moral questions from capitalism to the environment. This module, led by the Revd Rachel Revely, aims to further develop moral thinking, appreciation and judgment that is appropriate within the context of Christian teaching and pastoral ministry, and Christian living. [Book here.](#)

Draw Near: Life-giving habits for Lent | Wednesday 21 January at 12.30pm | Online



Join this special webinar to explore Lent and Easter 2026 resources for churches. The Church of England's theme for Lent will be **Draw Near: Life-giving habits for Lent**. The resources have at their heart the theme of a 'rhythm of life' – habits and patterns which help us grow as disciples of Christ day by day, especially as we prepare to celebrate the great mystery of God's saving

love at Easter. [Sign up here.](#)

Enhancing Pastoral Ministry | 28 January; 4, 11, 25 February; and 4, 11 March | 7.30pm - 9.30pm | Earl Stonham Village Hall IP14 5HJ

Enhancing Pastoral Ministry is a six-session course for people who are involved in pastoral care (for example, Readers, Lay Elders, clergy, pastoral visitors) as well as those interested in a deeper understanding. Guest speakers will include: Karen Galloway and members of the Diocesan Safeguarding team; Annabel Turner, member of the Diocesan counselling team, and the Diocesan Growing Younger team. [Book here.](#)

Fieldwork: Celebrating Rural Mission and Ministry in Suffolk | 28 February 2026, 9.30am to 4.00pm | Wingfield Barns, Nr Diss IP21 5RA



Join this Diocesan day conference for church members, PCC members, those in our church schools, lay ministers and clergy from our rural parishes. We will hear from a great keynote speaker, the Revd Jo Neary – Tutor in Rural Ministry and Mission (part-time) at Sarum College, Salisbury, alongside her part-time post as team vicar and pioneer priest in the Beaminster Area Team in Wiltshire, who will encourage us to think about the distinctive identity, calling and potential of the rural church.

There will be time to share our stories of joy and challenge, and be encouraged and inspired. It is being organised by rural ministers with the help of Diocesan staff and is free to attend. [To register please book here.](#)

In the beginning was the story... Approaching the New Testament | Starts Wednesday 29 April 2026 for seven weeks at Earl Stonham Village Hall

Led by the Revd Canon John Parr, Approaching the New Testament takes a story-shaped approach to the heart of Christian faith. This course looks at the beginnings of what became Christianity, in the writings of the New Testament, and explores their narrative features. The New Testament writers passed on the gospel of Jesus Christ not as a collection of facts or doctrines, but as a series of stories that shaped people's lives. What

can we learn from them about the challenges we face in doing the same in our day?
[Please book here.](#)

The Gathering | Friday 24 April 6.00pm - Sunday 26 April 2.00pm | Vauxhall Farm, Great Wenham CO7 6QQ



The Gathering is a termly youth worship night organised in partnership with Ipswich CYM and youth leaders from across Ipswich. We have the excellent Tim Alford joining us on the Friday night who will do a great job in delivering a Gospel talk.

Cost: £110 per young person. Bookings are managed by CYM Ipswich using the online *Ticket Taylor* system. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to get in contact:

jamie.swinerd@cofesuffolk.org. To find out more and book please visit our website [here](#).

Flourish | Saturday 2 May 2026, , 9.30am for 10.00am – 3.00pm | The Salvation Army Hall, Stowmarket IP14 1NE

An invitation to all Readers, Licensed Lay Ministers and Lay Elders to join us for our annual study day. The guest speaker this year is the Revd Dr Thomas Sharp from St Augustine's College of Theology. A core part of Thomas's teaching focuses on human flourishing, especially how Christians care for others in times of hardship. The morning session focuses on Pastoral Care in a Broken World and the afternoon session is on the Theology of Safeguarding – what does it mean to care? Reserve your free space now! Click here: [Flourish - Insight CofE Suffolk](#).

Church Community Services and Events

Great Blakenham Village Carol Singing | Friday 19 December, 6.30pm | St Mary's Church, Great Blakenham

Meet at the church to walk along the local area and take part in family carol singing. Finish at Tesco's for some mince pies! Everyone welcome - make sure to wrap up warm and bring a torch.

Remembering Loved Ones at Christmas | St Mary's Church, Great Blakenham | Saturday 20 December, 3.30pm to 5.00pm

Join this gentle candlelight service to pause, reflect and remember loved ones during the festive season. Share hymns, music, prayer and the lighting of candles.

A Seasonal Celebration of Song | Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford CO10 9DL | Saturday 20 December, 5.00pm

Come along and join a seasonal celebration of song, with HappySounds Community Choir and special guests Sudbury Sings and The VIPs. Tickets cost £10 in aid of Compassion/Macmillan, contact info@happysounds.co.uk

Epiphany Singers | Saturday 10 January 2026, 7.30pm | St Mary's Church, Walsham le Willows.

An unmissable evening with conductor Simon Carrington and organist David Hill. The

concert has taken place for over 50 years and the singers are from various choirs including King's Choral Scholars, Bach Choir and Tallis Scholars. No tickets required. The concert and service is such a special way to celebrate Epiphany and we'd love to share the weekend with more people, everyone is welcome.

Society of Catholic Priests (SCP) | Thursday 26 February, 11.00am, St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds IP33 1LS

The St Edmundsbury and Ipswich chapter of the SCP was relaunched three years ago. They meet four times a year, usually at the Cathedral, for a Eucharist, talk, lunch and conversation. The society is inclusive - for ordained men and women - and it celebrates humanity in all God-given diversity with respect to ethnicity, gender and sexuality. It is in the catholic tradition found within the Anglican communion and is centred on the Eucharist. If you are new to the diocese, recently ordained (including deacons), and feel this could be a spiritual home and place of encouragement and support for you, then come along. The next meeting lead speaker will be the Revd Canon Stuart Batten on Desert Spirituality. For more information please contact Mother Ali: teamvicarvnb@btinternet.com

Notices

Online Parish Returns System (OPRS): This is open to parishes wanting to input attendance figures on the number of people attending their church in person for services and other acts of worship during the first four weeks in October. This includes the number of people attending on Sundays and during the week (Monday to Saturday). The OPRS can be accessed via following link <https://parishreturns.churchofengland.org>. If you need help creating an account for the Online Parish Returns System, please send an email to statistics@cofesuffolk.org and we will be happy to help you.

Raffle for Free CollecTin More Contactless Device: The Parish Resources Team have a CollecTin More device which we would like to offer to a parish **FOR FREE!** Churches must have Wi-Fi installed in the church for the device to work. Please apply to Julie Podd, Parish Resources Manager by email to julie.podd@cofesuffolk.org by 30 January 2026 if you would like to go into the draw. Churches will be notified by the middle of February if they have been successful and will need to send us a picture of the installed device to use in our promotion materials.

Parish Giving Scheme – Office opening over Christmas: The PGS office will close for Christmas at 12.00pm on Monday 22 December 2025, and re-open at 9.00am on Monday 5 January 2026. Online giving services (regular and one-off giving) accessed through www.parishgiving.org.uk will be available 24/7 as usual.

Can you take five minutes to help build a national picture of internet connectivity in churches?

The Church of England's Digital team is gathering data on how many churches don't yet have an internet connection, as well as the benefits of getting more churches connected for growing their ministry and engaging more effectively with their communities. This short survey for churches, asks some questions about whether your church has an internet connection, what impact this has and whether you would be interested in taking part in a

project to get connected. [Complete the survey](#)

Vacancies

[Team Vicar | Sole Bay Team](#)

[Team Vicar](#) | Forest Heath Team Ministry (House for Duty - Sunday + 2 days)

[Executive Assistant](#) | River Church | Closing date: 8 January

[Worship Pastor](#) | River Church | Closing date: 8 January

[Kid's Pastor](#) | River Church | Closing date: 8 January

[Children's Choir Leader](#) | All Hallows' Church | Closing date: 12 January

[Non-Executive Safeguarding Chapter Member](#) | St Edmundsbury Cathedral

[Cathedral Volunteers](#) | St Edmundsbury Cathedral

[Risk, Audit and Review Committee Member](#) | St Edmundsbury Cathedral

[Associate Chaplain](#) | Sizewell C

[Part-time Youth Worker](#) | All Saints' Church, Ipswich

Christmas Messages

"I would like to extend my thanks to everyone for the enormous amount of work you do and the commitment demonstrated each day in serving our parishes, schools, and communities. I am looking forward to 2026, as we officially welcome Bishop Joanne on Saturday 24 January and together we can continue our work to achieve our vision 'Growing in God'. On behalf of the team at the Diocesan Office, may I wish you a Happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year." Gary Peverley, Diocesan Secretary.

Diocesan Office Christmas Hours:

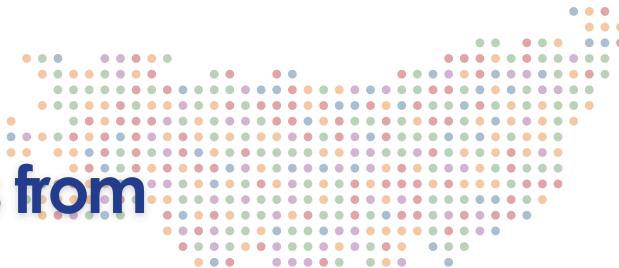
The office will be closed from 4.00pm Wednesday 24 December. The office will re-open on Friday 2 January 2026 at 9.00am.

- In an emergency: For clergy property emergencies please refer to the Christmas contact details provided via email to all those in clergy housing. For clergy housing emergencies considered to be possible insurance claims, please call Dawn direct on 07469 149744.
- For safeguarding: Primary contact should refer enquires to the Police in an emergency. For advice/support please call Thirtyone:eight on 0303 003 1111, this service is in place up to Monday 5 January.
- For press matters, Friel is contracted by the Diocese to manage any potential negative reputational risks that may arise from media coverage. Please contact them on: 01473 561191.

Please look out for the Christmas Message eNews from Bishop Joanne, coming out today.

The next issue of eNews will be Thursday 8 January 2026.

[Click here to print and share with others](#)



Watch our stories from around Suffolk



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