

Rectors Report 19th April 2026

The second of September 2025 was an important day: For the first time since I arrived the Deanery had all licensed posts filled. That date marked the licensing of Rev Romey Poston as Associate Priest in this Team, with particular responsibility for Ashdon and Hadstock, completing the staffing of our Saffron Walden and Villages Team. Our former Curate, Rev Ella Harris was inducted as Team Vicar, with special responsibility for the Cam Village Churches earlier in the year (11th June). We also welcomed Julie Lester as our new Children and Youth Lead in July, with Hayden Rocks working alongside her on a one-year internship. We meet each week to pray, share breakfast, discuss and plan, along with Claire and Anthea, our administrators, Judith Hasler and Rev Paula Griffiths. This is a very valuable time, allowing us to develop a Team identity and give and receive valuable support. In November several of us spent a day in the religious house in Clare sharing and planning. This Team model is becoming recognised as a positive example of joint leadership within the Diocese. After Easter we will have a Curate with us for a short while learning about the strengths, and challenges, of this model.

My hope is that, with the appointments mentioned above the Team can work more as a whole, rather than separate parts. We will do this increasingly through our Team Council. This Parish will be represented by myself and two lay members nominated by the PCC.

At the end of 2024 the Deanery gained funding to support project building familiarity with Bible stories amongst children at local Primary Schools; Open the Book. We now have teams running in St Mary's CE Primary School, Debden and Great Chesterford, and soon in Ashdon. Team members are also supporting work in schools elsewhere in the Deanery, and we hope to soon start an ecumenical Team in another Saffron Walden Primary School. Please pray for Debs, who co-ordinates this for the Deanery, and for our volunteers.

At the end of 2025 we secured funding for several more Deanery projects. We have already offered several first aid training events. We will also be offering gatherings and support for Churchwardens and also Church Administrators.

The rules and regulations that Churches work under have grown hugely in the 29 years I have been ordained. It's hard to imagine that once our Church buildings did not come under Health and Safety legislation, or that there was such a thing as Safeguarding Officers. Bureaucracy can be a burden, but much is necessary and long overdue. My thanks to Nathan as our Parish Safeguarding Officer for the demanding work he does. We now have the online Safeguarding Dashboard to help us ensure we make our Churches as safe as possible for all who take part. We are also looking at Church Management software, designed for the Church of England, and with Teams such as ours in mind, to help in the

administration of much of what we do. These, whilst an effort to learn, can be a very helpful tool in easing the burdens placed on both volunteers and staff.

Talking of volunteers: My thanks to you, whatever your role. We have a huge number of people contributing in all sorts of ways. If you are one then you are part of what makes St Mary's, St James' and St John's live. Thank you. I meet regularly with Vivian and Simon, our Churchwardens, and often our discussion involves how we can support you. If you have any ideas, please talk to one of us and we will see what we can do.

My special thanks this year goes to Steve Hasler and all who have worked with him in steering our lighting project. We can now quite literally see the fruits of all that labour. I hope you agree that the results are worth the effort. Instead of being blasted by light, at least where the lighting still worked, we now have a carefully crafted installation that not only allows us to see but highlights the detail and beauty of our fine building. It almost makes you long for the shorter days of Winter. Almost.

I am shortly heading off on a long-planned sabbatical. I will be absent from Parochial duties from Monday 27th April to Sunday 26th July inclusive. During this time I will be completing a number of pilgrimage routes, from the Way of St Francis, in Italy, to several shorter routes in my last Diocese, Exeter. During and between these I will be reflecting on the theme of the Christian journey, including my own journey of faith. I am now in my last decade of licensed ministry and wish to reflect on my experiences over the past 29 years; my alleged strengths and all-too-apparent weaknesses. Working in a Team has been a great boon to me, and I very much look forward to continuing my ministry here with renewed vigour. Our strong Team will be more than able to cope in my absence, I am confident.

As ever, my thanks to all who are the Churches of St Mary's, St James, and St John's. It is a privilege to be your priest.

Thank you

Jeremy