



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich

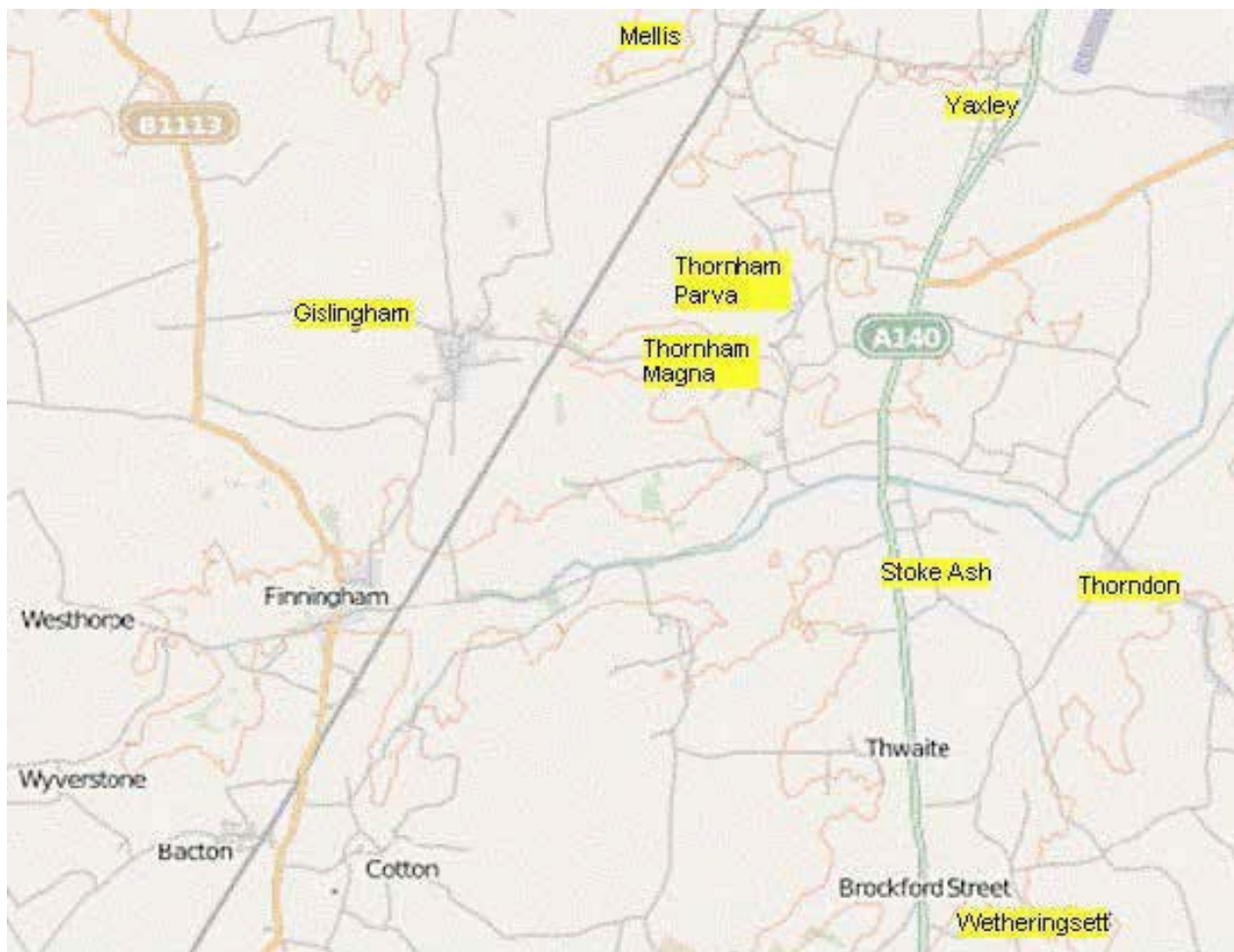
The Benefice Profile for South Hartismere

**Gislingham, Mellis,
Stoke Ash with Thwaite,
Thorndon with Rishangles,
Thornham Magna, Thornham Parva, Wetheringsett
cum Brockford, and Yaxley.**

September 2024

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The Benefice

We are looking forward to welcoming you to the South Hartismere Benefice and to working collaboratively with you. We are eight rural parishes set in the gentle and attractive countryside of North Suffolk. Each village church has its own identity, but we are united by our common aim to see more people experiencing the freedom which an encounter with the love of Jesus Christ brings.

We recognize the fact that if we are to share our faith within our communities, we must go outside the church building and we are fortunate in having a Lightwave appointed curate, Revd Debbie Nicholls to help us create and foster new initiatives for this purpose. Since her arrival in 2021, we have set up a variety of 'Connect' groups which meet outside the church in homes, schools and pubs.

We have four Church of England Primary Schools within our benefice and we have good relationships with all of them but we do want to enhance these links by, for example, restarting successful pre pandemic initiatives such as 'Open the Book'.

We see the appointment of a new incumbent as an opportunity for us to embrace change and innovation while still maintaining some of the more traditional aspects of Anglican worship.

The person we would like to find

- A person who is prayerful, who loves Jesus and who longs for others to encounter the transforming presence of our living God
- A teacher who can make the Gospel message relevant and take the church into the communities of our eight parishes
- An encourager who can help maintain and strengthen the links with our four church schools and support youth and children's work across the benefice
- A person who is willing to look for opportunities to be creative and innovative in worship, whilst continuing to celebrate and explore the richness of Anglican worship

What we can offer you

- A stipendiary Lightwave Pioneer Curate
- A ministry team consisting of one reader, six lay elders and two Lightwave lay family and children's workers. They are all commissioned to work across the benefice
- Three organists who are willing to play across the benefice and a further organist who plays at Gislingham Church
- Support from our hardworking church wardens and their assistants
- A retired non-stipendiary priest with permission to officiate
- The payment of priest's expenses in full and part-time paid help with administration
- Good leisure opportunities and communications
- An appreciation of your need for time and space so that you can enjoy the peace of this beautiful part of the country
- A modern, detached house in a pleasant location

Areas where we need help:

- To build on our existing strengths to become a stronger and more united benefice given the spread of our parishes
- To develop our work with children and teenagers and to encourage and welcome more families into our churches
- To build on our pastoral care especially of our families and the socially isolated
- Further training in discipleship so we can fulfil our calling to be the body of Christ in our benefice
- To develop our online presence

About our churches

Each of the parishes has a listed, medieval church building, all of which are in reasonably good condition. There is more information about the churches in the parish profiles and on Simon Knott's Suffolk Churches website, <http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk>.

Our benefice has four towers with bells in working order, Thornham Magna (6 bells), Gislingham (8 bells), Yaxley (6 bells) and Stoke Ash (5 bells). The ringers are drawn from different villages across the area and help each other so that there are enough ringers for services. We offer tuition for new learners with teaching accredited by the Association of Ringing Teachers (ART).

Church services

Our churches all have their own P.C.C.s and at present, each church has at least one service a month. On the fifth Sunday of the month a joint Benefice Eucharist takes place which rotates around the parishes. The great majority of our services are Common Worship including Services of the Word led by members of our team of six lay elders. At present, there are also occasional early BCP Services. Gislingham offers a Morning Prayer service every Wednesday as well as a Telephone Church on a Thursday morning.

The arrival of our Lightwave Curate has resulted in the creation of new outreach initiatives such as a weekly Mums and Tots group, Bible in the Pub as well as an after school cooking club which centres around a biblical theme.



Cursillo

Our benefice has strong links with the community of Cursillo, and six members of our congregation have attended the annual four day retreat. Cursillo is a loving community which helps enrich and deepen the faith of its members and as such works as a unifying force across the different parishes of our benefice. One of the strengths of this ecumenical, international and charismatic movement is the way in which it empowers the laity. In our Diocese it has played a part in a significant number of people following a vocation to become Readers, or Ordinands.

The Suffragan Bishop of Dunwich, the Rt. Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison oversaw Cursillo for our Diocese until his move to Exeter at the end of September.



Lightwave is a Christian community, meeting in small groups, especially in rural areas. The name comes from the idea of light waves being the way in which light spreads into dark places. Lightwave is committed to shining the light of Jesus through Christian witness and practical service. Our groups are especially involved in combatting isolation, engaging in youth work and caring for creation.

Lightwave SHB

Our Lightwave small group meets with the intention of waiting on God, to seek where the Spirit is leading us. Here we use the 4W's of welcome, worship, word and witness to frame our time together. Each time we meet, these four elements are shared so that we are **All** growing to **Become** disciples and **Create** community. Throughout our benefice, we are starting to see the emergence of expressions of God's love and these have been shared in the profile. The good news stories of what God is doing helps to encourage and build the church. We have many good news stories as people choose to follow Jesus. Here is one such example:

[Good News Stories | Debbie Nicholls-Gislingham \(youtube.com\)](#)

Bible in the Pub

We meet every month in a local pub for a meal and discussion of sections of the Bible. There are eleven of us about half of whom are non-believers. This always makes for lively discussion and what is particularly enjoyable is the tolerance, good humour and love which permeate the group.

Links with Care Homes

Within the South Hartismere Benefice, we have recently revived an initiative to reach out to two of our local care homes and we offer small, informal, friendly services to people who may otherwise not be able to access church. These visits have been focused on singing well known carols and hymns with the residents: many have been able to join in and have enjoyed the familiarity of traditional songs, others who have not been able to actively participate, have nevertheless appeared to gain pleasure from listening. We plan to continue to develop these links in the future in whatever format best meets the needs and abilities of the residents.

The Rectory



Serving our benefice of approximately 4,400, the rectory is in the friendly village of Thorndon which has a community run shop, a pub, The Black Horse, which serves good food, a children's play area and a C of E Primary School as well as the surroundings of great countryside for dog walking.

The house has four bedrooms, a bathroom, a large sitting room and separate dining room, a study, large kitchen and downstairs loo.

There is a single garage, and a manageable garden laid to lawn.

Our local area

Despite its proximity to major centres, there is a genuine feel of living in a rural community. Diss which is our nearest market town is about 5 miles away. The town offers several supermarkets, a golf course and a recently refurbished leisure centre and swimming pool as well as excellent cafes and an Arts Centre. There is a twice hourly rail service from Diss to London Liverpool Street, with a journey time of one and a half hours. The historic towns of Eye, Harleston, Bungay and Beccles with their specialist shops and ancient buildings are within easy driving distance while the larger centres of Ipswich, Norwich and Bury St Edmunds are all roughly a forty minute drive away. Our area also has some very old traditional Suffolk pubs and good quality food and hospitality are important elements of life in East Anglia.

There are C of E Primary Schools in Gislingham, Mellis, Thorndon and Wetheringsett and the church enjoys good relationships with all of them. Some schools bring their children into their local churches for the school's festival services. There are pre-schools in Gislingham, Mellis and Wetheringsett and three excellent high schools within easy reach of the benefice: Hartismere High in Eye, Debenham C of E Academy and Diss High School.



Braiseworth

The Parishes

GISLINGHAM - St Mary the Virgin

Population: 1172

We have an active P.C.C., a regular organist, Clare Oven, and a resident Reader, Jean Archdeacon. We are supported by a large number of volunteers who clean the church, arrange the flowers and open and close the church on a rota basis.



We are supported by the Friends of St. Mary's who contribute to both the maintenance of the church building and the churchyard, and who hold a very successful Flower Festival each year, and a monthly coffee & books morning in the Village Hall, which has become a community event and a valued link with the church.

We currently have two Sunday services a month, followed by refreshments. We also meet for Morning Prayer on Wednesdays.



Gathered around the Crib

Our primary school holds services in the church each term, and our Lightwave curate regularly leads worship in the school and runs a weekly Mum and Tots group for under twos. This has brought several families to church for baptism, and is an opportunity to develop the Christian faith. We also held an All Hallows event and a picnic in the churchyard.

Members of the church support the Stowmarket Food Bank, and the Children's Society, and we have a link with CMS (Taiwan), and are represented on the Gillingham United Charity.

We think there is room for development of services and activities in the life of the church, more relevant to modern life. There is a need for teaching the faith and finding ways of sharing the good news with those outside the church family, perhaps through home fellowship groups.



Fellowship following Carol Service

MELLIS - St Mary the Virgin

Population: 563

The village of Mellis is scattered around what is said to be the largest grazing common in the country, famous as a site where Oliver Cromwell trained his troops in the Civil War. In the centre of the common nestling among trees, is the church.

From its central position, our Inclusive Church reaches out over the Common to the people of Mellis and, along with the Memorial Hall and the Railway Tavern, acts as a focal point for the village.

Our congregation is friendly and welcoming and the fellowship over coffee after services is always vibrant and warm. We have a small, committed team who are involved in regular activities within the church such as cleaning, flower arranging and helping to run services.



Celebration of hedgerows service



We also have a long tradition of involvement in village events, and have very good links with our primary school which uses the church for its Carol and Easter Services. We take part in Ride and Stride, a Tractor Run and last year we played an active part in Mellis Open Gardens weekend.

The very rural setting of the village makes it a magnet for artists and we have hosted an exhibition of Arts and Crafts. We could further develop these links making the church a haven for both creativity and contemplation.

A comment in our Visitors' Book reads "This church feels loved" and we aim to ensure that feeling is felt in the village outside the building as well as within its walls. Our ambition would be to see more varied and livelier worship in the hope of bringing younger people and families back into our Church.



The annual tractor run in aid of Mellis church

STOKE ASH with THWAITE – All Saints

Population: 371

All Saints Church was once thatched and it retains three Norman doorways. Despite its antiquity, our Church has good amenities in the form of car parking, a loo and, within the last twelve years, it has benefited from rewiring, redecorating and the installation of pew heaters. We work collaboratively with Wetheringsett and Thorndon and host our P.C.C Meetings together.

Our monthly services are always followed by coffee and fellowship. For many years, there has been a three day Christmas Tree Festival in December.

The new Warden has this to say about her aims for the Church:

"My vision for this beautiful, rural church is for it to create its own identity as a warm and welcoming sacred space and for it to become a place for contemplation, peace and learning. A place which anyone visiting will be in no doubt as to why it has existed for eight hundred years".



Christmas Tree Festival – December 2023



Stoke Ash

THORNDON with RISHANGLES - All Saints

The Church serves a community of over 800 and the village of Thorndon includes a primary school, a village hall, the Black Horse Pub and a community shop. In addition to regular Acts of Sunday Worship, All Saints provides a place of sanctuary for our local residents. For this reason, the Church is open seven days a week. We host weekly coffee mornings, occasional prayer breakfasts and a Lent Course for the Benefice. In addition, the Church is used as a venue



for exhibitions and concerts. One of our most successful ventures has been the creation of TPlus. This was started in 2008 as an informal gathering led by volunteers. Its aim was to provide pastoral care and prayer alongside the provision of coffee and cake. It meets weekly and we now have an attendance of approximately 40.

We have a committed congregation of about 20 which includes some young families. We generally have two services a month, one of which is Holy Communion and the other a Worship for All Service which is led by our three lay elders. Our aim is to meet the needs of all members of the community and to welcome and openly encourage all ages.

A Friends' Scheme exists to support maintenance of the Church which is in a good state of repair following much restoration work over the past few years. We are committed to supporting green initiatives and recently received a Bronze Eco Church award.



Tplus



Christingle 2023



Thorndon School



THORNHAM MAGNA - St Mary Magdalene and THORNHAM PARVA - St Mary's

Thornham Magna and Thornham Parva are the two smallest parishes in the benefice with a combined population of approximately 200. Nevertheless, they are two distinct parishes, both civil and ecclesiastical. The church dedicated to St Mary Magdalene in Thornham Magna dates from the 14th and 15th centuries with much 19th century restoration, whilst St Mary's Thornham Parva has Anglo-Saxon origins, and is known for its wall paintings as well as its 14th century Retable which attracts visitors from across the world.



The two villages are separated by the parkland of Thornham Estate, itself also a tourist destination, as the Henniker family who own it have opened it up to create a popular network of walks. As well as the walks café, each village has a popular pub, and they share a village hall which is a centre of social activity. Two charities are based in Thornham Magna, within the Henniker estate – 'Beyond the Wall' operates from the Walled Garden and caters for personal development through horticulture for people with learning and other disabilities, and Street Forge Workshops provides training in woodworking skills, again for people with disabilities.



The two PCCs co-operate closely and have been meeting jointly for many years, voting to enlist as Inclusive Churches in 2019. Our small congregation is supplemented from within and beyond the benefice. Post-pandemic there has been a revival of sung forms of worship (Compline, Evensong and Sung Eucharist) and there is enthusiasm to continue to nourish this.



Decorating the church last Christmas



Volunteer day following the Coronation in May 20

Music at Thornham

For ten years or more the Thornhams have been home to a concert series featuring a range of visiting professional musicians. The acoustics of the two churches are very good and much appreciated by players who are used to performing in much larger halls. The concerts take place in the warmer months of the year and are gradually re-establishing themselves post Covid.

More details at
musicatthornham.org.uk

*Musicians performing
in Magna and Parva*



WETHERINGSETT cum BROCKFORD - All Saints

Population: 692

All Saints is a perfect example of a late Medieval East Anglian Church. We are fortunate to have received a large legacy specifically for the creation of a new stained glass window. This beautiful window adds colour and grandeur to our already magnificent church. What we now long to see is this space being used to its maximum potential to meet the needs of our seven hundred strong village population. While we do have a primary school and a modern village hall, we have no shop, public house, café or restaurant where people can meet more informally.



Our aim is for our Church to bridge this gap and discussions are underway to transform All Saints to include a kitchen, loo and community space. We recognise that we must embrace change and find new ways of being church.



New stained-glass windows depicting the life of Richard Hakluyt, geographer & former rector of Wetheringsett-cum- Brockford from 1590 until he died in 1616. He is buried in Westminster Abbey

Cook@Connect

This weekly Connect after school club has proved very popular. It takes place at Wetheringsett C of E Primary School and involves preparing food which is set in the context of a Bible Story. An example is where we made bread and talked about the Miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

As well as our loyal congregation and volunteer team of cleaners and flower arrangers, we also shelter a number of bats and we have worked with the Bat Conservation Trust to learn how to monitor and co-exist with our bats. We have made this the focus of an annual bat walk with refreshments in the church. As well as our bats, we also support green initiatives and the churchyard is managed in partnership with Suffolk Wildlife Trust where the wildflower meadow is allowed to flourish and grass cutting is kept to a minimum. We are fortunate to have a Lightwave lay family and children's worker; Emma Morris and she leads activities at Wetheringsett as well as some at Thorndon Church.



Coronation Celebrations

YAXLEY - St Mary the Virgin

Population: 596

At St Mary's we have a friendly and welcoming congregation and one of the sources of recent growth has stemmed from the reintroduction of visits to our local care homes. Some residents asked to come to church and staff were willing to accompany them. As well as engagement with our care homes, housing developments on the outskirts of the village offer the potential for outreach to young families.



Our church volunteers consist of a church warden and assistant warden, a bell tower captain and a lay elder who is also a children and family worker. Our lay elder is always willing to run services across the benefice.

Our historic church is open every day and we have regular visits from those interested in local history and church architecture such as U3A. We have a 1712 Vinegar Bible and one of only two remaining Sexton Wheels in the country. The large size of our church and its historic significance mean there is a need for fund raising events such as strawberry teas, soup lunches, harvest suppers and coffee mornings as well as a biannual flower festival.

We are looking forward very much to welcoming you into our community.



The Deanery

Working together to make a difference

Hartismere and Hoxne Deanery was formed in 2021 by the merger of two adjacent deaneries which had worked closely together for many years. It now comprises 39 parishes in six benefices, all very rural apart from the small town of Eye.

Benefices are encouraged to have their own plans for growth, within the overall diocesan vision of 'flourishing congregations making a difference', whilst as a deanery our particular objectives are the encouragement and release of gifts and vocations, the development of discipleship and spirituality, community engagement and the growth of work with families.

The deanery is blessed with six SSMs, three lay Readers (including one with PTO), active priests with PTO and committed commissioned lay elders.

Deanery Synod meetings are held three times a year: business is handled efficiently with a minimum of 'fuss' but the focus is very much on invited speakers or discussion on a variety of interesting and relevant subjects. Meetings are well attended and there is always time for fellowship over refreshments. Churches of the deanery meet for some shared services such as Ash Wednesday, Ascension and Lammas.

The Assistant Rural Dean, Revd Canon Eleanor Goodison, convenes monthly chapter meetings for clergy with a couple a year when we invite all the retired priests. The chapter is where we support one another, learn from each other and pray together. We are excited about the future, believing that this is a time for growth. Come and join us in God's mission in this beautiful part of Suffolk. We look forward to working with you!

Revd Canon Susan Loxton Rural Dean



A Wedding in Thornham Magna, September 2023

The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

Where are we?

The Diocese covers the county of Suffolk, excluding the area around Lowestoft in the north-east, and one parish in Essex. It is a mainly rural Diocese with a large number of small villages, plus market towns including Woodbridge, Halesworth, Sudbury and Beccles and the cathedral town of Bury St Edmunds with its historic ruins of the old Abbey. Ipswich is the county town with a population of about 137,000. Suffolk's population is c 650,000. The county embraces historic places of interest such as Sutton Hoo, culture at Snape with the famous annual Aldeburgh music festival, is on the Heritage coast and is a haven for lovers of natural history and birdlife. The busy port of Felixstowe is at the end of the A14 which runs via Cambridge to the Midlands and the A12 which gives access to London and the Norfolk Broads.

Who are we?

We are often known as 'the Church of England in Suffolk'. The diocesan bishop is the Right Reverend Martin Seeley, and the suffragan bishop is the Right Reverend Dr Mike Harrison. Both work from the Bishop's House in Ipswich. They work together closely to help us shape our vision and strategy, and amongst a plethora of other tasks offer regular teaching mornings to nurture the faith of people in our congregations – and a regular Vlog which can be found on Facebook. There are 3 archdeaconries and over 450 churches where visitors will find a wide range of worshipping styles, from the traditional to contemporary, as well as Fresh Expressions and growing numbers of 'Lightwave' groups for those who haven't connected with traditional church previously. The Cathedral of St Edmund and St James in Bury St Edmunds is the mother church of the Diocese and is proactive in offering support to clergy and parishes including welcoming parishes on pilgrimage. We also work closely with our 88 Church of England primary schools. All this is, of course, supported by a small and committed diocesan staff based in the diocesan office in Ipswich.

What is our vision?

Our diocesan vision is to be 'Growing in God', aiming to grow 'flourishing congregations making a difference'. This vision was accepted by Diocesan Synod in 2014 and since then we have been focusing on four key priorities:

- Growing in Depth: responding to the call of Christ in every part of our lives
- Growing in Number: drawing the contacts we have into the life of God's kingdom
- Growing in Influence: reaching beyond ourselves in our impact on the wider world
- Growing Younger; building churches whose age-range reflects our communities



Parishes are encouraged to use a simple Mission Action Planning tool to help us all to focus on these priorities and how they might be worked out in each different context. We are trusting God that this vision, underpinned by a commitment to Christian stewardship, will bear fruit as we look to the future.

As part of this vision, we have recently received Strategic Development Funding for two major projects: Inspiring Ipswich, overseen by the Archdeacon of Ipswich which aims to grow the

church in Ipswich through church planting and reaching out to those who live in the town, and 'Growing God in the Countryside', overseen by the Archdeacon for Rural Mission. This focusses on nurturing and discipling new Christians through small Lightwave groups and hubs such as the one being established at Bungay. (The Growing in God in the Countryside project plan is available among the documents at www.light-wave.org/vacancies).

We have also been part of a pilot scheme exploring how we can use our church buildings more creatively both for those who worship regularly and for the benefit of our communities and many churches have benefitted from this. We are broadening our vision through a growing partnership with the Diocese of Kagera in Tanzania, with fruitful visits and links being established.

How can we fulfil our "Growing in God" vision?

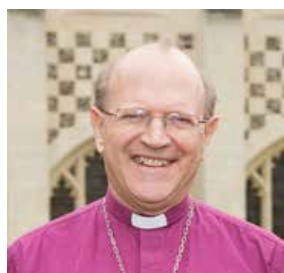
We value our huge range of different ministries: we have over 100 stipendiary clergy, plus many SSM and PTO clergy as well as lay and ordained chaplains who can be found in such diverse places as schools, prisons, hospitals, hospices, the army, RAF and the police. Some clergy are ordained to serve in their local benefice through our pioneering 'auxiliary ordination pathway' which enables people's vocations to ordained ministry to be discerned within the Diocese.

All clergy work alongside lay ministers – Readers, elders, and the growing number people exercising recently- introduced licensed ministries: pioneer ministers, evangelists, youth ministers and children's and family workers. Our ministry deployment principles encourage teams or clusters of lay and ordained ministers to work together so that clergy feel less isolated and ministry resources the mission of the church more effectively. We are just beginning to develop the principle of 'local ministers' in our benefices, releasing people's gifts to serve in their locality.

We are excited about these new developments which are playing an important part in our diocesan vision of Growing in God.

So, in summary:

As our Growing in God vision states, we aspire to be people who know that 'God is with us, gathering us as Christ-centered communities, calling us to make Christian disciples, sending us in loving service, empowering us by the Holy Spirit'.



*The Rt Revd Martin Seeley
Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich*



*The Rt Revd Mike Harrison, Bishop of Dunwich, on
a visit to South Hartismere*



Cathedral of St Edmund & St James, Bury St Edmunds



