



Letting people know about the
love of Jesus Christ

Parish Profile 2025

www.stowmarketparishchurch.co.uk

Come over to Stowmarket and help us...

Deepen

our faith

Share

the good news

Grow

a new vision

In a Nutshell

ST PETER AND

**ST MARY'S IS A SINGLE PARISH BENEFICE,
SITUATED IN THE CENTRE OF STOWMARKET. WE ARE
AN EVANGELICAL CHURCH WITH THE MISSION STATEMENT
'LETTING PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST' AT
THE HEART OF ALL WE DO. WE ARE LOOKING FOR AN ENTHUSIASTIC,
INSIGHTFUL AND STRATEGIC PERSON WHO WILL GUIDE US IN
BUILDING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE – FROM WHAT
WE ARE PRESENTLY DOING. AND THEN,
HAVING BUILT THE VISION, HELP US
TO BRING IT TO FRUITION.**

We are a relaxed, open, broadly evangelical church family with some charismatic expressions that desires to grow deeper in our faith.

We long to grow in confidence in sharing the Gospel with our community, in the impact of our ministry across Stowmarket, and in the numbers of those we see coming to faith. We would love to grow our ministry to children, young people and families – as well as strengthening our discipleship and pastoral care across the board.

Could you come over and help us?



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What we are looking for

We seek someone who:

1. Has a strong faith, is guided by the Spirit and who is rooted in Scripture;
2. Preaches the gospel in creative ways to help all members of the congregation deepen their faith and grow closer to God;
3. Is good with people, has good organisational skills and is comfortable working collaboratively with both ministry team and lay members to lead people to a personal faith in Jesus. Is able to nurture us, teach us and send us out;
4. Will help us define who we now are, with the ability to guide us in connecting all we do into a coherent vision;
5. Is willing to devote time and energy to foster and broaden the existing links between the church, the local schools and other organisations;
6. Can foster links across the generations and is appreciative of our older members and the broad range of preferred styles of worship;
7. Will be a visible and active presence in the community. As well as a member of Churches Together you will sit on the Stowmarket Relief Trust and the Churches Charity Trust as a trustee. These are historical trusts set up to administer legacies to the church and town.



Ipswich Street

What we can offer

We are a single parish benefice working in partnership with other churches in the town and supported by the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Personnel

We have an active PCC of seven members plus two deanery synod representatives, together with a treasurer and two church wardens. All members of the PCC serve on at least one of the three committees: Building and Finance (Standing Committee), Mission and Outreach, Ministry and Worship. The PCC meet every month except August and December.



There are two safeguarding officers who ensure the church is adhering to all the regulations surrounding safeguarding.

The church office is situated in the vestry of the church. It is staffed by volunteers 10am -1pm four days a week who are instrumental in supporting the day to day running of the parish.

We have a ministry team which consists of:

- An SSM – The Rev. Richard Stretch who has been in post since 1994
- A Reader – Tony Ingham
- Matt Levett, the Diocesan Youth Officer, a member of our church who preaches occasionally.
- Two church wardens.

The treasurer is also supported by a team of volunteers who help her in a variety of ways.

Home communion / care home services are led by Rev. Richard Stretch and other volunteers from the church.

Expenses

The PCC pays incumbent's expenses including:

- Car mileage at the Diocese Agreed Rate in connection with parish business
- Telephone rental and parish business calls
- Parish business stationery/ office running costs.

Who We Are – in Ministry

The diocesan vision, adopted in 2016, is Growing in God.

In 2018 the PCC agreed a strategic document that underpinned the management of the church. At the time it was agreed that the diocesan growing in God sections were outworked by the following aspects: looking after, looking out and looking in. The three committees of the PCC took one aspect each. **Buildings and Finance (Standing committee)**- looking after, **Mission and Outreach**- looking out and **Ministry and Worship** – looking in.

Each committee reports back to the PCC with proposals for discussion and ratification. The B&F committee meets every month and the other two quarterly.

The clergy, readers and preachers meet to plan the service rota following the lectionary.

Growing in God – growing in depth

We are a relaxed, open, broadly evangelical church family with some charismatic expressions that desires to grow deeper in our faith. Since the pandemic we meet once on a Sunday morning at 10am. At present, on the first Sunday of the month we have a Family Service, with the Eucharist celebrated on the 2nd and 4th Sundays and a Morning Worship Service on the 3rd Sunday. The clergy, readers and preachers take it in turns to lead and preach. The clergy do not generally robe for these services. Music is usually streamed. Members of the congregation read the Bible readings and lead intercessions.



'Moving Closer' is an evening service of praise, also held once a month. Each service has an extended time of modern sung worship, Bible readings, reflections and a time of waiting on God. This service has been running over 2 years, and has developed its own congregation.

A Communion service is also held at lunchtime on Thursdays. A number of people who attend the Thursday Communion do not attend on a Sunday.

The prayer ministry team is a small group of volunteers who meet before the weekly Sunday service to pray and after the service to offer prayer ministry to others. They meet once a month on Zoom for prayer and sharing God's word. The team also takes part in the Moving Closer evening worship service. A prayer network is in place for immediate needs to be covered with prayer.

We have a number of home groups who meet weekly for fellowship, Bible study and prayer. At times the material studied is set by the church leadership though there is also opportunity for individual groups to choose their own material. Home group leaders meet termly to review and plan.

Growing in God – growing in influence

Activities engaging with others outside the church include (in alphabetical order):

Baptism

All baptism families are visited twice before the child's baptism is arranged and offered the choice of Thanksgiving and/or Baptism. During the baptism service parents and God-parents are given a copy of the NT, Psalms and Proverbs provided by Good News for Everyone (formally the Gideons). We also give each baptised candidate a copy of the Bible. Baptisms take place during the Sunday morning service.

Bells



The bells and bell ringing frame were restored and replaced in 2023 after a successful fundraising appeal organised by the bell ringing project team. £179,000 was raised through donations, planned events and grants including a substantial grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The bell ringers are committed to promoting public awareness of Stowmarket bells and bell ringing in general. The bells are now rung every Sunday morning.



Boys Brigade and Girls Association

2nd Mid Suffolk Boys Brigade and Girls Association (BBGA) was added to our Children and Young People's ministry in September 2018. The group was set up in consultation with the PCC and Boys Brigade Headquarters. Although traditionally for boys we run a mixed group hence the title 'Boys Brigade and Girls Association'.



BBGA meets weekly during school term time in St Peter's Hall offering a programme of activities across 6 topic areas. There are currently 9 children of Primary school age mostly from non-church families who are very keen and love the programme that we offer. It is staffed by three church members plus one parent helper.



There is an annual 'enrolment' church parade in October and the children join in with some services throughout the year: Harvest Festival, Remembrance Sunday and on Mothering Sunday when they have enjoyed serving breakfast to the congregation before the service. They have also contributed to the Christmas Tree Festival and Cross Festival.



BBGA taking part in the Remembrance Sunday Parade

Carnival

Each year Stowmarket has a carnival procession and fair on the recreation ground. Last year we set up and ran a range of activities for the children. This has opened our eyes to the fact that not everyone knows about who we are and what we do.



Christmas Tree Festival

Set up 20 years ago, the festival now runs during the period of Advent. Trees are decorated on a Christian theme by members of the church and wider community. Though initially a church event, it has become a town event and other venues also display decorated trees. The start of the festival is celebrated in the town with stalls lining the streets. Over 2,000

people visit the church to see the

trees each year and by the end of the festival the prayer and remembrance trees are full of requests for prayer, all of which are prayed for. Schools and care homes visit during the day to see the trees and a number of primary schools hold their carol concerts in the church. This is one of our major outreach events of the year.

The Christingle Service is very popular with families, many of whom do not regularly attend church.



Churches Together

We are an active member of Churches Together in Stowmarket and have participated in a number of initiatives including supporting the local Food Bank and hosting Family Fun Days in August.



Civic and Remembrance Services

As the parish church, which is the largest auditorium in Stowmarket, we traditionally help plan and host these services and the church is often full.

Combined Churches' Choir

The Combined Churches' Choir is a relaxed group of friends who enjoy sharing the music we like and singing it together. Our members come from most of the local Christian churches and we are always delighted to welcome new people.

In 2025 we will be preparing for a Taizé – style service, to be held in early March. The theme will be peace, but in a very wide sense, encompassing loneliness and inner peace.

Cross Festival

A smaller festival displaying crosses created by the church and community has also been held over Easter. Following the success of the Christmas Tree Festival, this was set up as another outreach opportunity to remind visitors of the meaning of Easter.



Little Fishes – toddlers' singing group



Little Fishes meets every other week, for parents/carers and children from new born to 4 years old. It provides a warm, welcoming family atmosphere, a time of singing nursery rhymes/actions songs, including Christian songs, followed by chat, refreshments and play. At Christmas we have a special service in church. There are currently over 30 children who attend, and we have got to know hundreds of families over the 30+ years this has been running



Open the Book The team, made up mostly of retired people from a number of local churches, regularly visit three local primary schools to share Bible stories with them.

Operation Christmas Child

Each year we have collected shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. This year we sent over 80 boxes to some of the world's poorest children.



Osier in Church Café



Whilst this is a business not owned or run by the church, as often as possible church members make themselves available to sit and talk to those visiting the café and children's area. We would like to develop this aspect of reaching out.

Pastoral Care

Communion Services are taken to local Care Homes and private homes. We are happy to visit any church member who is unwell or housebound and who would like a visit or to receive Communion. Cards are sent to those who have been bereaved or who are in hospital. Generally speaking, the fellowship looks out for one another.

Preschool



St Peter and St Mary's Preschool has just celebrated its 50th anniversary. Rated good by Ofsted in 2023, it provides a welcoming and inclusive environment for children aged 2,3 and 4.

The inspiring and sequenced curriculum provides an excellent education in accordance with the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and is rooted in the children's interests. Parents speak positively about the Preschool and say that the staff are 'kind', 'caring' and 'approachable'. Parents find this is a superb introduction to full time primary school.

The staff of 7 is fully trained and most have long service with us.

The Preschool meets in St Mary's Hall Monday to Friday between 9am and 4pm.

The treasurer is a church member and the Chair of the committee is a PCC member. The Preschool has also contributed to the Cross Festival and the Christmas Tree Festival.



Growing in God – growing in number



We now find ourselves in the exciting place of welcoming new folk to the church family after a period of declining numbers. We are a diverse congregation representing different traditions and backgrounds. Our desire is to nurture and grow all church members including those who have recently joined or are just popping in to see what we are about.

Growing in God – growing younger

As an aging congregation with the recognition that like attracts like, we want to increase the number of families in the church so we can truly be a multigenerational church. We desire to strengthen the links we already have with families associated with Little Fishes, Preschool and BBGA and with those who come into the café.



enjoying activities during a family service.

Who we are – Church Buildings



St Peter and St Mary's, the parish church of Stowmarket, is situated in the heart of the town. It is a Grade 1 listed building dating back to the 14th century. Over the past 50 years, it has benefitted from an extensive restoration programme which has included replacing the spire, renovating the entrance porch and the installation of a toilet, repainting the inside of the church and

reordering the back of the church to remove pews and install kitchen facilities. The boiler was replaced in 2023 and audio-visual screens installed across the church.

AV in services and Church.

To amplify the services, we use a PA system using fixed and radio microphones which is linked to a hearing loop.

All services are projected, using PowerPoint, onto TV screens on the pillars along the nave and currently we are using pre-recorded music. Service leaders prepare presentations and we have a small and dedicated AV team who manage this aspect of our worship. We livestream our services which are then available on YouTube.

During the week, when the café is open, the screens are used to advertise all that is going on in the life of the church.



<https://www.youtube.com/@stowmarketparishchurch3747>



In 2022, Helen Knock relocated her café business to the church to open as the Osier in Church. The cafe is open Tuesday to Saturday. Helen is a Christian and shares the values of the church. She operates a 'pay it forward' scheme, free toiletries, warm coats, and meals for children in term holidays. Her lease will be up for renewal in 2027.

The church office is situated in the vestry and staffed by volunteers 10am -1pm every weekday except Wednesday.

The 1891 Hele organ, originally from Emmanuel Church Paddington, was relocated to the church in 1993 and is in need of restoration. A small group of volunteers has been set up to raise the funds to do so. Although not used in worship each week, the organ is used for civil services, carol services, weddings and funerals as required.

The church has two church halls, both within walking distance of the church and vicarage.



St Peter's Hall

SPH is situated on the south side of the church adjacent to the churchyard and is a Victorian building initially built to house the National School which closed in 1913. It has a main hall and smaller meeting room and fitted kitchen and toilets. Little Fishes and the Boys Brigade and Girls Association meet in SPH. It is also hired out to local organisations and for private functions.

St Mary's Hall (SMH)

This hall was built in the 1960's and is situated in Silverdale Avenue, a ten- minute walk from the church. It has a large hall, small kitchen and toilets. It has a flat roof which will require attention before too long. The Preschool meets there in term times. It is also hired out to local organisations and for private functions.



The following organisations have a long- term hire of these halls.

SPH - Stow Table Tennis and U3A Table Tennis (Monday and Thursday), The Royal British Legion also hires the hall for approx. 10 sessions a year.

SMH - Bridge Club (Friday) Home Church (Sunday and some Saturdays)

Who we are – Church Data

	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>
No. on electoral roll	120	111
Average Sunday attendance	50	40
On- line worship	10	14 replay 40
Average Moving Closer attendance	25	25
Average Thursday Communion attendance	15	15
Regular givers	55	47
Gift aid recovered	£12,512	£10,356 (estimated)
No. of weddings	2	4
No. of baptisms	2	7
No. of funerals	27	16
Parish share (paid)	£73,967 (in full)	£74,992 (in full)

Who we are – Finance

Structure and Status of the Church Finances

The church has a number of income streams: -

1. Collections at services, regular planned giving, donations.
2. Rents for the 2 church halls and the café in the church.
3. Fees for services.
4. Fundraising.
5. Grants.
6. Income from The Church Charity which administers land in Stowmarket owned by the charity of which the Church is the main beneficiary.

Covid had a significant effect on the church's financial position and the PCC (General Fund) is currently running in deficit. We were able to decrease the deficit last year (2023) and it is hoped that this year's Accounts (2024) will show further movement towards breakeven. In 2022/23 total income was £272,882 and expenditure was £291,892, giving a deficit of £15,633 after re-valuation of investments.

The church has significant reserves held in both restricted and unrestricted funds, including a fabric fund. These funds are invested with the diocese, £54,000 in the property fund and £39,000 in the equity fund. There is an additional £25,000 held on deposit to cover our obligations in terms of redundancy should the Preschool close.

The Church operates strict financial procedure with all expenditure verified/approved by two people. Expenditure over £250 is further approved by the clergy or churchwardens. All cash income is also verified by two people. The end of year accounts are prepared with the assistance of a qualified accountant and are examined and signed off by an independent accountant in line with Charity Commissioners requirements.

Who we are – the Community of Stowmarket



Stowmarket is a market town and civil parish in the Mid Suffolk District of Suffolk, on the A14 trunk road between Bury St Edmunds to the west and Ipswich to the southeast. The town lies on the Great Eastern main line between Diss and Needham Market, and lies on the River Gipping, which is joined by its tributary, the River Rat, to the south of the town.

The town takes its name from the Old English word *stōw* meaning "principal place", and was granted a market charter in 1347 by Edward III. A bi-weekly market is still held on Thursday and Saturday. It is 90 min away from London by train.

According to the 2021 census the population of the town is around 21,500. It is the largest town in the Mid Suffolk district and is represented in Parliament by the MP for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket, currently Peter Prinsley (Labour).

Within the town there is a library, a cinema complex with three screens, the Museum of Food, the John Peel Arts Centre, a Leisure Centre and a wide range of supermarkets. It has 5 care homes and there are 5 community primary schools in the parish and one secondary school.



There are a wide range of Christian churches in the town, some with their own buildings and others using rented halls. Most are involved with Churches Together.

The local Churches Together group holds three general meetings each year, one of which also includes the AGM. These are usually held in January, May (AGM) and September.

There are now nine local churches which are member of Churches Together in Stowmarket.



Churches Together: Good Friday Walk of Witness

At present we:

- join together in a Walk of Witness on Good Friday (planned and organised by St Peter and St Mary's Church);
- participate in Christian Aid Week;
- hold a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and have a United Service on Advent Sunday;
- host a Family Fun Day in August, held every other year;
- support the Stowmarket Foodbank which is led by New Life Church and the Pop-Up Shop run by Our Lady's/New Life.

The Mid-Suffolk Filling Station (a network of Christian meetings and events across the UK, offering worship, prayer, teaching and fellowship) meets in Stowmarket and members of St Peter and St Mary's are on the management committee.

Accommodation

The vicarage is situated at 7 Lockington Road a short walk away from the church on the edge of the parish. It was built in 1938 as a private house and was extended and converted to a vicarage in the 1980's. It has four bedrooms, two reception rooms, a downstairs cloakroom and a study, in addition to the normal facilities. It has an establish medium sized garden and a garage.



Thank you for looking at our profile.

You are in our prayers.

APPENDIX 1: 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 Right Reverend Martin Seeley retired as diocesan Bishop at the end of February 2025; the leadership of the diocese is now with The Right Revd Graeme Knowles. Bishop Graeme is acting diocesan Bishop until a new appointment is made. 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 focussing 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

Growing in God

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 received Strategic Development Funding for two major projects: Inspiring Ipswich, overseen by the Acting 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 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-centred communities, calling us to make Christian disciples, sending us in loving service, empowering us by the Holy Spirit'.

APPENDIX 2 – The Deanery of Gipping Valley

The Deanery is situated in the centre of the County of Suffolk and of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. The Deanery comprises ten benefices with forty-two individual parishes/churches. 2025 will see the Deanery focusing on supporting our Deanery Plan mission priorities. Recently heard in conversation: Deanery Synod members enjoy our meetings.

In the Deanery there are:

- nine stipendiary clergy posts;
- one House for Duty post;
- two self-supporting ordained ministers (curates being priested Summer 2025).

The Clergy Chapter meets monthly and is friendly and very supportive, with a wealth of experience upon which to draw. Everyone's voice is heard. There is active lay participation throughout the Deanery, with a number of Readers, Elders and other Licensed Lay Ministers, including a Licensed Evangelist.

A Map of the Deanery

